

**Overcoming consumer grievances through consumer advocacy during pandemic: a socio-legal analysis of consumer protection laws in Sri Lanka**

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COVID-19 outbreak creates complex challenges in every reasonable expectation of human life, and therefore empowering consumers through consumer advocacy becomes inevitable to protect vulnerable consumers from commercial fraudsters. An unprecedented number of consumer rights violations such as price gouging, dumping, misleading sales, tied selling, and scams are occurring in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak. Such violations are taking place despite the prevalence of the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) Act No 9 of 2003. Under the Public Security Ord, the Sri Lankan government declared an economic emergency to protect consumers from an artificially created shortage of certain essential food and the resultant escalating prices. Violations are being continued even after such a declaration, and therefore consumer advocacy is needed. The CAA is vested with considerable powers to deal with many issues such as eliminating illicit business practices, fixing control prices, handling issues related to refusal to sell goods, denial of possessions, conditional sales, and hoarding of goods. However, there seems to be no improvement in the position of disadvantaged consumers, and it may be due to a lack of consumer advocacy. While consumer protection laws have proven effective even in times of crisis in many foreign jurisdictions, it is not so in Sri Lanka. The UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection are considered valuable principles for setting out the characteristics of effective consumer protection legislation, enforcement mechanisms, and providing redress systems. While many countries have implemented these guidelines and thereby offered adequate protection to consumers, the CAA Act of SL enacted in 2003 has not been amended. This research is an effort to investigate the socio-legal perspective of consumer protection under Sri Lankan law in the aftermath of the pandemic and focuses on consumer rights violations in both physical and online platforms. This research is a doctrinal analysis that combines descriptive and analytical approaches to provide a depth-analysis of the chosen area and data for this research based on the available primary and secondary sources.

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