

Assessing Unethical Practices in the Food Industry of Bangladesh: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing business ethics practices within Bangladesh's food industry. By analyzing key drivers of unethical behavior, the study aims to understand their impact on consumer trust, market stability and the efficacy of regulatory bodies. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 311 respondents through judgment sampling and factor analysis was conducted to identify seven principal factors affecting ethical practices like sales & customer relations, food safety, legal compliance, fair market practices, product safety, price stability, and environmental responsibility. The findings reveal widespread concerns about food safety, product integrity, legal compliance, and market fairness, highlighting significant challenges within the industry. The findings also point to critical areas for improvement, particularly in ensuring product safety, fair pricing, and environmental responsibility. These insights are vital for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to foster ethical business practices and restore consumer confidence in food industry.]

Key Words: Affecting Factors, Business Ethics Practices, Food Industry

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a developing country that has made significant progress in various socio-economic indicators over the past few decades (World Bank, 2020; United Nations, 2019). The food industry in Bangladesh, a critical sector for the nation's economy and public health, faces significant challenges related to unethical practices (FAO, 2018). These practices, ranging from adulteration and contamination to misleading labeling and inadequate regulatory oversight, pose serious threats to consumer safety and undermine trust in the food supply chain (Rahman & Rashid, 2021; Alamgir et al., 2020). Despite economic advancements and infrastructural developments, the prevalence of such malpractices highlights systemic issues that need urgent attention (Hossain, 2019).

The food industry in Bangladesh is a vital sector that significantly contributes to the nation's economy and the well-being of its population. However, it is plagued by widespread unethical practices that compromise food safety and consumer health. These practices include the use of hazardous chemicals, mislabeling and inadequate hygiene standards, which have been linked to various health issues among consumers (Rahman, 2021). Despite efforts by regulatory bodies to curb these malpractices, their persistence highlights gaps in the existing regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms (Khan & Jahan, 2020).

Unethical practices in the food industry not only jeopardize public health but also erode consumer trust and confidence in food products. This erosion of trust can have far-reaching economic consequences, as consumers become wary of local products and may turn to imported alternatives, thereby affecting the market dynamics (Hossain & Ahmed, 2019). Addressing these challenges, it's required a comprehensive understanding of the

factors that drive unethical behaviors within the industry. On this background the researchers undertake this research work.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to identify unethical practices in the food industry of Bangladesh. For achieving this goal, some specific objectives of the study are assigned as follows:

1. To identify the key drivers of unethical practices in the food industry of Bangladesh.
2. To assess the impact of unethical practices on consumer trust and market stability.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of regulatory bodies in controlling unethical practices in the food industry.
4. To recommend suggestions for overcoming the problems thereon.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The food industry in Bangladesh has been increasingly scrutinized for its unethical practices, which have significant implications for public health, consumer trust, and economic stability. These practices include the use of harmful chemicals, false labeling, and poor hygiene standards, which pose severe risks to consumers (Rahman, 2021). Despite regulations and monitoring by government authorities, these unethical behaviors persist, undermining the effectiveness of policy interventions and eroding consumer confidence (Khan & Jahan, 2020). The significance of this research lies not only in its potential to uncover critical insights but also in its contribution to policy formulation and enforcement strategies. Addressing the unethical practices in the food industry in Bangladesh is paramount to ensuring food safety, protecting public health, and fostering sustainable economic growth. This article seeks to illuminate the pathways through which these malpractices manifest and persist, offering evidence-based recommendations for stakeholders, including policymakers, industry leaders, and consumer advocacy groups. Understanding the underlying factors that contribute to these unethical practices is essential for developing effective strategies to mitigate them.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Instructions

The research utilized a structured questionnaire designed to gather information relating to business ethics practices within the food industry in Bangladesh. The development of the questionnaire was guided by group discussions and the specific objectives of the study. It comprised two main sections: Demographic Information and Analytical Questions.

The demographic information section gathered key details about respondents including their name, sex, age, occupation, education level, and monthly income. Age was divided into six categories, while occupation included options like government/public service, private service, business owner, self-employed, student, housewife, and others. Educational qualifications ranged from no education to MPhil/PhD and income levels were classified into seven categories from no income to over BDT 1,00,000.

The analytical questions section aimed to assess respondents' views on business ethics practices in the food industry. The questionnaire consists of 19 factors, variables, or questions. A seven-point Likert scale was used, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used only for research purpose, creating a sense of trust and openness. The questionnaire concluded with a note of appreciation for their participation, emphasizing the significance of their insights to the study.

Sampling and Data Collection

This research is mainly based on primary data along with some secondary data. A total of 311 respondents were selected through the judgment sampling method. All data were collected using Google Forms, with the

majority of interview schedules gathered between August and September 2024.

Data Analysis procedure and Hypotheses

Collected data were coded, entered and analyzed by the use of Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS). IBM SPSS 23 was used for all of the statistical analysis. This study is based on factor analysis. Factor analysis is a technique which is used to reduce a large number of variables to some smaller number by telling us which belonging together and which seem to say the same thing (Emory and Cooper, 1991). Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the reliability of the data set. Prior to factor analysis Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Barlett's test of sphericity were measured to analyze the strength of associations among variables. KMO is calculated at first to determine the suitability of data for factor analysis. On the other hand, Barlett's test statistic is used to examine the hypothesis that correlation matrix is an identity matrix (Malhotra, 2008).

ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Reliability of Data Set

A total of 311 questionnaires were completed by the respondents. Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal consistency or reliability of scale items, ranges from 0 to 1. Generally, a value above 0.7 is considered acceptable, above 0.8 is considered good, and above 0.9 is considered excellent. In this study, in Table 1 a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.788 indicates that the 19 items on the Likert scale have acceptable internal consistency, meaning the items are reasonably correlated and collectively measure a similar underlying concept.

Table # 1Reliability of Data Set

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.788	19

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2, providing insights into the key characteristics of the participants based on sex, age, occupation, education, and income. This demographic overview highlights a diverse mix of respondents, with notable variation in age, education, occupation, and income levels, contributing to a broad representation of the population surveyed.

Table # 2Demographic Information of Respondents

Respondents' Profile		Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex of the Respondents			
	Female	110	35.4
	Male	201	64.6
Age of the Respondents			
	11-20 Years	28	9.0
	21-30 Years	116	37.3
	31-40 Years	63	20.3
	41-50 Years	51	16.4
	51-60 Years	31	10.0

	> 60 Years	22	7.1
Occupation of the Respondents			
	Service-Gov./public	19	6.1
	Service-Private	90	28.9
	Business Owner	33	10.6
	Self-employed	18	5.8
	Student	99	31.8
	Housewife	36	11.6
	Others	16	5.1
Education of the Respondents			
	No Education	14	4.5
	Primary	40	12.9
	SSC	34	10.9
	HSC	91	29.3
	Honors/Degree	63	20.3
	Masters	61	19.6
	M.Phil./PhD.	8	2.6
Income of the Respondents			
	No Income	116	37.3
	Tk-1,000-20,000	69	22.2
	Tk-21,000-40,000	61	19.6
	Tk-41,000-60,000	25	8.0
	Tk-61,000-80,000	16	5.1
	Tk-81,000-100,000	11	3.5
	> Tk. 100,000	13	4.2

Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

- Sex of the Respondents:** The sample consists of 110 females (35.4%) and 201 males (64.6%). This indicates a higher participation rate among males compared to females.
- Age of the Respondents:** The majority of respondents fall within the age group of 21-30 years (37.3%), followed by those aged 31-40 years (20.3%) and 41-50 years (16.4%). Smaller percentages are found in the 11-20 years (9.0%), 51-60 years (10.0%), and above 60 years (7.1%) age brackets, reflecting a relatively younger population in this survey.
- Occupation of the Respondents:** The largest proportions of respondents are students (31.8%), followed by those in private service (28.9%). Other significant groups include housewives (11.6%) and business owners (10.6%). Smaller proportions are involved in government/public service (6.1%), self-employed (5.8%), and others (5.1%).
- Education of the Respondents:** The educational background shows a wide range, with the highest

proportion having completed HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) at 29.3%. A significant number also hold an Honors/Degree (20.3%) or Masters (19.6%). Lower levels of education are represented by SSC (10.9%), Primary education (12.9%), and no formal education (4.5%). A small percentage holds an M.Phil./PhD (2.6%).

5. **Income of the Respondents:** A substantial portion of respondents (37.3%) report having no income, likely due to the high percentage of students and housewives. Among those with an income, Tk-1,000-20,000 is the most common range (22.2%), followed by Tk-21,000-40,000 (19.6%). Fewer respondents report higher income levels, with 8.0% earning Tk-41,000-60,000, and even smaller percentages in higher income brackets.

Factor Analysis

Firstly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was calculated in Table # 3 to examine whether our variables are appropriate for factor analysis. Our KMO value is 0.698, which exceeds the threshold of 0.60, indicating that the data is adequate for factor analysis. Although it falls within the "mediocre" range, it still suggests that the factor analysis is useful with the data.

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was calculated to assess the strength of the relationship between the variables. The analysis shows a Chi-Square value of Approx. 1616.965 with 171 degrees of freedom, which strongly supports the appropriateness of using factor analysis. The significant value of 0.000 indicates that the variables are highly correlated, further validating the suitability of applying factor analysis. Hence, the variables used in this study are significantly correlated, making factor analysis an appropriate technique.

Table # 3KMO and Bartlett' Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.698
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1616.965
	d. f.	171
	Sig.	.000

Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Factor Analysis

The analysis of business ethics practices in Bangladesh's food industry reveals significant insights through seven principal factors. From the Table # 4 it is seen that the first factor is **sales, customer relations and product integrity**. This factor demonstrates the importance of ethical seller behavior and product quality, carrying the highest eigenvalue of 4.132 and accounting for 21.75% of the variance. Key components include the ethical obligation of sellers to treat customers respectfully and the importance of accurately representing food products according to samples and descriptions. This emphasis on integrity and transparency is crucial, as it highlights the relationship between customer trust and the quality of the products sold. The ethical conduct of sellers is foundational to establishing positive customer relations and ensuring product integrity within the industry.

The second factor, **Food Safety and Compliance with Health Standards**, carries an eigenvalue of 1.934 and explains 10.18% of the variance. This factor focuses on the critical issues of food safety and adherence to health regulations. Key variables include refraining from selling adulterated food and avoiding prohibited chemicals in food products. The strong loadings associated with these variables emphasize the ethical responsibility of food sellers to maintain health standards and ensure consumer safety. The analysis underscores the importance of compliance with legal standards, reflecting a growing awareness of food safety issues among consumers and businesses alike.

Table 4 Results of Factor Analysis

Principal factors and variables	Factor Loading	Eigen value	% of Variance
Factor one: Sales, Customer Relations and Product Integrity		4.132	21.750
• Sellers behaves well with customers	.501		
• Sellers sell food products according to samples/descriptions.	.820		
• Sellers refrain from selling defective food.	.659		
• Sellers refrain from selling food with false statements.	.468		
• Business owners provide accurate financial statements for tax payments.	.401		
Factor two: Food Safety & Compliance with Health Standards		1.934	10.177
• Sellers refrain from selling adulterated food.	.848		
• Sellers refrain from adding prohibited chemicals to food products.	.857		
Factor three: Legal Compliance and Labor Practices		1.611	8.478
• Food business owners regularly pay taxes.	.823		
• Food businessmen refrain from employing child labor.	.810		
Factor four: Fair Market Practices & Anti-Corruption Measures		1.436	7.560
• Traders refrain from forming syndicates to artificially increase prices.	.623		
• BSTI conducts honest testing regarding product quality.	.535		
• Food businessmen refrain from bribing tax officials.	.796		
Factor five: Product Safety and Fair Pricing		1.400	7.367
• Sellers refrain from selling expired products.	.629		
• Food is marketed only after being tested by BSTI/authority	.515		
• Sellers refrain from selling food at excessively high prices.	.749		
Factor six: Price Stability and Fairness in Customer Treatment		1.201	6.320

During high-demand periods, sellers refrain from increasing prices.	.728		
Sellers refrain from price discrimination based on customers.	.806		
Factor Seven: Environment and Public Space Responsibility		1.119	5.890
Sellers refrain from using plastic for food delivery.	.802		
Traders refrain from doing business by occupying sidewalks or roads.	.608		

Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

The third factor is **Legal Compliance and Labor Practices**, which showed that its eigenvalue is 1.611, explaining 8.48% of the variance. This factor highlights the necessity for food business owners to comply with legal standards and uphold ethical labor practices. Regular tax payments and avoiding child labor are key components, indicating a strong correlation between legal adherence and ethical treatment of labor. The analysis reveals that businesses that commit to ethical labor practices not only foster a more equitable workplace but also contribute positively to the overall business environment. This factor reflects the significance of legal compliance in promoting fairness and accountability within the industry.

Fair Market Practices and Anti-Corruption Measures is the fourth factor, whose eigenvalue of 1.436, accounting for 7.56% of the variance. This factor addresses the need for ethical practices in the marketplace and efforts to combat corruption. Key components include avoiding price manipulation through syndicates, ensuring honest product testing by the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI), and refraining from bribery. The emphasis on fair competition and anti-corruption measures highlights the essential role of transparency and integrity in building a trustworthy market environment. This factor illustrates how ethical business practices can contribute to a level playing field for all participants in the food industry.

The fifth factor, **Product Safety and Fair Pricing**, has an eigenvalue of 1.400 and explains 7.37% of the variance. This factor focuses on maintaining product safety standards while ensuring reasonable pricing practices. Important components include avoiding the sale of expired products, marketing food only after obtaining BSTI approval, and refraining from excessive pricing. This underscores the ethical responsibility of businesses to prioritize consumer safety and fairness in pricing, thereby preventing exploitation. The relationship among these variables reveals a comprehensive approach to ensuring that products are safe and reasonably priced for consumers.

Price Stability and Fairness in Customer Treatment, the sixth factor, reveals an eigenvalue of 1.201, explaining 6.32% of the variance. This factor addresses the ethical considerations surrounding pricing strategies and customer treatment. Key components include avoiding price increases during periods of high demand and preventing price discrimination among customers. The strong loadings associated with these variables reflect the importance of fair treatment and price stability in ethical business practices. This factor highlights how businesses can cultivate trust and loyalty among customers by maintaining fairness in pricing, particularly during challenging market conditions.

The seventh and final factor, **Environment and Public Space Responsibility**, carries an eigenvalue of 1.119 and accounts for 5.89% of the variance. This factor emphasizes the ethical obligation of businesses to practice environmental responsibility and respect for public spaces. Key components include refraining from using plastic for food delivery and avoiding business operations that encroach upon sidewalks and roads. This factor underscores the importance of social responsibility in business practices, reflecting a growing recognition of the need to protect the environment and uphold community standards.

These seven factors provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the ethical landscape of the food industry in Bangladesh, emphasizing the necessity for integrity, safety, and fairness across all facets of business operations.

Frequency Analysis of Principal Factors

Principal Factor One: Sales, Customer Relations, and Product Integrity

The Table # 5 provides a frequency analysis of principal factor one, which focuses on Sales, Customer Relations, and Product Integrity in Bangladesh's food industry. It measures various ethical aspects of seller behavior, such as customer relations, product integrity, and business transparency. The responses are presented in percentages across a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," along with the mean and standard deviation for each statement. For example, the majority of respondents (60.4%) have a positive perception of how sellers behave with customers, reflected in a high mean of 4.83, indicating a generally favorable view of customer relations. However, there is greater variability in opinions about sellers' adherence to selling products according to descriptions, with a mixed response, as seen by the mean score of 3.86.

Table # 5 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor One

Factor One: Sales, Customer Relations and Product Integrity	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sellers behaves well with customers	2.6	3.2	7.1	22.5	28.9	31.5	4.2	4.83	1.29
Sellers sell food products according to samples/descriptions.	3.9	11.6	29.9	18.6	21.9	13.5	0.6	3.86	1.38
Sellers refrain from selling defective food.	5.1	22.2	46.0	10.6	9	7.1	-	3.17	1.23
Sellers refrain from selling food with false statements.	13.5	38.6	28.6	10.6	7.1	1.6	-	2.64	1.16
Business owners provide accurate financial statements for tax payments.	24.4	31.2	26.7	11.9	2.3	3.5	-	2.47	1.24

Source: Constructed on the basis of data collected through questionnaire.

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

In contrast, perceptions around sellers avoiding defective products and making false claims are more negative. Nearly half (46%) of the respondents somewhat disagree that sellers refrain from selling defective food, with a lower mean of 3.17.

In Bangladesh, the Consumer Rights Protection Act of 2009 plays a crucial role in regulating business practices to prevent misleading information about food products. Sellers are prohibited from providing false statements or fraudulent claims regarding the quality, weight, or composition of their products. Under this law, if a seller is found guilty of making deceptive claims, they can face penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The Table 5 provides the majority of respondents (52.1%) disagree or somewhat disagree that sellers avoid false statements about products, reflected in the low mean of 2.64. The most critical view is regarding the accuracy of financial statements for tax purposes, where a significant portion (55.6%) disagrees

or strongly disagrees, and the mean is just 2.47. These results suggest that while customer interactions are generally positive, issues such as product integrity and business transparencies remain areas of concern.

Principal Factor Two: Food Safety and Compliance with Health Standards

According to Ahmed et al. (2017), a significant proportion of food items in Bangladeshi markets are adulterated with harmful substances. Commonly adulterated foods include dairy products, spices, oils, fruits, vegetables, and confectioneries. Research by the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) has found that more than 40% of food samples tested was adulterated (Rahman & Rashid, 2016). The addition of prohibited chemicals to food products in Bangladesh is a significant public health concern, driven by economic pressures and insufficient regulatory enforcement. Common adulterants include formalin in fish, carbide in fruits, and various textile dyes in spices, all of which pose severe health risks, including cancer, organ damage, and developmental issues in children. The Table # 6 presents a frequency analysis of Principal Factor Two, which addresses Food Safety and Compliance with Health Standards in Bangladesh's food industry. It shows that a significant portion of respondents have concerns about food safety practices. For example, 55.6% either disagree or strongly disagree that sellers refrain from selling adulterated food, with a mean score of 2.47, indicating a generally negative perception. Similarly, 58.2% disagree or strongly disagree that sellers avoid adding prohibited chemicals to food products, with an even lower mean of 2.43. These low mean scores and high levels of disagreement reflect widespread dissatisfaction and skepticism regarding sellers' compliance with food safety standards. The standard deviations (1.215 and 1.147) suggest some variability in responses, but the overall sentiment remains critical of the industry's health compliance practices.

Table # 6 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Two

Factor Two:	St. Dis.	Dis.	Som.	Neu.	Som.	Agree	St.	Mean	Std.
Food Safety & Compliance with Health Standards	%	%	Dis. %	%	Agree %	%	Agree %		Dev.
Sellers refrain from selling adulterated food.	21.9	34.1	29.6	8.4	1.9	4.2	-	2.47	1.215
Sellers refrain from adding prohibited chemicals to food products.	19.9	38.3	30.2	4.8	4.8	1.3	0.6	2.43	1.147

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Principal Factor Three: Legal Compliance and Labor Practices

The Table # 7 analyzes principal factor three, focusing on Legal Compliance and Labor Practices in Bangladesh's food industry. It reveals mixed perceptions regarding business owners' adherence to legal and ethical labor standards. For instance, opinions are divided on whether food business owners regularly pay taxes: 22.8% agree and 22.2% are neutral, but 19.3% somewhat disagree, resulting in a moderate mean score of 3.65, indicating some level of agreement but with significant variation, as shown by the standard deviation of 1.48.

In Bangladesh While employing child labor is legally prohibited, especially in hazardous industries, child labor remains prevalent in many sectors, including the food industry. On the issue of refraining from employing child labor, the sentiment is more critical, with 22.2% strongly disagreeing and 22.8% somewhat disagreeing, indicating that a large proportion of respondents are skeptical about ethical labor practices in the food industry. The mean score of 3.17 shows general ambivalence or slight disagreement, and the standard deviation of 1.71 indicate considerable variability in responses. These findings suggest a need for improved legal compliance and labor practices within the sector.

Table # 7 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Three

Factor Three: Legal Compliance and Labor Practices	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Food business owners regularly pay taxes.	8.7	16.7	19.3	22.2	22.8	10	0.3 %	3.65	1.48
Food businessmen refrain from employing child labor.	22.2	16.4	22.8	14.1	12.5	9.3	2.6	3.17	1.71

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Principal Factor Four: Fair Market Practices & Anti-Corruption Measures

In Bangladesh, the claim that traders refrain from forming syndicates to artificially increase prices is not entirely accurate. In fact, syndicates of traders are known to exist and manipulate the prices of essential commodities, contributing to significant price hikes. These groups, often referred to as "syndicates," have been active in various sectors, including food, transportation, and retail. They artificially inflate prices by controlling the supply chain and market competition.

The Table 8 presents a frequency analysis of Principal Factor Four, which covers Fair Market Practices & Anti-Corruption Measures in Bangladesh's food industry. The results highlight significant concerns about unfair market practices and corruption. For instance, a vast majority of respondents (74.2%) either disagree or strongly disagree that traders refrain from forming syndicates to artificially raise prices, resulting in a low mean score of 2.09. This suggests a widespread perception of price manipulation in the market. The standard deviation of 1.06 indicates moderate agreement among respondents on this issue.

Table # 8 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Four

Factor Four: Fair Market Practices & Anti-Corruption Measures	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Traders refrain from forming syndicates to artificially increase prices.	30.5	43.7	17.4	3.9	3.2	1.3	-	2.09	1.06
BSTI conducts honest testing regarding product quality.	8	31.8	33.1	16.1	7.1	3.2	0.6	2.95	1.22
Food businessmen refrain from bribing tax officials.	14.1	35	37	8	4.2	1	0.6	2.59	1.09

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Similarly, when asked if the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) conduct honest quality tests, responses are mixed. While 31.8% disagree, another 33.1% somewhat disagree, with a mean score of 2.95, reflecting a generally negative view of BSTI's integrity. The standard deviation of 1.22 shows some variability in opinions, but most responses lean toward skepticism.

Lastly, the statement on whether food businessmen refrain from bribing tax officials shows that 37%

somewhat disagree and 35% disagree, leading to a mean score of 2.59. This indicates a general belief that bribery is prevalent. The standard deviation of 1.09 indicates that while there is some variation, most responses reflect concerns about corrupt practices in tax compliance. Overall, the table reveals significant distrust in fair market practices and anti-corruption measures within the industry.

Principal Factor Five: Product Safety and Fair Pricing

In Bangladesh, the practice of selling expired products is a concern, particularly in less regulated markets and among small-scale vendors. While some sellers adhere to ethical standards and refrain from selling expired products, others may not, especially when there is a lack of strict enforcement and consumer awareness. The Table 9 provides a frequency analysis of Principal Factor Five, which focuses on Product Safety and Fair Pricing in Bangladesh's food industry. The results indicate mixed perceptions on product safety and pricing practices. Regarding whether sellers refrain from selling expired products, 35.7% somewhat disagrees and 28.6% disagree, leading to a mean score of 3.15. This suggests that while opinions are divided, there is noticeable concern about expired products being sold. The standard deviation of 1.33 shows moderate variability in responses.

Generally, food is marketed only after passing through rigorous testing by relevant authorities like the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) and the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA). These organizations are responsible for ensuring that food products meet national and international safety standards before they reach consumers. On the issue of food being marketed only after testing by BSTI or an authority, 32.2% somewhat disagree and 23.5% disagree, with a mean score of 3.28, indicating that while some respondents believe in proper testing, a significant portion expresses doubt. The standard deviation of 1.35 suggests considerable variation in opinions.

In Bangladesh, sellers often refrain from reducing food prices, even when global costs decrease. This is largely influenced by market syndicates, which control supply chains and manipulate prices. These syndicates, consisting of wholesalers and retailers, often engage in price-fixing, hoarding, and other unethical practices, particularly during periods of high demand like Ramadan. Finally, for the statement regarding sellers refraining from selling food at excessively high prices, a large portion of respondents (40.8% somewhat disagree and 24.4% disagree) reflects significant skepticism, with a mean score of 2.72. This low mean, combined with a standard deviation of 1.14, points to general dissatisfaction with pricing practices, indicating concerns about price fairness in the market.

Table # 9 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Five

Factor Five: Product Safety and Fair Pricing	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sellers refrain from selling expired products.	6.1	28.6	35.7	10.3	11.9	7.4	-	3.15	1.33
Food is marketed only after being tested by BSTI/authority	6.8	23.5	32.2	16.7	14.8	5.5	0.6	3.28	1.35
Sellers refrain from selling food at excessively high prices.	15.8	24.4	40.8	12.5	4.2	2.3	-	2.72	1.14

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Principal Factor Six: Price Stability and Fairness in Customer Treatment

The Table # 10 presents a frequency analysis of principal factor six, which addresses Price Stability and

Fairness in Customer Treatment in Bangladesh's food industry. The results show significant concerns about price stability, particularly during high-demand periods. A majority of respondents (33.4% disagree and 25.4% strongly disagree) believe that sellers do not refrain from raising prices during these times, reflected in a low mean score of 2.48. The standard deviation of 1.39 suggests moderate variability in responses, indicating some divergence in opinions but a generally negative view of price stability practices.

Regarding price discrimination based on customers, responses are also mixed but slightly more balanced. While 35.7% somewhat disagree and 28% disagree, 10.9% agree, and 6.1% strongly agree, leading to a mean score of 3.14. This suggests that while many respondents are concerned about price discrimination, there is some level of neutrality or acceptance. The standard deviation of 1.46 indicates a wide range of opinions, highlighting variability in experiences related to customer treatment and pricing fairness. Overall, the table suggests dissatisfaction with both price stability and fair treatment of customers.

Table # 10 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Six

Factor Six: Price Stability and Fairness in Customer Treatment	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
During high-demand periods, sellers refrain from increasing prices.	25.4	33.4	26.0	6.4	2.6	4.2	1.9	2.48	1.39
Sellers refrain from price discrimination based on customers.	8.7	28	35.7	7.7	10.9	6.1	2.9	3.14	1.46

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

Principal Factor Seven: Environment and Public Space Responsibility

The Table # 11 provides a frequency analysis of Principal Factor Seven, which focuses on Environment and Public Space Responsibility in Bangladesh's food industry. The results reveal significant concerns about sellers' environmental practices, particularly in the use of plastic and the occupation of public spaces for business.

Table # 11 Frequency Analysis of Principal Factor Seven

Factor Seven: Environment and Public Space Responsibility	St. Dis. %	Dis. %	Som. Dis. %	Neu. %	Som. Agree %	Agree %	St. Agree %	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sellers refrain from using plastic for food delivery.	60	23.2	9	2.6	1.3	1.3	0.6	1.58	.96
Traders refrain from doing business by occupying sidewalks or roads.	37.9	44.1	13.8	2.9	1.3	-	-	1.86	.86

Note: St. = Strongly, Dis. = Disagree, Neu. =Neutral, Som. = Somewhat, Std. = Standard, Dev. = Deviation;
Source: Field Survey Data, August-September, 2024.

For the statement on whether sellers refrain from using plastic for food delivery, a striking 60% strongly disagree and 23.2% disagree, indicating a widespread perception that sellers heavily rely on plastic. The mean score of 1.58 is very low, reflecting a strong consensus on the negative environmental impact of plastic use. The standard deviation of 0.96 indicates that responses are fairly consistent, with limited variation in opinions.

Similarly, regarding whether traders refrain from occupying sidewalks or roads for business, 44.1% disagree and 37.9% strongly disagree, showing strong disapproval of this practice. The mean score of 1.86 suggests that most respondents believe traders frequently occupy public spaces illegally. The standard deviation of 0.86 indicates relatively consistent responses, confirming widespread dissatisfaction with this issue. Overall, the table highlights significant concerns about environmental responsibility and the misuse of public spaces in the food industry.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the critical challenges facing the food sector in Bangladesh due to persistent unethical practices, despite notable socio-economic advancements. Findings indicate that issues such as food adulteration, inadequate compliance with safety standards, and market manipulation significantly undermine consumer trust and public health. The identification of seven principal factors including sales integrity, food safety, legal compliance, and environmental responsibility underscores the multifaceted nature of these ethical challenges. The frequent dissatisfaction among respondents regarding product integrity and safety emphasizes the urgent need for improved regulatory measures and stricter enforcement of existing laws.

Moreover, the study reveals a clear disconnect between consumer expectations and actual practices within the food industry, highlighting a pressing need for increased awareness and education among stakeholders. By addressing the systemic issues driving unethical behavior, Bangladesh can work towards enhancing food safety, restoring consumer confidence, and ensuring a more ethical food supply chain, ultimately fostering sustainable economic growth. This research serves as a foundational step towards developing effective policy interventions aimed at mitigating unethical practices and promoting ethical standards in the food industry, which are essential for safeguarding public health and enhancing market stability.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire On

Assessing Unethical Practices in the Food Industry of Bangladesh: An Analysis

Section 01: Demographic information of the Respondent

(Please provide your opinion. The information you provide will be kept completely confidential and will only be used for research purposes.)

1. Your Name:

2. Your Sex:

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. Your Age-

O 11 -20 Yr	O 21 - 30 Yr	O 31 - 40 Yr	O 41 - 50 Yr	O 51 - 60 Yr	O > 60
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4. Your Occupation-

O Service (Govt./Public)	O Service (Private)	O Business Owner	O Self-Employed	O Student	O Housewife	O Others
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5. Your highest degree in education that you have already completed –

O No Education	O Primary (Class-V)	O SSC	O HSC	O Honors/ Degree	O Masters	O M. Phil./Ph. D.
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6. You're Income Level Per Month-

O No Income	O 1,000- 20,000	O 21,000- 40,000	O 41,000- 60,000	O 61,000- 80,000	O 81,000- 100,000	O > 100,000.
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Section 02: Express your opinion by marking a tick (✓) on a scale of 1 to 7 for each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. Sellers refrain from selling adulterated food.							
2. Sellers refrain from adding prohibited chemicals to food products.							
3. Sellers refrain from selling expired products.							
4. Food is marketed only after being tested by BSTI/authority							
5. Sellers refrain from selling food at excessively high prices.							
6. Traders refrain from forming syndicates to artificially increase prices.							
7. During high-demand periods, sellers refrain from increasing prices.							
8. Sellers refrain from price discrimination based on customers.							

9. Sellers behaves well with customers							
10. Sellers sell food products according to samples/descriptions.							
11. Sellers refrain from selling defective food.							
12. Sellers refrain from selling food with false statements.							
13. Sellers refrain from using plastic for food delivery.							
14. Food business owners regularly pay taxes.							
15. Business owners provide accurate financial statements for tax payments.							
16. BSTI conducts honest testing regarding product quality.							
17. Food businessmen refrain from bribing tax officials.							
18. Traders refrain from doing business by occupying sidewalks or roads.							
19. Food businessmen refrain from employing child labor.							

- Self-Employed: consultants, technicians, independent contractors, freelancers, you tuber.
- BSTI: Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution

Thank you very much for participating in the research work