



CONSCIOUS AWARENESS IN CONSUMER TOWARDS CONSUMERISM IN INDIA

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“Marketing is not a Battle of Products. But it is a Battle of Perceptions”

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the present position of consumer rights in the field of business. ‘Evaluative Study on Consumer Rights in the Context of Business ’ provides a comprehensive study of consumer rights such as Various dimensions of consumer rights, Needs of consumer rights and Measures of protection. This paper is also highlights some issue and challenges faced by Indian consumer. The Consumer Protection plays a vital role to safeguard the interest of the consumers. In order to utilize this Act to the maximum extent possible thorough awareness about various aspects of the act is essential. In this regard Government, Associations and Consumers should come forward and try to improve the concept of consumerism. A person who avails goods or services exclusively for the purpose of earning their livelihood by means of self-employment is considered as ‘consumers’. Consumer must be aware of his rights, raise voice against exploitation and seek redressal of his grievances. Consumers' consciousness determines the effectiveness of consumerism. Consumerism in India, is in a new high, and refuses to show signs of budging anymore. The Indian consumer, due to his exposure, of the global market, strives to get the best of the goods in his home land. “One of the weaknesses of our age is inability to distinguish needs from greed’s.”

KEYWORDS

consumer right awareness, consumer protection

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction :

“Differentiate or Die” is the watchword in today’s market. Every morning is the forest (market), a deer (seller) wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the faster lion (buyer) or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest deer or it will starve to death. It doesn’t matter whether you are a lion or a deer. When the sun comes up, you better start running.

Literature review India has been observing 15th March since 1989 as the National Consumers Day. This day has a historic importance as it was on this day in 1962, that the Bill for Consumer Rights was moved in the US Congress. Making an allowance for the global consciousness, Government of India has taken development steps by way of enactment of various Acts and other measures to help consumers. Consumer related matters were suffering from policy sickness in the field of consumer protection. A major breakthrough came during 1986 when Parliament passed Consumer Protection Act, 1986. According to Bello, Aduke and Danjuma (2012) when awareness is low among consumers, consumerism is in near absence. Vijayakumar and Venugopal (2012) postulated that consumer education enhances consumer rights awareness. The study on consumer rights awareness conducted in India found out that educational institutions played a significant role in raising consumer rights awareness. Further, the study was able to establish that consumers can still be exploited even when aware of their rights. The study focused on universities that offer studies on consumer affairs as part of their syllabus. Majority of students interviewed agreed that consumer awareness can assist in reducing consumer exploitation in the market place indicating a link between consumer rights awareness and reduction in consumer exploitation in the marketplace. Khurana and Khurana (2012) examined the general awareness among consumers regarding consumer protection measures and the Consumer protection Act (1986) in India. The study was conducted in the District of Yamuna Nagar of Haryana State. One of the objectives of the study was to provide recommendations that for strengthening consumer awareness programme in India. The study found out that all respondents had general awareness of consumer protection and that all consumers had faced the situation of consumer exploitation in one way or other. The study looked at consumer rights awareness and attitudes towards Consumer protection measures in India. It revealed that despite government measures to protect the consumer, consumers may end up not using the measures

properly. The study recommended for co-operative efforts on the part of consumers, business and the government as necessary for protecting consumers. The study suggested that in order for the Indian consumer movement to succeed government actions and consumer activation through consumer education was necessary. The other rights that required a deep understanding of complicated rules and procedures are less utilized by women. These findings were supported by Kulkarni and Mehta (2013) who investigated buying practices and level of consumer rights awareness among management scholars. The studies suggest that consumers need to be educated more about the procedure of filing complaint and seeking redress. Nair (2012) investigated the level of awareness among undergraduate students regarding the intellectual property rights and consumer protection in India.

Objectives of the study The following objectives guided the study: (i) To determine the effect of consumer rights awareness on consumerism and study the role of NGO's, government and society in protecting consumer rights of the people in India.

Consumerism- Consumerism is the policy or programme of protecting the rights and interests of the consumer. It is a demand that marketers should give greater attention to consumer's want and desires. Consumerism has grown in India over a period of time as a social phenomenon. It is evident that consumerism today has become a way of life for a citizen anywhere in the world. It is the ideology and a concept which has come to stay in business literature. Consumerism can be defined as an organized social movement of citizens seeking to augment the right of buyers in relation to sellers. It is the ideology and a concept which has come to stay in business literature. The consumer is exposed to many hazardous- physical, environmental and exploitation due to unfair trade practices. He needs protection, for instance, against products which are unsafe for consumption such as drugs and adulterated food products and products which may cause serious injury such as defective electrical appliances. He needs protection against mal-practices and deceit by sellers. He should have adequate rights and right of recourse to redressal measures against defaulting businessmen. He needs protection against environmental pollution of air, water and noise and effective measures should be devised to keep the surroundings neat and clean. Though in the new modern concept of the consumerism as Bauman(2009) delineates a shift from a society of producers to a society of consumers." He also analyses that in today's societies, "Freedom in consumerist cultures means freedom to choose and freedom to satisfy

individual desires and define as well as construct consumer identity under the sway of the market.”

Consumer organizations: What Are They?

Consumer organizations are those organizations which are formed and framed by consumers to fight for their rights to create awareness among fellow consumers about their responsibilities to enhance consumer welfare through proper co-ordination with the government and institutions. Consumer welfare agency, residents unions, associations for consumer guidance and civil societies are working as consumer organizations. In India consumer organizations no doubt have registered an impressive growth. But the way they are functioning is quite disappointing. Most of these organizations suffer from lack of funds, potential volunteers, continue support of the member, leadership with vision. The most important requirement for an organization is the manpower. Therefore it requires a number of active volunteers to carry out its activities. The government of India has been playing a very vital role in protecting consumers and encouraging consumer organizations.

In a developing country like India the consumer is at special risk while taking market decisions.

So the need of strong consumerism in our country because of:-

1. Most of the population is Illiterate
2. Lack of consumer education
3. Economic backwardness
4. Innocence
5. The advertisement bombarded make them confused

Rights and Responsibilities of consumers:-

1. Right to safety
2. Right to informed
3. Right to choose
4. Right to be heard
5. Right to consumer education
6. Right to healthy environment
7. Right to redressal

Responsibilities

1. Consume less and not gibe into over consumption
2. To pay reasonable price
3. Be careful about the false and misleading advertisements
4. To cooperate in a situation of shortage
5. Obtain proper procedure for redressal
6. Do not buy in hurry

Consumer Protection in India : The concept of consumer protection is not new, it is as old as trade and commerce itself. The consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of sale and purchase of goods, but also of the health and security aspects. Food safety has

become an important element of consumer awareness these days. In case of food products, its quality depends not only on its nutritional value, but also on its safety for human consumption. Consumption of contaminated or adulterated food is a major cause of human illness and suffering. There are 500 consumer associations, which are working in the field of consumer protection. They deal with various aspects of consumer exploitation. Some of the prominent are: Consumer Guidance Society of India, Mumbai; Citizens Action Group, Mumbai; Common Cause, New Delhi; Voice, New Delhi; Consumer Utility and Trust Society, Jaipur.

Who can file a complaint? A complaint on a plain paper either handwritten or typed, can be filed by a consumer, a registered consumer organization, central or State Government & one or more consumers, where there are numerous consumers having the same interest.

How to file a complaint? There are no legal formalities for filing the complaint. He needs not to go to any lawyer or professional for legal assistance. He himself can plead the case in the consumer court.

Where to file a complaint? The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 has provided the provision for a three-tier adjudication system popularly known as "Consumer Courts". India is the only country in the world which has established its three-tier quasi-judicial machinery in the name of exclusive courts at the district, state and national levels with a view to provide speedy and simple redress to consumer disputes.

Suggestions

The government should encourage consumer organizations by awarding cash prizes. Orientation courses should be conducted by the consumer organizations to develop the understanding, knowledge and expertise on consumer protection provisions. As consumers, we first need to be aware of all the different products available in the market. To start with, look out for the date of manufacturing and expiry date of products. Consumer is the king of market, if he is getting exploited then the market will be ruined. Organizations, NGOs, institutions and agencies allied to consumer movements should hearten administrative advocacy in settling consumer disputes so the hitch of case pendency and delay in case disposal can be avoided. India has the biggest consumer movement today due to the efforts of consumer organizations and the establishment of the consumer court etc. still the present scenario is not very encouraging, unfortunately the consumer courts have become replica of legal courts, as the procedure is no longer simple and quick in practice. These procedures need to be made simpler and quicker for making the process

more meaningful and realistic. Both the buyer and the seller need to be made socially more responsible. Systematic and accountable governmental as well as non-governmental endeavor should be made to educate and promote the consumers about their rights and responsibilities which will certainly lessen the number of violations of consumer rights. More stringent and comprehensive enactments are required to make the consumer law more effective and fruitful in India. Consumer rights have been protected individually or collectively. Government have been awarded and appreciated for the kind of work they have done to educate the people towards their rights and spread awareness to create a healthy society for the sake of every consumer's. This is a beneficial change which has affected each and every individual for the general awareness about the consumer rights. Similar kind of NGO's can be formed in other districts and their work can be replicated for the betterment of society. The study recommended for a consumer education policy involving its introduction as a mandatory subject at secondary and/or tertiary levels of education in India. The study also recommended that civil society should participate in enforcement of consumer rights as part of their campaigns against social ills in the society. The press should play a key role in advancing the course of consumers by dedicating weekly programmes on consumer rights protection that may be used as a means of consumer enlightenment. Government agencies and regulatory bodies involved in consumer protection should be adequately funded to enable them fulfill their obligations as provided by the laws establishing them. Manufacturers and producers should establish a division for consumer affairs to allow participation and representation of consumers in all corporate decisions. Further legislation is required to mitigate production or marketing malpractices and ensure adherence to the law by manufacturer. Consumer organizations and government regulatory agencies should intensify consumer education and sensitization campaigns across the country and establish consumer forums in all Counties.

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