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## An Empirical Study of Consumer Responses to Cheating Practices and Complaint Redressal Mechanisms: An Analysis

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**Abstract:** Consumer exploitation remains a persistent challenge in emerging economies, particularly in retail markets where information asymmetry and weak enforcement mechanisms prevail. This study examines consumers' experiences of being cheated, the steps taken in response, and actions adopted when complaints are not entertained by shop owners. Using primary survey data, chi-square tests were applied to examine the distribution and significance of consumer responses across three key behavioral variables. The results reveal statistically significant differences in consumer perceptions and actions, indicating varied levels of awareness, assertiveness, and trust in grievance redressal mechanisms. The findings underline the need for strengthening consumer awareness programs, enhancing accessibility to consumer forums, and improving retailer accountability. The study contributes to consumer protection literature by empirically validating the role of behavioral responses in consumer justice systems.

**Keywords:** Consumer protection, Cheating practices, Complaint redressal, Chi-square test, Consumer behavior

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### 1. Introduction

Consumer markets play a critical role in economic development, yet they are often characterized by unequal power relationships between sellers and buyers. Consumers, particularly in developing countries like India, frequently face unfair trade practices such as adulteration, overpricing, misleading advertisements, short weighing, and denial of post-purchase services. Despite the existence of consumer protection laws, many consumers remain vulnerable due to lack of awareness, low literacy, and hesitation to confront sellers.

Cheating in consumer transactions not only causes financial loss but also erodes trust in market systems. The response of consumers to such experiences is a crucial indicator of the effectiveness of consumer protection mechanisms. While some consumers actively complain or approach legal forums, others remain silent due to fear, time constraints, or lack of faith in redressal systems.

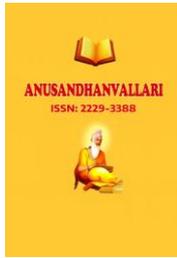
This study focuses on three critical behavioral dimensions:

1. **Extent to which consumers feel cheated**
2. **Steps taken after being cheated**
3. **Actions taken when complaints are not entertained by shop owners**

By applying chi-square statistical analysis, the study attempts to identify whether consumer responses are uniformly distributed or significantly different across categories.

### 2. Review of Literature

Prior research has extensively discussed consumer exploitation and complaint behavior. Day and Landon (1977) conceptualized consumer complaint behavior as a response to dissatisfaction. Singh (1988) highlighted that consumer responses range from inaction to formal legal complaints.



Kotler and Keller (2016) observed that consumers often avoid confrontation due to perceived low benefits relative to effort. Studies by Andreasen (2001) emphasize that awareness and education significantly influence the likelihood of complaint filing.

In the Indian context, NCAER (2018) reported that despite increased consumer awareness, formal complaint registration remains low. Research by Jain and Kaur (2019) found that most consumers prefer informal mechanisms such as negotiating with sellers rather than approaching consumer forums.

Statistical tools such as chi-square tests have been widely used in consumer research to analyze categorical data (Malhotra & Dash, 2016). These tests help determine whether observed behavioral patterns are statistically significant or due to random variation.

Indira Nair (2012) conducted an examination entitled "Assessment of Consumer Awareness amongst Undergraduate Students of Thane District—A Case Study," which elucidates that upon evaluating the level of awareness among students, it was determined that a mere 17.5% of participants from the collective six colleges possessed knowledge of the relevant legal framework. The proportion of individuals demonstrating partial awareness was calculated to be 12.0%, while the predominant segment of students, comprising 70.4%, exhibited a lack of awareness regarding the law.

Nalini Chandra (2012) in her work "Empowering Consumers through Consumer Education" asserts that prior to the acquisition of any goods or services, informed and educated consumers ought to diligently seek comprehensive information pertaining to the quality and pricing of the products and services in question. It is imperative that consumers remain cognizant of the potential for false and/or misleading information. Furthermore, consumers should refrain from making impulsive purchases and should inquire for complete information prior to engaging in any buying decisions.

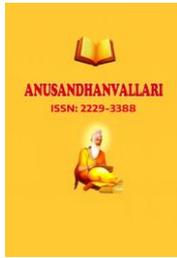
Sewanand (2012), Consumer Awareness and Consumer Protection Act - A Study. This investigation elucidates that a significant proportion of consumers possess a foundational awareness regarding their entitlements under consumer protection legislation. They exhibit familiarity with campaigns such as "Jago Grahak Jago," as well as recognized quality standards including ISO, ISI, and Agmark.

Dr. Partap Singh (2013), Consumer Protection in India: Some Issues & Trends. This research indicates that numerous legal frameworks have been instituted to safeguard consumers from unscrupulous trade practices; nevertheless, deceptive and misleading advertising persists, thereby taking advantage of consumers.

Deepika, D. Ratan Kumari (2014): A Study on Awareness of Legal Acts of Consumer Protection Among Students. The examination aimed to assess the level of awareness among students regarding various consumer protection statutes. A substantial number of participants demonstrated familiarity with the Indian Penal Code of 1860. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents acknowledged knowledge of various legislative acts. However, lesser awareness was observed concerning the Hire Purchase Act and the Railway Claims and Tribunal Act. The findings revealed that most students acquired information primarily through newspapers, academic journals, and course syllabi. The overall awareness regarding consumer protection rights was quantified at 53.3%.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the extent to which consumers feel cheated in market transactions
2. To examine the steps taken by consumers after being cheated
3. To study consumer actions when complaints are not entertained by shop owners
4. To test the statistical significance of consumer responses using chi-square analysis



## 4. Research Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The study follows a **descriptive and analytical research design** based on primary survey data.

### 4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to consumers. Responses were recorded on categorical scales suitable for chi-square testing.

### 4.3 Variables Studied

- **Question 29:** To what extent have you ever felt that you have been cheated?
- **Question 30:** What steps have you taken when you have been cheated?
- **Question 31:** In case your complaint is not entertained by the shop owner, what do you do?

### 4.4 Statistical Tool

The **Chi-Square Test of Goodness of Fit** was applied to test whether observed responses significantly differed from expected frequencies.

## 5. Hypotheses Formulation

### Hypothesis 1

- **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the extent to which consumers feel they have been cheated.
- **H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference in the extent to which consumers feel they have been cheated.

### Hypothesis 2

- **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in steps taken by consumers after being cheated.
- **H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference in steps taken by consumers after being cheated.

### Hypothesis 3

- **H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference in actions taken when complaints are not entertained by shop owners.
- **H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference in actions taken when complaints are not entertained by shop owners.

## 5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 6.1 Chi-Square Test Results

	Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig.
1	164.349	3	0.000
2	47.942	3	0.000
3	133.279	3	0.000

All tests satisfy the assumption that **no expected cell frequency is less than 5**, confirming the validity of the chi-square results.

## 6.2 Interpretation

### Extent of Feeling Cheated

The chi-square value of **164.349** with  $p < 0.001$  indicates a highly significant difference among response categories. This suggests that consumers do not uniformly experience cheating; rather, a substantial proportion report moderate to high levels of perceived cheating.

### Steps Taken After Being Cheated

The chi-square value of **47.942** ( $p < 0.001$ ) reveals significant variation in consumer responses. While some consumers complain directly to sellers, others seek external help or remain passive, highlighting differences in awareness and assertiveness.

### Action When Complaint Is Not Entertained

With a chi-square value of **133.279** ( $p < 0.001$ ), the results show strong disparities in consumer behavior. A notable section escalates complaints to consumer forums, while others abandon the issue, reflecting gaps in trust and accessibility of formal redressal mechanisms.

## 7. Discussion

The findings align with earlier studies that emphasize heterogeneity in consumer complaint behavior. The significant chi-square results confirm that consumer reactions are shaped by psychological, social, and institutional factors. The reluctance of many consumers to pursue formal complaints suggests the need for simplification of grievance procedures and stronger consumer education initiatives.

## 8. Implications of the Study

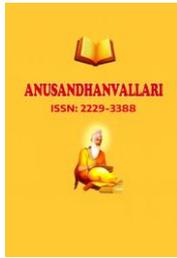
- **For Policymakers:** Strengthening consumer awareness programs
- **For Consumer Forums:** Simplifying complaint registration processes
- **For Retailers:** Adopting ethical practices to build consumer trust
- **For Researchers:** Validating behavioral theories in consumer protection

## 9. Conclusion

The study concludes that consumer responses to cheating and complaint denial are significantly varied and statistically meaningful. The chi-square analysis provides strong empirical evidence that consumer protection mechanisms must go beyond legal provisions to address behavioral and perceptual barriers. Enhancing awareness, trust, and accessibility remains critical for effective consumer justice.

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