

# Rights Without Awareness: The Irony of Consumer Protection in an Educated Society

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## ABSTRACT

Consumer protection laws are implemented to protect consumers from unfair commercial activities and to assure product safety. However, many customers are still clueless about their legal rights even with increased access to information and education. The irony is that consumers are not well-informed about their legal rights in modern nations where education is a means of empowerment. The article critically examines the paradox of consumer protection in an educated society where laws are in place, yet customers frequently fail to use their rights because they are unaware of them. Additionally, it talks about the main causes of this paradox, including institutional inefficiency, legal complexity, and information overload. The article concludes by stating the reasons behind the knowledge gap and the role of politics and institutions in strengthening consumer rights.

**Keywords:** Consumer, Law, Rights, Students, Education, Protection, Society

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer rights are described as the legal rights that protect customers from unjust treatment. According to the Consumer Protection Act of 2019, consumers have six essential rights: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choice, the right to be heard, the right to seek remedy, and the right to consumer education. The **Right to Safety** safeguards clients from risky goods and services that could endanger them or their property. The term "**right to be informed**" refers to a consumer's right to accurate information about any goods or services. The **right to choose** gives consumers the ability to select the quality of goods and services. Customers have the **right to express** any grievances and to have their interests taken into consideration when they exercise their right to be heard. Consumers have **the right to seek remedies** if they are sold any defectives good or services. Consumers have **the right to consumer education**, which means they can learn about their rights and responsibilities.

Consumer rights empower customers by providing them with information about their options, hence promoting sovereignty. The rights give customers the freedom to speak up and demand justice if they believe that the business is treating them unfairly and safeguard customers against receiving subpar products and services. The rights also promote fair competition and quality among customers. Equal access to trustworthy and safe products and services is another guarantee provided by the consumer rights. Ironically, even educated people, including students, are unaware of their consumer rights. Higher education students frequently lack the practical skills that are necessary to protect themselves as consumers, even when they have access to digital information and academic resources. Education formally focuses on theoretical subjects and professional skills, which is why students lack practical and legal knowledge, including consumer rights.

In the digital period, information is widely accessible, but mere access does not guarantee awareness. Education formally focuses on theoretical subjects and professional skills, which is why students lack practical and legal knowledge, including consumer rights. Educated individuals often assume that consumer rights are enforced by the authorities or businesses will act directly without any efforts made by the consumer. This false assumption reduces the likelihood that they will actively engage with consumer protection mechanisms or question unethical practices. Despite being frequent users of online purchasing and educational services, students are not aware of their rights, leaving them open to abuses like deceptive advertising or subpar goods.

The Consumer Protection Act of 2019 was passed, yet a considerable gap remains among educated individuals, particularly students. This ignorance of one's legal rights is a systemic problem caused by the gap between formal schooling and real-world legal understanding, not a personal lapse. Citizens cannot successfully use their rights if they lack the necessary understanding about consumer rights, which can result in exploitation and diminished democratic accountability.

## **2. UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER RIGHTS**

### **2.1 OVERVIEW OF BASIC CONSUMER RIGHTS**

Consumer rights are the legal rights that protect customers when they purchase goods and services. These rights are to protect consumers from exploitation, ensure fair trade, provide mechanism in case of any violation of rights and educate consumer. According to the Consumer Protection Act of 2019, consumers have six essential rights: the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choice, the right to be heard, the right to seek remedy, and the right to consumer education.

The right to safety protects clients against risky goods and services that can endanger them or their property. This involves food safety, which includes prohibiting any hazardous or expired food that could harm a consumer's life. The phrase "right to be informed" describes a consumer's right to accurate information about each purchase they make. It refers to being aware of the terms of service, substances, possible risks, pricing, and expiration dates. The right to choice gives consumers the freedom to select the quality of goods and services. Customers have the right to be heard, which means that their interests will be regarded and that they can express any objections. Customers who purchase defective goods have the right to pursue a remedy. This covers compensation, product replacement, or reimbursement via consumer protection organizations or legal proceedings. The right to consumer education refers to the capacity of consumers to obtain knowledge in order to comprehend their rights and obligations. Consumers are entitled to information that informs them of their rights and how to use them.

In addition to their legal rights, consumer rights also empower consumers by informing them of their options, thereby fostering sovereignty. These rights protect consumers from receiving inferior goods and services and allow them to speak up and demand justice if they feel that the company is treating them unfairly. Another protection offered by consumer rights is equal access to reliable and secure goods and services.

### **2.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING CONSUMER PROTECTION**

#### **National Legal Framework for Consumer Protection**

Each country has its own legislation that safeguard consumer rights. Here are examples from major legal system.

#### **India:**

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, was introduced in India to protect customers against deceptive

advertising, unfair trade practices, and online shopping. These rights include the following: the right to consumer education, the right to safety, the right to choice, the right to information, and the right to seek redress.

The Legal Metrology Act, 2009, was introduced to prevent any anti-competitive practices like price-fixing and abuse of market dominance. This Act protects consumers and promotes fair trade and consumers' interests.

The Bureau of Indian Standards was established as the National Standard Authority, requiring statutory certification to guarantee consumers improved product quality and safety.

The Food Safety and Standard Act, 2006, regulates the safety, quality, and labelling of food products through FSSAI. This Act protects consumers from adulterated and unsafe food.

Information Technology Act, 2000 protects consumers from digital transactions and e-commerce. This act also safeguards consumers personal data and consumer privacy.

### **United States**

Federal Trade Commission Act, 1914 was enacted to prevent any deceptive and unfair trade practices.

The Consumer Product Safety Act, 1972 ensures the safety of the product by safety regulations. The act grants Consumer Protection Safety Council the authority to create safety regulations and initiate product recalls for goods that pose irrational or significant risks of harm or death to users.

### **European Union (EU)**

The Consumer Rights Directive, 2011 grants customers a 14-day right to withdraw and guarantees transparency in all online transactions<sup>1</sup>.

The General Data Protection Regulation is a European Union regulation that safeguards consumers' data privacy.

### **United Kingdom**

The Consumer Rights Act of 2015 was passed in order to safeguard customers as well as products and services, including digital material.

The Unfair Trading Regulation of 2008 was put into effect to shield customers against deceptive and coercive tactics.

### **Australia**

Australian Consumer Law is a national law that provides statutory consumer guarantees and regulates misleading conduct<sup>2</sup>. This law ensures that every customer has rights when buying items and services, such as the ability to seek refunds and replacements for defective goods<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, this act creates safety standards for goods and services, offers enforcement tools, and shields consumers and their small companies from any unfair conditions in standard form contracts. The act extends to all Australian states and territories, offering uniform consumer protection<sup>4</sup>.

### **International standard and Framework for Consumer Protection**

International Organization play a vital role in setting consumer protection standard, such as fostering cross-border corporation and ensuring global consistency.

### **UN (United Nation)**

A global policy on consumer rights is provided by the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2011/83/oj/eng> (last visited on Mar. 16, 2025)

<sup>2</sup> <https://consumer.gov.au/about/australian-consumer-law> (last visited on Mar. 17, 2025)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

1985 (updated 2015).

### **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**

The general agreement on trade in services supports fair trade practices, work on issue related to e-commerce while allowing the country to enact consumer protection measures.

### **International Organisation for Standardization (ISO)**

ISO 26000 give guidance on social responsibility including consumer protection<sup>5</sup>.

ISO 10377 provides practical guidance on goods safety and ensure documentation of risk assessment and management to meet the requirement<sup>6</sup>.

### **Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

OECD encourages fair trade practices in cross-border digital markets by addressing issues like safety, fair treatment and information choices. It also promotes healthy composition and sustainable economic growth<sup>7</sup>.

## **3. THE AWARENESS PARADOX: WHY EDUCATED CITIZENS REMAIN UNINFORMED**

### **• Education vs. Awareness**

Education does not necessarily include consumer rights awareness, which is why many educated people, even students, are uninformed of their legal rights. Education focuses solely on academic information, often ignoring legal rights. Political science and economics may include theoretical knowledge, but students do not learn about consumer rights in practice.

### **• Lack of curriculum Focus**

Students' ignorance of their consumer rights can also be attributed to a lack of curriculum focus. Formally, education provides students with professional and academic knowledge, but it does not provide them with legal understanding about consumer protection. Since there is no curriculum in schools or institutions, students lack the fundamental knowledge they need to defend themselves in the marketplace.

### **• Complexity of Legal Process**

Despite being aware of their rights, many consumers find the legal process scary and complicated. Although students are aware of their rights as consumers, they lack the legal literacy necessary to properly navigate this system. The legal process presents challenges, particularly for elderly persons.

### **• The assumption of Institutional Protection**

Well-educated persons, including students, think that government agencies or regulatory bodies uphold consumer protection. Such presumptions encourage complacency. In order to stop mechanisms like corporate exploitation, citizens must get involved.

### **• Lack of Political Engagement**

There is a lack of public knowledge, which means that customers are only aware of their legal rights. The government ought to launch a campaign to inform citizens about their legal rights and choices, particularly those who reside in rural areas.

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.iso.org/standard/42546.html#:~:text=ISO%2026000%3A2010%20is%20intended,part%20of%20their%20social%20responsibility> (visited on Mar.17, 2025)

<sup>6</sup> <https://blog.ansi.org/iso-10377-2013-consumer-product-safety/#:~:text=What%20is%20ISO%2010377?,management%20to%20meet%20applicable%20requirements> (last visited on Mar.17, 2025)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/consumer-policy.html#:~:text=Consumers%20are%20the%20backbone%20of,in%20complex%20and%20transforming%20markets> (last visited on March 17, 2025)

#### 4. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ROLE IN CONSUMER PROTECTION

Consumer protection is not limited to legal rights; it is also a political responsibility. Governments, political parties, institutions, and regulatory bodies play an important role in safeguarding the consumers and their legal rights. They ensure a fair market and hold businesses accountable.

- **Legislative Role**

Parliaments and legislative bodies are responsible for creating, enacting, and enforcing laws. These rules safeguard consumers and provide mechanisms for them to seek redress. The legislative body drafts legislation that establishes fair corporate practices, consumer rights, and compensation. They amend laws and reflect new challenges relating to consumer. The legislative body also align with national laws like United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection.

- **Executive Role**

The executive branch is in charge of carrying out and upholding the laws that are passed by the legislature. The ministers in charge of consumer affairs manage redress, conduct public awareness efforts, and supervise the consumer policy. In the United States, specialized agencies like the Federal Trade Commission keep monitoring businesses and enforce penalties. Online consumer courts are established by the Consumer Dispute Redressal Mechanisms to expedite dispute resolution.

- **Judicial Role**

The judiciary interprets consumer laws and resolves issues using legal means. Consumers can easily submit complaints and seek remedies through consumer courts and tribunals. Judge decisions shape consumer laws, which are then interpreted and implemented. This legislation made the legal system stronger.

#### THE ROLE OF POLITICAL WILL IN ENFORCING CONSUMER LAWS EFFECTIVELY

The implementation of consumer protection regulations depends heavily on political will. Through legislative advocacy, awareness campaigns, and partnerships with civil society organizations, politicians and political parties can have an impact on consumer policy.

Example- In the European Union, consumer protection is an important aspect of the political agenda, ensuring that member states adhere to shared norms.

#### CHALLENGE IN POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSUMER PROTECTION

- Lack of Enforcement leading to unchecked corporate misconduct.
- Large Corporate Influence against consumers.
- Limited consumer awareness.
- Delay and complexity in legal proceedings.

#### 5. BRIDGING THE AWARENESS GAP: SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 5.1 INTEGRATING CONSUMERS RIGHTS EDUCATION

One of the primary reasons educated consumers, particularly students, are unaware of their consumer rights is a lack of consumer rights education. Instructing students about consumer rights in educational institutions will guarantee that the next generation is better trained.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

##### School and University:

- To teach consumer rights as part of civics, political science, and legal studies in elementary, secondary, and tertiary education.
- To conduct seminars and workshops in school and educational institution, where students learn how

to file consumer complaints and navigate legal processes.

- Consumer Literacy Programs in order to work with consumer advocacy groups to develop public education programs that specifically target disadvantaged groups such as students and communities with low incomes.

## 5.2 ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS

Government-led and community-driven campaigns are always important in educating consumers about their rights. Campaigns that make information more accessible can help to close the information gap.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Media Outreach:**

Using the traditional and digital media such as TV, radio, social media to broadcast about consumer rights to spread awareness.

- **Consumer Rights Day Events:**

Make use of international forums such as World Consumer Rights Day to increase awareness through information campaigns and public gatherings.

- **Simplified Information:**

Explaining consumer rights and complaint procedures in several languages and using booklets and pictures to help customers understand.

Example: In India, the “Jago Grahak Jago” (Wake Up, Consumer!) campaign has successfully educated millions of citizens about their consumer rights through media outreach.

## 5.3 SIMPLIFYING LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

When seeking compensation, complicated legal procedures are usually a major consideration, which discourages customers from pursuing remedies. These procedures can be simplified to maintain consumer rights while also making them more accessible and efficient.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- User-Friendly Online Platforms for filing complaints.
- Establish alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms such as online mediation to resolve cases quickly and cost-effectively for consumers.
- Providing free legal aid services for consumers who lack the financial support to pursue legal remedies.  
Example: In India, the Consumer Protection Act (2019) introduced its first e-filing for consumer complaints for consumers, making the process easier and faster.

## 5.4 STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

To ensure effective consumer protection, strong and independent regulatory organizations must enforce laws and protect consumers' interests.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Independent Consumer Protection Authorities to prevent any corporate and political influence.
- Frequent monitoring and reporting of consumer protection policy reviews, as well as the publication of enforcement activity reports.
- Participate with international organizations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to exchange best practices and enforce global consumer protection standards.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The irony of consumer protection in educated cultures is that, despite having access to knowledge, legal

frameworks, and digital knowledge, many educated individuals—including students—are uninformed of their consumer rights. This awareness gap undermines the effectiveness of consumer protection legislation, exposing consumers to exploitation and unfair commercial practices

Education, which is supposed to empower people, frequently falls short of delivering practical information on legal rights, particularly consumer safeguards. This paradox is exacerbated by the lack of consumer rights education in schools and university curricula, the complexities of legal processes, and the notion that institutions will always defend consumers. Without awareness, consumer protection rules remain theoretical and inaccessible to those consumers who need them the most.

Addressing this gap needs an organized effort. Consumer rights must be integrated into formal education, while governments should conduct public awareness campaigns and streamline legal processes. Consumer advocacy organizations and internet platforms can also play an important role in empowering people to use their consumer rights.

By closing the awareness gap, countries can move closer to true consumer empowerment, in which legal protections are more than just rights on paper, but tools for justice in real life.