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Management as a concept is discussed in all functional areas. The scope is not just restricted to the industries but becomes applicable to almost all the sectors such as agriculture, industries, services and the entire economy. In all these areas the resources being employed by the entrepreneurs are fundamentally scarce. They are not only scarce but can be used for multiple purposes. So there arises the problem of decision making and effective utilization of the resources. Management in particular attempts to provide an answer to this fundamental problem faced in the different sectors. In this process of decision making, the role of leadership gains prominence.

In the present issue, we include the research study conducted on the leadership. The paper highlights the point that the need of the hour is transformational leadership. In other words we require a leader who can think innovatively and give a new direction to the people and resources for being placed on higher growth path. The second article uses statistical techniques to study the level of development . The article develops few hypotheses and employs scientific techniques to verify these hypotheses with respect to development. The third article focuses on the understanding the trends and variations in the exports of India. By using the graphical method the author brings an insight into the export canvas of the country. Consumer behavior issues with regard to the trade practices are examined in the last article. The case study and the book review are the features of the journal that are being continued in the present issue. The articles, case study and the book review would help in giving new direction to researchers in the respective fields.

Dr. T. V. G. Sarma
Editor

Consumer Attitude Towards Unfair Trade Practices And Its Impact On Consumer Buying Practices

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Abstract : In competitive markets, the traders in their efforts to hold their existing consumers and attract new consumers may resort to unfair trade practices. It is the duty of responsible consumers to safe guard their interest and exercise their rights. The present investigation aims at exploring the relationship between consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices and consumer knowledge on consumer protection measures as well as consumer buying practices. Consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices was judged based on their action in the situations of unfair trade practices. A knowledge scale was used to measure respondents' knowledge on consumer protection measures. Consumer buying practices were evaluated in terms of desirable and undesirable buying practices. The mean age of the group of consumers who were taking the major responsibility of shopping in the family was 39.6 years. Three fourth of the sample exhibited inconsistent behavior towards unfair trade practices. They neither try to control the situation nor kept them away from the situation always. Their behavior was unpredictable. Out of 541 consumers, only 77 were having adequate knowledge on consumer protection measures available for the welfare of consumers. Negligible proportion of the sample exhibited highly desirable buying practices. Consumers level of knowledge on consumer protection measures and attitude towards unfair trade practices were independent of each other. Consumers who questioned against unfair trade practices were found to be adopting better buying practices.

Keywords: Unfair trade practices, Consumer attitude, Consumer knowledge, Consumer buying practices.

1.0 Introduction

Consumer is a person who generally engages in the activities of search, select, use and dispose of products, services, experiences or ideas. A wise consumer makes rational decisions after chief evaluation of the purpose, alternatives available, cost and benefits. Responsible consumers are characterized as being more involved in products and shopping than others. A consumer who is highly involved in marketing would be interested in knowing a lot about goods and services before making a

purchase and puts efforts to gather information. This group of consumers read brochures, compare brands and models available at different outlets, asks questions and look for recommendations and act as responsible consumers in the market place. A responsible consumer develops a positive attitude. Consumer's attitudes are a composite of consumer's (1) beliefs about (2) feelings about and (3) behavioral intentions towards some objects within the context of marketing. Attitudes are learned predispositions to behave

in a consistently favorable manner with respect to a given object.

Today, consumer markets are experiencing rapid changes and are flooded with new opportunities and new challenges. The significant changes in the consumer buying behavior, urbanized lifestyle and growth of service sector are the main reasons behind the changed scenario in the consumer market. Different types of consumer markets exist today. These include markets for fast moving consumer durables, consumer durables, consumer electronic goods, domestic electrical appliances, cosmetics, jewelry, furniture, food and apparels. Customers of consumer product markets lack in loyalty and tend to shift from one brand to another very quickly, hence the traders take up aggressive marketing to attract new consumers and hold the existing consumers. The consumer product market is characterized by high level of competition among the sellers. The companies are continuously engaged in modification of business models and business activities to match up with the changing consumer needs. Moreover, the norms of WTO (World Trade Organization) are resulting in various mergers, alliances and tie-ups among the companies. The companies are being compelled to go for these alliances to remain competitive and to exist in the market because, losing the competitive edge will ensure complete market exist.

This situation in the market can give rise to unfair business practices that encompass fraud, misrepresentation and oppressive acts or practices by businessmen against consumers. Sub-standard quality, duplicate articles, adulteration and impurity, lack of safety

devices, artificial scarcity, false or incomplete information, unsatisfactory after-sale services, rough behavior and undue conditions are some of the practices which are prohibited by law in the country are adopted by traders often against consumers. These practices are likely to cause substantial injury to consumers.

In these circumstances, it is the duty of a responsible consumer to exercise his/her rights. Consumer protection laws are designed to ensure fair trade competition and the free flow of truthful information in the market place. These laws aim at preventing business that engage fraud or specified unfair practices from gaining an advantage over competitors and may provide additional protection for the weak and those unable to take care of themselves. The legislations improve consumer protection by giving enforcers strengthened power to obtain court orders against business that do not comply with their legal obligations to consumers.

In spite of legal measures, greedy and irresponsible traders were rarely brought to court because consumers fail to complain. Majority of the consumers were not aware of consumer rights and those consumers who are aware of consumer protection measures are not responsible consumers to exercise their rights for the welfare of the society. It has been observed that people for whom various schemes have been taken up do not get benefited because of lack of awareness. Government has taken up many programmes and schemes for protecting consumer rights. Both Government and Non-Government organizations have taken up educational programmes to increase the awareness of consumers. The consumer protection act 1986 was enacted with an aim to

protect and empower consumers. Almost after three decades what is the level of consumer awareness regarding the legal protection available to consumers? To what extent both Government and non-Government organizations are able to bring awareness among consumers? What is the attitude of consumers against unfair trade practices? Whether consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices has any impact on consumer knowledge and consumer buying practices in the market? A research review was undertaken to answer these questions.

While describing about shopping orientation, Sinha (2003) reported that Indian shoppers seek emotional value more than the functional value of shopping. The orientation is based more on the entertainment value than on the functional value. The orientation is found to be affected primarily by the type of store, the frequency of buying and to some extent by the socio-economic classification.

A study by Malhotra (2003) suggests that the purchase preference is primarily determined by price than quality during pre-purchase evaluation. Given explicit quality information, price had no effect on pre-purchase or post-consumption quality perceptions. Instead, post consumption quality evaluation had a favorable impact on price evaluations.

A study conducted by Chernev and Alex (1997) to understand the purchase pattern of cosmetics among consumers, revealed that both male and female consumers prefer to purchase cosmetics individually and quality was the major factor influencing their purchase.

In fact, researchers have not focused

enough to understand the consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices, which is a key factor in the market place. Consumers who can raise their voice and initiate action against illegal practices of traders can only bring change and contribute for consumer protection.

There exists a research gap to answer the above research questions, hence to answer these questions the present investigation was carried out with the following objectives.

2.0 Objectives

1. To study the consumer's attitude against unfair trade practices
2. To study the consumer's knowledge on consumer protection measures
3. To study the buying practices of consumers in the market
4. To find out the relationship between consumer's attitude against unfair trade practices and

(i) Consumer's knowledge on consumer protection measures

(ii) Consumer buying practices.

3.0 Methodology

The sample for the study was drawn from major cities of Andhra Pradesh. The consumers who share the major responsibility (at least 50 per cent) of marketing in the family were identified as the respondents for the investigation. The consumers were met at the shopping places and structured questionnaire was given to them and explained the purpose of the study and importance of their participation. Five hundred and forty one consumers who returned the filled in questionnaire in all respects formed the sample for the investigation.

4.0 Review of Concepts

1. Consumer attitude towards unfair trade

practices: Attitude affects behavior and they occur within a situation. Consumers may react in different ways when they come across unfair trade practices. They may develop perceptual or behavioral attitude to avoid or to take action to control unfair trade practices. Consumer's attitude towards unfair trade practices was measured using a tool developed for the purpose. It was hypothesized that when consumer come across the unfair trade practices he/she may either raise his/her voice against and try to control or he/she may avoid and ignore it. Fifteen hypothetical situations of unfair trade practices were created. Under each of the situation two different ways of dealing with the situation were given. One option reflects consumer's attitude of ignoring and the other option reflects consumer's attitude of raising the voice against the unfair trade practice for controlling such practices.

The respondents were asked to indicate the particular course of action, they would follow and how often they would do the same if they come across the same situation. Effort to control the situation was considered as more desirable (positive) attitude and ignoring the situation was considered as less desirable (negative) attitude. The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of their response. Scores five to one were assigned to the responses "Always", "Frequently", "Some times", "Rarely" and "Never" respectively in the case of option that reflected control attitude. The scores were reversed in case of option that reflected consumers attitude of ignoring the situation The scores were

interpreted such that the higher the score the greater the tendency to exhibit positive attitude. The range of scores was from 15 to 75.

2. Level of knowledge on consumer protection measures:

Respondents knowledge regarding the consumer protection measures that safeguard the interest of consumers was studied. A knowledge scale was constructed. The scale consisted of 28 questions to test the consumers' knowledge on various aspects of consumer protection measures. The possible score range was from 1 to 28. Higher the score higher the level of knowledge on consumer protection measures.

3. Buying practices: Consumers buying practices can be explained as the analysis of how, when, what and why people buy. Consumer buying practices can be understood as "The decision process and physical activity individuals engage in when evaluating, acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services" (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1980). This phenomenon can also be illustrated as "activities people undertaken when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services (Blakwell, et.al, 2001).

A wise consumer always try to get maximum satisfaction in the market by adopting various measures like information search, bargaining, collecting information from others, assessing merits and demerits of the product, reading information labels, comparing the cost and so on. A consumer who goes to market with some pre preparation is assumed to adopt better buying practices than unprepared consumer who does the marketing without any pre preparation. Most desirable buying practices through which a consumer

can maximize his/her satisfaction were identified. The respondents were asked to state the frequency of following such buying practices to gain satisfaction in the market. Negative marking was done for undesirable practice that can lead to dissatisfaction.

A consumer who follows desirable buying practice earns a score and the consumer who adopts undesirable practices loses a score. A positive high score of the respondent is an indication of better buying practice.

5.0 Results And Discussion

1. General Characteristics of the sample

The age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 58 years. The mean age was found to be 39.6 years. The largest distribution of the sample was in the age group of 37 to 44 years. The sample consisted of 54 per cent male and 46 per cent female respondents. The entire sample was literates. Nearly half of the sample was postgraduates. A little less than one-fifth each was either graduates or professional degree holders. Nearly three fourth of the sample (73 per cent) were married. Majority of the respondents belonged to nuclear family. Only one third of the sample belonged to joint family system. Families with 3, 4 and 5 members together formed 83 per cent of the sample. The mean family size was found to be 4.3.

2. Extent of Involvement in marketing

The extent of involvement of various members of the family in marketing activities was ascertained. Initially the investigator met consumers at shopping places and asked whether they were responsible for major marketing in the family either individually or jointly with other member of the family. The family member who was responsible for major

part of marketing was identified as the respondent for the study. Information regarding the extent of involvement of all family members in the marketing activities was also ascertained. The mean extent of involvement of respondents of the study was found to be 74.3 per cent.

3. Attitude towards unfair trade practices

A five point continuum was used to measure the attitude of consumers against unfair trade practices. The possible range of scores was from 15 to 75. The respondents who scored 37.5 or less on the scale were identified as those consumers who does not take any action against the situations of unfair trade practices. These consumers are considered as not responsible consumers. The respondents who scored 52.5 and above were the class of consumers who raised their voice against unfair trade practices, and this category were identified as responsible consumers. The respondents whose scores ranged from 37.5 to 52.5 were identified as those who would be inconsistent in their action against unfair trade practices i.e. they may raise voice against or ignore the situation.

The findings of the study revealed that three fourth of the sample would neither try to control situations of unfair trade practices or keep them away from the situation predominantly but would be adopting either of these in an inconsistent manner. The proportion of respondents who would fight against the unfair trade practices was relatively more than those who would stay away from the situation. Only 15 per cent exhibited desired attitude. Large chunk of the sample cannot be considered as

Table 1. Unfair trade practices

Attitude towards Unfair trade practices	N	%
Undesirable attitude (score below 37.5)	62	11.5
Inconsistent attitude (score between 37.5 to 52.5)	398	73.6
Desirable attitude (score above 52.5)	81	15.0
Total	541	100
Mean	45.9	
SD	7.19	

responsible consumers. They were not contributing for the welfare consumers. Consumers who can take action against the unfair practices of traders are essential for a healthy society.

4. Knowledge on consumer protection measures

An effort was made to understand the level of knowledge possessed by consumers on consumer protection measures available to protect the consumers from unfair trade practices. The scale intended to measure the knowledge level of consumers consisted of 28 questions. The respondents who scored less than 14 on the scale were considered as consumers with poor knowledge and respondents who scored more than 21 were considered as consumers with good knowledge regarding consumer protection measures. The

respondents who scored between 14 and 20 were considered as consumers with adequate knowledge on consumer protection measures.

The mean score on knowledge scale was 19.4 with a standard deviation of 5.44. The categorization of the respondents was carried out on the basis of Mean and Standard Deviation. Nearly three fourth of the respondents had moderate level of knowledge with their scores lying between 13.96 and 28.84 while 11.8 per cent and 14.2 per cent of the sample had low and high level of knowledge respectively regarding the consumer protection measures available for protecting the consumer interest. On an average the respondents of the study earned 69 per cent of marks. Out of 541 consumers only 77 possessed adequate knowledge

Table 2. Knowledge on consumer protection measures

Knowledge level	N	%
Low	64	11.8
Moderate	400	73.9
High	77	14.2
Total	541	100
Mean	19.4	
SD	5.44	

5. Consumer buying practices in the marketing

The consumer can either earn a positive score or negative score based on his/her buying practices adopted while making a purchase. A consumer with a positive high score is regarded as a consumer with desirable buying practices.

The mean score of the respondents was

found to be 5.3 with a S.D of 3.48. Only 3.1 per cent exhibited highly desirable buying practices in marketing, while 1.7 per cent exhibited less desirable buying practices. Majority of the consumers (95.2 %) neither adopted desirable or nor undesirable buying practices. Their buying practices were inconsistent with out any pre preparation.

Table3.Desirable buying practicesin the market

Consumer buying practices	N	%
Less desirable	9	1.7
Inconsistent buying behaviour	515	95.2
Highly desirable	17	3.1
Total	541	100
Mean	5.3	
SD	3.48	

6. Relationship between attitude towards unfair trade practices and level of knowledge on consumer protection measures

Product moment correlation and Analyses of variance were computed to test the relationship between consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices and level of knowledge on consumer protection measures.

The computed 'r' and 'F' values were not found to be significant. Hence, it was concluded that consumers level of knowledge on consumer protection measures and attitude towards unfair trade practices were independent of each other.

7. Relation between attitude towards unfair trade practices and consumer buying practices

Significant positive correlation($r=+0.1371^{**}$) at .01 level was observed between attitude towards unfair trade practices and consumer buying practices

A comparison of the differences of mean scores on consumer buying practices by attitude towards unfair trade practices showed that consumers who scored low on attitude towards unfair trade practices differed significantly at .01 level from those who scored high on attitude towards unfair trade practices on their buying practices. Similarly consumers who scored moderate on attitude towards unfair trade practices differed significantly at .05 level from those who scored high on attitude towards unfair trade practices on their buying practices.

Table 4. Mean scores of unfair trade practices

Group	Attitude towards unfair trade practices	N	Mean
1	Undesirable attitude	62	4.81
2	Inconsistent attitude	398	5.14
3	Desirable attitude	81	5.72
Mean Contrast	Mean Difference	t Value	Level of Significance
1.2	0.33	1.49	n.s
1.3	0.90	3.00	.01
2.3	0.58	2.43	.05

6.0 Conclusion

Consumers who can exercise their rights in the market place are considered as responsible consumers. For the welfare of the community of consumers these classes of consumers are most essential. It is the duty of both Government and Non-Government organizations to educate, train and motivate consumers to develop right and responsible attitude in the market place. There exist research gaps to understand the current scenario for initiating correct measure. Hence the present investigation was planned with an aim to understand consumers' attitude towards unfair trade practices and factors that influence their attitude. The results of the investigation can serve as a guide to policy makers for initiating action for the welfare of the largest community of consumers.

According to the study, it was found that a very small portion of large consumer group made efforts to control unfair trade practices. The behavior of almost three fourth of the sample (73.6%) was inconsistent, they were

found exercising their rights at times and totally ignoring the situations. This attitude of consumers is not desirable. This group of consumers instead of contributing to the welfare of consumers harms the integrity. The fact that only 11.8 per cent of the consumers were aware of available consumer protection measures is alarming. After three decades of enacting consumer protection act 1986, the situation of consumers' knowledge is a worried fact.

Consumers with better buying practices are watch dogs, their existence is essential to safe guard the interest of consumers, but the facts of the investigation revealed that only 1.7 per cent exhibited best buying practices. Major portion (95.2%) of the consumers had exhibited inconsistency in their buying practices. This may be due to lack of motivation.

Consumers who were responsible and raised their voice against unfair trade practices were found to be with better buying practices. Hence, it is the need of the hour that

government, consumer organizations, the positive attitude to raise up to the occasions
educational institutions should work towards and motivating consumer for collective action.
enhancing consumer knowledge, inculcating

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