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Consumer Council of Fiji



www.consumersfiji.org



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PRESS RELEASE

Consumers Warned: Opaque Online Reward Schemes and Giveaways

Consumers are being warned to exercise caution when engaging with online reward programs, membership-based giveaways, or social media promotions that require payment or personal information in exchange for the chance to win prizes and obscure how winners are selected and require varying levels of payment to participate.

These platforms, often promoted on social media and through mobile apps, lure users with promises of high-value prizes. However, the Council has identified critical red flags: the selection process for winners is typically not transparent or verifiable, and participants are often pressured to upgrade by paying different fees for different membership tiers to "increase their chances" of winning.

Council CEO Seema Shandil highlighted the dual risks of these models. "We are seeing schemes where a user might pay a small fee for a 'Basic' membership, but are then prompted to pay significantly more for 'Gold' or 'VIP' memberships with the implied promise of better odds. This layered fee structure, combined with a complete lack of clarity on how winners are drawn, creates a high-risk environment for consumers. It is impossible to know if the game is fair or if anyone truly wins the advertised prizes," she stated.

Under the Gaming Act 2009, any lottery or game of chance must be conducted under a valid licence, which requires transparency and fairness. These unlicensed, opaque schemes not only violate the law but also leave participants with financial losses and no recourse for refunds. Furthermore, the practice of charging different fees for different levels of access may constitute a misleading and deceptive practice under consumer protection laws. Consumers are essentially paying for an unverifiable chance, with no guarantee of a fair draw.

Council CEO Seema Shandil emphasised that consumers must remain vigilant. "Online reward schemes and paid giveaways can be very appealing, but they are not always legitimate. Consumers should never pay to participate in prize draws, should verify whether businesses hold the appropriate licences, and should avoid sharing personal or financial information with unverified operators," she said.

Members of the public are encouraged to carefully scrutinise any online platform offering rewards or giveaways, avoid participation in schemes that require upfront payments or referral-

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based recruitment, and report any suspicious activity or financial losses to the Consumer Council of Fiji. Reports can be made by calling the toll-free National Consumer Helpline on 155 or emailing complaints@consumersfiji.org.

The Council will continue to monitor the market and work with relevant authorities, to ensure that online reward programs, promotional activities, and prize-based schemes comply with Fiji's consumer protection, gaming, and data privacy laws

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