

# Consumer Legislation and Media Information Sources in India

## AUTHOR

**Vinod Kumar Sharma**  
Research Scholar,  
Sr. General Manager  
(Marketing & Sales)  
Alkem Labs Limited,  
S.B. Road, Lawer Parel,  
Mumbai.

## <<< Abstract

*The consumer has every right to reject any product or services rendered by any manufacturer in the market and can suggest them to produce goods of their choice. Indian Consumer are ignorant, illiterate and do not know the role of consumption vis-a-vis economic system as well as quality of life. When they are ignorant of their rights, they cannot know their responsibility as consumers. Consumers in the market find themselves deceived by wrong weights and measures, adulterated and substandard products causing great damages to health. Many constitutional provisions have been made by government to protect the consumers. Until and unless the consumers avail of these provisions, the protection of consumer becomes inevitable. There is a great need to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities in India. Key Words: Consumer, Media, Legislation, Government, Service, Information.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In India, the consumer movement found a clear conception during the freedom movement of the 40's when Gandhi established the lead. Father of nation – Mahatma Gandhi has been defined as the greatest consumer advocate the world had ever seen. His various pronouncement in the consumer interests were even applauded by Ralph Nader, who himself has been considered the greatest consumer activist of USA in recent times. Gandhi's concern for the consumer is reflected in the following dictum: "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 the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to serve him." Year 1949 saw the first consumer organization in India established by a Gandhian R.P.Dalvai in madras. Since then the consumer movement in India started taking shape and by assumed the role of pressure group, with few mass membership organizations. It was in 1962, on 15th march, when John F. Kennedy the US president speaking to the US congress, declared four consumer rights and the movement in the USA took root. Subsequently, various countries passed consumer interests laws of different kinds. 15th march, 1962 is the day in the history of consumer rights. On this day Kennedy said: "it is the consumer's right to safety, information, and choice and hearing." On 9 April, 1985, the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously adopted a set of general guidelines for consumer protection. The 1984 and the 1986 amendment in the monopolies & restrictive trade practice act 1969 and the 1986 consumer protection act in India

formed the basis and fillip to consumer movement through legal measures in our country.

Neelkanta and Anand (1992) found that people prefer to absorb and endure the wrong done to them rather than fight against injustice. This is because consumers do not know the ways and means of facing them confidently. At present the consumer movement in India is in its infancy. Vast majority of the people are not even aware of consumerism as a movement closely connected with the protection of their interest. Many constitutional provisions have been made by government to protect the consumers. Until and unless the consumers avail of these provisions, the protection of consumer becomes inevitable. There is a great need to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities in India with special reference to Meerut region.

The study is helpful to society in understanding different legislation available in India regarding consumer protection.

The study is helpful to industry, as it is based on survey of consumer awareness. Therefore, it will give a direction to the industry, so they can develop various consumer awareness organizations for the benefit of consumer with the help of their internal research.

The study will be of immense use to academia as in past no such focused, and comprehensive study on the subject has been done. This study will invite scholars for further research in this area and hence sets ball rolling.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The current investigation has been undertaken with the specific objective such as :

- To assess the awareness of respondents towards
  - i. Consumer terminology used in India
  - ii. Legal laws available for consumer protection in India
- To ascertain the awareness of respondents regarding
  - i. Consumer organizations
  - ii. Various mass media information sources regarding consumer awareness

## 3. RESEARCH ORGANIZATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

- a) Research Design : Survey method was used with a structured type questionnaire as the data-collecting instrument.
- b) Research Area : The sample for the study was selected from Meerut Region. Selective sampling was chosen after critical review of literature. It has been observed that consumer behavior has been imposed on a range of people belonging to middle class. Therefore, the present study was limited to middle class society. Fifty percent respondents were males and 50 percent females having formal education.
- c) Data collection : In total 150 questionnaires were distributed out of which 120 sample was finally selected.
- d) Analysts of Data : The statements on consumer awareness were framed after critical review of literature and discussions with experts in the field. The answer to these statements were sought in terms of 'right', 'wrong', 'not sure' and 'don't know' which were scored as follows :

Right	:	3 points
Not sure	:	2 points
Wrong	:	0 point

Scoring pattern was reverse in case of wrong statements. Thus minimum score was 0 and maximum possible = 105. Mean and Standard deviation were calculated and range was formed to categorize the respondents as follows :

Low awareness	:	0 – 35
Partial awareness	:	36 – 70
High awareness	:	71 – 105

't' – test was used to study the difference between awareness level and sex of respondents.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

**Consumer Awareness:** It was observed from Table 1 that out of total 41.6 percent respondents have low level of awareness regarding consumer terms. Amongst, this, 15.0 percent are males and 26.6 percent females. Only 23.3 percent respondents had partial awareness out of which 15.0 percent are males and 8.3 percent females. Out of

total, 35 percent respondents had high level of awareness with 20 percent belonging to males and 15 percent to females. Findings of John's study (1974) also confirmed that majority of respondents has partial consumer awareness.

**5. LEGAL AWARENESS**

Regarding legal awareness, the majority of males and female respondents were aware about the legal laws protecting the consumers against adulteration of food stuffs (90 percent males, 86.6 percent females), adulteration of drugs (90 percent males, 86.6 percent females), short weighing (86.6 percent each of males and females); false weights and measures (86.6 percent males, 76.6 percent females) ; using stones for weights (80.6 percent males, 63.3 percent females) ; using hand made

balance (76.6 percent males and 50 percent females) and using deceitful packaging (70 percent males and 43.3 percent females). It was concluded from the above findings that males were having better awareness regarding legal laws than female respondents.

**6. AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING PRODUCT STANDARD**

Level of awareness regarding various terminologies was observed in Table 3. The data showed that 53.3 percent males and 66.6 percent females were aware of term Ag mark. The term ISI was known to 60 percent males and 66.6 percent females respondents. About 30 percent males and 40 percent female respondents were aware of the

**Table 1**  
 Distribution of sample according to their level of consumer awareness (N = 120)

Respondents	Low		Partial		High	
	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age
Males	18	15.0	18	15.0	24	20.0
Females	32	26.6	10	8.3	18	15.0
<b>Total</b>	50	41.6	28	23.3	42	35.0

**Table 2**  
 Distribution of sample according to level of consumer legal law awareness (N = 120)

S.N.	Legal Laws	Males				Females			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age	Frequency	% age
1.	Adulteration of food stuff	54	90	6	10.0	52	86.6	8	13.3
2.	Adulteration of drugs	54	90	6	10.0	52	86.6	8	13.3
3.	Short weight & measures	52	86.6	8	13.3	52	86.6	8	13.3
4.	False weights & measure	52	86.6	8	13.3	46	76.6	14	23.3
5.	Misuse of weights & measures	44	73.3	16	26.6	38	66.3	22	36.6
6.	Using stones for weights	48	80.6	12	20.0	38	63.6	22	36.6
7.	Using handmade balances	46	76.6	14	23.3	30	50.0	30	50.0
8.	Using deceitful advertisement	46	76.6	14	23.3	34	56.6	26	43.3
9.	Using deceitful packaging	42	70.0	18	30.0	34	56.6	26	43.3
10.	Without giving weighed contents	44	73.3	16	26.6	38	63.3	22	36.6

term mercerization. It was inferred from the finding that more number of female respondents were aware of these specific terms than men. It may be attributed to the fact that it is related more to clothing which is frequently purchased by women than men.

### 7. SOURCE OF INFORMATION REGARDING PRODUCT STANDARD

Majority of male and female respondents got some information of consumer interest through T.V. (86.6 percent males and 6.6 percent females) followed by radio, newspaper and magazines (Table 4). Journals were least commonly used sources of information (33.3 percent males and 36.3 percent females). It can be concluded that mass – media can

effectively be used to promote information and awareness especially to educated respondents belonging to middle income group. Mass – media can also play an effective role for masses belonging to different socio-economic categories also.

### 8. AWARENESS REGARDING CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS

The data in Table 5 showed that 80 percent males and 53.3 percent females were aware about consumer organizations working in and around their area. On the contrary, only 40 males and 26.6 percent females had shown any interest in joining these organizations. The reason given by majority of them was lack of time and no interest in joining them, as it will yield no results. Parameshwar (1988)

**Table 3**  
Distribution of sample according to their awareness of consumer technology (N = 120)

S.N.	Legal Laws	Males				Females			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1.	Agmark	32	53.3	28	46.6	40	66.6	20	33.3
2.	ISI	36	60.0	24	40.0	40	66.6	20	33.3
3.	Sanforized	18	30.0	42	70	24	40.0	36	60.0
4.	Mercerized	8	13.3	26	86.6	12	20.0	48	80.0

**Table 4**  
Distribution of sample according to mass media information sources (N = 120)

S.N.	Legal Laws	Males				Females			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1.	Television	52	86.6	8	13.3	56	93.3	4	6.6
2.	Radio	38	63.3	22	36.3	34	56.6	26	43.3
3.	Newspapers	36	60.0	24	40.0	42	70.0	18	30.0
4.	Journals	20	33.3	40	66.6	22	36.6	38	63.3
5.	Magazines	34	56.6	26	43.6	42	70.0	18	30.0

**Table 5**  
Distribution of sample according to their awareness of consumer organization

S.N.	Legal Laws	Males				Females			
		Yes		No		Yes		No	
		Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age	Frequency	%age
1.	Consumer Organizations working in the area	48	80.0	12	20.0	32	53.3	28	46.6
2.	Interest in Joining	24	40.0	36	60.0	16	26.6	44	73.3

analyzed that unless the government and voluntary organization can't achieve the desired results.

### 9. SEX POSTULATED TO BE POSITIVE CO-RELATES LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF SELECTED SAMPLE

Level of awareness between males and females was tested by employing 't' test. The results indicated that awareness level of both male and female respondents showed significant difference. Male respondents were significantly more aware than the female respondents. 't' value – 3.40. Thus, overall the findings gave an insight into the extent of consumer lack of awareness of many facts that are of much relevance for their own welfare.

### 10. FINDINGS

With reference to the above analysis it is inferred that :

1. Television was the main media for both the male and female respondents, which influenced their buying most.
2. There existed a significant difference between the awareness level of the male and female respondents regarding consumer terminology and consumer protection laws. Males were more aware about the popular consumer terminologies than females.

### 11. SUGGESTIONS

- It may be recommended that Mass Media and educational institutions need play an effective role in consumer awakening and imparting information regarding organizations working for the consumer's interest in their area specially in Meerut region.
- It is extremely imperative to encourage volunteers; who are gallant, audacious and forthright, concerned in consumer protection movement from the educational institution and NGOs in Meerut region.
- Organisations, NGO's, institutions and agencies allied to consumer movements should hearten administrative advocacy in setting consumer disputes.
- Government should enter into theaters with various countries in order to ensure extra territorial operation of the act.
- Government should be pro active towards the cunning policies of MNCs to exploit the consumer.
- A heavy sum should be taken from the multinational companies in the form of security money at the time of their establishment and incorporation.
- Government should make efforts to create a consensus for 'global consumer policy' in India.

### REFERENCES

1. Anonymous, 1976, Consumer Guidance Society of Bombay. Keem at page 5(3&4) :2-3
2. Brown, Tom J. and Peter A. Dacin (1997), "The Company and the Product: Corporate Associations and Consumer Product Responses", Journal of Marketing, page 68-84.
3. Bhatia, V, 1973, A Study of Homemaker's Buying Behaviour and Attitude Towards Certain Marketing Practices in the city Baroda. M.Sc. thesis (unpublished) M.S. University, Baroda.
4. Bhatt R, 1989, Buying powers of urban poor and public distribution. Keem, page 17
5. Gupta M. and Ogale, N, 2001, Educational needs of consumers regarding consumer protection laws. Journal of Research. H.A.U. Hissar; page 18 (3) : 236-241
6. J Goldring, (1990), Consumer Law and Legal Theory: Reflections of A Common Lawyer, 13 J Consumer Policy 1.
7. John M., 1974, Awareness of Consumer Responsibilities. M.Sc. thesis, (unpublished) M.S. University, Baroda
8. Parmeshwar, K.R., 1988, Protect consumer against quality tricksters. Yojana 32 (5) : 29 -31
9. Jocelyn Kellam (1995), Product Liability in the Asia-Pacific, Sydney, Legal Books, page-57
10. Mark Saunders et al (2003), Research Methods for Business Students, Pearson Education.
11. Naresh K. Malhotra (1999), Marketing Research, Pearson Education Asia.
12. Richard I. Levin & David S. Rubin (1999), Statistics for management, Prentice-Hall of India.