



INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1

Peer-reviewed, open-access, refereed journal

IJLAR

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www.ijlar.com

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Preface

The Indian Journal of Legal Affairs and Research is a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence in legal scholarship. This volume presents a curated selection of articles that reflect the diverse and dynamic nature of legal studies today. Our contributors, ranging from esteemed legal scholars to emerging academics, bring forward a rich tapestry of insights that address critical legal issues and offer novel contributions to the field. We are grateful to our editorial board, reviewers, and authors for their dedication and hard work, which have made this publication possible. It is our hope that this journal will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, and will inspire further inquiry and debate within the legal community.

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CONSUMER PROTECTION IN ONLINE SHOPPING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LEGAL AWARENESS AND CONSUMER RIGHTS AMONG STUDENTS OF SAMBALPUR UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of e-commerce has transformed consumer behavior by providing convenience, accessibility, and a wider range of products and services. However, the expansion of online shopping has also exposed consumers to various challenges, including misleading advertisements, defective products, delayed deliveries, refund disputes, cyber fraud, and inadequate grievance redressal mechanisms. To address these concerns, India enacted the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, establishing a comprehensive legal framework for safeguarding consumer interests in the digital marketplace. The present study examines the level of awareness regarding consumer rights among students of Sambalpur University and evaluates the effectiveness of the existing legal framework governing online shopping. The study adopts an empirical and descriptive research design based on primary data collected from 114 respondents through structured questionnaires administered via Google Forms. Secondary data have been collected from statutes, judicial decisions, books, journal articles, reports, and government publications. The findings reveal that although online shopping is widely prevalent among university students, awareness regarding consumer rights and digital grievance redressal mechanisms, particularly the e-Daakhil portal, remains inadequate. The study further highlights that defective products, delayed deliveries, and refund-related disputes are common experiences among consumers, while lack of legal awareness and procedural complexities discourage them from seeking remedies. The study concludes that despite the existence of a robust legal framework, effective implementation and enhanced consumer awareness are essential for ensuring meaningful protection of consumer rights in the digital economy.

KEYWORDS: *Consumer Protection, E-Commerce, Online Shopping, Consumer Rights, Consumer Protection Act, 2019, E-Daakhil Portal, Digital Marketplace.*

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented growth of digital technology and internet penetration has transformed the traditional marketplace into a borderless digital economy. Electronic commerce (e-commerce) has emerged as one of the most significant developments of the twenty-first century, providing consumers with convenience, wider choices, competitive prices, and access to goods and services beyond geographical limitations. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transformation, making online shopping an indispensable part of everyday life. However, alongside the benefits of digital commerce, consumers have increasingly become vulnerable to misleading advertisements, counterfeit products, delayed deliveries, cyber fraud, data privacy violations, and ineffective grievance redressal mechanisms.¹

Consumer protection in the digital era has become a global concern. Recognizing the changing nature of commercial transactions, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the revised United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection in 2015, emphasizing principles of fair business practices, transparency, privacy protection, and effective dispute resolution mechanisms.² Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has repeatedly emphasized the necessity of strengthening consumer protection frameworks to address the challenges posed by cross-border e-commerce and digital markets.³ The European Union has also enacted comprehensive measures through the Consumer Rights Directive, 2011, which guarantees consumers rights relating to information disclosure, withdrawal from contracts, and remedies against unfair commercial practices.⁴

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Consumer Protection Enforcement in a Global Digital Marketplace* (2020).

² G.A. Res. 70/186, United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (Dec. 22, 2015).

³ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *OECD Recommendation on Consumer Protection in E-Commerce* (2016).

⁴ Directive 2011/83/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011 on Consumer Rights, 2011 O.J. (L 304) 64.

In India, the rapid growth of e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho, and Myntra has fundamentally altered consumer purchasing patterns. Although the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 served as a milestone in safeguarding consumer interests, it was inadequate to address the challenges arising from online transactions and digital marketplaces. Consequently, Parliament enacted the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, replacing the earlier legislation and introducing several innovative provisions including product liability, mediation, electronic filing of complaints, establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), and regulation of e-commerce entities.⁵ The Act recognizes online transactions within the ambit of consumer protection and empowers the Central Government to formulate rules for regulating e-commerce activities.⁶

Pursuant to Section 94 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the Central Government notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, which seek to promote transparency and accountability among e-commerce entities. These Rules mandate disclosure of information relating to return and refund policies, grievance redressal mechanisms, payment methods, warranty conditions, and seller details, thereby enabling consumers to make informed decisions.⁷ In addition, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 seeks to address concerns relating to the collection, processing, and protection of personal data in the digital environment, thereby complementing the existing consumer protection regime.⁸

The judiciary has also played an important role in developing principles relating to digital consumer protection. In *Amazon Seller Services Pvt. Ltd. v. Amway India Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.*, the Delhi High Court emphasized the responsibility of e-commerce intermediaries in preventing unauthorized sales and protecting intellectual property rights.⁹ Likewise, in *Flipkart Internet Pvt. Ltd. v. State of NCT of Delhi*, the Supreme Court highlighted the need for regulatory oversight over e-commerce platforms and observed that technological innovation should not undermine consumer

⁵ Consumer Protection Act, No. 35 of 2019, India Code (2019).

⁶ Id. § 94.

⁷ Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, G.S.R. 462(E), Gazette of India (July 23, 2020).

⁸ Digital Personal Data Protection Act, No. 22 of 2023, India Code (2023).

⁹ *Amazon Seller Servs. Pvt. Ltd. v. Amway India Enters. Pvt. Ltd.*, 2020 SCC OnLine Del 4541.

rights and fair competition.¹⁰ These judicial pronouncements signify the evolving jurisprudence relating to intermediary liability and platform accountability.

Despite the existence of a comprehensive legislative framework, several challenges continue to impede the effective realization of consumer rights. Consumers frequently encounter problems such as defective goods, misleading advertisements, non-delivery of products, denial of refunds, and lack of efficient grievance redressal. Moreover, awareness regarding legal remedies remains inadequate, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas. Digital illiteracy, procedural complexities, and lack of accessibility to consumer forums further discourage consumers from seeking legal recourse.¹¹

Western Odisha represents a unique socio-economic context where internet penetration and online shopping have increased considerably over the past decade. However, the growth of digital commerce has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in legal awareness among consumers. Sambalpur University, being one of the leading higher educational institutions in the region, provides an appropriate setting to study the awareness, experiences, and perceptions of online consumers. University students constitute an important segment of digital consumers due to their frequent engagement with e-commerce platforms and increasing dependence on digital transactions. Therefore, examining their level of awareness regarding consumer rights and grievance redressal mechanisms becomes significant from both legal and policy perspectives.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of the legal framework governing online consumer protection and assess the level of awareness among students of Sambalpur University regarding their rights under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Through an empirical analysis of consumer experiences and perceptions, the study aims to identify existing gaps between law and practice and suggest measures to strengthen consumer protection in the digital marketplace. The study further contributes to the growing discourse on digital consumer

¹⁰ *Flipkart Internet Pvt. Ltd. v. State of NCT of Delhi*, 2022 SCC OnLine SC 1401.

¹¹ Poonam Singh & Deepak Soni, *Online Shopping and Grievance Redressal: A Survey*, 12 Int'l J. L. & Mgmt. 145 (2020).

rights by providing a regional perspective from Western Odisha, an area which has received limited attention in existing scholarship.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING CONSUMER PROTECTION IN ONLINE SHOPPING IN INDIA

The emergence of digital commerce has necessitated the development of a robust legal framework capable of addressing the unique challenges associated with online transactions. Unlike conventional markets, e-commerce transactions involve virtual interactions, electronic contracts, cross-border trade, intermediary platforms, and issues relating to data privacy and cyber security. Consequently, consumer protection in the digital marketplace is regulated through a combination of statutes, subordinate legislation, and judicial interpretations. The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, together with the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, constitutes the principal legal framework governing online consumer transactions in India. Additionally, legislations such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the Legal Metrology Act, 2009, and the Competition Act, 2002 collectively contribute towards ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective consumer redressal.

Consumer Protection Act, 2019

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 replaced the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 with the objective of addressing the challenges arising from the digital economy and strengthening consumer rights in India.¹² The Act recognizes electronic transactions and explicitly includes purchases made through online platforms, direct selling, teleshopping, and multi-level marketing within the ambit of consumer protection.¹³

Section 2(7) of the Act defines a consumer as a person who buys goods or avails services for consideration and includes transactions conducted through electronic means. The Act further guarantees six important consumer rights, namely the right to safety, right to information, right to choose, right to be heard, right to seek redressal, and right to consumer awareness.¹⁴ These rights

¹² Consumer Protection Act, No. 35 of 2019, India Code (2019).

¹³ Id. Section 2(7).

¹⁴ Id. Section 2(9).

form the foundation of consumer jurisprudence and seek to ensure fair treatment of consumers in the marketplace.

One of the significant innovations introduced by the Act is the establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) under Section 10.¹⁵ The Authority has been empowered to regulate matters relating to violation of consumer rights, unfair trade practices, and misleading advertisements. It possesses powers to investigate complaints, order recall of hazardous goods, impose penalties, and initiate proceedings before the appropriate consumer commissions.¹⁶

The Act also introduces the concept of product liability under Sections 82 to 87, enabling consumers to claim compensation against manufacturers, service providers, and sellers for harm caused by defective products or deficient services.¹⁷ This provision marks a departure from the traditional doctrine of caveat emptor and imposes greater responsibility upon manufacturers and online sellers.

Another important feature of the Act is the incorporation of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism under Chapter V.¹⁸ The Act also facilitates electronic filing of complaints and virtual hearings, thereby improving accessibility to consumer justice and reducing procedural barriers.¹⁹

Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020

In exercise of powers conferred under Section 94 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the Central Government notified the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 to regulate online marketplaces and safeguard consumer interests.²⁰

These Rules impose obligations upon e-commerce entities to provide clear information regarding return and refund policies, payment methods, warranty and guarantee conditions, delivery schedules, and grievance redressal mechanisms.²¹ They require appointment of grievance officers

¹⁵ Id. Section 10.

¹⁶ Id. Section 18.

¹⁷ Id. Section 82–87.

¹⁸ Id. Section 74–81.

¹⁹ Id. Section 35.

²⁰ Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, G.S.R. 462(E), Gazette of India (July 23, 2020).

²¹ Id. Rules. 4.

and mandate timely resolution of complaints. Further, the Rules prohibit unfair trade practices, misleading advertisements, and manipulation of prices or search results.²²

The Rules signify a shift from self-regulation to statutory regulation of digital marketplaces and aim to ensure greater transparency and accountability among e-commerce entities.

Information Technology Act, 2000

The Information Technology Act, 2000 provides the legal foundation for electronic commerce and electronic contracts in India. Section 10A recognizes the validity and enforceability of contracts concluded through electronic means.²³ Consequently, online contracts, including click-wrap and browse-wrap agreements, acquire legal sanctity.

Section 43A imposes liability upon body corporates for failure to protect sensitive personal information and provides compensation in cases of negligence.²⁴ Additionally, provisions relating to identity theft, cheating by personation, and cyber fraud under Sections 66C and 66D offer protection against cybercrimes affecting consumers.²⁵

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 further require intermediaries to maintain due diligence and publish privacy policies and grievance mechanisms, thereby strengthening digital accountability.²⁶

Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023

The enactment of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 represents a major step towards protecting personal information in the digital ecosystem.²⁷ The Act regulates the collection, processing, storage, and transfer of personal data and emphasizes consent-based data processing. The legislation imposes obligations upon data fiduciaries and grants individuals rights relating to access, correction, and erasure of personal data.²⁸ Since e-commerce platforms extensively collect and process consumer information, the Act complements consumer protection laws by addressing

²² Id. Rules. 5–6.

²³ Information Technology Act, No. 21 of 2000, § 10A, India Code (2000).

²⁴ Id. Section 43A

²⁵ Id. Section 66C–66D.

²⁶ Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, Gazette of India (Feb. 25, 2021).

²⁷ Digital Personal Data Protection Act, No. 22 of 2023, India Code (2023).

²⁸ Id. Section 11–13.

issues relating to privacy and data security. However, the relationship between consumer protection law and data protection law remains an evolving area requiring judicial clarification.

Legal Metrology Act, 2009

The Legal Metrology Act, 2009 seeks to ensure accuracy and transparency in weights, measurements, packaging, and labeling.²⁹ Under the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011, e-commerce entities are required to display essential information including Maximum Retail Price (MRP), quantity, country of origin, manufacturer details, and expiry date.³⁰

These requirements promote informed consumer choice and prevent deceptive trade practices in online transactions.

Competition Act, 2002

The Competition Act, 2002 plays an important role in regulating anti-competitive practices in the e-commerce sector.³¹ Sections 3 and 4 prohibit anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position respectively.³²

The rapid expansion of large digital platforms has raised concerns regarding predatory pricing, exclusive agreements, preferential treatment, and market concentration. The Competition Commission of India has increasingly scrutinized the conduct of major e-commerce platforms to ensure fair competition and consumer welfare.

Indian Contract Act, 1872

Online transactions are fundamentally contractual in nature and are governed by the principles contained in the Indian Contract Act, 1872. Essential elements such as free consent, lawful consideration, competency of parties, and lawful object continue to govern electronic contracts.³³ However, standard form contracts and click-wrap agreements often create inequality of bargaining power between consumers and e-commerce entities. Consequently, consumer protection laws operate as safeguards against unfair contractual terms and exploitative practices.

²⁹ Legal Metrology Act, No. 1 of 2010, India Code (2010).

³⁰ Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011, Gazette of India.

³¹ Competition Act, No. 12 of 2003, India Code (2003).

³² Id. Section 3–4.

³³ Indian Contract Act, No. 9 of 1872, India Code (1872).

Judicial Recognition of Consumer Rights in the Digital Era

The judiciary has played a crucial role in shaping online consumer protection jurisprudence. In *Amazon Seller Services Pvt. Ltd. v. Amway India Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.*, the Delhi High Court emphasized that e-commerce platforms cannot escape responsibility where they actively participate in the sale and distribution process.³⁴ Likewise, in *Flipkart Internet Pvt. Ltd. v. State of NCT of Delhi*, the Supreme Court acknowledged the necessity of regulatory oversight over digital marketplaces to ensure fairness and consumer welfare.³⁵

Thus, the existing legal framework reflects a multi-dimensional approach aimed at balancing technological innovation with consumer rights. Although India possesses a comprehensive statutory regime governing online consumer transactions, effective implementation, digital literacy, and awareness among consumers remain crucial challenges that need to be addressed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts an empirical and descriptive research design to examine the level of awareness regarding consumer rights and the effectiveness of the legal framework governing online shopping among students of Sambalpur University. An empirical approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates the collection of first-hand information relating to the experiences, perceptions, and awareness of consumers concerning e-commerce transactions and grievance redressal mechanisms. The study combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of consumer protection in the digital marketplace.

Universe of the Study

The universe of the study comprises the students of Sambalpur University, Odisha. With increasing internet penetration and widespread use of digital platforms, university students constitute an important segment of online consumers. Therefore, the study focuses on students who have experience in online shopping and are capable of providing meaningful responses regarding consumer rights, grievances, and awareness of legal remedies. The selection of Sambalpur University as the area of study provides a representative understanding of consumer behavior and legal awareness in a semi-urban academic setting.

³⁴ *Amazon Seller Servs. Pvt. Ltd. v. Amway India Enters. Pvt. Ltd.*, 2020 SCC OnLine Del 4541.

³⁵ *Flipkart Internet Pvt. Ltd. v. State of NCT of Delhi*, 2022 SCC OnLine SC 1401.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the level of awareness among students of Sambalpur University regarding consumer rights guaranteed under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. It seeks to identify the common legal and practical problems encountered by consumers in the course of online shopping, such as defective products, delayed deliveries, misleading advertisements, and refund disputes. The study further endeavors to assess the awareness and accessibility of consumer grievance redressal mechanisms, including consumer commissions and the e-Daakhil portal. In addition, it evaluates the effectiveness of the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 from the perspective of consumers in addressing issues arising in the digital marketplace. Finally, the study seeks to suggest appropriate measures for strengthening consumer awareness and improving the implementation and enforcement of consumer protection laws to ensure effective realization of consumer rights in the era of e-commerce.

Research Questions

The present study seeks to examine the extent to which students of Sambalpur University are aware of their rights as consumers in online transactions. It aims to explore the common issues and challenges encountered by consumers while purchasing goods and services through e-commerce platforms, including problems relating to defective products, delayed deliveries, misleading advertisements, and refund disputes. The study further investigates the level of awareness among consumers regarding the legal remedies and grievance redressal mechanisms available under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, particularly the use of consumer commissions and the e-Daakhil portal. In addition, it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020 in safeguarding consumer interests and addressing disputes arising in the digital marketplace. Finally, the study attempts to identify appropriate measures for enhancing consumer awareness and strengthening the legal and institutional framework for consumer protection in the era of e-commerce.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and empirical research design. The empirical method was adopted to collect primary data directly from respondents and to analyze their experiences relating to online shopping and consumer protection. The quantitative approach was employed to obtain measurable

responses through structured questionnaires, while qualitative observations were utilized to supplement the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Sampling Method

Since the study primarily focuses on consumers who actively engage in online shopping, non-probability sampling techniques were adopted. A combination of purposive and judgmental sampling methods was employed to select respondents possessing prior experience of online transactions. The respondents were selected from different departments and academic disciplines of Sambalpur University to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Sample Size

The study consists of a sample size of 114 respondents. The respondents comprise students from various departments and academic programmes of Sambalpur University. The sample size was considered adequate for identifying patterns relating to online shopping behavior, awareness of consumer rights, and accessibility of grievance redressal mechanisms.

Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire prepared using Google Forms. The questionnaire primarily consisted of close-ended questions relating to demographic information, online shopping habits, awareness of consumer rights, challenges faced during online transactions, and knowledge regarding consumer grievance redressal mechanisms. The questionnaire link was circulated among respondents through WhatsApp to ensure wider participation and accessibility.

Secondary Data

Secondary data for the present study were collected from a variety of authoritative sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the legal framework governing consumer protection in the digital marketplace. These sources included primary legislations such as the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, the Information

Technology Act, 2000, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. In addition, reference was made to judicial decisions, government publications, books, journal articles, reports, and research papers relating to consumer rights and e-commerce regulation. Relevant information and statistical data were also obtained from institutional resources, including the National Consumer Helpline and the e-Daakhil portal, to examine the accessibility and effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanisms available to online consumers.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through Google Forms during March and April 2025. The questionnaire was circulated electronically through WhatsApp groups and personal contacts of the respondents. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The use of digital questionnaires facilitated efficient collection, organization, and compilation of data while ensuring wider coverage among university students.

Data Analysis

The data collected from 114 respondents were systematically compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistical tools. Frequency distribution and percentage analysis were used to interpret the responses. Graphical representations, including pie charts and bar diagrams, were employed to present the findings in a clear and comprehensible manner. The analysis aimed to identify trends relating to online shopping behavior, awareness of consumer rights, and the effectiveness of grievance redressal mechanisms.

Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, it is confined to students of Sambalpur University and therefore may not fully represent the experiences of consumers in other regions. Secondly, the findings are based on the responses of 114 respondents and are limited by the subjective perceptions of participants. Thirdly, the study primarily relies on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which may be influenced by individual biases and varying levels of awareness. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into consumer protection in online shopping from the perspective of university students in a semi-urban region.

EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The empirical study was conducted among 114 respondents from Sambalpur University to assess their awareness regarding consumer rights and their experiences with online shopping. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire circulated through Google Forms. The responses reveal significant trends regarding online shopping behavior, awareness of legal rights, and accessibility of consumer grievance redressal mechanisms.

Age Profile of Respondents

The age composition of the respondents indicates that online shopping is predominantly practiced by young adults. Out of 114 respondents, approximately 76.3% belonged to the age group of 18–25 years, followed by 21.1% in the age group of 26–35 years. Respondents above the age of 35 constituted only a negligible proportion.

The data clearly indicate that young consumers constitute the dominant users of e-commerce platforms. Consequently, awareness regarding consumer rights among youth assumes considerable significance in the digital economy.

Frequency of Online Shopping

The study reveals that a substantial majority of respondents regularly engage in online shopping. E-commerce platforms have become an integral part of the lifestyle of university students because of convenience, availability of products, and competitive prices.

Problems Encountered During Online Shopping

A significant number of respondents reported facing various difficulties while purchasing goods online. The most common problems identified include delayed delivery, defective products, refund-related issues, and discrepancies between advertised and actual products received.

The prevalence of these issues indicates that despite advancements in e-commerce, consumers continue to encounter practical difficulties that affect their confidence in digital transactions.

Awareness Regarding Consumer Rights

The findings indicate that although respondents actively participate in online shopping, awareness regarding rights under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 remains inadequate. A considerable

number of respondents were unaware of their right to seek compensation, product liability provisions, and the availability of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

The lack of legal awareness highlights the gap between statutory protections and their actual realization among consumers.

Awareness Regarding Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

One of the major findings of the study is the low level of awareness regarding institutional mechanisms available for redressal of consumer grievances. Many respondents were unfamiliar with the e-Daakhil portal, National Consumer Helpline, and Consumer Commissions.

This finding demonstrates that lack of awareness remains one of the principal obstacles in ensuring effective consumer protection.

Satisfaction with Existing Grievance Redressal System

Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with existing redressal mechanisms because of procedural complexities, lack of information, and perceived delays in obtaining remedies. The findings suggest that consumers prefer simple, user-friendly, and technology-driven dispute resolution mechanisms.

Major Findings of the Study

The study reveals that online shopping has become widely prevalent among students of Sambalpur University, with young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 constituting the largest category of online consumers. The findings indicate that delayed deliveries, defective products, and refund-related disputes are among the most common problems encountered by consumers while engaging in e-commerce transactions. Despite the increasing dependence on online shopping platforms, awareness regarding consumer rights guaranteed under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 remains comparatively low. The study further reveals that a majority of respondents are unfamiliar with digital grievance redressal mechanisms, particularly the e-Daakhil portal and consumer commissions. Many consumers perceive the existing dispute resolution system as time-consuming and procedurally complex, which discourages them from seeking legal remedies. Consequently, a significant gap exists between the legislative safeguards available under consumer protection laws and the practical awareness of consumers regarding their rights and remedies. The findings also

suggest that educational institutions can play a crucial role in promoting legal awareness and enhancing digital consumer literacy through awareness programmes and legal education initiatives. The findings demonstrate that although India possesses a comprehensive legal framework for online consumer protection, its effectiveness largely depends upon consumer awareness, accessibility of remedies, and institutional support. Therefore, strengthening legal literacy and simplifying digital grievance mechanisms are essential for ensuring meaningful realization of consumer rights in the digital marketplace.

SUGGESTIONS

The empirical findings of the study reveal that although online shopping has become an integral part of consumer behavior among students of Sambalpur University, awareness regarding legal rights and grievance redressal mechanisms remains inadequate. In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen consumer protection in the digital marketplace.

Strengthening Consumer Awareness and Legal Literacy

One of the major challenges identified in the study is the lack of awareness regarding consumer rights under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020. Educational institutions should conduct regular consumer awareness programmes, seminars, workshops, and legal literacy campaigns to familiarize students with their rights and remedies. Universities may also introduce short certificate courses and awareness modules relating to digital consumer rights and cyber safety.

Establishment of Consumer Clubs in Educational Institutions

Consumer Clubs should be established in universities and colleges under the guidance of the Department of Consumer Affairs and State Legal Services Authorities. Such clubs can promote consumer awareness through debates, workshops, awareness campaigns, and legal aid activities. These initiatives would contribute to developing responsible and informed consumers.

Promotion of Digital Grievance Redressal Mechanisms

The study indicates that a significant number of respondents are unaware of the e-Daakhil portal and National Consumer Helpline. Therefore, awareness campaigns should be organized to educate consumers regarding online complaint filing procedures and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Simplification of the e-Daakhil portal and enhancement of user accessibility would further encourage consumers to seek legal remedies.

Strengthening the Role of the Central Consumer Protection Authority

The Central Consumer Protection Authority should intensify its efforts to monitor misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and deceptive online marketing strategies. Stronger regulatory supervision and effective enforcement measures are essential to ensure accountability of e-commerce entities and protect consumer interests.

Integration of Consumer Protection and Data Privacy Laws

With increasing dependence on digital platforms, protection of personal data has become equally important. There is a need for harmonization between the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 to ensure comprehensive protection against misuse of consumer data, unauthorized profiling, and privacy violations by e-commerce platforms.

Encouraging Online Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation and online dispute resolution (ODR) should be promoted to facilitate speedy, cost-effective, and accessible resolution of consumer disputes. Strengthening technological infrastructure and adopting artificial intelligence-based dispute resolution mechanisms may significantly reduce pendency and procedural delays.

Periodic Review of E-Commerce Regulations

Rapid technological advancements and evolving business models necessitate periodic revision of the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020. Issues relating to algorithmic discrimination, dark patterns, dynamic pricing, and artificial intelligence-driven advertising require comprehensive regulatory responses to ensure fairness and transparency in digital commerce.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of e-commerce has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior and commercial transactions by providing unprecedented convenience, accessibility, and diversity of products and services. However, the digital marketplace has also generated new forms of consumer vulnerability, including misleading advertisements, defective products, delayed deliveries, refund disputes, cyber fraud, and privacy concerns. These challenges necessitated the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020, which together constitute a comprehensive framework for protecting consumers in the digital era.

The present study, based on an empirical analysis of 114 respondents from Sambalpur University, reveals that online shopping has become highly prevalent among young consumers. Nevertheless, awareness regarding consumer rights and grievance redressal mechanisms remains inadequate. The findings indicate that delayed deliveries, defective products, and refund-related disputes are among the most common problems encountered by consumers. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of respondents were unaware of the e-Daakhil portal, National Consumer Helpline, and other institutional mechanisms available for redressal of grievances.

Although India possesses a progressive legal framework capable of addressing the challenges arising from digital commerce, effective implementation remains a major concern. Legislative safeguards alone cannot guarantee consumer welfare unless accompanied by awareness, accessibility, and efficient enforcement mechanisms. The gap between legal provisions and practical realization of rights continues to impede effective consumer protection, particularly in semi-urban regions.

The study emphasizes that educational institutions have an important role to play in promoting consumer awareness and digital literacy. Strengthening legal education, simplifying grievance redressal mechanisms, encouraging online dispute resolution, and ensuring greater accountability of e-commerce entities are essential for building consumer confidence in the digital economy. Moreover, integration of consumer protection with emerging data protection and artificial intelligence regulations will be crucial in addressing future challenges posed by technological advancements.

In conclusion, while the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 represents a significant milestone in safeguarding consumer interests in the digital age, continuous legal reforms, institutional support, and consumer awareness are indispensable for ensuring that the benefits of e-commerce are accompanied by effective protection of consumer rights. A consumer-centric, transparent, and accountable digital marketplace is essential for achieving sustainable growth and strengthening public trust in the evolving digital economy.

