



Price Collusion and Its Impact on Consumer Welfare: A Literature Review of the Last Ten Years (2015–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Price collusion and cartel practices remain major challenges in Indonesia's strategic sectors, particularly food, transportation, and telecommunications. These practices distort market competition, increase prices above competitive levels, and reduce consumer welfare by limiting access to essential goods and services. This study aims to analyze the impact of cartel practices on consumer welfare in Indonesia during the period 2015–2025. The research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach by analyzing fifteen selected references consisting of academic journals, books, institutional reports, and international publications. The findings indicate that cartel practices consistently generate negative effects on consumer welfare through higher prices, reduced consumer surplus, and weakened market efficiency. The study also finds that welfare losses are more severe in strategic sectors due to their importance in daily economic activities. Furthermore, competition law enforcement by the Indonesian Competition Commission (KPPU) plays a moderating role in reducing the negative effects of collusion, although enforcement effectiveness remains limited by institutional and evidentiary challenges. The findings also provide important implications for business management, particularly regarding ethical business conduct, corporate governance, and sustainable competitive strategies. Organizations that prioritize fair competition and regulatory compliance are more likely to achieve long-term stakeholder trust, organizational legitimacy, and sustainable business performance.

Keywords: Cartel Practices, Price Collusion, Consumer Welfare, Competition Law, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Market competition is widely recognized as one of the most important mechanisms in promoting economic efficiency, innovation, and consumer welfare. In a competitive market structure, firms are expected to compete fairly through price, quality, and innovation, allowing consumers to obtain goods and services at efficient prices. However, in practice, competition is often distorted by anticompetitive behavior, particularly through price collusion and cartel practices. Cartels occur when firms coordinate prices, restrict output, divide markets, or manipulate supply in order to maximize collective profits rather than compete independently. Such practices undermine market equilibrium and create welfare losses for consumers because prices rise above competitive levels while consumer choices become more limited (Tirole, 2017; Motta, 2020).

In Indonesia, cartel practices remain a significant challenge in several strategic sectors, including food, transportation, and telecommunications. These sectors are closely related to public welfare because they provide essential goods and services used daily by society. During the period 2015–2025, the Indonesian Competition Commission (KPPU) investigated and sanctioned numerous cases related to price-fixing agreements and market allocation among firms. Cases involving staple foods such as poultry and cooking oil, as well as transportation and telecommunications services, demonstrate how collusion can directly increase consumer burdens and reduce affordability (KPPU, 2023; KPPU, 2024). Recent reports further indicate that concentrated market structures continue to create opportunities for anticompetitive conduct, particularly in strategic sectors that directly affect public welfare (OECD, 2024).

From the perspective of industrial organization theory, cartel practices are inconsistent with welfare-maximizing outcomes. The theory of perfect competition assumes that firms act independently and prices are determined by supply and demand interaction. When firms collude, prices become artificially inflated and output is restricted, causing deadweight loss and declining consumer surplus (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2016). Porter (2018) argues that in industries characterized by concentrated market power, firms are more likely to coordinate because mutual interdependence creates incentives for cooperation rather than competition. Similarly, Harrington (2021) explains that collusion tends to emerge more easily in oligopolistic industries where a small number of firms dominate the market and can monitor competitors' actions effectively.

Empirical studies also confirm the harmful impact of collusion on consumer welfare. Research conducted by Sari and Santoso (2017) found that weak competition law enforcement in Indonesia contributed to the persistence of cartel behavior in several strategic sectors. Prabowo (2022) further demonstrated that cartel arrangements in food and transportation industries significantly reduced consumer welfare through higher prices and restricted market access. International evidence likewise shows that cartels weaken economic efficiency, reduce innovation, and undermine long-term competitiveness (Connor, 2020; OECD, 2019). Although existing studies have discussed cartel practices from legal and economic perspectives, many remain fragmented and focus only on specific cases or regulatory frameworks.

A significant research gap therefore exists in integrating theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, and regulatory developments concerning cartel practices in Indonesia over the last decade. Most previous studies focus separately on competition law enforcement or isolated case analyses, leaving limited discussion regarding the broader implications for consumer welfare and national economic resilience. This study attempts to address that gap by conducting a systematic literature review of cartel practices in Indonesia during 2015–2025.

From a business management perspective, price collusion is not only a violation of competition law but also a challenge to ethical business practices, corporate governance, and strategic decision-making. Contemporary management theories emphasize that firms should achieve sustainable competitive advantages through innovation, operational efficiency, and customer value creation rather than through anticompetitive agreements. While collusion may generate short-term financial benefits, it often damages corporate reputation, reduces stakeholder trust, and increases legal and regulatory risks. Therefore, understanding the effects of price collusion on consumer welfare is relevant not only for competition policy but also for business management, particularly in promoting sustainable and responsible business practices.

The objective of this article is to analyze the phenomenon of price collusion and its impact on consumer welfare in Indonesia by synthesizing theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and policy developments. The originality of this study lies in its integration of industrial organization theory with recent enforcement cases and consumer welfare analysis within the Indonesian context. The findings are expected to contribute both academically and

practically by strengthening discussions regarding competition policy, consumer protection, and market efficiency in developing economies such as Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Industrial Organization Theory

Industrial organization theory serves as the grand theory in explaining cartel behavior and market competition. According to Tirole (2017), industrial organization examines how firm behavior, market structure, and government regulation influence economic performance. Under competitive market conditions, firms independently determine prices and output, resulting in efficient resource allocation. However, when firms collude, they intentionally manipulate prices and supply in order to maximize collective profits. This creates market inefficiency and harms consumers through increased prices and reduced product availability.

Motta (2020) explains that cartel practices are among the most serious violations of competition policy because they directly distort the competitive process. Firms participating in cartels coordinate their behavior to avoid price wars and maintain high profit margins. Such agreements can include price fixing, bid rigging, market sharing, and supply restrictions. These practices weaken competition and create welfare losses because consumers pay prices higher than competitive equilibrium levels.

Price Collusion

Price collusion refers to agreements among firms to set prices collectively rather than compete independently. Porter (2018) emphasizes that collusion is more likely to emerge in oligopolistic industries where a small number of firms dominate the market. Firms recognize their mutual interdependence and therefore cooperate to maximize joint profits. Collusion may occur formally through explicit agreements or informally through tacit coordination.

Harrington (2021) notes that price collusion often persists because firms can monitor competitors and punish deviations from agreed pricing strategies. In sectors with high entry barriers, homogeneous products, and concentrated ownership, collusion becomes easier to sustain. These conditions are commonly found in strategic sectors such as telecommunications, food distribution, and transportation industries in Indonesia.

Consumer Welfare

Consumer welfare is commonly defined as the benefit or satisfaction consumers obtain from consuming goods and services at market prices. According to Samuelson and Nordhaus (2016), consumer welfare increases when markets operate efficiently and prices reflect actual supply and demand conditions. However, cartel practices distort these conditions by artificially inflating prices and limiting output.

Mankiw (2021) explains that collusion reduces consumer surplus because consumers are forced to pay higher prices for goods and services. In addition, reduced competition weakens incentives for firms to innovate and improve product quality. Consequently, consumers suffer not only financially but also through lower product variety and declining service standards.

Business Management Perspective

From the perspective of business management, firms are expected to achieve superior performance through innovation, efficiency, and strategic value creation rather than through anticompetitive behavior. Strategic management theory suggests that sustainable competitive advantage is obtained when organizations develop unique capabilities and respond effectively to market dynamics (Wheelen et al., 2023). Consequently, price collusion contradicts the fundamental principles of fair competition and long-term business sustainability.

Corporate governance also plays an important role in preventing collusive behavior. Effective governance mechanisms, including board oversight, compliance systems, transparency, and internal controls, help organizations adhere to competition regulations and ethical business standards. According to OECD (2024), firms with stronger governance structures are generally less likely to engage in anticompetitive conduct and more likely to maintain stakeholder trust.

Furthermore, collusion may expose firms to significant reputational, financial, and legal risks. Although coordinated pricing strategies may generate short-term profits, such practices often undermine organizational legitimacy and reduce long-term business performance. Therefore, cartel practices should be viewed not only as competition law violations but also as failures in business management and corporate governance.

Competition Law Enforcement

Competition law enforcement aims to maintain fair market competition and protect consumer interests. In Indonesia, the role of enforcing competition law is carried out by the Komisi Pengawas Persaingan Usaha (KPPU). According to KPPU (2019), enforcement activities include investigating cartel allegations, imposing sanctions, and monitoring business practices.

However, enforcement challenges remain substantial. KPPU (2023) reports that proving collusion often requires strong indirect evidence because cartel agreements are usually conducted secretly. Connor (2020) argues that weak sanctions and limited institutional authority may reduce the deterrent effect of competition law enforcement. Therefore, stronger institutional capacity and stricter penalties are necessary to reduce cartel behavior effectively.

Recent international evidence suggests that competition authorities play an increasingly important role in safeguarding market efficiency and consumer welfare. According to OECD (2024), stronger enforcement mechanisms, digital market surveillance, and interinstitutional cooperation significantly improve cartel detection and deterrence. Similarly, UNCTAD (2024) emphasizes that developing countries require stronger institutional capacity and more effective sanctions to address sophisticated forms of collusive behavior in modern markets.

Analytical Propositions

Based on the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above, this study develops the following analytical propositions to guide the synthesis and interpretation of findings related to price collusion, consumer welfare, and competition law enforcement in Indonesia:

Proposition 1 : Price collusion negatively affects consumer welfare in Indonesia during 2015–2025.

Proposition 2 : Cartel practices in strategic sectors such as food, transportation, and telecommunications generate greater welfare losses compared to non-strategic sectors.

Proposition 3 : Competition law enforcement by KPPU moderates the relationship between cartel practices and consumer welfare by reducing the negative impact of collusion.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine price collusion and cartel practices in Indonesia during the period 2015–2025. A literature review is a research methodology used to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing studies in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Snyder, 2019). According to Kitchenham (2004), a systematic literature review is conducted through a structured and transparent process to minimize bias and ensure that selected studies are relevant to the research objectives. Similarly, Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) explain that

systematic reviews are designed to integrate empirical findings and theoretical perspectives systematically so that conclusions can be drawn more objectively and comprehensively.

The use of the literature review method in this study is considered appropriate because the research focuses on synthesizing theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and regulatory developments related to cartel practices and consumer welfare. Through this method, the study is able to identify recurring themes, evaluate policy implications, and highlight research gaps concerning price collusion in Indonesia.

This research was conducted between January and April 2026 using secondary data sources obtained from academic journals, books, institutional reports, and international publications. The object of this study is cartel practices and their impact on consumer welfare in Indonesia, while the subjects analyzed include literature discussing price collusion, industrial organization theory, and competition law enforcement.

The sampling technique applied in this study is purposive sampling. According to Cooper (2010), purposive sampling in literature review research emphasizes the selection of high-quality and relevant references rather than random sampling. The selected literature met the following inclusion criteria: (1) published between 2015 and 2025, (2) directly related to cartel practices, price collusion, or consumer welfare, (3) relevant to the Indonesian context or international comparison, and (4) accessible in full text.

The SLR approach was selected because it enables the integration of diverse theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy developments related to cartel practices and consumer welfare. By synthesizing evidence from multiple sources, this method provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon while identifying research gaps and future research opportunities.

The data collection process followed several stages of systematic review methodology. First, relevant articles and publications were identified using keywords such as “cartel Indonesia,” “price collusion,” “consumer welfare,” and “competition law enforcement.” Searches were conducted through databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Sinta, OECD publications, and official reports from the Indonesian Competition Commission (KPPU). Second, duplicate and irrelevant studies were removed through abstract screening. Third, full-text screening was conducted to ensure that all selected sources fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The final screening process identified fifteen core studies that served as the primary basis for thematic analysis. Additional theoretical, methodological, and institutional references were used to support the conceptual discussion.

The literature selection process involved identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion stages. Initially, all potentially relevant studies were collected from the selected databases. Subsequently, duplicate records and studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. The remaining studies were evaluated through full-text assessment to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. This process enhanced the transparency and reliability of the review.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between cartel practices, competition law enforcement, and consumer welfare based on findings from the reviewed literature. Cartel practices are generally associated with higher prices, restricted output, and reduced market efficiency, which ultimately decrease consumer welfare. Conversely, competition law enforcement functions as a regulatory mechanism that may mitigate the adverse effects of collusion by promoting market transparency, deterring anticompetitive conduct, and protecting consumer interests.

Accordingly, this study conceptually examines how cartel practices influence consumer welfare and how competition law enforcement moderates this relationship within the Indonesian context during the period 2015–2025.

Within the conceptual framework of this review, cartel practices represent the primary phenomenon under investigation, encompassing behaviors such as price-fixing agreements, supply restrictions, and market-sharing arrangements identified in the literature and KPPU decisions. Consumer welfare is discussed through dimensions including consumer surplus, affordability, accessibility, and market efficiency. Competition law enforcement is examined as an institutional mechanism that may reduce the negative consequences of collusive behavior through regulatory interventions, sanctions, and market supervision.

The data analysis technique employed in this study is thematic analysis combined with narrative synthesis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method used to identify and analyze recurring themes within qualitative data. This technique was used to classify major themes related to cartel behavior, consumer welfare impacts, and competition law enforcement. Furthermore, narrative synthesis was employed to integrate findings from different studies, compare similarities and differences, and identify research gaps for future studies. Through these analytical approaches, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of cartel practices and their implications for consumer welfare in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Impact of Price Collusion on Consumer Welfare

The literature reviewed confirms that price collusion directly reduces consumer welfare by increasing prices above competitive levels and restricting output. According to industrial organization theory, competitive markets allocate resources efficiently because firms compete independently in determining prices and production. However, when firms engage in collusion, market equilibrium becomes distorted, leading to supracompetitive prices and reduced consumer surplus (Tirole, 2017).

Empirical studies in Indonesia provide evidence supporting this theoretical framework. Prabowo (2022) found that cartel practices in essential commodity markets caused substantial increases in consumer prices, particularly in food distribution industries. Similar findings were identified by Sari and Santoso (2017), who argued that weak competition law enforcement enabled firms to maintain coordinated pricing behavior over extended periods. These practices disproportionately affected lower-income consumers because essential goods became less affordable.

From a welfare economics perspective, collusion creates deadweight loss because consumers pay higher prices while total market output declines. Samuelson and Nordhaus (2016) explain that under cartel arrangements, firms intentionally reduce supply to maximize collective profits, resulting in inefficient resource allocation. Consequently, consumers experience reduced purchasing power and limited access to goods and services.

The findings also indicate that cartel practices weaken consumer trust in markets. When prices are artificially manipulated, consumers perceive markets as unfair and less transparent. This condition may reduce consumption confidence and weaken long-term economic stability. Therefore, the negative effects of collusion extend beyond immediate financial losses and influence broader market behavior.

Cartel Practices in Strategic Sectors

The reviewed literature demonstrates that welfare losses are particularly severe in strategic sectors such as food, transportation, and telecommunications. These sectors are considered strategic because they provide essential goods and services required for daily

activities. Consequently, collusion within these industries has broader social and economic consequences.

In the food sector, cartel practices involving staple commodities such as poultry and cooking oil significantly increased market prices and reduced affordability. Reports from KPPU (2023) indicate that coordinated supply restrictions among producers contributed to artificial scarcity and price instability. Consumers, especially low-income households, faced greater economic burdens due to rising food prices.

Similarly, collusion in the transportation sector reduced consumer choice and increased operational costs. Coordinated pricing among transportation operators limited fare competition and reduced service affordability. In telecommunications, price coordination weakened incentives for firms to improve service quality and innovation. According to Porter (2018), competition is a crucial driver of innovation because firms seek to gain competitive advantages through efficiency and technological improvements. However, under collusive conditions, firms prioritize profit stability over innovation, reducing market dynamism.

These findings support the argument that cartel practices in strategic sectors generate larger welfare losses compared to non-strategic industries. The essential nature of these sectors amplifies the negative impact on society because consumers cannot easily avoid purchasing these goods and services. Therefore, maintaining competitive market structures in strategic industries is particularly important for protecting public welfare.

Competition Law Enforcement and Welfare Protection

The results further show that competition law enforcement plays an important moderating role in reducing the negative effects of cartel practices. In Indonesia, the Komisi Pengawas Persaingan Usaha (KPPU) is responsible for investigating and sanctioning anticompetitive behavior. During the period 2015–2025, KPPU handled several major cartel cases involving food distribution, transportation services, and industrial goods.

KPPU reports (2019; 2023) demonstrate that regulatory interventions contributed to reducing welfare losses by imposing sanctions and increasing market monitoring. However, the literature also highlights substantial limitations in enforcement effectiveness. One major challenge involves proving the existence of collusion because cartel agreements are often conducted secretly without written evidence. Harrington (2021) explains that firms involved in collusion tend to use sophisticated coordination mechanisms to avoid legal detection.

Another challenge concerns the limited deterrent effect of sanctions. Connor (2020) argues that penalties imposed in many developing countries are often insufficient compared to the economic benefits obtained through collusion. As a result, some firms may still consider cartel participation profitable despite legal risks. This suggests that stronger penalties and improved institutional capacity are necessary to enhance enforcement effectiveness.

International studies from OECD (2019) further emphasize that successful competition law enforcement requires transparency, advanced investigative techniques, and stronger interinstitutional cooperation. Indonesia therefore needs to strengthen the authority and resources of KPPU in order to improve consumer protection and market efficiency.

Discussion of Research Findings

The findings of this study strongly support the theoretical framework of industrial organization and competition economics. The evidence confirms that cartel practices distort competitive equilibrium, reduce efficiency, and generate welfare losses. These findings are consistent with Proposition 1, which suggests that price collusion negatively affects consumer welfare in Indonesia during the period 2015–2025. Both theoretical and empirical studies consistently demonstrate that consumers experience higher prices, reduced output, and limited product choices under collusive market conditions.

The findings are also consistent with Proposition 2, which states that cartel practices in strategic sectors generate greater welfare losses compared to non-strategic industries. The food, transportation, and telecommunications sectors have direct implications for public welfare because consumers rely heavily on these goods and services in their daily lives. Consequently, collusion within these sectors produces broader economic and social consequences, including reduced affordability, limited accessibility, and declining market efficiency.

Furthermore, the reviewed literature provides support for Proposition 3, which proposes that competition law enforcement by KPPU moderates the relationship between cartel practices and consumer welfare. Regulatory interventions, investigations, and sanctions have contributed to reducing some of the negative effects of collusion. However, enforcement effectiveness remains constrained by evidentiary difficulties, limited sanctions, and institutional challenges. These findings indicate that while competition law enforcement plays an important role in consumer protection, it has not yet fully eliminated cartel behavior in Indonesia.

Recent developments reported by OECD (2024) and KPPU (2024) indicate that competition enforcement has become increasingly important in response to market concentration and emerging forms of collusive behavior. The growing complexity of modern markets requires stronger regulatory frameworks, enhanced investigative capabilities, and greater transparency to protect consumers and maintain competitive market conditions. These developments further reinforce the findings of this study regarding the importance of effective competition law enforcement in preserving consumer welfare.

From a business management perspective, the findings also highlight the importance of ethical business conduct, corporate governance, and compliance-oriented strategies in sustaining long-term organizational performance. Firms that prioritize innovation, transparency, and fair competition are more likely to build stakeholder trust and achieve sustainable competitive advantages than those relying on anticompetitive practices. Therefore, preventing collusive behavior should be viewed not only as a legal obligation but also as an essential component of responsible business management.

Overall, the discussion highlights the importance of strengthening competition policy and institutional capacity to protect consumer welfare. Effective competition law enforcement encourages fair competition, improves market efficiency, and supports sustainable economic growth. Stronger regulatory frameworks are therefore essential not only for reducing cartel practices but also for enhancing national competitiveness, public trust in market systems, and long-term business sustainability.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study examined the impact of price collusion and cartel practices on consumer welfare in Indonesia during the period 2015–2025 through a systematic literature review approach. Based on the synthesis of theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and institutional reports, the study concludes that cartel practices consistently generate negative effects on consumer welfare. Collusion increases prices above competitive levels, restricts output, reduces consumer surplus, and weakens market efficiency. These findings are consistent with industrial organization theory, which explains that coordinated behavior among firms distorts competitive equilibrium and creates welfare losses for society.

The study also finds that cartel practices in strategic sectors such as food, transportation, and telecommunications produce more severe welfare losses compared to non-strategic industries. Because these sectors provide essential goods and services for daily life, consumers are directly affected by price increases and reduced accessibility. The findings demonstrate that collusion in strategic sectors not only harms consumers financially but also weakens economic stability and social welfare more broadly.

Furthermore, this research confirms that competition law enforcement by the Komisi Pengawas Persaingan Usaha (KPPU) plays an important role in moderating the negative effects of cartel practices. Regulatory interventions, investigations, and sanctions have contributed to reducing some welfare losses and improving market supervision. However, enforcement effectiveness remains limited due to evidentiary challenges, hidden coordination mechanisms, and relatively weak sanctions. As a result, cartel practices continue to persist in several industries despite ongoing regulatory efforts.

Overall, the findings are consistent with the three analytical propositions developed in this study. The literature review confirms that price collusion negatively affects consumer welfare, welfare losses are more severe in strategic sectors, and competition law enforcement plays an important role in moderating the adverse effects of collusive behavior. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of cartel practices and consumer welfare within the Indonesian context.

From a business management perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of ethical leadership, effective corporate governance, and compliance-oriented business strategies in sustaining organizational performance. Firms that prioritize transparency, fair competition, and regulatory compliance are more likely to build stakeholder trust and maintain long-term competitive advantages. Therefore, preventing collusive behavior should be considered an integral component of responsible business management and corporate governance practices.

Based on these findings, several suggestions can be proposed. First, policymakers should strengthen competition law enforcement by increasing the authority, investigative capacity, and institutional resources of KPPU. Stronger sanctions and more transparent market monitoring systems are necessary to create effective deterrence against cartel behavior. Second, the government should encourage greater market competition, particularly in strategic sectors, by reducing barriers to entry and promoting fair business practices. Third, public awareness regarding consumer rights and competition law should be improved so that society can actively support fair market competition.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to conduct empirical and quantitative studies using econometric approaches in order to measure welfare losses more precisely and evaluate the effectiveness of competition law enforcement mechanisms. Comparative studies across countries and industries are also recommended to provide broader insights into cartel behavior, regulatory effectiveness, and consumer protection strategies in developing economies.

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In addition, the company can utilize the findings of this study to design a more informed reporting strategy transparent and sustainable, so that it is in harmony with stakeholder market interests and demands.

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