

CONSUMER AWARENESS SURVEY IN QUIRINO, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

Consumer awareness is one of the things that serve as a liberating factor in life. The study aims to assess consumers' level of awareness, particularly on consumer rights and responsibilities, programs and projects of consumer protection, and trade and industry laws. A descriptive research design was used in this study to assess consumers' awareness in Quirino province. The survey method was used to gather information from the participants using a designed survey questionnaire from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), region 2. The results of the survey revealed that the majority of the participants are aware of their right to basic needs and environmental issues but not to redress and solidarity. Likewise, most of the participants are aware of the different responsible agencies for products and services. Basic needs and prime commodities are the consumer act's topmost priorities in trade and industry. Moreover, only a few of them attended consumer education activities. The study suggests that there should be more programs on consumer awareness to build knowledge, competence, values, and skills geared toward the development of an aware and responsible consumer. Developed a continuing consumer education program to wake the consumers fully aware of their basic rights and responsibilities.

Keywords: Consumer Awareness, Rights and Responsibilities, Survey, Descriptive Research Quirino Province

INTRODUCTION

Today, along with the growing population in the world, is a significant growth in everyday consumption needs be it food, materials, or services. This daily progression in demand for various products makes the consumers the biggest economic group thus the target of all marketing activities. In short, whatever small decisions these consumers in the market affect their well-being and the economy in general. These decisions are anchored most of the time on the self-effort of consumers is what we call consumerism.

Consumerism as defined by Bloom (1982) is a social movement- which has sought to help consumers attain safer products, more information, adequate selection, and better access to redress mechanisms--has been examined by researchers from numerous disciplines using a wide variety of research approaches. It is in this light that there is a continuous move on the part of governments to raise awareness among consumers which does not only educate them about products but also the rights of the consumers.

Consumer rights gained significance in today's world. March 15 has been designated as global consumer awareness day. This right –consumer right had been internationally recognized when the United Nations (UN) promulgated the basic guidelines regarding consumer rights protection which says that “all citizens, regardless of their incomes or social standing, have basic rights as consumers. Consumer awareness is one of the things that serves as a liberating

factor in life. Kareem, et al (2016) agree saying consumer awareness of the many important issues in daily life is one of the most important priorities, and this awareness liberates society from many of these problems, thereby making that society sophisticated and civilized. He however said that many societies, especially in developing countries, are experiencing problems in sensitizing consumers about many of the necessary everyday products, especially the manufactured food products that have become one of the basic ingredients of the meals on the table every day. The Philippines is no excuse.

In developing countries like the Philippines, where rights are sometimes ignored and taken for granted, it is hard to speculate how many Filipinos are aware of their rights as consumers. While concern for the welfare and protection of consumers is rising locally, data on public perception about their basic consumer rights are limited (Ibarra and Revilla, 2016).

To protect the rights of the consumers, Republic Act 7394, also known as “The Consumer Act of the Philippines” is geared towards controlling fraudulent trade practices to protect the interest of the consumers, promote their general welfare, and establish standards of conduct for business and industry was signed into law in 1992. With this came R.A. 7394 creating the National Consumer Affairs Council (NCAC). This agency is composed of representatives from the government, consumer organizations, and business/industry sector to improve the management, coordination and efficacy of consumer programs.

RA 7394 (Consumer Act of the Philippines of 1991) serves as the legal basis for consumer protection in the country. The law embodies the state policy on the protection of consumers and establishes standards of conduct for business and industry in the country.

The Act aims to protect the “interest of the consumer, promote his general welfare and establish standards of conduct for business and industry” by adopting the following measures: protection against hazards to health and safety; protection against deceptive, unfair and unconscionable acts and practices; provision of information and education to facilitate sound choice and the proper exercise of rights by the consumer; provision of adequate rights and means of redress; and involvement of consumer representatives in the formulation of social and economic policies. In the country, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is a prime mover of consumer welfare. It is the agency primarily not only committed to the protection of the rights and interests of the consumers but also to developing policies and programs aimed at sustaining the growth and development of the Philippine economy. As part of its mandate to protect the consumers, DTI through its Consumer Protection Group (CPG), headed by one of its undersecretaries, is in charge of the enforcement of laws to protect consumers, consumer education, and the formation of consumer groups. It likewise oversees the effective implementation and enforcement of trade regulation and fair trade laws, as well as the protection of consumers through consumer education and information dissemination programs.

Consumer awareness can be done by relying on or making use of various stakeholders like social media, mass media, print media, and the right agencies or institutions in the government’s information drive. In 2017, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) launched the #consumerPH, a social media initiative to increase consumer awareness in the

country. Through its Consumer Protection and Advocacy Bureau (CPAB), the #consumerPH aims to boost the online presence of DTI on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The agency targets to maximize the use of social media to inform, educate, and communicate its advocacy campaign on consumer rights and responsibilities. DTI also has dubbed October as Consumer Welfare Month to further create awareness and promotion of information such as complaints and policies affecting consumers that would later on encourage dialogues and cooperation among consumers, businesses and government agencies. The studies of McEachern & Warnaby (2008); Hartlieb & Jones (2009); Donoghue & de Klerk (2012); Coulter et al. (2005); and Dommeyer & Gross (2003) as cited by Ishak and Zabil (2012) show that consumers' awareness and knowledge impose a significant impact on various types of effective consumers' behaviors. Hartlieb & Jones (2009) as cited by Ishak & Zabil has concretized the claims of the previously cited studies as it emphasizes the importance of ethical labeling for humanizing business images. The function of ethical labeling is to saliently develop the ethical qualities into product features so that customers become aware and have knowledge of the critical aspect which are expected to influence consumers' decisions or behaviors.

Since consumer awareness is one of the things that serve as a liberating factor in life, a lack of knowledge of consumers' rights and claim procedures distorts consumers' capacity and ability to defend themselves against sneaky traders. There is a need therefore to look and validate the extent of consumer awareness Vis a Vis various government initiatives through the DTI to highlight which of the initiatives is doing well and to come up with better. This study particularly will examine the consumer awareness of respondents from Quirino province and which mode of the consumer awareness campaign is most effective.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Generally, the study aims to assess consumers' level of awareness in Quirino, Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research problems:

1. What is the extent of consumers' awareness in the following areas:
 - 1.1 Consumer rights and responsibilities
 - 1.2 Responsible agencies on products and services
 - 1.3 Available remedies for consumer complaints
2. What are the sources of information for the consumer on the advocacy programs in terms of
 - 2.1 Programs and projects on consumer protection
 - 2.2 Trade and Industry Laws, and
 - 2.3 Relevant provisions of the Consumer Act of the Philippines

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used in this study to assess consumers' awareness in Quirino province. The survey method was used to gather information from the participants using a designed survey questionnaire. Descriptive design is seen to be the most appropriate design utilized in this study since it is the widest and most encompassing compared to other methods of investigation. In the context of this study, the researchers aimed to assess awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities, programs and projects on consumer protection, and relevant provisions to further promote consumer protection and its effectiveness on various consumer education and advocacy activities to come up with enhance intervention programs to further promote consumer protection in the province. The participants of the study were the youth (10-18-year-old), middle age (19-59 years old) made up of housewives, farmers/fisher folks, government or private employees, PWD's business sector, college students, OSW's, unemployed, and senior citizens (60 years and above). The number of participants (n) per municipality was computed based on the population (N) of the province. The total population of the province as of the year 2016 is 123, 747 which comprises the youth sector, middle age sector, and senior citizens (PSA, 2019). The number of samples per sector was computed based on the number of population per sector with the percentage distribution per sector which was provided by the DTI-R2. Hence, the total number of participants in the study is 84. (See Table 1) In addition, the selected municipalities were based on the suggestions made by the DTI Region 2 where most of their advocacy programs and projects were fully implemented.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants per sector in every Municipality in Quirino

Targets	Percentage Distribution	Quirino	Aglipay		Maddela		Diffun		Naglipunan		Saguday		TOTAL	
			N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n	N	n
1. Youth (10-18 yo)	25%	21	5391	4	7397	5	10430	7	5172	3	2979	2	31369	21
2. Middle Age (19-59)	65%	55	14071	11	19771	12	26906	18	11664	7	8372	7	80784	55
-Housewife	9%	8		2		2		2		1		1		8
-farmers/fisherfolks	9%	8		2		2		2		1		1		8
-Government/Private employees	13%	10		2		2		4		1		1		10
-PWDs	4%	5		1		1		1		1		1		5
-Business Sector	13%	9		1		2		4		1		1		9
-College students	13%	10		2		2		4		1		1		10
-OSYs/Unemployed	4%	5		1		1		1		1		1		5
3. Senior Citizens (60 yo and above)	10%	8	2150	1	3098	2	3772	3	1226	1	1348	1	11594	8
TOTAL	100%	84	21612	16	30266	19	41108	28	18062	11	12699	10	123747	84

The instrument utilized in this study is a survey questionnaire designed and provided by the DTI Region 2. Part I of the instrument includes the profile of the participants. Part II was the consumers' awareness of their rights and responsibilities while Part III includes awareness of DTI Consumer Advocacy Programs. The researchers and the staff of DTI checked and validated the instrument before data collection. First, a formal letter was made by the office of the regional director of DTI informing the research group will survey the province. Second, the researchers sought permission from the office of the different municipal mayors in the province for the conduct of the survey. Once, the letter was approved then the researchers administered the survey questionnaire to the target participants randomly. An interview method was conducted for some sectors like PWDs and senior citizens for some considerations. The survey questionnaires were floated in September 2019.

Finally, the questionnaires were retrieved from the target participants right after the survey. The retrieval rate of the survey questionnaire is 100%.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive Analytics such as frequency counts, percentages and means were used to assess awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities, programs and projects on consumer protection, and relevant provisions to further promote consumer protection including its effectiveness on various consumer education and advocacy activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Part I. Awareness on Consumer Rights and Responsibilities



Figure 1 shows the consumers' awareness of their rights regarding products and services. It can be shown in the figure that the right to basic needs is the topmost right they are aware of, followed by the right to safety and the right to choice and information. On the other hand, the right to redress is the least right that they are aware of. Consumers must be aware of their options so they can choose wisely. Customers have the right to safety, choice, and knowledge. According to Indirani & Kumar (2016), a structured and informal Consumer Education Program for students would be successful in raising consumer awareness. It will assist in the development of skills for making informed decisions about the purchase of products and services while taking into account one's values, the best possible use of available resources, viable alternatives, ecological concerns, and shifting economic situations.



Figure 2 illustrates the consumers' awareness of their responsibilities regarding products and services they purchase or avail. From the figure, the right to environmental awareness is the

topmost responsibility they are aware of, followed by social concern, critical awareness, action and solidarity. The findings of the study of Mojica et al (2016) indicate that respondents' knowledge of their consumer rights and obligations was poor and very low, respectively. The respondents' self-evaluations showed that they are only slightly aware of their rights and obligations. The respondents' attitudes and behaviors revealed some consumer rights, including the rights to knowledge, safety, and consumer education. Additionally, important knowledge and action are included in the obligations that were made clear.

Table 2: Consumers' Awareness on the Responsible Agencies on Products and Services

Product/Service	Agencies		
Senior Citizen Discount	OSCA (65)	LGU (10)	DTI (4)
Price of Basic & Prime commodities (i.e. salt, soy sauce, vinegar, sardines, detergent)	DTI (73)	DOH (2)	LGU (4)
Meat, Livestock, vegetables, rice, fish	DA (49)	DTI (25)	LGU (5)
Airline Promo Fares	DOTC (59)	DTI (2)	CAB (15)
drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, household products with Hazardous substances	DTI (10)	LGU (1)	DOH/FDA (67)
Medical/Hospital Services	DOH (75)	FDA (3)	DTI (0)
Labelling &Packaging of manufactured goods and services (processed foods)	DTI (53)	DA (4)	DFA (20)
False and Misleading Advertisement	DA (14)	DOH (7)	DTI (56)
Text Scam	DTI (8)	NTC (64)	DOTC (5)
Product Warranty & Services	NTC (16)	DTI (60)	DepED (1)
Spa Services(i.e. facial, manicure, pedicure, etc.	DTI (26)	DOH (41)	LGU (10)
Labelling and Packaging of drugs, cosmetics and devices	FDA (51)	DTI (22)	BIR (4)
product quality of electrical products and services	ERC (54)	Consumer Welfare Desk (13)	DTI (10)
waste and sewerage-related problems	LWUA (70)	DTI (4)	Consumer Welfare Desk (3)
defective product/services (manufactured)	LGU (12)	Consumer Welfare Desk (28)	DTI (37)
prices of fuel/petroleum products	DOE (47)	DTI (14)	LTFRB (16)
construction materials	DENR (44)	LGU (10)	DTI (23)
price tag violation	DA (6)	DTI (71)	DOH (1)
telephone, mobile and internet services	DTI (4)	NTC (71)	DOTC (2)
deceptive sales acts and practices	Consumer Organization (23)	LGU (12)	DTI (42)
food(i.e. restaurant, food chains, sidewalk)	FDA (48)	DOH (21)	LGU (8)
credit card surcharge	BSP (51)	DTI (7)	SEC (19)
subdivision, Condominiums, Housing	LGU (6)	HLURB (67)	DTI (4)
weights and measures (i.e. wet market)	FDA (15)	DTI (33)	LGU (29)
insurance claims	IC (69)	Consumer Organization (3)	DTI (5)
sales promotion (non-food products)	DOH (10)	DTI (64)	DA (3)
tuition fees	DEPED/ CHED (75)	LGU (1)	SEC (1)
school supplies	DEPED (51)	LGU (4)	DTI (22)
non-issuance/Fraudulent Official Receipts	BIR (72)	SEC (6)	DTI (0)
balikbayan boxes, etc.	DFA (32)	DTI (13)	DOT (32)

Table 2 shows the consumers' awareness on the responsible agencies for products and services. It can be viewed in the table that the majority of the participants are aware of the different agencies on products and services whenever complaints occur. Republic Act No. 7394 also known as the Consumer Act of the Philippines, under Consumer Product Quality and Safety, Article 6 on implementing agencies states that the Department of Health is responsible for food, drugs, cosmetics, devices and substances while the Department of Agriculture is responsible for all products related to agriculture and the rest of the consumer products that are not stated are concerns by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

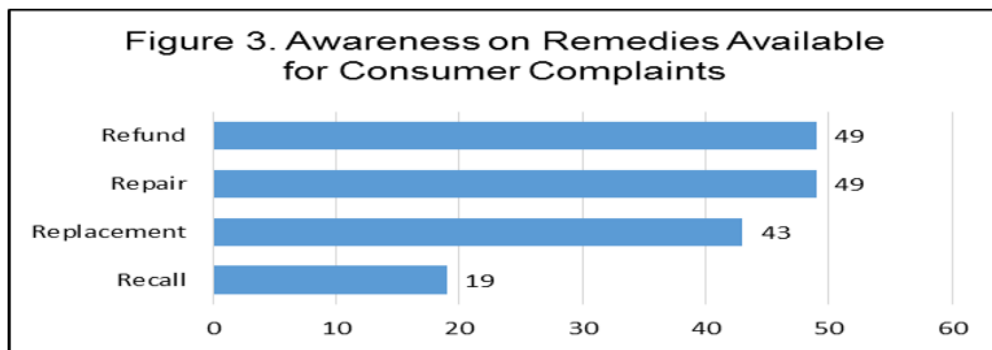


Figure 3 shows the awareness on remedies available for consumer complaints. The figure shows that refund and repair are the topmost remedies in case of consumer complaints followed by replacement and recall. Under Republic Act 7394, often known as the Consumer Philippines consumers are entitled to the return, exchange, and refund of any goods they have purchased if they are found to be faulty or broken. Customers who answer surveys must therefore be informed of the return and refund policy. As far as is reasonably possible, the department shall establish procedures for consistently logging, investigating, and responding to consumer complaints in the creation of consumer policies, rules, and regulations. This will allow consumers to more easily and simply access the complaints process.

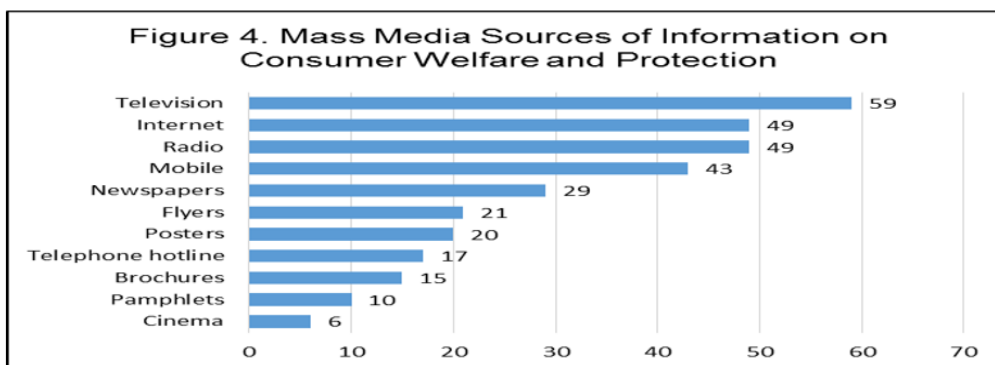


Figure 4 shows sources of information on consumer welfare and protection on mass media. Based on the figure, television is the topmost source of information of the participants regarding consumer welfare and protection in mass media followed by the internet, radio and

mobile. Meanwhile, brochures, pamphlets and cinema are the least sources of information on consumer welfare and protection in mass media. The results are consistent with Sama (2019), who found that advertisers invest money in a range of media platforms to influence consumer behavior. Each media platform has a different mix of adverts, and each one has a different manner of grabbing customers' attention. The findings also demonstrate that periodicals and newspapers are powerful media for influencing consumers' pre- and post-purchase behavior.

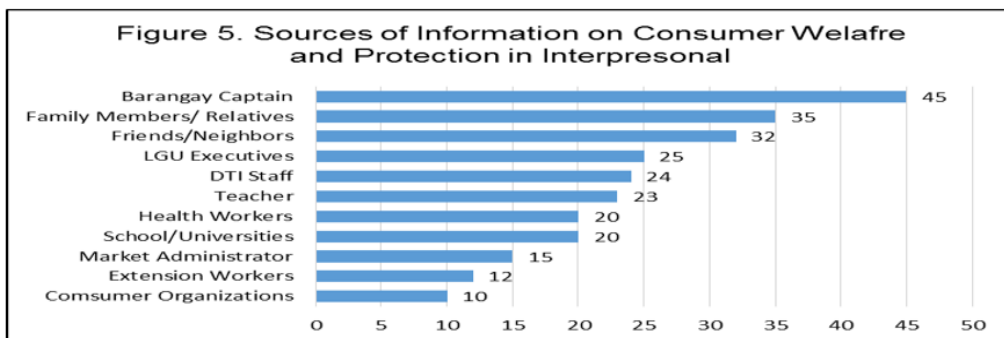


Figure 5 shows the source of information on consumer welfare and protection in the interpersonal aspect. Based on the figure, the barangay captain is the topmost source of information on consumer welfare and protection followed by family members or relatives, friends or neighbors, and LGU Executives. Meanwhile, DTI Staff placed 5th as sources of information on consumer welfare and protection. Also, market administrators, extension workers and consumer organizations are the least sources of information on consumer welfare and protection in the interpersonal aspect. According to Mojica et al. (2016) found that the best sources for learning about consumer rights and obligations were families and teachers/professors. This demonstrates unequivocally that individuals who have a direct touch with the respondents are the suppliers of interpersonal information on DTI advocacy campaigns.

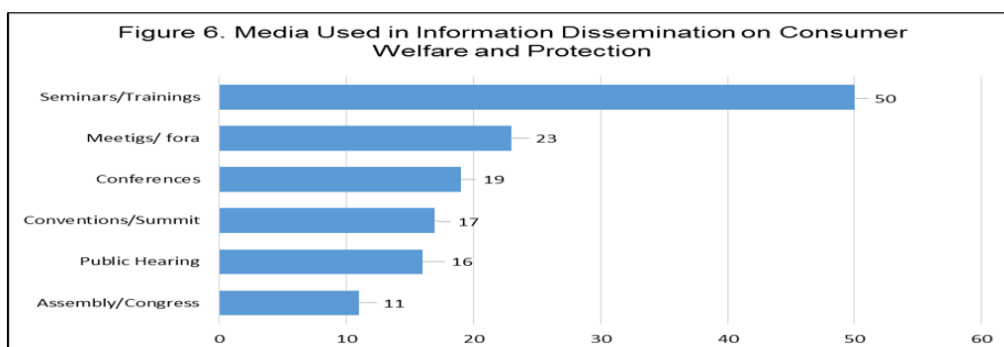


Figure 6 displays media used in information dissemination on consumer welfare and protection. Based on the figure, seminars and training are the topmost media used in information dissemination followed by meetings or fora, conferences, conventions, and public hearings. Meanwhile, assembly or congress is the least media used in information dissemination on

consumer welfare and protection. The use of sales promotion like mass media is also a technique purely intended to increase the sales, patronage and/or goodwill of a product (RA 7394).

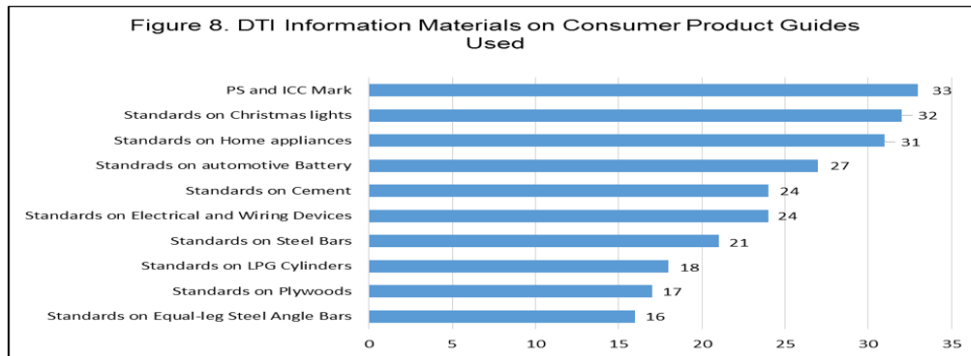
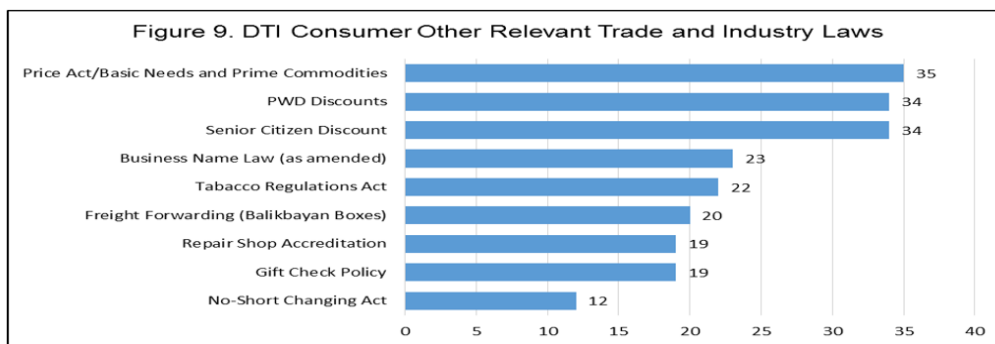
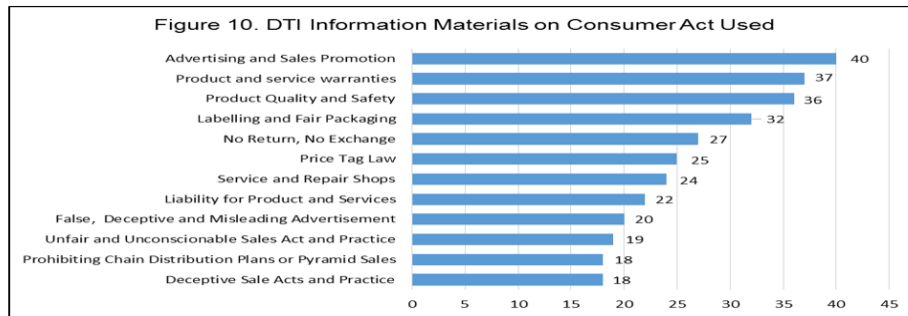


Figure 8 shows that PS and ICC mark is the topmost used DTI information materials on the product guide by the participants followed by standards on Christmas gift and home appliances. The least used DTI information materials on the product guide by the participants are standards on LPG cylinders, plywood, and in equal-leg steel angle bars. The PS mark or ICC sticker should typically be attached to the product itself, except ballasts, self-ballasted lamps, single/double capped fluorescent lamps, incandescent lamps, circuit breakers, electrical tapes, wires & cables, and flat cords, or when doing so would endanger the product's original packaging, as in the case of television sets and air conditioners.



The Department of Trade and Industry-Bureau of Philippine Standards (DTI-BPS) urges customers to report retailers selling covered products without the aforementioned necessary markings and to always seek the PS mark or ICC sticker when purchasing products covered under the mandated certification. Figure 9 displays the usefulness of DTI materials to consumers on other relevant trade and industry laws on DTI consumer act. Figure shows that price act/ basic needs and prime commodities are the topmost useful other consumer act followed by PWD and senior citizen discounts. On the other hand, repair shop accreditation, gift check policy and no-short changing act are the least other useful DTI consumer trade and industry laws. The results show how consumers perceive the DTI's information materials about

other pertinent trade and industry legislation and how it aids in their understanding of their rights and obligations.



Based on the figure, the topmost used DTI information materials that have read or watched by the participants on the consumer act are advertising and sales promotion followed by product and service warranties and product quality and safety. Meanwhile, the least DTI information materials that have been read or watched by the participants are unfair and unconscionable sales acts and practices, prohibiting chain distribution plans or pyramid sales and deceptive sales acts and practices. The DTI-Region 2, Bureau of Trade Regulation and Consumer Protection protects consumers through consumer education and information dissemination programs. DTI information materials provide a mechanism for the speedy resolution of consumer complaints.

SUMMARY

The majority of the participants are aware of their right to basic needs and environmental issues but not to redress and solidarity. Also, most of the participants are aware of the different responsible agencies for products and services.

Television is the media's main source of information on consumer welfare and protection followed by the Internet and radio while the interpersonal source of information is the barangay captain.

Also, half of the participants used consumer information materials as sources of information and protection. The information materials are available in print-outs or can be watched on television.

In terms of the usefulness of the DTI Information Materials, most of the participants find advertising and sale promotion as useful consumer acts while PS and ICC mark is the topmost used DTI information materials on the product guide by the participants.

Radio is the topmost medium of dissemination of the DTI Consumer Welfare Advocacy programs

The price act /basic needs and prime commodities are the consumer act's topmost priorities on trade and industry laws.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, participants find their rights and responsibilities very significant as part of their basic needs. The survey's findings are anticipated to be used as the foundation for developing projects and programs that will raise consumer awareness and alertness, resulting in improved consumer protection.

The researcher recommends that there must be a collaborative effort of all sectors of the different agencies to highlight information dissemination

There should be more programs on consumer awareness to build knowledge, competence, values, and skills geared toward the development of an aware and responsible consumer.

Developed a continuing consumer education program to wake the consumers fully aware of their basic rights and responsibilities.

Establish links and partnerships with educational institutions and government agencies to emphasize the need and importance of integrating consumer education into the curriculum. Consumer education should be introduced from primary to higher levels to educate the youth properly.

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