

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary business landscape, the intertwining realms of consumer protection and sustainability have become focal points of discussion and scrutiny. This exploration aims to delve into the intricate dynamics that govern the relationship between safeguarding consumer rights and fostering sustainable practices within businesses. As ethical considerations and environmental consciousness gain prominence, understanding how companies navigate this intersection becomes crucial. This study is an attempt to find out the extent of consumer awareness of consumer rights and sustainable consumption in Mangalore City. The study also analyses the factors which influence their trust in sustainable consumption. The random sampling technique is used for data collection, and for the analysis of the data, SPSS 24 has been used. The Friedman test and point-biserial correlation test were used to analyze, compare, and interpret the data. The findings of the study prove that consumer are aware of brand which promotes sustainability.

Keywords: CONSUMER PROTECTION, CONSUMER RIGHTS, SUSTAINABILITY

INTRODUCTION

The goal of consumer protection is to defend against unfair business practices those who purchase goods and services. Consumer rights and consumer protection are related. The former leads to the establishment of consumer organisations that give consumers more options and, in the event that they are dissatisfied, the ability to file complaints against these companies. The purpose of consumer protection law is to protect customers against fraudulent activities and schemes by sellers, sales contracts, and product pricing. It also assists consumers in receiving compensation.

India passed the Consumer Protection Act in 1986. In compliance with the Act, Consumer Dispute Redressal Forums have been set up in each district to facilitate easy access for customers. The core of UNCTAD's contribution to inclusive and sustainable development rights for all is consumer protection. By promoting bargaining equality, consumer protection advances equity and social justice. A multifaceted subject, consumer protection aids in the achievement of numerous sustainable development objectives. For humans to coexist on Earth for a very long period, sustainability is a social objective. Three dimensions can be used to define what sustainability means: environmental, social, and economic.

“The choices that consumers may have significant social, economic and environmental implications. In particular consumer choices can often have an impact on sustainable development”, OECD. The above definition enhances the need for incorporate sustainability into consumer protection policy as a means to promote economic and societal development and avoid poverty reduction. Consumer education and business engagement are key activities under an effective consumer protection policy and play a role in achieving sustainable consumption and in relation to consumer choice.

Voluntary corporate initiatives and consumer empowerment have the potential to greatly advance sustainable production and consumption. Customers with more authority recognise the value of sustainable goods and are able to make informed decisions. Additionally, empowered customers serve as a catalyst for increased investment, corporate innovation, and sustainability-related competition. Encouraging sustainable consumption from the perspective of consumer protection policy, including consumer education and information, business consumer activities, and consumer protection authority enforcement and guidance actions.

Consumer empowerment through education and information

Guidelines for consumer education and information programmes, including product labelling, environmental protection, and the most efficient use of resources, water, and energy, were released by the UN. In an effort to increase awareness of the effects of consumption habits, guidelines for sustainable consumption were also released. Therefore, educating people about the value of protecting the environment is essential in every nation.

Three International initiatives

Three international initiatives with regard to consumer protection and sustainable development are;

- Egypt reduced the use of plastic bags in 2017. The campaign specifically targeted women because they are crucial in teaching families and other stakeholders about the dangers of using non-recyclable plastic bags.
- Sweden, Consumer Agency has produced educational material on sustainable consumption which consists of 24 lessons for secondary schools with videos and quizzes. On being environment friendly and keeping track of expenses.
- In 1994, Eco-Schools were created in Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom with the intention of integrating a sustainable development dynamic or education on sustainable development.

All parties, including the Government, Corporate's and Consumers, should share the objective and responsibility of empowering consumers with regard to sustainable development through consumer protection. As an essential component of consumer policy, the Government should prioritize the promotion of sustainable consumption and include it into all of its programmes. The Government should also enforce consumer protection rules to stop unfair and deceptive business practices that involve green washing and false environmental claims. As per UNDP guidelines, in order to achieve sustainable development and economic progress, we must drastically reduce our environmental impact by altering the way that we generate and use resources and things.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers should be given more awareness on ecological dangers if not given immediate attention on sustainable development and consumption, (Hansen and Schrader, 1997). Sustainable consumption is a discourse which requires a solution to ecological problems such as industrial production. Study focuses on achieving sustainable consumption and sustainable development. (Dolan, 2002). Sustainable production and consumption is widely considered and accepted globally. Study opines that, to bring sustainable production and consumption worldwide, requires structured systems and life cycle approach considering economic, environmental and social development. Study recommends that, importance should be given to understand the complexity and interrelationships so that technological solutions can be attained. To facilitate this, a new support framework was developed and was valued as it is able to integrate different sustainability techniques. (Adisa Azapagic, Laurence, 2016). Consumption in global environmental governance and debates on main causes of environmental problems are the main areas of concern. Study identifies relevant political actors and traces developments in global sustainable consumption governance, depicts the current state of affairs discusses obstacles to progress and also explores policy implications. This helps in identifying different phases of sustainability initiatives at grass root level. (Dorie, Boll, 2018). Consumers and corporations were considered as stakeholders of an institution and consumption as an institution. Study opines that consumer protection towards sustainable development aids in promoting stakeholder's engagement and meaningful corporate social responsibility. (Onyeka and Ugochi, 2019). The primary objective of consumer law is, to protect and promote the interest on consumers, to keep them informed about their rights and representation in the bodies where decisions concerning them are taken. New consumer protection law also aims to encourage and bring change in the consumer behaviour by creating awareness of ecosystems fragility through adoption of sustainable consumption patterns. (Fonseca, Galindo, 2019). Sustainable consumption pattern encourages the use of products and services to satisfy basic needs without adversely affecting the environment. Consumers should be encouraged to purchase products and services which

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are produced without harming environment. Rights of consumers to consume safe and effective products and services go hand in hand with their individual responsibility to preserve the planet. (IGE Consumer, 2019).

International Organization for Standardization also joins hand in promoting sustainability consumption through proposing suitable solutions for all the Sustainable Development Goal's, translates consumer needs into particular projects, establishes methods for verification, enables consumer choices and also encourages collaborations. (Matray, 2019). Sustainable consumption and production is an essential requisite for sustainable development as it does not have any alternative for existence of human kind. Study opines that pattern of sustainable consumption may vary according to the factors such as cultural diversity, economic growth, political conditions. (Wang, et.al., 2019). Study was also conducted with an objective to analyse the contribution of European Union consumer protection legislation to sustainable consumption also to give recommendations on future development and possible reforms of European Consumer protection legislation to contribute to more and more sustainable consumption. Study suggests to focuses on sustainable consumption, repair, reuse, recycling and also to convert wasteful resources into resources may be by redesigning the products. Waste might be fine-tuned and narrowed, so materials that were previously deemed waste should now be considered resources. B. Kiersbilck; et.al., 2020). Increasing importance for environmental protection and awareness on same, plays very important role in framing regulatory efforts. Framing regulations is not an easy task, therefore international consumers law on sustainable consumption is confined to UN guidelines on consumer protection and its precautionary clauses. (Durovic & Lech, 2020). Policies on sustainable consumption should be clear, precise and also must specify sustainability initiatives and policy measures. Consumers not only play a crucial role in sustainable consumption matters, they also have the right towards sustainable environment. Study suggest that consumer protection law should be strengthened as a mechanism which contributes towards sustainability. (Laura & Stuwig, 2023).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVE:

The study is intended to assess consumer awareness of consumer rights and sustainable consumption in Mangalore City. The study also analyses the factors which influence their trust in sustainable consumption.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

Hypothesis is developed in order to analyse whether demographic variables have significant difference in level of awareness of consumer rights and factors which influence their trust in sustainable consumption.

It is formulated as follows;

H1: There is a positive correlation between awareness of consumer rights and demographic variable

H2: There is a significant difference between various factors which influence their trust in sustainable consumption.

H3: There is a positive correlation between consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging and demographic variable

H4: There is a significant difference between various factors which contributes towards sustainable consumption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study is focused on determining whether demographic variables have significant difference in level of awareness of consumer rights and factors which influence their trust in sustainable consumption. Descriptive research design has been followed in this study. Both primary as well as secondary data is utilized. The primary information is gathered using a structured questionnaire. 225 respondents are selected for the study based on simple random sampling. The study is covered in Mangalore City. The measurement instruments were constructed and extracted a more comprehensive questionnaire based on the items of interest for this study cronbach's alpha value is 0.899 which is higher than the minimum value (0.70) which shows that test results are acceptable and study is considered to be reliable.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Data collected was tabulated and analysis was carried out by using Simple percentage analysis, Descriptive analysis using mean and standard deviation and inferential analysis such as friedman and point biserial. Data was analyzed as follows;

Respondents profile

The present study considered respondents from mangalore city as participants. Out of 225 respondents, majority that is 38.8% of the respondents come under the age group of 40-60. Most of the respondents are female (38.8%). 46.5% are from urban area.

H1: There is a positive correlation between awareness of consumer rights and demographic variable

The point-biserial correlation is used to examine whether awareness of consumer rights is related to demographic variables like age, gender and place of domicile. It measures the strength and direction of the association between variables. Point -biserial analysis was used to test H1. Results are summarised as follows. coefficients for the interaction terms consumer rights awareness, gender(H1_a) and age(H1_b) were insignificant. Thus, gender and age did not moderate the effect of consumer rights awareness. Therefore, H1_a and H1_b were not supported. The descriptive result shows that there is negative effect and gender has positive effect. consumer rights awareness and place of domicile (H1_c) had a significant positive effect. This suggests that place of domicile moderates the effect of consumer rights awareness. Therefore, H1_c was supported. Results showed that respondents from urban area where aware of consumer rights such as

H2: There is a significant difference between various factors which influence consumer trust in sustainable consumption.

The results showed that the mean ratings of the various factors which influence consumer trust in sustainable consumption were in the range of 3.85 to 4. Five factors are considered to know the important factors which influence consumer trust in sustainable consumption. The highest mean rank shows scientific basis (3.15) with first rank, followed by credibility and reputation of certifying organization with (3.12) mean value with second rank, track record and history third rank (2.92), endorsement by government fourth rank (2.94) and stringency of standards fifth rank (2.86). The calculated Chi-square value is 13.863. The significant value is less than 0.01. As a result, it is reasonable to infer that the mean ranking of the factors differs significantly.

H3: There is a positive correlation between consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging and demographic variable

Correlation coefficient is used to examine whether there is positive consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging is related to demographic variables like gender and place of domicile. It measures the strength and direction of the association between variables. Correlation coefficient was used to test H3. Brands such as Fabindia, Forrest essential, The body shop, Soulflower, Switchfix where considered. Results are summarised as follows. coefficients for the interaction terms consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging and gender(H3_a) were insignificant. Thus, gender did not moderate the effect of consumer rights awareness. Therefore, H3_a were not supported. Consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging and place of domicile (H3_b) had a significant positive effect. This suggests that place of domicile moderates the effect consumer awareness of brand which promotes sustainable packaging. Therefore, H3_b was supported. Consumer where aware about Body shop and fab India brand which promotes sustainable packaging.

H4: There is a significant difference between various factors which contributes towards sustainable consumption.

The results showed that the mean ratings of the various factors which influence consumer trust in sustainable consumption were in the range of 3.7 to 4. 5 factors are considered to know the important factors which influence consumer trust in sustainable consumption. The highest mean rank shows avoiding single use plastic (3.24) with first rank, followed by recycle of E-waste with (3.15) mean value with second rank, purchase of organic product

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third rank (3.05), purchase of plant based diet fourth rank (2.82) and adopting green technology fifth rank (2.75). The calculated Chi-square value is 29.52. The significant value is less than 0.01. As a result, it is reasonable to infer that the mean ranking of the factors differs significantly

CONCLUSION:

Sustainable Consumption involves meeting the needs of current and future generations to provide services in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner. Company and consumer should work in hand to create sustainable development. Way in which resources are used for production and consumption should be taken into consideration by both policy makers and policy takers. In this regard there is need to empower the consumer to know their rights and to make sustainable choice.

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