

Consumer Awareness

Meaning of Consumer Awareness

Consumers' consciousness towards their rights and duties is known as consumer awareness. Consumers should be aware of their rights to ensure proper standards of goods and services they purchase. According to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, a consumer in India is 'any person who buys goods and services by making full or part payment for those goods and services without any objective of using them for commercial purposes'.



Forms of Consumer Exploitation

The common business malpractices which prevail in the market are

- Sale of adulterated goods, i.e. addition of inferior substances to the product being sold.
- Sale of sub-standard goods, i.e. sale of goods which do not confirm to the prescribed quality standards.
- Use of false weights and measures leading to losses.
- Supply of defective goods.
- Misleading advertisements, i.e. advertisements falsely claiming a product or service to be of superior quality, grade or standard.
- Sale of spurious goods, i.e. selling something of little value instead of the real product.
- Sale of duplicate goods.
- Hoarding and black-marketing which lead to scarcity and rise in prices.
- Charging more than the maximum retail price (MRP) fixed for a product.
- Supply of inferior services, i.e. quality of service is lower than the quality agreed upon.

Reasons for Consumers Exploitation

Reasons for the exploitation of consumers in India are

- Consumers buy a wide range of goods without taking adequate initiatives to know consumer rights.
- Because of illiteracy, consumers do not challenge the quality and quantity of goods supplied by the seller, even though the goods and services provided by them are not satisfactory.
- Consumers are attracted by the advertisement of articles that they do not try to verify the quality of those goods.

Growth of Consumer Awareness

In India, the consumer movement emerged because of social reasons. It was felt that it is necessary to protect the interests of consumers against unfair practices of traders. Rampant food shortages, hoarding, black marketing and adulteration of food and edible oil gave birth to a growing dissatisfaction among consumers with dishonest traders. This led to a consumer movement in an organised manner. Since 1962, 15 March of every year is celebrated as World Consumer Rights Day. The spread of the consumer movement in India has been influenced by the Government of India in favour of consumer protection. They enacted the Consumer Protection Act in 1986 to safeguard the interests of consumers.

Consumer Behaviour in the Market

Consumer protection in India is essential in the following three cases:

- To improve the market conditions which provide consumers with more choices at a lower price.
- To reduce the incidences of consumer exploitation by the sellers in the marketplace.
- To help consumers transform from 'passive' consumers to 'active' consumers.

Rights and Duties of a Consumer



- **Right to safety:** It implies the right to be protected against the marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to our health and property. The goods and services purchased by consumers should not only meet their immediate needs but also fulfil their long-term interests.
- **Right to choose:** Consumers have the right to choose from among the variety of goods and services available before them at a competitive price. This right becomes meaningful in a competitive environment where a large number of enterprises are allowed to produce different goods and services with least control by the government.
- **Right to be heard:** The interest of the consumer will receive due consideration at appropriate forums. Thus, any consumer has the right to raise their voice against unfair and restrictive trade practices.
- **Right to seek redressal:** Consumers have been given the right of redressal of their grievances relating to the performance, grade and quality of goods and services. In case of any defect, the product must be repaired or replaced by the seller. The Consumer Protection Act has duly provided for a fair settlement of genuine grievances of consumers. It has also set up a proper mechanism for their redressal at district, state and national levels.
- **Right to consumer education:** Consumers have the right to acquire adequate knowledge and skill to become educated and informed throughout their life.
- **Right to be informed:** Adequate and accurate information about quality, quantity, purity, standard and the price of the goods and services must be provided to consumers. Nowadays, the manufacturers provide detailed information about the contents of the product, its quantity, date of manufacturing, date

of expiry, maximum retail price and precautions to be taken on the label and package of the product. This information helps consumers in their buying decision and the use of the product.

Some duties of consumers are

- To check if the products are of the standard quality: While making purchases, consumers should check for standard quality certification marks such as ISI, Agmark, FPO, Eco-mark and Hallmark.
- To be aware of deceptive and unfair trade practices: For consumers to be protected against unfair trade practices, they should be aware and cautious of the quality, quantity, purity, standard and price of goods and services, so that they are not deceived.
- To acquire proper knowledge: It is a consumer's duty to acquire knowledge and skills needed for taking action and to influence factors which affect consumer decisions.
- To receive consumer education: Education is the most powerful tool for the promotion of consumer welfare. Consumers must educate themselves through programmes conducted by voluntary organisations with the help of mass media.

Consumer Protection Act

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, made the provision for setting up a three-tier system of consumer courts at the national, state and district levels. This led to the formation of the National Consumer Commission at the national level, the State Consumer Commission at the state level and the District Forum at the district level. Consumer grievances and complaints against traders are checked at these three levels. Also, they provide relief and compensation to the affected consumers. Currently, there are more than 500 district courts functioning in the three-tier system of India.

Right to Information

The Right to Information (RTI) Act was passed on 15 June 2005 and came into force on 13 October 2005. According to the provisions of the RTI Act, the right to information means the right to access information held by or under the control of any public authority. It includes the right to

- Inspection of work, documents and records
- Making notes, certified copies of documents or records
- Making certified samples of material
- Receiving information in the form of CDs or in any other form of electronic mode or through printouts where that information is stored in a computer or in any other device