CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

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SUGGESTIONS
Consumer is a central point in the economic operation of any country whether developed or developing in the world. The very production and distribution process of industrial and agricultural activity solely depends on the consumer. Thus, the consumer assumes great importance in the minds of manufacturers, marketers, Government agencies and especially among researchers.

In recent times there are tremendous changes in the tastes, fashions, life styles, living standards, behavioural patterns and level of awareness among the consumers. Technological innovations and advanced civilisation have also further brought sea-changes in the minds of the consumers. Taking all these opportunities, many producers have ventured into the market with different types and brands of goods and commodities. Besides, in order to sustain and survive in the competitive market, the consumer has been a target to them to achieve this end.

However, because of this competitive nature and environment, the manufacturers and other marketers are supposed to stand in the market arena. This, perhaps, sometimes force them to resort to some malpractices and misleading the consumers in different ways such as selling low quality products, low weight; adulteration charging high prices by creating artificial scarcity and unbelievable advertisements etc., to sell their produce.
Accordingly, it is reported in recent times that these malpractices are increased in different forms at different levels in selling different products. However, the Government has been keen and cautious enough in identifying such malpractices. Establishment of departments of metrology and vigilence and enactment of different Consumer Protection Acts are some of the institutions and legal provisions in this regard. Besides, Government is also establishing Consumer Grievance Redressal Cells through its legislations at all levels in the country. It is also extending liberal financial assistance to many voluntary organisations to conduct Consumers' Awareness Programmes as to enlight the consumers about their rights and privileges.

Now the pertinent questions which need to be answered are whether or not the consumers under study are aware of different types and brands of edible oils available in the market? Whether or not there is an awareness among the consumers about consumerism, Consumer Protection Acts, the Departments of Metrology and Vigilence, Government agencies and other voluntary organisations associated with it? Also asks whether the consumers are perceiving their buying dynamics while buying the edible oil.

Above all, though many studies were made on consumers in different dimensions, no study of this nature has so far been made exclusively on consumer behaviour and awareness among edible oil users in Anantapur town. Hence, the present study is an endeavour in this direction.
For the purpose of the study, Anantapur town has been selected to probe into the consumer behaviour and their awareness among the consumers such as employees, businessmen and labourers.

There are 28 wards in Anantapur town. From each ward, six represents i.e., 2 employees 2 businessmen and 2 labourers have been purposively selected and thus the total number of respondents have come to 168. Data have been collected from these consumers and hence the findings are confined to the responses given by them.

These selected consumers have been contacted by the researcher with a structured questionnaire which has been divided into four main sections. Section I intends to give the general information about consumers, Section II is deliberately framed to drive home the Consumers' awareness about different types and brands of edible oil, section III is devoted to the dynamics of consumer buying behaviour and Section IV is concerned about different Consumer Protection Acts, Government agencies and such other related information.

The consumer profile, detailed in Chapter II indicates the comparative classification of age, sex, educational background, size of the family, monthly income, monthly expenditure on foodstuffs and also monthly expenditure on edible oil.
All the consumers under study are above 21 years. But a majority of them are below 61 years. Sex-wise composition indicates that majority of the respondents from all categories are males. However, it is a notable point that some of the female consumers are found in the study. The size of the family members among businessmen is more and it is followed by labourers and employees. It can reliably learnt that generally the businessmen with their joint families might be running their business and hence the composition of the family size among them is higher than the other two categories. A majority of the consumers from all categories are from nuclear family. However, joint families are found more among businessmen followed by labourers and employees.

As far as the educational background of the consumers is concerned, the majority of the labourers, i.e., 46.64 per cent, are illiterates. But the literacy rate among businessmen and employees is high, but the composition of employees and their education is ranging from secondary education to Post-Graduation.

From the cross-sectional analysis between three categories of consumers about the earning members of the families, it is clear that 71.44 per cent of the employees' families and 60 per cent of businessmen mainly depend on single earning member. While 48.21 per cent of the labourers have said that their families depend upon single earning member.
Regarding monthly income of the consumers it is clear that 63 per cent of the consumers have their monthly income in between Rs. 600-3,000 and the rest 37 per cent are earning more than Rs. 3,000.

Total expenditure on foodstuffs of the respondents indicates that 33.93 per cent of the consumers of all three categories are spending between Rs. 601-1,200 and it is followed by 18.45 per cent of the consumers below Rs. 600. The average expenditure on foodstuffs among the employees is Rs. 2,057, among businessmen Rs. 2,348 and Rs. 958 among the labourers.

Monthly expenditure on edible oil by the consumers under study states that expenditure on edible oil is more among the businessmen and comparatively less among the employees and labourers.

The buying dynamics approach to analyse consumer behaviour has emerged in recent years. Accordingly, in order to understand the act of buying as distinct stage in the buying process, it was felt necessary to examine the events that precede and follow the buying process. In the study, it is found that all the consumers, irrespective of their type, have known the 'groundnut' oil as an edible oil. 'Palmolín oil' is also known by almost all the respondents. 'Sunflower' oil can be used as an edible oil and is available in the market. This is well-known among employees
and businessmen, while it is considerably less among the labourers. Though the 'Sesamum oil', 'Soyabean oil' can be used as an edible oil but it is known only to very few respondents. From the above analysis it can be inferred that groundnut, palmolin and sunflower oils are very popular in the town.

In recent times different types of edible oil with different brand names have entered the market. The very popular brands of Sunflower are 'Sweekar', 'Suffola', Godrej' and under the groundnut refined oil brands like 'Dhara' and Vijaya' are popular. In the I.T.C. products, the very popular brands are 'Crystal' and 'Abhilash'. These brands are known by a majority of the employees and businessmen and to a very meagre percentage of labourers.

'Vanaspati' which can be used for the preparation of sweets is also popular among employees and businessmen. The popular brands under this type are 'Gagan' and Ghar'.

As far as the source of information about the availability of the different brands of oil is concerned, it is found that a majority of the employees and businessmen have got it through family members, Television and newspapers. Of all the sources of information, the most popular are the members of family and Television. In the case of labourers, the main source of information is family members and dealer.
A majority of the employees and businessmen have the habit of buying from the retailer and wholesaler and an overwhelming majority of the labourers buy the oil from the retailer and ration shop. Some of the consumers have the habit of buying from cooperative stores, super bazar and FEDCON. It seems the respondents under study are ignorant of the fact that all products including edible oil are available at cheaper rates with the cooperative stores, super bazars and FEDCON. So, there is a need to campaign for these agencies and the advantages offered by these agencies.

Knowledge about FEDCON is known comparatively more to the employees and businessmen than to the labourers. It is found that taste and quality, easy availability and low price are the main reasons for using the same brand among the employees and businessmen. As many as 80 per cent of the labourers have confessed that they buy the same edible oil because of its low price.

Regarding the motivational factors in buying a particular brand of oil, it is stated by majority of the labourers and businessmen as self-intuition. Family members, doctor's advice and friends also constitute an important motivational force in buying the edible oil.

Factor-wise analysis while buying, shows that a majority of the labourers and businessmen are conscious
about the price of the edible oil. In case of employees 'quality' has been the most influencing factor in buying a particular brand of edible oil followed by taste, colour and smell.

The most used edible oils at present among the selected consumers are Groundnut, Palmolin, Sweekar, Suffola and Godrej. A majority of them have stated that high quality is being maintained and hence they are being used. The consumers under study on and often test the brands they use. Some of the oils most frequently tested are Groundnut, Suffola, Sweekar and Godrej.

Regarding the mode of purchase, 86.07 per cent of the employees and 87.50 per cent of the businessmen buy their oil by cash only while 53.57 per cent of the labourers buy it on credit. It is found in the study that majority of the consumers are buying between 2 - 5 Kgs edible oil. It can further be said that provisions of credit facility will enhance the quantum of buying.

Regarding the frequency of purchase of edible oil among the selected consumers, majority of the employees and businessmen buy the oil monthly while weekly purchases are more among the labourers.

Changing of brands of oil is more among the businessmen and employees and this flexibility is not found in case of labourers. The reason that can be attributed is
lack of awareness about different brands and lack of purchasing ability to buy such new brands.

A majority of the respondents under study, irrespective of their type, have not suggested to any one to buy a particular brand. However, a small percentage of businessmen and employees have suggested to others to buy the oil which is being used by them.

As regards the buying behaviour of the consumers, when there is decrease in price of edible oil a very small percentage of them have inclined to buy more quantity than earlier. Alternative oils have not been used by majority of the consumers in spite of increase in price of oil.

It is also found in the study that the attitude of changing the oil because of non-availability of favourite oil is relatively very poor. However, only some among them have opted the alternatives. Among such alternative brands, either because of sudden decrease or increase of the price of oil they use or because of non-availability of such oil, are 'Palmolin', 'Ground nut' and 'Dhara'.

The responses about "high priced edible oil contains the best quality" are that majority of the labourers and employees have believed it. While 54.79 percent of the businessmen have strongly believed the statement.
The consumers under study have the absolute knowledge that on and often, the traders create artificial scarcity to the edible oils and only some of the respondents of all the categories have confessed that artificial scarcity cannot be created.

Non-a-days it is stated in many of the reports on consumer that consumers are exploited in different forms with the malpractices of the traders at different levels. The reasons may be many and varied from consumer to consumer and from trader to trader. There are different reasons for this exploitation: illiteracy, lack of awareness among the consumers about the Consumer Protection Acts and ignorance of different institutions associated with consumers to protect and safeguard the consumers from the exploitation of the traders. Even the consumers who know these reasons are reluctant to approach for the redressal. The lack of zeal and enthusiasm to know something about the Consumer Acts may also be the reason. The above stated phenomena are not an exception in case of edible oil users.

The Consumer movement in India has gained a momentum in recent years. It is found in the study that 58.67% of the respondents, irrespective of their type, have knowledge about the Consumer Movement. But the awareness is more among businessmen, employees and labourers in order. But, it is surprising to note that majority of
the labourers and the businessmen do not know exactly the 
prevalence of Consumer Protection Act. But awareness is found among the employees. 'Newspapers' is main source in knowing about the Consumer Protection Act among the employees and businessmen. Television, friends and radio, also constitute important source in making the consumer aware about the Act.

Knowledge about Consumers Forums is more among the businessmen and employees than the labourers. But still it is an urgent need to bring about awareness among the respondents. Because the rate of exposure to the Forums is not as much as it is supposed to be in an urban area like Anantapur.

Existence of Consumer Protection Cell at S.K.University is known to majority of businessmen (67%) employees (57%). But awareness about the cell is very poor among the labourers. Hence there is a need to taken up consumer awareness campaigns to enlighten among the people about it. So that the consumers in this town can effectively make use of the services of this cell.

Awareness regarding the existence of Food Inspector and Weights and Measurements Department is more among businessmen and employees than among the labourers. Therefore, labourers are to be properly educated in this regard.
A majority of the employees and the businessmen under study have not observed any adulteration while majority of the labourers have expressed that adulteration is found in loose oil. A very small percentage of the respondents have, however, said that there is adulteration even in the packed oil.

It is reported by a majority of the consumers that they have not experienced low quality of oil being sold at higher prices. This may be due to the fact that they are not much serious about the same. This, however, does not mean that the traders are not selling low quality of oil at higher prices. This opinion is reflected from some of the respondents.

There is a common understanding that prices for the loose oils are different from shop to shop. It is a glaring fact as evident that majority of the respondents witnessed and observed this differentiation of prices.

40.21 per cent of the businessmen and 41.07 per cent of the employees have said that they are cautious and observe the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) affixed on the packed oil. But this is not observed by the labourers as revealed by the study.

It is stated by a majority of the consumers that consumers are often deceived by the traders with the low quality of oil.
Looking at the realities found in the study, it is proposed to give some concrete suggestions to the consumers, manufactureres, marketers, voluntary organisations and other Government agencies who are striving for the cause of consumerism.

SUGGESTIONS

Recognizing the importance of the consumerism as need of the hour, Government has been keen enough in enacting different Consumer Protection Acts, provisions of establishing different institutional support such as Consumer Courts and Consumer Forums at National and States level. Though through these institutions, many awareness camps in different forms have been taken, it is disheartening to notice that in the study only a small percentage of the respondents have been found being aware about the Consumer Acts and different institutions associated with. It is found no consumer has revealed that he\she has attended such awareness camps. This reveals the fact that the fruits of the consumer legislations and the efforts of institutions have yet to reach the public at large. It is a general belief that such provisions are supposed to be expected high in the urban centre like Anantapur but such awareness is not found. It can be suggested here that television media can be better used to telecast more programmes so that consumers will have the chance to have different ways in which they are being
exploited and it will be a caution to the traders that such practices are illegal and bound to be punished if they perpetuate such malpractices.

The study reveals that Groundnut Oil is traditional and very easily available edible oil in the market. Other types of edible oils such as Sunflower, Palmolin, Sesamum, Cottonseed are second in order. Groundnut oil is also cheaper when compared to other oils in the local market. But many consumers are not aware that the possibility of adulteration is more in case of non-package oils such as groundnut. It is also the opinion of many respondents that refined oil is costlier than the ground nut oil. Thus most of the consumers have favoured loose oil rather than the packed one even within the refined oils. They say that packed one is an extra burden and expensive. But the manufacturers supply packed oil with an impression that such oil cannot be adulterated. It is an implied understanding that the retailers will not have the ethical values and hence the consumers are also not trusting them. Therefore it is necessary not only to create awareness among the consumers to sue such traders causing adulteration but also to know how to switch the consumption to the alternative oils available in the market. After the ground nut which is a popular oil in the region the Sunflower oil stands next in order. It can also be suggested here that the big oil merchants in the area can float a factory for the purpose of refinement of the locally available huge
quantities of groundnut oil so that it can be offered in packages at comparatively less prices. It has to be mentioned here that Anantapur is the second largest groundnut crop growing district in the country.

So far only middle class people can offered to go in for purchase of packed oil. If a local factory would be floated with the great support of the government to the local oil millers, even lower consumer income groups can also come forward to purchase packed oil.

Among the sunflower brands, Sweekar, Suffola and Godrej are very much popular in Anantapur Town. It is evident from the study that malpractices in one form or the other are experienced by the selected consumers. But it is surprised to note that none of them has approached either courts, forums or any other agency with a complaint against any malpractices. Hence the urgent need to create more awareness among the edible oil consumers as to their rights and the legal resources available to them against any unfair trade practice suffered by them.