

Evolution of Consumer Rights and Awareness in India: 1986–2025

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Abstract - Consumer rights and awareness have undergone a significant transformation in India over the past four decades. From the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act in 1986 to the emergence of digital commerce and online marketplaces, consumers today are more informed, empowered, and vigilant. This review synthesizes studies from 1986 to 2025, with a focus on consumer awareness, grievance redressal mechanisms, purchasing behavior, and the impact of technological and macroeconomic changes. Drawing upon empirical studies, surveys, and case analyses, this paper traces the evolution of consumer knowledge, perception, and rights advocacy in India, highlighting the critical role of education, legislation, and digital platforms in shaping contemporary consumer behavior.

Keywords - Consumer Rights, Consumer Awareness, Consumer Protection Act, FMCG, Online Retail, Quick Commerce, India, 1986–2025.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Consumer Protection Act (CPA) of 1986 marked a watershed moment in Indian consumer law, establishing statutory mechanisms for grievance redressal and rights protection (Tamilmani, 2017). Early studies indicated limited awareness among consumers, particularly in tier-2 and tier-3 cities (Tamilmani, 2016). Over the years, socio-economic development, digital literacy, and increased media coverage have dramatically influenced consumer awareness levels. Simultaneously, rapid growth in the FMCG sector, e-commerce, and digital payments has created new challenges and opportunities for consumer empowerment. This review consolidates findings from research conducted between 2016 and 2025 to trace the evolution of consumer rights awareness in India.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the Consumer Protection Act (1986), many Indian consumers remain unaware of their rights and the

grievance redressal mechanisms. Studies indicate that both urban and rural consumers face challenges in accessing information, understanding consumer laws, and applying these laws in practical scenarios. Furthermore, the rapid growth of e-commerce, digital payments, and FMCG markets introduces new dimensions to consumer rights that require ongoing awareness and adaptation.

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the historical evolution of consumer rights and awareness in India from 1986 to 2025.
- To examine the level of consumer awareness regarding grievance redressal mechanisms.
- To analyze changes in consumer behavior in FMCG, retail, and online markets.
- To assess the impact of macroeconomic policies and government initiatives on consumer empowerment.
- To explore the influence of technology, including digital platforms and Industry 4.0, on consumer rights awareness.

- To identify emerging challenges and trends in consumer rights awareness in contemporary India.
- Consumer Awareness and Grievance Redressal
- Initial research highlighted the low awareness of consumer rights and redressal mechanisms. Tamilmani (2016, 2017) conducted studies in Coimbatore City, revealing that while legal frameworks existed, most consumers lacked knowledge of how to access grievance redressal machinery. Collaborative studies (Kanagaraj, Tamilmani & Archana, 2016) emphasized procedural complexities that discouraged consumer complaints.

Over time, awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and media outreach improved consumer knowledge. Recent studies (Tamilmani & Archana, 2025) show that consumers in urban areas now actively utilize grievance redressal mechanisms, reflecting a shift towards proactive consumer behavior.

Consumer Behaviour in FMCG and Retail Markets

Research conducted between 2020 and 2025 underscores the impact of branding, international trade, and digital platforms on consumer decisions:

- Tamilmani & Jeyalakshmi (2020) analyzed consumer perception of international FMCG products in Coimbatore, highlighting trust and quality perception as key drivers.
- Tamilmani (2023a, 2023b) examined the influence of international trademarks on consumer trust, demonstrating the role of branding in consumer decision-making.
- Studies on quick commerce and online grocery platforms (VM & Tamilmani, 2025; Tamilmani & Archana, 2025) indicate rising consumer expectations for convenience, speed, and reliability, reflecting the shift from traditional retail to digital channels.

These studies collectively suggest that consumer rights are increasingly linked with service quality, digital literacy, and brand accountability, beyond traditional legal awareness.

Impact of Macro-Economic and Policy Factors

Macroeconomic factors and government initiatives have further influenced consumer awareness:

- Tamilmani (2022) examined the effect of macroeconomic variables on investment-related decisions, indirectly reflecting consumer sensitivity to economic conditions.
- The implementation of MGNREGA has enhanced rural income and consumer empowerment (Tamilmani, 2024; Saikrishnan, Tamilmani & Archana, 2025), highlighting the importance of socio-economic policies in shaping consumer behavior.
- These findings indicate a broader contextual framework, where consumer rights and awareness are not only legal constructs but also outcomes of economic and social development.

Technological Influence and Industry 4.0

Digital transformation has redefined consumer interaction with markets:

- The integration of Blockchain and Industrial IoT (Tamilmani et al., 2023) has improved transparency in supply chains, indirectly enhancing consumer trust.
- AI-based financial and marketing analytics (Sutar & Tamilmani, 2023) facilitate personalized offerings, requiring consumers to be aware of their rights in digital transactions.
- Digital literacy and e-commerce platforms are critical in modern consumer rights awareness, bridging gaps between legislation and practical enforcement.

Emerging Trends and Challenges

Despite progress, challenges remain:

- Cross-border education and consumption (Sundareswari & Tamilmani, 2025) demonstrate the complexity of consumer rights in global contexts.
- Credit card usage and fintech adoption (Sukiivaradhan & Tamilmani, 2025) pose regulatory and awareness challenges.
- Gender- and age-specific behavioral patterns (Tamilmani, 2025) highlight the need for targeted awareness campaigns.
- Future research must explore the intersection of digital commerce, financial literacy, and evolving

consumer legislation to strengthen consumer protection mechanisms.

II. CONCLUSION

The evolution of consumer rights and awareness in India reflects a progressive trajectory from limited legal knowledge in the 1980s to informed, proactive consumers in 2025. Research indicates that education, legislation, technology, and socio-economic policies collectively enhance consumer empowerment. By synthesizing studies conducted by Tamilmani (2016–2025) and collaborators, this review highlights the importance of continuous awareness initiatives, technological adaptation, and policy integration for a robust consumer protection ecosystem in India.

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