

## Mediation Analysis of Consumer Awareness Level in Delhi-NCR under CPA 2019

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### Abstract

Protection of consumer welfare is the duty of the government not only today but since ancient times, *ADHARMA* i.e the act of adulteration was as old as Mauryan region (i.e.300 B.C.) and considered with disgrace and selling of adulterated food articles was forbidden. Quite a large number of acts were ratified by the Government of India with the view of consumer protection. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is considered as the landmark in the Indian history of socio-economic regulation to protect the consumers from unfair trade practices. Different from the other laws which are more inclined towards prevention of consumers, the provisions of this act provides compensatory relief to the consumers. The Constitution of India consists of various articles which advocate protection of consumers besides CPA, 2019 which was ratified by our government.

CPA was formulated to protect the interest of the consumers but its success depends on how well consumer is aware about various issues faced during their day to day purchases. The paper intends to measure Awareness Level of Consumers of Delhi- NCR. The real problems for exploitation of consumers arise when Consumers were ignorant about their rights and duties. The results of structural equation modeling analyses conducted for 500 consumers from Delhi-NCR, offered strong support for the proposed model. We found that complaint found by consumers was directly associated with their level of awareness. This study theoretically contributes to the consumer awareness literature by revealing how level of awareness completely mediates the relationship between complaint found and kind of complaint. The study also offers practical implications by stressing the significant role of consumer awareness in protecting their own interest and save them from being exploited in the marketplace by the vendors/ traders.

**Keywords:** Consumer Protection, Consumer Awareness, Consumer Welfare, Unfair Trade Practices, Consumer Rights, Adulteration

### Introduction

In today's socio-economic context, where every individual is essentially a consumer, the importance of consumer protection cannot be overstated. With the rapid pace of globalisation and digitalisation, markets are undergoing constant transformation, leading to a noticeable increase in complaints regarding everyday goods and services. These developments are not limited to any single country. In many developing nations, especially those influenced by socialism, public sector dominance, and strict social controls, consumers do not enjoy the freedom to make independent choices. Instead of being treated as sovereign decision-makers, consumers often find themselves at a disadvantage—particularly in environments where profit-driven businesses overshadow the enforcement of consumer rights. The idea that “the

customer is king” no longer holds true in many marketplaces, where unethical sellers and service providers exploit consumers without fear of accountability. Additionally, consumers are frequently unorganized and lack a collective platform to raise their voices, making them vulnerable to exploitation by more powerful entities. This is where voluntary organisations play a significant role in advocating for consumer rights. However, in India, challenges are compounded by factors like widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness, and, most troubling of all, the general apathy among consumers themselves.

The concept of consumerism, a socio-economic movement aimed at protecting consumer rights, began gaining momentum in the nineteenth century through joint efforts by citizens and governments across both developed and developing nations. However, the roots of this movement can be traced back even earlier in the United States, where by the late seventeenth century, steps were being taken to safeguard consumer interests and raise awareness about basic consumer rights. In India, consumerism is not a new phenomenon. Although it has existed as part of the modern economic framework for over a hundred years, its influence became more prominent in recent decades with the emergence of consumer advocacy groups and awareness campaigns. The growing global recognition of the need for consumer protection is largely driven by increasing economic interdependence and the international reach of modern businesses. In India, however, the factors driving the rise of consumerism were notably different from those in the West. Key reasons included a shortage of essential goods, persistent inflation, limited technological progress, substandard product quality, unethical business practices, and misleading advertisements.

Consumers are the central force behind all economic activity and represent the largest economic group in any country. As such, they deserve due attention in every aspect of the marketplace. Renowned thinkers like Adam Smith, Philip Kotler, Peter F. Drucker, and Theodore Levitt have played key roles in shaping our understanding of consumer behavior, satisfaction, and how businesses should respond to consumer needs. Consumers generally seek high-quality products and services at fair prices. They expect accurate measurements, safe products, consistent availability, reliable services, protection against unfair trade practices, effective grievance redressal mechanisms, and strong regulation of unethical business conduct. Unfortunately, these reasonable expectations are often unmet, leaving consumers vulnerable to various forms of exploitation.

The idea of protecting consumers is not new. Historical records indicate that even as far back as 200 B.C., individuals in India who adulterated grains and oils were subject to punishment. However, today’s challenges are far more complex. The Indian Constitution provides not only political and legally enforceable rights—known as "Fundamental Rights"—but also outlines various social and economic objectives under the "Directive Principles of State Policy." Since 1950, the Indian Parliament has enacted more than thirty social and economic welfare laws aimed at protecting consumers and promoting justice. Despite these efforts, the reality remains grim for the average consumer, as enforcement mechanisms have proven to be inefficient, apathetic, and largely ineffective.

Moreover, these legal bodies have restricted authority. Consumers seeking to reclaim their rights often had no choice but to approach either civil or criminal courts. However, this route proved to be unsuitable, as it involved high expenses, lengthy delays, and a complex legal

process. Additionally, these legal provisions largely overlooked minor consumer grievances, offering little relief for small claims.

With the objective of ensuring that consumers receive fair value for their money, the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was introduced to address a broad spectrum of goods and services. Considered one of the most significant legislative contributions by the Indian Parliament since independence, this landmark act received presidential approval on December 24, 1986—a date now observed annually as National Consumer Day. The Act introduced a unique legal framework, establishing a three-tier system for resolving consumer disputes efficiently and affordably. This includes the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums (DCDRF) at the district level, the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions (SCDRC) at the state level, and the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) at the national level, headquartered in New Delhi. These bodies were created to handle complaints related to defective goods and deficient services.

In today's digital age, rising consumer expectations—such as easier access, more choices, seamless payment options, improved services, and convenient shopping—have introduced new challenges in the realm of consumer protection. In response, the government enacted the landmark Consumer Protection Act, 2019, replacing the earlier 1986 legislation. This new law aims to address the evolving issues of the digital marketplace by ensuring faster and more effective resolution of consumer complaints. To streamline the process, the Act allows for online complaint filing and includes provisions for arbitration to resolve disputes efficiently. It also establishes Central Consumer Protection Councils at the district, state, and national levels, which serve as advisory bodies tasked with safeguarding and promoting consumer rights.

The new Act also introduces the establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), tasked with promoting, safeguarding, and enforcing consumer rights. Under the Act, the CCPA is empowered to issue directives, curb unfair trade practices, and levy penalties on endorsers who promote misleading products. Additionally, the Act incorporates an alternative dispute resolution mechanism through the creation of Mediation Cells at the district, state, and national levels. If mediation fails to resolve the issue between the complainant and the opposing party, the case can then proceed to the appropriate District, State, or National Commission for judgment. Since the implementation of these redressal mechanisms, a growing number of consumers have sought justice through them—often choosing to speak up and take action in cases where they might have otherwise stayed silent.

In Delhi-NCR, the government implemented the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 2019 through the Delhi-NCR Consumer Protection Rules, with the Department of Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs overseeing its enforcement via the Delhi State Commission and nine district forums. By February 2022, DCDRFs in Delhi-NCR had recorded roughly 2.87 lakh cases, while about 0.175 lakh appeals had been submitted to the SCDRC during the same period.

Undoubtedly, for consumer protection to be truly effective, both legislation and its enforcement must go hand in hand. This requires proper and systematic implementation of legal measures. Therefore, it is essential to conduct regular reviews and evaluations of the functioning of the consumer redressal system established by the government. Gathering

feedback from key stakeholders—such as consumers, complainants, businesses, respondents, legal professionals, and voluntary consumer organizations (VCOs)—on the system's challenges and shortcomings is necessary. Such an exercise can help enhance and strengthen the system's overall effectiveness.

## 2. Review of Literature

Gupta and Kashyap (2016) carried out a study to evaluate consumers' awareness of the procedures for filing and monitoring complaints at the District Consumer Redressal Forum. Utilizing a stratified random sampling method and a survey-based approach, they gathered data from 104 participants at the Diwani Civil Court in Agra, Uttar Pradesh. The data was collected through a self-developed questionnaire comprising twenty questions designed to assess the respondents' knowledge of the steps involved in initiating and following up on complaints in the consumer forum. The research examined procedural awareness and classified the types of complaints lodged, analyzing these in relation to various socio-demographic characteristics. Analytical tools such as the Student's t-test, mean, percentage, and standard deviation were employed. The findings highlighted significant differences in awareness based on age, gender, education, occupation, and income levels. The researchers concluded that enhancing the consumer protection system requires greater efforts from both government agencies and consumer advocacy groups to raise public awareness and understanding of the complaint resolution process.

Kariyawasam and Wigley (2017) examined the transformative impact of online shopping on modern marketing practices. The rapid rise of e-commerce has significantly changed how goods and services are bought and sold, enabling consumers to access a wide range of products from global sellers—often at lower prices and with just a single click—even when those items aren't available locally. Despite these advantages, the shift away from in-person transactions has introduced new legal challenges, especially in terms of defining and enforcing consumer protection. The study focuses on the prevalence of misleading advertising in the online marketplace and evaluates how well existing consumer protection laws and regulations are equipped to handle deceptive practices in this digital environment.

Mittal and Gupta (2018) explored the opinions of advocates and legal experts on the obstacles and necessary reforms for improving the effectiveness of Consumer Forums under the Consumer Protection Act in Haryana. Although the Act of 1986 allows individuals to present their own cases or seek legal aid, the complexity of procedures often leads both complainants and respondents to turn to legal professionals for guidance. With their active involvement in forum proceedings, advocates are well-equipped to pinpoint challenges and suggest feasible improvements.

The study followed a descriptive research methodology, focusing on legal professionals as the main respondents. Using a convenience-cum-purposive sampling method, 50 participants were selected. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using various statistical methods such as averages, ratios, standard deviations, percentages, one-sample t-tests, the Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), and Factor Analysis via Principal Component Analysis.

The research highlighted that the main barriers to the smooth functioning of Consumer Forums include administrative delays, insufficient staffing, and problems within the work

environment. Based on their experience, advocates suggested several strategies to overcome these issues and improve the efficiency of consumer dispute resolution mechanisms. The study offers valuable recommendations for policymakers aiming to enhance the Consumer Protection Act and ensure better justice delivery for consumers.

Kumar and Sharma (2019) highlighted the key advancements brought by the Consumer Protection Act of 2019, which were absent in the original 1986 legislation. While the 1986 Act was initially designed to protect consumer interests and resolve grievances, it eventually became outdated, unable to address the challenges posed by rapid technological progress and the growth of the digital marketplace. In response to these evolving conditions, the Indian Parliament enacted the 2019 version of the Act to better reflect the needs of today's consumers and to provide them with enhanced rights and protections.

One of the most notable features of the revised Act is the establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), a dedicated regulatory body tasked with promoting, safeguarding, and enforcing consumer rights. Additionally, the new law includes specific provisions to penalize misleading advertisements and prevent unfair trade practices, ensuring that consumer protection measures keep pace with the changing dynamics of the modern market.

Raju and Singh (2019) conducted a comprehensive study of the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 in India, focusing on its origins, implementation, and historical development. A consumer is defined as an individual who purchases goods or services by completing a transaction with a seller. Consumer protection is designed to defend the rights and interests of such individuals, ensuring fair treatment—a responsibility shared by both businesses and the government. This protection includes safeguarding consumers from substandard products, deceptive marketing, unfair trade practices, complications related to mergers and acquisitions, and promoting standards such as product safety, accurate labeling, and fair pricing.

The concern for consumer welfare in India dates back to the pre-independence era, when national leaders recognized the importance of protecting consumers and implemented several initiatives. One significant move in this direction was the introduction of the Trade Practices Act, which came into effect on October 1, 1974. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive legal framework for consumer protection was not established until the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act in 1986. Internationally, the emergence of consumer movements during the early to mid-20th century led various nations to adopt robust consumer protection laws. Influenced by the United Nations' guidelines, many developing countries, including India, developed their own legal frameworks. Among them, India's Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was notable for its thoroughness, effectiveness, and extensive scope.

Howells (2020) highlighted the substantial benefits consumers are experiencing in the age of rapid technological progress and digital transformation. Advances in how goods and services are produced and delivered, along with the introduction of innovative products, have reshaped the consumer landscape. The essay calls for a balanced legal framework that offers robust consumer protection without hindering innovation. It warns against aligning legal systems too closely with technology in ways that could undermine consumer rights and stresses the need for careful, thoughtful adaptation of laws. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of reassessing traditional regulatory models to ensure they remain relevant in the

era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Singh (2021) asserted that the main aim of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 is to shield consumers from unethical business practices and ensure the protection of their rights. Despite this, many consumers still fall victim to unfair trade practices in real-world situations. The study set out to examine the level of public awareness regarding consumer rights and to evaluate how effectively the Act is functioning. To assess the current landscape, primary data was gathered using a structured questionnaire completed by 100 respondents. The results showed that widespread exploitation of consumers persists, largely due to a general lack of awareness and ignorance. The study highlights the urgent need to strengthen consumer education efforts, particularly about their rights and necessary precautions when making purchases. A key objective of the research was to analyze present conditions and examine the impact of the recent amendments to the CPA. It concluded that although respondents recognized the difficulties in asserting their rights, overcoming these barriers is essential to empower consumers to make full use of the legal protections available to them.

Vaishnav and Routiya (2022) assessed the extent of consumer awareness concerning their rights. Although India has established clear and robust legislation to protect consumers, the actual situation remains troubling, with many individuals still lacking awareness of even their fundamental consumer rights. The Consumer Protection Act of 1986 serves as a cornerstone in this legal framework, aiming to defend consumer interests. However, for consumers to effectively address violations, they must be well-informed about their rights and the procedures for seeking redress.

In today's era of globalization and growing capitalism, businesses often prioritize boosting sales and maximizing profits, sometimes at the cost of consumer welfare. This profit-driven mindset can lead to exploitative behaviors such as inflated pricing, false measurements, poor-quality products, and misleading advertisements. To safeguard themselves, consumers must remain alert and informed about these practices.

The study, which relied on primary data, aimed to gauge the level of consumer awareness. Data was collected through a structured online questionnaire completed by 108 participants, selected using a random sampling method. The results revealed that most respondents had only a basic understanding of their rights and responsibilities, highlighting the pressing need for awareness campaigns. The analysis also found that individuals with higher income and education levels were more aware of consumer rights, while awareness tended to decline with increasing age.

Guruswamy (2023) noted that as a developing nation, India strives to balance social justice with industrial growth. However, restrictive and unfair trade practices continue to hinder free trade and economic fairness, negatively affecting public welfare. This study investigates various consumer-related concerns, including public perception of the Consumer Protection Act, understanding of inventory management, common issues faced during purchases, knowledge of complaint procedures and necessary documentation, involvement in consumer awareness programs, suggestions for improving grievance redressal systems, reasons for reluctance to file complaints against government bodies or manufacturers, opinions on establishing consumer forums at the sub-divisional level, and expert insights on obstacles to the effective functioning of these forums.

The research offers a thorough evaluation of the Unfair Trade Practices (UTPs) provisions as amended under the 2019 revision of the MRTP Act. It also explores potential risks and opportunities for consumer forums and suggests practical measures to shield consumers from exploitation. Data was gathered from a randomly selected group of 200 respondents. Alongside a detailed review of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the study includes comparisons with related laws when applicable. Focusing on Coimbatore District, the research assesses the general public's awareness of the CPA 2019 and its implementation. Goel, Gupta, and Vashisht (2024) conducted a study to assess how effectively individuals are making use of the grievance redressal mechanisms established under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Participants were divided into two main groups: one group consisted of consumers who had faced problems such as poor product quality or substandard services but chose not to file a complaint, while the other group included those who took action to seek redress for their issues. The research also examined consumers' awareness of their rights under the Act and the extent to which they actively exercise those rights.

### 3. Research Methodology

A structured questionnaire was prepared to measure the level of consumer awareness under consumer grievances redressal machinery. Objectives of the study were identified as:

1. To find the kind of fraudulent practices of vendors for which complaints can be filed.
2. To measure the awareness level of consumer.

Sampling design consisted of:

- Population Area: - The population area is confined to Delhi NCR for this study.
- Sample Units: - Individual customers served as the sample unit for this goal.
- Sample Size: - It was decided to limit the sample of general consumers to 500 respondents

Sampling Method: The study employed non-probability sampling methods, specifically convenience and purposive sampling, to select participants. In convenience sampling, respondents were selected based on their availability and ease of access to the researcher.

### 4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

To ensure consumer safety, it is essential for buyers to remain attentive during transactions. Consumers' alertness while shopping is especially important due to growing concerns about their protection. Those who are unaware, uninformed, or hold traditional mindsets are often vulnerable to exploitation. Such exploitation may occur in several forms, including unfair trade practices, inflated pricing, adulteration, poor-quality goods, misleading packaging, defective services, and restrictive business tactics.

The survey was designed to assess whether consumers recognize the unfair practices and problematic issues they face during purchases, as well as whether they took steps to report such problems. To measure respondents' awareness of various product-related issues, a list of fifteen different types of product defects was prepared. Participants were asked to identify the type of fault they had encountered and to indicate whether they had filed a complaint with the seller or manufacturer regarding the specific issue.

**Table1: Kind of Complaint Found and Complaint Forwarded to Vendor**

SN o.	Nature of Problem	Whether any complaint found				Complaint forwarded to Vendor			
		Yes	%	No	Total	Yes	%	No	Total

1	Inferior quality Goods sold/ Adulterated Goods	432(68.4)	5.8	68(13.6)	500(100)	253(58.5)	3.3	179(41.4)	432(100)
2	Second hand & defective goods sold	421(84.2)	5.6	79(15.8)	500(100)	262(62.2)	3.4	159(37.7)	421(100)
3	Extravagant Price/ Charged above MRP	417(83.4)	5.5	83(16.6)	500(100)	245(59.34)	3.2	172(40.66)	417(100)
4	Inappropriate Labeling & Packaging	398(46.0)	5.3	104(54.0)	500(100)	227(56.88)	3.0	171(43.12)	398(100)
5	Absence of Response from the Vendor	379(75.8)	5.0	121(24.2)	500(100)	171(50.74)	2.2	166(49.26)	379(100)
6	Lack of substitute of Goods	326(54.3)	4.3	274(45.7)	500(100)	224(68.7)	2.9	102(31.2)	326(100)
7	Unavailability of Product	474(94.8)	6.3	26(5.2)	500(100)	122(25.7)	1.6	352(70.4)	474(100)
8	Inaccuracy in Weights & Measures	299(49.8)	3.9	301(50.2)	500(100)	134(63.55)	1.7	165(36.45)	299(100)
9	Deceptive Advertisements	382(52.5)	5.0	118(47.5)	500(100)	181(47.3)	2.4	201(52.6)	382(100)
10	Unsatisfactory after Sales Service	495(99)	6.6	5(1)	500(100)	115(23.2)	1.5	380(76.8)	495(100)
11	Difficulty in claiming Warranty/ Guarantee	432(59.8)	5.7	68(40.2)	500(100)	230(53.2)	3.0	202(46.8)	432(100)
12	Restrictive & Unscrupulous Trade Practices (such as force	469(93.8)	6.2	31(6.2)	500(100)	143(30.5)	1.9	326(69.5)	469(100)

	selling, black marketing, tie-up sales, hoarding, etc.)								
13	Price Discrimination (Variable Discount/ Allowance etc.)	418(83.6)	5.5	82(16.4)	500(100)	183(43.77)	2.4	235(56.2)	418(100)
14	Hazardous goods and services (Spurious Drugs/ Polluted Air/ Water etc.)	318(53.0)	4.2	282(47.0)	500(100)	205(64.47)	2.7	113(35.53)	318(100)
15	There are more frauds associated with online shopping	405(81.0)	5.4	95(19.0)	500(100)	172(42.5)	2.2	233(57.5)	405(100)
	Total	665(80.8)	10.0	1737(23.16)		2867(38.2)	10.0	3156(42.08)	

#### Figures in parentheses indicates percentage

As seen in Table 4.19, consumers reported issues across nearly all categories. The highest number of complaints (99%) were related to after-sales services, whereas the least number (46%) were concerning improper labelling and packaging. Overall, consumers demonstrated a moderate level of awareness when it came to filing complaints. Among the identified issues, the most frequently reported were related to the lack of appropriate substitute products (68.7%), while the fewest complaints (23.2%) were made about unsatisfactory after-sales service.

#### 4.1 Significance of Demographics Variables on Kind of Complaints Found and Complaints Forwarded

Table 4.20 has been constructed to examine the influence of demographic characteristics on the fifteen identified areas of consumer complaints and whether those complaints were actually reported to the sellers. The 'N' value in the table reflects the average number of respondents who not only identified a particular issue but also took the initiative to report it to the manufacturer or vendor.

**Table2: Kind of Complaint Found and Complaint Forwarded across Consumers' Demographics**

Demographic Variables	Across 15 Areas of Complaint Found (N=494)				Across 15 Areas of Complaint Forwarded (N=456)			
	Calculated Value $\chi^2$	DF	p-value	Ho	Calculated Value $\chi^2$	DF	p-value	Ho
Age	5.826	6	0.433	Not Rejected	2.469	4	.405	Not Rejected
Gender	8.071	3	0.045	Rejected	18.007	2	.000	Rejected
Place of Residence	55.238	6	0.000	Rejected	18.220	4	.001	Rejected
Education	15.250	9	0.084	Not Rejected	10.327	6	.112	Not Rejected
Family's Monthly Income	21.100	12	0.049	Rejected	11.140	8	.194	Not Rejected
Occupation	4.192	9	0.89	Not Rejected	3.79	6	.705	Not Rejected

The following null hypothesis was examined using the statistics above:

H<sub>0</sub>= there is no significant association between Consumers' demographics and on the fifteen kinds of complaints found and lodged to manufacturer/ vendor.

Upon applying the chi-square test at a 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis was partially upheld. This indicates that for those instances where the chi-square significance (p-value) exceeds 0.05, there is no statistically significant relationship between the fifteen identified complaint areas and the filing of complaints to producers or vendors with respect to the respondents' demographic characteristics.

#### 4.2 Measurement of Consumer Consciousness Level

The responses across all fifteen categories were consolidated to assess the overall level of consumer awareness regarding complaints encountered during the purchase of goods and services. Scores were allocated to the responses as follows:

In the cases where response is 'Found' 2

In the cases where response is 'Never' 1

Based on the total scores accumulated across all fifteen factors for each respondent, consumer awareness regarding issues identified during the purchase of goods and services was represented as follows:

Aggregate Marks	Consumer Consciousness Level	No. of respondents
22 to 30	Consumers with high level of consciousness	62 (12.4%)
12 to 20	Consumers with moderate level of consciousness	79 (15.8%)
02 to 10	Consumers with lowest level of consciousness	359 (71.8%)

#### 4.3 Factor contributing to deceptive and fraudulent practices of Vendors

The factor analysis method was employed to examine the areas of complaint for which consumers have submitted grievances. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic assesses sampling adequacy, indicating whether the sample size is sufficient. If the KMO value falls

below 0.6, conducting factor analysis is not advisable (as shown in Table 4.21). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity checks whether the variables are sufficiently correlated to justify factor analysis. For the data to be deemed suitable, the significance level must be less than 0.05. As reflected in the table, both tests yielded favorable results, confirming that factor analysis is appropriate for the dataset.

**Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.802
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5726.439
	DF	105
	Sig.	.000

**Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component		
	1	2	3
Inferior quality Goods sold/ Adulterated Goods	0.189	0.641	0.285
Second hand & defective goods sold	0.128	0.171	0.753
Extravagant Price/ Charged above MRP	0.186	0.228	0.726
Inappropriate Labeling & Packaging	0.625	0.566	0.222
Absence of Response from the Vendor	0.675	0.267	0.344
Lack of substitute of Goods	0.734	0.261	0.432
Unavailability of Product	0.558	0.119	0.595
Inaccuracy in Weights & Measures	0.425	0.681	0.363
Deceptive Advertisements	0.283	0.253	0.657
Unsatisfactory after Sales Service	0.087	0.775	0.124
Difficulty in claiming Warranty/ Guarantee	0.745	0.285	0.071
Unscrupulous & restrictive Trade Practices (such as force selling, black marketing, tie-up sales, hoarding, etc.)	0.850	0.250	0.112
Price Discrimination (Variable Discount/ Allowance etc.)	0.378	0.754	0.170
Hazardous goods and services (Spurious Drugs/ Polluted Air/ Water etc.)	0.749	0.284	0.257
There are more frauds associated with online shopping	0.759	0.056	0.268

**Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization**

The three new components which comprise the usual deceptive and fraudulent practices of vendors/ producers are:

1. Unethical Trade Practices

When extracted, this component showed the highest percentage of variance explained. It includes practices like Hoarding, Black Marketing/ Tie Up Sales/ Force Hoarding, Black Marketing/ Tie Up Sales/ Force Selling; frauds associated with online shopping; Inappropriate Labeling & Packaging Hazardous goods and services.

2. Destructive trade practices

Variables in the second component include Unsatisfactory after Sales Service, Price Discrimination, and Inaccuracy in Weights & Measures with loading of 0.775, 0.754 and 0.681 respectively.

3. Illusionary Trade Practices

This component includes practices like sale of Second hand & defective goods sold, Extravagant Pricing and Deceptive Advertisements.

#### 4.4 Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Factors Related to Consumer Dispute Redressal Machinery at Redressal Agency

To confirm the factors indicating the fraudulent practices of vendors and shopkeepers during the sale and purchase process, PLS SEM technique is used to check whether the three factor model was fit for our sample. It undergoes an appropriate evaluation of convergent validity. The research constructed the fraudulent practices of vendors as a lower order reflective higher order formative measurement model. An important consideration is to assess whether the indicators of the lower-order factors share the same antecedents and consequences. Since the nomological network of the indicators defining the construct may vary, this required treating the construct as a formative measurement model.

In order to assess the respondents' awareness level regarding the various kinds of problems faced in the products, respondents were asked to mark the area in which they have found the problem and whether they actually forwarded the complaint with the seller/ vendor regarding that particular area. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been put forward.

H1: Complaint found is negatively associated with low level of awareness

Level of awareness of consumer can be used to connect complaint found with the kind of fraudulent practices used by seller for exploiting consumers. A consumer with high level of awareness will able to identify the kind of fraudulent practices for which complaint can be forwarded. Therefore, following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Level of Awareness mediates relationship between complaint found and kind of complaint

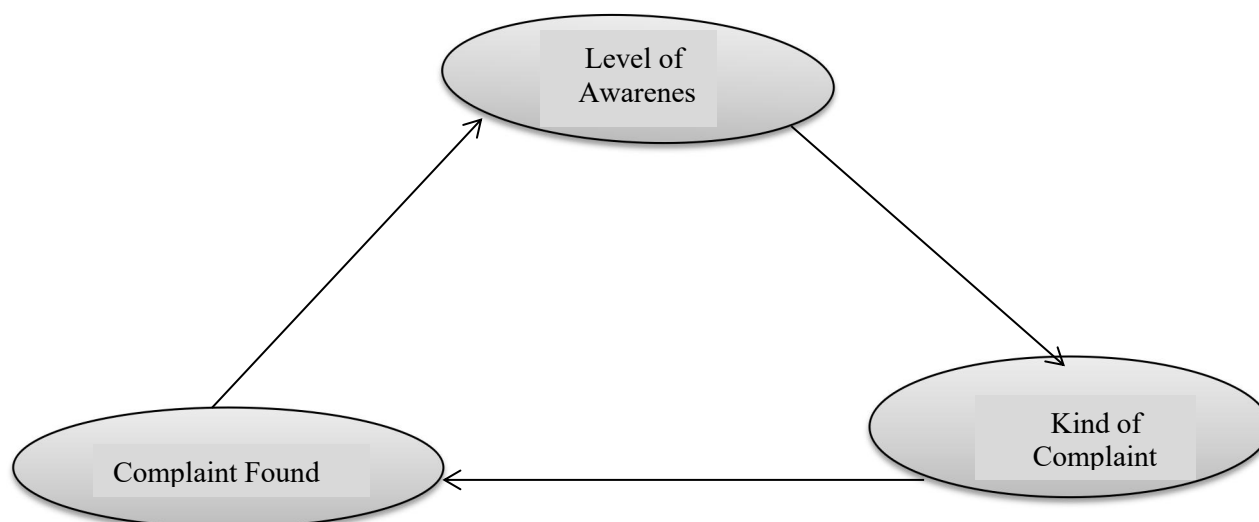


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

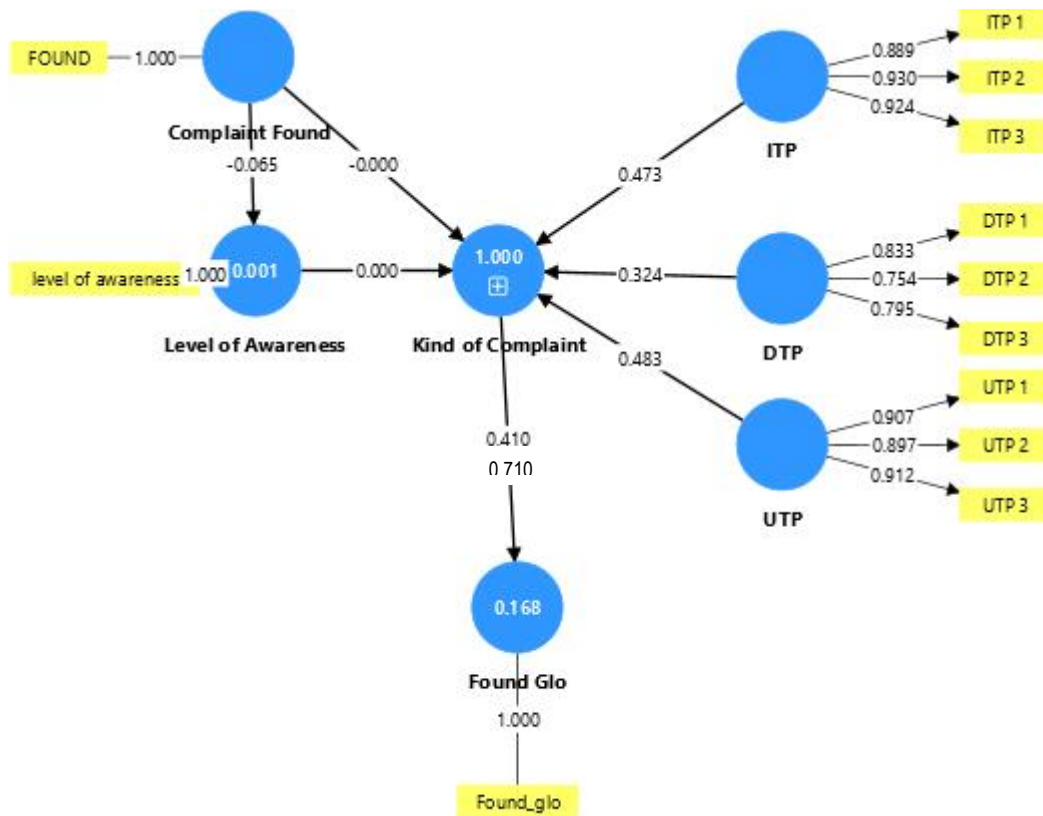


Figure 2: Path Diagram

For reflective measures, measurement model assessment includes estimation of factor loadings and significance, indicator reliability, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2013). It can be observed that reliability is confirmed since the values of Cronbach  $\alpha$  and Composite Reliability exceed the threshold value of 0.7 (Nunnally 1978; Fornell and Larcker 1981). All the values of factor loadings lie above the threshold value of 0.7. In the case of AVE, all the values lie above 0.5 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Hair et al. 2010) and discriminant validity is established, with all HTMT ratio values falling below 0.85 (Kline, 2011) meeting the threshold standard (Hair et al., 2013).

For formative measures, measurement model assessment includes convergent validity assessment, collinearity assessment and the assessment of the significance and relevance of the formative indicators, Hair J (2017).

Irrespective of the nature of the measurement model – formative or reflective, an analysis of multi-collinearity through variance inflation factor is significant. All VIF values fall below the stringent cut-off value taken as 5 (Dimantopoulos, 2008); thus multi-collinearity is not an issue for this formative construct model. Applying redundancy analysis, the association between formative construct and overall measures confirms indicator validity (MacKenzie et al., 2005). This analysis resulted in a path coefficient of 0.710 (see Figure 1), which is above recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). This provides support for the relationship between complaint found and level of consumer awareness thus confirming convergent validity. As multi-collinearity is not at an issue in this study, we can analyze outer weights and its significance. The significance of outer weights was considered by means of bootstrapping using 5,000 samples (Hair et al., 2017). The values of the outer weights are

standardized and can therefore be compared with each other. After analyzing the outer weights (Table 7.8), t-statistics and p-values of each indicators, was to be significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table5: Assessment of Measurement Model**

S. n o	Construct			AVE	P Value	Items VIF	Outer
	Loadings	$\alpha$	CR				
1	Unethical Trade Practices (UTP)				0.890	0.891	0.820
	1.281			UTP1			0.889
	<.001			UTP2			0.930
	<.001			UTP3			0.924
2	Destructive trade practices (DTP)						2.421
	0.760	0.631					0.721
	0.833			DTP2	<.001	0.897	DTP1
		<.001		DTP3	0.795		
3	Illusionary Trade Practices (ITP)						
	2.884					0.902	0.905
	0.836			RJ1	0.907		
		<.001		RJ2	0.897		
	<.001		RJ3	0.912			
	<.001						

**Table 6: Direct effect**

	Path coefficients	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV) values	P values
Complaint Found -> Low Level of Awareness	-0.262	0.011	16.325	.000

**Table 7: Direct and indirect effect in the presence of mediator.**

	Path coefficients	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ( O/STDEV ) values	P values
Complaint Found -> Level of Awareness	0.451	0.011	16.325	.000
Level of Awareness -> Kind of Complaint	0.327	0.034	9.843	.000
Complaint Found -> Level of Awareness -> Kind of Complaint	0.255	0.017	12.524	.000
Complaint Found-> Kind of Complaint	0.444	0.027	5.026	0.125

#### 4.5 Mediation Analysis

Following the comprehensive evaluation of the model, a mediation analysis was carried out using the method proposed by Hayes (2009). This approach is based on the premise that two significant direct effects do not automatically imply an indirect relationship. The process involves examining the total, direct, and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable, incorporating a mediating factor.

The first step involved testing the indirect effect between complaint found *and* level of awareness using PLS-SEM 3. The analysis revealed a statistically significant negative relationship ( $\beta = -0.262$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with an  $R^2$  value of 0.567 for level of awareness (refer to Table 6). These results are consistent with prior studies, which suggest that individuals with greater awareness are more likely to report complaints, whereas those with lower awareness tend to refrain (Mittal, 2015). Given the significant association, H1—that a relationship exists between complaint found and level of awareness—is supported.

In the next step, level of awareness was introduced as a mediator. As outlined by Nitz, Roldan, and Cepeda-Carrion (2016), the presence of a significant indirect effect is sufficient to confirm mediation. Once kind of complaint was included in the model, new significant paths emerged: one between complaint found and level of awareness, and another between level of awareness and kind of complaint. The indirect effect, with level of awareness acting as the mediator, remained significant ( $\beta = 0.255$ ; see Table 7), indicating the existence of a mediation effect.

The final step focused on determining whether the mediation was full or partial. Full mediation is present when the indirect path is significant and the direct path becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable occurs solely through the mediator. In this study, introducing level of awareness as the mediator rendered the indirect relationship between complaint found *and* kind of complaint is significant. Additionally, the model's explanatory power increased, with an  $R^2$  of 0.683. These findings support H2, confirming that level of awareness fully mediates the relationship between complaint found and kind of complaint.

While purchasing goods or services, a consumer must keep in mind the factors like price,

quality, usage quantity, guarantee or warranty, etc. Indian consumers come across a variety of issues in their day to day interactions with merchants and other organisations. Consumer protection is dependent on their awareness of these issues. Consumer must be aware about such unfair practices of scrupulous traders in order to play safe at an hour of purchase. The study revealed that nearly 30% of the consumers have a moderate and low consciousness level towards looking into the complaints while purchasing the products. 71.8% of consumers showed a high level of consciousness with regard to problems faced at the time of purchase. The majority of customers reported that they had cause to file a complaint regarding the goods or services they had purchased, but very few of them actually forwarded the complaint after being duped (Khurana & Khurana, 2012). The outcomes of findings contradict the result of Surekha (2010). The areas of vendor's exploitation for which consumers had filed the complaints are Unethical trade practice, destructive trade practices and Unconscious consumer behaviour. From our analysis, it is clear that full mediation exists complaint found and kind of complaint

### Summary

Consumers were presented with a list of fifteen potential issues they might face while buying products—each representing a possible basis for filing a complaint. Although the majority could recognize at least one such problem, the actual rate of complaint submission was fairly low. Concerns about after-sale services were the most common, yet they resulted in the fewest formal complaints. In contrast, the lack of suitable alternative products was the issue most frequently reported. Complaints about incorrect labeling and packaging were the least mentioned. Demographic characteristics had a moderate impact on both the identification of issues and the likelihood of filing complaints.

The study observed that nearly 30% of consumers had low to moderate awareness of which issues warranted complaints, while 71.8% showed a high level of awareness when identifying problems during purchases. Factor analysis highlighted three major categories of vendor misconduct likely to lead to complaints: unethical trade practices, harmful practices, and misleading or deceptive strategies.

Structural equation modeling, conducted with data from 500 consumers in the Delhi-NCR region, provided strong evidence supporting the proposed framework. It was found that a consumer's ability to detect issues was directly related to their level of awareness. The research contributes to consumer awareness theory by demonstrating that awareness fully mediates the relationship between identifying an issue and the type of complaint made. The study also underlines the importance of consumer awareness in empowering individuals to protect themselves from unfair practices in the market.

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