

Research Paper :

Consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation was undertaken to assess the extent of awareness of consumer towards selected aspects of consumerism. Samples for the study comprised of 80 randomly selected respondents from different localities of Parbhani. The findings revealed that around 50 per cent of the consumers had high level of awareness regarding food adulteration, deceptive and misleading advertisement, consumer rights and responsibilities, sales promotion techniques and legal protection. Though difference in the mean awareness scores was observed between various groups of personal characteristics of consumers, statistically the difference was non significant in selected characteristics namely, age, family size and monthly income, education of the consumer etc.

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Consumers are the largest economic group in any country and they are the central point of all the economic activities of a nation. But the very same consumers are the most voiceless group, especially in India (Swami, 1990). In highly developed economy of the west, consumerism is well developed and established with consumer movements wide spread and enough to be effective. On the other hand, in less developed countries, consumer movements are weak and poorly organized. Indian consumer is not only poor, apathetic and ignorant in general, but highly unaware of his rights and responsibilities as well. Swami Vivekanand also believed that the “consumer is the king” in the market who can purchase anything from any where (Seetharaman and Sethi, 2002). In reality consumer may be “King” of corporate activities but his “Kingdom” remains only on paper. Hence, today consumers are no longer safe against the fraudulent practices, in market there are several unfair and fraudulent practices which can play a havoc with the life of the consumers causing many health hazards. Hence, it is important to be aware of various deceptive techniques used by manufactures / sellers to lure the consumers to use the products/services. Therefore, an attempt was made in the present study to assess the extent of consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism with the help of awareness scale and correlate with selected personal characteristics of consumer.

METHODOLOGY

Assessment of consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism was carried out among randomly selected 80 respondents using the awareness scale developed by Murali *et al.* (2006). The scale was administered to the selected respondents personally and the consumers were asked to tick the correct answers for each item in the scale. After getting the responses, the tick marked factors were checked and correct answers were allotted with one mark while wrong answers were scored as zero. The total score was computed by summation method. Apart from calculating the percentage, frequency of the scores, correlation coefficient test was applied to find out the correlation of the awareness score regarding selected aspects of consumerism with selected personal characteristics of consumers (Garett and Woodworth, 1981).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the personal characteristics of selected consumers, it was found that majority of the consumers were in the age group ranging from 36-45 years (41.25%) having 1-4 members (50%) and 5-8 members (47.5%) in the family with a monthly income ranging from Rs. 10000 - Rs.20000 (56.25%). The highest percentage of consumers was of graduates (52.5%) followed by post graduates (37.5%) living in nuclear family (61.25%). An equal percentage of male (50%) and female (50%).

Level of consumer awareness regarding consumerism is presented in Table 1.

Awareness level	Range of score	Frequency and percentage of consumers
Low	1 - 25	--
Medium	26 - 40	43 (53.75)
High	41 - 50	37 (46.25)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

It is clear from the table that more than 50 per cent of the consumers (53.75%) were having medium level of awareness with scores ranging from 26 to 40 while 46.25 per cent of consumers had high level of awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism with score between 41 and 50. None of the respondents were having low level of awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism.

Though majority of the respondents in the present study reported to have medium and high level of awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism. However, many of them did not like to report any complaints to the concerned redressal authority just because the grievance redressal system is time consuming procedure (Jindal, 1997). Another reason for this negligence may be because consumer generally yield to sales tactics and never bother about quality (Goel, 1997). Besides this, general consumers are lethargic and negligent in claiming grievance unless the amount is big.

Mean score of extent of consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism is recorded in Table 2.

It is evident from Table 2 that vast majority of consumers had high level of awareness score (ranging from 7 to 10) regarding food adulteration (95%) deceptive and misleading advertisement (96.25%) consumer rights and responsibilities (92.5%) sales promotion techniques (82.5%) and legal protection (72.5%). A meagre percentage of consumers had low level of awareness

(score ranging between 1 and 3) only regarding sales promotion techniques (1.25%) Maximum mean awareness score was recorded for deceptive and misleading advertisement (8.55) closely followed by food adulteration (8.5) and consumer rights and responsibilities (8.35) while the mean score of for sales promotion techniques and legal protection was 7.49 and 7.42 respectively.

From these findings it is clearly evident that vast majority of the consumers were reported to be having high level of awareness regarding deceptive and misleading advertisement, food adulteration consumer rights and responsibilities.

Correlation between consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism and selected personal characteristics is reported in Table 3.

It is clear from Table 3 that though there was a slight variation in the mean awareness scores of consumers with varying age, level of education, family size and family income statistically the difference was non-significant in majority of the aspects of consumerism. However, awareness score of consumer with varying family income was positively correlated ($r = 0.22^*$) with awareness regarding consumer rights and responsibilities. Regression analysis indicated that an increase in income by 1 Re. caused to have increased the mean awareness score by 0.03 while awareness regarding sales promotion techniques of consumers belonging to different family size was negatively correlated ($r = -0.21^*$) revealing that increase in family size by 1 member caused to have decreased the mean awareness score by 0.16. Mean awareness scores of consumers with varying levels of education was positively correlated ($r = 0.28^{**}$) with awareness regarding legal protection with a regression equation indicating that an increase in education by 1 level caused to have increased the mean awareness score by 0.13. Positive correlation of the awareness score with family income and education of consumers showed that as the income and education of consumer increased the awareness of consumers regarding rights and responsibilities and legal protection also increased.

Awareness level	Range of score	Frequency and percentage of consumer having awareness regarding selected aspects				
		Food adulteration	Deceptive and misleading advertisement	Consumer rights and responsibilities	Sales promotion techniques	Legal protection
Low	1-3	--	--	--	1 (1.25)	--
Medium	4-6	4 (5)	3 (3.75)	6 (7.5)	13 (16.25)	22 (27.5)
High	7-10	76 (95)	77 (96.25)	74 (92.5)	66 (82.5)	58 (72.5)
Mean awareness score		8.5	8.55	8.35	7.49	7.42

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

Table 3 : Correlation between consumer awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism and selected personal characteristics

Aspects of consumerism	Correlation			
	Education level	Family income	Family size	Age of consumer
Food adulteration	0.04 NS	-0.14 NS	-0.13 NS	0.02 NS
Deceptive and misleading advertisements	0.12 NS	-0.05 NS	-0.12 NS	0.06 NS
Consumer rights and responsibilities	0.02 NS	0.22* (y = 7.63+0.03x)	0.13 NS	-0.02 NS
Sales promotion techniques	-0.05 NS	-0.07 NS	-0.21* (y = 8.3 - 0.16x)	0.01 NS
Legal protection	0.28** (y = 5.47+0.13)	-0.02 NS	0.06 NS	0.07 NS

NS = Non-significant * and ** indicate significance of values at P=0.05 and 0.01, respectively

In conclusion it can be said that though consumers are having high level of awareness regarding selected aspects of consumerism yet they are voiceless and do not guide the economic system properly. Hence, government should take steps towards strengthening of government and non-government organizations working for the welfare of consumers by facilitating the organization of more consumer oriented educational programmes through audio visual aids, press media, fairs etc. so that consumers will become more powerful and guide the economic activities wisely.

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