

Awareness of Consumer Rights among Students

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ABSTRACT

We are consumer by birth and become a buyer over a period of time. Sooner or later everyone buys a product by taking various decisions. These decisions or selections play a vital role in the buying process. The purpose of the study is to check about the knowledge of the buyer regarding consumer rights and responsibilities. The study will also focus on the awareness of the grievance handling machinery among the students. The study will focus on 100 respondents from Bareilly region and their responses will be taken with the help of a questionnaire. This study will focus on providing suggestions for the further awareness of all the consumer rights.

Keywords: Consumer; Consumer Protection; Grievances; Consumer Rights; Consumer Responsibilities; Awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The prime motto of opening a business is to earn profit and with this aim every business/businessman goes for maximisation of profit by keeping aside basic rights and obligations which a consumer wants. Sometimes the business goes for false and manipulated advertisement, hiding the facts, etc. this can also be seen in various ways like poor quality, higher price than actual cost, cloning the product, incorrect measurement, incomplete information, increasing prices by showing scarcity of the product, adulteration, etc.

In order to protect and safeguard the interest of consumers The Consumer Protection Bill was introduced in 1986. This bill was passed by the Parliament of India and became Consumer Protection Act, 1986 (No. 68 of 1986). At present, the law relating to consumer protection is contained in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, the Consumer Protection Regulations, 2005 and the Consumer Protection Rules, 1987. The Act was enacted with an aim of providing better protection to the consumer as the authorities under the Act were performing the judicial functions. The act was a complete and comprehensive mechanism for the consumers. The main purpose of the act was to provide the following:

- Promotion of consumer awareness
- Promote and sustain discrimination and exploitation free competition in markets
- Prevent unfair trade practices
- Protect and promote the rights of consumers,
- Speedy and economical redressal of grievances

II. WHO IS A CONSUMER?

A consumer can be referred to all those individuals who buy products and services either for themselves or on behalf of their households. So they can be either the users of these products and services, or are responsible for the welfare and well being of those who use them

According to the definition contained in the Act, a person to be a consumer of goods should satisfy the following conditions-

- 1) The goods are bought for consideration.
- 2) Any person who uses the goods with the approval of the buyer is a consumer.
- 3) Any person who obtains the goods for resale or commercial purposes is not a consumer.
- 4) Person buying goods for self-employment is a consumer.

A person is a consumer of services if the services are hired or beneficiary or any amount is paid or payable.

III. CONSUMER RIGHTS

As per the act the following 6 rights are recognized-

- 1) The right to be protected against marketing of goods which are hazardous to life and property,
- 2) The right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices,
- 3) The right to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of goods at competitive prices
- 4) The right to be heard and to be assured that consumers' interests will receive due consideration at appropriate forums,
- 5) The right to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers and
- 6) The right to consumer education.

IV. CONSUMER RESPONSIBILITIES

It has been found that many of the consumers are not aware about their responsibilities. An unawareness of this leads to various unsatisfaction needs of the consumer. A consumer should always ask or enquire about the complete detail of the product or service before making the final decision. It includes like price, tax, quality, warranty, terms and conditions, after sales service, etc. in order to safeguard customers their are various quality assurance logos like AGMARK, HALLMARK, ISI, WOOLMARK, ECOMARK, etc. if a customer is offered a inferior product or service then he can take up the matter to the court for redressal. Most of the customers don't take the bill of the purchase done by them. This act of the customers makes the sellers to sell whatever they want whether good or bad.

The Act provides a 3 tier quasi judicial redressal system at district, state and national level. These levels are also called as District forum, State forum and National forum. But most of the consumers are unaware about all of these as the awareness level is minimum to promote it. Usually the consumer protection act is studied by higher education students and its awareness at school level is minimal. In a small town like Bareilly if the awareness level is so poor than what can we accept about a village. By the help of this study I am trying to spread an awareness level among the students at school levels or undergraduate first year student.

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives –

- 1) Awareness level among students
- 2) What a consumer looks for while purchasing a product
- 3) Spreading awareness
- 4) Suggestion

VI. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Nair (2012) analyzed a negative result and limited consumer awareness among respondents in spite of various Government initiatives.

Singh and Sharma (2013) found difference in levels of awareness among respondents with different educational qualification and profession.

Dr. Arora et al. (2014) is of the opinion that the benefits of consumer awareness of an individual include enhanced critical thinking, improved life skills and increased self-confidence. Results of their study indicate that teenagers are not fully aware of quality assurance marks on different products.

Dr. Gurusamy et al. (2014) however found a positive result and observed almost complete consumer awareness among the respondents of Coimbatore district.

Singh et al. (2014) marks an unsatisfactory awareness level about Consumer Protection Act among the medical as well as surgical specialists.

VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, primary and secondary data has been collected.

The major data was collected with the help of questionnaire and one to one interview by the respondents of 12th class and first year Degree College going students of Bareilly region. Students of management course and commerce stream were kept out of the survey as they have studied about the consumer protection act in their curriculum. Secondary data has been received from various books, articles and journal papers, etc. A sample size of 100 students has been taken through convenient random sampling method.

VIII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The survey was conducted and level of awareness about consumer rights and responsibilities including general awareness was judged on the following parameters:

- Who the consumer is i.e are you a consumer or a customer
- What they look into a products packet (MRP/Expiry or Manufacturing date/color/attraction)
- Do they really check the warnings mentioned on the pack or ignore them
- Do they check for the ingredients
- Do they check for the quality assurance marks
- Do they really know about consumer forums

The study gave very poor findings as the students were not aware about most of the things. The students were not aware that who the consumer is and who he customer is. They are least concerned about the MRP as the money is paid by their parents. They were looking for something very attractive on the packet of the product rather they look for manufacturing date or expiry date. They are hardly concern about the warnings mentioned on the product. They are just supposed to use the product. They don't even take pains in knowing that what all ingredients are used to make this product. Quality assurance marks and logo knowledge was bare minimum. And lastly, they don't even know that if the product or service is not up to their satisfactions then they can complaint about the same to which authority.

All these responses can be very well and easily be understand by the help of graphs shown in the below figures. The figure 1 gives a very pathetic response about the awareness of the students regarding to know that they are customer or consumer. The survey showed that 44% of student know that one who purchase a product is a consumer whereas 34% says that one who pays for the product is a consumer. Only 17% are aware about the exact meaning of the consumer.

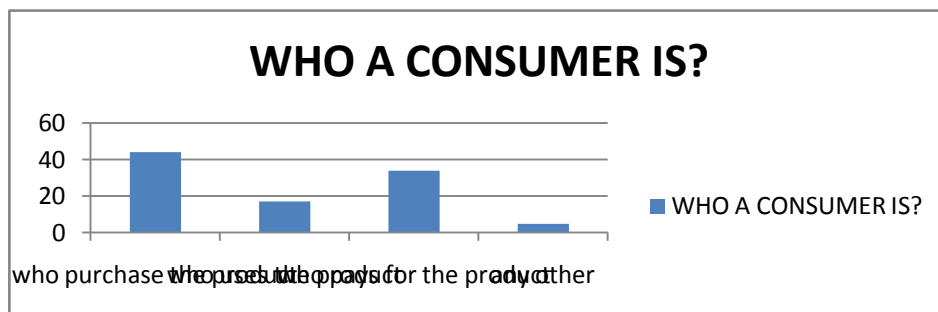


Figure 1: Who a Consumer is?

The second question focused on knowing about what actually a student (Consumer) looks out for in the packet of the product. 42% of the respondents said that they see the MRP first on the product and then any other thing or not. It is shocking that only 21% of students check out for manufacturing and expiry date in a product. Statutory warnings don't play a vital role as per them. Figure 2. Gives a detail about it.

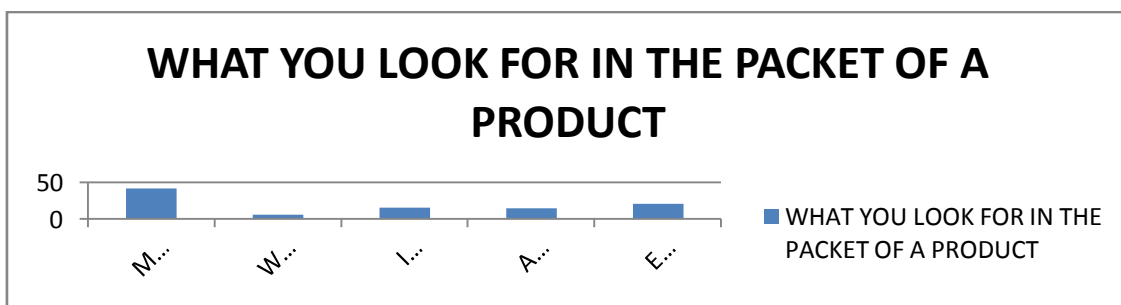


Figure 2: What a consumer look for in the product

Figure 3. will tell that how much aware our students are when it comes to have knowledge about the quality assurance marks or logo. Only 58% students were knowing about quality assurance marks and that to very few. Most of them were aware about AGMARK, HALLMARK. But other prominent marks were not aware to them few told about ISI and WOOLMARK.

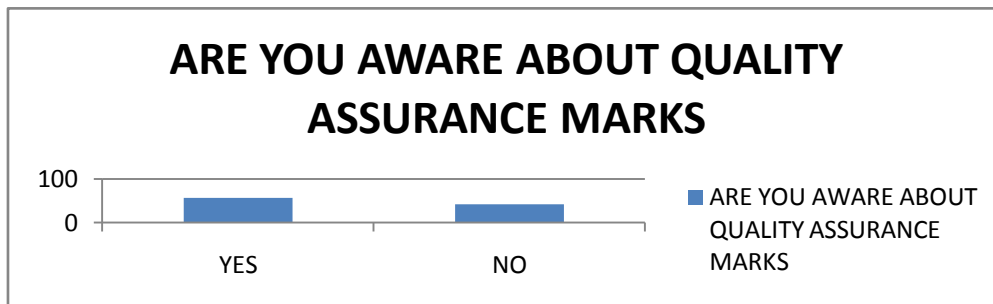


Figure 3: Quality assurance mark awareness

Our students from the region are very less aware about the consumer courts/forum. They hardly force the shopkeeper for providing the bill. Seeing this the shopkeeper also relax that now no one is going to complaint to authorities as they are not having the bill. Figure 4. Tells about the awareness level.

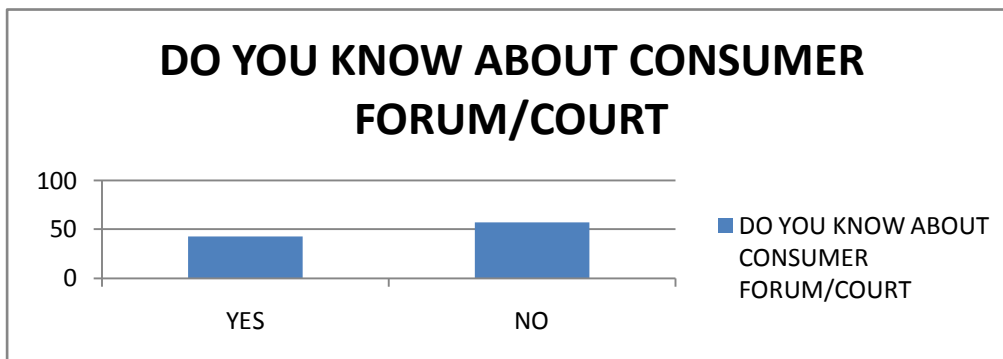


Figure 4: Awareness about consumer forum

SUGGESTIONS

With the help of this paper an effort was taken to know and understand about the awareness level of the students about the legislation named The Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Consumer’s unawareness about the rights and responsibilities makes the manufacturers and sellers to exploit the consumer. I would like to suggest the authorities to kindly add a topic of Consumer Protection Act in the course curriculum of students at 10th class level so that they can understand it exercise their right effectively.

CONCLUSION

The students are not aware about the term consumer and they are also unaware about quality assurance marks. To provide the protection to consumers it is the responsibility of the government which has very well been discharged by passing The Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The government is also conducting various programs to spread consumer awareness among people. But still, people are not fully aware of the movement of consumerism. Such ignorance gives the manufacturers and sellers more opportunities to cheat and exploit consumers. To provide awareness among the new generation can also make the older generation conscious of their consumer rights.

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