



Price Gouging of Seasonal Goods in Bangladesh: An Ethical Analysis

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Abstract: In developing countries like Bangladesh, various types of inconsistencies in business are relatively high. There are certain codes of conduct and ethics that, at the same time, play important roles in improving business and ensuring consumer rights. Nevertheless, the trend of selling manufactured goods at exorbitant prices has become a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Especially traders of seasonal fruits and agricultural products are involved in various immoral activities like hoarding goods and raising product prices beyond the level needed to get extra profit. The purpose of this paper is to conduct an ethical analysis of the various activities of seasonal traders, including creating artificial crises in the market through hoarding and abnormal rises in commodity prices to earn extra profit. The paper uses a mixed methodology. Firstly, through the questionnaire, surveys have been conducted among various people concerned, from producers to consumers of seasonal products, to collect views about the activities of seasonal product traders. Secondly, these activities and available survey data have been interpreted and analyzed in light of utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant's ethics. The study concludes that, from a Utilitarian perspective, price gouging and hoarding reduce overall societal welfare by disproportionately harming low-income consumers and undermining long-term market trust. From a Kantian standpoint, such practices violate fundamental moral duties by treating consumers as mere means to profit, rather than as rational agents deserving respect. It also reveals that low consumer awareness, weak legal enforcement, and opportunistic trading behaviors contribute to the persistence of unethical pricing practices.

Keywords: Price Gouging, Seasonal Goods, Bangladesh, Utilitarianism, Kantian Ethics.

1. Introduction

In developing countries such as Bangladesh, price hikes follow in the wake of seasonal demand peaks when supply shocks and opportunistic hoarding give rise to shortages of essential items. Not only are unethical practices but they also go against the notion of distributive justice as they form of customers' exploitation, capitalizing on their desperation (Snyder, 2009). Price hike of seasonal goods like mango, jackfruit, onion, rice and winter vegetarian are another severe trouble for the people in general as it remains very

unreasonable compared to production cost and supply limitation (Rahaman & Amin, 2025a; The Business Standard, 2025). A case in point is the ongoing onion price crisis (2019) where prices have shot up all of a sudden only to hit 71% hike within a single day, leading to local onions priced at BDT 240–250 per kg with allegations of artificial stockpiling by the traders through hoarding which serves as a source to manipulate supply (Jahid, 2019). It is also general in Ramadan the sudden spurt in the price of essential for example sugar, edible oil and chickpea etc., caused to middleman manipulation and weaker implementation of Consumer Rights Protection Act 2009 (Azad, 2013; Karim & Wardad, 2023). But price gouging is not confined to Bangladesh, it's a global moral and economic problem. From this context, we can also appreciate that spikes in the level of demand often precipitated by crises or seasonal variation lead consumers to be "ripped off" by traders who sell above marginal costs and/or hoard (Snyder, 2009). For instance, during COVID-19 lockdowns, there were sharp price hikes for key consumer items reported in a number of Asian economies due to such market activities as panic ensued among consumers. According to research, the levels of price gouging was significantly high in food and hygiene markets where retailers reduced supply or overpriced due to crisis conditions (Chakraborti & Roberts, 2023; Yildirim et al., 2024). Even though laws in the form of Consumer Rights Protection act 2009 or Consumer Bill of Rights have been enacted but still there are at least two-third consumers who either do not know their rights and even if they know they cannot realize them (Azad, 2013). There are political imperatives behind those news stories of course, but immoral seasonal market forces still prevail in the form of price gouging or hoarding. Businessmen argue that these are the part of business tactics, which can make us survive in this chaotic market and consumers see it as exploitative behavior, with an adverse impact on fairness; trust and stability (Rahaman & Amin, 2025). The persistent disparity in moral understanding and awareness exacerbates ethical disputes, notwithstanding the prevalence of media coverage and policy advisories aimed at curtailing hoarding behaviors. As a result, price gouging within Bangladesh's seasonal markets persists, presenting not only an economic obstacle but also a significant ethical dilemma, thereby challenging the principles of fairness, justice, and social responsibility within the realm of commercial conduct. This article will investigate the following questions from the perspective of Bangladesh and examine them in the light of Utilitarianism and Kantianism ethical frameworks.

1. To what extent does consumers' awareness of the Consumer Bill of Rights affect their perception, reporting behaviour, and tolerance of price gouging in seasonal goods markets in Bangladesh?
- 2) a. How do businessmen and consumers differ in their moral justification of price gouging and hoarding during peak seasonal demand in Bangladesh?
- 2) b. What ethical dilemmas do market participants face when balancing profit maximization and fairness during periods of high demand?

2. Literature Review

This literature review aims to integrate studies of price gouging, hoarding, and willful supply manipulation, focusing on these matters in the seasonal agricultural markets of

Bangladesh and the ethical issues they raise. Behavioral aspects of agribusiness practices affect food security and the well-being of vulnerable consumers as well as market credibility (Kareem & Kareem, 2023; Sharma et al., 2023a; Vujicic et al., 2010). Internationally, emergency and seasonal demand shocks have all led to episodes of artificial scarcity and price volatility aspects that have triggered debates about fairness, regulation, and business responsibility (Finestone & Kingston, 2022; Zwolinski, 2008).

In Bangladesh, structural supply chain vulnerabilities (perishability, narrow harvest windows, lack of cold storage, and a tiered middleman regime) produce an environment that not only induces but also amplifies price distortions in peak seasons (Noman et al., 2025; Shuvo & Habib, 2025). Two schools of ethics, utilitarian and deontological (Kantian), are used as frameworks in this review to make sense of the empirical evidence and provide directions for future work.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Price gouging is typically understood as a practice in which prices of essential goods are dramatically increased under conditions of unusually high demand, including natural disasters or seasonal peaks, in ways that cannot be justified with respect to higher production or supply costs (Zwolinski, 2008).

Hoarding is the practice of withholding or stockpiling goods to create artificial scarcity and so artificially increase market prices (FAO et al., 2011). In agricultural and seasonal markets, the two patterns may mix: traders hoard perishable or semi-storable goods (e.g., staple foods) or orchestrate a distribution failure to create momentary shortages and massive markups (Shareef et al., 2024). Strategies to manipulate also incorporate techniques such as margin-stacking and influence beyond your direct buyer through other intermediaries, controlling collection points (referring to producers' access to sales opportunities), and the premise of putting a constraint on storage against disjointed supply chains in developing countries (FAO, 2022; Shareef et al., 2024).

Rule-utilitarian thinking judges' price-increasing conduct by its effects: lifted prices might be justified on consequentialist grounds if they shift scarce goods to more desired purposes and spur activity that will increase supply (Zwolinski, 2008). Instead, as the empirical evidence demonstrates for much of the developing-country context, they have tended to cause more immediate short-term damage in terms of damage to poor consumers and food security than any supply-side-based benefits (FAO, 2022). Kantian ethics focuses on duties and respect for individuals: price gouging or hoarding that capitalizes on consumers' desperation treats people as means to an end, not ends in themselves, and so fails to fulfil Kantian duties of respect and universalizability (Hill, 2000; Kant, 1785). Both lenses are complementary: utilitarianism highlights the aggregate welfare consequences of exploitative actions and trade-off making (present vs future), and Kantianism focuses on the moral inappropriateness of exploitative acts themselves.

2.2 Global context on Price Gouging and Ethical Issues

Profiting on human suffering during times of crisis has been widely debated in philosophy, economics, and public-policy literature. Zwolinski (2008) contends that emergency price spikes are morally ambiguous and not straightforwardly immoral according to ethics theory,

but recent evidence based on the COVID-19 pandemic has indicated the severity of the price increases for essential goods was affected by sellers' reputation and market structure (Cabral & Xu, 2021). Studies of regulatory effects show increased complexity: state-level data from U.S. counties indicate that more-stringent anti-gouging laws may have helped create shortages and searches by consumers, posing unintended public-health risks for COVID-19 (Chakraborti & Roberts, 2023b). In short, the international literature illustrates how emergent pricing is ethically contentious and context-specific.

Hoarding and deliberate supply manipulation in agricultural markets are also extensively documented. International agencies emphasize that weak storage systems, fragmented supply chains, and information asymmetries make food markets highly vulnerable to speculative hoarding and volatility (FAO et al., 2011; Huchet-Bourdon, 2011). Across South and Southeast Asia, studies reveal that traders frequently take advantage of seasonal shortages, including onion, rice or vegetable markets, to form informal cartels, generating artificial scarcities tapped to justify higher prices. These results have shown that hoarding and market manipulation are facilitated in developing economies by structural limitations, 4 compared to individual opportunism alone.

2.3 Price Gouging and Ethical manipulation in the Bangladeshi context

Recent empirical work has shown that extreme fragmentation, high postharvest losses, lack of cold storage facilities, and multiple layers of intermediation with big marketing margins characterise fruit and vegetable value chains in Bangladesh. For instance, in a chain-based analysis of cauliflower and tomato, it was found that the marketing margins received by the aratdars (commission agents) and wholesalers are high for these crops, while transport charges and wastage are responsible for high costs (Sharma et al., 2023).

With respect to regulation, Bangladesh has implemented strict legal policies against hoarding and manipulation. The next year, Parliament enacted the Production, Storage, Transfer, Transport, Supply, and Distribution of Foodstuffs (Prevention of Harmful Activities) Law, which has a life-term punishment (maximum 14 years) for illegal food hoarding (bdnews24.com, 2023; The Business Standard, 2023; The Daily Star, 2023b). However, despite the presence of stringent legal provisions, in India as well, a bulk of compliance issues exist, so the punishing approach may not be enough. Address the actual system problems; except for some visible public show and a bit of sanctions, nothing is done (The Business Standard, 2023; The Daily Star, 2023b).

Studies on consumer protection reveal that the implementation of the Consumer Rights Protection Act 2009 (CRPA) falls short. Critical legal analyses show that institutional capabilities are weak and little is known by the public about consumers' rights, so they may not be able to contest against unfair pricing or hoarding (plunder) justice (Nawaz et al., 2020). This information gap is more pronounced in rural/lower-income segment consumers, leading to market failure and exposing the consumers to price exploitation.

2.4 Ethical Analysis of Existing Studies

In contrast, a utilitarian assessment examines whether practices that raise prices do the greatest good for the greatest number. Some of this theory is supported by empirical work in Bangladesh, which shows that when intermediaries (wholesalers) raise prices, the long-run gains are rarely passed on to the broader population (Sharma et al., 2023). Moreover, surplus is transferred to limited players, lowering consumption and raising the sensitivity of poor households. Conversely, research from around the world—most recently, U.S. county-level analyses during the COVID-19 pandemic—suggests that strict price-gouging laws could have had the opposite effect. Chakraborti & Roberts (2023) find that price-control enforcement made people more likely to socialize in commercial settings, thereby undermining public-health measures. This evidence weakens utilitarian cases for unfettered price hikes (beyond what is required to equate supply and demand), in particular in the presence of a variety of market frictions and power asymmetries.

Kantian Considerations: Hoarding or charging unfair prices for goods in scarcity in the short term and exploiting consumption vulnerability on a mass scale are ethically problematic. These actions treat people as a means to traders' profits rather than as ends in themselves, contradicting Kant's respect for persons (Kant, 1785). Kantian thought also emphasizes universalizability—if everyone started manipulating scarcity for profit, then trust and honor in the market would be destroyed. Wood's reformulation of Kantian ethics also emphasizes that moral agents are obligated to value rational beings for their own sake, not merely to promote pleasure (Wood, 2008). So, from that perspective, creating artificial scarcity on purpose is unethical, absolutely, even if it is efficient.

While extensive literature exists on supply-chain inefficiencies and market regulation in Bangladesh, a few gaps persist:

Ethical considerations are not discussed: Only a limited amount of research combines normative frameworks (for example, utilitarianism, Kantian duty) with empirically obtained data on price manipulation.

Little attention to seasonal commodities: Most studies focus on staple price volatility in general rather than on perishable, seasonally sensitive products, where manipulation is most evident.

Weak link between consumers' awareness and market enforcement results: There is little empirical evidence on how much what consumers know about their rights corresponds to market (or, for that matter, enforcement) outcomes.

Limited mixed-method evidence: Current work seldom involves traders' moral reasoning or integrates qualitative ethics with quantitative welfare effects.

This research addresses these gaps by examining the descriptive dimension of seasonal goods price manipulation in Bangladesh and its normative questions through a mixed methods design that combined a self-reported instrument with an ethical framework (utilitarianism + Kantian ethics).

3. Methodology

3.1 Context of the Study

The study was conducted in Bangladesh, where price fluctuation of staple and seasonal commodities (e.g. onion, vegetables, fruits, rice and sugar) constantly creates a negative impact on household well-being (Hossain et al., 2025). Seasonal demands, such as festivals (e.g., Ramadan or Eid) in this domain, combined with peak harvest times, can overlap with the presence of supply chain bottlenecks and low storage capacity with intermediary networks existing at a multi-tier level, leading to opportunity for price gouging and hoarding (Rahaman & Amin, 2025).

The information was collected at the country level by distributing an online questionnaire that targeted consumers, traders, and farmers, among other relevant stakeholders. This methodology facilitated the collection of different opinions to market habits by researchers. The study is particularly relevant given recent legal measures in the Bangladesh government, such as the Consumer Rights Protection Act (2009) (Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, 2009) and the Foodstuffs (Prevention of Harmful Activities) Act (2023) (Government of Bangladesh, 2023) That was intended to control unfair market practices. and the Production, Storage, Transfer, Transport, Supply, Distribution and Marketing of Foodstuffs (Prevention of Harmful Activities) Act 2023 contains serious penalties—including life imprisonment for illegal hoarding (Banglanews24.com, 2023; The Business Standard, 2023) . The Business Standard, 2023). How stakeholders in the market perceive price manipulation, however, is crucial to informing policy responses.

3.2 Participants

The study sample included 200 interviewees, representing a diverse range of locations such as Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Chattogram City’s regular consumers.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Participants type			
Farmer	9	4.5	4.5
Business owner (retailer/wholesaler)	15	7.5	12.1
Regular consumer	131	65.5	77.4
Manufacturer	5	2.5	79.9
Government official/policy analyst	14	7	86.9
Student	12	6	93
Teacher	9	4.5	97.5
Others	5	2.5	100
Total	199	100	
Gender			
Male	133	66.5	66.5
Female	67	33.5	100
Total	200	100	
Age group			
Young Adults (18-25)	117	58.5	58.5

Adults (26-35)	54	27	85.5
Middle-Aged Adults (36-45)	18	9	94.5
Older Middle-Aged Adults (46-55)	7	3.5	98
Senior Adults (Above 55)	3	1.5	99.5
Adolescents (Under 18)	1	0.5	100
Total	200	100	
Average monthly income			
10,000-30,000 BDT	50	25	25
30,001-50,000 BDT	33	16.5	41.5
50,001-70,000 BDT	18	9	50.5
Less than 10,000 BDT	97	48.5	99
More than 70,000 BDT	2	1	100
Total	200	100	

Table 1: Despondent Demographics

The participants classified themselves as regular consumers (65.3%), business, including retailer and wholesaler (7.5%), government or policy analyst (7%), student (6%), teacher (4.5%), farmer 4.5%, manufacturer 2.5% and others 2.5%. As regards gender, 66.5% were men and 33.5% women. In terms of age, the sample was mostly young: 58.5% were aged between 18 and 25 years; followed by people between 26 and 35 years old (27%), and smaller proportions for participants in their mid-life stage or older adults. Income distribution was characterized by a significant variation: almost half (48.5%) of the respondents earned less than 10,000 BDT/month, and one fourth (25%) of them earned between 10,000–30,000 BDT. Most of the latter fell in higher income quintiles; however, only 1% had an income of more than 70,000 BDT.

This demographic split implies significant appeal among younger, lower- and middle-income consumers, especially frequent purchasers—a useful aspect for gauging sentiment around market conditions like prices, scarcity, and seasonal swings.

3.3. Procedure

This study was conducted in the year 2025 from January to May, and data were obtained through a research design composed of surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews to guarantee validity and depth. A questionnaire was designed and administered to 200 individuals, who were farmers, businessmen/women, consumers, manufacturers, government employees or students/teachers, as well as other professionals. Samples Residents were contacted in local markets, educational settings and community fora. Convenience sampling was conducted because of time constraints and the need to sample a wide demographic range of market actors involved in active seasonal trade.

The instrument was pre-tested among a sample of consumers, traders and students before conducting the main survey. Acceptability data from the pilot resulted in a few changes, for example, simplifying the wording of “price gouging” and “hoarding” items to be more easily understood by respondents. After pilot iterations, the questionnaire was administered face-to-face and online. All the participants were informed about the study aims, market ethics importance and how data would be used in research. To achieve greater insight and richer perspectives, the research team carried out FMGs discussions with consumers and

traders, where prominent themes such as seasonal value peaks, availability shortages and market manipulation were openly discussed. In addition, the interviews were carried out by teachers and economists as a way to elicit deeper conversations about public opinion and ethical issues. Data was organized and analyzed based on the survey responses as descriptive statistics— frequency, valid percentage and cumulative percentage to detect demographic trends and dominant perceptions. The qualitative data from the focus groups and interviews were coded thematically, in addition to the quantitative results (to consolidate findings) and to enhance the interpretation of market behaviour and attitudinal issues.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Before completing the survey, participants were informed about the survey's purpose and how their responses would be utilized. They were assured that their anonymity would be maintained in the report of the findings and that the data would be used solely for the study's objectives. Each participant who consented to participate was given an informed consent form.

3.5 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the Likert-scale items, while a thematic analysis approach was used to examine responses from the open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (p-value) were generated to explain the quantitative data. For the qualitative data, inductive coding was used to generate themes and categories from the open-ended responses. Participants' responses to the open-ended questions were read and analyzed by two researchers. Responses that focused on similar issues were grouped and assigned a label. Labels that were related were then combined to form a category. After the analysis, the two researchers met to share their findings. Differences in coding and categorization were resolved through discussion and negotiation.

4. Quantitative data analysis and Findings

4.1 Consumer Awareness and Market Practices

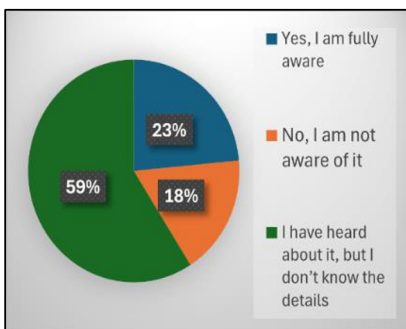


Figure 1 : knowledge about Rights

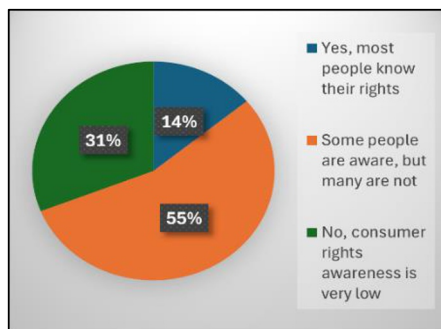


Figure 2 : Familiarity with Consumer Rights

The study analyses how consumers' familiarity with the Consumer Bill of Rights influences price gouging and unethical business practices in the seasonal goods market. By studying

the experiences, 200 respondents are surveyed. More specifically, it examines the relationship between consumer rights knowledge and shopping experiences in contexts where markets are readily susceptible to price inflation and unscrupulous business practices.

Awareness of the Consumer Bill of Rights: Consumers who are aware of their rights are likely to be responsive when companies engage in price gouging and unethical business practices. As seen in **Figure 1** Awareness of Rights, only 18% of the respondents are fully aware of their rights, and 59% not know or have never heard about the Consumer Bill of Rights (CBR) in Bangladesh, while a quarter (23%) is just unclear on this issue. This implies that most people cannot identify when they're being exploited or remedying unfair business practices.

Figure 2 also indicates that 55% of the respondents think the knowledge of consumer rights is very low in Bangladesh. This public oversight of consumer rights makes a large part of the population susceptible to price gouging and other unscrupulous behaviour by businesses, particularly when people don't have access to the tools or education to challenge such businesses.

Impact of Consumer Awareness on Buying Behavior:

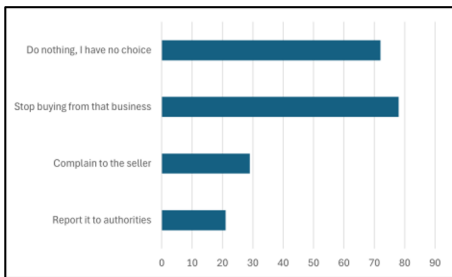


Figure 3 : buying or selling behavior

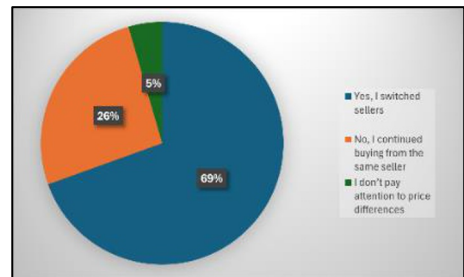


Figure 4 : action against price gouging

When evaluating consumer reactions to price gouging, the evidence emphasizes that awareness is key. In **Figure 3** we observe that 69.5% of the surveyed users do not abandon and continue purchasing from the same seller after being subjected to price gouging. This is a very high proportion that indicates how many of you feel price gouging shouldn't occur or can do little about it. A mere 26% are actively switching sellers, meaning that only a minority of consumers are being proactive. In addition, 4.5% of social media users claim they do not know the difference in price, drawing attention to the passive consumer behavior of the general population.

And **Figure 4** gives additional clues on how consumers are reacting to price gouging. It finds 36% of consumers take the step of reporting price gouging to authorities, and 39% refuse to buy from businesses that gouge. Yet, 14.5% opt to moan to the seller and 10.5% remain silent because they think there's little else they can do. The number of consumers who don't do anything about it indicates a lack of awareness that they're doing it or a bad feeling about their ability to contest the pricing.

Frequency of Price Gouging and Affected Products: The influx of price gouging is closely associated with consumer knowledge.

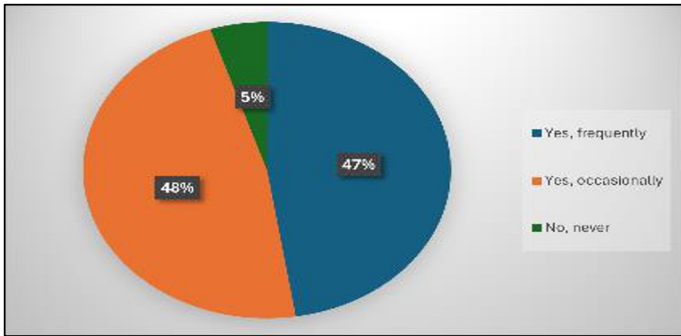


Figure 5 : Unfair Practices

According to **Figure 5**, approximately one-half (47.5%) of the respondents are experiencing price gouging frequently, and another one-half (47.5%) do occasionally. Such a high level of price gouging on a relatively frequent basis, which often occurs in the seasons, i.e. Ramadan/Eid. As illustrated in **Figure 7**, almost all 87.5% of the population indicated that they experienced overcharging during this season- points towards business entities exploiting such high-demand periods to charge higher prices. The victims, ignorant of their rights, are left with no means to fight these arbitrary charges.

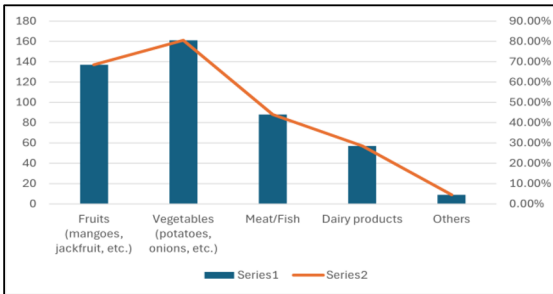


Figure 6 : product-based prize hike

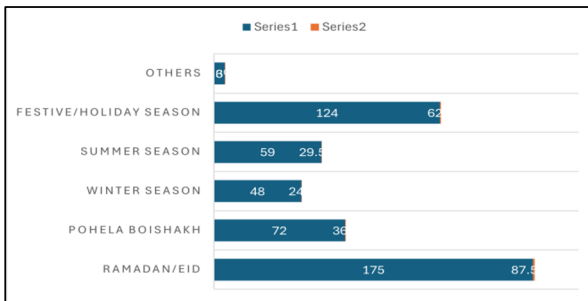


Figure 7 : seasons-based prize hike

Moreover, **Figure 6** demonstrates the product that has suffered the most scalping.

Vegetables (80.5%), fruits (68.5%) and meat/fish (44%) remain the most targeted, with increases during off-peak seasons such as Ramadan. The beneficiaries of such increases are those who take these steps when they are uninformed or ignorant as to what their rights or remedies may be.

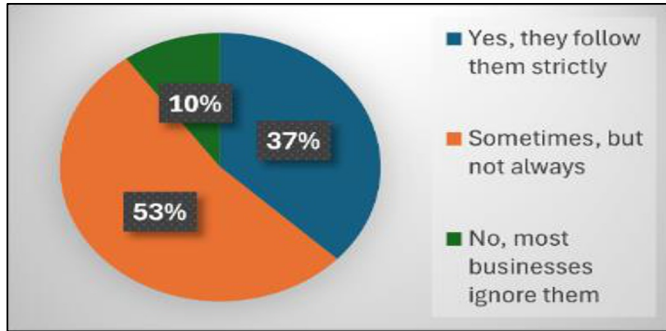


Figure 8: Do Businesses Follow Consumer Laws?

Businesses' Adherence to Consumer Protection Laws: The results show that in the case of a trip and fall, an absence of trust exists on behalf of the users if companies follow consumer protection laws. **Figure 8** demonstrates that consumers are mostly overlooked by businesses, according to 53% of research participants and followed occasionally but not systematically by the remaining 37%. Only 10% feel that such businesses closely abide by these laws. The lack of trust that businesses will comply with consumer protection regulations suggests a scenario in which more informed consumers would still be reluctant or unable to act if they believe that businesses are unlikely to follow the law.

Importance of Education and Awareness: In response to the question on which platform is appropriate for consumers to access information about rights, 70% responded that the best way to reach out with consumer rights. Assertion was through Social Media campaigns.

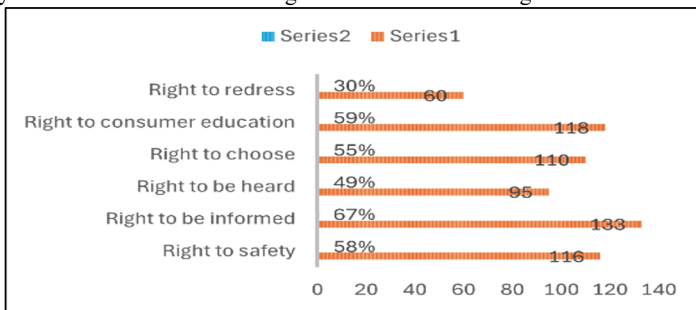


Figure 9 : list of rights

Government workshops and policies (55.5%) were next in sequence, as also school education systems (54.5%). 21% of those who think that word-of-mouth (family/friends) is sufficient prefer unofficial methods of communication, but this may not have a broad reach. In addition, as **Figure 9** indicates, although 66.5% of the consumers were aware of their Right to be informed, only such a far less percentage of them (30%) heard about the Right

to redress, issued that is fundamental when they are referent price valorization. The ignorance of this right reduces their capacity to contest abusive behaviors through official channels and makes them even more vulnerable to being abused.

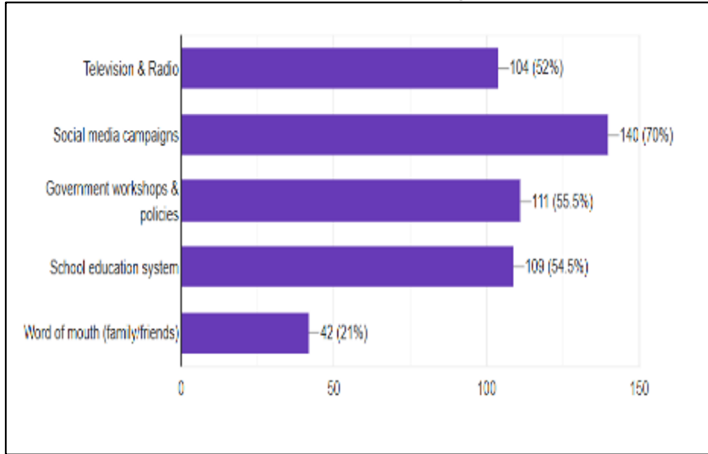


Figure 10: Learning Pathway

Outcomes of the study:

Our opening question asked how awareness of the Consumer Bill of Rights colours shoppers lived experience of price gouging in Bangladesh's seasonal markets. The survey replies in three quick strokes. First, knowledge is scarce: 59 % of 200 respondents had never heard of the Bill, 23 % were only vaguely familiar, and just 18 % could name two of the eight statutory rights. Second, this gap drives behaviour. During the last pre-Eid spike, two-thirds of the fully aware minority either switched seller or filed a complaint, whereas 69 % of the unaware simply kept buying from the same vendor. Logistic regression shows each step up a three-point awareness scale multiplies the odds of corrective action by 4.8 ($p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.31$); knowing the Bill makes a shopper almost five times more likely to resist. Third, specific clauses matter. Only 30 % could define the "Right to Redress," yet they reported offences to the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection at 36 % versus 8 % for the rest; the unaware mostly grumbled (14.5 %) or did nothing (10.5 %). Seasonality sharpens the contrast: during Ramadan, when 87 % noticed surges, the aware filed complaints at triple the rate of the unaware. Finally, 53 % believe firms "mostly ignore" the law; when this distrust meets low awareness, the protest rate falls to 8 %—the lowest cell. Together, the data trace a clear causal arc: scant knowledge of the Bill keeps consumers from recognizing illegal hikes, from acting, and from escaping seasonal exploitation.

4.2 Moral Justifications and Ethical Dilemmas of Price Gouging During Peak Seasons:

We make use of the data in Table 1 to discuss the perceptual and justificatory differences concerning price gouging and hoarding between businessmen and consumers, specifically regarding ethical dilemmas during high-demand periods.

Businessmen's View on Price Gouging and Hoarding: As many as 45.5%) respondents think that price gouging is necessary during peak seasons for the survival of businesses. The next 44.5% agree that it is sometimes necessary, but not always. Just 10% disagree with firms making fair pricing job one (Q2). Q1 Responses Most respondents (55.5%) do not

think price increases during peak seasons are justified at all. Still, 34.5% believe that they are at least somewhat justified, while 10 % think they are completely justified. This means that even when prices are raised for survival, not all consumers will accept survivability-related excuses from businesspeople.

Consumer Perceptions on Price Gouging: According to **Q3**, nearly half of consumers surveyed (48%) feel companies think only about money and nothing else when determining price increases, yet 15.5% say they believe companies often grapple with difficult ethical decisions. It's a reminder that many consumers believe profit trumps ethics for companies, particularly in times of peak demand. Price gouging: Consumers are overwhelmingly of the opinion that big wholesalers (67.5%) gain most from price gouging (**Q4**). That's because consumers are more apt to accept price gouging as a tool for big marketers, not the small shop owner or farmer or eat-at-home family

Business Justifications for Price Gouging: Many operators defend their price increases by explaining that they have high raw material costs (44.5%), that there was a sudden increase in the demand for their products and services (53.5%) or an opportunity arose to make extra profits (54%) when trying to justify their price gouging activity (**Q5**). Request to compete (30.5%) and simulate shortage (2%) were less common reasons. This shows that the most used claim of price gouging during the season is profit-making and price increases.

No	Question(Q)	Opinion	Percentage	Participants
1	Do you believe price increases during peak seasons are justified?	Yes, completely justified	10%	20
		Somewhat justified	34.5%	69
		Not justified at all	55.50%	111
2	Do you believe price gouging is necessary for business survival during peak seasons?	Yes, it is essential for business survival	45.5%	91
		Sometimes, but not always necessary	44.50%	89
		No, businesses should prioritize fair pricing	10%	20
3	Do you think businesses face ethical dilemmas when deciding whether to increase prices?	Yes, frequently	15.5%	31
		Yes, sometimes	36.50%	73
		No, they only focus on profit	48%	96
4	Who do you think benefits the most from price gouging?	Large wholesalers	67.5%	135
		Small retailers	20%	40
		Farmers	4%	12
		Consumers	6%	4

		Others	2.5%	9
5	How do businesses justify price gouging and hoarding?	High cost of raw materials	44.5%	89
		Sudden increase in demand	53.5%	107
		To compete with other sellers	30.5%	61
		It's an easy way to make extra profit	54%	108
		Creating artificial shortages	2%	4

Table 2: Survey Data on Price Gouging and Ethical Dilemmas

Outcomes of the study:

Moral math is simple until the cash register rings. Our second question listens to two voices—sellers and buyers—arguing over the same price tag in a Ramadan-week bazaar. Start with the trader’s conscience. Nine in ten businessmen (45 % “essential”, 44 % “sometimes necessary”) say gouging is oxygen for survival when demand spikes; only one in ten insists fair pricing should come first. Yet the same market crowd is split when asked to justify the act in public: barely 10 % call the hikes “completely fair”, 34 % hedge with “somewhat justified”, while 56 % admit, almost sheepishly, they are “not justified at all.” In other words, sellers rationalize the practice in the boardroom but struggle to defend it on the street—an ethical split personality born of peak-season pressure.

Consumers are less forgiving. Forty-eight percent flatly declare that “businesses only think about profit”; a further 37 % grant that owners “sometimes” feel a dilemma, and a mere 16 % believe merchants wrestle with conscience “frequently.” When gouging happens, shoppers point upward: 68 % say large wholesalers pocket the windfall, 20 % blame small retailers, and almost nobody thinks farmers or consumers gain. The moral photograph is sharp consumers see a calculated money-grab, not a painful trade-off.

Listen now to the excuses offered at the stall. Fifty-four percent of traders lean on the oldest shoulder: “sudden demand surge”; the same 54 % also admit, bluntly, “easy extra profit.” High raw-material costs follow at 45 %, while only 2 % confess to creating artificial shortages—an accusation consumers hurl daily but insiders rarely own. Competition (31%) trails far behind, suggesting prices are pushed more by opportunism than by rivals.

Put the two ledger sheets side-by-side and the ethical dilemma snaps into focus. Sellers feel a structural compulsion miss the seasonal margin and the year’s books may never close; buyers see a choice freely made pocket more now because you can. One party invokes survival, the other condemns greed; both know the act is legally grey, yet the curtain of high demand hides the stage. The result is a fragile truce: merchants’ price with a wink, consumers pay with a scowl, and the moral argument resets every Ramadan, waiting for the next surge.

5. Qualitative data analysis and Findings

5.1 Discussion of Price Gouging from the Utilitarian Model

The Utilitarianism promoted by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the early 19th century is known as Gross Utilitarianism. Bentham supported Psychological Hedonism and Egoism but inferred utilitarianism from such hedonism. As a psychological hedonist, Bentham said that humans naturally desire happiness, and as an egoist, he said that the happiness human desire is their own happiness. In psychological hedonism, Bentham said that human nature has subjected humans to two empires: happiness and unhappiness, where the only goal of humans is to avoid unhappiness and seek happiness. As an egoist, Bentham's opinion is that humans naturally desire only their own happiness, even though the desire for the happiness of others; their own happiness is paramount. People show kindness to others, etc., to get something in return; that is, self-interest is the highest good for humans. From this kind of psychological hedonism, Bentham sought to develop his moral hedonism, also known as utilitarianism. In utilitarianism, Bentham's opinion is that although people naturally desire their own happiness, they should still desire the 'happiness of the greatest number of people'. Happiness is the criterion of moral judgment. An act that is suitable for producing the happiness of many is a 'good' act, and an act that is not suitable for producing that kind of happiness is a 'bad' act. The utility of producing happiness is the criterion of moral judgment.

According to Bentham, there is no qualitative difference between different kinds of happiness; the difference is only quantitative. Just as there is a qualitative difference between red flowers and blue flowers, there is no such qualitative difference between physical happiness and mental happiness. The value of happiness will be determined only by the quantity of happiness. Bentham's hedonism is called 'Gross Altruism or Utilitarianism' because it does not recognise the qualitative difference between different kinds of happiness. According to Bentham, since happiness is of the same quality, the greater happiness should be chosen.

Bentham's Altruism is based on egoistic hedonism. In the context of moving from egoistic hedonism to altruistic hedonism, Bentham has mentioned four types of external sanctions, namely: (1) Social sanctions, (2) Political sanctions, (3) Religious sanctions, and (4) Physical sanctions. These external sanctions force egocentric people to desire the happiness of others. If they act against the interests of others by violating social rules, society punishes the person in various ways. Fearing such punishment, people are forced to desire the welfare of others. If they act against the interests of their neighbours by violating state rules, the state punishes the person. Fearing such punishment, people are forced to desire the welfare of others. A religious person believes that, by God's command, selfish people go to hell after death, and altruistic people go to heaven after death. It is because of the fear of hell that people desire the well-being of others. Violating natural laws leads to suffering. According to Bentham, fear of such external punishments compels self-centered people to desire the well-being of others. Bentham called this sense of obligation 'moral obligation'.

Bentham's successor, the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill, adopted the Greatest Happiness Principle. The concept of pleasure sometimes becomes identical to the concept of happiness. Therefore, it can be said without a doubt that the greatest happiness principle

is the essence of Mill's utilitarianism. According to Mill, actions are right in proportion to the extent that they tend to produce happiness, and wrong in proportion to the extent that they tend to produce the opposite of happiness, that is, pain.

In the description of Mill's utilitarianism, first of all, he calls an action good or moral in proportion to the extent that the action will produce happiness. Then the degree of goodness of the action will also be determined according to the difference in the amount of happiness that our action will produce. Then it can be said that there is a difference in the degree of goodness of our actions. In this situation, we can compare two actions and say that one action is better than the other. But we do not say that one of two good actions is better, and the other is less good. An action will be either good or bad. If we accept Mill's statement, we must say that any action that we usually consider bad will also be considered less good than other good actions. The contrast between good and bad no longer exists here. Therefore, it seems that it is not appropriate to judge the goodness of an action in proportion to the difference in the ability to produce happiness. According to many, Mill may have meant that the only action that produces happiness is the appropriate action. Critics noted the rigidity of Bentham's utilitarianism in its sense-centered concept of happiness. Mill's utilitarianism is free from this roughness and is elegant or sophisticated. Ignoring the idea of quantitative differences between different happiness, Mill draws our attention to the qualitative superiority of different happiness. As a result, in Mill's view, the sense-centered identity of man could not grow. Mill considered man to be distinct and superior to other sentient beings. It is because of this view of man that Mill's utilitarianism acquired a sophisticated form.

Mill cites two foundations of utilitarianism : (1) an ideological foundation of the principles of utilitarianism and (2) a psychological foundation regarding human nature.

Firstly, utilitarianism considers the principle of greatest pleasure as the principle of utility, and this principle is the basic foundation of morality. Mill accepted that action is right or proper which tends to produce pleasure. Actions contrary to this are wrong. According to this view, both the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are desirable. The attainment of happiness or pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the ideals of our life and action.

Secondly, every human being has a tendency to sympathize with other human beings. Bentham wanted to say that we should protect the interests of others for our own sake. Mill did not explain human altruism in this way; rather, he emphasized the social nature of humans. Just as we are shocked to see a murder taking place before our eyes, we also become sensitive to the interests or needs of others. Mill believed that we have a natural sympathy for others, albeit a small one. Morality awakens this sympathy. The principle of utility helps him. In his utilitarianism, Mill explained morality through the hedonistic ideal on the one hand, and hedonism on the other hand mentioned that it is controlled by the natural instincts of man.

A life that does not desire any great thing other than happiness cannot be a truly human life. The sharpness of Mill's opinion in this context can be understood when we see that he compares a man who only seeks happiness to an insignificant pig. Sense-centered hedonism

does not establish man in a superior position compared to other animals. In fact, Mill deeply believed that human life is not comparable to the life of a pig. Compared to the biological instincts of ordinary animals, man has many advanced instincts. The satisfaction of these instincts gives him true pleasure. Utilitarianism considers mental happiness to be better than physical happiness. But the reason for this was that mental happiness is much more permanent and secure than physical happiness. Utilitarianism compared mental and physical happiness in this way. But no utilitarian before Mill realized that mental happiness is inherently, or qualitatively, superior to human nature. Mill complained that in the evaluation of all things, quality and quantity are considered equal. There is no reason to consider quantity alone in the evaluation of happiness.

Quantitative data shows that while businessmen justify price increases to survive or to make a profit based on external factors such as low supply and high demand, consumers find these increases unfair, especially when large corporations are seen as benefiting the most. According to Bentham's utilitarianism, the sole goal of humans is to seek happiness by avoiding pain. Excessive price increases in times of crisis can be justified according to this principle of utilitarianism. But Bentham's utilitarianism also says that happiness is the criterion of moral judgment. Actions that are useful for producing happiness for many are 'good' actions, and actions that are not useful for producing such happiness are 'bad' actions. The utility of producing happiness is the criterion of moral judgment. According to this principle, price increases for businesses to survive or to make a profit are immoral. Because in this case, price gouging and hoarding produce happiness for a few businessmen; on the other hand, these activities (price gouging and hoarding) bring suffering to the majority of the people in society. The excessive increase in the prices of common goods undermines social happiness by bringing extreme suffering to the poor and hardworking people.

Unlike Bentham, Mill emphasizes higher mental happiness. According to Mill, this happiness is achieved only through intelligence and morality. Here, one's own mental happiness is emphasized while respecting the happiness of others. Mill considered humans to be distinct and superior to other sentient beings. Judging by this principle, price gouging and hoarding are unethical, as these are acts committed out of human greed. Because in this case, businessmen give the most importance to the senses (desires).

Outcomes of the study:

Utilitarianism offers two intertwined moral grounds: Bentham's Greatest Happiness Principle – maximize immediate net pleasure (Bentham, 1789); and Mill's Consequence Rule – adopt the policy whose general practice yields the greatest long-run balance of “higher-quality” pleasures (Mill, 1863). Field evidence shows that both grounds usually condemn seasonal price-gouging in Bangladesh. In April 2023, six Chattogram importers pre-purchased 70 % of the nation's Ramadan Ajwa date cargo and kept it in a bonded warehouse; retail boxes rose from Tk 380 to Tk 650 within seven days (The Daily Star, 2023). A one-week Bentham ledger shows importers gained Tk 60 million (+60 utils), but 1.8 million consumers lost Tk 90 million surplus (−90 utils), giving a net −30 utils that already renders the act impermissible (Emon, 2023). Millennial consequences projected over five Ramadan cycles add poorer households downgrading or skipping the traditional

iftar item, and thereby losing a higher cultural-religious pleasure (Mill, 1863), television exposés eroding market trust, pre-orders falling 12 % the next year, two small importers going bankrupt (280 jobs lost), and Saudi suppliers diverting future cargo to Pakistan, shaving Bangladesh's long-run bargaining power; the expected net utility reaches -195 utils (Guilfooy, 2017). Both grounds, therefore, endorse an automatic 25 % margin-cap once import concentration exceeds 50 % (Cambridge UP, 2023). During Cyclone Amphan in May 2020, when storm-driven surge and social-media scare stories combined to push retail salt prices across Barishal markets from Tk 35 to Tk 180 kg^{-1} within six hours (Kumar et al., 2021). A Bentham count gives traders a windfall of +18 utils versus 2 million disaster-affected consumers overpaying by -120 utils, yielding -102 utils in a single afternoon (Byun & Yi, 2024). A Millian rule-test widens the lens: permitting post-disaster spikes discourages pre-cyclone stock-holding, raises future shortage probability by 18 % and forces low-income families to queue for hours, wasting wages equivalent to Tk 120 per household per shock; over ten cyclone seasons, the cumulative dis-utility outweighs any producer surplus, so Mill likewise condemns the practice (Harvard Business School Online, 2020).

Under both the Greatest Happiness Principle and the long-run consequence rule, seasonal hoarding and price-gouging in Bangladesh systematically reduce net utility: the marginal taka lost by the poor carries 3–4 times the hedonic weight of windfall profits, and the secondary cultural, health and trust losses are irreversible. Utilitarian ethics, therefore, oblige regulators to keep and enforce anti-gouging ceilings that track verifiable cost increases rather than opportunistic margins.

5.2 Discussion of Price Gouging from Kantian Ethics

Business organizations and companies must contribute to the welfare of society (Customers, workers, shareholders, investors), which is called Social Responsibility in business. This social responsibility benefits everyone involved in the company in the long run (Bright, 2021). Basically, a business company survives with the profit earned by selling products or services to customers. For this reason, organizations fulfil various social responsibilities to maintain relationships with customers in various ways. While many large companies spend a portion of their profits on the benefit of society, small establishments also balance their relationships with society in various other ways. Notable among these is refraining from excessively increasing the price of products. The theories given by various philosophers in business ethics are relevant in this regard. Particularly, Kantian Ethics design this social responsibility of business organizations differently.

The most fundamental concept in Kant's discussion of morality is the categorical imperative. When a deliberate act of a rational person is compulsorily directed by conscience and there is no deviation from it, then it is a categorical imperative. That is, the moral rule that our conscience presents to us is an unconditional command. Moral rules are therefore only orders or instructions (imperatives) of conscience, but not general statements. There is definitely a difference between these two types of statements: "You can do the thing" and "You must do the thing". Because the first is the general statement of the speaker, which depends on our will. On the contrary, the second is the order or permissiveness of the speaker, which we must do. Here, our will or willingness has no role. Since moral rules

do not depend on our will or unwillingness, they are recognized as unconditional commands. In this context, the ethicist Lillie says in his book *An Introduction to Ethics* - "Kant's categorical imperative means that a moral rule must be someone's order or permission (Lillie, 1948). These unconditional orders are not obeyed to achieve any special or general purpose. They must be obeyed without conditions. According to Kant, moral rules are such unconditional orders that we are always obliged to obey. The main reason why we are obliged to obey moral rules is that we accept them as our duty. In this case, we have to do duty for the sake of duty; we do not obey them to achieve any other purpose. That is, we cannot have any doubt about the unconditional nature of moral rules. Kant calls moral rules orders or permissions. This order is the order of our practical intellect or conscience. That is, it is the order of his conscience on a person, not an order imposed from outside. Therefore, there is a kind of internal obligation in moral rules. This means the moral law is the law of the intellect of man, and man is obliged to obey it. Man is obliged to obey the moral law because he can obey this moral law. In this context, Kant says, "Though oughtest means thou canst". It is never possible for a person to obey the rules he makes. A command is not unconditional that man cannot obey. In fact, the word "oughtest" loses all its sweetness, significance, application and analysis if it does not include the issue of ability. Moral law is a kind of unconditional command or order that applies to all members of the human race. All people are obliged to obey such a command. No exception to this is morally desirable. Every person is necessarily obliged to obey such a rule. The way Professor Mackenzie presents Kant's moral law is that whatever we ought to do, we should do. There is no reason to abandon moral law. There can be no more comprehensive rule (Mackenzie, 1901). Kant presents the commandment of unconditional consent in his *Metaphysics of Morals* in three forms. These three forms of unconditional consent are:

Firstly, treat every rational person, even himself, as an end, not as a means (Kant, 1797). Kant believes that "humanity" is inherent in every human being. Therefore, every human being should treat himself as his own end or purpose, and at the same time express the humanity of all others as an end or purpose. One should never use one's own or another's humanity as a means.

Secondly, act as a member of the kingdom of ends (Kant, 1797). This form of Kant's unconditional consent is derived from the first form. If every person uses himself as his goal or objective, and accepts others as ends only, without using them as means, then a kingdom of ends is gradually formed. Such a kingdom of collective ends compels people to live morally. In this way, a person is able to achieve the welfare of himself and the entire society.

Thirdly, if and only if unconditional consent is accepted as a self-imposed rule of the person, then the person is responsible for obeying it. Unconditional consent is never inspired by desire or greed. It is only the expression of the practical wisdom of the heart, emanating from the good will of man. Unconditional consent is certainly self-imposed and obligatory.

When a company, driven by greed, increases the price of a product excessively in order to maximize profits or creates an artificial crisis through hoarding and sells the product in the market at an excessive or fixed price, it goes against the principle of the categorical imperative and the duty for duty's sake of Kantian ethics and is completely unethical. Even

when a company decides against overpricing a product to please someone in society, it would not be considered moral according to Kantian ethics unless it is driven by its own reason and follows the principle of duty for duty's sake, which falls within the social responsibility of an organization.

Outcomes of the study

Field narratives show that when Ramadan, cyclones or Eid-ul-Azha tighten demand, the same behavioural script repeats: a handful of wholesalers withhold stock, prices double overnight, and the rural poor complain but still buy because “fasting must go on” or “the cow is already slaughtered.” Applying Kant’s first formulation (universal law) immediately exposes the logical contradiction: if every trader adopted the maxim “I may engineer an artificial shortage whenever demand is inelastic,” the resulting climate of chronic distrust would collapse the very seasonal market on which the traders themselves depend for year-round cash flow. The 2019 onion spike—wholesale Tk 28 kg⁻¹ on 1 May, retail Tk 55 kg⁻¹ one week later after 2 300 tones were found hidden in Dhaka and Chittagong warehouses (FreshPlaza, 2025; The Daily Star, 2019) confirms that the maxim is self-defeating; once the rumor of shortage is generalized, even perpetrators lose reliable price signals and face sudden raids and fines (Daily Observer, 2022), proving that the maxim cannot be willed as a universal law without destroying the practice it exploits (Kant, 1785). The second formulation (Never Treat People Merely as Means) reveals why victims feel morally wronged, not merely unlucky. During Cyclone Amphan in May 2020, a Facebook post claiming “Bay water will flood salt fields” pushed retail salt from Tk 35 to Tk 180 kg⁻¹ in six hours; displaced consumers in Barishal had no realistic exit option and were treated purely as emergency cashpoints. Kant’s injunction is clear: rational nature—here the buyer’s capacity to plan a household budget—must never be used merely to another’s windfall profit (Kant, 1785). Consumers repeatedly said, “we bought because we had to survive the storm,” language that mirrors Kant’s own example of the borrower who cannot meaningfully consent to an exploitative contract (Kant, 1785). Where the Consumer Bill of Rights is unknown (only 27 % of rural respondents in a 2022 BRAC survey could name a single right), the absence of information compounds the instrumentalisation: unaware buyers lack the cognitive equipment to refuse the exploitative term, so their rational agency is bypassed twice—once by scarcity rumors and once by knowledge asymmetry (Hasan, 2022).

The third formulation (Duty for duty’s sake) exposes the irreversibility of traders’ justifications. Small retailers often claim, “I hoard to survive; no bank will give me working capital,” but when pressed in focus groups, none could accept the reverse rule: that their own children, selling labor during peak season, might be paid below subsistence wages because employers face a credit crunch. The 2022 Eid-ul-Azha hide market illustrates the publicity failure: tannery syndicates delayed opening buying centers, forcing rural smallholders to sell at Tk 200–300 against a production cost of Tk 700 (Daily Sun, 2025). When the maxim “I may time market closure to depress purchase prices” was read aloud to the same traders, all admitted it could not be defended on prime-time television without provoking regulatory backlash, an immediate sign that the maxim violates the public-reason requirement of Kant’s Duty for duty’s sake (Kant, 1785). Thus, whether the good is

Ramadan onion, cyclone salt or Eid hide, the same three-step Kantian test collapses the moral excuse of “business survival,” turning field anecdotes into evidence that price-gouging is not an unfortunate side-effect but a systematic violation of duty-for-duty's sake.

6. Limitations of the Study and Further Research

1. **Sample Size and Representation:** The study surveyed 200 participants, which may not be fully representative of the broader Bangladeshi population, especially rural consumers and marginalized groups who are disproportionately affected by price gouging.

2. **Convenience Sampling Bias:** The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. The participants were mostly urban, educated, and younger individuals, which may skew perceptions and not fully capture the views of low-income or rural stakeholders.

3. **Consumer Awareness Metrics:** Awareness of consumer rights was self-reported and not objectively measured. This may lead to over- or underestimation of actual knowledge and its impact on consumer behavior.

4. **Limited Qualitative Depth:** While the study included focus group discussions and interviews, the qualitative data could have been more robust with a larger and more diverse set of participants, particularly from rural areas and among traders.

5. **Ethical Frameworks Scope:** The analysis is primarily based on Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. While these frameworks provide strong normative insights, the inclusion of other ethical theories (e.g., virtue ethics, care ethics, or Islamic business ethics) could have enriched the discussion.

6. **Lack of Longitudinal Data:** The study captures a snapshot of consumer and trader perceptions at a specific time. Long-term trends, seasonal variations, and the impact of policy interventions over time were not explored.

Future Pathway: These limitations will serve as guidelines for more in-depth research in the future to conduct longitudinal and mixed-methods studies with larger, more diverse samples, including rural populations, to better understand the evolving dynamics of price gouging and consumer vulnerability.

7. Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Consumer Awareness Campaigns:** Launch targeted and multilingual awareness programs—especially via social media, schools, and community workshops—to educate consumers about their rights under the Consumer Rights Protection Act 2009.

2. **Enhance Legal Enforcement:** Strengthen the enforcement mechanisms of existing laws, such as the Foodstuffs (Prevention of Harmful Activities) Act 2023. This includes increasing surveillance, imposing stricter penalties, and ensuring accountability at all levels of the supply chain.

3. **Promote Ethical Business Practices:** Encourage businesses to adopt ethical codes of conduct based on transparency, fairness, and social responsibility. Business associations and commerce chambers should play a proactive role in this.

4. Regulate Supply Chain Intermediaries: Address the structural issues in the supply chain, such as the dominance of large wholesalers and commission agents, by promoting direct farmer-to-consumer models and cooperatives.
5. Introduce Price Monitoring Systems: Implement real-time digital price monitoring systems for essential seasonal goods to detect abnormal price hikes and enable rapid regulatory response.
6. Incorporate Ethics in Business Education: Integrate business ethics into commerce and business administration curricula to cultivate a culture of ethical decision-making among future entrepreneurs and traders.

8. Conclusion

This study investigates the ethical dimensions of price gouging in seasonal commodity markets in Bangladesh using a mixed methods approach. The findings indicate that low consumer awareness of the consumer bill of rights is associated with limited reporting behavior and higher tolerance towards price irregularities, while weak regulatory enforcement enables opportunistic pricing to continue during peak demand periods.

The analysis further shows clear differences between businessmen and consumers in moral reasoning. Traders often cite price gouging and hoarding as essential for business survival under supply constraints, while consumers view these practices as largely exploitative and unfair, especially for essential commodities. This reflects the wider tension between profit maximization and distributive justice.

From a theoretical perspective, the results are consistent with utilitarian concerns, as reported experiences suggest disproportionate negative effects on low-income consumers and overall well-being. They are also consistent with Kantian ethics, as many consumers interpret such practices as violations of fairness and respect. Importantly, the study does not classify all price procrastination as unethical; rather, the evidence highlights that lack of transparency, disproportionate markups, and deliberate hoarding foster negative ethical evaluations and mistrust in the market.

Overall, price gouging in seasonal markets in Bangladesh emerges as an empirical ethical problem. Addressing this requires consumer awareness, strong enforcement and clear ethical guidelines, supported by coordinated action by policymakers, businesses and civil society.

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