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CONSUMERISM AND ITS AWARENESS IN INDIA: AN EVALUATIVE STUDY

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Consumerism and Its Awareness in India: An Evaluative Study

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Abstract – In this paper an attempt is being taken to evaluate the present position of consumer rights in the field of business. In doing so, the entire paper is divided in to three parts. '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. 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 consumer is a person who buys any goods or hires any service for valuable consideration. The term does not include a person who obtains goods or services for resale or for any commercial purpose. However, persons who avail goods or services exclusively for the purpose of earning their livelihood by means of self-employment are 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.

Keywords: Consumerism, Awareness, India, Evaluative, Effectiveness, Consumers, Business, Awareness, Improve, Services.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer right is an immensely important aspect to be considered by every business house. Because by protecting consumer rights, business develop welfare to consumer and ensure justice and personal freedom to them and thereby modern society can move towards an advanced state of social development. But in most of the modern business houses, it is seen that in majority cases, they frequently violate the consumer rights by supplying inferior goods, creating artificial food scarcities, providing incomplete information about the product and deceptive advertising etc. The law of the free marketplace causes competition among the various businesses, which creates variations in the quantity, quality and cost of the products that are in demand by the consumer (Singh, 2013). These products are marked in a number of ways that it is often difficult for the consumer to judge their quality adequately. Again more varieties of the same product encourage false advertising which claims and give the consumer a false sense of choice. On the other hand poor distribution and underutilization of food grains lead to violation of human rights by artificially-creating food scarcities in the Indian country. Considering these circumstances, there is a need of careful research work on the topic referred to here, so that this kind of research work can provide some effective guidelines to the business community, consumer as well as to

general people of the society, by virtue of which they can maintain the necessary consumer rights in course of performing their respective activities (Zitkus, 2013). This type of research helps in enhancing consumer awareness towards their rights. Keeping in view this importance of the research work on consumer rights, the present study aims at discussing some important aspects of consumer rights. These aspects include various dimensions of consumer rights, needs of consumer rights and measures of protection.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumer rights are the rights given to a "consumer" to protect him/her from being cheated by salesman/manufacturer/shopkeeper. It is refer to a consumer's right to safety, to be informed, to choose and to provide manufacturers with information concerning their products when they make a purchase. There are strong and clear laws in India to defend consumer rights. Out of the various laws that have been enforced to protect the consumer rights in India, the most important is the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 which define consumer right as the „right to be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property“. Consumerism is a social as well as economic order which encourages the buying of goods and services

in ever-greater amounts. In some places, the term consumerism refers to the organized movement of citizens and government agencies to improve the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2009). The consumer movement covers some extra rights such as adequate information of the product, proper protection against questionable products and influencing power on product for improving quality of life in addition to the traditional rights such as right not to buy a product, expect safety product and right to claim the expected performance from the product. In present situation, consumer protection has assumed to be greater importance and relevance. According to McMillan Dictionary (1985) "Consumerism is concerned with protecting consumers from all organizations with which there is exchanged relationship. It encompasses the set of activities of government, business, independent organizations and concerned consumers that are designed to protect the rights of consumers".

Quazi (2002) examined the managerial perception of consumerism with reference to the very different macro environments Indian country found significant differences between the two groups of managers in terms of their commitment to consumerism on such issues as government regulation, advertising to children, the role of consumer organization and industry self-regulation.

Bradgate (2010) in his research report that is prepared for the Indian Business, Innovation and Skills examined some of the legal issues raised by the continued growth of the market in digital products and the protection currently given by the law to the consumer of digital products According to him the present law on consumer rights on purchase of digital products is unsatisfactory on several grounds. Further he argued that despite several court decisions and the numerous discussions in academic and practitioner literature, the status of digital products and the consumer's rights on purchase of such products remain unclear.

Khurana & Khurana (2012) conducted study on 100 respondents to study the general awareness among consumer regarding consumer protection and specially awareness of provisions of Consumer Protection Act 1986. Further he said that today most of the consumers have general awareness in relation to consumer protection and to safeguard the interests of the consumers, Consumer Associations, Business Associations and Government Legislations are also actively working.

Krishnakumar & Sakthiventhan (2012) conducted study on 125 rural respondents of Cuddler district to examine the consumer protection awareness among rural consumers in India. They have the opinion that rural respondents are lacking with their heights and responsibility and therefore they should be educated and trained towards their own welfare.

Fernandes (2013) examined about the various dimensions of comparative advertising and its impact on the registered trademarks of the owners. He argued that although initially comparative advertising was considered as unfair competition but today it has been looked upon positively as a means of providing a detailed study reference which would in turn help consumers in knowing the true facts of the various products and be careful in their purchases.

Nwaizugbo & Ogbunankwor (2013) examined the level of satisfaction attained by the consumers from different consumer protection agencies in Indian State. For this purpose they have surveyed total 43 out of 92 complainants and found that consumer protection agencies and duties carried out by these consumer protection agencies have significant effect on consumer satisfaction. They further recommended that the agencies should among other things, liaise with market associations, the media, consumer groups, sister agencies and other relevant stakeholders to achieve the desired consumer satisfaction.

VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS:

Globalization and liberalization of trade and business has resulted in many products and services being available to the consumers. According to India would be the most populous nation in the world by 2030. Economist feels that vast population will confer a huge economic benefit to India (Ramaswamy & Namakumari, 2009). India has a vast magnitude of middle class population in the world and the age mix of India's population is quite favorable for economic growth. Growth in economy has resulted in increase in the purchasing power of the middle class section, which is the largest segment of the population. This has necessitated giving high priority for the protection of the consumers and promotion of responsible consumer movement in the country (Report of the Working Group on Consumer Protection). Any goods or services produced in an economy are ultimately meant for consumers. According to Sergio Zyman, the former Vice President marketing, of Coca-Cola, globally the consumer environment in recent years is characterized by the rise of consumer democracy (Ramaswamy & Namakumari, 2009). Therefore, the consumers themselves should have the right to take decisions about the allocation of resources for their own needs. In doing so, every consumer should know the various dimensions of their rights. In this connection, the various dimensions of consumer right can be understood from it. These Guidelines provide a framework for Governments of developing and newly independent countries for formulation of consumer protection policies and legislations. The Indian Guidelines developing policies for consumer protection, where from various dimensions of consumer rights can be identified, are as follows:

Physical safety: Governments should adopt or encourage the adoption of appropriate measures,

including legal systems, safety regulations, national or international standards, voluntary standards and the maintenance of safety records to ensure that products are safe for either intended or normally foreseeable use.

Promotion and protection of consumers' economic interests: Government policies should seek to enable consumers to obtain optimum benefit from their economic resources.

Standards for safety and quality of consumer goods and services: Governments should, as appropriate, formulate or promote the elaboration and implementation of standards, voluntary and other, at the national and international levels for the safety and quality of goods and services and give them appropriate publicity.

Distribution facilities for essential consumer goods and services: Adopting or maintaining policies to ensure the efficient distribution of goods and services to consumers; where appropriate, specific policies should be considered to ensure the distribution of essential goods and services where this distribution is endangered, as could be the case particularly in rural areas.

Measures enabling consumers to obtain redress: Governments should establish or maintain legal and/or administrative measures to enable consumers or, as appropriate, relevant organizations to obtain redress through formal or informal procedures that are expeditious, fair, inexpensive and accessible.

Education and information programmes: Governments should develop or encourage the development of general consumer education and information programmes, including information on the environmental impacts of consumer choices and behavior and the possible implications, including benefits and costs, of changes in consumption, bearing in mind the cultural traditions of the people concerned.

Promotion of sustainable consumption: Sustainable consumption includes meeting the needs of present and future generations for goods and services in ways that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data are compiled by the techniques of personal interview and questionnaires. In this regards, it is to be mentioned that a few well reputed and long experienced business persons have been selected for highlighting their view and attitudes towards the consumer rights. Further with a view to

conducting necessary questionnaires, a group of respondents is formed consisting 95 nos. taking from different relevant categories as follows:

Table No: 1 Formation of sample Respondent

Sl. No.	Respondents	Nos.
1.	Businessmen having minimum 10 years' experience: i. Trader = 10 ii. Manufacturer = 10 iii. Auxiliary service render = 10	30
2.	Advocate deals with the concerned Act.	03
3.	Senior Citizen	07
4.	Consumers	25
5.	Govt. Officials	10
6.	Cultivator	10
7.	Banker	10
8.	Total	95

In fine, both the primary and secondary data have been analyzed and explained in the light of prevailing position of consumer right and thereby some major findings are identified. Accordingly some suitable suggestions are put forward.

Against this question, out of 95 respondents, 42 (44.21%) respondents are of the opinion that 51% to 75% of consumers enjoyed dimensions of consumer's rights. According to these 44.21% respondents although now consumers become aware of their rights to some extent through television, radio, newspapers and other sources, but they are exploited regularly in various ways. Most of the consumers ignore if they found any adulteration in food stuff and their complain is limited to sellers or service providers only. Often they do not prefer to go consumer court. On the other hand 19 (20%) respondents are of the opinion that 76% to 100% of consumers enjoyed dimensions of consumer's rights because middle class consumers of Assam are very conscious concerning their health and safety. According to them television is the principal media through which they come to know about their rights. Now most of the consumers are aware of MRP, ISI and AGMARK. Where, 24 (25.26%) respondents said that almost 11% to 50% consumers enjoyed few consumer rights. According to them very less number of the consumer in both urban and rural areas are fully aware of the Consumer Protection Act. 10 (10.53%) respondents have not heard about consumer protection act. Among them most are from consumers and cultivators. This can be depicted by the following diagram:

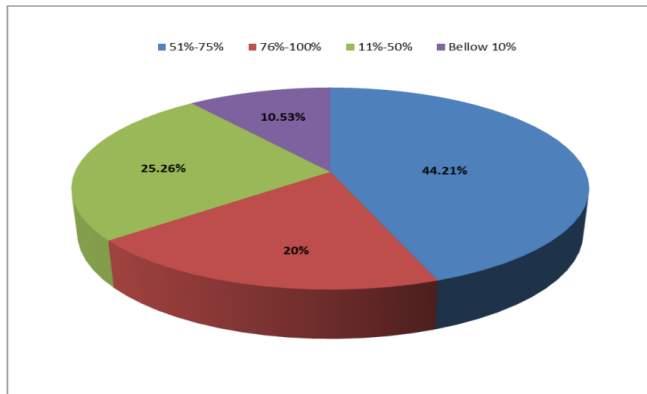


Figure-1

Against this question, out of 95 respondents, 58 (61.05%) respondents are of the opinion that less than 10% businessmen really feel and do their business activities for fulfilling the needs of consumer rights. According to their feelings consumer rights are to be maintained by offering goods and services honestly in ethical way, without which they cannot survive long. They opined that businessmen do their business for earning profit and in this profit earning process they never think about customers. On the other hand 18 (18.95%) respondent said that less than 25% businessmen really feel and do their business activities for fulfilling the needs of consumer rights. According to this 18.95% respondents, although the government, NGO, different consumer forums are trying their level best to promote and protect the interest of the consumer but it is the fact that the consumers are cheated regularly by the seller or producer. Where, 13 (13.68%) respondents are of the opinion that less than 50% businessmen do their business activities for fulfilling the need of consumer rights. They opined that although there are various techniques to mislead the customers such as high pricing, reduction of weight, quality etc., but there are also various provisions for marking and certification of product of good quality, fair price and measurement. Again many producers provide consumer helpline and toll/free numbers to take advice from this helpline. Remaining 6 (6.32%) respondents said that less than 75% businessmen really feel and do their business activities for fulfilling the need of consumer rights. According to them as the consumers are important component of society, therefore it is the social responsibility of every business houses to think about the need of consumers. Further they opined that there are some established business firms which really care for consumer satisfaction, their own reputation and goodwill. These are depicted by the following diagram:

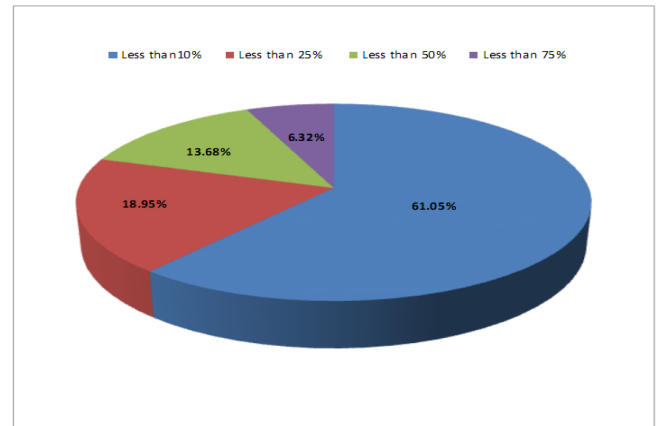


Figure-2

CONCLUSION

It is the social responsibility of every business to work for the wellbeing of society where, consumer is an important part. Although Consumer Associations, Business Associations and Government Legislations are working to safeguard the interest of the consumer but it is the fact that the consumers are cheated regularly by the seller or producer. Therefore consumer awareness are needed the most to make consumer protection movement a success. It can be said that there should have an honest, friendly and brotherly relationship in between businessmen and consumers. Every businessman should realize that they are also the consumer of other business houses. Every customer should have strong determination to avoid such business houses which are found to be doing unfair means of business by violating consumer rights. Both the business houses and consumers should have a motive to build up a welfare society for which they have to discharge some responsibilities.

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