
ROLE OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN STANDARDS (BIS) IN CONSUMER PROTECTION

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ABSTRACT

In the context of modern economies with mass production, digitalised markets and globalised supply chains, consumer protection has become of increasing importance. In India, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is responsible for protecting the interests of consumers by setting standards, certifying products, ensuring quality control and creating awareness on safe consumption practices. The paper discusses the multiple roles of the BIS in consumer protection, its contribution to the realisation of consumer rights and the challenges that the institution faces in a rapidly evolving marketplace. The functioning of BIS is also impacted by technological development, growth of e-commerce and rising expectations of consumers. The paper ends by recommending policy measures to strengthen the standardisation mechanisms and improve consumer confidence in the Indian market.

Keywords: Bureau of Indian Standards, Consumer Protection, Standardization, ISI Mark, Hallmarking, Consumer Rights, Quality Assurance.

Introduction

Consumer protection is an important part of economic governance and social welfare. As markets become more complex and more products are introduced, there is a need for effective regulatory mechanisms to ensure consumer safety and confidence. In India, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) established under the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016 is the national standards body for developing standards and certifying products.

BIS is an important institution to promote quality assurance, prevent deceptive trade practices and ensure availability of safe and reliable products in the market. Its activities are in consonance with objectives of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 to empower consumers and provide for the mechanisms for grievance redressal.

Standardization as a Tool for Consumer Protection

Standardization acts as a foundational pillar of consumer protection by establishing universal benchmarks for product safety, quality, and reliability. By defining clear rules for manufacturing and performance, it transitions the market away from *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware) to a system where buyers are guaranteed fundamental rights to safety and accurate information.

Standardization ensures physical safety dictating the minimum safety requirements for electronics, construction materials, and medical devices, effectively minimizing hazards to public health. It also prevents deceptive practices by standardizing weights, measures and ingredient disclosures ensuring buyers to know exactly what they are buying which allows for easy comparison between brands. It provides legal recourse where established standards serve as the baseline for courts and consumer commissions to determine liability and damages if a defective product causes harm.

Product Certification and the Significance of the ISI Mark

BIS's product certification program, especially through the ISI mark, is one of its most well-known contributions. The ISI mark may be used as proof of conformity by manufacturers whose goods meet certain Indian Standards. In India, the ISI mark governed by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is a critical certification ensuring that consumer and industrial goods are reliable, durable, and legally compliant. The main purpose of the ISI mark is to protect

consumers from unsafe and low-quality products. Products with this mark go through testing before they are approved. Over the years, the ISI logo has become a symbol of trust. Many buyers actively look for this mark before purchasing products, especially electrical and safety-related items. For manufacturers, the ISI mark acts like a badge of honour.

The ISI mark is mandatory for certain products that directly affect the public health and safety. Household electronics, food products, construction materials, safety equipment, automotive and industrial products and chemicals need ISI mark to ensure the safety of consumers. Selling these products without ISI certification is a punishable offense under the BIS Act.

Ensuring Consumer Safety Through Regulatory Oversight

Regulatory oversight protects consumers from hazardous products and deceptive practices by enforcing safety standards, tracking adverse events, and mandating transparent recalls. It balances business innovation with public safety, ensuring that the goods you buy are rigorously tested before entering the market.

Key Pillars of Oversight

- **Mandatory Testing & Quality Control:** Regulatory bodies establish baseline scientific and mechanical standards. In India, for instance, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) utilizes Quality Control Orders to certify that goods meet rigorous safety guidelines.
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Oversight doesn't stop at the initial launch. Continuous surveillance such as post-market clinical trials for drugs or facility inspections in the food sector identifies risks that appear only after mass distribution.
- **Transparent Recalls:** When a product fails testing or poses a hazard, regulators compel manufacturers to enact market withdrawals and issue public alerts.
- **Consumer Redressal:** Modern frameworks empower consumers to report defective or misleading products. Mechanisms allow buyers to hold companies legally accountable for product liability or poor service delivery.

Quality Control and Market Surveillance

Quality Control (QC) involves pre-market, in-house inspections and testing to ensure products

meet specific manufacturing standards and defect requirements. Market Surveillance, conversely, is the post-market regulatory process of monitoring goods already in the supply chain to verify they remain safe, compliant, and effective for consumers.

Quality Control is conducted during and immediately after the manufacturing process whereas Market surveillance is conducted after the goods are cleared for sale and circulating in the marketplace. QC catch defects, inconsistencies or deviations from design specifications before items leave the factory and MS ensure products do not pose a hazard to public interest, check for counterfeit goods and verify compliance with regional/global regulations.

In markets like India, local surveillance heavily involves the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) implementing Quality Control Orders (QCOs) to mandate conformity and restrict the entry of substandard goods. Similarly, on an international scale, groups like the UNECE Advisory Group on Market Surveillance harmonize best practices to ensure transparency and protect consumers globally.

Consumer Awareness and Education

Regulation and enforcement alone are insufficient to safeguard consumers. In order to ensure successful market discipline, consumer knowledge is equally crucial.

BIS conducts a number of programs to inform customers about certification marks, quality requirements, and their legal rights. Digital platforms, seminars, workshops, educational programs, and public awareness campaigns have all grown in importance as information-dissemination instruments.

Additionally, consumers can file complaints about subpar items, bogus certification claims, misuse of the ISI logo, and malfunctioning certified products. BIS looks into these complaints and, if needed, takes corrective action.

The BIS CARE mobile application, which allows customers to confirm licence data and certification information before to making purchases, is a significant advancement in this area. These technology advancements help to improve transparency and enable well-informed decision-making.

BIS and the Realisation of Consumer Rights

BIS's operations directly support a number of rights recognised under consumer protection law. Strict compliance procedures and standards for hazardous products are used to advance the right to safety.

Certification marks enhance the right to information by giving consumers trustworthy information about the quality and compliance of products. Ensuring the availability of quality-certified items in the marketplace strengthens the right to choice. Grievance redressal procedures, which enable customers to report infractions and request remedial action, safeguard the right to be heard.

Therefore, by fostering a more open, responsible, and customer-focused economy, BIS supports the more general goals of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Contemporary Challenges Before BIS

One of the biggest challenges is the spread of counterfeit ISI markings that mislead consumers and undermine faith in certification processes. Despite attempts by regulators, counterfeit goods still find their way into marketplaces.

The efficacy of certification procedures is often impacted by low consumer knowledge, especially in rural and distant locations. The importance of quality marks and verification processes is still unknown to many consumers.

There are more difficulties because e-commerce platforms are expanding so quickly. Online marketplaces frequently allow imported goods to evade proper regulatory scrutiny, raising the possibility of non-compliance with Indian requirements.

Furthermore, carrying out thorough inspections and upholding efficient supervision are practically challenging due to India's sizable and varied industry. Technological advancements and emerging industries also necessitate frequent revisions of standards, requiring BIS to remain adaptive and forward-looking in its regulatory approach.

Conclusion

A key role in India's consumer protection framework is played by the Bureau of Indian Standards. BIS has made a significant contribution to guaranteeing product safety and boosting

customer confidence through standardisation, certification, quality control, hallmarking, market surveillance and consumer awareness programs.

However, globalisation, internet commerce, and changing market dynamics necessitate ongoing reinforcement of regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. Improving the efficacy of BIS requires increased consumer education, improved technology integration, and more stringent measures against counterfeit certification techniques.

BIS will continue to be a crucial organization in striking a balance between industrial progress and consumer welfare as consumer expectations continue to change. Its function goes beyond simply establishing standards; it is a crucial cornerstone in the development of an equitable, open, and reliable marketplace in India.

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