HOW INFORMED AND PROTECTED THE CONSUMERS ARE?

CÂT DE INFORMAȚI ŞI PROTEJAȚI SUNT CONSUMATORII?

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Abstract: *The purpose of the present research is to emphasize two dimensions: the degree of information of the consumers concerning the own rights and the level of protection offered by the authorities to the consumers. The information from the survey is strictly confidential.*

Key words: *research, information, consumers protection.*

INTRODUCTION

The survey was realized during the period 22 – 27 April 2012 on 30 participants (consumers), from the urban area classified in 5 age categories (18 – 25 category, 26 – 35 category, 36 – 45 category, 46 – 55 category, 56 – 65 category) and 7 groups according to their education (8 grades or less, 10 grades, vocational school, high school, post secondary school, college, university), the participants were classified also according to sexes (male/female).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used 10 questions which cover the two dimensions: the degree of information of the consumers concerning the own rights and the level of protection offered by the authorities to the consumers - the two dimensions represent the object of this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

For the question no 1: *Do you know your rights as consumers?* 90% of the participants answered that they know their rights while 10% don't know their rights, however 10% highlights the fact that they cannot mention an authority which could protect their rights.

The degree of consumers' knowledge regarding their rights is high but the way they consider to be informed and protected by the authorities is considerably low, 73.3% of the participants are not satisfied by the way the authorities informs and protects them.

10% of the participants could not mention an authority, while 36.7% of the participants could not name correctly the National authority for the consumers' protection.

In the following table we correlated information related to the mentioning/knowledge of and authority and every participants education.

Table 1 Mentioning/knowledge of and authority according to education

Naming an authority Education	1. the office for consumer's protection	2.National authority for consumer's protection	3. The agency for consumer's protection	4.Consumer's protection	5.don't know	6. Total
1. 8 grades or less	11,1%	-	-	16,7%	-	6,7%
2. 10 grades	22,2%	-	-	-	33,3%	10,0%
3. Vocational school	11,1%	9,1%	-	33,3%	33,3%	16,7%
4. High school	22,2%	9,1%	100,0%	16,7%	33,3%	20,0%
5. Post high school	11,1%	-	-	16,7%	-	6,7%
6. College	-	9,1%	-	-	-	3,3%
7. University	22,2%	72,7%	-	16,7%	-	36,7%

As we can see from the above table, the consumers the most informed are those who graduated a University or at least a secondary school. From the participants, only those who graduated a university have named correctly the National authority for consumer's protection.

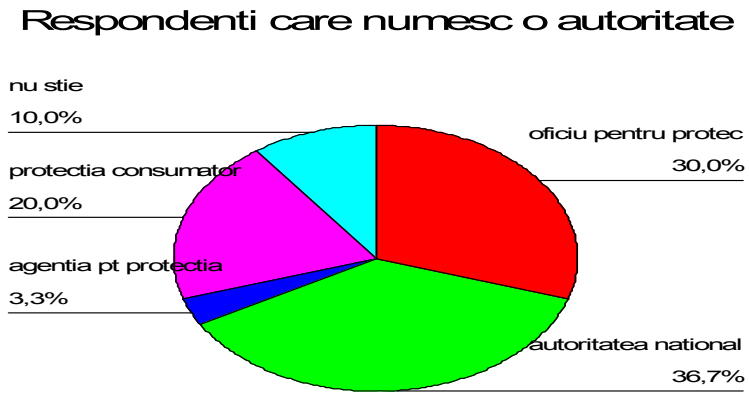


Figure nr 1

Question no3: *What represents **A.N.P.C?***

From the participants who partially knew what A.N.P.C represents, answered the Agency for consumer's protection or The Association for consumer's protection.



Figure nr.2

In the following table we managed a correlation between age and the correct answer for what A.N.P.C. represents.

Table 2 Correlation age/correct answer A.N.P.C

Age	1. Know what represents	2. Partially know what represents A.N.P.C	3. Don't know what represents	4. Total
18-25 category	-	27,3%	37,5%	20,0%
26-35 category	45,5%	9,1%	-	20,0%
36-45 category	18,2%	27,3%	12,5%	20,0%
46-55 category	9,1%	27,3%	25,0%	20,0%
56-65 category	27,3%	9,1%	25,0%	20,0%
				100%

The less informed age category is 18 – 25 compared to the 26 – 35 category which is the best informed (45.6%). The next category which answered correctly is 56 – 65 as they get older the consumers become more responsible and prudent and pay more attention to their rights.

Question no 4: *Did you know that a defective product must be repaired, returned or replaced?*

Almost all the participants (96.7%) answered affirmatively although none of them took any measure in order to return or to repair/replace the defective product.

Table no 3 Problems faced as consumer

Variables		Percentage
1. Deceptive advertising	Yes No	33,3% 66,7%
2. Abusive contractual clauses	Yes No	40% 60%
3. degree of product safety	Yes No	10% 90%
4. Guarantees	Yes No	60% 40%
5. Shelf life	Yes No	76,7% 23,3%

6. Other problems	Yes No	10% 90%

Question no 5: *What kind of problems did you have as a consumer?*

Most of the consumers faced the shelf life problem (76.7% mentioned that they bought expired products), followed by the problem of guarantee certificates (60%) and of the abusive contractual clauses (40% of the participants).

6. Which is the source of information you use related to your consumer rights?

80% of the participants use as main source of information the radio or the television, 43.3% use as source of information the newspapers and the rest use the internet.

Table 4 Source of information according to age

Age	1. radio/TV	2. A.N.P.C site	3. Other sources
18-25 category	Yes 8,3% No 66,7%	Yes 42,9% No 13,0%	Yes - No 25,0%
26-35 category	Yes 20,8% No 16,7%	Yes 14,3% No 21,7%	Yes 33,3% No 16,7%
36-45 category	Yes 20,8% No 16,7%	Yes 28,6% No 17,4%	Yes 50,0% No 12,5%
46-55 category	Yes 25,0% No 20.0%	Yes 14,3% No 21,7%	Yes 16,7% No 20,8%
56-65 category	Yes 25,0% No 20.0%	Yes - No 26,1%	Yes - No 25,0%

Most of the consumers get the information from radio/TV compared to the young people who like the on-line press and get the information directly from the A.N.P.C. site. The internet and the mass- media have an important role in encouraging the consumers when 42.9% of the young

consumers use the internet in order to get information regarding the consumers' rights and taking into consideration that mass – media communicates directly with the citizens.

Question 7: *Did you face situations when your consumer rights were violated?*

63,3% of the participants faced situations when their consumer right were violated, so the potential to encourage the consumers to improve their life quality and to reduce the prejudices related to the consumers is significant and almost 36.7% of the participants did not face such situations.

Question 8: *Did you take measures in this sense?*

60% of the consumers who faced situations when their rights were violated did not take any measure.

The damage to the consumer is estimated to 0.4% of the gross domestic product of EU. The less educated and the elders are the most reticent in trying to obtain repairing measures, even if they are not less exposed to face difficulties. The survey confirms the importance of the access to proper repairing measures. Many of these problems could be solved if there were more alternative mechanisms for solving the differences.[1]

Question 9*: Who did you contacted to solve your consumer problems?*

Most of the consumers ledge their complaints against the retailer, most of those who do not receive a satisfactory answer don't take further actions.

Table 5 Who does the consumer contact in case its rights are violated

	Percentage	
1.seller/retailer	Yes	96,7%
	No	3,3%
2. producer	Yes	3,3%
	No	97%
3. county office for consumers' protection	Yes	20%
	No	80%
4. non-governmental organization for consumers' protection	Yes	10%
	No	90%
5. court	Yes	6,7%
	No	93,3%

[1] http://www.eccromania.ro

6. other	Yes No	3,3% 97%

Most of the consumers (96.7%) appeal to the seller or retailer and few of them make claims or take further actions to solve their problems faced as consumers.

Question 10: Are satisfied by the method the authorities inform you and protect your rights?

Although 73,3% of the consumers are not satisfied by the methods used to inform and protect them, most of them don't take further actions to solve the problems they face.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion we mention the following main findings: the degree of knowing their rights declared by the consumers is high but, the level concerning the methods they are informed or protected by the authorities is alarmingly low, 73.3% of the participants are not satisfied by the methods used by the authorities to inform and protect them.

The less informed category of age is 18 – 25 compared to 26 – 35 category of age which is the most informed; also the most informed consumers are those who graduated a higher school. Most of the consumers get their information from radio/TV, compared to the young consumers who prefer the on-line press and get their information directly from A.N.P.C. site.

Even if *60%* of the consumers faced situation where their rights were violated they didn't take any action.

Most of the consumers lodge their clams to the retailers and most of those who don't receive a satisfactory answer don't take further actions.

The potential to encourage the consumers to improve their life quality and to reduce the damage to the consumer is significant; almost 37% of the participants didn't face such situations.

The authorities improved in time and started to demonstrate their effectiveness, the retailers are obliged to post the green phone number for the consumers, and some retailers have special places for claims.

We would propose an aggressive campaign on a significant period of time through mass – media in order to better inform the consumers from all age categories or professional education.

In our opinion, in order to prevent some incorrect practices, the authorities must make periodic controls and the penalties should be severe if the violations are related to the persons' safety, health and integrity.

REFERENCES

1. *** http://www.eccromania.ro