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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF CONSUMER PROTECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION AND FINANCIAL CRISES – THE CASE OF PALESTINE

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Abstract

This study aims at clarifying the concept and dimensions of consumer rights, and at diagnosing the reality of consumer rights represented in the (right to choose, right to safety, right to be heard and right to be informed). The descriptive approach was the one used for the purpose of this study. The current study was conducted on consumers of some basic goods and services. A facilitated sample consisting of (100) people was used. The blank questionnaire method was used to obtain the primary data. The results show that there is an increase in the frequency of consumer rights violations in light of globalization and the repercussions of the financial crisis due to the Corona virus crisis. It was found that the consumer rights watchdogs' knowledge of global consumer rights regulations was very limited, and that their ability to know and meet consumer rights is weak. There are few contributions by researchers in addressing the importance of consumer rights in the Palestinian reality. In addition, there is a retreat in the provision of safety and protection requirements in some of the products offered in the Palestinian consumer market. The role of the government and regulatory authorities such as consumer protection and the Ministry of Economy in providing information of interest and providing protection Sustainable for consumers is weak as well.

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Introduction:-

The United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection (2015) and the principles of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) emphasized the importance of governments' setting policies and taking the necessary measures to protect consumers from threats to their health and safety, promoting and protecting their economic interests and ensuring sustainable supply of goods for them. The both abovementioned guidelines and principles also emphasized the importance of protecting basic services, taking into account international standards for consumer protection in accordance with the economic, social and environmental conditions of each country. (UNCTAD Secretariat, 2013).

Therefore, many countries have issued consumer protection laws aiming at regulating consumer rights vis-à-vis the providers of goods and services. In addition to these laws, there is much legislation related to consumer protection in Arab countries, such laws include: laws to suppress fraud, set standards for goods and services, protection from misleading advertisements, protection of trademarks and commercial data, laws to protect competition and prevent

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monopolistic practices. There are many devices for consumer protection in every country, in addition to consumer protection associations that seek to spread a culture of rights, consumer awareness and rationality.(Mohieldin, 2005).

However, in light of the market economy and the growing role of the private sector in development and the openness of markets as a result of the liberalization of global trade and the emergence of electronic commerce, forms and of commercial and industrial fraud have increased; especially in light of the recent health and economic crises; particularly in the field of food and medicine, electronic devices and spare parts. the occurrence of The consumer is a victim of these practices, in light of the limited capabilities of the regulatory agencies in controlling these phenomena, the emergence of new electronic buying patterns, the lack of adulthood among some consumers, due to ordinary and digital illiteracy and poverty conditions for a large segment that makes them a victim of fraud, and neglecting the importance of information before the economic decision-maker, which is characterized by fairness and balance in rights and duties between the consumer and the producer. (shaheen, 2019), (Izaguerra Vila, A, 2019)

Problem of the Study:

The rapid and successive development in various fields of life, the liberalization of trade and the openness of markets make the consumer face a real problem related to the selection of appropriate products. The lack of information, the lack of awareness and the lack of consumer guidance constitute an obstacle for the consumer. So, this study aims a achieving the goals of sustainable development by protecting The consumer needs to provide policymakers and enforcement with a basis for reflecting on the positive impacts of safeguarding and sustainability principles. It assists them in promoting more comprehensive development plans within the framework of improving the goal of consumer protection and implementing sustainable development strategies; in accordance with the 2030 development plan and the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection. (Alakras, 2008), (Hunter, J. and Riefa, (2017) (Shaheen, 2019), (Mas, 2004).

Therefore, the problem of the study is represented by answering the following questions:

1. Is there awareness among consumers of their economic rights?
2. Is there exploitation by producers and merchants of goods and services for the rights of consumers?
3. Is there a role for the government and other regulatory bodies in educating consumers?
4. Does globalization and Financial Crises provide adequate and sustainable consumer protection?

Importance of the Study:

Presenting a set of theoretical concepts related to consumer protection, in light of the serious violations of many principles and values of economic consumer rights, especially in the Palestinian reality. This study will contribute in the field of diagnosing the reality of consumer rights in the Palestinian market. It will also show what the role of the Government and of the regulatory authorities in protecting their rights is.

Objectives of the Study:-

This study seeks to clarify the concept of consumer rights in terms of origin, development, and consumer movement as well as the dimensions of these rights. This will be done by presenting a theoretical framework drawn from the literature on the topic. It also seeks to give a diagnosis of the reality of consumer rights, which is represented by the four basic rights (the right to choose, to safety, to be heard, and to be informed).

The Theoretical Framework:

Consumer Rights and Protection:

The issue of consumer protection has gained great importance in recent years and the issue of marketing deception has received great attention from research observers, as well as the interest of official authorities on the issue of consumer protection in most countries of the world, and the issue of consumer protection has emerged as an important issue within the issues of social responsibility for the business sector. And it occupied a prominent place among the political, social and economic issues discussed in conferences and seminars, and it won the attention of many writers and researchers.(Bin Isa, 2008).

The consumer protection movement began as a result of the many illegal practices practiced by producers, traders and intermediaries in the markets, far from social values and ethical controls. Thus, the idea of consumer protection arose and expanded its movement in developed societies; as a result of the pressure that consumers exerted on their governments to intervene and impose laws to protect them from what is known as the greed of speculators. The first

consumer protection law was issued in the United States in 1873 CE, followed by the issuance of laws and measures taken by many countries in the world with the aim of protecting the consumer and his rights. Non-profit civil societies have also been established aiming at consumer protection and at unifying efforts and expertise to provide means to defend the interests of consumers; and several methods are followed in their defense of consumers. The most important of which are awareness-raising, counter-advertising, abstaining from purchase and refraining from paying. (Al-Zoubi, 2003).

These movements to protect the consumer came as a result of the failure to apply both the modern concept of marketing, and the social concept of marketing. The definitions of consumer protection vary. The most prominent of these definitions is (the philosophy adopted by the various organizations in the country towards providing goods or providing services to the consumer at the lowest material, physical and psychological cost, through the prevailing environmental variables in the country). The concept of consumer protection is based on three main axes: (Shaheen, 2019), (Itiani, 2011).

The Supervisory Axis:

Guarantees the safety of the goods' supply and services and their conformity with international standards. Government agencies perform this role mainly; in addition to civil society institutions represented in the associations concerned with consumer protection, which aim to prevent consumers from being exposed to commercial fraud, misinformation and deception in all its forms.

The Legislative Axis:

Based on reviewing the existing legislation in order to create an umbrella to protect all consumer rights.

The Educational Axis:

Raising the consumer's awareness of his rights and duties, in a way that guides his decisions and directs them to achieve the greatest level of protection, especially preventive protection. (Liajal, 2002).

Areas of Breach of Consumer Protection:

(Bin Isa, 2008), (Durovic, M. & Micklitz, H. W. (2017). Mentioned that the consumer suffers from a violation of his legitimate rights by the organizations, which often compete with each other to achieve the largest possible profit, so the consumer always needs to have effective control devices that protect him from the breach that he may be exposed to in any of the following areas:

Advertising:

Methods of deception in advertising messages for the purpose of misleading the consumer and provoking his rational emotional behavior to acquire the commodity, through the mental image that the consumer creates from the information contained in the advertising message contrary to the reality of the thing that the information promotes.

Guarantee:

When the consumer obtains a specific product, he is supposed to give a guarantee about the validity of the sold product and its safety from defects, whether from the importer or the producing and exporting company. (Ibrahim & others, 1995).

Transparency:

The right to be informed is related to products and how to use them, due to deficiencies on the part of the consumer, or with the intention of the companies producing this in order not to put themselves under legal accountability.

Price:

There are many forms of breaching the consumer protection of the price component, imposing prices that are inconsistent with his financial ability, and circumventing the prices that producers follow through installment sales or fake downloads, and other illegal methods, and taking advantage of the lack of product supply in the market and the consumer's need for it. And the sale of subsidized products on the black market. (Kotler, 2005)

Distribution:

Not distributing products in specific places and times, which may expose the consumer to monopoly situations and allocate a lot of effort and time to acquire these products? (Kotler, 2005)

Packaging:

The organization may use unhealthy materials in the packaging process, which exposes the consumer to a lot of harm as a result of these practices.

Measures and Weights:

Lack of adequate control may expose the consumer to a breach in the measures and weights of the products, such as a lack of weight, size, or components.

General Consumer Rights:

The Right to Safety:

Providing protection and safety from harmful goods and services that cause a danger to the consumer's life. Therefore, organizations must examine and test their products to ensure their safety from defects before they are presented in the market.

The Right to Be Informed: The consumer's right to be informed is related to the products he wishes to buy. The consumer has a complete picture to make the right decision without being exposed to fraud, fraud and misleading advertisements.

The Right to Be Heard:

Giving the consumer the right to express his opinion about the extent to which products satisfy his needs. Organizations should strive to obtain consumer satisfaction and establish long-term relationships with him to win his loyalty, and make efforts to develop and innovate modern products that meet his desires.

The Right to Choose:

Consumer freedom to choose the products he wants to obtain from among the various products, at competitive prices and with guaranteed quality.

The Right to Redress:

The consumer obtains a fair compensation in case he is damaged by the product, compensation for misleading, inferior goods or unsatisfactory services.

The Right to Education :

The consumer should acquire the required skills and knowledge to enable him to consciously choose between goods and services, and in a manner that makes him aware of his basic rights, responsibilities and how to use them.

The Right to Satisfaction of the Basic Needs :

The necessity to ensure that the consumer has access to his basic needs, which are: food, clothing, housing, health, security, education, water, energy, employment, and other basic services.(Hunter, and Riefa, 2017)

Study Methodology:-

The descriptive approach was the one used for the purpose of this study. A facilitated sample consisting of (100) people was used, conducted on consumers of some basic goods and services. The blank questionnaire method was used to obtain the primary data, classify it, analyze it and come up with the results: The right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose, the right to be heard.

Data Collection Tools:

The questionnaire is the main tool for collecting data from the field side, as it was prepared with reference to the literature on the topic by the researcher, and the use of descriptive statistics in describing and diagnosing this study's sample and the characteristics of the consumers who represent the study sample, and the method of factor analysis was used.

Study Tool:

The researcher used the Likart scale to test the data resulting from the questionnaire. The following figure shows the vocabulary of the five-fold Likart scale:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Response
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1	2	3	4	5	weight
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Results of the Study:**The Right to Safety:**

The following table (1) shows the results of mean and standard deviation of the paragraphs of the first variable:

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD	Rank.
1	The necessity of providing international standards and local standards to ensure the product, such as ISO and TQM	4.49	1.121	1
2	The need for accurate systems and measures that guarantee consumer rights as a result of using the products and services of the relevant organizations	4.30	0.964	3
3	Consumer rights organizations provide guarantees for the treatment of dangerous products and compensate consumers if they suffer any damage as a result of using these products	3.10	1.322	4
4	Not allowing organizations to promote inferior products that harm the consumer.	2.81	1.637	5
5	The organizations develop standards related to raising the level of quality control	4.40	0.849	2
	Total marks	3.82	1.178	-

Right to be Informed:

The following table (2) shows the results of the mean and the standard deviation for each paragraph of the second variable:

Rank.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD	Rank.
2	There are programs to continuously develop the information that is supposed to be available to the consumer	3.42	1.24	2
3	The necessity to define the products, their specifications, how to use them, and the materials included in their composition	3.33	1.32	3
4	Commodity coding is applied elaborately and in practice.	3.09	1.32	4
5	The government plays an important role in providing information of interest to consumers.	2.95	1.62	5
1	The labels and data affixed to the product reflect the quality standards of the organization.	4.30	0.94	1
-	Total marks	3.42	1.288	-

The Right to Choose:

The following table (3) shows the mean and the standard deviation for each paragraph of the third factor:

No.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD	Rank.
1	The best products are provided to the consumer and not what the consumer would like.	3.74	1.00	1
2	There is ample opportunity to choose what the consumer wants to buy.	3.51	1.03	2
3	You have the ability to obtain products at competitive prices.	3.44	1.22	3
4	The producers impose the conditions they want on the consumers.	2.95	1.48	4
5	Consumer choices are limited by unfair competition.	2.84	1.41	5
	Total marks	3.30	1.228	-

The right to be Heard:

The following table (4) shows the results of the mean and the standard deviation for the periods of the fourth factor:

Rank.	Paragraphs	Mean	SD	Rank.
1	Organizations make room for consumers to hear their opinions on products.	3.74	1.01	1
2	Organizations are interested in creativity, innovation and accepting consumer suggestions to develop their products	3.51	1.03	2
3	Consumers are represented on the boards of directors of organizations, and their opinions are taken into account when designing the policies and	3.44	1.22	3

	strategies of these organizations.			
4	Store owners welcome consumers when they come up with new product ideas.	2.95	1.48	4
5	The government raises complaints and penalizes organizations that do not adhere to these rights.	2.84	1.41	5
Total marks		3.30	1.226	-

Table 5: All Variables - Consumer Rights

No.	Consumer Rights	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Right of Safety	3.820	1.178	1
2	Right to be informed	3.420	1.288	2
3	Right to Choose	3.288	1.228	4
4	Right to be heard	3.300	1.226	3
		3.460	1.230	-

Results of the Study:-

Enhancing consumer (customer) protection for goods and services and educating him is one of the priorities of the control system; because of its impact on economic and social stability, improving access to goods and services. This calls for following up and setting legal controls to protect consumers for these services, and empowering regulatory bodies with the powers and capabilities necessary to perform their duties, requires cooperation between the various relevant regulatory agencies and bodies. It is also related to the importance of increasing attention to consumer protection issues; especially for financial and banking services, and working according to international principles issued by appropriate supervisory and supervisory methodologies, guided by the Group of Twenty and the principles and values of the United Nations' economic rights and human rights.

From the follow-up of references on consumer rights, it was found that their knowledge of the global regulations on consumer rights is very limited, and it is clear that they are not close in any way to meeting or knowing consumer rights. It was found through the results of this study that the degree of protection for the rights of the Palestinian consumer through the four dimensions (The right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose and the right to be heard) is an average degree of (3.46).

There are few contributions by researchers in addressing the importance of consumer rights in the Palestinian reality.

1. It appeared that there is a decline in the availability of international safety requirements and standards and international standards in the products offered in the Palestinian consumer market.
2. The weak role of the government and consumer protection societies in providing information of interest to consumers is weak.
3. There are few opportunities for consumers to choose products in the market.
4. The regulatory authorities and consumer protection organizations operating in Palestine do not allow the consumers to be heard, as there is no complaints box, for example, or a free phone number.

Recommendations:-

1. Increasing the references and writing by researchers in this field due to its importance.
2. Proposing the formation of the Consumer Rights Association to take into account all aspects of safety and rights in products and in accordance with international standards. This association is also concerned with all products offered to citizens.
3. Organizations are required by the government to display all necessary information on products and to be truthful.
4. Allowing organizations that work safely and according to government laws to operate in the market and receive government support.
5. Organizing seminars and awareness campaigns, and coordinating with newspapers and television channels to follow up on the association's activities, promoting a culture of citizen rights and transforming it into a community culture, and addressing media agencies in the Ministries of Education and Higher Education.

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