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THE ISSUE OF CONSUMER EXPLOITATION AND THE NECESSITY OF AWARENESS-RAISING AND EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Consumers are individuals who buy goods or services with the intention of consuming them or using them. Each and every shopper has specific needs and desires. Additionally, Every consumer has a legal right to use fair trade to obtain the goods or services they want. Only if the buyer is satisfied is a product or service worth what the customer paid for it. Many customers are taken advantage of by false advertising, deceptive billing practises, the sale of defective goods, internet fraud, hoarding, pricing discrimination, etc. because they are unaware of their rights as consumers. The most crucial element in consumer education is consumer rights and responsibilities knowledge, which has a significant impact on individual behaviour. We need consumer education so that we won't be misled by producers; it clarifies if the products we buy, are worthwhile investments for our money and are safe for both the environment and ourselves. Many people may not know that they have the right to protection against others' exploitation. So, knowledge is necessary to acquire a comprehensive picture of the extent of consumer exploitation. when there is a place for such redress of grievances, it appears that there is no such widespread exploitation and it becomes a rare one. This study paper's major goals are to address the dilemma of consumer exploitation, to raise knowledge of consumer rights under Consumer Protection Act, 1986, the role played by the supporting groups in spreading consumer awareness and the real necessity for consumer education in the Indian society.

INTRODUCTION:

Consumers have been taken advantage of throughout the history of Indian society. Additionally, governments have occasionally passed laws to safeguard them. Whether we look at the pre-independence era or the post-independence era, the interests of the consumers have undoubtedly been kept in mind by both legislators and policy planners. The governments have passed a number of laws in an effort to safeguard the interests of consumers. However, the fundamental issue with all of these laws is that they are either extremely difficult to understand or that the process for obtaining justice through the use of these laws is extremely time-consuming. The ultimate effect is that a regular person either lacks knowledge of these complex laws' provisions or lacks motivation in engaging in any kind of time-consuming legal process in order to seek and obtain justice. Nothing comes out of it other than India being able to boast about having some of the most comprehensive and high-quality laws. But when it comes to their relevance and implementation, we must hang our heads in shame since the average consumer, for whom these laws were written, is unaware of their existence and, even if he is, has the finances, time, or desire to take advantage of them. Consumers are therefore continuously and endlessly exploited. Therefore, customers must be aware of these laws, aware of their rights, and should be in compliance with them in order to truly benefit from all of these pieces of legislation. Consumers must be willing to stand up for their rights, and consumer campaigners playing a significant role in promoting consumer awareness and motivating customers to bring up their complaints in order to avoid being taken advantage of at the hands of traders and even at the hands of immoral experts.

THE REAL PROBLEM IN THE INIDAN SOCIETY

Consumer exploitation is when a producer acts selfishly for his own gain, with the intention of bringing more mental satisfaction to solely the producer and having negative impacts on the customer who may be uneducated or oblivious. In that case, we want consumers to benefit from these laws, but if we truly want them to be able to defend themselves in the marketplace against the

dishonest and immoral acts of traders, sellers, businesspeople, and these days, even exploiting professionals, they must be fully aware of their rights and obligations. Only then we will be able to build a society that is truly focused on consumer protection. More knowledge would increase awareness, which would increase assertiveness, which would increase protection, and so on. In actuality, even people who are highly educated, smart, and well-read are unaware of their consumer rights. By now, we should be completely aware that the Indian Parliament approved the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 with the intention of promoting and safeguarding consumers' interests and facilitating their simple access to justice. After this law was passed, the Indian market entered a new chapter of consumer protection. The market began progressively changing from a seller's place to a buyer's place, ushering in an era of "Consumer Sovereignty." This was a significant victory for consumer advocates and organisations that had been fighting for a distinct Consumer Protection Law to advance and safeguard the interests of consumers. The Consumer Protection Act functioned well in the beginning, but after advocates began to appear before the Consumer Forums, these Forums began to act like civil courts, where adjournments are cheerfully requested and granted for every big and little matter. Neither the ineffective operation of the Commissions and Forums for Consumer Protection nor the representation of advocates before these Forums constitute the underlying issue.

Consumer behaviour itself is the primary problem. Absolutely, none of us as customers are aware of our legal rights. We have some rights under the Consumer Protection Act of 1986, they are, the rights to safety, information, hearing, remedy, and consumer education, among others. How many of us, though, are actually aware of these Consumer Rights? Not many of us. And this is the issue that leads to our constant exploitation. We won't be taken advantage of the way we have been up until now, if we are aware of our rights. Even though some of us may be aware of our rights, we are not yet prepared to exercise them. Thus, lack of education, ignorance, lack of awareness, and finally a lack of desire to claim our rights are the true causes of consumer exploitation in Indian society.

IN NEED OF EFFECTIVE CONSUMER EDUCATION, GREATER CONSUMER RIGHTS AWARENESS AND ASSERTIVENESS

Based on consumer experience in industrialised nations, it is clear that the less exploited population is, the more conscious they are, of their rights and the more willing they are to stand up for them. Consumers are now progressively becoming more aware, as seen by the growth of education, literacy, and awareness. Though, merely becoming aware won't provide anything in the way of results. Assertiveness must be used in conjunction with awareness rather than as a substitute for it. For instance, if a trader takes advantage of a customer in the marketplace and the customer confronts the trader about the over price he charges or the damaged product he sells, nothing will change unless the customer goes to the Consumer Protection Agency and lodges a complaint if the trader does not address his legitimate complaints. The Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was created with the intention of promoting and safeguarding consumers' real interests. We must emphasise the role that consumer voluntary organisations may play in society when we discuss consumer education and awareness. It is unquestionably true that only through the tireless efforts and fiercest consumer defence campaign led by consumer protection organisations across the nation, Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was approved.

Despite the large number of consumer organisations, the Consumer Education and Research Society in Ahmedabad, the Consumer Guidance Society of India in Bombay, the Consumer Action Group and Common Cause in Delhi, and the Consumer Unity and Trust Society in Jaipur and Calcutta have all played very significant and noteworthy roles. In addition to educating consumers about their rights, the majority of these organisations are also prepared to intervene and file lawsuits on behalf of customers whose interests as a group of social beings are at stake. In order for these organisations to continue their fight against the exploitation of customers' interests, we as consumers must support them in addition to recognising their efforts.

Government of India launched various campaign programmes to create awareness among consumers. In 2005, Consumer protection campaign Jago Grahak Jago was launched and it was the most significant and effective programme that has effectively addressed consumer concerns and protected customers from unethical marketing tactics.

CONCLUSION

We must be fully aware of our rights if we wish to achieve a society that is consumer protection oriented. Having knowledge of our rights will enable us as consumers to exercise them. Since the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was passed, everyone—including businesspeople and traders—has a clear understanding of their obligations. They've come to the realisation that a contemporary, educated customer is no longer willing to fall prey to constant commercial exploitation. Because so many customers have taken businesses to the Consumer Forums, companies are increasingly reluctant to offer faulty goods. However, only really well-educated and forceful consumers would experience this. The corporate sector is identical for the majority of us. They solely care about making money, even at the expense of abusing innocent customers by selling them damaged or contaminated goods, pay outrageous rates, fabricating artificial scarcities, refusing to offer after-sale support, and other practises. While corporates are at the notion that their sole purpose is to run firms and carry on businesses only to make unfair trade practises and anticompetitive practises shall prevail. Both the producers and retailers should know that the market is for the consumers and their rights are to be protected. At last, it is concluded that it is necessary for an awareness to prevail amongst the consumer to protect them from unscrupulous trade practises and injustices.