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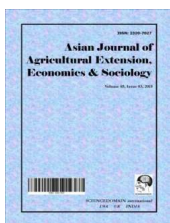
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Assessment of Consumer Awareness amongst Women of Deesa, Gujarat

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all three authors. Author SS designed the study, prepared the data collection tool and wrote the manuscript. Whereas author SA collected the data and author MKC analyzed the data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to assess the consumer awareness about eight consumer rights in Deesa city and to correlate their awareness with the age, education and media exposure. Descriptive research design was used for the study. Two hundred women were selected randomly from different societies of Deesa Taluka of Gujarat State. Data was collected during the period of June to December, 2016. An interview schedule was developed to collect data on personal characteristics of the respondents, various sources of information for consumer education utilized by them and consumer problems faced by them. Teacher made test was used to assess the awareness level of women regarding consumers' rights. Awareness regarding consumer responsibilities and consumer protection laws was also assessed. Data was analyzed by applying suitable descriptive types of statistical tools such as mean score, frequency, percentage and correlation. Rank was given on the basis of mean scores. It was found in the present study that majority of the respondents (69%) were

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having moderate awareness level about consumer rights. On comparing mean scores of awareness level of respondents regarding consumer rights, they were highly aware about "Right to information (mean score-21.62)" followed by "Right to Redress(mean score-21.57)". Consumers were more aware about Right to information in comparison to other rights. Consumer protection was explored as a vulnerable area, which needs to be taken care of. Education had a significant impact on consumer awareness.

Keywords: Consumer rights; consumer problems; media exposure; consumer awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for empowerment of consumers is already well recognized all over the world. The level of awareness of the consumer can be taken as an indicator of the progress of a country. Self-effort on the part of consumers for safeguarding themselves is known as "consumerism" [1]. It is a challenge to the consumer to purchase the products when s/he enters into the market. It is therefore, necessary for the consumers to be aware of their legitimate rights during and after purchases [2]. In developing countries like India, where rights are sometimes ignored and taken for granted, it is hard to speculate how many people are aware of their rights as consumers. With liberalization and globalization and greater thrust towards privatization accompanied with heightened awareness on account of increased availability of information and media exposure; today's consumer has changed radically. However, in spite of best efforts during the course of consumption a consumer may encounter many problems. In spite of various provisions providing protection to the consumer and providing for stringent action against adulterated and sub-standard articles in the different enactments, very little could be achieved in the field of Consumer Protection. There is an urgent and increasing necessity to educate and motivate the consumers with regard to quality of products. In short, the consumers should be empowered with respect to their rights as a consumer. They should be equipped to be vigilant with a discerning eye so as to enable to protect themselves from any malpractice on the part of the traders. This is indispensable to spread consumer education among women which are more vulnerable to be exploited by traders. This study focuses on women consumers' awareness level in Deesa city.

1.1 Objectives of Study

- i. To assess awareness amongst women regarding consumers' rights and responsibilities.

- ii. To probe the awareness of women regarding the consumer protection.
- iii. To analyze the consumer problems faced/perceived by women.
- iv. To identify various sources of information utilized by women consumers
- v. To identify factors affecting consumer awareness amongst selected women of Deesa city

1.2 Research Questions

- i. What is the awareness level of women about consumer rights?
- ii. What is the extent of awareness level of women regarding consumer protection and consumer responsibilities?
- iii. What types of problems are faced by women consumers?
- iv. What are different factors involved in consumer awareness level?
- v. Does the media exposure affect awareness level of consumers, specifically women consumers?

1.3 Significance of the Research

Many rules and regulations have been formulated to protect consumers from deceitful acts of businessmen. Various acts are effective in our country so that consumers can get valuable goods by spending their hard earned money. The legislative efforts are worthless if consumers are not aware about their rights as well as their responsibilities. Women being a key decision maker for buying goods, are indispensable segment of society to be aware of consumerism. Hence, the present research is highly significant to know key factors affecting consumer awareness among women. The results may be used for policy connotations to improve the awareness level of women consumers, if it is not au fait.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was focused on woman consumers because every woman plays an important role in

buying of house hold and other goods for satisfying desire of every family member. She is an important decision maker for purchasing household goods and planning for it. Besides it, many researchers had reported about low level of awareness regarding consumer education among women [3]. Taking these points into consideration, the investigator planned a female oriented study and tried to make out how much female were aware about consumer education and to which extent they need interventions to enhance their awareness regarding it.

2.1 Research Design

2.1.1 Location of study

This research study was conducted in Deesa city.

2.2 Selection of Respondents

Two hundred women were selected randomly from different societies of Deesa city.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

An interview schedule was developed to collect data on personal characteristics of the respondents such as age, education, occupation, various sources of information for consumer education utilized by them and consumer

problems faced by them. Teacher made test was used to assess the awareness level of women regarding consumers' rights. Five points response pattern was followed in the test, which was strongly agree, somewhat agree, can't say, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. 5,4,3,2 and 1 scores were given to positive statements and reversed sores were given to negative statements.

Awareness regarding consumer responsibilities and consumer protection laws was also assessed by using three points teacher made test. Three points response pattern – aware, somewhat aware and not aware was used. The sores given to these responses were 3,2,1 respectively for positive statements. The response pattern was reversed for negative statements.

2.4 Analysis of Data and Presentation of Results

After completing the work of data collection; data was analyzed by applying suitable descriptive types of statistical tools such as mean score, frequency, percentage and correlation. Rank was given on the basis of mean scores. Correlation analysis was done to know the association of independent variables with consumer awareness.

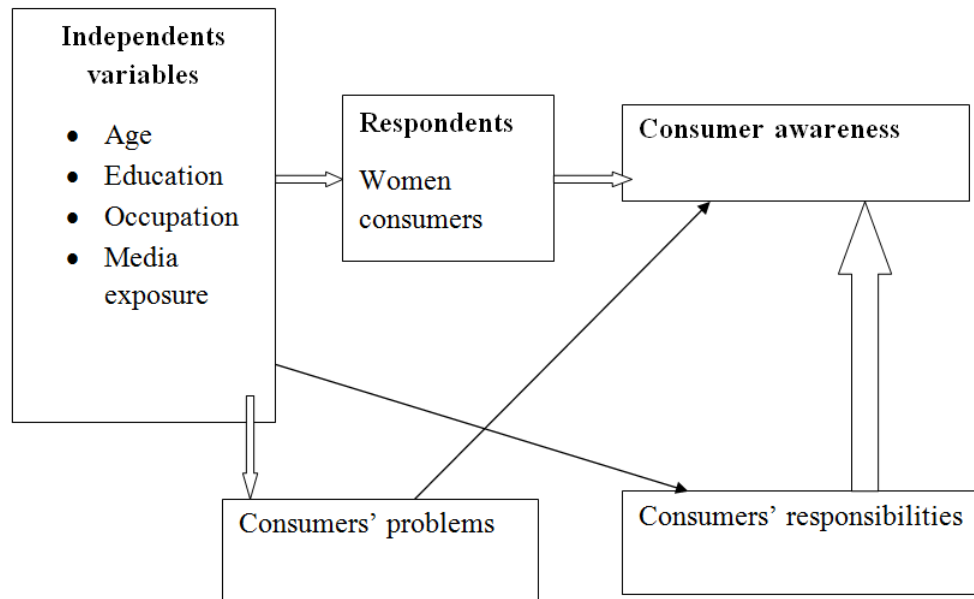


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework of research

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the findings of the study.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their age

Age groups	Frequency	Percent
Young (18-40 yrs)	132	66.0
Adult (40-65 yrs)	66	33.0
Old (> 65 yrs)	2	01.0
Total	200	100.0

Distribution of age shows that maximum respondents belonged to young age group followed by adult age group. Age group may have a vital association with consumer behavior and consumer awareness.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their education

Education	Frequency	Percent
Primary	7	3.5
8 th	26	13.0
High school	15	7.5
Intermediate	81	40.5
Undergraduate	66	33.0
Post graduate	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 2 envisages that maximum respondents were intermediate while 33 per cent were Undergraduate also. Education is a personal factor which may influence consumers' knowledge.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Students	32	16.0
Homemakers	107	53.5
Job	41	20.5
Business/Self employed	20	10.0
Total	200	100.0

Occupation of the respondents illustrates plenty of variation. More than half of the respondents were housewives, while sixteen per cent were still studying. Almost thirty per cent of respondents were earning also through their job or business.

Majority of the respondents were getting information about new products through television, friends and relatives. Internet, news

papers and posters or hoardings were also important sources of information to know about new products in the market and other consumer related information.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to sources of information they use (n=200)

Sources of information about new products	Frequency	Percent
Newspaper	174	87.0
Television	184	92.0
Internet	174	87.0
Friends	185	92.5
Relatives	182	91.0
Advertisement literature	117	58.5
Posters, hoardings	160	80.0

It was reported in other study that mass media like TV, Radio and Newspaper were the most important sources for creating consumer protection awareness, whereas Journals and Magazine were the least important sources for making consumer protection awareness [4].

Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to their awareness level regarding consumer rights (n=200)

Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
Low	34	17.0
Moderate	138	69.0
High	28	14.0
Total	200	100.0
$\bar{x} = 2.51$		SD= 0.931

Consumers have different rights, which are formed to protect consumers from exploitation. They can protect themselves from business malpractices only if they are well aware about their consumer rights. It was found in the present study that majority of the respondents were having moderate awareness level about their consumer rights. Very few respondents were highly aware about their consumer rights. This may be due to lack of exposure to consumer education.

Results of a comparative study showed that the overall degree of awareness for Filipino consumers in Guam and in the Philippines were both "moderate" [5].

On comparing mean scores of awareness level of respondents regarding consumer rights, they were found highly aware about "Right to information" followed by "Right to Redress". In

other words, consumers were gathering information about the products before purchasing. They were also complaining about any problem if they had, to the shopkeepers or other concerned persons. Surprisingly, respondents were least aware about "Right to choose". This denotes that respondents' selection of products was influenced by salesman, advertisements or other factors. They do not make rationalized choice while purchasing products.

Table 6. Mean scores of awareness regarding different consumer rights (n=200)

Consumer rights	Mean score	Rank
Right to basic needs	19.72	VI
Right to safety	14.12	VII
Right to information	21.62	I
Right to choose	11.40	VIII
Right to representation	20.41	V
Right to redress	21.57	II
Right to consumer education	20.69	IV
Right to a healthy environment	20.83	III

A large amount of marketing information is miscomprehended and consumers form inaccurate, confused or inappropriate information interpretation [6]. Here, it is important to note that consumers reported highest awareness about right to information, but the information they comprehend and received should be appropriate.

A consumer should have the opportunity to select the goods or services that he or she wants to purchase [7]. In the present study, women consumers were found least aware about their right to choose.

Table 7. Distribution of consumers according to their awareness regarding consumer protection laws

Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
Aware about consumer protection laws	74	37.0
Somewhat aware	116	58.0
Not aware about consumer protection laws	10	05.0
Total	200	100.0

Further, consumers were asked whether they were aware about various consumer protection laws. Almost 95 per cent respondents were aware or somewhat aware about them.

Table 8. Distribution of consumers according to their awareness regarding consumer courts for redressal of grievances of the consumers

Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
Aware about consumer courts	67	33.5
Not aware about consumer courts	133	66.5
Total	200	100.0

Majority of the respondents were not aware about the consumer courts. Consumer courts are made to deal with the consumer grievances only and consumers can get justice and compensation for their grievances if they will file a case in consumer courts. Hence, it is important to know about consumer rights as well as consumer redressal mechanism to protect ourselves from being subjugated by tradesmen's malpractices.

Table 9. Distribution of consumers according to their willingness for joining consumer organizations to fight for the redressal of grievances

Awareness level	Frequency	Percent
Willing	191	95.5
Not willing	09	4.5
Total	200	100.0

Consumers can file complain alone or can join a consumer organization which may deal consumer related cases in the court. These consumer organizations help consumers to file their complaints and create awareness about their rights and responsibilities. Majority of the consumers (95.5%) wanted to join consumer organizations/forums to be facilitated for getting information and filing their complaints.

There are many consumer related problems, which offend people. Amongst all, the problem of getting imitated products in the market was faced by majority of the consumers (87%). There are many shopkeepers who sell imitated products which are not easily recognizable. Sub standard quality of the products was also found another major problem among the consumers (74.5%). Many times, consumer purchases a product but due to its sub standard quality it becomes blemished rapidly. The third major problem quoted by consumers was high admission fees in private schools and colleges (70.5%). There

were many other problems faced by consumers such as high prices of essential goods, incorrect weights and measures, sale gimmicks etc. Aloof behavior of businessmen towards consumers was reported by the least respondents (38%). Another study [5] illustrated that almost half of the participants reported a problem that the stores could raise the prices of goods anytime.

Table 10. Problems faced by consumers (n=200)

Consumer problems	Faced problem		Rank
	Frequency	Percent	
Adulterated food	105	52.5	11
Imitated products	174	87.0	1
Incorrect weights and measures	136	68.0	5
Misleading advertisements	126	63.0	8
Incomplete information in label	119	59.5	9
High prices of essential goods	140	70.0	4
Sub standard quality goods	149	74.5	2
Unfair warranties	134	67.0	6
Sale gimmicks such as gifts, sale, promotional schemes etc.	107	53.5	10
Cheated by any vendor	77	38.5	13
Extra prices for the essential goods due to black marketing and hoarding	89	44.5	12
Businessmen are not cordial	76	38.0	14
High admission fees in private schools and colleges	141	70.5	3
Problems while availing many community services such as – Cooking gas, communications, water and electricity supply, hospital services, municipal services	131	65.5	7

Table 11. Distribution of respondents according to bearing their consumer responsibilities (n=200)

Statements	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Examining the expiry date of the items	200	100	1
Checking the MRP (Maximum Retail Price) before buying a product	194	97.0	2.5
Charging the MRP or less than the MRP	120	60.0	11.5
Checking the weight of the products mentioned on the items	187	93.5	4
Complaining shopkeeper about adulteration, if find	131	65.5	10
Realizing the need for forming some consumer clubs to fight for your rights	151	75.5	7
Ready to join such forums for the redressal of your grievance	191	95.5	5
Using consumer courts for redressal of grievances of the consumers	67	33.5	19
Filing a case in the consumer court	67	33.5	19
Collecting information about the product	194	97.0	2.5
Obtaining and using information regarding all kinds of purchase	178	89.0	6
Planning properly before purchasing any good	136	68.0	9
Keeping the receipts and relevant documents safely for future reference	120	60.0	11.5
Pointing out the seller's mistake at the same point itself	67	33.5	19
Comparing prices at more than one store and taking advantage of the lowest priced item.	87	43.5	16
Searching for bargains at seasonal sales auctions	102	51.0	14
Reading consumer articles in newspapers and magazines	82	41.0	17
Looking for a guarantee on expensive products before deciding on the purchase	141	70.5	8
Sharing product information with friends and relatives	106	53.0	13
Gaining product knowledge to protect from exploitation	100	50.0	15

Table 12. Correlations of awareness regarding consumer rights with independent variables

Dependent variable	Age	Education	Media Exposure
Consumer rights awareness	-.166*	.212**	-.109 ^{ns}

An informed consumer cannot be cheated or exploited; hence, to reduce these consumer problems, product knowledge is very important. Consumers should use their rights and bear their responsibilities to avoid such consumer problems.

As far as consumer rights are concerned, they are devised to protect consumers. Along with these rights, there are some responsibilities which a consumer should abide cautiously. Consumer responsibilities were designed to complement the already existing consumer rights [8,9]. Likewise, few scientists argued that, not only do consumers have rights, but they also have responsibilities in exercising these rights [10]. Hence, there was a need to know whether consumers put into practice their responsibilities or not while purchasing goods and services.

It is evident from Table 11 that respondents were very much conscientious about some of their responsibilities as a consumer. All the respondents examined the expiry dates of products before purchasing (100.0%). Some of the consumer responsibilities were dealt by majority of the respondents such as checking MRP (97%) and collecting information before purchasing products (97%) followed by checking weight of the product mentioned (93.5%). It signifies that respondents were careful about these responsibilities while purchasing and they checked products specifications before purchasing.

Respondents were feeling need to form consumer forums and they were also found willing for joining consumer forums to solve their grievances. Though, very few respondents were using consumer courts for their grievances (33.5%). Respondents were lacking to abide one of the significant responsibilities, i.e., pointing out the seller's mistake at the same point itself (33.5%). If the consumers will point out seller's mistake at that very moment, it can make difference and warn sellers that consumers are well aware and informed about their rights and responsibilities.

Correlation analysis of consumer rights awareness of respondents with independent variables reflects that awareness of consumer

rights was negatively significantly correlated with their age and significantly positively correlated with education. Education of consumers was found significantly positively associated with their consumer awareness [11].

It refers to the fact that young and more educated respondents were more aware about their consumer rights. This may be due to the fact that they get more exposure in comparison to the less educated ones. Another study [12] showed that the p value (0.03) is less than 0.05, hence, there was a statistically significant difference between age and Level of Consumer Awareness about Consumer Organizations.

4. CONCLUSION

Majority of the consumers were from young age group, a few of them were undergraduate and post graduate and they were working, housewives, students and self employed also. Hence, the sample shows variation of socio-economic profile of respondents. Mass media and friends of consumers were found the foremost important source of information for them. In the nutshell, consumers were moderately aware about their rights. Consumers were more aware about Right to information in comparison to other rights. Consumer protection was explored as vulnerable area which was required to be taken care of. Consumers were not aware about consumer protection laws and redressal mechanism for their grievances. Though, they were aware and wary about their responsibilities. Major sources of information for consumers were found Television, friends and relatives. Education had a significant impact on consumer awareness.

5. RECOMMENDATION

1. This study called for collaborative efforts of all sectors of society to highlight more programs on consumer awareness to build knowledge, competence, values, and skills geared towards the development of an aware and responsible consumer.
2. A consumer education program should be developed as a means to waken or re-awaken the consumers until they are fully aware about their basic rights.

3. A consumer forum should be built up to spread consumer knowledge and guide consumers to solve their problems easily.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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