

CONSUMER AWARENESS ABOUT PRODUCTS AND SERVICE PROVIDER

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INTRODUCTION—In the early times, consumer was considered as King of the market but in the contemporary society, consumers are no longer safe against the mal practices such as, substandard goods and unsatisfactory services. The consumer has every right to reject any product or services rendered by any manufacturer in the market and can mould them to produce goods of their choice. Indian Consumer are ignorant, illiterate and do not know the role of consumption vis-a-vis economic system as well as quality of life. When they are ignorant of their rights, they cannot know their responsibility as consumers. Consumers in the market find themselves deceived by wrong weights and measures, adulterated and substandard products causing great damages to health. Neelkanta and Anand (1992) found that people prefer to absorb and endure the wrong done to them rather than fight against injustice. This is because consumers do not know the ways and means of facing them confidently. At present the consumer movement in India is in its infancy. Vast majority of the people are not even aware of consumerism as a movement closely connected with the protection of their interest. Many constitutional provisions have been made by government to protect the consumers. Until and unless the consumers avail of these provisions, the protection of consumer becomes inevitable. There is a great need to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. The current investigation has been undertaken to seek answers to key aspects such as level of consumer awareness regarding legislation and organization with the specific objective such as :

- To assess the awareness of respondents towards (i) consumer terminology (ii) legal laws.
- To ascertain the awareness of respondents regarding consumer organizations and various information sources.

MATERIAL AND METHODS—(a) **Research Design** : Survey method was used with a structured type questionnaire as the data-collecting instrument. (b) **Pre-Testing** : Pre-testing was done on 20 subjects (10 males and 10 females) for clarity and reliability of the tool. (c) **Sampling Procedure** : The sample for the study was selected from Indore district. Selective sampling was chosen after critical review of literature. It has been observed that consumer behaviour has

been imposed on a range of people belonging to middle class. Both rich and poor have different problems. Therefore the present study was limited to middle class society. Fifty percent respondents were males and 50 percent females having formal education. (d) **Data collection** : In total 150 questionnaires were distributed out of which 120 sample was finally selected. (e) **Analysts of Data** : The statements on consumer awareness were framed after critical review of literature and discussions with experts in the field. The answer to these statements were sought in terms of 'right', 'wrong', 'not sure' and 'don't know' which were scored as follows :

Right	: 3 points
Not sure	: 2 points
Wrong	: 0 point

Scoring pattern was reverse in case of wrong statements. Thus minimum score was 0 and maximum possible = 105. Mean and Standard deviation were calculated and range was formed to categorize the respondents as follows :

Low awareness	: 0 – 35
Partial awareness	: 36 – 70
High awareness	: 71 – 105

't'-test was used to study the difference between awareness level and sex of respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION—Consumer Awareness—It was observed from Table 1 that out of total 41.6 percent respondents have low level of awareness regarding consumer terms. Amongst this, 15.0 percent are males and 26.6 percent females. Only 23.3 percent respondents had partial awareness out of which 15.0 percent are males and 8.3 percent females. Out of total, 35 percent respondents had high level of awareness with 20 percent belonging to males and 15 percent to females. Findings of John's study (1974) also confirmed that majority of respondents have partial consumer awareness. (see back-Table-1)

LEGAL AWARENESS—Regarding legal awareness showed that majority of males and female respondents were aware about the legal laws protecting the consumers against adulteration of food stuffs (90 percent males, 86.6 percent females), adulteration of drugs (90 percent males, 86.6 percent females), short weighing (86.6 percent each of males

Table 1 : Distribution of sample according to their level of consumer awareness (N = 120)

Respondents	Low		Partial		High	
	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age
Males	18	15.0	18	15.0	24	20.0
Females	32	26.6	10	8.3	18	15.0
Total	50	41.6	28	22.3	42	35.0

and females); false weights and measures (86.6 percent males, 76.6 percent females) ; using stones for weights (80.6 percent males, 63.3 percent females) ; using hand made balance (76.6 percent males and 50 percent females) and using deceitful packaging (70 percent males and 43.3 percent females). It was concluded from the above findings that males were having better awareness regarding legal laws than female respondents. (See Back Page-Table 2)

Table 2 : Distribution of sample according to level of consumer legal law awareness (N = 120)

S. Legal Laws N.	Males				Females			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1. Adulteration of food stuff	54	90	6	10.0	52	86.6	8	13.3
2. Adulteration of drugs	54	90	6	10.0	52	86.6	8	13.3
3. Short weight & measures	52	86.6	8	13.3	52	86.6	8	13.3
4. False weights & measure	52	86.6	8	13.3	46	76.6	14	23.3

1. Misuse of weights & measures	44	73.3	16	26.6	38	66.3	22	36.6
2. Using stones for weights	48	80.6	12	20.0	38	63.6	22	36.6
3. Using handmade balances	46	76.6	14	23.3	30	50.0	30	50.0
4. Using deceitful advertisement	46	76.6	14	23.3	34	56.6	26	43.3
5. Using deceitful packaging	42	70.0	18	30.0	34	56.6	26	43.3
6. Without giving weighed contents	44	73.3	16	26.6	38	63.3	22	36.6

AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING PRODUCT STANDARD:

Level of awareness regarding various terminologies was observed in Table 3. The data showed that 53.3 percent males and 66.6 percent females were aware of term Ag mark. The term ISI was known to 60 percent males and 66.6 percent females respondents. About 30 percent males and 40 percent female respondents were aware of the term mercerization. It was inferred from the finding that more number of female respondents were aware of these specific terms than men. It may be attributed to the fact that it is related more to clothing which is frequently purchased by women than men.

Table 3 : Distribution of sample according to their awareness of consumer technology (N = 120)

S. Legal Laws N.	Males				Females			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1. Agmark	32	53.3	28	46.6	40	66.6	20	33.3
2. ISI	36	60.0	24	40.0	40	66.6	20	33.3
3. Sanforized	18	30.0	42	70	24	40.0	36	60.0
4. Mercerized	8	13.3	26	86.6	12	20.0	48	80.0

Table 4 : Distribution of sample according to mass media information sources (N = 120).

S. Legal Laws N.	Males				Females			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1. Television	52	86.6	8	13.3	56	93.3	4	6.6
2. Radio	38	63.3	22	36.3	34	56.6	26	43.3
3. Newspapers	36	60.0	24	40.0	42	70.0	18	30.0
4. Journals	20	33.3	40	66.6	22	36.6	38	63.3
5. Magazines	34	56.6	26	43.3	42	70.0	18	30.0

SOURCE OF INFORMATION REGARDING PRODUCT STANDARD-Majority of male and female respondents got some information of consumer interest through T.V. (86.6 percent males and 6.6 percent females) followed by radio, newspaper and magazines (Table 4). Journals were least commonly used sources of information (33.3 percent males and 36.3 percent females). It can be concluded that mass – media can effectively be used to promote information and awareness especially to educated respondents belonging to middle income group. Mass – media can also play an effective role for masses belonging to different socio-economic categories also.

AWARENESS REGARDING CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS-The data in Table 5 showed that 80 percent males and 53.3 percent females were aware

about consumer organizations working in and around their area. On the contrary, only 40 males and 26.6 percent females had shown any interest in joining these organizations. The reason given by majority of them was lack of time and no interest in joining them, as it will yield no results. Parameshwar (1988) analyzed that unless the government and voluntary organization can't achieve the desired results. (See back Table-3,4)

H 0 : Sex Postulated to be Positive Co-relates Level of Awareness of Selected sample-Level of awareness between males and females was tested by employing 't' test. The results indicated that awareness level of both male and female respondents showed significant difference. Male respondents were significantly more aware than the female respondents. 't' value = 3.40*. Thus, overall the findings gave an insight into the extent of consumer lack of awareness of many facts that are of much relevance for their own welfare.

Table 5 : Distribution of sample according to their awareness of consumer organization

S. N.	Legal Laws	Males				Females			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1.	Consumer organizations working in the area	48	80.0	12	20.0	32	53.3	28	46.6
2.	Interest in joining	24	40.0	36	60.0	16	26.6	44	73.3

FINDINGS-With reference to the above analysis it is inferred that- **1.** Television was the main media for both the male and female respondents, which influenced their buying most. **2.** There existed a significant difference between the awareness level of the male and female respondents regarding consumer terminology and consumer protection laws. Males were more aware about the popular consumer terminologies than females.

SUGGESTIONS AND ANNOTATION-• It may be recommended that Mass Media and educational institutions need play an effective role in consumer awakening and imparting information regarding organizations working for the consumer's interest in their area. • It is extremely imperative to encourage volunteers ; who are gallant, audacious and forthright, concerned in consumer protection movement. • Organisations, NGO's, institutions and agencies allied to consumer movements should hearten administrative advocacy in setting consumer disputes. • Government should enter into theaters with various countries in order to ensure extra territorial operation of the act. • Government should be pro active towards the cunning policies of MNCs to exploit the consumer. • A heavy sum should be taken from the multinational companies in the form of security money at the time of their establishment and incorporation. • Government should make efforts to create a consensus for 'global consumer policy'. • Administrative advocacy should be encouraged in order to reduce the burden of consumer redressal agencies.

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