
AWARENESS OF CONSUMERS RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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Introduction

Majority of consumers in India do not have awareness of their rights and responsibilities, which are closely associated with the protection of their interest. They are confronted with a large number of problems such as sub-standard and unsafe products coupled with poor after-sale service, cheating by way of overcharging, black marketing, misleading advertisements etc., that have become the common practice of greedy of sellers and manufactures to make unreasonable profit. In this context, it is the duty of the government to make the consumers well aware of their right and responsibilities to safeguard of their interests. Hence, efforts are being taken to unite the consumers to fight for their rights and to realize their responsibilities in the society. But in India, consumer's movement has now started picking up momentum. However the movement is limited to educated male and female consumers residing at town/city only. Under these circumstances, it has induced the researcher to take up a study on "awareness of consumers' rights and responsibilities with special reference to karaikudi town, sivagangai district of Tamilnadu"

Statement of the Problem

Consumer awareness is an abstract concept and hence, it cannot be measured directly in quantitative terms. There is no fixed value of score, which can help measure the awareness, but the awareness, can be measured indirectly. The awareness varies from consumer to consumer, place to place and time to time. Generation of awareness develops conscious attitude in the consumer.

To protect the consumer's rights and to educate the consumers about their responsibility in the society, the voluntary consumer organizations are arranging the different seminars and workshops. In addition they are publishing the consumers' problems in magazines and newspapers, popular in urban and rural areas. But majority of consumers are still unaware of their rights and responsibilities and unable to fight against odds, as they are ignorant of the existence of the consumer Production Act

and the redressal agencies created under the Act. Some consumers in urban areas would have heard about Consumer Acts and other voluntary organisations, which are ready to redress the consumer problems. But they cannot use them to protect their interest, as they do not know how to prefer complaints with consumer court. Hence the paper has made an attempt to bring to light the awareness of consumers' rights and responsibilities in Karaikudi town.

Objectives

The following are the specific objectives of the study

- To analyse the awareness of educated male and female consumers' rights in Karaikudi town
- To study the awareness of educated male and female consumers' responsibilities in Karaikudi town and
- To offer suggestions based on the findings of the study.

Methodology

This study is based on the survey method. In view of the above-mentioned objectives, a survey was done with the help of a well-structured questionnaire in Karaikudi town, Sivagangai District so as to find out the awareness of male and female consumers' rights and responsibilities.

Sampling Design

Karaikudi is one of the taluks in Sivagangai District. The researcher has used primary data for this study. The primary data have been collected from 120 educated male and female consumers of Karaikudi town alone so as to analyse their awareness through random sampling method. The sex ratio of the respondent has been kept equal (60 males and 60 females)

Statistical tools Used

In order to find out the significant relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable, chi-square test is applied. Moreover, percentage analysis and weighted Average method are also used for the interpretation of the primary data.

Limitation of the Study

The study has been conducted only in Karaikudi town. Thus derived benefits may not represent the awareness of consumers' rights and responsibilities in all towns of India. The sample size of 120 is relatively small to make the study very comprehensive.

Period of the Study

The survey was carried out in the month of January 2018 at the sample town (Karaikudi)

Hypotheses of the Study

1. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to safety
2. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to be informed
3. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to choose
4. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to be heard
5. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to consumer education
6. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to redress
7. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to healthy environment
8. The educated male and female consumers' in town do not awareness of their right to basic requirements

Area of the Study

The Karaikudi is one of the taluks in Sivagangai District. It is 52 Kms away from the District headquarter, Sivagangai District. The length and breadth of the Karaikudi town is 4 Sq.Kms. The Karaikudi is selected on the basis of population and other socioeconomic factors such as 1. Central Economic Chemical Research Institute, 2. Alagappa University, 3. Nearly 25 public, Private and co-operative sector banks, 4. More than 20 schools and 6 colleges.

Analysis and Interpretation

Awareness of Different Consumer Rights

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to safety is presented in Table-1

Right to Safety

Sl.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	37	23	60	50
2	Unaware	13	17	30	25
3	No answer	10	20	30	25
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =7.14

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference=Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is greater than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is rejected. So, there is an awareness of right to safety between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to be informed is presented in Table-2

Right to be Informed

SI.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	37	31	68	56.6
2	Unaware	20	15	35	29.2
3	No answer	03	14	17	14.2
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =8.36

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference=Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is greater than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is rejected. So, there is an awareness of right to be informed between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to choose is presented in Table-3

Right to Choose

SI.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	18	09	27	22.50
2	Unaware	30	43	73	60.83
3	No answer	12	08	20	16.67
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =6.12

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference=Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is greater than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is rejected. So, there is an awareness of right to choose between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to heard is presented in Table-4

Right to be Heard

Sl.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	32	28	60	50.00
2	Unaware	18	16	34	28.33
3	No answer	10	16	26	21.67
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =1.76

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference=Not Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is less than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no awareness of right to heard between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to consumer education is presented in Table-5

Right to Consumer Education

Sl.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	19	15	34	28
2	Unaware	35	43	78	65
3	No answer	06	02	08	07
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =3.30

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference=Not Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is less than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no awareness of right to consumer education between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to redress is presented in Table-6

Right to Redress

Sl.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	30	17	47	39.17
2	Unaware	20	25	45	37.50
3	No answer	10	18	28	23.33
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =6.42

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference= Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is greater than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is rejected. So, there is an awareness of right to redress between male and female consumers in town.

The opinion of respondents about the awareness of consumer right to healthy environment is presented in Table-7

Right to Redress

Sl.No	Particulars	No. of Respondents Male	No. of Respondents Female	Total	Percentage
1	Aware	20	20	43	36
2	Unaware	30	28	58	48
3	No answer	07	12	19	16
	Total	60	60	120	100

Source: Primary Data

CHI-Square Test

Calculated =1.58

Degree of freedom =2

Table value =5.99

Inference= Not Significant

From the above analysis, it is found that the calculated value is less than the table value, i.e. null hypothesis is accepted. So, there is no awareness of right to basic requirements between male and female consumers in town.

Awareness of Consumer Responsibility

Rights and responsibilities are the two sides of the same coin. The International Organization of Consumer Union (IOCU) has demanded the above rights through the Bill of Rights. It has also mentioned the following consumer responsibilities.

1. To consume less and not to give into over consumption
2. To conserve all kinds of energy and not to waste.
3. To pay reasonable price and not to encourage black-marketing.
4. To be alert and not to be apathetic
5. To complain systematically and to await redressal

The ranking of important responsibilities by male respondents is given in Table.9

The Ranking of Important Responsibilities by Male Respondents

S.No	Different types of responsibilities	Most Important	More Important	Important	Least Important	Important	Weight score	Rank
1	To consume less and not to give into over consumption	16	13	14	12	05	203	5
2	To conserve all kinds of energy and not to waste	24	15	14	06	01	235	3
3	To pay reasonable price and not to encourage black-marketing	44	11	04	01	00	278	1
4	To co-operate in a situation of shortage and not to hoard	25	17	15	03	00	244	2
5	To be alert and not to be apathetic	10	12	17	16	05	186	6
6	To complaint systematically and to await redressal	20	10	13	10	07	206	4

Source: Primary Data

Most important-5 points, more important-4 points, least important-2 points and Unimportant-1 point

Table: 9 reveals that male respondents rank the different types of responsibilities. According to the different type of responsibilities of respondents, the responsibility "to pay reasonable price and not to encourage black-marketing" is ranked first with the weight age score of 278 points. The second rank is given to the responsibility "to co-operate in a situation of shortage and not to hoard" with the weight age score of 244 points. The third rank is given to the responsibility "to conserve all kinds of energy and not to waste" with the weight age score of 235 points. The fourth rank is given to the responsibility "to complaint systematically and to await redressal" with weight age score of 206 points. The fifth and sixth ranks are given to the responsibility "to consume less and to give into over consumption" and "to be alert and not to be apathetic" and with the weight age score of 203 points respectively.

The ranking of important responsibilities by female respondents is given in Table.10

The Ranking of Important Responsibilities by Female Respondents

Sl.No	Different types of responsibilities	Most Important	More Important	Important	Least Important	Important	Weight score	Rank
1	To consume less and not to give into over consumption	45	10	04	01	00	279	1
2	To conserve all kinds of energy and not to waste	19	13	12	10	06	209	4
3	To pay reasonable price and not to encourage black-marketing	25	12	16	05	02	233	3
4	To co-operate in a situation of shortage and not to hoard	25	15	15	03	02	238	2
5	To be alert and not to be apathetic	09	12	18	14	07	182	6
6	To complaint systematically and to await redressal	19	11	13	10	07	205	5

Source: Primary Data

Most important-5 points, more important-4 points, least important-2 points and Unimportant-1 point

Table: 10 reveals that female respondents rank the different types of responsibilities. According to the different type of responsibilities of respondents, the responsibility "to consume less and not to give into over consumption" is ranked first with the weight age score of 279 points. The second rank is given to the responsibility "to co-operate in a situation of shortage and not to hoard" with the weight age score of 238 points. The third rank is given to the responsibility "to pay reasonable price and not to encourage black-marketing" with the weight age score of 233 points the fourth rank is given to the responsibility "to conserve all kinds of energy and not to waste" with weight age score of 209 points. The fifth and sixth ranks are given to be alert and not to be apathetic" and with the weight age score of 205 points and 182 points respectively.

Problems in exercising consumers' rights and responsibilities, Consumers face number of problems in safeguarding their rights and responsibilities. During the survey, problems affecting the rights and responsibilities of consumers as stated by the respondents were illiteracy and ignorance, unorganized consumers, spurious goods, deceptive advertising and selling of defective, inferior and sub-standard goods. Lack of knowledge about consumer rights, innocence and implicit faith, economic backwardness, ineffective implementation of COPRA(Consumer Protection Act 1986), black-marketing and hoarding and frequent change in price of goods were other problems as stated by the respondents.

Suggestions

- Consumers' awareness of rights and responsibilities should be created through mass media.
- Consumers' association should be established in all urban and rural areas of TamilNadu.
- More power to consumers' Redressal Forum should be given so as to solve consumer problems.
- Essential commodities should be supplied to consumers through fair price shops.
- Consumers must be given adequate safety against the abuse of monopoly position and restrictive trade practices.
- The government has to pay a significant role in keeping prices under control and taking quick action against economic offenders by shortening the time lag between complaint and decision.
- Consumers should be protected against fraudulent, deceitful, or grossly misleading information, advertising, labelling or other practices.
- The goods or services being hazardous to the health or life of consumers should not be sold in the market.
- Consumers should be assured of their interest being protected and considered sympathetically at the time of formation of government policy.
- Adequate compensation to consumers for the injury caused to them by the seller should be ensured.
- The consumers should be educated about their rights and responsibilities through consumer education that should be provided by educational institutions and institutional agencies.
- Every consumer must be assured of the availability of items of basic necessity.

Conclusion

The consumers have to be aware of their rights and responsibilities. They have to play a key role in the society. The success of the awareness of consumers' rights and responsibilities depends upon consumerism, consumer education and government co-operation. The interest of the consumers can be protected through business self-regulation, consumers self-help, consumers association and government regulations. In a competitive environment, the consumers have to exercise their choice either in favour of or against the goods and services. Their choices are going to be vital and final. They should realize their importance and prepare themselves to exercise their rights with responsibilities. Everyone should realize their rights and responsibilities as a consumer and exercise it while buying or utilizing services. The study reveals that male educated consumers have more awareness of rights and responsibilities than female educated consumers in Karaikudi town.

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