

CONSUMER PROTECTION AWARENESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the lack of knowledge about awareness of consumer protection in South Africa, especially amongst disadvantaged consumers.

Literature shows that there is a high correlation between the level of economic development and the awareness of consumer rights. The more developed a country is, the more aware its people will be in terms of their consumer rights.

The less developed a country is, the lower the level of consumer rights awareness consumers will have. Consumers, like any other citizens of a country, have a right to be protected by the law. Private and non-governmental organisations and the consumer councils need to ensure that the interests and rights of consumers are well protected.

The study involved a literature review and an exploratory empirical study into the effect of income and education on awareness of consumer protection by a sample of Durban consumers. A strong positive relationship between consumer protection awareness and income and education was found.

Recommendations for actions to improve consumer protection awareness amongst low income, poorly educated consumers are made, and further research to develop a deeper understanding of the problem is suggested.

Key words: consumerism, consumer protection, consumer rights, consumer knowledge, education, income.

“Consumerism appears to have become part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life. Areas of social life that were previously free of the demand of the marketplace, including religion, have to adapt to a world where the needs and desires of the consumer are apparently paramount” (Miles, 1998: 1).

INTRODUCTION

Consumer matters are very sensitive issues in developed countries. People know their rights and enforce them. They pay their money and they demand value for their money. Marcella and Baxter (2000), in a national survey in the United Kingdom, found that the general public felt that they were generally well informed about citizenship issues and three quarters were well informed about their legal rights. In the United States consumerism is very prevalent, with savvy consumers being aware of choices (Jennemann, 2003).

Consumers in the less developed countries (LDC) do not seem to have these levels of awareness of consumer protection activities and of their rights to consumer protection. Although they may be aware of their rights, they do not stand up and fight for them. Kaynak (1985) found little evidence of active consumerism in less developed countries, with most consumerism being seen as a governmental and legislative matter. It is for this reason that governments in LDCs should step up their efforts to educate consumers of their rights. They must also create an environment conducive to consumerism by enacting the necessary laws that will protect the interest and rights of the consumers.

From the above it can be seen that developed and less developed countries seem to fall into different stages of consumerism. Kaynak (1985) reports on different consumerism life cycle models, with four stages being identified, crystallization, organization, institutionalization and conceptualization (Table 1).

The more developed countries tend to fall into the institutionalization or conceptualization stages, while the LDCs fall into the crystallization or organizational stages. The implication is that more governmental action was needed to pull the LDCs into the institutionalization stage.

Table 1 – Consumerism life cycle

<p><u>Stage 1 – Crystallization</u></p> <p>Regulation of producers to encourage competition</p> <p>Antitrust phase of regulation</p> <p>No organized, national consumer movement</p>	<p><u>Stage 2 – Organization</u></p> <p>Consumers begin to organize to gain a voice in legislation. Independent, voluntary organizations formed. Emphasis placed on: a) consumer education, b) comparative product testing, c) standard sizes, and d) informative labelling.</p>
<p><u>Stage 3 – Institutionalization</u></p> <p>Local and central government intervene in market on behalf of customer. Emphasis on: a) consumer affairs, b) competition policy, c) policies on trade marks, patents, copyrights.</p>	<p><u>Stage 4 – Conceptualization</u></p> <p>Consumer involvement in almost all macro issues. Complete consumer involvement in broader policy issues.</p>

Source: Adapted from Kaynak, 1985: 17.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH

South Africa is generally seen as a dual economy, being made up of developed and less developed sectors. It is therefore, difficult to place South Africa into only one of Kayak's stages of consumerism. It seems likely that the developed components of the South African economy would fall into the institutionalisation stage, while the less developed sectors would fall into either the crystallization or organization stages. Lewis (2004) implies the former, saying that South African consumers are very poorly organized, with little involvement of consumer representatives with government. This he finds surprising considering the degree of consumer activism during the anti-apartheid struggle – potato, red meat, pasta, rent, bus and electricity payment boycotts were well organized and effective. Although generally few people are activists (Marcella and Baxter, 2000), the removal of apartheid appears to have discouraged consumers even more from consumer activism. This may be because these activities were essentially political rather than consumer acts. However, for the first time consumers cannot avoid consumerism and its full consequences in their daily life, and therefore need to understand it and engage with it (Kitching, 1999).

Many South African consumers do not seem to be aware of their basic consumer rights or of the legislation available to protect them (Lewis, 2004; NEDLAC, 2003; Higgs-Klein, Abratt and Brewer, 2000). This is consistent with Kayak's (1985) finding that activities by government and the media to protect consumers do not always lead to an increase in consumerism. He claims that what are required are an increase in the number of products and services

produced, and an improvement in the socio-economic status of the LDC (especially income distribution and education levels). Broadly speaking these requirements have either been achieved or are the subject of clear governmental policies. Therefore, it appears that some of the pre-conditions for consumerism in South Africa have been addressed.

However, without awareness of their rights, consumers would not know to take advantage of the infrastructural improvements that are being put in place. Furthermore, lack of awareness can put consumers at risk in other ways. For example, lack of consumer awareness means they may not be informed of:

- the dangers of hazardous chemicals and may not be aware of the legislation that protects them (NEDLAC, 2003),
- their rights in relation to foodstuffs, especially related to biotechnologically altered food (Moolman, 2004)
- consumer remedies for reducing cyber-crime, for example, strategies related to cooling off periods, unsolicited goods and services, and complaints to Consumer Affairs Committee (Stavrou, 2000).

So it is important to clearly identify if awareness of consumer protection and consumer rights is, in fact, a problem in South Africa. If this is the case it might indicate the need for intense consumer educational programmes teaching consumers their rights. In addition, intense use of the media may also be required to increase consumer awareness. This would result in consumers being aware of their rights, knowing where and to whom to go to if they feel disadvantaged or have not been able to get satisfaction. Since businesses have

a reasonably high understanding of consumerism and consumer protection (Sardha, 2000) it could be expected that businesses will turn to more fair business practices if consumers show an increase in consumer protection awareness and an increase in consumer activism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumerism is defined as “a movement of consumers whose aim is to improve the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers” (Kotler et al., 1998, cited in Quazi, 2002: 36). Up until the 1960s, consumerism was essentially an individual act, with individual consumers taking actions against companies to satisfy grievances. The organized consumer movement was started by the widely publicised activities of activists such as Ralph Nader and the promulgation of President John F. Kennedy’s Charter of Consumer Rights (Kaynak, 1985; Quazi, 2002).

According to Kotler (1972, cited in Quazi, 2002; 36) the consumerism movement arose due to six factors, which included changes to, and discontent with, economic, social and ecological systems; growing dissatisfaction with detrimental or unethical business practices; mobilization of, and support from, the media and unions; and inadequate response from business and government to these factors. In other words, consumers needs have not been met, their genuine satisfaction has been ignored, and their trust betrayed.

Consumer Movement in South Africa

According to McQuoid-Mason (1997) the consumer movement began in the late 1960's in South Africa. This movement was supported by the government in 1972 when the government established the South African Co-ordinating Consumer Council as an umbrella body to co-ordinate consumers' interests. However, the Consumer Council was often criticized for being too closely connected with the interest of business and the government's financial departments. The consumer movement in South Africa is still in its infancy. Organisations such as the Housewives League, The South African National Consumer Union and the National Black Consumer Union have existed for several years but have had a limited lobbying influence on government and business (McQuoid-Mason, 1997).

The media including radio, newspapers and television, on the other hand, have played a very important role in protecting consumers and drawing consumer abuses to the attention of the public. Many consumer journalists have assisted consumers through the threat of adverse publicity for unscrupulous business organisations or traders. According to McQuoid-Mason (1997) the electronic media, in the form of the television programme 'Fair Deal' and the radio programme 'Price Tags', have played a major role in giving consumers a voice to air their complaints. The media (electronic and print) has been one of the most powerful weapons that consumers in South Africa could use until a proper consumer movement developed. Several professional associations provide protection for consumers, but generally these are less effective than independent consumer protection agencies

Consumers in the first world - third world context

South Africa is a mixture of first and third world countries, including components of developed and less developed economies. 33% of the population earn less than R1000 a month, about half the population have inadequate water and electricity supply and lack modern sanitation facilities, and 24% of the adult population is unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2003). Clearly South Africa has a large LDC component to its economy.

In many countries the poor pay more for consumer purchases. According to Miles (1998) a study in the United States showed that price levels in comparable stores in high income and low-income neighbourhoods were similar, but that prices were higher in the small businesses common in low-income areas. Even though large numbers of poor people go outside their neighbourhoods to shop, many buy from the smaller stores despite their higher prices. Statistics South Africa (2003) shows that, in South Africa, the majority of poor people are Africans and there is no doubt that they are subjected to the same consumer purchasing patterns as poor people in other countries. According to McQuoid-Mason (1997) this is definitely true in South Africa, where for many years the apartheid restrictions on commercial activity in the townships prevented the development of supermarkets in these townships.

Causes of development of consumerism

In order to understand the development, momentum and durability of consumerism, it is necessary to identify the underlying problems and reasons that have led to its development.

Information gap

Prior to the development of consumerism, buyers were usually quite competent to make most of their own buying decisions (Aaker, 1978). The goods were as simple as their needs. However, over the last fifty years things have changed dramatically. Products have grown in quantity and complexity. Product complexity, in turn, requires more evaluation of dimensions related to new performance, convenience of product and other issues such as the ecology. With technology advancing so quickly, the information gap has widened and consumers are no more equipped to make decisions concerning the quality of goods and services. This is similar to Kotler et al's. (1998, cited in Quazi, 2002) argument that societal developments have resulted in complexity in marketing and technology, resulting in contradictions for the consumer.

Advertising has also failed to correctly inform consumers (Aaker, 1978). Advertisements appeal to or create unnecessary wants; consumers have become sceptical about the usefulness and trustworthiness of information provided by commercial sources. Promotion of unrealistic or unsupportable expectations and exaggeration about performance of a product has made consumers sceptical of marketing. This factor is also identified by Kotler et al. (1998, cited in Quazi, 2002), who see questionable marketing and business practices as precipitating consumer dissatisfaction. The gap has also widened due to the lack of time for shopping and because of the competing activities that accompany the new lifestyles.

Antagonism towards advertising

There are other complaints that stimulate specific consumerism issues (Aaker, 1978). These are:

- Intrusiveness and clutter – increasing numbers of viewers believe there is more advertising on television than programmes.
- Irritation is increasingly occurring when an advertisement is irrelevant to the target audience or does not respect their privacy, values or intelligence.
- Stereotyped role portrayals - advertisements that perpetuate stereotypes and new roles such as working mothers are often ignored.
- Promotion of unrealistic or unsupportable expectations - a product may be associated with a certain lifestyle that the product cannot realistically be expected to deliver.

Kotler et al. (1998, cited in Quazi, 2002: 36) refers to this dissatisfaction with advertising as “structural strain”, brought about by “questionable products, deceptive advertising”.

Performance gap

Consumer expectations of product quality, performance and reliability have been steadily increasing, in part because the launch of new products has constantly stressed their improvements. However, such developments and improvements generally make products more complex, which make them more difficult to use and operate fully. Thus, consumers often cannot attain the promised performance levels.

The Disadvantaged: The Young, the Old and the Poor

Whatever problems the average consumers face, their capacity to cope with these problems is much greater than the three vulnerable groups in society. The poor have suffered from fraud; over-priced poor quality products and services. Miles (1998) states that beggars on the streets of European cities provide a clear indication of the limitations of even the most advanced consumer cultures and of the fact that consumerism cannot always provide what it promises. Aaker (1978) points out that the young are vulnerable to dangerous products such as flammable toys and clothing and to unscrupulous television advertising. The aged, on the other hand, often lack the income to cope with their nutritional health and shelter needs. As their strength and faculties decline they may lose their motivation to overcome these problems or to defend against unfair sales practices.

Impersonal and unresponsive marketing institutions

The rise of self-service retailing, the declining ability of sales employees and the intervention of the computer into relations between the customers and the organisation have created an impersonal relationship. The fact that executives maintain a low profile makes it difficult for the organisation to develop a warm personal image. The impersonal nature of markets has turned society into a 'me' society and the cocooning trend that was identified by Popcorn (1992) is now evident in Internet and catalogue shopping, Internet banking and chatting on the Internet. This unsatisfactory situation is alluded to by Kotler et al. (1998, cited in Quazi, 2002) in terms of business practices that are detrimental to the consumer and to the resistance to consumer activism that businesses exhibit.

Other factors

In addition to the above reasons for the development of the consumerism movement, Kotler et al. (1998, cited in Quazi, 2002) also mention the increasing support of the media and trade unions, inadequate support from legislative and governmental bodies and a growing discontent with society and its ability to provide the required quality of life, including issues such as environmental pollution.

Consumer protection

The basis of consumer protection is the law, which governs situations in which goods are exchanged for money. These laws cover a very wide range of situations in which a consumer is involved. Most of the legislation that affects consumer protection is in the field of criminal law, and the main aim is to uphold high standards of trading. The consumer protection laws assure the consumer of a reasonable and acceptable level of quality (Stewart, 1978).

In the field of consumer affairs, certain government departments are responsible for law making (Roe, 1987). These include departments or ministries responsible for consumer protection, prices, trade, industry, commerce, agriculture, fisheries, food or home or internal affairs. These departments initiate most of the consumer legislation, including the laws that protect consumers in a free economic system, namely:

- Hire purchase laws that control the issuing of credit and credit facilities, bank overdrafts and the advertising of credit
- Laws relating to fair trading, which limit the establishment of monopolies and which deal with general consumer matters
- Laws relating to contracts of sale, especially where these limit the consumers rights, such as to do with guarantees and warranties
- Labelling of products with regard to ingredients, instructions, product description and claims, and name of producer

Major sources of consumer protection

There are three major sources that promote consumer protection, namely, legal influence, political influence and competitive influence (Craston, 1978).

Legal influence

Legal influences are governmental, state and local legislation, and the agencies that are involved in reinforcing the laws and that investigate business practices.

These agencies deal mostly with business competition and consumer protection. For example, mergers are often not good for consumers, so it is important for government to have oversight in order to protect the interests of consumers. The aviation industry is such an industry that is subject to scrutiny (FDCH Press Releases, 2001).

Political influence

This involves protecting consumer interest against misconduct and unfair dealings by business people and firms, and also includes the political pressure exerted to control marketing practices and activities by various consumer groups.

Competitive influence

Competitive influence refers to actions of other firms intended to affect each other as well as consumers (Craston, 1978). "Competition is the life blood of commerce" (McQuoid-Mason, 1997:114) and therefore companies must compete within the boundaries of law. In South Africa, the Maintenance and Promotion of Competition Amendment Act No. 88 of 1990 applies to acquisitions, restrictive practices and monopoly situations in the business world. This is an act that protects competitors and consumers against injustice done by other competitors when companies are involved in marketing warfare (Woker, 1999).

As can be seen, it is not only the government that is responsible for consumer protection - other organizations have an important role to play, and consumers can also form or organize their own movements to protect themselves from unscrupulous marketers. The international community has taken steps to ensure protection is extended to third world countries as well as to western nations.

International consumer protection

The abuses perpetrated against consumers in both the first and third world have led to international developments in consumer protection. In 1985 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a set of *Guidelines on Consumer Protection* to assist countries (especially developing countries) to strengthen consumer protection policy and legislation, and to encourage international co-operation (McQuoid-Mason, 1997).

The general principles in the guidelines cover a wide area and recommend that government establish a system to provide for:

- the physical safety of consumers
- the protection of the economic interests of the consumer
- access to enable consumers to obtain redress
- distribution of essential goods and services
- satisfactory production and performance standards
- adequate business practices and informative marketing
- proposals for international co-operation in the field of consumer protection.

The guidelines also include more specific measures such as quality control for food, water and pharmaceuticals as well as emphasizing the importance of adequate distribution facilities, standards and labelling. The South African government legislated in accordance with these guidelines in 1994.

The rights of the consumer

The original declaration of consumer rights by President Kennedy in 1962 created four basic principles: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose and the right to be heard (Peattie, 1995):

- *The right to safety:* to be protected against products, production process and services that are hazardous to health and life. The manufacturers are expected to disclose the risks and side effects that may occur from the incorrect use of products.
- *The right to be informed:* to be provided with adequate information in order to make an informed choice and to be protected against dishonest

or misleading advertising and labelling. This includes being informed of the ingredients that have been used in manufacturing the product. This is crucial if a consumer has an allergy to a certain chemical or component.

- *The right to choose:* to be able to select from a range of products and services offered at competitive prices with an assurance of satisfactory quality. They should not be forced to use certain products, directly or indirectly. By stocking or not stocking certain products, consumers can be forced to use products that do not appeal to them.
- *The right to be heard:* to have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy, and in the development of products and services. Consumers should be listened to if there is something that they are not happy about or when they have lodged a complaint.

According to Peattie (1995) the International Organisation of Consumer's Unions has since supplemented these principles with four more which are:

- *The right to redress:* to receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation or unsatisfactory services. If consumers have been abused or exploited by sellers, they have redress in terms of the law. If goods are sold that have expired, are below standard, or are unsafe, faulty or of poor quality, courts, independent tribunals and arbitrators could be used to provide the consumer with redress (Grove, 1993).
- *The right to consumer education:* to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while

being aware of basic consumer rights, responsibilities and how to act on them. Consumers should also be educated about the correct usage of products, as incorrect use of a product could lead to danger or disease.

- *The right to a healthy environment:* to live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the well being of present and future generations. Water and air pollution can cause a health hazard to consumers.
- *The right to satisfaction of basic needs:* that is to have access to basic essentials and services such as adequate food, shelter, health care and education.

These consumer rights are enshrined in the South African Bill of Rights (South Africa, 2006).

Further categories of rights have subsequently been added to these by the International Organisation of Consumer's Unions (Peattie, 1995), such as:

- the right to honesty
- the right to fair agreements
- the right to privacy
- the right to correct abuses

The role of the legal and regulation system

The legal system in South Africa has been very harsh for the consumer, as common law has not provided adequate protection for all consumers. Until the first democratic national elections in 1994, South Africa had neglected the consumer rights of much of the population due to:

- the apartheid system, which obstructed the development of a real free enterprise system.
- the lack of extensive official research into the experiences of consumers in the marketplace.
- the vulnerability of uneducated, unsophisticated consumers with major differences in language, literacy and cultural norms for transacting business.

This has resulted in a chasm between consumers and suppliers, who have for a long time practised the 'take it or leave it' approach to consumer relations. Recent surges in consumer complaints can be attributed to the increase in sophistication of consumers and to the political and economic development among consumers, especially black consumers (Smith, 1998).

The government has put considerable effort into protecting the consumer. The South African Constitution was amended in 1998 and now provides major legal regulations to protect the rights of consumer. One of these is the Consumer Affairs Court Act 46 Of 1996, which provides for the investigation, prohibition and control of unfair business practices in the protection of consumers, to establish an office for the investigation of unfair business practices under the direction of a Consumer Protector and a consumer affairs court, as well as to authorize local authorities to establish consumer advice offices (South Africa, 1998).

Other South African bodies that contribute to consumer protection include:

- *The Small Claims Court:*

This is a government funded body available to consumers who cannot afford high legal fees. Cases involving sums of money below R3 000 are handled by this Court. A consumer can take a company to this court, but not vice versa (McQuoid-Mason, 1988).

- *The South African Bureau of Standards (SABS)*

The SABS establishes standards of safety and efficiency for a variety of consumer goods. All consumer products must be registered with this body. Should consumers have any complaints or grievances against any products in the market, they may lodge their complaints with this body (SABS, 2004).

- *The South African National Consumer Union*

This is a non-governmental body that deals with consumer grievances. If consumers are not happy about a certain seller, or if consumers receive an unsatisfactory service from a service provider, they can report their complaints to this body, which also tries to increase the level of awareness amongst the society regarding the rights of consumers.

- *National Consumer Forum (NCF)*

The NCF is a non-governmental body aimed at protecting and promoting consumer rights and interests in South Africa. They operate according to the United Nations Guidelines on Consumer Protection of 1985 (and as amended in 1999) ensuring that consumer rights find expression in consumer policy (NCF, 2004).

South Africans are still learning about consumer protection and how it works.

During the apartheid era, South Africa was in the dark ages – all consumers

were not really allowed to speak their minds or stand up for their rights. But things have changed and people have the right to speak up and be heard. For South Africa to conform to the rest of the world, consumers should know where they stand in the marketplace, that is, they should know when they can stand up for their rights, and to whom they should go when they feel they have been wronged. Since a large percentage of the South African population is illiterate or semi-literate, awareness of consumer rights and protection cannot be taken for granted. It is essential to identify the extent to which education at the grassroots levels is required.

METHOD

The main objective of the study was to investigate specific factors that may influence lack of knowledge about consumer protection. The research was exploratory in nature as it was intended to provide insights into and understanding of consumer awareness. A sample of 60 respondents was interviewed personally in Durban at a major shopping centre and at the main railway station in order to maximise the probability of obtaining a sample that included both educated and less educated respondents. The data were collected through a self-completion questionnaire using quota sampling. Education was used as the control characteristic, and an effort was made to obtain a sample split equally between knowing and not knowing what consumer protection is, as well as a spread between those with different levels of education. This sample is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Study sample

Education level	Knowledge of what consumer protection is			
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Primary school	0	0%	3	5%
Some high school	3	5.0%	13	21.7%
Matric	4	6.6%	10	16.7%
Some tertiary	7	11.7%	4	6.6%
Diploma/degree	9	15.0%	0	0%
Post graduate	7	11.7%	0	0%

Completed questionnaires were manually checked and edited, and analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.

RESULTS

Education and income levels and knowledge of consumer rights

Respondents were asked to name any four basic consumer rights in order to determine if they knew what consumer protection is and how well they knew their rights. Education and income levels were also considered when this question was asked in order to identify if there is a relationship between consumer protection awareness and the level of education and the level of income. Furthermore, respondents were asked if they had ever written to a consumer organization in order to obtain some measure of their level of

involvement in consumer protection. A correlation analysis of the data was conducted and is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations: qualification, income, knowledge of rights

	Knowledge of consumer rights	
	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Qualification of respondent	.662**	.000
Respondent income	.660**	.000
Wrote to a consumer organisation	.367**	.009

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis of the data showed that there was a strong positive relationship between level of education and knowledge of the four basic consumer rights, at a 99% confidence level. In other words, knowledge of consumer rights and consumer protection can be expected to increase when consumers become more educated.

There was also a strong positive relationship between consumer income and knowledge of the four basic consumer rights at the 99% confidence level. In other words, the higher the income the respondents earned, the more likely they were to know their basic consumer rights.

Although not very strong, there was a significant positive relationship between knowledge of consumer rights and having written to a consumer organization. In other words, it can be expected that people with knowledge of consumer rights might be more inclined to take actions to enforce their rights.

DISCUSSION

The responses of consumer awareness, education and income have been described and the relationship between these variables has been established which has served to satisfy the objectives of the study.

The study has determined that a strong positive significant relationship exists between consumer protection awareness, education level and income in the South African population, and people scoring highly on these characteristics are also likely to take actions to enforce their consumer rights.

Research findings have shown that consumers who have higher education or higher income levels are likely to have a higher awareness of consumer protection. This could be because educated people may be more informed, willing to learn, and pay attention to different types of media (including educational programs), which expose them to this consumer awareness and knowledge.

Another reason could be the fact that many organisations educate consumers about consumer protection and their rights as consumers (not only consumer organisations, but also, for example, businesses and schools). Such companies are also likely to encourage their customers to complain when they are not satisfied with service levels. The media has also shown commitment in educating consumers and exposing those companies that exploit the rights of consumers. However, this type of education is likely to bypass the

disadvantaged in society – the poor and the illiterate or semi-literate – and as has been seen, this comprises a large proportion of the South African population. Thus, the main reason for a lack of knowledge about consumerism in South Africa is probably due to the high rate of illiteracy. However, consumerism is not supposed to be a movement only for the educated and the rich, but a movement that supports and protects all the consumers. South Africans are still learning about consumer protection and how it works. Undoubtedly many consumers, especially the older consumers, are still suffering from the vestiges of apartheid when many consumers were not allowed to speak their minds and stand up for their rights.

For South Africa to conform to the rest of the world, the consumers should know where they stand in the marketplace, when and to whom they should go to when they have been wronged.

Since the majority of the South African population is illiterate, it is essential that a bold effort be made to educate people, at grassroots levels, as to their rights.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The study does offer some areas that need to be considered in detail, especially the lack of knowledge about basic consumer rights and the functioning and effectiveness of consumer protection bodies.

As can be seen from the research findings, education and level of income influence consumer protection awareness. A further study should be done to determine other factors that affect consumer protection awareness.

It is recommended that a larger study should be undertaken. If the sample size were to be increased, other intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect consumer protection awareness could be identified.

Consumer organisations could also conduct research in order to determine reasons behind their lack of effectiveness in the market, which could also highlight ways to effectively inform consumers about this movement.

Consumer education programs are very important in order to educate consumers about their rights. Consumer education programs should begin at an early stage in life; to educate young consumers about their rights, it is important to have consumer educational programs in schools as part of the educational system.

SUGGESTIONS TO INCREASE CONSUMER PROTECTION AWARENESS

Profit and non-profit organizations should also make an effort to educate the public about consumer protection. Companies should conduct seminars to inform consumers about their rights, when and whom to contact if they need advice or assistance.

Media is currently involved in consumer educational programs, but more effort should be put by different media in all the nine official languages in order to educate the public in a more effective way because even uneducated

consumers will be able to learn in their own language. This will result in an increase in consumer protection.

The Governments should step up their efforts in increasing the awareness campaigns among consumers. On top of that, Governments should create a more conducive environment by allocating more funds to help consumers in disputes with big business.

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VITAE

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