

Consumerism – A Social Movement

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Abstract:

Consumer is the central stage of the market. Adam Smith in his “Wealth of Nations” observes how important is to take care of interest of consumers. Every business can be defined as serving either customers or markets or end users. Consumer is king because he has right to safety, right to be informed, and the right to choose and right to be heard. Consumerism is a social movement seeking to rights. It protects the consumers against the exploitation they are subjected to in the market. In present day marketing requirement, the things are not right in the prevailing situation there is strong felt need for an efficient and effective consumer movement to ensure the welfare of the consumers. Consumerism has been unfairly portrayed as an evil that is destroying our society. People often neglect its positive features. The reality for most is determined by the impact of mass media and the effects of commercialisation.

Keywords : Consumerism, Unawareness, Rights, Good Consumer Protection.

Introduction of Consumerism:

Consumerism is an organised movement of citizens and government to strengthen the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers. It is the ideology and a concept which has come to stay in business literature. The consumer is exposed to many hazardous-physical, environmental and exploitation due to unfair trade practices. He needs protection against products which are unsafe for consumption

products which may cause badly injury such as defective electrical appliances. He needs protection against malpractices and deceit by sellers. He should have adequate rights and right of recourse to redressal measures against defaulting businessmen. A policy of protecting and informing consumers through honesty in advertising and packaging, improved safety standards etc.

Consumerism mean , The influence of the general public, as end users of products and services, on the way companies manufacture and sell their goods. Consumers exert considerable power over companies as organisations become more customer-focused. Demand is rising for products that are of high quality, ethically produced, well priced, and safe, and consumerism pressurises companies to operate and produce goods and services in accordance with the public’s wishes.

Unawareness of Consumers:

- Consumer doesn’t ask the bill of the products to seller which he was buying
- Consumer are not aware of the “quality norms” of the products which is they purchased.
- Consumer purchases the products without weight it in proper way and given the pre-fix price of these low weight products to the seller.
- Consumer attract by those products which have the lucky draw, gifts, discount, buy one get one free etc. But the quality of these type of products have not meet the required

norms.

- Consumers not keep the warranty cards in proper way and the bills of the products, due to these problems he will not able to get the opportunity of warranty on products, several time he will pay for maintenance of the products in warranty period.

Methods of Consumerism:

(A) Voluntary Methods :

- Business self-regulation:- the business community itself can help in achieving consumer protection and satisfaction by enforcing self-discipline-Business can regulate its own behaviour and actions by raising their ethical standards.
- The state can play an important role by channel sing the energies of its organs towards consumer protection and satisfaction. All the three organs of the state- legislature, executive and judiciary- have to work in unison.
- The legislature enacts laws which must be enforced strictly by the executive. The laws are to be modified in the light of actual experience and the interpretation and suggestions by the judiciary. The judiciary can play its critical role by emerging as a strong agency with aggressive punch on the erring party.
- Consumer's Association has been given a locus stand in may laws. They can play an important role in making consumers achieve satisfaction. The consumers can awaken, educated and organised to avoid their own victimisation against the malpractices of business.
- The consumer must be alert, and on his toes. When he finds himself being cheated in the market place he should not stay, "Forget about it". He should believe in the adage: "Self-help is the best help".

(B) Legal Methods :

The government of India has enacted more than 30 laws to improve the lot of consumerism. Various means of consumer protection under different laws are as follows

a) Consumer Protection Act,1986

This Act allowed to consumer can go district forum, state commission or national commission and get the remedies for replacement of defective goods, repair & removal of good, repayment of price etc. There are different rights and responsibilities under this act that helps consumers in protecting them as well as in guidance. Rights under this act are as follows

- 1. Right to safety**
- 2. Right to be Informed/ Right to Representation**
- 3. Right to choose**
- 4. Right to be Heard**
- 5. Right to Seek redress**
- 6. Right to consumer education**

b) MRTPA 1969

This act contains provisions for the protection of consumer against false and misleading advertisement and form monopolistic restrictive and unfair trade practice. MRTPA commission was constituted to hear complaints and to pass necessary orders.

c) The contract Act, 1982

This law prescribes the condition in which promise made by a party to contract shall be legally bending on each other. It also lays down the remedies available to one party if the other party fails to honour his promises.

d) The sale of goods Act 1930

It provides some safe guards to buyer of goods. Where a buyer is injured by a product transferred to him under a contract of sale, subject to certain exceptions, he may rely on implied conditions and warranties as well as express undertakings of the seller. As regards product liability, these standards are implied by the Sale of Goods Act. The Act provides certain remedies to the buyer in certain situation.

e) The Essential Commodity Act 1955

The objective of this Act is to control of production, supply, pricing strategy and distribution of essential commodities.

- i) To control the production, supply, pricing strategy and distribution of essential commodities.
- ii) To check the inflationary trends in prices.
- iii) Equitable distribution of essential commodities.

f) The Law of torts

There are situation where a buyer of goods cannot damage under the law of contract. For example, the goods are reasonably fit for the purpose but they cause damage or personal injuries due to faulty packing or inherently dangerous contents under the Contract Act or Sale of Goods Act. Under the Law of Torts, consumers are protected by entitling them to damages in case they suffer loss as a result of use of any defective, unfit or dangerous product.

g) The standards of weights and measures Act, 1976

As the title of the Act suggests, it aims at introducing standards in relation to weights and measures used in trade and commerce.

The ultimate objective is to sub serve the interest of the consumers. The Act, therefore, is essentially a consumer protection measure as every article manufacture, subject to the standards of weights and measures under the Act, ultimately finds its application or use by or the benefit or consumer. The preamble to the Act enlists the following objects:

- i) To establish standards of weights and measures.
- ii) To regulate inter-state trade or commerce in weights, measures and other goods which are sold or distributed by weight, measure or number.
- iii) To provide for matters connected with the above or incidental thereto.

Standards of weights and Measures (Amendment) Act, 1986 have empowered the voluntary organisations to make a complaint under the Act.

- Prevention of food Adulteration Act 1954.
- Drug and cosmetics Act 1940

(C) Organisations:

In our country judiciary plays a very vital role. On recommendation of the amendment of consumer protection Act in 2000 the consumer protection councils or forums are created at district, state and national level. Under the Act there is a provision of Three-Tier Judiciary to redress the grievances of consumers in a simple, speedy and inexpensive way. These are

1. District Forum: According to consumer protection Act, state governments can set up one or more district forums in each District. There are three members including the presiding officer. Out of this one

member must be a lady. They must have a qualification of District Judge and must be appointed by state government. Its main feature is that it can hear cases up to Rs.20Lacs. Any appeal may go to state commission within 30 days.

2. State Commission: One state commission is appointed by the state government in each state. It also has three members out of which one is a lady member but they must have qualification of High Court Judge and should be appointed by state government. It can hear cases involving sum exceeds Rs.20 Lacs and upto Rs.1 Crore. Any appeal may go to national commission within 30 days.

3. National Commission: It is appointed by central government. It consists of five members out of which one must be a lady member. They must have qualification equivalent to Supreme Court Judge. It has a Jurisdiction to hear complaints amounting more than Rs.1 Crore. Any appeal may go to Supreme Court within 30 days.

(D) Non- Governmental organisations:

In addition to government many about 500 non-governmental organisations (N.G.Os) are making efforts in order to safeguard the interest of consumer. These organisations perform the following functions:

1. Accelerating consumer awareness/Educating consumers: The first priority of consumer organisation is to accelerate consumer's awareness towards

their rights. To accomplish this task which they have to perform are: (a) To publish Brochures, Journals. (b) To arrange seminars, conferences and workshops. (c) To educate consumers to help themselves. (d) To provide special education to women about consumerism. (e) To encourage to follow desirable consumption standards.

(E) Press/Media:

Whenever there is any revolution or a campaign is run for Public Awareness, News papers and journals play a very significant role. Indian Express is the first for this noble cause . Press takes following steps to make consumer protection campaign a success. (a) To publish articles (b) To make available columns (c) To show live telecasts (d) To publish consumer complaints

Conclusion:

Apart form this, there is a need to develop a new consumer culture there are many supportive agencies to protect consumers rights. But the main role is to be played only by the consumers. They must understand their rights to freedom from any kind of exploitation, and make use to redressal machinery which has been made available to them to get quick justice without having to incur any expenditure. Consumerism is also known as a movement that seeks to provide adequate information about products so that consumers can make wise decisions in purchasing goods and services.



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