

PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT 1986 AND CONSUMER RIGHTS: IT'S IMPACT ON CONSUMERS IN KANYAKUMARI AND THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICTS

Mrs. T.Sangeethasudha¹ Dr.B.Revathy²

¹Ph.D Scholar, Department of Commerce, (REG. NO: 18112211012003) Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli, TamilNadu

²Professor and Head, Department of Commerce, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli. TamilNadu

Abstract: Past studies shows many problems in perception & practice of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and Consumer Rights Hence the survey was conducted in Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi districts of Tamil Nadu, India (n= 1016) from Consumers, an equal importance was given to Urban and Rural Consumers. The main aim of this study is to examine the existing awareness and attitudes of Consumers Protection Act 1986 Rights and the problems in execution of Rights and Act. Consumers have high awareness in Consumer Protection Act 1986 & unfair trade practice, but the practical execution of Consumer Rights practices is very low. Majority of consumers are still completely ignorant of the existence of the Consumer Protection Act and redressal agencies. Use government Regulatory machineries and Consumer Organisations to create awareness of Acts Rights and train them in complaint handling practices

Keywords: Awareness, Consumer Protection Act 1986, Consumer Rights, Consumer Organisations.

Introduction

In the present socio-economic scenario, Consumer Protection is of vital concern globally as well as locally. The growing interdependence of the world economy and international character of many business practices have contributed to the development of universal emphasis on consumer rights, protection and promotion. Consumer protection is a social- economic programme to be pursued by the government as well as the satisfaction of consumers. Consumer protection laws are designed to ensure fair competition and free flow of truth full information in the market place. The laws are designed to prevent business that engage in fraud or specified unfair practices from gaining an advantage over competitions and may provide additional protection for the week and those unable to take care of themselves. Consumer Rights observes the frustrations and disappointments of the dissatisfied Indian consumers. He points out that it is the duty of the government to ensure legal support to consumer and to abolish unfair trade practices (J.P. Chandra). Building the capacity of consumers to work both collectively and individually, as responsible consumers can lead to fair and just commercial practices in the market place. It will also help them to attain a better quality of life for the society. In fact the role as consumers can ensure value for money, value to people, value for the environment as well as value to democracy and justice. (Bishan Singh, 2001). On the other side, very few consumers who are aware of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and face many difficulties in executing the Consumer Protection Act 1986 and Consumer Rights. Hence, the researcher has made an attempt to find out the reason for unawareness and the problems in execution of Consumer Rights. The aim of the study is to analyze the awareness and attitudes of consumer in executing there in buying goods and services in Thoothukudi and Kanyakumari districts.

Statement of the Problem

Growing internationalization during the past three decades has become one of the most pervasive influences in business today. Consumers of today's world required adequate knowledge and border range of skills than before, but they are not well organized and have suffered lack of protection. Exploitation of human need and suffering is the worst crimes. In India, consumers face problems like unfair business practices like misbranding, spurious products, unsafe products, planned obsolescence, adulteration, fictitious pricing, price collusion, deceptive packaging, false and misleading advertisements, defective warranties, hoarding, profiteering, black marketing, short weights and measures, ect. (Cochran and Bell, 1956, Single et al., 1980, and Sundaram, 1985) The root cause is low standard of living ignorance of legitimate, rights of consumer, insufficient knowledge of market conditions lack of consumer education and many more. Despite of policies, schemes and programmes of government, the consumer find themselves subject to all kinds of exploitations. Government and Consumer Organisation give more importance to Consumer Protection Acts rights and its regulatory measures than the basic needs of consumer education unfortunately; they are only in document level. "Knowing your consumer rights which explains how familiar consumers are with laws regarding marketing practices and to what extent consumer have knowledge about their rights. (Verhage Geroge J. 1987) Government and Consumer Voluntary Organisation take enormous steps to protect the interest of the consumers and in creating awareness about Consumer Protection Act 1986 still many consumers are unaware of Consumer Protection Act 1986. On the other side very few consumers who are aware of Consumer Protection Act 1986 face many difficulties in executing the Consumer Protection Act 1986. " Awareness of Consumers regarding the rights, responsibilities and Consumer Protection Act 1986", explored and identified consumer awareness regarding, responsibilities and consumer rights in Consumer Protection Act 1986. She conclude that only a very few consumers were fully aware about the rights, responsibilities and Consumer Protection Act. (Divya Harian Jan, 2000, PP. 5-9).

Hence the researcher has made an attempt to find out the reason for unawareness of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and the lacuna in between the consumer awareness and practical application of Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Objective of the study

1. To analyse the impact of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and Consumer Rights in Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi districts consumers.
2. To understand the awareness of Consumer Protection Act 1986 and Consumer Rights
3. To what extent the consumers have awareness in consumer rights.

Hypothesis

Ho There is no significant difference in the awareness and exercising of Consumer Protection Acts and Rights.

Ho There is no significant relationship between gender and Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Methodology

Sources of data collection: Primary data are collected from the consumers by questionnaire and interview method. The consumers are randomly requested to fill the questionnaire. Secondary data are collected from different literatures like books, published in articles of Awareness of Consumer Protection Acts and websites.

Construction of Tools

Keeping the objectives of the study in mind the research constructed the questionnaire to elicit required information from the consumers. Totally, 1016 questionnaires are issued to consumers in two districts such as Thoothukudi and Kanyakumari in southern parts of TamilNadu. The collected data are analyzed by using the statistical tools of Chi-Square test, 'F' test, and 'T' test.

Table 1 Awareness of Consumer Rights in District wise

Generally, when the Consumer Act is implemented properly, the consumers get more protection. In this study, data were collected from two districts of southern part of Tamil Nadu The awareness of basic Rights of the consumers including Right to safety, Right to inform, Right to Choice, Right to be heard, Right to redress, Right to basic need and Right to consumer Education have been analysed in Thoothukudi and Nagercoil districts of southern Tamil Nadu. 'T' test is used to identify the significant variation in between awareness of consumer rights and district wise.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between awareness of consumer right in district wise.

	Districts	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P value
Right to Safety	Thoothukudi	525	2.12	1.099	2.153	0.032
	Nagercoil	491	2.27	1.044		
Right to Inform	Thoothukudi	525	2.14	1.099	1.951	0.051
	Nagercoil	491	2.27	1.046		
Right to Choice	Thoothukudi	525	2.19	1.153	1.483	0.138
	Nagercoil	491	2.29	1.047		
Right to be Heard	Thoothukudi	525	2.18	1.146	1.518	0.129
	Nagercoil	491	2.29	1.034		
Right to Redress	Thoothukudi	525	2.15	1.129	1.978	0.048
	Nagercoil	491	2.29	1.039		
Right to Basic Need	Thoothukudi	525	2.17	1.145	2.053	0.040
	Nagercoil	491	2.31	1.050		
Right to Consumer Education	Thoothukudi	525	2.18	1.160	1.763	0.078
	Nagercoil	491	2.30	1.043		
Right to Healthy Environment	Thoothukudi	525	2.15	1.150	2.524	0.012
	Nagercoil	491	2.32	1.057		

* 5% level of significance

In this study since 'P' value is less than 0.05 at five percent level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It is concluded that there is significant difference between awareness of consumer rights in between two districts. Mean value of right to healthy environment and right to basic needs of the consumers in Nagercoil district have better than Thoothukudi district. Hence, there is the close relationship in between awareness of consumer rights in district wise.

Table 2 Educational Wise Responses in the Awareness of basic Proceedings to file Complaints against unfair trade practices

The consumers should know the basic procedure regarding filing of a case in the Consumer Court in order to prevent them from the unfair trade practice. The Educational plays a vital role in the awareness of basic proceeding to file complaints against unfair trade practices. Here, the study reveals that the educated consumers have more awareness of the proceeding to file complaints than that of these uneducated consumers. χ^2 is used to identify the significance variation in between educational wise responses in the awareness of basic proceeding to file complaints against unfair trade practices.

Awareness of Proceedings to file a case		Education				Total
		Illiterate	School	Graduate	Professional	
Awareness in filing Complaints	Count	4	51	106	33	194
	% within Proceedings to file a case	2.1%	26.3%	54.6%	17.0%	100.0%
	% within Education	1.3%	14.7%	36.2%	54.1%	19.1%

Unawareness in filing Complaints	Count	311	296	187	28	822
	% within Proceedings to file a case	37.8%	36.0%	22.7%	3.4%	100.0%
	% within Education	98.7%	85.3%	63.8%	45.9%	80.9%
Total	Count	315	347	293	61	1016
	% within Proceedings to file a case	31.0%	34.2%	28.8%	6.0%	100.0%
	% within Education	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* 5% level of significance

Table 2 indicates the educational wise responses in the awareness of basic proceedings to file complaints against unfair trade practice. Out of 1016 respondents, majority (80.9%) of the consumers are unaware of basic proceedings to file complaints against unfair trade practice. In which, 37.8% of the consumer are illiterate, 36.0% of the Consumer are at school level education followed by 27.7% of the consumer are graduates and the remaining 3.4% of the consumers are professionals. Among the 1016 respondents 19.1% of the consumers have awareness in basic proceedings to file complaints against unfair trade practices. Of which 54.6% of the consumers are graduates, 26.3% of the consumers have school level education, next 17% of the consumers are professionals and the remaining 2.1% of the consumers are illiterate.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between awareness of basic Proceedings to file Complaints against unfair trade practices an educational level.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	172.857 ^a	3	0.000*
Likelihood Ratio	190.560	3	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	170.261	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	1016		

* 5% level of significance

In this study the 'P' value is less than 0.05 at 5% significance level. It is concluded that there is an association between education and the awareness of basic proceedings to file complaints against unfair trade practices. Hence, awareness of basic proceedings to file complaints differs in different levels of educational.

Table: 3 Awareness of Consumer forums among Rural and Urban Consumers

The Consumers Forum which has been set up under the Consumer Protection Act, to give necessary guidance and legal advice to the consumers in approaching the court regarding the consumer problems.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between Awareness of consumer forums in Rural and Urban area consumers

	Locality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P Value
District Forum	Urban	500	2.85	1.013	10.524	0.000
	Rural	516	2.14	1.144		
State Forum	Urban	500	2.86	0.991	11.037	0.000
	Rural	516	2.12	1.138		
National Commission	Urban	500	2.89	1.000	11.371	0.000
	Rural	516	2.12	1.145		
Supreme Court	Urban	500	3.04	0.997	12.861	0.000*
	Rural	516	2.17	1.154		

* 5% level of significance

In this study, the 'p' value is less than 0.05 at five percent level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that the Rural and Urban area consumer have Awareness about Consumer forums. Among the different variables relating to the Awareness of Consumer forums with their locality, it is found that Urban Consumers are highly aware of Supreme Court (mean value 3.04). The mean value of National Commission shows that the Urban Consumers are more aware than that of Rural Consumers. Hence there is the close relationship in between awareness of consumer forum among Rural and Urban area consumers

Table 4 Reaction to substandard Product/service among Male and Female Consumers

When the consumers are dissatisfied in the quantity and quality of the products, they may complaint to the Seller, Consumer Protection Council and in District Forum. This will give redressal for unfair trade practice.

Null hypothesis: There is no significant difference between reaction to substandard product/service among male and female Consumers.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P value
Complaint to seller	Male	396	3.11	0.993	0.228	0.820
	Female	620	3.09	0.944		
Complaint to Consumer Protection Council	Male	396	2.97	0.949	0.773	0.440
	Female	620	3.02	0.807		
Complaint to District Forum	Male	396	2.95	0.941	0.923	0.356*
	Female	620	3.00	0.815		
No Complaint to any forum	Male	396	2.85	0.984	0.741	0.459
	Female	620	2.90	0.888		

* 5% level of significance

Table 4 denotes all the variables of reaction to substandard product/service. All four variables the 'p' value is greater than 0.05 at 5% level of significance. Hence, the null hypotheses including all the four variables are accepted. It shows that there is no significant difference between reaction to substandard product/service among male and female Consumers. High mean values (3.11) in the Consumer Complaint to seller of male consumers are better than that of female consumers. Hence there is no relationship in between male and female consumers.

Table: 5 Experience of unfair trade practices among Male and Female Consumers.

The awareness of consumerism will eradicate the unfair trade practice. Generally, the public are in the thought that they have to face the experience of inferior quality, less quantity unfair trade practice whenever they purchase a product.

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between experience of unfair trade practices and their gender wise.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P value
Inferior quality	Male	396	3.09	1.091	0.016	0.586
	Female	620	3.12	0.976		
Less quantity	Male	396	3.07	1.084	0.016	0.271
	Female	620	3.14	0.956		
Adulteration	Male	396	3.09	1.088	0.016	0.346
	Female	620	3.15	0.961		
Exorbitant price	Male	396	3.09	1.069	0.037	0.441*
	Female	620	3.14	0.972		
False guarantee	Male	396	3.11	1.084	0.004	0.451
	Female	620	3.11	0.956		

* 5% level of significance

The 'P' value is greater than 0.05 in all variables relating to the experience of unfair trade practices. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significance. The mean value of (93.15) adulteration is high among female consumers when compare to male consumers. It is concluded that there is no relationship between experience of unfair trade practices with their male and female consumers.

Table: 6 Awareness of products and services through different media.

To the consumers, there are some variations in analysing the products and services. These will be different on the basis of educational knowledge and others. There are different types of media to help the consumers to understand the products. In this study, data were collected from two districts in southern part of Tamil Nadu. 'F' test is used to identify the significant variation in between awareness of products and services in different media.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between education and awareness of products and service through different media.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F value	P value
Television / Radio	Illiterate	315	2.91	0.627	16.021	0.000
	School	347	3.36	0.922		
	Graduate	293	3.40	1.225		
	Professional	61	3.13	1.500		
News Paper / Magazine	Illiterate	315	2.91	0.599	19.321	0.000
	School	347	3.37	0.913		
	Graduate	293	3.47	1.201		
	Professional	61	3.25	1.422		
Friends and relatives	Illiterate	315	2.90	0.599	17.480	0.000
	School	347	3.40	0.924		
	Graduate	293	3.37	1.228		
	Professional	61	3.31	1.444		
Through traders	Illiterate	315	2.87	0.573	8.474	0.000
	School	347	3.20	0.912		
	Graduate	293	3.20	1.202		
	Professional	61	3.03	1.366		
Consumer Club	Illiterate	315	2.86	0.579	8.414	0.000*
	School	347	3.17	0.904		
	Graduate	293	3.20	1.158		
	Professional	61	3.02	1.396		

* 5% level of significance

In this study 'p' value is less than 0.05 at five percent level of significance therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It is concluded that there is significant difference between education of Consumers and awareness of products and services. Newspaper and magazine plays a vital role in creating awareness among consumers in different products and services. Its mean value is 3.47. In it graduates get awareness by newspaper and magazine.

Table 7 Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and its levels of opinion

The Consumer Acts are easy to understand to all even an illiterate. In this study, data were collected from two districts in southern part of Tamil Nadu. 'T' test is used to identify the significant variation in between awareness of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 gender wise.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between gender and Consumer protection Act 1986.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P value
Simple	Male	396	3.06	0.960	0.457	0.648
	Female	620	3.09	0.913		
Easy to understand	Male	396	3.07	0.946	0.007	0.994
	Female	620	3.07	0.900		
Complicated	Male	396	2.92	0.971	0.575	0.565*
	Female	620	2.96	0.918		

* 5% level of significance

In this study 'p' value is greater than 0.05 at five percent significant level therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It is concluded that there is no significant difference between gender and Consumer protection Act 1986. Mean value of female Consumer is higher in understanding of Consumer protection Act 1986.

Findings

1. This study indicates, the majority of consumers have awareness in consumer Rights which are high in Nagercoil. District .The awareness of consumer Rights is based on district of the consumers.
2. The study shows that there is significant association between the educational level of the consumers and the complaints are consumers in consumer court.
3. In this study, the 'P' value is less than 0.05 at 5% level of significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that, there is significant difference between the education of the consumers and awareness of products and services through media. The majority of the graduate consumers are much aware of products and services when compared to other type of media through newspapers/magazines. Only least of the consumers are aware of consumer club.
4. From this study, 'P' value is greater than 0.05 at 5% level. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted and concluded that there is no significant relationship between experience at unfair trade practices with male and female consumers. From the mean value it implies that female consumers have high experience in adulteration than male consumers.
5. In this study, the 'P' value is greater than 0.05 at 5% level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference between the male and female consumer with their awareness in Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Majority of the male and female consumers stated that, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is Simple and easy to understand.
6. In this study indicates the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significance. It shows that there is no significant relationship between reaction to substandard product/ service among male and female consumers. The mean value indicates the consumer complaints to seller of male consumers are better than that of female consumers.
7. In this study since 'P' value is less than 0.05 at 5% level of significance, therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It concluded that there is relationship between awareness of consumer forums with their locality. The mean value is found that urban consumers are highly aware of consumer forums than rural consumers.

Suggestion

1. This study indicates the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significance. There is no significant difference in between awareness of consumer rights two districts. The mean value implies that awareness about consumer rights are better in Nagercoil district when compared to Thoothukudi district. Awareness should be created among consumers in Thoothukudi district about consumer Rights.
2. In this study majority of the consumers are not aware, how to file complaints in the consumer court against the unfair trade practices. Only least are aware of filing complaints, Therefore steps should be taken to made the consumers aware about how to file complaints in the consumer court. This is possible only by making them aware about the consumer protection Act 1986
3. Majority of the graduate consumers are aware of product and services through newspaper magazines when compared to other types of media. The school level and the professionals are not aware of different availability of product and services. Therefore, awareness should be created among the professionals and school level consumers regarding the availability of products and services in the market.
4. Generally, the female consumers have highly awareness of adulteration about the less quantity, exorbitant price than the male consumers. Therefore, awareness must be created to the male consumers.
5. The male consumers have no awareness in complaints to district forum when compared to female consumers. Most of the female consumers are filing complaints to seller. Some consumers' do not filing the complaints in other forum. Awareness should be created among female consumer in giving complaints against all unfair trade practices.
6. Most of the consumers are aware of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, and stated that it is easy, simple to understand. Only a small number of consumers stated that they are unable to understand the Consumer Protection Act. Therefore, steps should be taken to create awareness about Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and the Act should be explained in a simple way in form of circulars to the consumers.
7. The urban consumers have more awareness of consumer forums. The rural consumers have not aware the state forum, district forum and national commission. The rural consumers have no knowledge about consumer forums. Therefore, the government has to play a vital role to create awareness programme for the rural consumers.

Conclusion

The success of the consumer awareness towards consumer protection measures depends upon the consumers' involvement and the government cooperation. Despite the continuous efforts being taken by the voluntary consumer organizations towards protecting the consumer's interest and their rights and undertaking different programs and activities for conducting seminars, workshops, etc, a majority of consumers are still completely ignorant of the existence of the Consumer Protection Act and redressal agencies created under this Act. The use of consumer protection is the need of the hour. It should be the way of life for all sections of the society to be real consumer. The use of consumer education as a competitive tool has two basic aspects. First, a company determines what consumers need to know that will allow them to take the most satisfying purchases of the company's products and services. Next, the firm integrates this consumer education material with its existing budgeted promotion plan and future budgeted plans. The best interest can only be protected through effective cooperation among consumers, businessman, and government. It is necessary to educate consumers, to make them vigilant, rational, and aware buyers.

Reference

1. Chandra, J.P. (1990). *Consumer Awareness*, New Jersey Tamil Sangam USA/INDIA, pp. 104.
2. Bishan Singh, (2001). Consumer Rights and Responsibilities Code of Conduct for Ethical Business Importance of Protect Labelling. *Consumer Education*, pp. 6.
3. Bell, C. S. & Cochran, W., & (1956). *The economics of Consumption*, McGraw Hill. New York, pp. 13-14.

Website

<http://www.consumerdaddy.com> , Accessed on 11th June 2013.
<http://www.consumer-voice.org>, Accessed on 15th June 2013.
<http://www.consumerhelpindia.com> , Accessed on 25th June 2013.
<http://consumeraffairs.nic.in> , Accessed on 10th June 2013.

