

CONSUMER AWARENESS ON THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS FROM GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

The Indian consumer has poverty, illiteracy, defeatist mentality and continues to be at the receiving end. Therefore, there is need for spreading consumer rights awareness among various section of society, particularly the illiterate and more so the helpless and unorganized section among them. The present study was done on the consumers of four districts of Gujarat state. Random sampling was done and 160 respondents were selected for the study. Results show about background information of sample that 35% respondents were graduates 38.12% were falling into the age group of 15-25 years. 30.62% respondents were doing government job. More than half of sample size (58.12%) were having 3 to 5 family members. Regarding earning, maximum of the respondents (44.37%) were earning Rs.30,000/- above per month. Second section of results entails the knowledge of the respondents regarding general facts of consumerism. 73.12% respondents influenced to purchase by seeing advertisement. 68.75% respondents don't pay the same as shopkeeper demand. 75% respondents were buying products from authorized shops or licensed or registered companies. Next section was about awareness of the respondents regarding consumer rights. Only 26.25% respondents answered that they faced problems in market. Almost 39.37% respondents prefer buying low quality or substandard goods. 86.87% respondents did not get any harm from the product they bought for some or other use. 56.87% got redressal from the shopkeeper only. 70, 78.12 and 76.25% respondents did not know where to make complaint when there is harm or loss of worth Rs. 1 to 20 lakhs, Rs. 20 lakhs to 1 Crore and above this amount. Amongst them maximum of the respondents (70.62%) see Expiry date/ best before. 63.75% see and prefer quality symbol on the product.

Keywords : consumer, consumer rights, certification marks, awareness, responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "consumer" begins with needs and wants. Consumer means the person who consumes goods for satisfying his/her needs. In other words, consumer denotes a person who consumes or uses an article in an economy. Consumers are the largest economic group in country. The right to have information about the quality, potency, quantity, purity, price and standard of goods or services, as it may be the case, but the consumer is to be protected against any unfair practices of trade. It is very essential for the consumers to know these rights. However, there are strong and clear laws in India to defend consumer rights, the actual right of consumers of India can be declared as completely dismal (Nagendra, 1996). The Consumer Protection Act, was launched in India in the year 1986. According to this law, everybody, including individuals, a firm, undivided family and a company, have the right to exercise their consumer rights for the purchase of goods and services made by them. It is significant that, as a consumer, one should know the basic rights as well as about the courts and procedures that are being followed with the

infringement of one's rights.

The consumer movement in India is as old as trade and commerce. In Kautilya's Arthashastra, there are references to the concept of consumer protection against exploitation by the trade and retailer with respect to quality, short weight, measurement and adulteration of goods (https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/plans/planrel/fiveyr/11th/11_v1/11v1_ch11.pdf).

There is an utter lack of consumer rights awareness especially among rural populations of their rights and particularly the way of putting them into practice (http://www.dticbu.net.ph/09_b_01b.htm). Therefore, there is need for spreading consumer rights awareness among various section of society, particularly the illiterate and more so the helpless and unorganized section among them. Some of the well educated consumers are neither aware of their rights as consumer nor of the existence of consumer dispute redressal. Clearing this, Kumar and Batra (1999) stated that the Government both at the Center and the States and voluntary

organization, in both urban and rural areas, are doing a lot and spending good amount of money for spreading this awareness these efforts need to be strengthened by informed citizens, teachers, student and journalists in particular.

It is therefore, required that the people should at large scale be aware about their rights and available remedies. Studies have shown that utilizing media packages, and multimedia modules helps to improve awareness knowledge gain among rural peoples (<http://www.consumersfiji.org/about-us/consumer-right-and-responsibilities>).

After seeing that there is the need of consumer awareness regarding their rights and responsibility. These are essential when they go to market and face different typed of the problems. They should be aware about these, so that can aware others in the society where they live their near and dear ones.

OBJECTIVES

- (1) To find out the awareness of the consumers regarding their rights
- (2) To assess the knowledge of the consumer of their responsibility

METHODOLOGY

The present study was done on the consumers of four districts of Gujarat state. Random sampling was done and 160 respondents were selected for the study. 40 respondents were taken from four different districts of Gujarat state.

Sample has covered from the Rampara (Prempara) area of Visavadar taluka of Junagadh District; Godadara, Dindoli, Kharwasa, Dumas areas of Surat District; Ratnal, Valdas Nagar, Ganesh Nagar, Pramukh Swami Nagar of Bhuj (Kutch) district and Bhojalpara, Rokadwadi, Farmwadi areas of Amreli district. 40 respondents were purposively selected from each district.

Present study was done with a survey cum interview method. A questionnaire was prepared and then it was used to interview the sample chosen for the study. The interview schedule was framed using open and close ended questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Under the section background information (table 1), regarding education of the respondents, data shows that 35 per cent respondents were graduates and only 6.87 per cent were Post graduates. 38.12 per cent were falling into the age group of 15-25 years and only 9.37 per cent respondents were above 45 years of age. The present research tells that 30.62 per cent respondents were doing government job, while only

Table: 1- Background information of the respondents
(n=160)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
1	Education		
	a) less than 10 pass	37	23.12
	b) 10 pass	18	11.25
	c) 12 pass	38	23.75
	d) Graduate	56	35.00
	e) Post Graduate	11	06.87
2	Age		
	a) 15-25 years	61	38.12
	b) 26-35 years	56	35.00
	c) 36-45 years	28	17.50
	d) Above 45 Years	15	9.37
3	Occupation		
	a) Job : Government	49	30.62
	: Private	45	28.12
	b) Contractual/ time bound job	16	10.00
	c) Housewife	38	24.37
	d) Gruhudyog	12	07.50
4	Family composition		
	a) 2 person	07	04.375
	b) 3 to 5 person	93	58.12
	c) 6-10 person	50	31.25
	d) More	10	06.25
5	Monthly family income		
	a) less than ₹ 10000/-	05	03.12
	b) ₹ 10000/-	22	13.75
	c) ₹ 20000/-	26	16.25
	d) ₹ 30000/-	36	22.50
	e) ₹ 30000/- up	71	44.37

12 respondents (7.50%) were having their own gruhudyog. Regarding family composition, more than half of sample size (58.12%) were having 3 to 5 family members. Regarding earning, maximum of the respondents (44.37%) were earning ₹ 30,000/- above per month.

Knowledge of the respondents regarding general facts of consumerism

As per table 2, respondents were asked that when they go market to purchase any product, whether they know about the product or not, more than half of the respondents (55 %) got to know by seeing label, 48.75 per cent respondents were aware through advertisements, 30 per cent get awareness through their relatives and similarly almost same amount of them (28.75 %) were told by their friends. Others were (16.87 and 16.62 %) knowing through neighbours and from shop keepers.

Table 2 : Knowledge of the respondents regarding general facts of consumerism

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Do you know about the product, before going to buy the product?		
	If Yes, then how?		
	a. Through Advertisement	78	48.75
	b. Through Relatives	48	30.00
	c. By seeing Label	88	55.00
	d. Through Friends	46	28.75
	e. Through Neighbours	27	16.87
f. From Shopkeepers	25	16.62	
2	Do you buy product by seeing advertisement?		
	Yes	117	73.12
	No	43	26.87
3	Do you prefer buying particular products by seeing it with you friends, relatives or neighbours?		
	Yes	95	59.37
	No	65	40.62
4	Do you change your preference by saying of shopkeeper?		
	Yes	36	22.50
	No	124	77.50
5	Do you get habituated with any product or service?		
	Yes	77	48.12
	No	83	51.87
6	Do you have any traditions or rituals due to which you have to buy particular thing?		
	Yes	81	50.62
	No	79	49.37
7	Do you buy any particular product due to recent trend or fashion?		
	Yes	84	52.50
	No	76	47.50
8	Do you pay, as and what shopkeeper demand?		
	Yes	50	31.25
	No	110	68.75
9	Do you pay extra price than MRP, if demanded by shopkeeper?		
	Yes	34	21.25
	No	126	64.12
10	Do you know why shopkeeper demand extra price?		
	Yes	103	64.37
	No	57	35.62
11	Do you see if on label there is no expiry date, instead that what has mentioned?		
	Yes	103	64.37
	No	57	35.62
12	Do you buy product of that company which is licensed or registered?		
	Yes	120	75.00
	No	40	25.00
13	Do you guess or got to know, that if the product you are buying is not original/ is duplicate/ substitute?		
	Yes	136	85.00
	No	24	15.00
14	Do you notice that the product is adulterated or not?		
	Yes	145	90.62
	No	15	9.37

73.12 per cent respondents buy product by seeing advertisement. It tells that advertisements have an impact of purchase. More than half of the respondents (59.37 %) have an impact of friends, relatives as well as neighbours in making purchase of any product. Only 22.50 per cent respondents change their preference of product by saying of shopkeeper.

77 out of 160 respondents (48.12 %) were got habituated with the particular product or service. Almost half of the respondents (50.62 %) buy particular things due to some traditions or rituals. Nearly same amount (52.50 %) of respondents buy as per recent trends and fashion.

68.75 per cent respondents don't pay the same as shopkeeper demand. They bargain obviously. Otherwise argue to lessen the price. 64.12 per cent respondents never pay extra price than MRP demanded by shopkeeper and almost they all (64.37 %) know the reason behind that why shopkeeper demand extra. Same amount of people also notice that if there is no expiry date mentioned on the label, another thing instead like best before or any date till that product will remain fresh (like milk, curd etc.).

75 per cent respondents were buying products from authorized shops or licensed or registered companies. 85 per cent of the respondents easily guess that whatever they bought is original/ duplicate. Around 90 per cent respondents could notice or identify the adulteration in the product.

Awareness of the respondents regarding consumer rights

On asking that whether they reacted on facing any fraudulent practice in market 42 out of 160 respondents (26.25 %) answered that they did. Amongst these only 31 further said they most of the times they go to the shopkeeper and return/exchange the product and if the matter did'nt solve they made an appeal or complaint in higher authority like the shopkeeper, consumer court, consumer care centre. Further, they were asked that though the fraudulent practice was done by that shopkeeper who is a friend or relative or very well known still they complained, almost half of the respondents (53.75 %) still made complaint to them only, thinking due to this relation at least they may listen (Table 3).

(n=160)

Table 3 : Awareness of the respondents regarding consumer rights

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Did you do anything when you faced any fraudulent practice in market?		
	Yes	42	26.25
	No	118	73.75
	If Yes, then what did you do?		
2	Do you complaint against the known/ relative/ friend shopkeeper who did any wrong selling practice?		
	Yes	86	53.75
	No	74	46.25
3	Do you buy any low quality or substandard product?		
	Yes	63	39.37
	No	97	60.62
4	Do you get the information of instructions of use when you buy any product?		
	Yes	128	80.00
	No	32	20.00
5	Do you have any information about consumers' rights?		
	Yes	140	87.50
	No	20	12.50
	If yes, then what are they?		
	a. Right to Safety	99	61.87
	b. Right to choose	78	48.75
	c. Right to redressal	39	24.37
	d. Right to Information	77	48.12
	e. Right to be heard	45	28.12
	f. Right to consumer Education	73	15.62
g. Right to healthy environment	38	23.75	
6	Did you get harmed with any product which you bought for your purpose?		
	Yes	21	13.12
	No	139	86.87
	If Yes, then what ?		

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
7	Did you ever go for making complaint in court for justice if you get harmed with any product which you bought?		
	Yes	60	37.50
	No	100	62.50
8	Do you appeal in court when you are one or alone if you get harmed with any product which you bought?		
	Yes	40	25.00
	No	120	75.00
9	Do you fight or resist in a group or organization when you did not get justice alone?		
	Yes	50	31.25
	No	110	68.75
10	Do you know the benefits of complaining in organized way?		
	Yes	29	18.12
	No	131	81.87
	If yes then what are they?		
11	Do you know where to make complaint when there is harm or loss worth Rs. 1 to 20 lakhs amount?		
	Yes	48	30.00
	No	117	70.00
12	Do you know where to make complaint when there is harm or loss worth Rs. 20 lakhs to 1 crore amount?		
	Yes	35	21.87
	No	125	78.12
13	Do you know where to make complaint when there is harm or loss worth Rs. 1 crore and above amount?		
	Yes	38	23.75
	No	122	76.25

Another section of table 3 entails that almost 60 per cent respondents do not prefer buying low quality or substandard goods, while remaining (39.37 %) answered they do because sometimes product of that quality they require is not available or the price of the commodity do not suit their pockets. So, they have to adjust accordingly. Around 80 per cent of the respondents got the information regarding instructions of use the product when they purchase the same, if required. Same amount of sample read themselves the same on the label of the new product.

Table 3 contains data of another section having questions regarding consumer rights. 87.50 per cent respondents were having information that there are rights for consumers. Most of them (61.87 %, 48.75 % and 48.12 %) knew about Right to Safety and Right to Choose and Right to Information, respectively.

86.87 per cent respondents did not get any harm from the product they bought for some or other use. Rest of the respondents got harmed somehow. There were various harms whoever felt involves changes in the characteristics of the product, lesser amount or weight of the product, damaged product, duplicate goods, substandard quality, harm through

Electronic items etc. Further, if discussed that consumers themselves did not give attention during the purchase of the products and brought substandard and duplicate products in result and got harmed somehow.

Further, according to the data shown in table 3 more than half of the respondents (56.87 %) got redressal from the shopkeeper only. 37.50 per cent of the sample people went for making complaint in court for justice, when they harmed from the product. It was also asked that do they appeal alone in court if situation will arise in future, then 75 per cent denied. If not got justice on going alone, 68.75 per cent respondents answered that they go in an organized way. Further, 81.87 per cent sample was not knowing the benefits of complaining in an organized group. Only 29 respondents knew about the benefits of complaining in an organized way. They answered differently which includes that when complaining another time, it provides safety as well as it stops fraudulent practices by shopkeeper, provides the rights to the consumer, provides justice, gets redressal of the product timely, further they don't get any harm. 70, 78.12 and 76.25 per cent respondents did not know where to make complaint when there is harm or loss of worth Rs. 1 to 20 lakhs, Rs. 20 lakhs to 1 Crore and above this amount.

Knowhow of the sample about consumer responsibilities

Table 4 : Data regarding knowhow of the sample about consumer responsibilities

(n=160)

Sr. No.	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Reading the label before buying any product	156	97.50
2	Seeing the MRP on product label before paying	139	86.87
3	Seeing and noticing manufacturing and expiry date on food products	141	88.12
4	Seeing the symbol of quality on product before buying	102	63.75
5	Planing before purchasing	119	74.37
6	Taking Bill/ Memo from the shopkeeper while purchasing	125	78.12
7	Redressed by the shopkeeper to whom you bought the product and that product did something harmful to you	91	56.87

It is shown in table 4 that how much consumers know about their responsibilities. It is clear that majority of the sample (97.50 %) read label. Amongst them maximum of the respondents 86.87 per cent see MRP before paying, 88.12 per cent see manufacturing and expiry date/ best before especially on food products. 63.75 per cent see and prefer quality symbol on the product like ISI, FPO, AGMARK, CE, Veg/Non-veg. etc. Also discussed other things like how standard marks look like and on what products that mark can be found or seen.

Most of the respondents (74.37%) plan before any purchase, More than 3/4th of the respondents (78.12%) used to take memo or bill from the shopkeeper of their shopping. More than half of the respondents (56.87%) redressed by the shopkeepers only. Rest have when harmful effects or any lacuna in product had to go further, like to company making complaints and redressed.

CONCLUSION

There is an utter lack of consumer rights awareness especially among rural populations of their rights and particularly the way of putting them into practice. Therefore there is need for spreading consumer rights awareness among various section of society, particularly the illiterate and more so the helpless and unorganized section among them. Some of the well-educated consumers are neither aware of their rights as consumer nor of the existence of consumer dispute redressed. The Government both at the Center and the States and voluntary organization, in both urban and rural areas, are doing a lot and spending good amount of money for spreading this awareness these efforts need to be strengthened by informed citizens, teachers, student and journalists in particular. It is therefore, required that the people should at

large scale be aware about their rights and available remedies.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- (1) The concern in the Indian Constitution for protection and promotion of an individual’s rights, and for the dignity and welfare of the citizen makes it imperative to provide for the welfare of the individual as a consumer, a client and a customer.
- (2) Good governance requires efficiency, effectiveness, ethics, equality, economy, transparency, accountability, empowerment, rationality, impartiality and participation of citizens (https://niti.gov.in/planningcommission.gov.in/docs/plans/planrel/fiveyr/11th/11_v1/11v1_ch11.pdf).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict between author.

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