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PUBLIC AWARENESS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS: A STUDY IN CHENNAI

AUTHORED BY - ARULRAJ P

ABSTRACT

Consumer protection is important in markets involving retail purchases, digital commerce, financial services, transport, food products and other services. This journal examines public awareness of consumer rights in Chennai through two methods: doctrinal analysis of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and related official resources, and a proposed non-doctrinal questionnaire study. To demonstrate the intended analysis, it includes a clearly labelled illustrative dataset of 100 respondents, frequency tables, percentage calculations, graphs, findings and recommendations. The illustrative results suggest possible gaps in awareness of statutory rights, complaint mechanisms and everyday consumer practices. These figures are a model for analysis only and must not be described as actual survey results unless verified by fieldwork.

KEYWORDS

Consumer rights; Consumer Protection Act, 2019; Chennai; consumer awareness; doctrinal research; empirical research; questionnaire; grievance redressal.

CHAPTER I — INTRODUCTION

Consumers regularly purchase goods and use services, including through e-commerce platforms. Information asymmetry, misleading advertisements, defective products, hidden charges and poor after-sales service can weaken a consumer's ability to make informed choices. Legal protection is effective only when people know their rights and the practical routes available to raise a grievance.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 modernises India's consumer-protection framework, including provisions concerning e-commerce, product liability, unfair trade practices and the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA). The National Consumer Helpline (NCH) provides a pre-litigation grievance mechanism. Official information identifies six consumer rights: safety, information, choice, being heard, redressal and consumer education. [1][2]

Statement of the Problem

Although consumer-protection laws and complaint channels exist, the extent to which members of the public understand their rights and know how to seek redressal may vary with education, access to information, shopping practices and digital literacy. The study proposes to examine these issues among a sample of consumers in Chennai.

Research Questions

- How familiar are respondents with consumer rights under Indian law?
- Do consumers check bills, MRP, expiry dates and product information?
- Do respondents know where and how to raise consumer grievances?
- What action do consumers take when goods or services cause a problem?
- What measures may improve public awareness in Chennai?

Objectives

1. To explain the legal framework governing consumer rights in India.
2. To assess awareness of consumer rights through a structured questionnaire.
3. To study consumer practices relating to bills, labels and online purchases.
4. To identify awareness gaps in grievance redressal mechanisms.
5. To suggest practical measures for consumer education and legal awareness.

Hypotheses

H1: Consumer awareness of legal rights and complaint mechanisms is not uniform among respondents. H2: Knowing that consumer rights exist does not necessarily mean that a person knows how to file a complaint. These hypotheses should be tested against actual survey responses; the illustrative data below cannot establish population-wide conclusions.

Scope and Limitations

The proposed geographical scope is Chennai. A sample of 100 adults is used as the planning model. A convenience sample is practical for an internship but cannot represent every Chennai resident. Results may be affected by sample selection, self-reporting, question wording and limited sample size. Findings should be described as relating to the respondents surveyed, not all residents of Chennai.

CHAPTER II — DOCTRINAL RESEARCH: LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. Consumer Protection Act, 2019

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 came into effect on 20 July 2020. It provides a framework for consumer rights and remedies and addresses, among other matters, unfair trade practices, misleading advertisements, product liability and e-commerce. The official Department of Consumer Affairs maintains the Act and related rules. [1][2]

2. Six Recognised Consumer Rights

Right	Meaning in brief
Right to Safety	Protection against goods and services hazardous to life and property.
Right to be Informed	Access to relevant information such as quality, quantity, price and standards.
Right to Choose	Access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices.
Right to be Heard	Consumer interests and complaints should receive due consideration.
Right to Seek Redressal	Ability to seek remedy for unfair trade practices or exploitation.
Right to Consumer Education	Ability to learn about rights and make informed decisions.

These descriptions are summaries for educational use. The statutory text and official guidance should be consulted for exact legal wording. [3]

3. Central Consumer Protection Authority

The CCPA is empowered to address violations of consumer rights, unfair trade practices and misleading advertisements affecting consumers as a class. Its functions include investigation, directions relating to recall/refund or discontinuance of specified practices, and promotion of consumer awareness. Individual consumer grievances can also be taken to the National Consumer Helpline and, where appropriate, the relevant Consumer Commission. [4][5]

4. Consumer Grievance Redressal

The National Consumer Helpline lists 1915 and 1800-11-4000 as contact numbers and provides online and other channels for lodging grievances. The NCH is a pre-litigation mechanism; if

the matter remains unresolved, a consumer may consider approaching the appropriate Consumer Commission. The current official portal should be checked before filing because processes and links may change. [4][5]

5. E-commerce and Misleading Advertisements

The 2019 Act extends consumer-protection principles to electronic transactions and includes provisions addressing misleading advertisements and product liability. Consumers should preserve invoices, order confirmations, screenshots, warranty terms, correspondence and payment records when raising a dispute. [1][2]

Doctrinal Method

The doctrinal component uses primary legal materials and official government guidance. The researcher should read the Act and applicable rules directly, distinguish statutory provisions from summaries, and verify any case law through reliable legal databases or official judgments. This draft does not invent case citations; relevant judgments may be added after independent verification.

CHAPTER III — NON-DOCTRINAL RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Design

A descriptive, cross-sectional survey is proposed. Data would be collected once from adult consumers in selected Chennai localities using a structured questionnaire. The study combines closed-ended questions for frequency analysis with an optional open-ended question for suggestions.

Item	Proposed design
Study area	Selected residential, commercial and public locations in Chennai
Target group	Adults aged 18 years and above who purchase goods or use services
Proposed sample	100 respondents
Sampling method	Convenience sampling, with an effort to include varied age and occupation groups
Tool	Structured questionnaire, administered in English or Tamil
Analysis	Counts, percentages, frequency tables and bar graphs
Ethics	Voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and no unnecessary personal data

Sampling and Data Collection Procedure

1. Explain the purpose of the study and obtain voluntary consent.
2. Recruit 100 adult respondents from more than one location, where feasible.
3. Do not collect names, phone numbers, addresses or other identifiers unless genuinely necessary and separately justified.
4. Ask each respondent the same core questions and avoid leading wording.
5. Check questionnaires for missing or inconsistent answers without changing responses to fit expectations.
6. Enter actual responses into a spreadsheet; calculate frequencies and percentages.
7. Retain only anonymised data and report limitations transparently.

Data Analysis Formula

Percentage = (Number of respondents selecting an answer ÷ Total valid responses to that question) × 100. Where 100 valid responses are recorded, the count and percentage are numerically equal. For questions allowing multiple answers, totals may exceed 100 and must be labelled accordingly.

CHAPTER IV — ILLUSTRATIVE SURVEY DATA AND ANALYSIS

IMPORTANT: Every figure in this chapter is illustrative, constructed to demonstrate how results from 100 respondents could be tabulated and graphed. It is not evidence that 100 people were actually interviewed. Replace these numbers with the real survey dataset before submitting the work as empirical research.

A. Illustrative respondent profile

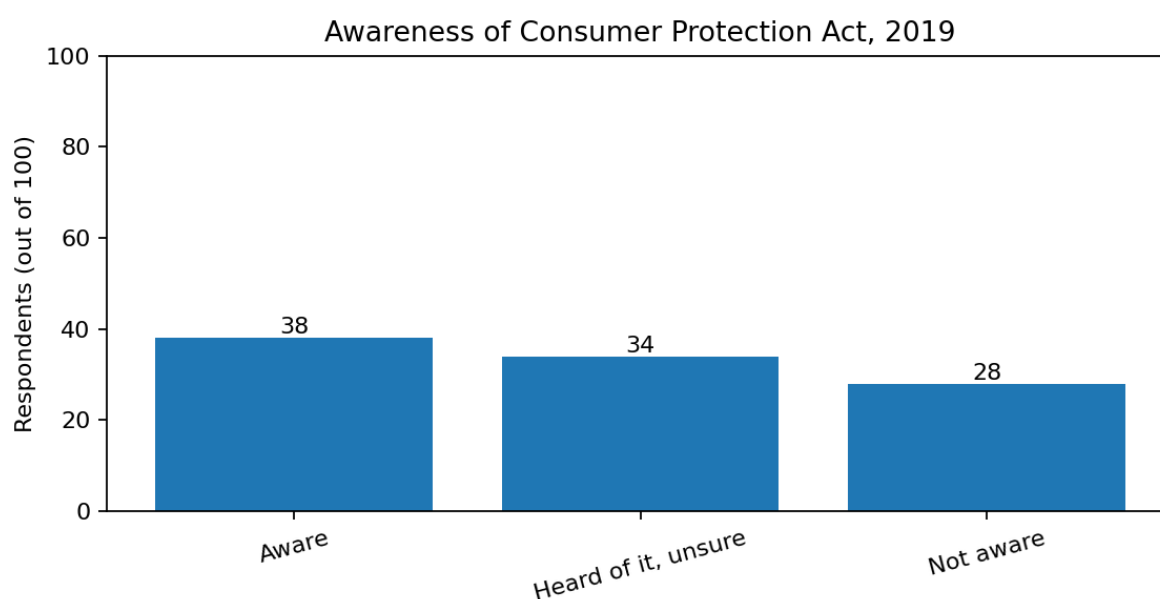
Variable	Category	Illustrative count	Percentage
Age	18–25	22	22%
Age	26–35	30	30%
Age	36–45	24	24%
Age	46 and above	24	24%
Gender	Men	54	54%
Gender	Women	44	44%
Gender	Prefer not to say / other	2	2%
Education	School level	20	20%

Education	Undergraduate	38	38%
Education	Postgraduate	28	28%
Education	Other	14	14%

B. Awareness of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019

Response	Count (n=100)	Percentage
Clearly aware	38	38%
Heard of it but unsure of details	34	34%
Not aware	28	28%
Total	100	100%

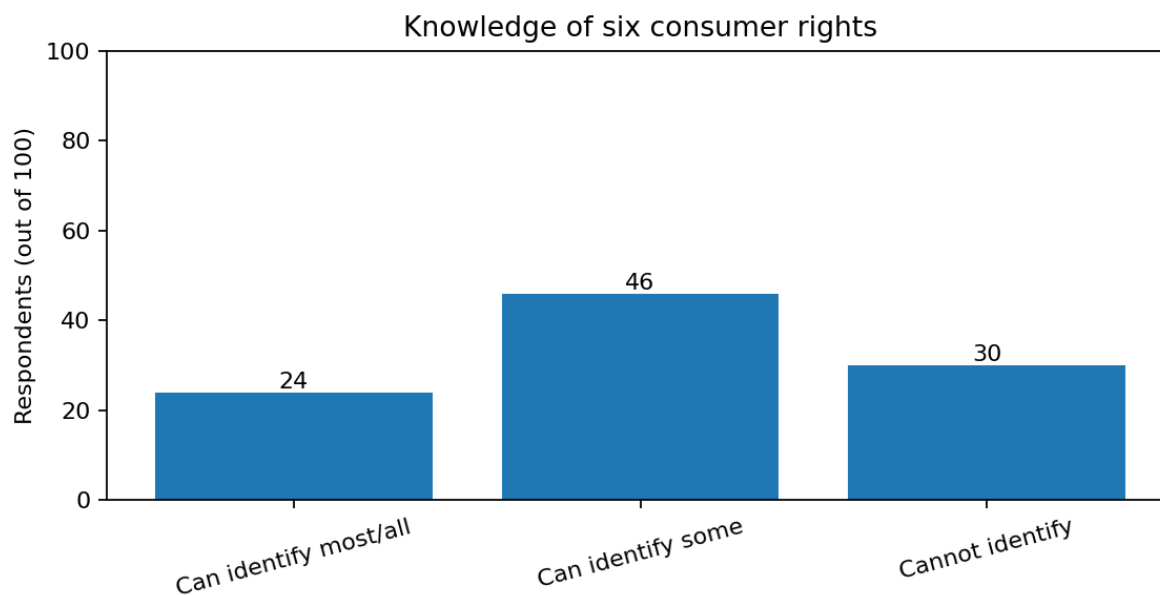
Interpretation: In this illustrative dataset, 38% are clearly aware of the Act, while 62% report either partial familiarity or no awareness. This indicates a possible need for practical awareness campaigns, but the figures cannot be generalised to Chennai without a valid sample.



C. Knowledge of six consumer rights

Response	Count	Percentage
Can identify most or all six rights	24	24%
Can identify some rights	46	46%
Cannot identify the rights	30	30%
Total	100	100%

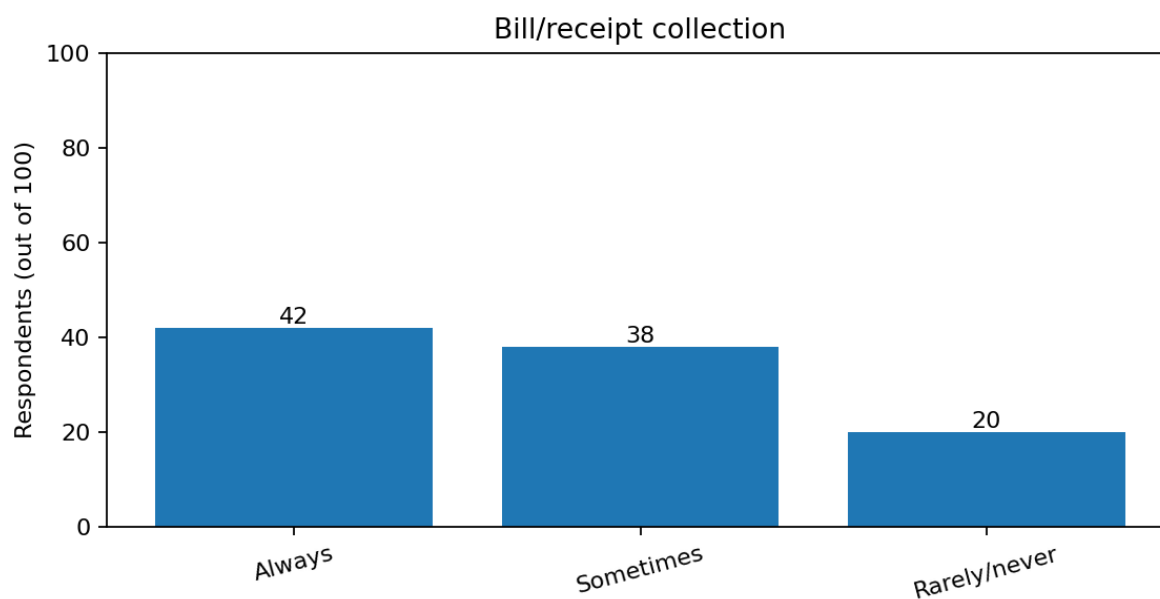
Interpretation: The illustrative result suggests that familiarity with individual rights may be incomplete even where people have heard of consumer protection.



D. Bill or receipt collection

Response	Count	Percentage
Always ask for/keep a bill	42	42%
Sometimes	38	38%
Rarely or never	20	20%
Total	100	100%

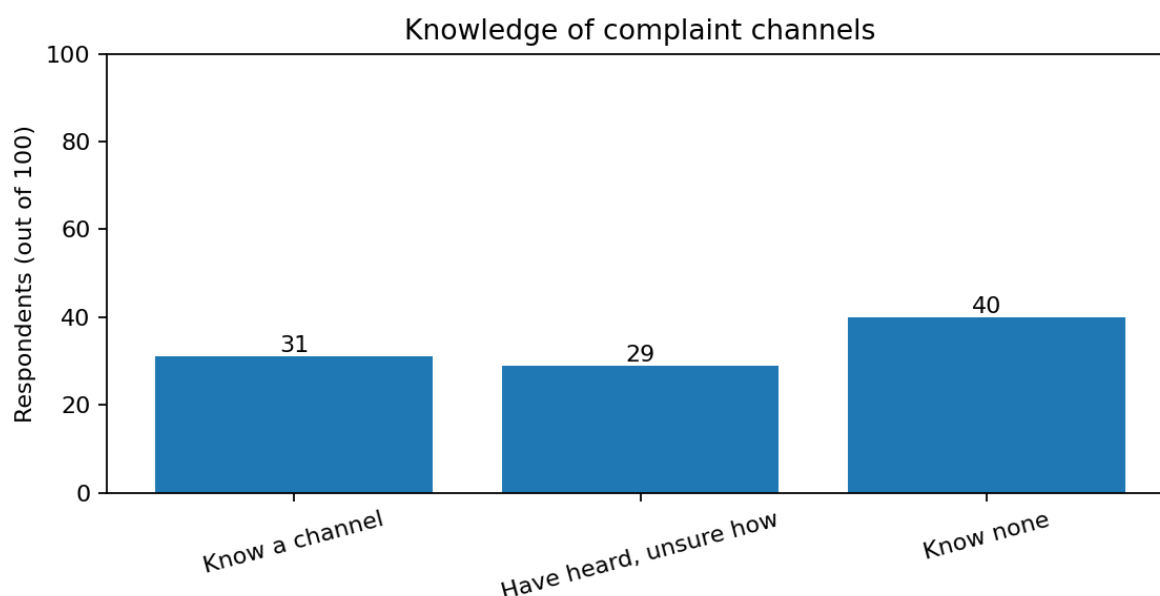
Interpretation: In this model, 58% do not always keep a bill. A bill or digital invoice can be important evidence of a purchase, though the precise documents needed depend on the dispute.



E. Knowledge of complaint channels

Response	Count	Percentage
Know a complaint channel and how to approach it	31	31%
Have heard of a channel but are unsure how to use it	29	29%
Know no complaint channel	40	40%
Total	100	100%

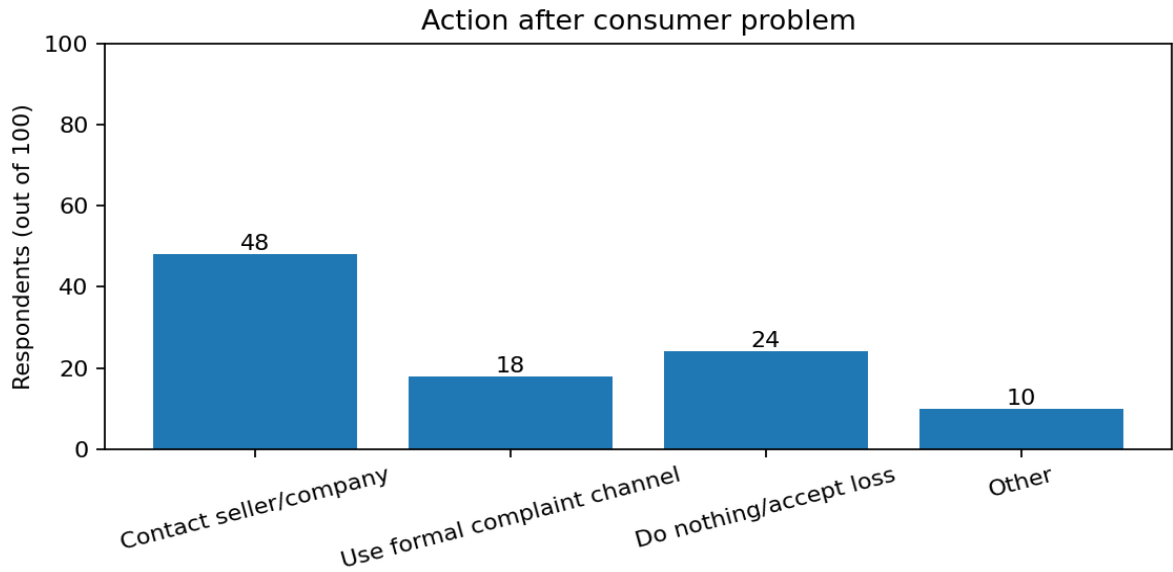
Interpretation: This illustrative distribution points to a practical information gap. Consumer education should explain the National Consumer Helpline and the route to the appropriate Consumer Commission.



F. Action taken after a consumer problem

Response	Count	Percentage
Contact seller/company first	48	48%
Use a formal complaint channel	18	18%
Do nothing or accept the loss	24	24%
Other action	10	10%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: The model shows that direct contact with a seller/company is the most common first response, while 18% use a formal channel. Actual survey wording should specify whether this question concerns the most recent problem or usual behaviour.



G. Summary of illustrative results

Indicator	Illustrative result	Possible implication
Clear awareness of the Act	38%	Use simple explanations of the law and rights.
Can identify most/all six rights	24%	Teach the rights using examples from daily purchases.
Always collect a bill	42%	Promote bill retention and digital receipts.
Know a complaint channel	31%	Explain complaint channels and required documents.
Use a formal channel after a problem	18%	Provide practical filing guidance and referral information.

CHAPTER V — FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Illustrative Findings

- The model dataset suggests that awareness of the Act may be lower than general exposure to the term consumer rights.
- Knowledge of the six recognised rights appears limited in the illustrative distribution.
- Bill collection is not consistent in the model data.
- Awareness of formal grievance mechanisms is a key potential gap.
- Respondents may first approach sellers directly; some may accept losses rather than escalate complaints.

Suggestions

1. Conduct consumer-rights awareness sessions in colleges, workplaces, resident associations and local markets.
2. Use Tamil and English posters, short videos and examples of common problems such as defective goods, misleading advertisements and online-delivery disputes.
3. Publicise the National Consumer Helpline number 1915 and official portal, while explaining that the NCH is a pre-litigation mechanism.
4. Encourage consumers to request and preserve bills, receipts, warranties, screenshots and complaint correspondence.
5. Teach consumers to check MRP, expiry dates, quantity, product labels and relevant certification marks.
6. Provide a simple step-by-step guide explaining when to contact a seller, when to use the NCH and when to approach a Consumer Commission.
7. Repeat the survey with a larger and more representative sample and compare results by age, education and online-shopping frequency.

Conclusion

Consumer rights are meaningful when consumers can recognise unfair practices, preserve evidence and access an effective remedy. The doctrinal component of this journal explains the statutory framework and official grievance resources, while the non-doctrinal component provides a structure for measuring awareness among consumers in Chennai. The included tables and graphs are illustrative only. A defensible final conclusion must be based on genuine questionnaire responses, a transparent sampling method and careful interpretation of the limits of the sample

CHAPTER VI — QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Public Awareness of Consumer Rights: A Study in Chennai

Instructions: Participation is voluntary. Do not write your name. Select one answer unless the question says “select all that apply.”

1. Age group?

18–25 / 26–35 / 36–45 / 46 and above

2. What is your highest educational qualification?

School level / Undergraduate / Postgraduate / Other

3. Are you aware of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019?

Yes, clearly / Heard of it but unsure / No

4. Can you identify the six recognised consumer rights?

Most or all / Some / None

5. Do you check the MRP and expiry date before buying products?

Always / Sometimes / Rarely or never

6. Do you ask for and keep a bill or receipt?

Always / Sometimes / Rarely or never

7. Have you experienced a defective product, poor service, overcharging or misleading advertisement in the last 12 months?

Yes / No / Prefer not to say

8. If you faced a consumer problem, what did you do most recently?

Contacted seller/company / Used a formal complaint channel / Accepted the loss or did nothing / Other / Not applicable

9. Do you know the National Consumer Helpline number 1915?

Yes / No / Not sure

10. Do you know how to submit a consumer grievance online or through the helpline?

Yes / Partly / No

11. Have you ever filed a consumer complaint with a formal grievance mechanism or Consumer Commission?

Yes / No / Prefer not to say

12. What is your main source of information about consumer rights?

TV/radio/newspaper / Social media / Government website / Friends/family / School/college / Other

13. Do you read return, refund and warranty conditions before purchase?

Always / Sometimes / Rarely or never

14. Do you shop online?

Frequently / Sometimes / Never

15. What is the biggest obstacle to filing a complaint?

Lack of knowledge / Time and effort / Uncertainty about outcome / Difficulty with online process / No obstacle / Other

16. What would help improve consumer awareness in Chennai?

Open-ended response

APPENDIX — FIELDWORK RECORD TEMPLATE

Date	Locality (avoid exact address)	Questionnaires completed	Notes
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

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1. Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India, “Consumer Protection Act,” official Acts and Rules page: <https://consumeraffairs.gov.in/pages/consumer-protection-acts>
2. National Consumer Helpline, “Consumer Protection Act 2019” (official knowledge base):
<https://www.consumerhelpline.gov.in/public/index.php/knowledgebasedetails/Consumer%20Protection%20Act%202019>
3. National Consumer Helpline, “Consumer Rights”:
<https://consumerhelpline.gov.in/public/index.php/consumerrights>
4. National Consumer Helpline, official portal: <https://consumerhelpline.gov.in/>
5. Central Consumer Protection Authority, Government of India, official website and functions: <https://ccpa.doca.gov.in/>
6. Shruthi, P. and Uma Maheshwari, “Awareness about Consumer Protection Act amongst Patients Visiting a Private Medical College and Hospital at Chennai: A Descriptive Study,” Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, 15(2), 2021, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37506/ijfmt.v15i2.14350>. This is a related study in a specific hospital-patient population, not a substitute for this proposed general public survey.

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Before submission, conduct the survey or clearly title the numerical chapter “Illustrative Model Analysis.” Do not state that interviews were conducted, respondents were contacted, or results were observed unless those activities actually occurred. If real data are collected, replace every illustrative count, percentage, interpretation and graph with calculations from the actual responses.