

Consumer Rights and Awareness on Consumers: Analysis of Consumer Knowledge and Education

Adari Kishore Kumar

Prof. D. Surya Prakasa Rao

Research Scholar, Department of Law
Andhra University

Department of Law, Andhra University

Abstract:

The purpose of this survey is to determine consumers' understanding of their rights. To determine the degree of customers, a questionnaire was prepared and sent online to gather data. Despite India's robust and well-defined legal framework safeguarding consumer rights, the real state of affairs for Indian consumers is nothing short of appalling. Very few customers are aware of or comprehend their fundamental legal rights. Of the numerous laws passed in India to safeguard the rights of consumers.

Keywords: Consumer Rights, Consumer Protection and Consumer Awareness.

Introduction:

We are living in the consumer era. Any person who consumes products or services in any manner is referred to as a "consumer"¹. Furthermore, since the customer not only serves as the market's focal point but also controls how it operates, any breach of his rights will be taken very seriously. Due to the communication revolution, which has made business transactions and other purchases increasingly easier and more accessible, the current era is known as the "digital age." This has been made feasible by the additional dimensions that the expansion of electronic communication has brought about, namely the increase in business prospects that come with direct connectivity between different countries. However, this possibility is further undermining consumer rights because of the business class's avarice. Nevertheless, despite best attempts, the user may encounter numerous issues during consumption.

The fundamental causes of consumerism's rise in India diverge significantly from those in the West. The most prominent problems are a lack of basic consumer products and services, inflation that is still present, low technological proficiency, poor product quality, unethical business activities, deceptive advertising, and similar problems. The primary goals of the consumer movement in our nation should be to protect the interests of consumers, raise consumer awareness, build and strengthen positive buyer-seller relationships, stop consumer exploitation, encourage consumer education, provide pertinent consumer information, offer facilities for quality testing, etc. However, the movement's development in India has been comparatively slow and sluggish compared to its counterparts in the West. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, a lack of adequate market information, a lack of consumer involvement and interest in issues pertaining to the market, etc. In this aspect, the government has also failed to deliver results. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that government efforts to safeguard consumers should not be undervalued. It has implemented a number of legal safeguards in order to protect customers' interests, enforce consumer protection laws, and monitor and regulate market misconduct. To a

large degree, the problem appears to be with how they were implemented. In the marketplace, the consumer is the one who requires special consideration.

The statement "Consumer is the sole end-purpose of all production and the interest of the producer ought to be attended to only so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer" was highlighted by Adam Smith¹ more than two centuries ago. Finding a customer for his good or service is a salesman's main responsibility during a campaign. The source of all sales is him. According to Philip Kotler², "marketing is analysing, organizing, planning and controlling of the firms as well as consumer impinging resources, policies and activities with a view to satisfying the needs and wants of chosen customer groups at a profit" . Marketing is "a process that converts a resource, distinct knowledge into a contribution of economic value in the market place," according to Peter F. Drucker³. The creation of customers is the aim of business. Thanks to this expanded perspective on marketing, the "Marketing Concept" was developed, as Theodore Levitt explains succinctly: "Management needs to view its role as providing value satisfaction that creates value for customers, rather than as producing products." This concept needs to be pushed into every crevice and area of the organisation. If not, the business will just be a collection of siloed components lacking a unifying vision or strategy. In other words, the company needs to learn to view itself as a buyer of clients rather than a producer of goods or services, and as acting in a way that will encourage others to do business with it.⁴ It is reasonable to assume that the producers and vendors will conduct their business with integrity, honesty, and adherence to moral standards. Since he is giving manufacturers a chance to make items, they should consider the welfare of the consumer.

Protecting the interests of customers will undoubtedly be greatly aided by businesspeople who are aware of their social obligations and who willingly instill in themselves self-control, self-discipline, and business ethics. Maybe strict regulations against them won't be necessary. Customers usually have some basic expectations of traders: reasonable price, decent quality, precise weight, product safety, guaranteed supply, resolution of complaints against dishonest merchants, post-purchase service, and defence against unfair trade⁵. The following analysis focus on these fundamental consumer expectations.

The "Caveat Emptor" theory dominated the market for a considerable amount of time. Manufacturers and traders who were well-informed and well-organized took advantage of consumers in a number of ways that have already been detailed in the preceding pages of this study. But gradually, different people started to occasionally raise the voice of protection. There was a growing recognition of the necessity of safeguarding the rightful interests of both consumers and society at large. Public opinion was putting increasing pressure on the government and business sectors. Realisation set in that consumer rights needed to be respected and safeguarded. The following significant consumer rights were outlined in a 1962 speech by US President John F. Kennedy⁶, which marked a turning point in the march in this direction.

RIGHTS OF CONSUMERS:

The Legal Claim for Safety According to this right, consumers must be shielded from the promotion of products that endanger their health or property.

The right to information This right grants the consumer the protection against false, dishonest, or blatantly misleading advertising, labelling, and other activities, as well as the right to have the information necessary to make an informed decision.

The Freedom of Selection: The customer should have reasonable rates for a wide range of goods and services. Government regulation is to be used in those industries where competition is impractical in order to offer adequate and high-quality goods and services at reasonable costs.

Review of Literature:

According to Dr. Mona Sikka's (2012) study article, Consumer Protection Act-Awareness, patient rights have always been a topic of controversy on a global scale. In fact, patient rights are becoming legalised all over the world, including in India under the "Consumer Protection Act, 1986". There have been attempts to safeguard the rights of consumers, including hospital patients receiving treatment, however health professionals are not aware of these laws. In the past few decades, scientific and biotechnological advancements have raised living conditions and increased people's awareness of their legal rights. This is the reason why there are numerous claims made by patients against doctors for treatment defaults in the medical profession, as per the contract between the doctor and the patient.

Medicus Ishwar Mittal. The current research report, Consumer Awareness about Different Consumer Protection Legislation in India (2015), is based on research conducted in the state of Haryana to ascertain people's knowledge of the various laws designed to safeguard consumers' interests. All applicable laws to better protect the interests of consumers by enforcing the right to "life and personal liberty" as stipulated in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, shielding them from various sorts of exploitation, fraud, and deceit. implemented with the intention of saving.

The right to be heard states that the government shall give careful and sympathetic attention to the interests of the public when formulating policies and shall handle matters pertaining to the public interest in its administrative "tribunals" in a fair and expedient manner. Three further consumer rights were later approved by the International Organisation of Consumers Union. These are described in the section below.

Right to Seek Redress: Under this right, a customer may file a complaint about deceptive business activities or dishonestly exploit them. It also covers the right to a just resolution of customers' legitimate complaints.

The goal of the right to consumer education is to give consumers the tools they need to become knowledgeable shoppers for the rest of their lives.

The consumer's right to a life of dignity and well-being, where his fundamental needs and services are provided, is outlined in the right to a healthy environment. In order to clean up pollution and restore the world's natural beauty, it ensures that people have access to enough food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, and sanitation.

The issues that customers have with sellers are the main emphasis of the consumer protection concept. Considering the current socio-economic shifts in people's living conditions, it is critical to build a robust and inclusive consumer movement that stimulates consumerism⁷. Consumer consciousness is rising sharply in the industrialized economies of the West, and there is a robust and active consumer movement. However, the consumer movement is disorganized and weak in emerging nations. The urgent issues facing consumers are not given enough attention by the governments of these nations. Despite being numerous, the actions they took in this direction have not been successful.

Statement of the Problem:

In this busy day and age, we have grown so indifferent to our rights even though we know that we should always check the quality, standard trademarks, expiration date, and other details of any product or service before purchasing it or using it, but we also don't have the time to do so. The only option in the event of a subsequent loss is to contact the consumer forum. In order to avoid having too many consultations before visiting the forum, the consumer will only proceed if he believes the forum has the potential to compensate him for his loss; otherwise, he will not.

Objectives of the Study:

To study the levels of consumer's awareness on Consumer Rights.

To study the factors of consumer's awareness on Consumer Rights.

To assess consumer awareness based on geographic location and occupational differentiation.

Research Methodology:

Data Collection of the Study-

The primary data for the study were used. Primary data was gathered via online interactions with respondents using a standardised questionnaire. Random sampling has become the accepted method. Three WhatsApp groups and Facebook were used to distribute the questionnaire, and 100 users answered our organised form overall.

The Likert scale, which has five categories—very high, high, neutral, very low, and low—has been used to identify customers' rights regarding awareness.

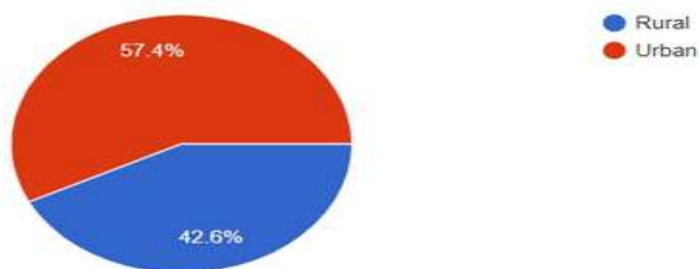
For the research results, the level of duties has been determined using several statistical measures, such as mean and standard deviation, in conjunction with the respondents' age, education, occupation, and geographic location.

The consumers' level of awareness has been gauged using the following formulas. (1) Mean > SD = good; (2) SD > Mean = poor is the score.

Research Finding and Discussion

Consumers of various age groups were asked five questions to find out what level of rights they had and what background information they had acquired. Graph 1 makes it evident that the majority of responders fell between the 21–30 age range. Nonetheless, responses have also been received from customers between the ages of 18 and 21 and 30 and 45. Most young people use modern technology these days, including laptops and cell phones. In other words, they buy the majority of the content found online.

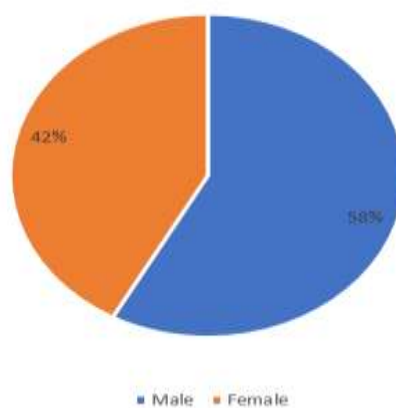
Graph 1(Geographical Status of Consumers)



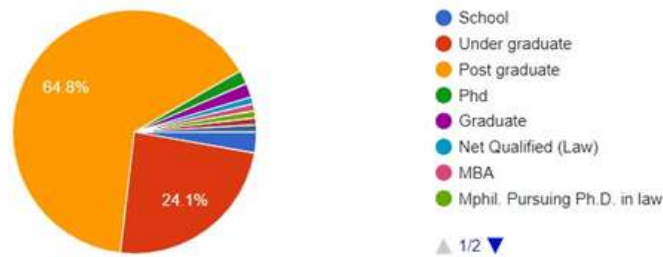
According to the following graph, 42.6 percent of the 108 respondents (consumers) live in rural areas and 57.4 percent are urban. This makes it logical that consumers in remote locations are equally interested in making purchases of goods and services online.

Graph 02(Gender Status of Consumers)

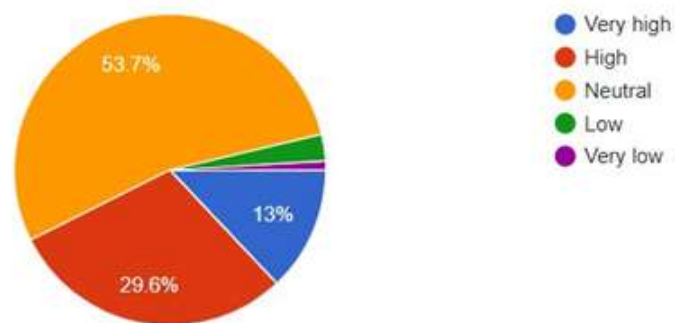
Gender Status



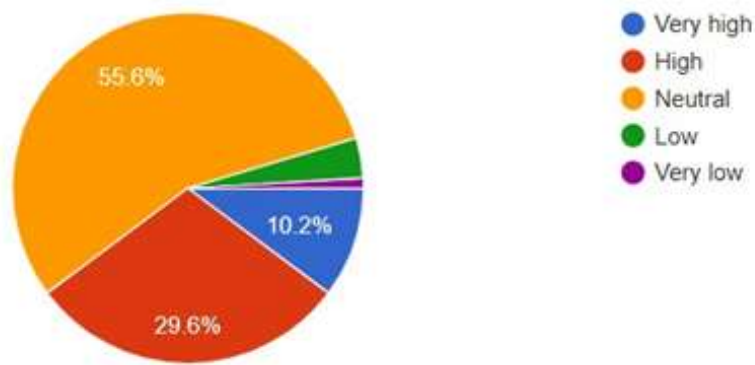
The above graph signifies that 58 percent male and 42 percent female respondents have given information about consumer rights. This shows that women also believe in online shopping.

Graph 3 Educational Qualifications

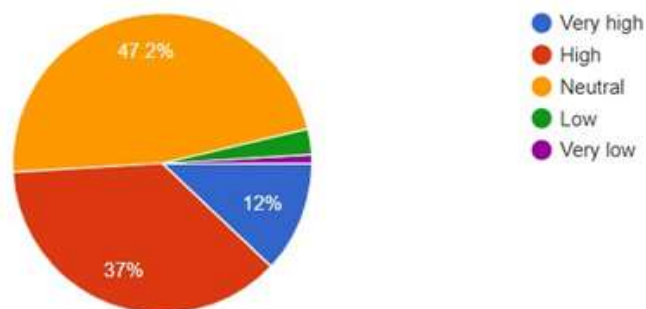
According to the accompanying graph, respondents with varying levels of education—from elementary school to a PhD—have responded to questions about consumer rights knowledge. Of these, 64.8 percent are post-graduates, 24.1 percent are graduates, and 11% have other qualifications. The researcher postulated that knowledgeable customers would appropriately exercise their rights. The above table shows that 108 respondents answered the researcher's five questions in total, and the Likert scale was used to determine the mean and standard deviation of the responses.

Graph 4 Knowledge on decision-making process related to consumer interest**Interpretation:**

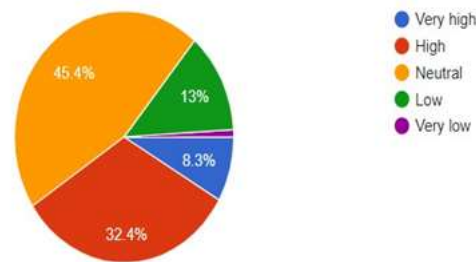
The graph above shows that while 29.6% of respondents had high knowledge and 13% had very high knowledge about the decision-making process connected to consumer interest, more than half (53.7%) of respondents had neutral understanding in this area. The mean value (2.4814815) is higher than the SD value (2.0637973) on the Likert scale. It is evident that the majority of respondents had a skewed understanding of how decisions pertaining to consumer interests are made.

Graph 5 Knowledge about hazardous goods**Interpretation:**

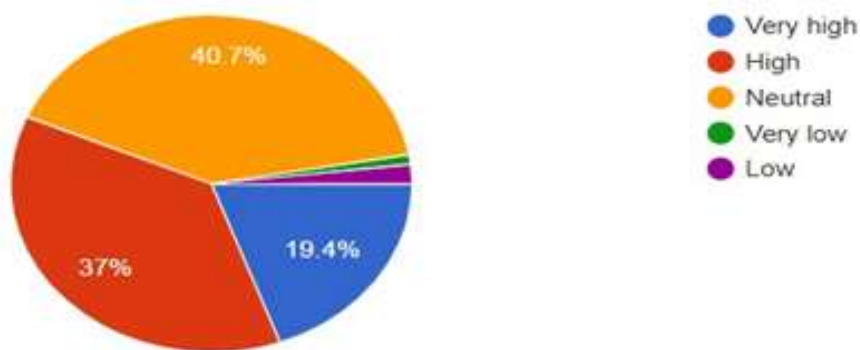
The graph above makes it evident that 10.2% of respondents had very high awareness, 29.6% had high awareness, and fewer than half (55.6%) had neutral understanding of hazardous goods and services. The SD value (2.116951) is less than the mean value (2.5462963). It is evident from this that the majority of respondents had unbiased knowledge regarding dangerous items and services.

Graph 6 Performance and quality of goods and services**Interpretation:**

The graph above shows that, with regard to the performance and quality of all goods and services, less than half (47.2%) of the respondents had neutral knowledge, 37% had high knowledge, and 12% had very high knowledge. Since the mean value (2.4259259) is higher than the standard deviation (2.0046243), it is also evident that the majority of respondents had a neutral awareness of the effectiveness and calibre of all goods and services.

Graph 7 Knowledge on seeking redressal mechanism**Interpretation:**

It is evident that less than half (45.5%) of the respondents had neutral Knowledge on seeking redressal machinery, 32.4% of the respondents had high Knowledge, 13% of the respondents had very high Knowledge. The mean value is 2.6481481 and SD value is 2.2443344.

Graph 8 Consumer knowledge and education**Interpretation:**

40.7% of respondents had neutral knowledge about consumer education, 37% had high knowledge about consumer education, and 19.4% had very high knowledge about consumer education, according to the graph above. Since the mean value is higher than the standard deviation, the majority of consumers had neutral information about this claim.

Findings and Suggestions:

Despite India's robust and well-defined legal framework safeguarding consumer rights, the real state of affairs for Indian consumers is nothing short of appalling. Very few customers are aware of or comprehend their fundamental legal rights. The most significant of the several laws passed in India to safeguard consumers' rights is the Consumer Protection Act of 1986. Any individual, business, corporation, or undivided Hindu family may utilise their consumer rights under this legislation with regard to the products and services they buy. As consumers, it is critical that we are aware of our basic rights as well as the legal system and processes that handle infringements on those rights.

Any producer's primary goal in this era of globalisation and capitalism is to maximise profits. The company is attempting to boost product sales in every manner that it can.

As a result, in achieving their goal, they lose sight of the interests of the customers and start taking advantage of them. Some examples of this include charging exorbitant prices, selling products that are fake or of low quality, deceiving customers through deceptive advertising, etc. It is imperative that the consumer understands this. Making the customer aware in this sense entails informing them of their rights and responsibilities. Upon examining all of the aforementioned information, the study's findings indicate that most consumers only have a vague understanding of their rights, which highlights the necessity for consumer education initiatives aimed at enhancing quality of life. The majority of the participants possess a moderate comprehension of consumer responsibility. The findings indicated that while wealth and education were positively connected with awareness level, age was negatively correlated with consumer awareness of consumer rights. From the explanation above, it is clear that consumers who are educated can exhibit this attribute by prioritising things according to their needs.

Suggestions

Therefore, in the developing rural market, increased consumer protection is essential. Enhancing the implementation of current legislation, examining the redress system, and maintaining official and informal consumer education initiatives—such as public awareness campaigns and television ads—would all be positive first steps.

Specifically, throughout all industries and professions, there is a uniform lack of awareness of the consumer's entitlement to education. Since it enables the consumer to utilise all other rights, this is essential. Vendors are still free to refuse customers their right to information. Extensive legal processes deter people from using the courts to address problems.

Conclusion:

The survey shows a disparity in consumer knowledge between metropolitan and rural areas. The least aware of all job categories seem to be farmers. Most importantly, a low level of awareness exists on the right to consumer education across all industries and professions. This is essential since it gives the customer the ability to assert all other rights. Sellers are still able to deny customers their right to information without consequence. Difficult court procedures deter people from trying to get their complaints heard by judges. Therefore, there is a pressing need for increased consumer protection in the developing rural market. It would be beneficial to improve the enforcement of current legislation, redesign the redressal process, and implement ongoing formal and informal consumer education initiatives, such as awareness-raising TV ads and public events. It is anticipated that the data in the study will help those who design policy, such as the Indian government, non-governmental organisations, the judiciary, research, and educational institutions. Additionally, the study's conclusions will assist the government in creating more focused policies that uphold and advance consumer rights.

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