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Consumer Protection in Digital Environment in Pakistan

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Abstract

Development of technology and specifically information technology has changed the way things were done and dealt in past. Buying and purchasing feature of humans is as old as making being basic need and necessity. Various measures had also been taken to protect the interest of parties. In a contract of sale, the seller focusses on consideration which is mostly certain like a specific currency and quantum of that very currency but the purchaser is uncertain about many things like quality, durability, originality and certainty. Law of consumer protection deals with the buyers of commodities and services to ensure that they are not exploited by the sellers and service providers. With the evolution of information technology and digitalization these contracts are taking place online and to ensure the protection of consumer rights has become more complex especially in transnational commercial activities. The present research study has highlighted that what are the possible issues that may arise with a focus on protection of consumer rights. In online transactions and week jurisdictions like Pakistan it is double edged sword that on one end customer do not find appropriate remedies and on the other end consumer activism brings a bad name for those enterprises who are really concerned about their name and repute. Tips have been provided that how good businesses can avoid unnecessary litigation and bad repute. It has also been suggested that consumer courts must realize the importance of online consumers because that is need of time and that saves a lot of energy, resources and cost. During the era of Covid 19 it importance was multiplied so these online consumers deserve same level of protection like on the counter consumers.

Keywords: Consumer Rights, Consumer Courts, Digitalization, Online shopping,

Introduction

From birth, a person begins consuming. Clothing, milk, oil, soap, water, and a variety of other necessities are all necessary for his survival throughout his life. As a result, we are all consumers in the most literal meaning of the word. We



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demand value for our money when we enter the market, which includes the right amount, quality, and price as well as information on how to use it to achieve the best possible results. Since the global digital revolution began, we have seen an increase in the usage of the internet for e-commerce and online shopping and it is going on and on (Reed, 2020). Nevertheless, it's a fantastic tool for saving time and money, among many other advantages that will be covered later. However, as everything has advantages and disadvantages, there may be instances in which an internet customer is duped and his complaint goes unanswered. An appropriately developed legal framework aids in preserving the trust and confidence of Pakistani online buyers, protecting them against anything from fraudulent transactions and false product descriptions to delayed deliveries and subpar customer service. In order to safeguard consumers, legislative frameworks that hold companies responsible for their actions operate as a deterrent to unfair tactics and promote moral behaviour in the e-commerce industry (Rahool M, 2019).

Online enterprises have grown rapidly in Pakistan in the fast-paced digital age. Addressing possible problems is crucial as customers depend more and more on e-commerce platforms to meet their buying demands. A sufficient, effective, and modern legal framework that creates deterrent regulations is essential for settling conflicts between customers and internet companies.

The Rise of E-commerce in Pakistan

Numerous advantages come with online purchasing, including easier communication, a greater range of products, lower prices, time and money savings on travel, and the possibility to avoid periodically haggling with store owners. The widespread use of cellphones and the introduction of the internet have fundamentally altered how people purchase in Pakistan. E-commerce websites have flourished, offering a wide range of products and services to consumers around the country. This growth can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as improved transit infrastructure, easier payment methods, and increased internet access. As e-commerce has expanded, online businesses have gained a lot of recognition in the Pakistani market. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can now compete with established physical shop fronts because of the level playing field. Along with giving consumers more options, this has opened up new business prospects for businesses. It offers retailers numerous advantages. They can offer their goods without physical stores, which saves money on rent, staff, property taxes, and other expenses. These advantages can only be realized if customers have faith in the quality of the products, the ability to exchange them, the ability to return items, the protection of their data, etc. E-commerce is essential, but its expansion is reliant on a fundamental problem with consumer trust. The legal framework must inevitably expand in terms of efficacy and efficiency if Pakistan's e-commerce industry is to thrive (OECD, 2016).

However, in spite of the benefits, Pakistani internet enterprises still face challenges that may negatively impact client satisfaction. Issues including phone products, deceptive advertising, poor customer service, and delivery problems have proliferated. In this case, consumer courts are crucial to defending the rights of online users.



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Do Existing Consumer Laws extend to E-Commerce?

Many people are wondering if the current consumer laws apply to online marketplaces and e-commerce retailers since e-commerce in Pakistan expands quickly and more and more transactions are made online. Transactions conducted in a digital environment are not particularly covered by current federal and provincial regulations. Although consumer laws do not expressly ban electronic transactions, it is still unclear if consumer courts are the appropriate venue for redress. Determining the court's territorial jurisdiction becomes more difficult with e-commerce because online retailers may be based anywhere in Pakistan or even beyond.

According to Pakistan's E-Commerce Policy, federal and provincial laws should be changed to: (a) define "online transactions"; (b) handle complaints; (c) establish who has the authority to hear complaints; and (d) create online dispute resolution procedures. Clearly identifying "online transactions" and placing them under the purview of the appropriate courts are crucial.

Consumer Rights in Online Transactions

Pakistan has passed laws such as 'The Punjab Consumer Protection Act, 2005' and alike in other provinces to safeguard the rights of consumers. The following are the basic rights guaranteed provided internationally (NNCTAD, 1985) and here in our legislations;

1. **Right to information:** The customer should be provided with accurate, transparent, and truthful information regarding the price, shipping, and refund policies of the desired goods or services.

2. **Right to safety:** Manufacturers should put the safety of their customers first. They ought to be allowed to purchase a safe and defect-free product. If the product does not meet their safety standards, they should also be eligible for a refund or replacement.

3. **Right to be heard:** Consumers have the right to express their thoughts, file complaints, or provide candid feedback about their online purchases. The Consumer Protection Act and Provincial Consumer Protection Councils enable the protection of these rights.

4. **Right to choose:** Consumers have the freedom to pick from a variety of products and services available on the market. They shouldn't be subjected to unfair business practices or forced to purchase a particular good or service.

5. **Right to redress:** Customers have the right to seek redress through consumer courts or other dispute resolution processes in the event of a disagreement. Companies have a right to a fair and impartial hearing and are required to follow the court's decisions.

6. **Right to privacy:** Clients have a right to the confidentiality and safety of their personal information. Online businesses should have robust privacy policies in place to safeguard and ensure the privacy of their customers' information.

Challenges: Despite these rights and the mechanisms in place to protect them, a number of problems remain, including inadequate law enforcement, a lack of consumer awareness, and the need for a stronger framework regarding compensation in the event of harm. Pakistan will strengthen consumer protection and promote a fair marketplace by addressing these problems.



Role of Consumer Courts in Protecting Online Consumers

Pakistani consumer courts have the authority to hear complaints and defend consumers' rights. These courts have the power to handle cases pertaining to online commercial transactions and guarantee equitable treatment for customers. A prompt and economical settlement of conflicts between customers and companies is the main goal of consumer courts. A case titled 'Shaista Jamil Vs. Daraz and another' decided by Lahore High Court Multan Bench is reflection of online dispute (Shaista Jamil Vs. Daraz and Another, 2023).

By serving as an impartial third party, consumer courts guarantee that firms and consumers alike have an equal chance to make their case. The judges can make well-informed decisions based on the information offered since they possess a thorough understanding of consumer laws and regulations. Businesses are required to abide by the court's rulings since they are legally binding.

Consumer courts play a function that goes beyond simply settling conflicts. They are also essential in educating the public about their rights and bringing attention to consumer rights. By doing this, consumer courts enable customers to hold companies responsible for their acts and make educated decisions. The creation of E-Courts, which effectively handle consumer cases, has the potential to revolutionize Pakistan. In the end, this mechanism can lessen the load on other courts by enabling online conflict resolution processes like arbitration or mediation, virtual hearing systems, and speedy case disposition. When e-courts are implemented properly, they will transform consumer dispute resolution, making justice faster and easier for everyone while boosting consumer trust in online shopping.

How to File a Complaint with a Consumer Court?

Customers can use the following actions to lodge a complaint if they have a problem with an online company:

Collect proof: It is crucial to collect all pertinent data pertaining to the dispute before submitting a complaint. Order information, correspondence with the seller, payment receipts, and any further supporting documentation might be included.

Speak with the vendor through Legal Notice: it is a legal requirement to serve a legal notice (The Punjab Consumer Protection Act, 2005) before filing complaint in court. This legal notice serve the main purpose in a way of extra court settlement. It might save time and money of not only the parties but also courts. Often, getting in touch with the vendor directly will take care of the problem. It is best to express the issue and look for a solution in a clear, courteous manner. If the issue is not resolved then move forward to court.

Look up legislation protecting consumers: Learn about the legislation pertaining to consumer protection in Pakistan. This will assist you in comprehending your legal rights and options.

Contact a consumer court: You can submit a complaint to the appropriate consumer court under section 25 of The Punjab Consumer Protection Act if the matter is still unresolved. Give all the information and proof you need to back up your claim. The court will set a hearing after evaluating the grounds of your complaint.



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Go to the hearing: Engage in the court proceedings and make a strong argument. Be ready to respond to enquiries and offer more proof if necessary.

Await the ruling of the court: The consumer court will render a decision following the evaluation of the evidence and the hearing of both parties. The company will be ordered to pay damages or take suitable corrective action if the court finds in your favor.

Loopholes in the Legal framework regarding to the online business

At international level, many laws are working for the consumer protection in digital environment like United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection, European Union's Consumer Rights Directive, The **Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and** Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Act (United States) to deal with the unfair and fraudulent practices in the domain of digital advertising for the protection of e-consumer and promotion of e-commerce, but still the legal framework for the online business dealing with the e-consumers is lagging in many ways creating a lot of back doors for the fraudulent online businesses to protect themselves from being charged and dealt with their violations of Consumer Protection Laws (Bashir et al., 2019). These loop holes lead to inadequate protection for the online consumers and hence ultimately lose their confidence (Jabbar, 2023).

Lack of Clear Regulations: Despite laws being enacted, rules are yet to be framed or enforced in many provinces. Legal frameworks even failed in defining the e-consumers.

No Representation for E-Consumers: The provincial and district level councils working in the field for the protection of consumer's rights don't possess any separate representation for E-consumers.

No Data Protection: In Pakistan's legal framework, despite being a plenty of enacted laws, the data protection laws are scattered in various law and there don't exist any separate law for the data privacy of the consumers. There is no specific authority that can secure this privacy right of E-consumers.

Personal Data Protection Bill: A draft bill has been introduced, but it's yet to be promulgated into law. It establishes a commission to regulate data protection.

Lack of Robust Data Protection Laws: Robust Data Protection Laws grants privacy to the online consumers and gives them control over their Data balancing the use and need of personal data of the consumer and permission to use that allowed data in an allowed manner. Despite the efforts to develop and enforce laws like Electronic Data Privacy Bill 2005, Pakistan still faces difficulty in data protection of the E-Consumer and no key measures have been taken in this regard.

Cybercrimes: Nowadays Cyber-attacks are the most prevalent crimes of Pakistan and these crimes are divided into four categories: Cyber-crimes against individuals, Cyber-crimes against society, cyber-crimes against property and cybercrimes against organizations. For example, Web jacking, piracy, hacking and email spoofing. Although Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016, was enacted to protection online consumer but it is facing a lot of criticism for its less efficiency and vagueness as it has granted excessive powers to the governmental authorities which raised the concerns about data protection and privacy of E-Consumers.



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Surveillance Technology: In the veil of the Country's Safety and to counter terrorism, Law enforcement departments and intelligence agencies have taken the charge to the data controlling by expanding their skills and developing new technologies at national level as well as they have partnered with foreign companies for mass surveillance.

Biometric Data: By maintaining the most sensitive and comprehensive database of the citizen biometric data, Pakistan's National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) has the extensive authority and access to that sensitive data, which is then further shared with government and its wings for the security concerns. But as one single CNIC number is enough to get to the comprehensive detail of a person, it is still alarming.

Gender and Minority: Contrary to the male part of the society, Women and minority faces more data privacy challenges facing serious privacy threats in Pakistan.

Proposed solutions: To eradicate these type of problems from the digital environment of Pakistan and protect the E-Consumer, government should implement a dual-prolonged strategy at both national and international levels, establish a privacy commission for the accountability of the governmental organs regarding to the access and use of the sensitive data and strong protection system to avoid cyber-attacks.

Financial literacy: In Pakistan, there is a very low literacy rate but the percentage of financial literacy is more drastic, only 3% of the population actually have the knowledge about the e-consumer, digital environment or online payments.

Information disclosure and Transparency: Digital Environment of Pakistan lags in the provision of proper mechanisms for reasonably comparing the prices of the products and understanding the business terms and conditions which is a huge hindrance in the development of the digital economy. Proper training and certifications should be required by the online business holders.

Dispute Resolution: As Alternative Dispute resolution works for the speedy and effective dispute resolution being affordable and properly redress the loss of the consumer, it should be introduced virtually for the digital world to redress the e-consumers (Sheikh, 2014).

The Role of Consumer Protection in the Digital Economy

There exists a huge power imbalance between consumers and service providers in a manner that the service providers have greater information about the product, resources and hence have ultimate access to the backdoors to hide their malpractices so the consumers have very limited knowledge making it difficult for a rational decision. Consumers are unaware about most of the characteristics of their desired product and they're unable to test the product before purchase. These practices were done behind the covering of misleading advertisements, unclear guidelines, terms and conditions and hidden fee keeping the online consumer unaware of any type of competition. More challenges are added by the lack of proper redress forum, unawareness about the complaint protocols and procedures, frauds, privacy concerns and complex transactions. Lack of competition results in the low efficiency of digital market, for this purpose, online business owners in monopolistic markets keep the e-consumer unaware about their competition creating a hindrance in their purchase of good quality



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product in less amount. In digital framework, the power of bargaining is also useless for the buyers. Effective implementation of Consumer Protection Laws can result into the confidence of the consumer on digital markets, accountability mechanisms, transparency in transactions and fairness. By addressing abovementioned issues including information disparities and empowering consumers with better information, Consumer Protection laws will create a safer environment, providing equitable grounds for the e-consumers resulting in consumer confidence, advancement in digital field and the sustainable growth of the digital economy (UNCDF, 2021).

Challenges for small online businesses by consumer protection Laws

Online consumer protection laws emerged along with the emergence of Commerce. Many progressed countries like United States, European Union, China and other countries took these initiatives for the better protection of their online consumers and to ensure and secure transparent transactions in online trading system (Winn, 2013). These laws have some positive impacts on the E-Commerce business, like boosting consumer trust leading to the higher rate of their sales and enhanced reputation due to the coherence with ethical and legal standards. These positive impacts give competitive edge to the online businesses that comply with these laws. However, complying with these online consumer protection laws also put some challenges to the small online businesses or startups as these laws require businesses to invest on the technology, security and staff training. These requirements are actually a burden on the new and small online businesses as they are already struggling with the low budget and more competition in the digital market. Another challenge is the diversity of regulations across countries. These exist a number of business with their franchise in different countries, to comply with the online consumer protection laws is pretty challenging as these laws changes with the territorial jurisdiction. These multiple jurisdiction leads to navigating different legal frameworks ultimately creating a financial burden and complexity. Despite all these challenges, online consumer protection laws are very important in digital globe because they not only protect an online consumer but also provide a level playing field and a fair competition in E-Commerce. As e-commerce is continuing to expand internationally, these online consumer protection laws can contribute to the long term success of the e-commerce industry (Bashir, 2023).

Rights of consumer and E- Commerce policy in Pakistan

The acts pertaining to the consumers grant different rights including, right to safety, right of choice, be informed, to be heard and redressed. Many consumers worry about the online thefts and frauds. Online consumer protection laws provide many rights to the e-consumer but the legislations till the present times do not specifically deal with the digital transactions, although these laws don't exclude electronic mediums but still there exist some undeniable questions that whether consumer court is the right forum to be approach for redress. Consumer feels safer in a digital environment where his right to privacy is prioritized and all other consumer protection laws all complied with (Sidekick, 2022). Court's territorial jurisdiction is also under question because the merchants and buyers of digital world live all over the country so it is necessary to draft a plot for



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the jurisdiction of right and approachable forum. It is recommended to clearly define “online transactions” along with the provisions of jurisdiction, complaints procedure and dispute resolution mechanism to clearly add this area into the jurisdiction of the relevant forum and making the legislation clear about the grey areas of digital environment as per the consumer protection in Pakistan.

Cyberspace and E-Commerce

The cart of E-Commerce and digital economy has impressively increased worldwide, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic as it pushed the consumer towards the digital world but the legislated framework of Pakistan is not that much strong to tackle with the advanced digital problems and growing demand of security needs. Unfair cyber practices like shopping from fake websites, data theft, miss leading advertisements and phishing; where the data is stolen by impersonating trusted companies, create a lot of fuss in digital environment losing consumer’s confidence on online system.

Pakistan’s government has taken certain steps to eradicate this issue through E-Commerce Policy, 2019 and National Cyber Security Policy, 2021 but these steps still lags in the enforcement area. A huge amount of E- Consumers in Pakistan prefer ‘Cash on Delivery’ so along with establishing the mobile banking systems like Jazz Cash and Easypaisa government still needs to take efficient and strong steps to build stronger security measures for providing the customers a safe and threat-free digital environment. For this purpose, E-Courts with clear jurisdictions should be established for online dispute resolution along with a department of Cyber Police Force and the legal system should be updated to enforce strict regulations. (Aziz & Hussain Bhatti, 2023). Moreover, there should be an online system that regularly updates the security measure of these online business to avoid any cyber threats or crimes protecting the E-Consumer efficiently.

Enacted Laws

Different countries have enacted different laws with the same aim of consumer protection namely, consumer protection laws, privacy laws; for the protection of consumer’s data from being misused and these laws explicitly require the permission of the consumer for data collecting, Security laws; requiring the online businesses to establish strong security system like encryption system to protect user’s data, Dispute Resolution Laws; for speedy, transparent and fair redress and business dealings.

While in Pakistan, at first stance the Islamabad Consumer Protection Act was enacted in the federal ambit in 1995, the same scheme was followed by the assemblies of all the other provinces to protect the rights of consumers. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it’s enacted as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act, 1997. Likewise, in Baluchistan, it’s enacted as the Baluchistan consumer protection act, 2003, and in Punjab, it’s enacted as Punjab consumer protection Act, 2005. At the last part of riddle, it’s enacted by the Sindh assembly as the Sindh Consumer Protection Act, 2015. All the provincial and federal assemblies made these enactments to support and upheld the rights of consumers by providing them, i.e. Protection of right, Promotion of right, Interests of consumer, speedy redress of consumer complaints and all other matters related to consumer. These laws let



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the consumers feel that online transactions are trustworthy, secure and online businesses are reliable source of quality products and services. Noncompliance results into a drastic effect on the reputation and publicity of the business and businesses have to face penalties, fines and even the criminal charges in this regard.

Digital Divide in Pakistan

After the deregulation of telecom sector in 2003, a huge amount of people in Pakistan lack digital opportunities, internet and mobile connectivity making a gap between the people having access to technology and those who don't have which is a big hindrance to move towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The key issues include low digital literacy, huge amount of taxes, limited fiber connections and inefficient infrastructure. To bridge this gap, government of Pakistan has already taken some steps by making policies like the Digital Pakistan Policy and broadband initiatives but still the element of limited funding, low rate of implementation and less coordination are stopping the progress of Pakistan in digital world. To remove these issues from Pakistan, a collective effort of government, people and private companies is required to build strong digital relations ensuring the growth in digital world as well as economic development.

Globally, ranking low in ICT Adoption is another problem of the E-consumers of Pakistan (Ali, 2024). Lack of education, awareness, income, age and gender are the major reasons of this problem. Moreover, there is a clear segregation of ICT adoption even in different areas of Pakistan, like Punjab have shown better ICT usage than rural areas or Balochistan. Fewer women are allowed to access the online forums, age and education also play a huge role in the type of usage of the digital technology.

Encryption system and Online Transactions

During the online transactions and keeping the cyber-attacks away, encryption can be a cornerstone for safeguarding the sensitive financial information such as account information and identification details. It constitutes the main roles as to maintain the trust in digital payment system along with the protection of the information in a way that even if a criminal succeeds to get the access to this information, he will be unable to read or use it. A faster and more efficient way for this purpose, is the Secret Key Encryption, uses a single key shared to both sender and recipient, to encrypt and decrypt the vulnerable data. Here, Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) is used by industries for the protection of their data using 128-bit, 192-bit or 256-bit keys for its better working. On the other hand, Asymmetric Encryption have two types of keys, one of them is public, used for data encryption while the other is a private key that is used for the decryption of the data (Mervana, 2024). It is more useful in cases of e-commerce and online banking. For improved and efficient protection of online consumer's data in the digital environment of Pakistan, it is necessary to adopt standards like PCI and DSS. With the emergence of quantum computing we need to keep security measure robust, building the consumer's trust on online transactions.

Cross boarder E-Commerce



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Cross boarder e-commerce can be very challenging for the protection of e-consumer (Xue et al., 2016) due to certain factors including cultural changes, diversity in laws, language barriers, and change mechanisms, multiple laws and different litigation system. For this purpose, a separate international law should be made so that each country can abide by the same rules internationally.

Evolution of online payments in Pakistan

From the past 10 years, the use of online banking has been surprisingly increased and it'll not be incorrect if we say that soon, the online system will completely replace the physical banking or cash payments with the hectic working of cheques, payments and cash deposits (Dian, 2023). Pakistan is also taking its baby steps towards the progress and evolution of its digital marketing environment by incorporating the mobile wallets and crypto currency into its system. Mobile banking played a vital role for the inclusion of the financial department of Pakistan. Algorithmic based loans and digital lending platforms are highly promoting the entrepreneurship by the way of online banking services. QR codes allow cashless payments allowing the shopping and payments easier than ever. Despite these small steps towards the advancement, security should be the top priority and multiple steps like encryption, biometrics or authentication should be implemented flawlessly to develop consumer's confidence. For this purpose, qualified technical experts, advanced software systems, domains and commercial programs are required which are still lacking in our country. Moreover, providing access to strong and stable internet connections and promoting technologies which are eco-friendly and customized as per the demand of consumer can also increase the rate of online payments. To increase the digital literacy in the youth, so that they can actively participate in the field of digital marketing, more strategies like provision of advanced skills development should be made. Media platforms to work with the clear terms and conditions and precise guidelines can also play an important role for revolutionizing the position and protection of e-consumer in Pakistan. Products and services should show the best possible quality to comply with the international quality standards, fostering the international relations to cater the e-consumers residing in the different countries. Clear guidelines for the taxes, consumer protection and procedures for complaints should be provided as ambiguous guidelines creates a lot of back doors for the violation of consumer protection laws keeping loss of the consumers unattended.

The Future of Online Business and Consumer Rights in Pakistan

The importance of consumer rights and the function of consumer courts and online business environment of Pakistan are side by side processes. For the promotion of trust in online transactions, the legislators, companies and consumers must collaborate creating a strong regulatory framework.

An awareness of consumer rights is more important rather than educating businesses and consumers about their respective responsibilities. As a result, parties will be benefited from a fair online business environment.

Enacted laws of Pakistan like, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, the West Pakistan Pure Food Authority, the Contract Act of 1872, the Sale of Goods Act of 1930, the Drugs Act



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of 1976, the Agricultural Pesticides Ordinance of 1971, the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority Act and many more laws protect consumer interests to some extent. However, these rules compel the consumer to file a civil suit being expensive and time-consuming legal practice. The role of the Consumer Protection Provincial Act makes it simpler and quicker for customers to have their complaints resolved. These Acts explained the concept of consumers and specifically mentioned the rights of consumers in Pakistan either online or physical. Despite all these rights, these acts still lag in the complete protection of the consumers. The protection is only granted to the person who fit in the definition of a "consumer" under the relevant Act. For instance, the Consumer Protection Acts provide protections against suppliers who harass or defraud consumers, hence dealing with a specified or particular area of the consumers.

But the question on the procedure to seek the protection or remedy still lies there, in the field. Under the Acts, consumer protection councils are established by the government in each province to file consumer related complaints. There is a full fledge mechanism to scrutinize those complaints as Consumer forums with special authority will review these complaints, making it actionable against careless and fraudulent suppliers and compensating the loss of the consumer that resulted in the hardship. These forums are made to follow a consumer friendly mechanism as there is no mandatory requirement to hire an advocate or attorney or the bear the headache of paying any court fee. The legislations specifically made for the consumer's protection also define the private legal and relationship between the consumer and the relevant business of which the consumer is using the product or services.

For the protection of the trust and welfare of consumers on Pakistan's marketing, consumer protection laws developed over time ensuring consumers to have reliable information about the products and services which they are going to purchase. The regulations are working for the eradication of the issues and consumer rights, including the right to have information about cost, competition and safety of the product or services. These legislations also compensate the consumers being harmed by any fraudulent activity. Discouraging the dishonest behavior to create a developed and well maintained society along with the safety of the consumer is the main goal of incorporation of these laws into the legal system of Pakistan.

District consumer courts were established in different districts in the provinces of Pakistan including, Punjab, KPK, Baluchistan and Islamabad. As far as the province of Sindh is concerned, these courts are being established to provide citizens with easy access to the legal forums in case of any dishonor. Along with these district consumer courts, district consumer protection committees have also been established in each province of Pakistan, with the aim of public awareness about their rights being a consumer. The protection of the consumer is necessary as it is the basic unit of the economy of a country resulting in the raise or fall of the economic graph of a country.

Educating the consumers about their rights and relevant forums to be approached in case of breach means enabling them to raise voice for them self and demanding compensation for any harm caused to them so current period has



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been given the name of "Consumer Era".

Unethical business practices result into the complaints and these complaints have a higher rate in the developing countries like Pakistan.

These types of practices have a huge impact on the economy of the country and confidence of the consumer. Considering this fact, unlike Pakistan, Consumer Laws are more frequently being passed in progressing countries.

Ambit of Competition Commission Act

Firms are under a lot of pressure to launch new ideas and products quickly in order to maintain a competitive edge in the highly competitive global market of today. This pressure can lead to firms deviating from the correct course. By outlawing deceptive marketing techniques, such as disseminating inaccurate and misleading information about a product's price, characteristics, manufacturing process or location, qualities, suitability for a given use, or quality, the Competition Act protects consumer rights. The Act also covers fraudulent use of another person's registered trademark, company name, product label, or packaging, as well as false or misleading comparisons of goods in advertising.

A collection of laws known as consumer protection law, or simply "consumer law," regulates the private law interactions between consumers and the companies that supply them with goods and services. Protecting consumer rights and imposing duties on businesses and service providers are the goals of the consumer protection law.

World Consumer Rights Day is March 15. The theme for 2018 was "Fair Digital Finance." "Making Digital Marketplaces Fairer" was the theme. These are crucial topics to concentrate on in a time of rapid digitization.

How can we strengthen consumer protection laws?

Only the improvement or advancement of the working framework is not enough for the protection of consumers in digital environment but raise of awareness regarding to the rights and duties of the consumer in digital environment is necessary. Educating the consumers refer to the raise of awareness that in case of any violation of the Consumer Laws, how, when and where the violation should be reported? This report will help out the enforcing agencies for strict actions prioritizing the ethical practices (Bashir et al., 2023). An educated consumer can more actively participate in the healthy competitions in the digital market and make better decisions. This practice will ultimately lead to advancement of the business, fair dealing and improved product quality and services. The rights of information can only be claimed to its full extent if the consumer has well acquired the skills and knowledge to use that information effectively, avoiding any loss so that he can successfully analyze his rights and duties in this regard. But in this era of instability in Pakistan, educating the consumer is another big issue due to socio economic and cultural barriers. To tackle it, different tailored schemes of education, like collaboration with educational institutes and consumer agencies and campaigns in different areas of Pakistan, according to the need of consumers, can be implemented.

Tips for Online Businesses to Avoid Consumer Court Cases



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Online companies can reduce the danger of consumer court claims by being proactive. Here are some pointers:

Accurate and transparent product descriptions: Give precise and understandable details about your goods and services. Steer clear of overstated claims or deceptive comments that can make customers unhappy.

Customer service that is responsive: Create efficient routes for customer care to quickly handle questions and complaints from customers. Escalated disagreements can be avoided by promptly and satisfactorily addressing consumer complaints.

Systems for safe payments: To safeguard consumer financial information and offer a secure shopping experience, use secure payment channels.

Dependable partners in logistics: Collaborate with reputable logistics firms to guarantee prompt and effective product delivery. To control expectations, keep clients updated on the status of their orders.

Unambiguous return and reimbursement guidelines: Customers should be made aware of your return and refund procedures. Make the procedure simple and guarantee that any requests for returns or refunds are handled quickly.

Conclusion

Consumer courts are crucial to protecting online shoppers' rights and maintaining moral business conduct in Pakistan. With the rise of e-commerce, it is now essential to address the problems that online businesses face and provide consumers with a means of pursuing justice and restitution. Customers' rights when making purchases online are protected by a number of laws and regulations, and they have the option to complain to consumer courts if their concerns are not taken seriously. By adhering to best practices and fostering an ethical culture, online businesses can lower the likelihood of consumer court proceedings and boost customer trust. If Pakistan's online business and consumer rights are to thrive, companies, consumers, and lawmakers must work together to create a fair and acceptable online business climate. By doing this, we can ensure that the growth of e-commerce continues to benefit businesses and consumers alike.

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