



Awareness on Right to Information: An investigation pertain to Consumer Protection Act in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract: This study discusses the level of awareness on right to information pertain to consumer protection act, 1986 in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, India. This study was conducted among 400 respondents using stratified random sampling method. Seven factors such as acquiring bill on purchase, checking expiry date, certification marks, vegetarianism logo, MRP, register for warranty and service in authorised centres were used in this study to identify the level of awareness and as the result it is found that there is a less number of people aware of information in a product which they consume daily. This study recommended that the buyer should be aware of what he buy and consume. This study can be extended to other districts of Tamil Nadu and comparative study between districts and state.

Keywords: right to information; awareness; consumer protection act; Vellore district

I. Introduction

Emerging cultures, modern trends and seasonality have provided unparalleled opportunities for consumers to choose between different products and services to satisfy their needs and to express their individuality. In the past, the consumer purchasing power was limited by budgetary constraints and their purchase seemed to have a small impact on their daily life. Currently, the income, access to information and competition empowered the consumers to demand the market to meet more of their expectations.

Current consumption patterns have changed and evolved among the consumers, who are keenly aware of market trends, the information for them is easily accessible through different information channels such as newspaper, television, and internet. The current scenario of global market is consumer-centric where all types of products and services are tailored according to the requirement of the consumer. For example, if a business owner wants to purchase a laptop, he requires software and application that compute and store business data. If a student needs a laptop for engineering purpose, it requires high-configured hardware and software.

In this context, on one hand, the consumer perceives the required product and service according to their requirement and on the other hand, the consumer takes risk on his own because the product is manufactured according to the requirement of the consumer and not as per the devise of the producer.

Consumer should know the information about a product or a service, before he decides to buy or avail. This paper discuss about the level of awareness on consumer right to information in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu, India.

II. Review of Literature

Every person in an economy is playing a role as buyer at one point of a lifetime. The purpose of an individual buyer, who is purchasing provisions for his home, shall differ from a buyer, who is purchasing raw materials for manufacturing a product. They differ on socio-economic status, shopping behaviour and their personal characteristics [1]. The buying behaviour of women is different from men because women are found to be obsessed with the products like apparel and cosmetics.

Because of the globalization and liberalization, increase in middle income and high-income population in the villages our rural markets are also expanding. Therefore, companies are reaching with their products to our rural markets as well. However, the rural consumers in India are generally ignorant and illiterate. Therefore, the manufacturers, traders and service providers exploit them. Rural consumers face problems like fake brands, spurious products, lack warranties and guarantees, imitation, unreasonable pricing, lack of varieties and so on. There is a need for spreading consumer awareness in the rural areas more seriously [2].

Vast sections of Indian population are socially and economically backward where consumer protection had to take into account as an integral part of socio-economic development and the broader objectives of promoting and

developing the country along the lines envisaged in our constitution. It recognized that in business transaction with consumers unfair-practices are widespread. The ignorant consumer is no match for the businessman and all his resources. It is also recognized that the consumer is not only one who purchases goods for use but is also a purchaser of services even those provided by the government [3].

Reference [4] was reviewed and found that that the primary duty of a business is to satisfy consumer by providing quality goods and services at right place, on right time and in right quantity at a fair price. Lawmakers in India recognize the need for consumer protection since ancient times. It is realized that unscrupulous producers exploit consumers by goods and services. Therefore, the ancient Indian law codes regulated not only social conditions but also the economic life of people by establishing human values and code of trade practices to protect the interests of buyers.

Consumers should be very careful about the product, which they take in especially packed foods, which may have a few ingredients as preservatives that may become hazardous to health when stored for a long time. The products like bottle juice have huge market all over the World particularly the country like India where climate is hotter [5]. Consumer should mandatorily check the information such as date of manufacturing, certification mark, duration of usage and so on therefore they will not be exploited.

Indian government, to create awareness among the unaware, launched a scheme called 'Jaho Grahak jaho' to measure the level of awareness and the necessity of consumer rights [6]. This scheme is particularly design for poor household and vulnerable can be easily exploited by service provides and seller [7]. It is resulted that that there is a significant effect of mass media campaigns on consumer buying behaviour but this change is mostly informal. There is no knowledge implementation in practical way [8]. Therefore, education is not the only way to curb the problem but something more is needed to check the problem.

From the lights of above reviews, it is identified that there is no developed study for consumer rights awareness, which is considered as research gap of this study.

III. Research Methodology

Descriptive research design is used in this study to explain the characteristics of the consumers in the study area with respect to right to information under consumer protection act, 1986. The minimum sample size required for this study is derived as 384 using Reference [9] formula. As Vellore district has 20 regional blocks and each block is taken as stratum, the sample size taken is equal to 400 (20 blocks multiplied by 20 respondents in each block). Thus the sample size is taken as 400 and is distributed according to stratified random sampling method.

Questionnaire is used as data collection tool to know the awareness level of consumers pertain to right to information. People who cannot read and write are explained the questions in regional language and filled up by the interviewer. The data were collected from the customers of Vellore district, which is primary data source and secondary data sources are articles, government websites, reports, and newspapers.

IV. Results and discussion

A. Socioeconomic status of the respondents

This study consists of socioeconomic status of the respondents with four factors such as gender, age, educational qualification and income, which is tabulated in Table I.

Table I Socioeconomic status of the respondents

| Demographic factors | | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Gender | Male | 285 | 71.3 |
| | Female | 115 | 28.8 |
| Age | 18-25 | 94 | 23.5 |
| | 25-35 | 101 | 25.3 |
| | 35-45 | 80 | 20.0 |
| | 45-55 | 84 | 21.0 |
| | 55 and above | 41 | 10.3 |
| Educational Qualification | Schooling | 142 | 35.5 |
| | Under Graduation | 181 | 45.3 |
| | Post Graduation | 37 | 9.3 |
| | Professional Qualification | 6 | 1.5 |
| | Others | 34 | 8.5 |
| Income | Less than Rs.5,000 | 161 | 40.3 |
| | Rs.5,000 to Rs.15,000 | 184 | 46.0 |
| | Rs.15,000 to Rs.25,000 | 32 | 8.0 |
| | Rs.25,000 to Rs.35,000 | 12 | 3.0 |
| | Rs.35,000 and above | 11 | 2.8 |
| Total of each demographic profile | | 400 | 100.0 |

Source: Primary data

The results in Table I depicts that there are more male respondents than female, more number of respondents are aged between 25 and 35, mostly undergraduates and income holders in the range of Rs.5,000 to Rs.15,000. In education qualification, the factor 'others' comprises uneducated people.

B. Factors used to test the awareness level of right to information

This study comprises of seven factors, which are used to test the customer rights to information in Vellore district, which are tabulated in Table II.

Table II Factors on right to information

| S. No. | Factors | Always | Sometimes | Never | Total |
|--------|---|--------|-----------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Acquire bill for product purchase (especially medicines and ready to eat foods) | 135 | 56 | 209 | 400 |
| 2 | Check the MRP before paying for purchase | 100 | 112 | 188 | 400 |
| 3 | Check Vegetarianism logo in case of vegetarian product purchase | 69 | 45 | 286 | 400 |
| 4 | Check expiry date on purchase of product | 129 | 38 | 233 | 400 |
| 5 | Check certification mark such as Agmark, ISI, Hallmark on purchase of product | 67 | 23 | 310 | 400 |
| 6 | Prefer authorised service centres for after sales service | 198 | 110 | 92 | 400 |
| 7 | Register the product to claim warranty | 84 | 79 | 237 | 400 |

Source: Primary data

From the results in Table II, more than half of the respondents replied that they do not claim bill for the product purchased. Respondents of 47% said that they do not check MRP in the product. More than 70% respondents said that they never check vegetarianism logo in the product, 58% replied that they never checked expiry date in product. Respondents of 78% said that they are not aware of certification marks like ISI, Agmark and BIS Hallmark.

V. Conclusion

From the lights of the results, it is found that majority the respondents reply to the factors was negative. It shows that there is no increase in the level of awareness even though all the information are printed in the label of the product. People should come forward to know the importance of bill, labels, logos, certification marks, date of expiry and warranty. By knowing about these factors, one can file a complaint against unscrupulous manufacturers to stop the production of products with sub-standard quality. Caveat Emptor is the only possibility for consumers to protect themselves from deceitful sellers. This study is limited to description and conducted in a single district. This study can be further extended to other districts of Tamil Nadu and other state. Statistical techniques such as multivariate regression and Structured Equation Modelling can be used to statistically prove the analysed data.

VI. References

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