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Feature Article

A Safe Eid Shopping Experience for Consumers

As the festival of Eid approaches, Fijians households which observe the month of Ramadhan are abuzz with preparations, including purchasing groceries, gifts, and festive delicacies. This time of joy and togetherness, however, also brings certain consumer risks that shoppers must be vigilant about. Past trends have shown an increase in price gouging, misleading advertisements, and the sale of expired or spoiled food items during the festive period, leading to financial strain and health risks for consumers.

This feature article explores the common consumer issues that arise during the Eid shopping season and provides insights on how shoppers can protect themselves from unethical practices in the marketplace.

Price Gouging, An Unfair Burden on Consumers

A recurring concern during Eid preparations is the inflation of prices on essential food items. With increased demand for ghee, dairy products, meat, and other key ingredients, some traders exploit the situation by charging exorbitant prices. Such unethical pricing practices place an additional burden on consumers, who may already be working within tight budgets to make the festival a memorable occasion for their families.

It is important for consumers to compare prices across different retailers before making purchases. Keeping track of standard market prices can help identify unreasonable increases. Additionally, shoppers should be aware of the price control regulations in place and report any businesses that appear to be taking unfair advantage of the demand surge. Regulatory authorities play a crucial role in monitoring and preventing unjustified price hikes to protect consumer rights.

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Misleading Advertisements and Pricing Discrepancies

Another prevalent issue during the Eid shopping season is misleading advertising. Consumers have reported instances where businesses advertise discounts and promotional deals, only to charge higher prices at checkout. This deceptive practice not only undermines consumer trust but also leads to financial losses for shoppers who may not realize the discrepancy until it is too late.

To avoid falling victim to misleading promotions, consumers are advised to double-check advertised prices against in-store pricing. Keeping digital or printed copies of promotional materials can serve as evidence in case of disputes.

Expired and Spoiled Food Products: A Health Hazard

Increased consumer activity during Eid can be seen as an opportune time to sell expired substandard food items to clear old stock. Reports have emerged in previous years of supermarkets and smaller retailers offering products past their expiration dates, including dairy items, cooking oils, and spices. One particularly alarming case involved the sale of Samai with visible fungus at a local supermarket, highlighting the potential health risks of consuming expired products.

Consumers must inspect product packaging for expiration dates and signs of spoilage before purchasing. Any items with damaged or tampered packaging should be avoided. Food safety is of utmost importance, especially during a time when families come together to celebrate and share meals. Shoppers should also be cautious when purchasing bulk items, as some retailers mix fresh stock with old inventory to sell off aging products.

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Pre-Ordered Sweets and Catering Issues

Eid celebrations are incomplete without a spread of traditional sweets and savory delights. Many families opt to pre-order these items from local caterers and bakeries to save time and effort. However, past experiences have shown that some suppliers struggle to fulfill orders due to overwhelming demand. Instances of delayed or unfulfilled orders have been reported, leaving consumers scrambling for alternatives at the last minute.

Additionally, quality concerns arise when pre-packaged sweet boxes contain stale or substandard items. Consumers should place orders well in advance with reputable vendors and confirm delivery timelines. It is also advisable to request samples or inspect products upon collection to ensure freshness and quality.

Online Shopping Risks During the Festive Season

With the growing popularity of online shopping, particularly for festive sweets and specialty foods, many consumers turn to social media platforms and websites to place orders. While this offers convenience, it also introduces risks, as not all sellers operate transparently or adhere to quality standards. Complaints about unresponsive vendors, undelivered orders, and poor-quality products have surfaced in previous years.

To mitigate these risks, consumers should research online sellers by checking reviews and verifying their business legitimacy. Opting for well-established retailers with clear return policies can help prevent disappointment. Furthermore, payments should be made through secure methods that offer buyer protection, ensuring that consumers have recourse in case of fraud.

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Protecting Consumer Rights and Making Informed Choices

As consumers navigate the busy shopping season, staying informed and cautious is key to ensuring a smooth and hassle-free Eid celebration. Here are some practical steps to safeguard against common shopping pitfalls:

- **Verify Prices:** Compare prices across different stores and keep records of advertised promotions.
- **Check Product Labels:** Inspect expiration dates, packaging conditions, and ingredient lists before purchasing food items.
- **Read Online Reviews:** Research vendors before making online purchases to ensure they are reputable and trustworthy.
- **Keep Receipts:** Always request and retain receipts as proof of purchase in case of disputes or the need for returns.
- **Report Unethical Practices:** If consumers encounter unfair pricing, misleading advertisements, or expired products, they should report these cases to the Council through our National Toll-free line 155.

By adopting a proactive approach, consumers can protect themselves from financial losses and potential health risks, ensuring that the festive spirit remains joyful and stress-free. Retailers, in turn, must uphold ethical business practices and comply with regulations to foster a fair and transparent marketplace.

Conclusion

As Eid festivities draw near, both consumers and businesses have a role to play in maintaining a fair and safe shopping environment. While consumers must exercise caution and make

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informed choices, businesses should prioritize ethical conduct and customer satisfaction. Responsible trading practices contribute to a positive shopping experience, fostering goodwill and trust between retailers and consumers.

Ultimately, Eid is a time of togetherness, generosity, and celebration. Ensuring that these values extend to the marketplace by promoting fairness, honesty, and consumer rights will allow all Fijians to enjoy the festivities without unnecessary stress or financial strain. By staying vigilant and making smart purchasing decisions, consumers can safeguard their well-being while embracing the true spirit of Eid.

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