



A study on level of awareness of college students on consumer protection practices

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Abstract

Any individual who purchases products or services for his personal use and not for manufacturing or resale is called a consumer. A consumer is one who is the decision maker whether to buy or not to buy an item. Consumers form the largest economic group in any country. They are the pivots of all economic activities. It is often said that the consumer is king, but in reality consumers are treated very badly in the market. The consumers are cheated in different ways by middlemen like adulteration, under-weight of goods, selling goods of inferior quality and duplicated goods, charging higher prices, misleading advertisement in the media, etc. The consumers are not sure of getting qualitative goods manufactured and preserved in hygienic condition and at competitive prices. The most important step in consumer education is making them aware about consumer rights and to empower them for self-protection from the unscrupulous businessmen.

Education is a lifelong process of constantly acquiring relevant information, knowledge and skills. Consumer education is an important part of this process. Consumer education at the college level is an important process to enhance the capacity of the youth particularly the students to take the responsibility for their own life, their family, obligations to society and the environment. Consumer education helps the students to participate in the social life, as competent citizens. Students are not only learn about the consumer rights and duties but also teach their parents and the community, thereby they are enriching the society.

Keywords: consumers, consumer awareness, consumer protection, consumer rights, consumer education

Introduction

Any individual who purchases products or services for his personal use and not for manufacturing or resale is called a consumer. A consumer is one who is the decision maker whether to buy or not to buy an item. Consumers form the largest economic group in any country. They are the pivots of all economic activities. It is often said that the consumer is king, but in reality consumers are treated very badly in the market. In this age of capitalism and globalization, the main objective of each producer is to maximize his profit. In each and every possible way the producer are trying to increase the sale of their products. Therefore, in fulfillment of their aim they forget the interests of consumer s and start exploiting them for example – overcharging, under weighing, selling of adulterated and poor quality goods, misleading the consumers by giving false advertisement etc. Thus in order to save himself from being cheated, it is necessary for a consumer to be aware. In this way, consumer awareness means noticing the general public about consumer rights and protective legislations.

Education is a lifelong process of constantly acquiring relevant information, knowledge and skills. Consumer education is an important part of this process. Consumer education at the college level is an important process to enhance the capacity of the youth particularly the students to take the responsibility for their own life, their family, obligations to the society and the environment. Consumer education helps the students to participate in the social life, as competent citizens. In addition to learning the consumer rights

and protective measures, students should take them to the nearby community through NSS or Extension activities. This is also a way and opportunity to the teachers to teach the students to educate the awareness level of general public on Consumerism, unless we never the quit unfair trade practices of middlemen and traders.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are

1. To know the level of awareness of college students on consumer rights.
2. To know their buying behavior and their existing practice while buying goods and availing services.
3. To remember the educational institutions about their role and responsibilities to give consumer education.

Methodology

The type of research is an analytical research. The method of data collection is based on primary method. The researcher personally involved in the data collection process with the help of structured questionnaire. The method of sampling technique adopted is Area sampling. We have collected data from 5 different colleges located in Coimbatore Area. The sample size is 50. The number of respondents from each institution is ten. Simple percentage method and two way table will be used to analyze the collected data.

Significance of the study

It has been observed very often that a consumer does not get

right goods and services. Even among the educated, the rate of ignorance on consumer rights especially the younger generation is high. We have selected college students as respondents for this study because through which we hope we can reach more people. Many exploitation and unfair trade practices happened due to our ignorance on consumer rights as well as Consumer Protection Act. They are charged a very high price and they get adulterated goods or low quality goods and so on. Therefore it is necessary to make them aware about Consumer Protection act and Consumer Rights. We hope the study will give a positive impact on students to keep them alert. Hence this study is a highly significant one in the present scenario.

Limitations of the study

1. The study is based on Primary data.
2. The study area of the project is limited to Coimbatore city only. The sample size of the project is 40 only. So the sample size of the project is small.
3. This study is based upon the responses given by 40 college students belonging 4 different colleges in Coimbatore city. Hence it may not applicable to other areas.

Analysis and interpretation

Table 1: Gender wise Classification of students

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	19	47.5
Female	21	52.5
Total	40	100

This table is prepared to classify the total respondents i.e., college students in to gender wise. Out of forty students 19 are male and 21 are female. Hence, more or less equal number of students is taken from both genders.

Table 2: Graduation wise Classification of students

Graduation	Number	Percentage
Under Graduates	11	27.5
Post Graduates	29	72.5
Total	40	100

From the above table it is clear that out of forty total students 11 are studying under graduates and 29 are studying post-graduation degrees. Most of the students are doing post-graduation studies. Hence we can say most of our respondents are matured enough to talk as well as give opinion on consumerism.

Table 3: Practice of asking Price of the product during Buying

Enquiring Price While Buying	Number	Percentage
Yes	36	90
No	04	10
Total	40	100

It is good to note that 90% of the students had a practice of enquiring price of the products before they own them. It is really a surprise fact. Nowadays many youngsters hesitated to

ask price before they buy. Some of them never know the price of the products even the purchase process gets over. It shows their urgency and carelessness in this regard. We need not blame the students community here, because many family man are also followed the same practice while buying.

Table 4: Practice of Checking MRP, Date of Expiry, etc.

Checking MRP, Date of Expiry	Number	Percentage
Yes	40	100
No	00	00
Total	40	100

Again it is a surprised to note that, 100% of the students, irrespective of their gender had checked the details of MRP, Date of manufacturing and Date of Expiry on the pack before they are buying. This is an appreciable practice of the students. This is the first step to express our alertness towards self-protection from unscrupulous businessmen and traders. This practice shows their better level of awareness on consumerism.

Table 5: Observing instruments used for Measurement

Observing Instruments of Measurement	Number	Percentage
Yes	32	80
No	08	20
Total	40	100

It is happy to note that 80% of the student respondents listening the instruments and balances which were used while measuring and weighing the products at the time buying. This kind of practice will helps to identify fraudulent businessmen and poor traders. A fair and genuine market environment is possible only when we start following this kind of practices while buying the products.

Table 6: Knowledge on Consumer Court

Heard about Consumer Court	Number	Percentage
Yes	32	80
No	08	20
Total	40	100

Out of forty respondents 80% are heard about the existence of consumer court, remaining students do not know the consumer court. Even though the awareness level on consumer court is satisfactory, but still one fifth of the students need to know about consumer courts.

Table 7: Attended programs on Consumerism

Heard about Consumer Court	Number	Percentage
Yes	24	60
No	16	40
Total	40	100

Out of forty respondents only 60% including (Post Graduation students) are attended programs on Consumerism. Remaining 40% were not attended any programs on consumerism. Hence the colleges have a major role to educate their students on consumerism.

Two Way Analysis (gender wise comparison of responses)**Table 8**

Responses on Consumerism (various aspects)	Male (19)				Female (21)			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
Knowledge on Consumer Rights	8	42	11	58	10	48	11	52
Bitter Experience in advertisements	11	58	8	42	17	81	4	19
Satisfaction on Functioning of Local Ration Shops	7	37	12	63	10	48	11	52
Helping others towards self-protection	11	58	8	42	5	24	16	76
Able to answer questions on Consumer Courts	15	79	4	21	18	86	3	14
Attending Consumer Education programs at College	9	47	10	53	7	33	14	67

This table helps to compare the level of awareness of college students on gender basis. It is also helpful to know their practice towards self-protective practice and helping others towards better protection from false advertisements.

Some Highlights of the above table

58 percentage of male and 52% of female do not have knowledge on consumer rights. In case of bitter experience on

advertisement is concerned; female students (81%) are very much disappointed than male gender (58%). 63% of male students and 52% of female students are not satisfied on functioning of local ration shops. It is happy to say that the awareness level on consumer court is satisfied in both genders. More than half of the male students and two third of the female students are not attending programs on consumer education.

Two Way Analysis (Graduation wise comparison)**Table 9**

Responses on Consumerism (various aspects)	Under Graduates (11)				Post Graduates (29)			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
Knowledge on Consumer Rights	7	64	4	36	17	59	12	41
Bitter Experience in advertisements	7	64	4	36	18	62	11	38
Satisfaction on Functioning of Local Ration Shops	5	45	6	55	13	45	16	55
Helping others towards self-protection	5	45	6	55	4	14	25	86
Able to answer questions on Consumer Courts	9	82	2	18	10	34	19	66
Attending Consumer Education programs	7	64	4	36	8	28	21	72

This table is prepared to compare the opinion of students on the same points but on the basis of their graduation level. This analysis will helpful to know, how extent the PG students are shown their matured behaviour while comparing the under graduate students.

Some Highlights of the above table

Even though we have more respondents in Post-Graduation category, the level of awareness of UG students is better in many aspects. Especially the basic knowledge on consumer rights and consumer courts, attending programs on consumerism and helping others towards self-protection the UG students are comparatively better than PG students. We think the PG students concentrate more on regular studies. In case of functioning the local ration shops, in both category equal responses were recorded.

Suggestions

1. Even though sizeable respondents had met bitter experience in false advertisement but they never worry and they do not proceed to fight against those unfair practices. Hence it is suggested to raise questions bravely. They must know their rights. Students may involve in helping others to protect from false advertisement and give consumer education.
2. Number of arguments between the traders and consumers

and no struggle found against exploitation in the society. It shows their poor association. Hence it is suggested to form some associations to empower consumer forum at local level.

3. It is found that the programmes conducted by colleges on consumer education are not adequate. Hence the authorities of education can plan to conduct this kind of events atleast once in a year. They have to extend this awareness programme in the nearby local places also for the benefit of community.

Conclusion

In general, the level of awareness of college students on consumerism is satisfactory. It is found that their practices and behavior during the buying process is appreciable. They have checked the tools and instruments used in the measurement while buying. They have verified MRP, Date of Mfg and Date of Expiry details too. The awareness level of the UG students is better than the PG students in many aspects. PG students are not much involved in educating others. No much difference found between the students of two genders with regard to the level of awareness on consumer education. This study found that the female gender hesitated to involve in programs of conducted outside the campus especially in attending programmes and enriching the community as well.

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