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Safety, Standards and Certification Marks on Consumables – An investigation on Awareness with Reference to Rural Consumers of Vellore district, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Abstract: This study investigates the awareness of safety, standards and certification marks on consumable products and/ or services among rural consumers of Vellore district, Tamil Nadu, India. The independent variables are demographic profile such as age, educational qualification, occupation, income and residential status and the dependent variables are with the core factors such as certification marks, awareness on obtention of cash receipt for product purchase, checking date of expiry, checking whether the product is sold in Maximum Retail Price and checking whether consumable product is properly packed and sealed. From the analysis using Linear Regression, the study found that there is a significant association between respondents and certification marks and safety and standard factors, except a few. Consumers should consider the factors such as hygiene, quality, quantity, standard of performance, which make them to choose the right product and/ or service and make the manufacturers and the service providers to rectify their fault in the business conduct.

Keywords: Awareness; Certification Marks; Consumers; Safety and Standards; Vellore district

I. Introduction

An act of ingesting a product and/ or service is called as consumption. Consumers, before consumption must ensure the safety and standards, which can be recognized from the quality, quantity, purity, potency, standard and price^[1], so that they can ease their life healthily. But, the present scenario of human life is endangered with the lack of safety on consumption, unfair trading in the marketing and food adulteration. As per the estimation by McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), India will triple its average household income and become the fifth largest consumer economy in the world by 2025^[2]. India has huge population of Poor, illiterate and rural consumers, who are not aware of quality, hygiene, cleanliness, brands, standards and performance manner of product and/ or service, rather they seek for more quantity and less price. Regulations such as Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, were implied in the nation to shield the consumers' life from peril^[3]. The current study explores the knowledge of rural consumers at Vellore district on safety and standards of consumable products and/ or services, which are accomplished by the certification marks such as ISI (Indian Standards Institute) for industrial products, which was took over by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), BIS Hallmark, a mark for the purity of precious metal; FPO (Food Process Order), a mark for all processed fruit products in India; Agmark (Agricultural Certification Mark), a mark for agricultural products and TM (Trade Mark) to affirm the legal properties of products and/ or services^[4]. Other factors surveyed in this study are the awareness on (i) bill receipt on purchase of products, (ii) expiry date for products purchased; (iii) products, sold at Maximum Retail Price (MRP); and (iv) packaging of products with seal.

II. Literature Review

Consumption is an activity carried out by every living being to use any resource in the world. Such consumption should be safe and healthy, which can be obtained from products and services with quality standards^[5]. The quality standards awareness in India began its establishment with Indian Standards Institution (ISI), which protect and promote the interest of the consumers towards the certified products. The factors such as affluence, standard, promotion, convenience, social, necessity and longevity are measured using ISI^[6]. The standard factor plays most significant role in the product and / or service than the other and this certification mostly found in white goods and electrical appliances. Homemakers are mostly the end-user of home appliances with ISI mark and their awareness on the mark were tested in Dharwad city of Karnataka State. The ISI mark was well known to seventy one percent of the respondents and a few was aware of Agmark^[2]. They insisted for more consumer awareness to safeguard themselves from scrupulous manufacturers and service providers^[7]. If a consumer is buying a product, it is mandatory that the product's quality and quantity must rely on standards, which can be conformed through product specifications. The specifications of a product must be mentioned in its label such as ingredients, quantity in weight and certification mark, so that it shall display the product's transparency to the

consumer while buying a product. It is most important for a consumer to get the bill for the product purchased. This shall help the consumer in case of fault or defect in a product. Most of the shops are not providing proper bill receipt to the consumer, which shall not help them under the circumstance of seeking redressal^[8]. Quality is contested and complex notion from the consumer and marketing point of view^[9],^[10]. To confirm the quality and quantity of any product, it should be properly labeled, which is the only description about the ingredients the consumer shall trust the product and the manufacturers can prove the consumer that their product is as per specified^[11]. It can be noted that a product with perfect packing, sold at Maximum Retail Price (MRP), with manufacturing date and expiry date mentioned, shall be a trusted product by the consumers^[12]. Researchers pertain to this study suggested that the legislation should be made with effective enforcement so that the existence of unsafely consumables can get eliminated and safety can be assured^[16]. Another important indication of consumer awareness to determine the quality of product and / or service is billing. It is most mandatory for a consumer to get the bill for the product purchased or for service availed. Especially the products with high sensitivity such as medicines and cosmetics should be billed on purchase so that the aggrieved party can sue the scrupulous manufacturers for their defective products sold^[14]. It was found by the researchers that the quality standards on products and/ or services are not similar all over the world and the regulations is not firm in India as it pave the way for adulterated product in the market^[15]. It was well known that the marketing irregularities are being controlled by consumer protection legislations, which empower the consumers to take legal action and make multiple choices of purchases as well. The policy of consumers concentrates in traditional manner with their economic interests through factors such as quality, price, choice and redress. The consumer policy too protected the safety and health of the consumers from their consumable products especially food, that ensure their access to protected goods and services^[17]. Most of the literature reviews are explaining the safety and standards of consumable products and/ or services. There are many studies conducted in food products safety because food is the most essential consumable product and need in the human life. Consumption of defective product and availing of deficiency service will endanger the consumers' life. This study throws the light upon the existing reviews by making clear about the awareness on standards and safety of consumable products and/ or services, which can be made more effective than present so that the people shall get their products and services at the best.

III. Objectives of the Study

The core objectives of the study are:

- (a) To evaluate the awareness on certification marks in consumable products and/ or services among rural consumer of Vellore district, Tamil Nadu and
- (b) To assess the awareness of safety and standards on date of expiry, Maximum Retail Price, bill receipt and package of products among the rural consumer of Vellore district, Tamil Nadu.

IV. Research Methodology

Vellore district is selected for the study because it is the second most economically backward district in the Tamil Nadu state and consists of 56.76 % of rural population living in the district and this is the homeland of the researchers, who are willing to know the awareness status on safety and standards of consumable products and/ or services among their people in the district. The sample for the study is selected from the Vellore district, which contains 20 village blocks. The sample of 23 respondents from each block is selected through stratified random sampling technique. Using Krejcie and Margon (1970) model of sample size determination, 460 structured questionnaires were distributed in total, out of which, 400 samples were finally selected from Vellore district. In the questionnaires left over, 32 questionnaires were received with incomplete information and 28 questionnaires were not returned back by the respondents. Descriptive research design is considered to be appropriate because it portrays various characteristics and attitudes of the present study in an accurate manner. Hybrid of Primary and secondary data are used for the study. Primary data is collected by using structured questionnaire and secondary data is collected from books, websites and e-sources, online articles and journals, e-newspapers and previous research studies. Linear Regression analysis is used to find the association between dependent variable and independent variable. This study considers awareness factors as dependent variables and demographic profile as independent variables. These tools are appropriate because the samples are independent and drawn from normal population. The application of these tools and techniques is identified on the basis of the objectives framed for this study.

V. Analysis and Results

A. Awareness on Certification Marks

Certification marks indicates legal evidence, assurance and product and / service certification, which creates the trust among the consumers, so that they can believe the product and/ or service as safe and hygiene. This study analyzes the most frequently used certification marks for consumable products in India such as ISI (Indian Standards Institute), BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards), FPO (Food Process Order), Agmark (Agricultural Certification Mark) and TM (Trade Mark). The demographic profiles such as age, educational qualification, occupation, income and residential status of the respondents' are cross tabulated with the certification marks, to know whether the rural consumers of Vellore district are aware of the above marks, and they are analyzed with

Linear Regression analysis to know the significant association among those variables. The tested variables are tabulated in Table I.

Table I Linear Regression analysis for certification marks awareness

Demographic Profile * Awareness on Certification marks		t	Sig.
ISI	Age	4.750	0.000
	Educational qualification	1.472	0.142
	Occupation	3.856	0.000
	Income	1.149	0.251
	Ownership status of residence	-7.344	0.000
BIS Hallmark	Age	4.442	0.000
	Educational qualification	11.164	0.000
	Occupation	0.014	0.989
	Income	-9.926	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	3.183	0.002
FPO	Age	15.27	0.000
	Educational qualification	2.343	0.020
	Occupation	-2.625	0.009
	Income	-10.010	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	2.588	0.010
Agmark	Age	-0.942	0.347
	Educational qualification	-3.310	0.001
	Occupation	0.858	0.391
	Income	26.629	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	-14.160	0.000
TM	Age	11.602	0.000
	Educational qualification	1.342	0.180
	Occupation	-0.670	0.503
	Income	-5.916	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	-0.580	0.562

Source: Primary data compilation; Independent variable: demographics, Dependent variable: Certification marks awareness

From the table I, it is found that there is the significant association between demographic profile and certification marks except educational qualification and income with ISI, occupation with BIS Hallmark, age and occupation with Agmark, educational qualification, occupation and ownership status of residence with TM. The remaining combinations accept the alternative hypothesis.

B. Awareness on Safety and Standard Factors

Corresponding to the certification marks, the other core factors that focus on awareness of safety and standard of consumable products are bill receipt of the product purchased or service rendered, checking expiry date in a product, product purchased in MRP and product package with seal. These factors are cross tabulated with socio economic statuses of the respondents and analyzed using Linear Regression analysis to test the significant association between demographic profile and safety and standard factors of the study. The tested variables are tabulated in Table II.

Table II Linear Regression analysis for awareness on safety and standard factors

Demographic Profile * Safety and standard factors		t	Sig.
Bill Receipt for the product purchased or service rendered	Age	3.539	0.000
	Educational qualification	12.225	0.000
	Occupation	0.258	0.796
	Income	-10.136	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	3.308	0.001
Checking expiry date in the product	Age	0.692	0.489
	Educational qualification	8.705	0.000
	Occupation	3.577	0.000
	Income	-8.796	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	6.055	0.000
Product purchased in MRP	Age	-2.076	0.039
	Educational qualification	1.098	0.273
	Occupation	13.674	0.000
	Income	-11.370	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	21.966	0.000
Product package with seal	Age	9.414	0.000
	Educational qualification	1.322	0.187
	Occupation	0.498	0.619
	Income	-3.900	0.000
	Ownership status of residence	-2.262	0.024

Source: Primary data compilation; Independent variable: demographics, Dependent variable: Certification marks awareness

From the table II, it is found that there is the significant association between demographic profile and safety and standard factors except occupation in case of bill receipt for the product purchased or service rendered, age and checking expiry date in the product, educational qualification and product purchased in MRP and educational qualification and awareness on product package and seal.

VI. Recommendations

From the light of analysis and results, the following recommendations are derived. Protection of consumers is one of the vital objectives of every manufacturer. They should manufacture the product compliance to quality standard. People in rural area never check out the product package. They generally consume the food which is kept open and sold in food centres and in eateries. On one side, the manufacturer should stick with the standards. On the other side, it is the responsibility of the consumer to beware of what they are consuming. They should check the product's date of manufacture and the expiry date of a purchasing product. In some shops, the products were sold more than MRP. In some cases, we can find the MRP is erased or hidden by the shop keeper and were sold to the people. The consumer must find whether the product is sold on MRP. Another most important substance to be noted is the receipt when the product is purchased. This must be taken care especially when a pharmaceutical product is purchased because there is chance of health problem when an expired medicine or wrong medicine is taken. Only a receipt received along with the product will help the consumer to sue against the shop keeper in case of danger. The consumers can be educated about their safety and standard through various media such as television, newspaper, and magazine and through internet. The government should inform the concerned authorities to educate the school and college students regarding safety and standards by including the information in their syllabus so that they can be aware of it and can instruct and educate their surroundings.

VI. Conclusion

India is one of the fastest developing nations in the world. On one side, the nation is gaining technological advancement in many industries, which makes the country to grow fast. On the other hand, the people were exploited by deceitful manufacturers and sellers by food adulteration, products with false price and expired product is sold with false manufacture date. From the study, it is fathomed that the consumers must be more aware of their products and/ or services before they consume or avail. Though the government is continuously putting their efforts to regularize the problems confronted by the consumers, it is the duty of the consumer to be aware before consumption. The bill must be obtained from the shop keeper during their purchase of goods, thereby the expiry date, certification mark and MRP must be checked on purchasing a product, which shall drastically increase the acuity of safety and standards about consumables among the consumers. It will make the manufacturers to rectify their fault in their business conduct. As the present study's scope is limited to Vellore district rural consumers, this project could be taken as a model for the further research in other districts of Tamil Nadu and also other states of India to find out the shortcomings of reaping the actual benefits of the safety and standards and effectively remove the hurdles for ushering better consumer awareness.

VII. References

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