



A STUDY ON THE AWARENESS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS ON CONSUMER PROTECTION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PALAKKAD DISTRICT, KERALA

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Abstract: The CPA enlists the importance of six types of consumer rights to the unethical practices followed by traders and manufacturers. The youth of our country should have essential knowledge about their rights and they must focus on involving in activities that ensure consumer protection for the betterment of the society. The present study analyses the awareness of college students regarding the malpractices of traders and their involvement in exercising their rights and protective mechanism with special reference to the Palakkad district.

Key words: CPA, protective mechanism.

Introduction

The awareness of consumers regarding their legitimate rights has been constantly growing now-a-days. Consumer protection is connected to the consumer rights and the formation of consumer organizations help consumers to select better market places and to redress their complaints. Consumer Protection Laws are a form of government regulation that aims to protect the rights of consumers and safeguard their interests against any type of exploitation.

It is a fact that consumers are meant to be king but always exploited by a series of unethical practices followed by manufacturers and traders such as sub standard quality of products, false weights, misleading advertisement, adulteration and the like. There is a need of awareness regarding such unfair practices prevailing in the market, the grievance handling mechanism and there should be active involvement from the youth to protect the interests of a common man.

Unethical Practices against consumers

The common unscrupulous activities followed by businesspersons that go against the interests of consumers are listed below.

1. Adulteration:-It is a usually accepted practice to maximize the profit. It goes to the extent that may even be harmful to the lives of consumers

creating many health problems. It is the addition of another substance to a food item to increase the quantity of it and may result in the loss of actual quality of food item. Generally, for ready to eat foods and fresh fruits and vegetables, the presence of harmful microorganisms will render the food adulterated.

2. Deceptive Advertisements: Most of the businessmen use false and misleading advertisements to attract consumers. They make false claims about the products advertised. These practices are considered as unfair trade practices.
3. Duplicates:- Even the popular brands and products are duplicated ,now-a-days. They are sold under the popular brand names or similar names e.g.:- Detergents, Soft drinks, Soaps, Bags etc.
4. False Warranties: - According to A.C. Fernando, "Indian manufacturers are notorious for not honoring their guarantees and warranties. They give some reason to evade responsibility to their consumers. Even the Multi National Companies and established firms follow double standards on developing countries and follow unfair practices.
5. Exorbitant Prices: - Products are fixed prices that are much higher than the cost of production. Some of the life saving drugs are so costly that sick and poor patients cannot afford buying

them. There have been instances where higher prices are marked for some batch of medicines.

Review of literature

Indira Nair (2012), in her case study on Thane District assessed consumer awareness among undergraduates. The study checked the awareness regarding intellectual property rights and consumer protection. The schemes like Grahak Jagran, consumer clubs etc are operating in schools and colleges. The study suggested that such programmes are required at the State Government level.

Deepika and Ratna Kumari (2014) have studied awareness of students on legal acts of consumer protection. Twenty legal measures taken by the government were considered for the study. It concluded that most of the students are aware of the legal measures through newspapers, journals and syllabus.

Hima (2016), in her study on Kannur District, Kerala covers variables such as basic factors in consumer awareness, source of information, awareness related matters, checking of MRP, expiry date, adulteration, consumer rights and opinion on Consumer Protection Law. The study states that 65% of students are aware of consumer rights and Consumer Protection Act. But only 47% of them know how to file a complaint under Consumer Protection Law and 86% of them have never attended any consumer rights awareness programmes. The study emphasis on the necessity of more and more consumer awareness programmes among the youth.

Indrani and Ashok Kumar (2016) have taken consumer rights as dependent variable and gender, subject of study, residence, nativity, parental education, college level and curricular activity as independent variables. A stratified representative sample of 412 students was selected. The study concluded that Arts students have more consumer rights awareness compared to science students and the overall awareness on consumer rights among undergraduate students are satisfactory.

Chaudhari (2017) has studied consumer awareness among college students. She checked the awareness of consumers of arts and science stream and emphasized on the inclusion of CPA in higher secondary or degree syllabus of all streams. A sample of 100 students has been taken through convenience sampling method. As per the study, most of the respondents do not insist on getting a cash memo for their purchase. Students hold the opinion that mass awareness regarding consumerism can be spread through social networking sites.

Babogul et al (2017) has conducted a study on the awareness of consumer protection and consumer rights. The study was made on twelve provinces for the age group more than 18. As per the study, 51.3% of consumers are having average awareness and 23.2% having low awareness and only 22.4 % have high awareness.

Vinodkumar (2017) has studied the rural consumer awareness in the Ranga Reddy district of Telengana. The sample size was 138 and as per the study, there is low level of awareness regarding Consumer Protection Act and the programmes initiated by the government. The study suggests that consumer clubs should be formed with rural consumers and awareness programmes should be conducted in rural areas.

Sanjeev et al (2018) has focused on 100 respondents from Bareilly Region. The variables such as MRP, expiry date, color, warnings mentioned on the pack, ingredients, quality assurance marks and awareness about consumer forum were analyzed. The study gave very poor findings. The students are least concerned about MRP as money is paid by parents. They are not concerned about the expiry date or warnings mentioned. Only 40% have heard about consumer forums. The study has urged the need of including a topic of CPA in the course curriculum of students so that they can exercise their rights effectively.

Objectives of the study

1. The study analyses the student awareness regarding the existence of unethical practices

followed by manufacturers and traders , with special reference to Palakkad District of Kerala

- The study also focuses on whether the students are showing active involvement on exercising their consumer rights and protective mechanism prevailing in the state.

Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. The sample size consists of fifty students selected from various colleges of Palakkad District. Palakkad district is the biggest district of Kerala and can be considered as a replica of the entire state as it includes both urban and rural sectors. The selected students were classified on the basis of gender, age and educational classification. Primary data were collected using questionnaire.

To check the awareness regarding unethical practices followed by manufacturers, seven variables were considered and to evaluate the involvement of them in consumer protection, seven related variables considered. The data were evaluated on the basis of percentages, mean percentile score(MPS) and independent t test.

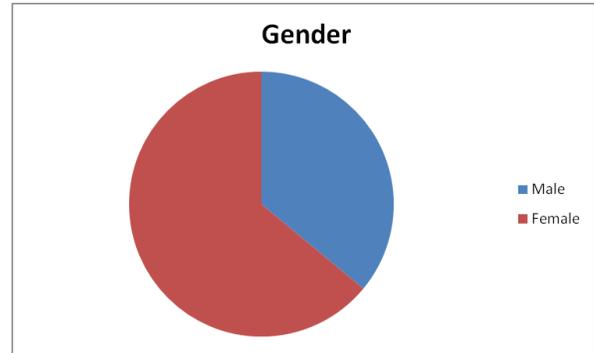
Student Profile

Fifty respondents from various colleges in Palakkad district were selected for the study. They have been classified on the basis of gender, age and educational qualification. They are presented below with the help of tables and diagrams.

Table 1: Gender wise Classification of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	18	36.0
Female	32	64.0
Total	50	100.0

Diagram.1

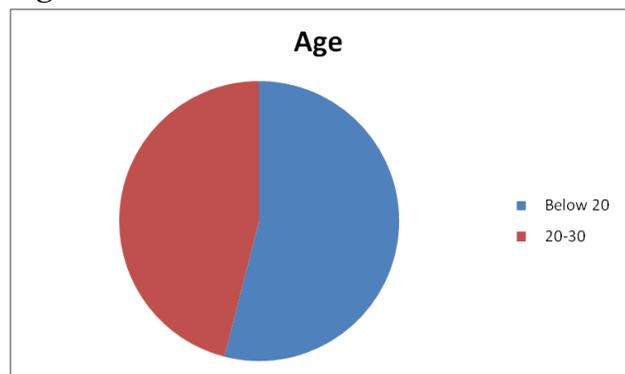


Among the fifty students selected, 18 of them (36%) are male and 32(64%) are female

Table 2: Age wise Classification of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent
Below 20	27	54.0
20-30	23	46.0
Total	50	100.0

Diagram.2

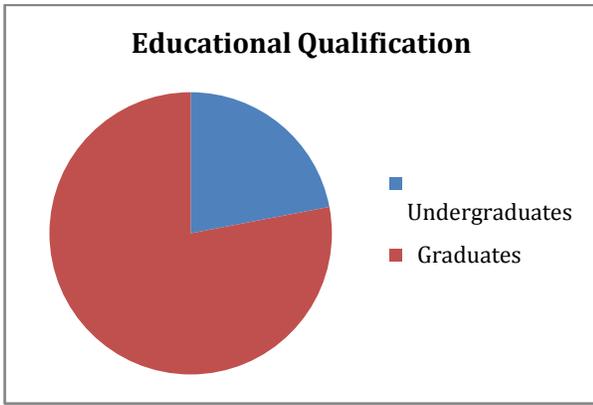


54% of students under the study are below the age of 20 and 23 of them (46%) are above the age of 20 but below 30.

Table 3: Educational Classification of Respondents

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Undergraduates	11	22.0
Graduates	39	78.0
Total	50	100.0

Diagram. 3



Most of the respondents (78%) are Graduates and only 22% are Undergraduates.

Analysing the student opinion regarding the existence of unethical practices

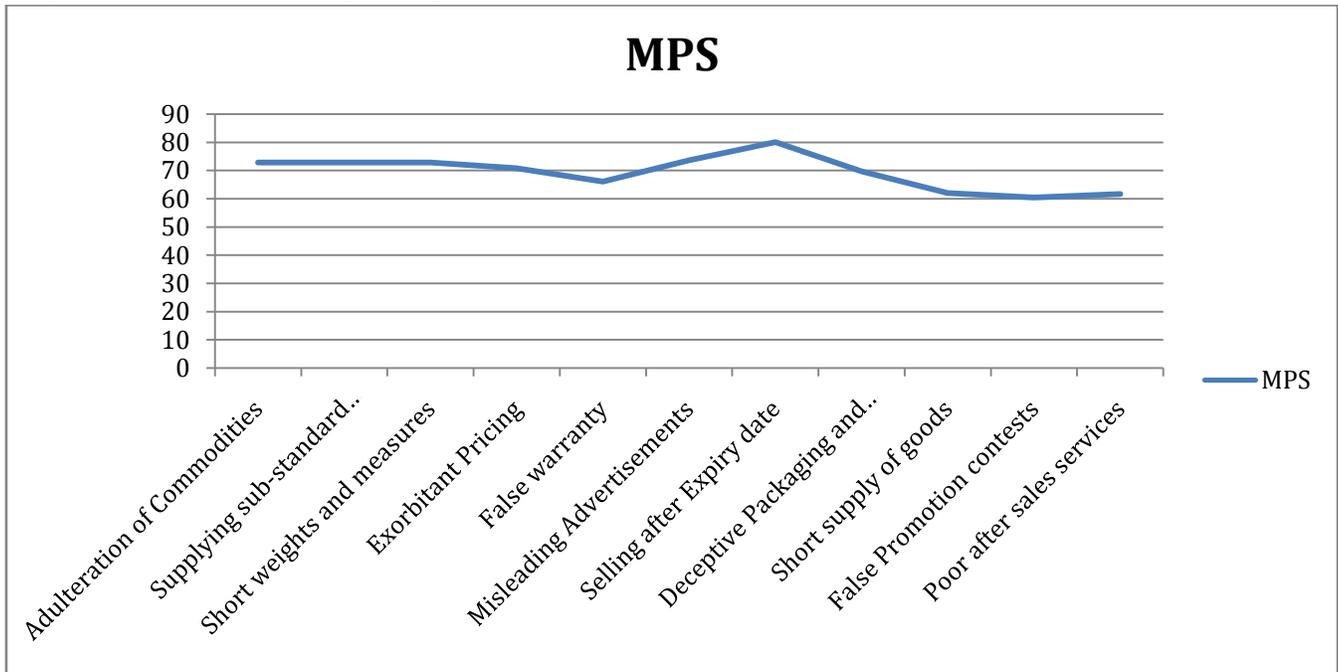
Analysis has been made on eleven commonly used unethical activities followed by the manufacturers and traders. The practices such as adulteration of commodities, sub standard quality, short weights, huge pricing, false warranty, misleading advertisements, selling after expiry date, deceptive packaging, short supply, false promotion

contests and poor after sales services have been considered for the study. The awareness regarding these variables have been analysed using Mean Percentile Score and Independent t test.

Table 4: Awareness Regarding Unethical Practices

Unethical Practices	MPS
Adulteration of Commodities	72.8
Supplying sub-standard quality goods	72.8
Short weights and measures	72.8
Exorbitant Pricing	70.8
False warranty	66
Misleading Advertisements	73.6
Selling after Expiry date	80
Deceptive Packaging and labeling	69.6
Short supply of goods	62
False Promotion contests	60.4
Poor after sales services	61.6
Awareness Regarding Unethical practices	69.31

Diagram 4: Awareness Regarding Unethical Practices



The Mean Percentile Score of all the eleven variables ranges in the category 60-80. That means the students are having awareness about the bad

practices followed in the market though they are not highly aware as none of the MPS > 80. The overall MPS is 69.31. The variable that has highest MPS is

‘Selling after Expiry date’. It is the variable the students are more aware of. ‘False Promotion Contests’ is the variable having less MPS or less awareness.

The overall mean score of awareness among the male and female students were tested with the help of Independent t test. The hypothesis tested and the results are shown below.

H₀: There is no significant difference in the awareness on unethical practices among male and female groups

H₁: There is significant difference in the awareness on unethical practices among male and female groups

Test: Independent sample t test, P value is greater than 0.05 thus accept null hypothesis

Male	18	67.52	1.453	0.158
Female	32	70.83		

Null hypothesis is accepted. The level of awareness among male and female students regarding the unethical practices prevailing in the market is same.

Student Involvement in Consumer Protection

Every citizen has an obligation to follow the rules of the country and spread their awareness regarding legislations among the public. One has to make use of the information they have for the wellbeing of him and the nation. Fifteen variables have been analysed in the current study to measure the Index of Involvement (Mean Percentile Score) of College students in Consumer Protection. The variables have been splitted into three tables for the purpose of analysis.

Table 5: Results of Independent sample t test

Gender	N	Mean	t value	P value
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Table 6: Index of Involvement in Consumer Protection-Set I

Variables	Index of Involvement (MPS)
Gathering information before purchasing product	79.2
Examine the product before purchase	74.8
Verify the Maximum Retail Price	86.8
Verify the weight and measures	76.8
Verify Expiry date	83.2

The above table shows the MPS of five variables. If the MPS>80,it can be interpreted that there is high involvement by the respondents.MPS on verifying the MRP is very huge. It is 86.8. MPS on verifying MRP is also very high, 83.2. So it can be interpreted that most of the college students are

verifying MRP and Expiry date while purchasing. The other three variables considered here shows MPS less than 80. That shows they are not so actively involved in gathering information before purchase, examine the product before purchase and verifying the weights and measures.

Table 7: Index of Involvement in Consumer Protection-Set II

Variables	Index of Involvement(MPS)
Demand the bill for price paid	74
Demand guarantee/warranty card and after sales services	70.4
Compare the advertisement with product features	74.4
Demand for Repairs and Replacement	69.5
Demand for compensation for loss or damage	74.8

The five variables of considered above and their respective index of involvement shows that students are not highly involved in checking the bill, demanding guarantee card, comparing advertisements, demanding repairs and replacements, demanding compensation for loss etc. All the

variables show moderate index of involvement i.e. between 60-80. Though they are highly educated and aware of their rights they are not so active in utilizing their rights which may be due to the financial protection they get from their parents.

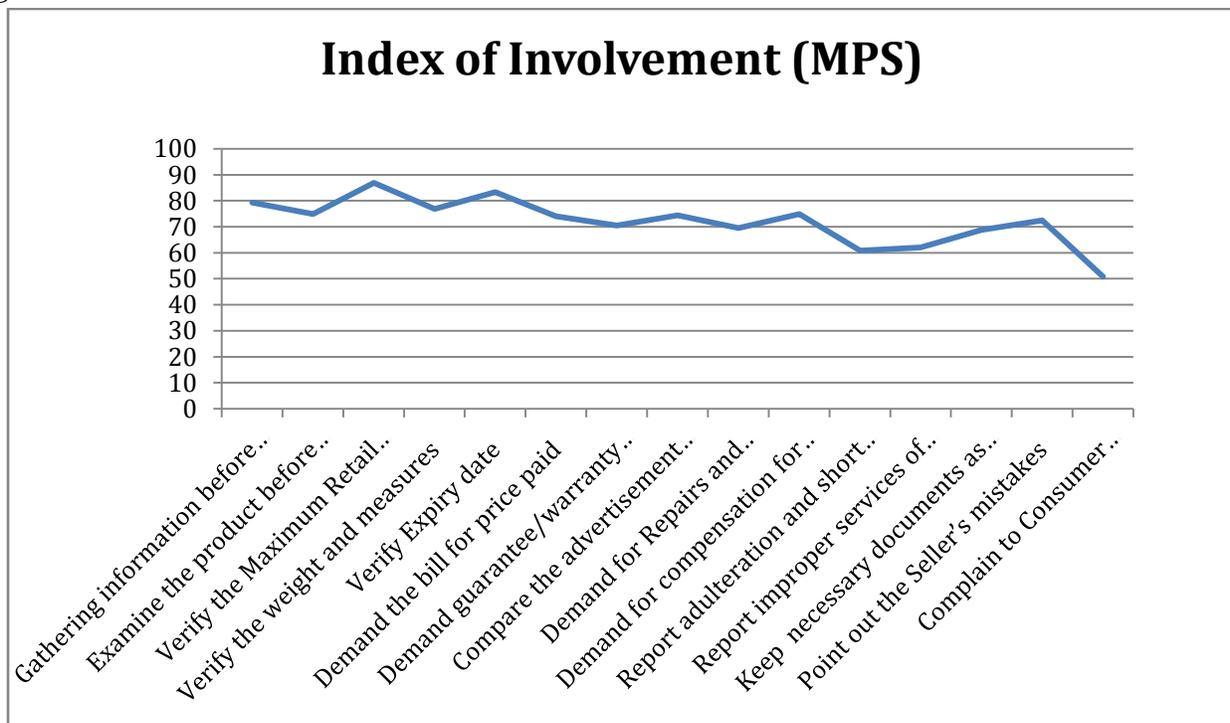
Table 8: Index of Involvement in Consumer Protection-Set III

Variables	Index of Involvement(MPS)
Report adulteration and short weights	60.8
Report improper services of service sector organizations	62
Keep necessary documents as evidence	68.8
Point out the Seller's mistakes	72.4
Complain to Consumer Dispute Redressal agency	50.8

The third set of variables considered for checking the student involvement on protection are showing comparatively less degree of involvement except on pointing out seller mistake. It shows very low involvement on complaining to Consumer Dispute Redressal Agency which may be due to the

non-awareness of the legal procedures. Students are also not highly active in reporting adulteration and short weights, improper services of service sector organizations and keeping necessary documents as evidence.

Diagram 5: Index of Involvement



Considering all the fifteen factors chosen, most of the students are keen to verify the maximum retail price as it has the highest index of involvement,

86.8. Complaining to Consumer Redressal Agency shows lowest index, 50.8. Only two variables show high index greater than 80, verifying MRP and

Expiry date. All the other variables show only moderate involvement from the point of view of students. Considering the literacy rate and higher education statistics of the state, these indices are not a good sign. There should be active involvement for consumer protection and consumerism by the youth for the welfare of the fellow citizens of the nation.

Findings

Major findings of the study are:

1. The students are having awareness about the bad practices followed in the market as their MPS ranges between 60-80 and the average awareness is 69.31
2. The variable the students are more aware of is selling after expiry date. They are less aware of false promotion contests.
3. Most of the students verify maximum retail price as it shows the highest index of involvement.
4. The students are less aware of the procedures regarding complaining to Consumer Redressal Agencies.

5. Though the students are showing active involvement in verifying MRP, Expiry date etc they are not showing much interest in reporting adulteration and short weights, improper services of service sector organizations and keeping necessary documents as evidence. This shows they are concerned about their own purchases only and not showing any social obligation.
6. The level of awareness regarding unethical practices followed in the market among male and female students are same.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the students have average awareness regarding consumer rights and protection. But they have to be educated regarding their social commitment and the legal proceedings to be followed in reporting the malpractices. It is essential to include the Consumer protection Act as a part of their curriculum to enable them active and to curtail the malfunctioning in the current marketing scenario.

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