

**An Empirical Analysis on the Consumers' Awareness of Rights and Education
with reference to FMCG products**

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Abstract

The consumer buying and consumer decision making are complicated paradigms as a result of which external influence needs to be handled within an internal frame of reference which comes from consumer socialization. The present study has been undertaken to have an idea about the extent of utilization of existing knowledge of consumer education and awareness of rights by rural consumers towards FMCG products. An empirical survey among the rural populace was conducted in Kamrup district (rural) among the target consumers in the state of Assam. Altogether 300 consumers belonging to General, SC and ST communities were surveyed and responses availed. It was observed that amongst all the respondents belonging across GEN, ST and SC populace, the rural consumers are having poor awareness in displaying adequate knowledge in consumer education. Although consumers exhibited awareness in some segments of consumer knowledge as explored in the study, the rural consumers need to be much aware in the extent of utilization of existing knowledge of consumer education in their respective purchase decisions.

Key words: consumer education, consumer rights, FMCGs, rural consumers.

Introduction:

Indian 'consumerism is yet in its infancy. Low literacy rate, lack of transportation and communication, lack of awareness on the part of the consumers, of their rights, indifferent government and business attitude, cumbersome and expensive legal process, etc are responsible for weak consumer movement in the country. Though, there are number of consumer organizations, but most of them are not active in the field. One of the notable exception is 'Consumer Education and Research Centre' (CERC), Ahmadabad which is active in the course of protecting consumers and accelerating the consumer movement in the country.

Consumer education is basically an education which brings about behavioural changes in a person who goes to market to buy anything. Consumer education is the process of gaining the knowledge and skills needed in managing consumer resources and taking actions to influence the factors which affect consumer decisions. Consumer education addresses four issues i.e. consumer decision making economics, personal finance, rights and responsibilities. (Chundi et al, 2000)

Consumer behaviour and decision making have become prominent areas of research. Consumer behaviour in everyday living is modified by complex micro and macro environment. The consumer buying and consumer decision making are so complicated as a result of external influence that it has to be handled within an internal frame of reference which comes from consumer socialization. The change in consumer education should be beneficial for the buyer. Now a day, the market is glutted with a variety of goods and services which leave the consumer confused. He is constantly exploited by the market men like the producers, traders and the shopkeepers through malpractices and unethical ways. The unfair and unethical malpractices adopted in the market may be black marketing, food adulteration,

under-weighting, misleading advertisements, rising prices, false claims, lucky draws, zero percent finance schemes and a lot more which add to the already existing problems of the consumers. The consumer is totally perplexed what to do and what not to do; ultimately deciding to buy which he doesn't need at all. Though there is advancement in education yet most of the consumers are unaware of their rights like right to safety, right to be heard, to seek redress, to be adequately informed and consumer education. Most of the consumers still don't utilize the consumer knowledge they have.

Objective of the Study:

To have an idea about the utilization of existing knowledge of consumer education towards FMCG products, an extensive empirical survey among the rural populace was conducted in Kamrup district (rural) among the target consumers.

The prime objective of the paper is to find the extent of utilization of existing knowledge of Consumer Education among the rural populace of Assam towards FMCG products.

Design and Method:

Altogether 300 consumers belonging to General, SC and ST community were surveyed adopting a multi staged random sampling technique. Over twenty villages in the two sub-divisions are being selected for the purpose of our study. The selection of four blocks from Guwahati sub-division constitutes 30 per cent of the total blocks (11) in the same sub-division, whereas the selection of one block from Rangia sub-division constitutes 30 per cent of the total blocks (4) of the same sub-division.

At the second stage the choice of four villages from each of the selected blocks is done at random basis. Selection of villages has been made where population of General Caste, STs and SCs is found to be dwelling altogether. The select villages (sample size) as such accounts for approximately 30 percent of the total number of the villages which is actually inhabited by the General Caste, ST and SC population altogether (diverse socio-economic background)

The villages which are not inhabited by General Caste, ST and SC population altogether are deliberately excluded while selecting the sample size of villages from the concerned blocks. This attempt has been made purposefully in order to establish the buying behavior of respondents from a diverse pool of socio-economic and cultural family background of population in a particular village. Finally, the selection of fifteen households from each of the chosen villages in a block is taken at 5% which accounts to 300 households. The proportion of households belonging to the three classes, viz, Gen, ST and SC categories is kept in the ratio 3:2:1 i.e. out of 300 household 150 for General Caste, 100 for Scheduled Tribe and 50 for Scheduled Caste.

Analysis and Interpretation:

Table1

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on matter of bargain over MRP

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
Bargain over the MRP	47.0	25.0	28.0	35.0	44.0	21.0	36.0	44.0	20.0

Source: Field survey

Table1 indicates that of the rural respondents, nearly half (47%) of the General category respondents always bargained over the MRP, while 25% seldom bargained and rest 28% of the respondents belonging to general category never bargained over the MRP. In case of respondents belonging to the ST community the figure shows that 35% of the respondents always bargained over the MRP, the figure is more in case of respondents who seldom bargain over the MRP (44%), whereas 21% of the respondents never bargained over the MRP. The respondents belonging to the SC community were 36% who always bargained over the MRP, while 44% bargained seldom and 20% of the respondents of the same community never bargained over the MRP.

It may be seen that the respondents have the knowledge that there is a provision to bargain over the MRP of a product. In most of the cases the respondents opined that the retailer also lowered the price on the MRP if bargain is made in a proper way.

Table 2

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on matter of expiry of products

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
Verify the expiry date	24.6	18.6	57.3	8.0	40.0	52.0	10.0	44.0	46.0

Source: Field Survey

It is important to note that more than half of the respondents belonging to the category, viz., GEN, ST and SC, never verify expiry date before buying goods as reflects from Table 2. This figure tends to 57.3%, 52% and 46% respectively among the category of respondents. Whereas only 24.6%, 8% and 10% of the respondents belonging to the Gen, SC and ST respectively always verify the expiry date before buying the goods. The respondents who seldom verify the expiry date entailed to

18.6%, 40% and 44% of the same category respectively. The figure connotes that verifying expiry date is not a necessary criteria while buying goods.

Table 3

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on looking /insisting popular branded products

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
Look for / insist on popular branded products	56.0	11.3	32.6	36.0	35.0	29.0	54.0	32.0	14.0

Source: Field survey

In case of respondents who always insist for popular branded products while making purchase, amounts to 56% of the General, 36% of the ST and 54% of the SC community as evident from Table 3. While 11.3%, 35% and 32% respondents respectively seldom insist for popular branded products. Further, respondents who never insist for popular branded products were 12% in case of SC, and 32.6% in case of Gen and 29% for ST respectively.

It is also found that the reason for insisting popular branded products was due to the influence of advertisement which they see in the TV. The respondents are having latest knowledge of the availability of branded products which they insist for while making purchase.

Table 4

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on matter of insisting retailer for vouchers/cash memo

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
Insist the retailer for vouchers/cash memo	6.0	9.3	84.6	8.0	10.0	82.0	4.0	12.0	84.0

Source: Field survey

It was strange to note from Table 4, that more than three-fourth of the respondents belonging to the Gen, ST and SC (84.6%, 82%, and 84%) respectively never took cash memo after buying. Only 6%, 8% and 4% of the respondents belonging to the Gen, ST and SC category took cash memo after buying. Respondents who seldom take cash memo were 9.3%, 10% and 12 % of the category respectively.

The figure above (Table 4), reflects that majority of the respondents never know it to be a necessary right to be exercised. Many respondents although construed that they are provided with a paper slip with the amount mentioned which they consider as good as cash memo. The retailers hardly issue a printed cash memo. This behavior indicates the lack of proper knowledge on the part of the rural respondents as to what a cash memo actually is?

Table 5

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on checking ISI/AGMARK

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
Check ISI mark / AGMARK	14.0	14.6	71.3	14.0	13.0	73.0	12.0	16.0	72.0

Source: Field survey

Regarding the checking of ISI mark and AGMARK a very similar pattern has been observed in rural areas (Table 5). Approximately identical percentage (71.3%, 73% and 72%) belonging to the Gen, ST and SC category respectively of the rural respondents never bothered to check these marks on the products. As far as checking of ISI mark /AGMARK on food products among fast moving consumer goods is concerned only 14% in case of Gen, ST and only 12% belonging to SC of the rural respondents always checked it, followed by almost identical percentage, i.e. 14.6% for Gen, 13% for ST and 16% for ST who seldom checked the concerned mark.

This shows that the buying decisions of the rural respondents belonging to the each of the category viz., Gen, ST and SC are almost identical.

It is to be mentioned that although some respondents knew that the ISI mark indicate a mark of purity and quality, majority of the respondents do not have any knowledge about the significance of the term ‘AGMARK’.

Table 6

Extent of Utilization of Existing Knowledge of Consumer Education by Rural Consumers on matter of expiry of products

Category of Respondents	Gen(150) (%)			ST(100) (%)			SC(50) (%)		
	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never	Always	Seldom	Never
File complaint upon	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: Field survey

As far as lodging of complaint in consumer forum is concerned, none of the respondents whether Gen, ST or SC had ever lodged a complaint (Table 6).

A study by Meena Siwach et al (2009) conducted on the rural and urban respondents where they found that about 75.0% of rural and 70.0% of urban respondents never filed a complaint. About 25.0% rural and 30.0% urban respondents seldom lodged a complaint and none of the rural and urban respondents always filed complaint. The findings are in concordance with Sangwan et al. (1991) and Asha Rani (2001).

Today's modern economy is the market place which provides the consumer an adequate choice of goods and services as well as satisfaction with the choice. But sometimes products and services are not perfect or are below standard which necessitates the society and consumers to develop consumer oriented culture. Generally, it has been found that relatively fewer formal complaints are made than would be expected from expressed levels of dissatisfaction (Barnes and Kelloway 1980); (Oliver 1987); (Dolinsky 1994). Moreover, conceptualizing consumer complaint behaviour as only formal complaint behaviour is generally considered restrictive (Singh 1988); (Halstead and Droge 1991). Additionally it has been observed that a large majority of dissatisfied consumers never complain to the retailer, manufacturer or a third party. Whereas, it has been seen that dissatisfied consumers take some hidden actions instead of directly lodging complaints (Day et al. 1981); (Kincade et al. 1998). The study reflects similar view as observed in the study by Meena Siwach et al (2009).

Conclusion:

From the present study, it has been observed that amongst all the respondents belonging across GEN, ST and SC populace, the rural consumers are having poor awareness in displaying adequate knowledge in consumer education. Although consumers exhibited awareness in some segments of consumer knowledge as explored in the study, the rural consumers need to be much aware in the extent of utilization of existing knowledge of consumer education in their respective purchase decisions. The post purchase evaluation in terms of which a selected product meets or exceeds the expectations of the consumer is generally held to be ideal outcome of consumer decision which is guided by adequate consumer knowledge leading to consumer satisfaction. Thus, it is need of the hour that the rural consumers exhibit more knowledge in their purchase behaviour in order to safeguard their own rights and shield themselves from deception and malpractices of sellers which cannot be overcome in midst of ignorance and lack in consumer knowledge and education. Consumer awareness camps, organizing seminars by NGOs and proactive role of government and more particularly an informed populace can help in ensuring a sustained practice in the domain of consumerism.

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