

ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONSUMERS AWARENESS AND PROTECTING THE CONSUMERS' RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Media plays a vital role in creating consumer awareness among the people belonging to different strata of society. The different modes of media which include the print, electronic and the vernacular media which have a direct impact on the goods and services to inculcate a specific image about a particular brand of a commodity into the minds of the consumers. Further, the media has paved the way to make the consumers aware of their rights and the consumers Act 1986. There are some of the serials like Rajni and the comedy serial like 'Office-Office' has played a very significant role by creating an adequate awareness among the consumers during 80s and the 90s; where this type of serial has a significant impact on the consumers mind. All these modes of media have been successful to change the attitude and the mindset of the consumers on some of the fallacious issues about the usages of some of the consumers products. Currently the media like social media, new media and the citizen journalist have a vital significance to raise the voice against delivering the faulty goods and services. All these media have paved the way for expediting the process of the grievance redressed through the consumer's organizations and the consumers' courts to protect the rights of the consumers.

KEYWORDS: Consumers Awareness, Consumers Rights, Grievances Redressed, Print and Electronic media, Social and New media.

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer awareness refers to the knowledge consumers have about products or services and their rights as consumers. At the basic level, this means developing an awareness of products or services, and understanding the rights a consumer has regarding a malfunctioning product. As consumer awareness increases, the consumer may become familiar with ways in which to use a

product or service, the benefits or drawbacks of a specific product or service, or reviews or recalls of a product or service. In large part, this awareness comes through the media, both by advertising and through news stories about products or services. The consumer form is the largest economic group in the society which is a focal point of all the activities performed by the firms. At present, the consumers are the pivot of the market which depends upon the consumers' awareness and their propensity to consume the consumable items and in order to create awareness, different modes of media play a very significant role to the consumers, belonging to different strata of society. Further, the media has paved the way to make the consumers aware of their rights and the consumers Act 1986. There are some of the serials like Rajni and the comedy serial like 'Office-Office' has played a very significant role by creating an adequate awareness among the consumers during 80s and the 90s; where this type of serial has a significant impact on the consumers mind. All these modes of media have been successful to change the attitude and the mindset of the consumers on some of the fallacious issues about the usages of some of the consumer's products. Currently the media like social media, new media, citizen journalist and the vernacular media have played a very significant role to raise the voice against delivering the faulty goods and services at the right platform to air their grievances and seek a right redress of their loss. All these modes of media have paved the way for expediting the process of the grievance redressed through the consumer's organizations and the consumers' courts to protect the rights of the consumers (Permeshwar, 1988).

The mass media is viewed as mass media due to their accessibility to the consumers in a rapid way and its multiplier effects to expedite the process of to hear the consumers grievances at the right platform. Currently the growing role of electronic media has been proved relatively more effective than the print media. With regard to print media which has a vital significance to show solidarity with the socio-economic problems of the consumers of India in terms of the quality and the quantity of the goods and the services delivered to the consumers. The press has been very much responsive, particularly the regional pages of the newspapers of the national daily, published in the local language across the country. This regional approach of the newspaper has made the print media very accessible to every consumer's related news in the rural and urban areas of the country (Nabirasool & Prabhakar, 2014).

Given the rapid growth in the human population, there is an urgent need to produce large quantities of food products to feed this large number of people. This has led to the widespread sale of manufactured food products, which have become one of the main ingredients on the food

tables of many people (Bernstein, Mackintosh, Martin, & Crow, 2014). Diversity in the use of chemical compounds in the food products industry, such as colored materials, chemicals to improve flavor, preservatives and improve food strength are the cause of many of the health problems for the consumers. Some of these problems are currently known, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer tumors, and may be that science will reveal more of these health problems in the future. These food products are manufactured with the approval of the world's national health authorities. This is under food laws permitted and according to the specific conditions laid down by standardizing bodies (Vapnek & Spreij, 2005). Unfortunately, many food factories, especially in the developing countries, may not adhere to the specifications of the quality for its products and have mastered the means of defrauding these specifications (Petrini, 2003).

In addition, there is the absence of effective health control systems in many countries in terms of food products manufactured and imported from other countries. In the end, the health of consumers is the price that must be paid (Wallack & Montgomery, 1992). Social Media plays an important role in all countries and international societies. Whether these media are traditional, such as written press, television and radio or the modern, such as the news sites and the electronic media on the Internet like YouTube, or social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, they are methods that influence the building and improvement of the awareness of the individual or society, which in turn contributes to the formation of the vision of the individual and society of the combined issues and the ability to analyze and understand them to take appropriate behavior on these issues (Bijlani, 1990).

However, while the impact of social media may sometimes be very strong, and thus influence the deployment of behavioral patterns and cultural and social aspects pursued by the individual or the society, sometimes, the effect of these social media may have less impact. Thus, this means that social media have an influence on sensitizing the individual or the society and change their behavior and patterns of their lives toward many important issues, such as political, economic, and social (Fournier, 1998). Based on the foregoing, this study is an attempt to understand the real role of social media in terms of the consumer awareness of manufactured food products, particularly as to how to limit consumption of these products because of their danger to the health of consumers.

Most studies have been conducted with a focus on the role of social media in educating the individual or society on issues of corruption, political, and economic issues. Very few studies

have focused on social media and its role in improving consumer awareness of materials and industrial products, especially the manufactured food products that have become basic elements on the everyday dining table. Thus, this study is considered the first of its kind that is designed to investigate the role of social media in the consumer awareness toward the manufactured food products in India (Rajnikanth, 2016).

A. Concept of Consumer Awareness

Awareness is an element that appears in the human automatic process. Automaticity can involve a conscious or unconscious course of action (Chartrand, 2005). In this case, the consumer awareness is the level of knowledge about manufactured food products (Ishak & Zabil, 2012). Consumer awareness is about making the consumer aware of his/her rights. It is a marketing term, which means that consumers are aware of products or services, its characteristics and the other marketing P's (place to buy, price, and promotion) (Karim, 2013). Though the first consumer movement began in England after World War II, a modern declaration about the consumer's rights was first made in the United States of America in 1962, where four basic consumer rights (choice, information, safety, and to be heard) were recognized (Mandal, 2010). Ralph Nadar, a consumer activist, is considered as the father of the "consumer movement". March 15 is now celebrated as the World Consumer Rights Day (Mierzwinski, 2010). The United Nations in 1985 adopted certain guidelines to achieve the objectives of maintaining protection for consumers and to establish high level ethical conduct for those engaged in production and distribution of goods and services (Karim, 2013).

However, an organized and systematic movement to safeguard the interest of consumers is a recent phenomenon. The consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of the sale and purchase of goods, but also of the health and security aspects. Food safety has become an important element of consumer awareness these days (School of Arts, 2014). In the case of the manufactured food products, their quality depends not only on its nutritional value, but also on their safety for human consumption. Consumption of contaminated or adulterated food is a major cause of human illness and suffering (Roberts, 2001).

B. Media and Consumers Awareness

Media is one of the ways of Communication to all within the span of the period. The consumers are capable of being aware of the different modes of media, particularly the Consumers protection Act. The role of print media has been very harmonious to integrate the varied nature of the consumers, belonging to different strata of society. Few years back, Rajasthan government started

a Tele talk on the legal aspects of the consumers and its implementation to protect the rights of the consumers by telecasting the various consumers relating programmes through ‘Doordarshan’ and as well as through the community radio on every Sunday from 5.30 pm to 6 pm. Every legal aspect of the consumer's issues are discussed in this show.

The types of media which can influence consumer awareness are more numerous than ever. Older media platforms, including newspapers, radio and television, are still available but have lost popularity since the advent of the Internet. Within the category of Internet media, a consumer finds respected sites such as web versions of print newspapers and government websites alongside opinion-based sites such as blogs and message boards. Advertising exists on nearly all media platforms, whether print, television or Internet, further bombarding the consumer with information that may or may not be accurate. As consumers turn more frequently to Internet sources for purchase advice, they're able to keep up with recent developments faster than ever. This means, for instance, that companies have the ability to use Internet media to distribute news of product recalls almost as soon as they know a recall is necessary. It also means that unfounded information can be distributed before reliable journalists have a chance to confirm it (Vanishree, 2013).

C. Responsibility of Journalist

Journalists have the responsibility to practice the same ethics when publishing online that they use for print media, including double-checking facts and reporting without bias. Even though online media may seem less permanent than print, it actually reaches more consumers in a shorter time. Consumers have the responsibility to ensure any website they take advice from practices journalistic standards rather than simply publish opinions. Government websites or online versions of print publications are good starting sources.

Since online publishing is still new to many journalists in 2010, journalists are moving through a transition period as they learn to balance the techniques used for newspaper reporting with the new demands of Internet media. For example, in previous times, when a journalist found an error printed in one of his newspaper stories, he would run a correction in the next edition. Online, he has the opportunity to change the facts in the story, but he may be left wondering whether he needs to point out the change. Adding links to stories is another gray area, as journalists have to decide how much responsibility they bear for the accuracy of the websites (Shukla, 2011).

Media in all its form print or electronic, is a mirror of the times and society we live in. It connects us to the world and the world to us. Media plays a very useful role in setting up good or amicable

relations between traders and buyers. It has become a silent opinion maker and hence, it is working on a larger plane than any other institution. So, it is important that the media should work in a judicious manner. Some suggestions for what should be the role of media for consumer protection and welfare against various exploiting elements are as follows:

- An independent and free media is necessary in a democracy as it ensures the accountability of the government.
- The media should play its role in empowering the consumers through consumer education and also highlighting various unfair trade practices resorted to by the traders and service providers.
- There has to be a check on misleading Advertisements, however, the media has to self-regulate itself.
- The print media should have regular columns which should contain the various decisions of the consumer courts.
- The Departments of Journalism and Mass Communication in various Universities may include Consumer Protection and Consumer Welfare in their syllabus for undergraduate and postgraduate courses.
- In order to disseminate information about consumer rights by organising various campaigns on this, the new media can serve as an effective platform. In the past, the media has undertaken the job of consumer education and fighting against exploitation of consumers.

2. CONCLUSION

Media has the freedom and the right and the obligation to report about political initiatives. But the media has also a responsibility to help the consumers to protect their rights in a judicious way. A consumer's protection Act was implemented to provide an adequate safeguard to the consumers. This act has paved the way to protect the rights of the consumers in multiple ways. The different modes of media which include the print, electronic and the vernacular media which have a direct impact on the goods and services to inculcate a specific image about a particular brand of a commodity into the minds of the consumers. Further, the media has paved the way to make the consumers aware of their rights and the consumers Act 1986. Then the obvious question that is raised is the objectivity of the media in carrying out its responsibility of reporting and informing

its public about media freedom and consumer protection. The real issue is how we can reconcile the two of them. We are optimistic for further exploring this in the forthcoming period that the media will regulate the minds of the consumers and will act as a teacher to inculcate the right things into the wrong minds. Lastly, the media has paved the way to expedite the process of the legal action in the consumer courts to compensate the consumers for delivering the faulty, and the wrong goods and services for them.

3. REFERENCES

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