

STUDY ON CONSUMER AWARENESS ABOUT LEGAL SYSTEMS PROTECTING CONSUMERS

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Abstract: Consumers' awareness about the legislations holding the promise of consumer protection and the government departments specifically constituted to implement, the laws for the interest of the consumers is still in its infancy in our country. The important aspect of the study is to analyse the Consumers awareness about the legal systems protecting consumers in India. The objective of the present study is to study the awareness of the consumers about the legal system and to study the socio-economic factors influencing the awareness of legal system. Null hypothesis is used for this study. The data are collected from 300 consumers from all the parts of Kanyakumari district about the selected twenty consumer legislations. Out of 300 sample consumers, 194 are male and 106 are female. The level of awareness is found and classified as high, medium and low. Chi-square test is used to find out the relationship between the socio economic factors of the consumers and the awareness of legal system. It is found that from the 300 sample respondents' 74 respondents belong to the category of low level of awareness of legal system, 86 respondents belong to the category of medium level of awareness of legal system, and 140 respondents belong to the category of high level of awareness of legal system. Consumers have positive relationship with the awareness of legal system are age, sex, educational status and place of birth.

Keywords: Consumers awareness, Legislations, Legal system.

I. INTRODUCTION

The cardinal objective of any production activity is consumption. "Consumption is the sole end and purpose of all production; and the interests of the producer ought to be attended to, only in so far as it may be necessary for promoting that of the consumer." In this regard, consumers serve as the fundamental entity for many activities in any business transactions. Everyone is a consumer wherever they live and whatever activities they pursue irrespective of their age, sex, colour and creed. In 1934, Mahatma Gandhi, highlighting the importance of consumers in business said, "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is a part of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so".

Despite the volume of legislations holding the promise of consumer protection and an array of government departments specifically constituted to implement these laws, for the interest of the consumers has not been protected. Today an average Indian consumer is poor, illiterate, ignorant, apathetic or just defeatist and continues to be at the receiving end. Ignorance of consumers is evident in the state of affairs like adulterated food we eat, the spurious, unsafe and sub-standard products we buy. Consumer rights are human rights and they are recognized as the fundamental rights of the consumers. Hence, an in-depth study of the awareness of the consumers about the legal systems protecting consumers is the need of the hour in India.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

India is lagging behind in consumer movement as compared with the other developed countries. The biggest challenge of the movement in India is the indifference and distrust on the part of the consumers. The plight of the consumers in India is weak in relation to sellers. The consumer falls prey to exploitative practices such as false advertising, defective weighing, duplication, sub-standard product and low quality, rising prices, poor and inadequate market information and the like. It was estimated, the Indian consumers are being cheated to the tune of about Rs.2000 crores every year". The Government of India has taken various legislative measures from time to time for eradicating the malpractices and other social evils plugging into consumer society. The consumer awareness, efficiency of consumer organization, business ethics and the government's control largely depend on consumer legislations, which create a legal environment.

Consumer awareness is necessary as it enable the buyers to protect themselves against the exploitation by unscrupulous seller's indulged in unfair trade practices. An in depth study is necessary to probe into the awareness of the various legislations protecting consumers and hence this study has been undertaken.

Objectives of the study

The study has the following objectives:

- To study the awareness of the consumers about the legislations protecting consumers.
- To study the level of awareness of consumers about the legislations.
- To study the socio-economic factors influencing the awareness of legal system.

Hypothesis

- There is no relationship between consumers awareness of legal system and Socio Economic factors.

Methodology

The present study is empirical in nature based on survey method. The primary data regarding the attitude of consumers were collected through an inventory designed for this purpose.

Sampling design & Period of data collection

Convenient sampling is adapted to identify the population for the study. Consumers with different educational background such as graduates, postgraduates, professional degree holders and those who studied up to school level are included for this study. The primary data were collected from 300 sample consumers from all the parts of Kanyakumari district of Tamilnadu, India. Out of 300 sample consumers, 194 are male and 104 are female. In addition, Out of 300 sample consumers, 170 respondents are graduates and postgraduates, 97 have studied up to school level, and rests of the respondents have professional degrees. Primary data were collected during the period October 2018 to December 2018.

Tool Used

The tool used for the study is (i) Personal Data Sheet (ii) Selected 20 Legislations protecting Consumers (iii) prepared by the investigator.

Statistical techniques used for analysis

Mean and Standard Deviation were used for finding the Consumers level of awareness about the legal systems. Chi-square test was used to find out the relationship between the factors such as age, sex, education, occupation, place of birth, family size, family type, and marital status and the awareness of legal system.

AWARENESS OF CONSUMERS ABOUT THE LEGISLATIONS

To measure the extent of awareness of legal system, it is imperative to ascertain the opinions of all groups of consumers. One method of ascertaining such opinion is to measure their knowledge and awareness on the name of such acts. Table shows the identified 20 consumer legislations, the maximum possible scores, and the actual scores of 300 sample respondents.

TABLE – I

Sl. No	Legislations	Maximum Score	Score Obtained
1	The Sale of Goods Act 1930	600	492
2	The Agricultural Produce(Grading and Marking) Act 1937	600	342
3	The Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940	600	336
4	The Drugs Control Act, 1950	600	312
5	The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954	600	330
6	Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954	600	504
7	The Essential Commodities Act, 1955	600	402
8	Fruit Products Order (FPO), 1955	600	380
9	The Standards of Weights and Measures Act, 1956	600	480
10	The Trade and Merchandise Act 1958	600	354
11	Retail Price (food) Display Order, 1963	600	312
12	The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act (MRTP), 1969	600	468
13	Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974	600	372
14	The Cigarettes (Regulations of Production, Supply and Distribution), Act 1975	600	492
15	The Packaged Commodities (Regulation) Order, 1975	600	342
16	Paper (Control) Order, 1979	600	300
17	Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980	600	556
18	Household Electrical Appliances (Quality Control) Order, 1981	600	450
19	The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981	600	336
20	The Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986	600	560
	Total	12000	8120

Source: Primary Data

From table 1, it is clear that for all the twenty legislations, the maximum score is 12000 points (Yes 2 score and No 1 score value) and the actual score obtained from 300 sample respondents is 8120. The maximum score of 560 points was secured by the variable “Bureau of Indian Standards 1986” followed by the variable “Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act 1980” by securing 556 points. The variable least preferred by the sample consumers was “Paper Control Order 1979”.

LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF CONSUMERS ABOUT THE LEGISLATIONS

The tool Consumer Legislations Inventory measures the level of awareness of consumers about the legal system. Mean and standard deviation score of the total 300 respondents were calculated, and the value obtained for mean is 156 and standard deviation is 12.48. The level of awareness of consumers about the legal acts are classified as high, average and low by applying the formula: $m+sd$ (high), between $m+sd$ and $m-sd$ (average) and $m-sd$ (low).

Using the calculated Mean and Standard Deviation values, it is found that 74 consumers have Low level of awareness, 86 consumers have Medium level of awareness, and 140 consumers have High level of awareness about the legal systems protecting the consumers.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL FACTORS AND AWARENESS

There are a number of socio-economic factors responsible for the awareness of sample consumers towards legal system. The factors have been identified for analysis are Age, Sex, Educational Status, Occupation, Place of Birth, Family Size, Family Type and Marital Status. To find what extent their influences are significant by using the Chi-Square Test.

Age and Level of Awareness of Legal System

For the purpose of this study, Age has been classified under three headings namely Young (below 30 years), Middle (31-45 years) and Old age (above 45 years).

TABLE – II

Sl. No	Age (years)	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	<30	46 (37.4)	37 (30)	40 (32.6)	123	0.05	29.4484	<0.00001	Significant at p<0.05
2	31-45	23 (23.2)	25 (25.2)	51 (51.6)	99				
3	>45	5 (6.4)	24 (30.7)	49 (62.9)	78				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

It is clear from the above table that the percentage of respondent with high level of awareness of legal system is highest (49(62.9 per cent)) among the respondents of old age category and the same is lowest (40(32.6 per cent)) among the respondents of young category.

It is found from the table II that the calculated Chi-square value is 29.4484 and significant at p < 0.05. From the analysis, it is inferred that there is a close relationship between age and level of awareness of legal system.

Sex and Level of Awareness of Legal System.

When compared to men, the public contact of women, especially those who look after legal system is limited. For the purpose of this study, sex of the sample consumers has been classified into two categories namely male and female.

TABLE – III

Sl. No	Sex	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Male	32 (16.5)	58 (29.8)	104 (53.7)	194	0.05	20.8234	0.00003	Significant at p<0.05
2	Female	42 (39.6)	28 (26.4)	36 (34)	106				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

Table III shows that the number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is highest (104 (53.7 per cent)) among the male respondents and the same is lowest (36(34 per cent)) among the respondents of female category. From table, the calculated Chi-square value is 20.8234 and the result is significant at p < 0.05. It is inferred that there is a close relationship between sex and level of awareness of legal system.

Educational Status and Level of Awareness of Legal System

Education is one of the significant factors having direct relationship with consumer awareness of legal system.

TABLE – IV

Sl. No	Education	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Up to Primary	34 (58.6)	13 (22.4)	11 (19)	58	0.05	83.0173	<0.00001	Significant at p<0.05
2	Secondary	19 (48.7)	9 (23.)	11 (28.3)	39				
3	Graduate	17 (17.2)	31 (31.3)	51 (51.5)	99				
4	PG	2 (2.8)	27 (38)	42 (59.2)	71				
5	Professional	2 (6.1)	6 (18.2)	25 (75.7)	33				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

Table IV reveals that the number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is the highest (25 (75.7 per cent)) among the professional respondents and the same is the lowest (11(19 per cent)) among the respondents up to primary education. From table, the calculated Chi-square value is 83.0173 and the result is significant at p < 0.05. Hence, from the analysis, it is inferred that there is a close relationship between education and the level of awareness of legal system.

Occupation and Level of Awareness of Legal System

The awareness of people towards legal system and values attached to them are determined largely by their occupation. Consumers of different occupations hold widely different opinions about legal system.

TABLE – V

Sl. No	Occupation	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Business	15 (17.8)	28 (33.4)	41 (48.8)	84	0.05	34.3553	0.000035	Significant at p<0.05
2	Agriculture	12 (26.6)	14 (31.2)	19 (42.2)	45				
3	Employee	25 (24.5)	29 (28.4)	48 (47.1)	102				
4	Professional	2 (6.1)	6 (18.2)	25 (75.7)	33				
5	Others	20 (55.5)	9 (25)	7 (19.5)	36				
6	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

From table V, the number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is the highest (25 (75.7 per cent)) among the professional respondents and the same is the lowest (7 (19.5 per cent)) among the respondents of others category. From table, the calculated Chi-square value is 34.3553 and the result is significant at p < 0.05. Hence, it is found that there is a close relationship between occupation and level of awareness of legal system.

Place of Birth and Level of Awareness of Legal System

For the purpose of this study, the place of birth of the sample consumers is classified into three categories namely rural, urban and semi urban.

TABLE – VI

Sl. No	Place of Birth	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Rural	51 (50)	20 (19.6)	31 (30.4)	102	0.05	55.8551	<0.00001	Significant at p<0.05
2	Urban	8 (7.4)	39 (36.2)	61 (56.4)	108				
3	Semi Urban	15 (16.6)	27 (30)	48 (53.4)	90				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

It could be seen from the table VI that the number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is the highest (61 (56.4 per cent)) among the respondents from urban and the same is the lowest (31 (30.4 per cent)) among the respondents from rural areas. "Place of Birth of the respondents and the level of awareness of legal system are associated" holds good. Hence, there is a close relationship between Place of Birth and level of awareness of legal system

Family Size and Level of Awareness of Legal System

Members in a family are analysed as one of the factors influencing the level of awareness of legal system. For this study, the size of the family of the sample consumers is classified in the three categories namely small (3 members and below), medium (between 4 and 5 members) and large family (above 5 members).

TABLE – VII

Sl. No	Family Size	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	<3 Members	24 (30.8)	19 (24.4)	35 (44.8)	78	0.05	6.6882	0.153314	Not Significant at p<0.05
2	4 or 5	37 (26.8)	42 (30.4)	59 (42.8)	138				
3	>5	13 (15.4)	25 (29.7)	46 (54.7)	84				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

The number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is the highest (46 (54.7 per cent)) among the respondents of large family category and the same is the lowest (59 (42.8 per cent)) among the medium family respondents. From table, the calculated Chi-square value is 6.6882 and the result is not significant at $p < 0.05$. Therefore, from the analysis, it is understood that there is no significant relationship between the family size and the awareness of the legal system.

Family Type and Level of Awareness of Legal System

Nature of family (i.e., joint or nuclear) they live in, is an important determinant of the roles one assumes in the family and this could have a bearing on their perceptions or awareness about legal system. For the purpose of this study, the family type of respondents can be grouped into two namely joint family and nuclear family.

TABLE – VIII

Sl. No	Family Type	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Joint	13 (15.5)	26 (30.9)	45 (53.6)	84	0.05	5.3995	0.067223	Not Significant at p<0.05
2	Nuclear	61 (28.3)	60 (27.8)	95 (43.9)	216				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

It is evident from the table VIII that the number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is highest (45(53.6 per cent)) among the respondents of joint family and the same is the lowest (95(43.9 per cent)) among the respondents of nuclear family. From table, the calculated Chi-square value is 5.3995 and the result is not significant at $p < 0.05$. Hence, it is inferred that there is a no close relationship between the family type and the level of awareness of legal system.

Marital Status and Level of Awareness of Legal System

Marital status is one of the significant factors influencing the level of awareness of legal system. For the purpose of this study, the marital status of the respondents can be classified into two category namely married and unmarried.

TABLE – IX

Sl. No	Marital Status	Level of Awareness			Total	Significant level	χ^2 value	p value	Result
		Low	Medium	High					
1	Married	46 (26.4)	44 (25.3)	84 (48.3)	174	0.05	2.4065	0.300217	Not Significant at p<0.05
2	Un Married	28 (22.2)	42 (33.4)	56 (44.4)	126				
	Total	74	86	140	300				

Source : Primary Data

Note : (Figures in parenthesis denote row wise percentage)

The number of respondents with high level of awareness of legal system is the highest (84 (48.3 per cent)) among the married respondents and the same is lowest (56(44.4 per cent)) among the unmarried respondents. Here, the calculated Chi-square value is 2.4065 and the result is not significant at $p < 0.05$. From this, it is concluded that there is no close relationship between the marital status and the awareness of legal system.

III. CONCLUSION

Findings:

Twenty legislations have been used to collect data regarding the awareness of legislations. Using analysis it is found that people are more aware in “Bureau of Indian Standards 1986” followed by the variable “Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act 1980”. The variable having low level of awareness is “Paper Control Order 1979”.

Consumer’s level of awareness about the 20 legislations were found by using Consumer Legislations Inventory. Mean and Standard Deviation values were calculated. It is found that 74 consumers have Low level of awareness, 86 consumers have Medium level of awareness, and 140 consumers have High level of awareness about the legal systems protecting them.

An attempt has been made to describe the variables in the socio economic background of the sample consumers. Eight hypotheses have been framed and tested with the help of the Chi-Square test. It is found that the socio-economic factors of

sample consumers have positive relationship with the awareness of legal system are age, sex, educational status, occupation and place of birth. However, there is no close relationship between family size, family type and marital status of the sample respondents and the level of awareness of legal system.

Suggestions:

Government of India has passed several Acts and laws to protect the consumers and give redress to their grievances. Study about the consumer's awareness of legislations protecting consumer interest revealed that the respondents are very much aware of the acts Bureau of Indian Standards Act 1986 and Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act 1980. However, most of the sample consumers are not aware of the legislations Paper Control Order 1979, Retail Price (Food) Display Order 1963, The Drugs Control Act 1960. Therefore, it is recommended that consumer awareness programmes should be conducted at the village level to make the consumers aware of all the legislations specifically Retail Price (Food) Display Order 1963, The Drugs Control Act 1960 and the Paper Control Order 1979.

Analysis done by using Chi - Square Test highlights the fact that the socio economic factors are the deciding factors of the consumer's awareness about the legal system. It is suggested that in order to eradicate the disparity that prevails among the various sections of the society, regarding the awareness about consumer protection, the government should take necessary legislative measures. It is to make mandatory that the producers give adequate information to the consumers along with the materials, about the procedures to be adopted by the consumers to get compensation/protection, in case the material is not as per specification.

Conclusion:

The study provides a thorough analysis of the awareness of sample consumers regarding legal system. The protection of consumers is not only a responsibility of the State but also a mandate against commercial and business entities. A satisfied consumer base is essential for the successful existence of commercial enterprises. It is important to note that although huge amount has been spent by the government for creating awareness, but the procedural part is not being shown in those awareness advertisements. Special advertisements should be created to educate the consumers regarding procedure for filing complaint- where to file complaint, when to file complaints etc. News Papers, News Channels and other media agencies should also come forward to educate the consumers on these points. Consumer Association should also come forward to work more and more to aware the consumers to raise voice against exploitation. Last but not the least; it is also the duty of the consumers that they must educate themselves and their neighbours about their rights and availability of legal acts.

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