



MEDIA AND CONSUMER RIGHTS AWARENESS AMONG RURAL CONSUMERS IN TELANGANA

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INTRODUCTION:

Consumers form the largest economic group in any society and are the focal point of all the activities performed by the firms. In modern day markets consumer is considered as king. Business firms are concentrating on satisfying the needs and wants of consumers in all respects. It is very fact that modern day marketers are not isolating the consumer need/interest, but it is doubted whether these marketers look at *typical* consumer as a potential buyer to their product (Kaptan, 2003). It has been observed that the nature of the problem varies, but the fundamental issues are the same i.e. consumer dissatisfaction with/need for protection regarding some aspects of their position as consumers (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993). The growing size and complexity of production and distribution systems, the high level of sophistication in marketing and selling practices and in advertising and other forms of promotion, mass marketing methods and consumers' increased mobility resulting in a reduction of personal interaction between buyers and sellers, have contributed to the increased need for consumer protection. The best protection to a consumer has is to be well informed about his/her rights and responsibilities (*Consumer Affairs, Victoria Australia*). An aware consumer is an empowered consumer. Creating consumer awareness and protection can only save the consumers in the marketplace against all odds. The unbalanced relationship that exists between consumers and the business organizations calls for the protection of consumers. Consumer protection includes a group of laws and organizations that are designed to ensure the rights of consumers (Zhao et al. 2014). The individual consumer development and protecting himself/herself from the threat of shadow products and faulty services is reflected in social development. In this context the present study is focused on identifying the major sources of information to the consumers about their protection.

Literature Review:

It is widely acknowledged that consumer awareness and protection level is a true indicator of the country and progressiveness of civil society (*11th Five-year plan*). Consumer awareness and protection are linked to the social movement called 'consumerism'. Consumerism is defined as the range of activities and aspect that concern to protect consumers from the practices of government and business (Day and Aaker, 1970, Balan 1992). It is a social movement seeking to augment rights and powers of consumers (Kotler 1972). This movement is 'of the consumers', 'by the consumers', and 'for the consumers' (Balan 1992).

McIlhenney (1990) defined it as a citizen's movement which will make broad-reaching social, ecological and political demands on suppliers of goods and services. Consumerism emerged as a result of consumer dissatisfaction with the products, price and marketing practices followed by companies (Kotler 1972, Drucker 1977). After Ralph Nader giving a boom to it in 1960s, US presidents Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson supported the movement and institutionalised it. (Kotler, 1972; Mayer 2012) Consumer activities spread across the world in 1970s and early 1980s. But consumerism is in its infancy in developing

and third world countries.(Kaynak 1985, Post 1986). This is because most of the consumers in these countries are illiterates and economically poor. (Kaptan 2003). In United States the dissatisfied consumers, low income consumers and educated consumers acted as catalysts for its growth. (Day and Aaker 1970), but in countries like India the illiterate and poor consumers are unaware of this movement.(Balan 199; Himachalam, 2012). Kaynak(1985) noted that consumerism could not develop until consumers believe problems exist in the market place. He opined that the activities undertaken by government and the media to protect the consumers do not necessarily lead to an increase in the consumerism. In less developed countries the consumer policy primarily emphasized on consumer protection, followed by consumer awareness, education and information, whereas it is reverse in developed nations that favoured them in getting better results.

In India, The Consumer protection Act, 1986 is meant for consumer protection. The Indian parliament enacted Consumer protection Act 1986, which received the assent of Indian president on 24th December 1986. The Act is meant to provide single, speedy and inexpensive redressal for consumer grievances under a three-level quasi-judicial redressal agency. According to Shri H K L Bhagat, this legislation was intended to provide a prompt and meaningful remedy for consumer grievances. He pointed out that the success of the Act depends upon its effective implementation of Central and State governments and the development of broad-based voluntary consumer movement at the grassroots level. The Act came into effect from April 15th, 1987. And Chapter 3 of the Act, which deals with Consumer Redressal Agencies, came into effect from 1st July 1987 (Maheswari, 2008). The Consumer Protection Act 1986 was amended in 1991, 1993, 2002, 2010 and 2015.

It was observed that there was a raise in the awareness of consumer rights and consumers started utilizing the provisions of the Act, after its implementation (Sengupta 1989). And it was found that there was a growth in the amount of self-regulation in public and private sectors (Singh 1993). The Consumer Protection Act was appreciated for its simple, speedy, inexpensive and effective justice to the consumers (Desikan 2003; Chaudary 2003), with less paper work and less formal procedures (AR Prasad, 2008). It was considered to provide more effective protection to consumers than any other correspond legislation existing in the world (Singh and Chadha, 2008; Basant and Mohanty, 2007). At the same time there were criticisms against Consumer protection Act. Though CPA has remedies for consumers they are not sufficient and consumer finds himself/herself as helpless due to ineffective legal machinery (Chatterjee and Sahoo, 2011; Patidar, 2013). George Cheriyan(2012) opined that consumers are slowly losing their interest in the redressal mechanism of CPA 1986. It is the need of the hour that there is a need to strengthen the agencies under CPA through infrastructure, Human resource and funds (Srividya 2012). As of now CPA is providing relief to those who are aware of it and it is required to further strengthen the Act to make it more consumer friendly (Patidar, 2013; Desikan, 2003).

Media is the most powerful tool of communication in the modern world and the role of media is vital in increasing public awareness. Media can mould the society to make it choose the right path and can spread awareness about political, social and economic issues. Promoting consumer rights awareness and protection is among the one of the prime tasks that media can perform towards the development of consumers and thereby the society.

In India, Media has always shown its solidarity with the socio-economic issues of the country and fought for the public causes (Agnihotri 2011; Shukla 2011). Consumer awareness and protection is also the concern of media in India. At the same time it is the job of media to set good relationships between buyers and traders (Vanisree 2013) so that the consumer protection becomes part of buyer and seller relationship. The consumer activists need to make the media to take concern of consumer protection issues and there is a need for these two groups work hand-in-hand for the betterment of society (Padma 1990; Bijlani

1990). In India, The problems of poor quality, adultery, corruption, smuggling and artificial shortage were always highlighted by Media (Shukla 2011). Articles and TV programs related to consumer rights issues were positively received by the consumers, and media has been the better source of information to consumers about their rights and protection (Kaptan 2004; Agnihotri 2011; Vanisree 2013).

Consumerism was predominantly a Western phenomenon. Rising in the standards of living, electronic media, and increased international travel (Gaedeke and Udo-Aka, 1974) tried to follow the consumerism in developing countries like India, Singapore etc. As a result of change in the consumerism movement, business felt increasing pressure to change behaviours and to consider consumer and government concerns. Mass media coverage, formation of consumer interest groups created awareness among general public about the consumer movement (Kotler, 1972). Media is the key influencer in the markets where awareness is high.

Research Objective:

Media played a key role in providing information about different aspects of consumer exploitation. The government is promoting the consumer awareness programs through different media. But it is very much important that know the media for which the rural consumers have access, and the sources of their information about consumer protection. This gap of research is to be addressed. In this regard the study has been conducted in the rural parts of Telangana to know their informational sources and their awareness levels.

Research Methodology:

The study used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was collected from Books, Journals, Magazines, Internet and consumer organizations and government publications. Primary data was collected from the chosen sample of rural consumers using a pre-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect the demographic profile, media habits and awareness of rural consumers. The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended questions and closed questions. The awareness of the respondents was measured using a 5 point Likert scale. The questionnaire was prepared in English initially which is based on past studies conducted in the area of consumer rights awareness then translated into Telugu (the regional language) with the help of an expert in the language. Validity and Reliability of the questionnaire were checked before collecting the data on full-fledged. Validity was established using a panel of experts and a field test. The questionnaire was administered to 25 members, including research scholars, Ph.D. holders; consumer rights activists, consumer court judge, and Professionals to ensure its validity. The questionnaire was administered to 30 rural consumers randomly selected from 2 villages (Peddamupparam and Adibhatla villages of Warangal and RangaReddy districts respectively). The questionnaire consisted of three types of questions viz. Open-ended questions, Dichotomous questions and multiple choice questions. .

Sampling

According to the Census 2011, Rural is defined as any habitation having a population density of less than 400 per square kilometer, with at least 75% of the population engaged in agriculture and where no municipality or board exist.

As the study is about rural consumer rights, the population chosen for the study are rural population of Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. It consists of 10 districts out of which 9 districts consist of the rural population (Telangana has 10 districts but Hyderabad district has no rural population, Hence not considered for the study). The total rural population in the selected districts is 2,15,85,313. A sample size of 1085 was chosen for

the study (Bayesian statistics. Kothari, 2004). The sample was made to cover all the 9 rural districts of Telangana. 2 Mandals from each district were selected randomly and 2 villages from each Mandal are selected randomly for the study. From each village, 30 respondents were chosen randomly from the voter list. In this way, the sample size was made justified. (9districts*2Mandals*2 Villages*30respondents = 1080 respondents).

Data Collection

The respondents were chosen randomly from the voter lists and were contacted personally. The pre-structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents by the researcher. Collected data was reviewed periodically to check the deficiencies and errors.

Statistical techniques

The data collected through questionnaires was coded properly. SPSS software version 16.0 was used to analyse the data. As the study is to find out major informational sources of rural consumers simple frequencies and correlations were used to analyse the data. Proposed hypotheses were tested at 0.01 level of significance.

Limitations:

The study has following identified limitations

- A sample of 1085 was chosen as the sample for the study among a total population of 2,15,85,313. The sample representation is the biggest limitation of the study
- The questions of the questionnaire rely on the self-reported behaviour of the respondents.
- Nonresponse Bias
- The study considered only available literature in the field of consumer rights
- The results of the study are bind to the time of the data collected and analysed, and may not be applicable in the long run.

Analysis and Results:

Demographics of Sample Respondents

The sample consists of 22.5% respondents between age 18 and 25, 24% respondents belong to age group between 26 and 35, 21.5% respondents belong to age group 36-45, 20.6% belong to age group 46-55, 7.2% belong to age group 56-65, and 4.3% of the respondents belong to age group of above 65 years. 60.2% of the sample are male and 39.8% are female respondents. It consists of 17.6% illiterates, 12.0% respondents who completed their primary education, 17.1% respondents who completed their high school education, 17.9% respondents who completed Intermediate education, 4.4% who completed Diploma, 20.6% graduates, 10.1% postgraduates and 0.2% respondents who finished their education above post graduation. There are 4.6% of Skilled labours, 17.5% of Unskilled labours, 6.5% of Small Traders, 2.8% of businessmen/Industrialist, 5.9% of Clerks, 3.7% of Supervisors, 21.3% of Farmers, 10.5% of Teachers/lecturers/professors (Private and Government), 9.2% of Housewives/homemakers, 10.5% of Students, 3.7% higher officials (Private and Government) and 3.9% of other occupations including retired employees, unemployed graduates, priests etc. in the sample. 42.0% of respondents are with monthly household income less than Rs.5000/- per month, 27.4% of respondents with Income between Rs.5001 and 10,000 per month, 10% with Income between Rs 10001 and 15000, 7.2% with Income between Rs 15001 and 20000, 5% with Income between Rs 20001 and 30000 and 8.5% with monthly Income above Rs.30000 per month. There are 85.1% of Hindus, 5.7% of Muslims, 8.8% of Christians and 0.4% other religion people in the sample. The sample consists of 24.0% of respondents who belong to Upper Class (OC), 34.5% of Other Backward Class

(OBC), 23.8% of Scheduled Social Class, and 12.1% respondents who belong to Scheduled Tribes. The other 5.7% have not mentioned their Social Class.

The study has found that 44% of the rural consumers don't know about consumer rights. Only 56% of the rural consumers heard about at least one consumer right or know that they have such kind of right as consumer. It also observed that more than 70% of the rural consumers are unaware of the law related to consumer protection in India. Among those who said that they were aware of consumer protection law only 40% (11.6% of total respondents) named it correctly. It shows that the awareness among rural consumers is low even after 28 years of implementation of Consumer Protection Act 1986.

Informational sources:

It has been observed that 65% of the consumers could not able to recollect spontaneously, the major source from where they were getting the information related to consumer protection. 7.7% of the respondents were getting information from their friends, 5.3% of the respondents from the government publications, 4.1% of the respondents from books and 2% of the respondents were getting information from their family members. 11.8% of the respondents said that they got information media. It could be inferred that media and friends are the better sources of information for the rural consumers as they were recollected spontaneously. Other sources which constitute 1.3% included elders, teachers, employees, colleagues, and volunteers etc. When given the source name, majority of the respondents said that, Newspaper (47.7%) and Television (41.7%) are their sources of consumer protection information for them. Only 9% of the rural consumers are getting consumer protection information from the radio and 10% from magazines. 17.3% of the rural consumers said that they are knowing information related to consumer protection from internet. One in every rural consumer, who is aware of consumer rights, is getting information from voluntary consumer organizations (VCOs), and one in ten is getting information from material published and distributed by the Government. Eenadu, Namaste Telangana and Saakshi are the major newspapers in rural areas of Telangana. ETV, Gemini TV, MAA TV and T-News are the major TV channels that are popular in these parts. Only 10% of the rural consumers of Telangana are listening to radio 14% are reading magazines. Facebook is a popular website among youth.

Hypotheses Tested:

Null Hypothesis (Ho1): There is no significant correlation between Newspaper the consumer read and Consumer rights awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha1): There is a significant correlation between Newspaper the consumer read and Consumer rights awareness Consumer rights awareness.

At 0.01 level of significance, there is no significant correlation between the newspaper the consumers read and their awareness of consumer rights. The p-values is 0.947535 which is very higher than required, so **Null Hypothesis (Ho) cannot be rejected.**

Null Hypothesis (Ho2): There is no significant correlation between television channel the consumers' watch and Consumer rights awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha2): There is a significant correlation between television channels the consumers' watch and Consumer rights awareness.

At 0.01 level of significance, the above table shows that there is a sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant correlation between the Television channel that the consumer watches and Consumer rights awareness. (P-value is less than 0.00001). **Null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.**

Null Hypothesis (Ho3): There is no significant correlation between consumer's access to radio and Consumer rights awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha3): There is a significant correlation between consumer's access to radio and Consumer rights awareness.

At 0.01 level of significance, the above table shows that there is a sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant correlation between the consumer's access to radio (listening to the radio) and Consumer rights awareness. (P-value is less than 0.00001). **Null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.**

Null Hypothesis (Ho4): There is no significant correlation between consumer's access to magazines and Consumer rights awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha4): There is a significant correlation between consumer's access to magazine and Consumer rights awareness.

At 0.01 level of significance, the above table shows that there is a sufficient evidence to conclude that there is a significant correlation between the consumer's access to the magazine (reading any magazine) and Consumer rights awareness. (P-value is less than 0.00001). **Null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected.**

Null Hypothesis (Ho5): There is no significant correlation between the website the consumer mostly visits and Consumer rights awareness.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha5): There is a significant correlation between the website the consumer mostly visits and Consumer rights awareness.

At 0.01 level of significance, there is no significant correlation between the website the consumer mostly visits and the awareness of consumer rights. The p-values is 0.103937 which is higher than required, so **Null Hypothesis (Ho) cannot be rejected.**

The study has found that there is a significant relationship between the media like radio, magazine and television channel to which the consumer has access and their awareness of consumer rights and consumer protection law. The study also found that there is no correlation between the newspaper the consumers read and website they visit, and their awareness of consumer rights and protection law.

Implications of the study:

Consumer rights awareness is one of the indicators of progressiveness of the society. In India there were many studies conducted in different parts of the country and most of them revealed that consumer awareness is low. To promote a responsible and responsive consumer movement in the country, the Department of Consumer Affairs has initiated various programs including multi-media campaigns and consumer involvement through efforts of Government and Non-governmental actions.

Along with the campaigning, the Government of India and the Department of Consumer Affairs are creating awareness and established the district, State, and National Consumer Redressal Forums under Consumer protection Act 1986. A multi-media campaign Jago Grahak Jago and other publicity campaigns are being aired on Television, Radio, Newspaper and Outdoor advertising. Consumer Helpline is a viable option introduced – to address local issues in regional language – to guide the consumers in the resolution of complaints.

In this regard the present study is an attempt to find out different sources that the rural consumer have access, there by suggesting the government and VCOs to choose those media to create awareness. The study is only a preliminary enquiry in to the sources; there is lot scope for further research in terms of different aspects like the page a consumer reads regularly in a newspaper, the time at which he/she watches TV or the messages he/she reads in a website etc.

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