

Social Media Marketing and Price Gouging: A Comparative Study of Consumer Attitudes in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, And Egypt

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Abstract. This study analyzed the role of social media marketing (SMM) in facilitating price gouging from a consumer perspective across three countries – Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. A survey questionnaire was administered to 1372 respondents. The results of regression analysis revealed that various social media marketing approaches contribute to price gouging behaviors. These include targeting specific consumers, spreading misinformation, lack of transparency, and ineffective regulations. Significant differences were also found between countries, with higher price gouging reported in Saudi Arabia. The findings imply that unethical social media marketing practices exploit consumers and enable unfair pricing, especially during crises. Tighter regulations, consumer education, and ethical commercial conduct are needed

Keywords: Social Media Marketing SMM, Target, Amplification, Regulation, Transparency, Price Gouging, Manipulation, Crises, Exploitation

1. Introduction

Marketing through social media has emerged as an easy, accessible, low-cost marketing method that guarantees direct access to the consumer. With the development of social media, many organizations have adopted the method of marketing through these means in order to ensure a low-cost and guaranteed marketing strategy (Keller, 2021).

Social media has reached a stage where it has become a place for marketing all kinds of products and services, by many organizations, whether they are licensed or just home production projects. With the passage of time, social media has become a place for fake advertisements that promote products that do not meet specifications and standards and at irrational prices. Unsupervised marketing through social media also led to the publication of false reviews of products and websites with the aim of quick profit, monopoly or price manipulation (Chen et al., 2019).

Cabral and Xu (2021) aimed to show the relationship between the reputation of the brand and the seller when practicing price gouging during the Covid-19 pandemic. Market data was collected from social media platforms that dealt with advertisements for products such as sanitizers and facemasks. Through the analysis, the researchers found that the merchants who least engaged in price manipulation had a better reputation than those who took advantage of the pandemic and manipulated prices.

Ruan et al. (2021) aimed to demonstrate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and national closures on vegetable prices in wholesale markets in China. The researchers adopted a quantitative method, collecting data from 28 wholesale markets in China. The study concluded that storable vegetables were less prone to price gouging compared to perishable vegetables whose prices were excessively manipulated.

Arafat et al. (2020) aimed to analyze the factors responsible for panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic, by monitoring social media. The researchers analyzed advertisements and social media reports for the year 2020, which showed cases of panic buying for consumer goods and food significantly. The study found that these ads gave a sense of lack of supplies, anxiety and tension, and informational, social and economic effects that prompted individuals to panic buying, regardless of the rationality of the prices.

Liu et al. (2022) aimed to analyze the effect of price gouging on financial markets. Researchers collected data related to the opening and closing prices of shares, trading volume, and financial indicators of companies listed on the Chinese Stock Exchange during the study period extending from January 2015 to December 2018, and used logistic regression analysis to analyze the relationship between opening price manipulation and its impact on the future value of the companies. The study found that opening price gouging leads to changes in the future value of companies, and affects investors' investments and behavior in financial markets.

Ampountolas et al. (2019) aimed to demonstrate the impact of social media as a channel that contributes to defining and framing the pricing strategies of companies in the hospitality and tourism sector. The quantitative method was adopted by distributing a questionnaire to a sample of (114) organizations in the field of hospitality and tourism in the United Kingdom. The study concluded that social media plays a clear role in directing pricing strategies in the hospitality and tourism sector, and that tourism organizations that practice pricing through social media are usually able to achieve higher revenues through dynamic pricing, discounts and promotions. In other words, unregulated marketing helped these organizations achieve illegal gains, which requires the concerned authorities to tighten control over advertisements and unregulated marketing, and educate consumers about their rights and methods of protection from fraud and deception in online buying and selling.

Stemming from hypotheses development above, we saw that a literary gap appeared that gathered between social media marketing and prices gouging. It appeared to us that price gouging is mostly vivid within SMM advertisement due to the absence of oversight, monitoring and control by the competent authorities and bodies. We also noted that there appeared to previous studies that examined the role of

SMM in increasing price gouging for the sake of profiteering and market gains. This makes a customer the victim of greed especially during crises and special situations like the spread of a disease, natural disasters and health related circumstances.

From that, we aim in the current study to examine social media marketing in the field of price gouging, the study mainly sought to find out whether SMM is merely a fairness for retail traders, or it is a feed for the greediness of price gouging. Reaching this aim as done through collecting primary data from three different consuming environment as in the following table 1.

The main question that the study seeks to answer is:

Is social media marketing (SMM) a type of fair marketing approach or it is just to feed greediness in prices?

Reaching the aim of study was done through realizing the following objectives:

- Identify the concept of social media marketing SMM
- Explore the areas of SMM in defining prices and what is considered to be price gouging
- Present some examples of price gouging in related marketing environments

Table 1. Geography of Application

Sample Source	Justification for Choosing
Jordan	Consuming Society in the Middle East
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Consuming Society in GCC
Egypt	Consuming Society in Africa

In order to make things more vivid for reader, researcher built the following model which highlighted the relationship between variables and from which study hypotheses were extracted:

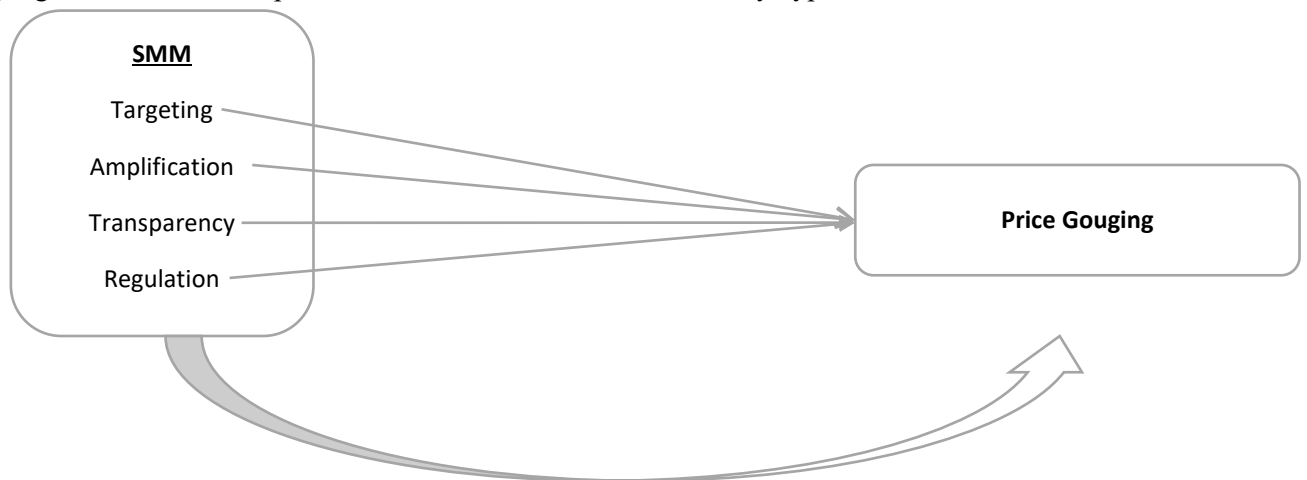


Fig.1: Study Model (Keller, 2021; Chen et al., 2019)

Based on the above presented mode, researcher was able to extract the following hypotheses:

H1: Social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers.

H2: There are no significant differences in the effect of social media marketing on price gouging from perspective of consumers due to their nationalities

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Media Marketing SMM

Today, marketing through social media - Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat - is considered one of the most important and widespread marketing methods due to its low cost and the ability to reach millions of people with the product or service compared to traditional marketing methods (MacCarthy, 2020; Hashem,2023; Hashem,2016). Jacobson et al. (2020) confirms that marketing through social media gives the organization access to target customers based on digital data and criteria related to their preferences, needs and desires. Goanta and Ranchordás (2020) and Hinson et al. (2022) agreed on the same idea, indicating that marketing through social media promotes Brand awareness and is able to create a unique marketing experience and thus increase customer loyalty.

Jacobson et al. (2020) stressed that organizations usually adopt social media for marketing and launching promotional campaigns for various products and services, and they also rely on it to publish their news, developments and business details. In addition to that, the organization in this way is able to monitor consumers' reactions to its products directly and without an intermediary and thus be able to develop and update its products or take appropriate decisions.

The dimensions of social media vary according to the purpose for which it is used. Organized marketing through these means is regulated by different legislation systems that determine the quantity and price of the products and services offered. In the current study, the use of social communication and the achievement of material profits was in an unregulated marketing and pricing method, which was driven by the following dimensions (Helberger, 2020; Haikal et al., 2020):

Targeting

Targeting refers to price manipulation through social media by targeting a specific category of consumers who need a product such as medicines, spare parts for machinery and equipment, or even products for special cases of individuals. Social media uses data and algorithms to identify specific individuals or groups on social media platforms and target them with higher prices for goods or services in times of crisis, emergency or need. In some cases, individuals who deal with luxury products are targeted, and individuals start ordering such products in order to access and obtain these products and ensure that they are available to them. An example of targeting is what some organizations do after natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, by targeting individuals affected by these disasters and raising the prices of food, clean water, and temporary tents, or airlines take advantage of the holidays or pilgrimage seasons to raise ticket prices exaggeratedly.

Amplification

Amplification as one of the dimensions of marketing through social media refers to spreading rumors and false news about the interruption of a product, its scarcity, or its low quality in order to manipulate prices. This method takes various forms such as tweets, posts, video clips and audio, which leads to the feeling of scarcity of the product and the possibility of its non-existence in the markets, and thus the collective rise in prices appear quickly and on a large scale. An example of amplification in marketing through social media is the dissemination of news related to the interruption or cessation of the manufacture of a certain basic drug for people with chronic diseases such as diabetes, pressure, and many others. Likewise, spreading false news about the interruption of one of the types of infant formula, which prompts parents to search for the product and offer any price in exchange for obtaining it.

Transparency

Transparency in pricing through social media, or even artificial transparency, refers to price manipulation through social media by claiming to provide information, quality, source, or quality of a product, especially in times of crisis and emergency. Examples of claiming transparency include bullying and criticism of one of the products in the market by one of the parties, and providing evidence

and evidence of the low quality of this product in order to reduce demand for it and direct it towards a product of the same quality, but from a different source, in order to achieve profits.

Regulation

Regulations in marketing through social media refers to the set of laws and regulations that can govern marketing through these means, however, with the large number of marketers, and the diversity and multiplicity of marketing sources, regulation and oversight have become unenforceable, especially with the presence of marketing agencies. Unlicensed sourced from homes and various home projects. These laws include anti-rigging laws, which are laws that prohibit sellers from raising prices excessively in times of crisis or emergency. In addition to price transparency requirements, these are regulations that require sellers to provide clear and accurate information about the prices of goods or services, especially in times of crisis or emergency.

2.2. Price Gouging

Yang and Mason (2022) defined price gouging as providing services and products at exorbitant prices in times of crises and disasters, or in cases of lack of supply and increased demand in order to achieve high profits. As for Cabral and Xu (2021) defined price gouging as adopting practices that involve raising the prices of products and services during a period of crisis. Price manipulation is among the many maneuvers carried out by the organization in order to ensure the highest possible profit level, and examples of this are (Beatty et al., 2021; Chakraborti and Roberts, 2021; Buccafusco et al., 2021):

Many organizations stockpiled sterilizers and masks and offered them at exaggerated prices during the spread of COVID 19, as an example of a retail point of sale in the United States of America buying 18,000 hand sanitizers at \$1 per box, and reselling them through social media for \$7 per box. About 300 sanitizers were sold before the US authorities closed the store due to price gouging.

Many organizations have manipulated prices during disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes, exploiting these disasters due to the decrease in supply and the increase in demand, down to achieving profits up to 450%. An example of this is the increased demand for tents after hurricanes, or the increased demand for food, clean water and medicine after earthquakes

Egypt

In 2013, in the midst of the political turmoil that accompanied the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi, there were reports of food and fuel price gouging, up to twice the normal price. In 2016, the period of inflation in Egypt and the depreciation of the Egyptian pound, many pharmacies doubled the prices of basic medicines, which made these medicines unaffordable for Egyptians. In 2020, many merchants manipulated the prices of sterilizers, facemasks, and gloves due to the increase in demand and lack of supply that accompanied the spread of Covid-19. In 2021, the month of Ramadan was accompanied by a major manipulation of the prices of meat and vegetables, reaching up to three times the normal price.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In 2018, during the Hajj season, accommodation and transportation prices were manipulated, so that some hotels imposed double prices on their services, taking advantage of the high demand by pilgrims. In 2019, during the Ramadan season, the prices of basic foodstuffs were manipulated, which led to the objection of Saudi citizens. In 2020, many abuses were reported regarding the prices of hand sanitizers and face masks, leading to monopolies. In 2021, Saudi Arabia recorded price manipulation of building materials such as cement and steel, taking advantage of the high demand from construction projects in the country.

Jordan

In 2018, Jordan went through a period of economic hardship and the prices of basic necessities such as food and fuel were manipulated. In 2020, the prices of sterilizers and facemasks were manipulated

due to the increased demand for them during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, Jordan faced a state of inflation, and many cases of price manipulation of electronic and home appliances appeared.

On international levels, the world witnessed some of the highest attempts of price gouging as in table below:

Table 2. Price Gouging International Examples

Venezuela	The prices gouging of food, medicine and fuel have increased by 1000% in recent years
Zimbabwe	During the years 2021-2022, a price crisis appeared, so that some basic products were manipulated by 500%.
Haiti	Due to natural disasters and repeated political crises, Haiti faced gouging of food and water prices to 300%.
Sudan	Due to political instability from 2020 to 2023, Sudan suffers from massive price gouging that has reached up to 200%.
The Philippines	Hurricanes and earthquakes in the Philippines led to price manipulation of basic materials that reached 100%.

2.3. Dimensions of Price Gouging

Beillahi et al. (2022) indicates that there are several dimensions to price gouging by distinguishing it from conventional marketing and pricing behaviors, these dimensions include:

Timing

Price gouging is usually associated with timing, as it appears during a crisis or emergency such as natural disasters, epidemics, or even political unrest, and this timing is what drives many parties to manipulate prices in order to make profits from the gap between supply and demand.

Size

It cannot be denied that there is price manipulation under normal circumstances, except that this manipulation varies according to the size of the crisis, and thus the difference in price becomes higher than the typical market in the event that the crisis is on a local, national, international or even global level.

Deception or procrastination

This dimension refers to the case in which marketers manipulate prices by deceiving consumers, such as misrepresenting the quality and quality of products, or their quantity, or attracting customers through false advertisements, or even promoting the idea of interruption and scarcity of goods.

Target

This dimension refers to targeting a specific category of consumers in cases of price manipulation under normal circumstances, such as consumers of luxury products and luxuries. However, the targeting is doubled in the event of crises, as it is directed to all segments of society, including low-income families.

Regulation

Price manipulation is illegal in most countries of the world - in the event that there is censorship - but in the case of selling and marketing through social media, it is difficult to enforce and therefore cannot be controlled.

2.4. Drivers of price Gouging

As it was previously indicated, that price gouging is the difference in prices for a product or service

from one place to another and from time to time in an excessive and unfair manner (Reese and Pies, 2021). Many motives encourage price gouging. The most important of these motives are what Chakraborti and Roberts (2020) and Scheitrum et al. (2023) refer to as:

Supply and demand gap

Price gouging appears when there is a lot of demand and little supply for a product, and marketers tend to raise the price of the product that has demand in order to achieve higher profits.

Natural disasters and emergencies

Price gouging appears in cases of hurricanes, earthquakes, and epidemics, and marketers tend to raise the prices of basic or necessary items such as water, food, medicine, or even medical supplies.

Limited competition

Price gouging appears when competition is limited in the market for a product, so merchants tend to raise prices for fear of losing customers to the competitor

Monopoly

The absence of a competitor leads to monopoly and increases the freedom to manipulate and increase prices unfairly due to the lack of competition.

Psychological factors

Marketers may be tempted to raise prices due to greed, stinginess, or the desire to make higher profits

2.5. Economical Influence of Price Gouging

Price gouging is among the abuses that lead to dire economic consequences, including that it leads to ineffective allocation of resources, as when prices are exaggerated, consumers are not encouraged to buy even if there is a need for the product, which causes waste of resources (Oladosu et al., 2022). On the other hand, price gouging - according to Fung and Roberts (2021) - can lead to inequality, as those who are able have access to the required product, while families with limited income cannot access the product, which exacerbates social inequalities. Sánchez-Cartas et al. (2021) asserted that price gouging reduces consumer confidence in the market and reduces consumer confidence in the government's ability to regulate prices.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological Approach

Current study adopted the quantitative approach in order to collect data and answer its main question. The reason for choosing the quantitative approach is due to its ability to deal with larger sample size that is located in different geographical zones.

A questionnaire was chosen to be the main study tool. The questionnaire was built through the aid of previous studies including Cabral and Xu (2021); Ruan et al. (2021); Arafat et al. (2020); Liu et al. (2022); Ampountolas et al. (2019) and contained two main sections, the first took into perspective demographics of study sample (gender, age, qualification, income, occupation and nationality). The other section contained paragraphs which were related to study variables (SMM and price gouging). The questionnaire was uploaded online Google Forms as it guarantees its reach to different geographical zones. In addition to that, the links were sent to different platforms according to their existence were researcher made sure that individuals from Jordan, KSA and Egypt had access to the questionnaire. To validate the questionnaire; we have presented the rough draft of the questionnaire on a group of academics and specialist in the field for the sake of arbitration and validation of questionnaire items. After arbitration, we made sure to modify the items as according to arbitrators' suggestions in order for the questionnaire to realize its aim.

Table 3. Distribution of Statements on Variables

Variables	# of Statements
SMM	
Targeting	5
Amplification	5
Transparency	5
Regulation	5
Price Gouging	6

Population of study consisted of consumers within three different consuming environments including (Jordan – Middle East / Egypt – Africa/ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Gulf Countries. A convenient sample of (500) from each country was chosen to represent the population with total of (1500) respondent. After application process, researcher was able to retrieve (1372) filled questionnaire, which indicated a response ratio of (91.4%) as statistically accepted:

Table 4. Sample Distribution according to Country

Country	Sample	% of Respondents
Jordan	481	35.1
KSA	426	31.0
Egypt	465	33.9
Total	1372	100

Based on the idea that price manipulation is usually related to the purchasing power of the individual, the current study dealt with the idea of price manipulation through social media in each of (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt). There are significant differences in purchasing power between the three countries, as Saudi Arabia recorded the highest per capita GDP among these three countries, followed by Jordan and Egypt. This idea means that individuals in Saudi Arabia are more capable and have higher purchasing power. In addition, the World Bank indicated that there is a large disparity in income between the three countries, as Saudi Arabia is the highest-income country and therefore its purchasing power is stronger, leading to it being more vulnerable to price manipulation and exploitation of social media compared to other countries (World Bank, 2020).

Statistical package for social sciences SPSS was used in order to screen and analyze gathered primary data. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated in order to test reliability and consistency of study tool as in table below:

Table 5. Alpha Value

variable	Alpha
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Targeting	0.823
Amplification	0.715
Transparency	0.767
Regulation	0.819
Price Gouging	0.785

Other statistical tests used in current study included mean and standard deviation, frequency and percentage, multiple regression, ANCOVA and multicollinearity test.

4. Results

As it appeared from table below, frequency and percentage indicated that majority of respondents were males forming (58%) of the total sample. Sample respondent also appeared to be within age range of 29-39 years old forming 44%, majority of them held BA degree forming 37%. In addition to that, table 6 below indicated that majority of respondents had a monthly income that ranged between \$ 1000-\$2000 forming 42.2%. Table also was able to highlight that majority of respondents were employees forming 57.9% of the total sample.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Demographics

	f	%
Gender		
Female	576	42.0
Male	796	58.0
Age		
18-28	66	4.8
29-39	604	44.0
40-50	399	29.1
More than 50 years	303	22.1
Qualification		
High School or Less	62	4.5
Diploma	122	8.9
BA	507	37.0
MA	435	31.7
PhD	246	17.9
Income/\$		
1000-2000	579	42.2
2001-3000	308	22.4
Less than 1000	251	18.3
More than 3000	234	17.1
Occupation		
House wife	98	7.1
Business Owner	308	22.4
Student	65	4.7
Martial Employee	55	4.0
Retired	51	3.7

Employee 795/57.9

It can be seen from table below that not all statements and variables were positively accepted in all countries under examination as there were variable which scored lower than mean of scale 3.00. The highest mean was scored by the variable (regulation) scoring 4.03/5.00 compared to the lowest mean 2.78/5.00 which was scored by (Amplification) and a mean of 2.86/5.00 scored by (transparency). The fact that transparency scored lower than the mean of scale indicated that respondents had issue regarding marketing through social media and its transparency which was highlighted through the table below.

Table 7. Questionnaire Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation
I see more ads related to my previous search and personal preferences on my SM page	4.18	.77
When something happens in my city I begin to see more product related to that incident	3.82	1.11
Sometimes I am overwhelmed with ads related to a disease that I have Just because I looked it up	4.10	1.15
Whenever the need for a certain product appears, the prices goes sky high	3.85	.74
I can predict the gap between demand and supply through the continuous changes in regular prices that I know of	3.93	.67
Targeting	3.98	.50
Social media ads create a sense of urgency and pressure around a product, so I buy it regardless of the price	2.89	1.38
Social media ads give me a sense of the importance of the product, which makes me buy it at a higher price	2.29	1.25
Social media takes advantage of the shortage in supplying and orders, which pushes them to ask for higher prices	3.84	.81
Exploiting influencers and social media personalities makes me think that I am getting a better product even if it is at a higher price	2.55	1.19
Social media ads give me a sense of the scarcity of the product, so I pay higher prices to ensure its existence	2.36	1.14
Amplification	2.78	.80
The transparency of social media marketing creates a false sense of confidence in me, so I buy the product even if it is at a higher price	2.07	1.10
Transparency is a strategy to justify product price differences between different places	3.14	1.13
Social media convinces me that the higher the price, the higher the quality	2.87	1.07
Social media ads create a sense of social responsibility, manipulating prices under the umbrella of solidarity, donations and aid	3.70	.92
Social media convinces me that the product is more expensive because it is for me alone	2.53	1.12
Transparency	2.86	.77
The existence of a law and a regulatory body that protects me as a consumer from price gouging is evidence that it is illegal	3.76	.97
I think that regulatory authorities such as ministries and agencies should monitor social media advertisements, especially in times of crisis	4.64	.60
In my country, I don't know where to file a complaint if I discover price gouging in one way or another	3.46	1.20
The problem with social media is that marketing through it is not monitored	4.23	.92
I think price manipulation through social media is easy and unavoidable	4.06	.78
Regulation	4.03	.58

Creating shortages and scarcity of products through social communication leads to price manipulation	4.28	.84
Justifying the price difference as a difference in quality makes me pay more for the product.	2.91	1.21
Influencers and celebrities are one of the main drivers of product price gouging and making me pay more for the product than it's actually worth.	2.65	1.16
Price discrepancy Social media marketing creates a sense of urgency about a product launch	3.25	.95
I think luxury consumers are more vulnerable to price gouging	4.16	1.12
Price manipulation creates a sense of hype around a product, causing prices to rise in the initial period before prices stabilize.	3.89	.89
Price Gouging	3.52	.55

On the independent variables, VIF and Tolerance calculations were conducted to search for multicollinearity as shown in table 8 below. The absence of multicollinearity in the data is demonstrated by the fact that all of the VIF values in the table above are less than 10 and all of the Tolerance values are greater than 0.10 (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

Table 8. Multicollinearity Test

variable	Tolerance	VIF
Targeting	.661	1.514
Amplification	.245	4.085
Transparency	.253	3.955
Regulation	.738	1.355

Hypotheses Testing

H1: Social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers.

The hypothesis was examined using multiple regression, the results indicated that the F value was significant at the 0.05 level. This suggested that "Social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers". In addition, it was determined that the correlation coefficient, $r=0.869$, was high and that the independent variables accounted for **75.6%** of the variation in the investigated dependent variable.

The coefficient table reveals that the t-values for each variable are statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that:

1. Targeting in social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers, since t- value =12.974 is significant at 0.05 level
2. Amplification in social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers, since t- value =10.898 is significant at 0.05 level
3. Transparency in social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers, since t- value =14.683 is significant at 0.05 level
4. Regulations in social media marketing doesn't imply fairness and feeds price gouging from perspective of consumers, since t-value =27.453 is statistically significant at the 0.05 level and has the greatest influence on the price gouging (as measured by $\beta=0.427$).

Table 9. Testing H1

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	R	R Square
	B	Std. Error	Beta					
1(Constant)	-.392	.071			-5.477	.000	.869	.756
Targeting	.233	.018	.213		12.974	.000		
Amplification	.201	.018	.294		10.898	.000		
Transparency	.277	.019	.390		14.683	.000		
Regulation	.406	.015	.427		27.453	.000		

The second hypothesis presented and tested in the study was articulate “**H2: There are no significant differences in the effect of Social media marketing on price gouging from perspective of consumers due to their nationalities.**” ANCOVA test was used to test above hypothesis and following results were found:

It was found that $F = 7.43$ was significant at 0.05 level. That means there were no significant differences in the effect of Social media marketing on price gouging from perspective of consumers due to their nationalities. These differences tend to increase in the GCC sample because its mean was the highest mean between the tested samples.

Table 10. Testing H2

Dependent Variable: Price Gouging					
national	Mean	Std. Deviation	N		
Jordan	3.45	.69	481		
Gulf	3.57	.52	426		
Egypt	3.56	.36	465		
Total	3.52	.55	1372		
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	300.301 ^a	3	100.100	1241.529	.000
Intercept	.066	1	.066	.815	.367
Social media marketing	296.393	1	296.393	3676.109	.000
national	1.198	2	.599	7.430	.001
Error	110.297	1368	.081		
Total	17452.917	1372			
Corrected Total	410.599	1371			

a. R Squared = .731 (Adjusted R Squared = .731)

Current study aimed at highlighting customers’ attitudes towards marketing through social media between a fairness of access to affordable marketing platforms, or just an approach to price gouging. A sample from three differently located countries were taken to form the sample of the study (Jordan – Asia / KSA – GCC and Egypt – Africa). A questionnaire was employed in order to collect data from (1273) customers within these countries as according to liker 5 scale. SPSS was employed and results indicated that following:

- Majority of respondents were from Jordan forming 35.1% of the total sample followed directly by Egyptian customers forming 33.9% of the sample and in the last rank came the Saudi customers who formed 31% of total sample.
- The main idea of study was revealed and it appeared that customers were aware of social media role in marketing especially in the recent years

It cannot be denied that marketing through social media has represented a way for many

organizations to reach the target audience at a lower cost and complications compared to traditional marketing campaigns. It is an effective tool that has helped many organizations to build a huge customer base with less costly marketing procedures and in a systematic and clear manner. However, you have two sides of the coin, as it has been noticed recently that social media marketers tend to manipulate prices and increase them for the consumer by adopting hidden marketing approaches that may not be understood by the consumer. The current study's results indicated and answered its main question through the results. It was found out that social media marketing plays a role in increasing prices on customer through following an internal agenda from the organization that is not noticed by customers which leads to an increase in the prices and gaining more credit by the organization.

The study proved that marketing through social media contributed significantly to attracting the attention of customers by providing various amenities, which include product descriptions, realistic pictures and videos, prices, and the possibility of delivery to the customer's door. The existence of these factors contributed to enhancing consumer acceptance of the idea of marketing through social media review the product and deliver it to the consumer without the need to move from one place to another until they make the purchase which agreed with Cabral and Xu (2021) and Ruan et al. (2021).

Through the analysis, it was concluded that marketing through social communication is an effective means for organizations to manipulate prices, and this was shown in the analysis based on the presence of variables that were met with negative attitudes by the respondents, which included (amplification and transparency). This agreed with Arafata et al., (2020) who argued that marketing through social media reflects the incorrect reality of products by pressuring the consumer to buy based on manipulation of emotions and feelings. Such as the idea that the proceeds of the product go to charity, or to contribute part of the price to help the poor, and many other similar ideas.

Another aspect that contributed to price gouging through social media is the fact that it is uncontrollable. Marketing operations through these means cannot be controlled, and thus reach the stage of harming consumers due to the lack of alternative options for obtaining those goods and services. This agreed earlier with Liu et al. (2022) who argued that the uncontrollable nature of social media marketing might cause a decrease confidence in the market and a negative impact on the reputation of brands.

Finally, results of study indicated that price gouging within GCC countries was higher compared to Jordan and Egypt, this can be attributed to the fact that there are many differences between the chosen countries including the difference in the purchase power which is higher in GCC countries. In addition to that, GCC mainly depend on rentier economy, which is the economy that depends on natural resource like oil and petroleum. This has the ability to make GCC higher in purchase power due to the fact that oil and gas prices change dramatically which affects the prices of other products and services in the country, and can lead to price manipulation.

5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that certain social media marketing approaches facilitate price gouging from a consumer view. Tactics like emotional manipulation, obscuring true costs, and targeting vulnerable segments appear to feed unfair pricing behaviors. The results highlight the need for better safeguards to protect consumers, particularly during periods of hardship when unethical price inflation has dire impacts. Stricter regulations, consumer awareness programs, and ethical business conduct are critical to curtail price gouging enabled by manipulative social media marketing. While focused on three countries, the findings have broader implications on harnessing social media for fair versus exploitative pricing strategies globally. Further research can build upon this work by examining additional factors and country contexts. Overall, ensuring responsible use of social media marketing to support equitable pricing is crucial.

Examining the extent to which SMM contributes to the development of price gouging within three countries with different consumer environments could have many theoretical and practical implications.

From a theoretical point of view, the study may contribute to clarifying the role of SMM in promoting price gouging by analyzing SMM strategies in marketing. In addition, environmental factors that promote and encourage price manipulation can be indicated, such as political, social, intellectual and cultural factors. It is also possible to find out the best practices that would frame and standardize price gouging, especially in crises.

Practically speaking, the study could develop effective systems in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt to ensure that this problem is addressed by developing policies and regulations tailored to unique challenges and opportunities. The study may also contribute to increasing consumers' awareness of the practices of marketers and their different methods of price gouging, which leads to an increase in the responsibility of marketers and various organizations.

From previous conclusion, researcher recommended the following:

- Policy makers and consumers have to come together to prevent this harmful practice and ensure that all people have access to essential goods and services in times of crisis.
- Follow ethical practices and laws and legislation in force in the field of marketing and business
- Develop strategies to improve public health and social awareness about future crises, and improve public response to supply and economic crises, to reduce price gouging and better use of available resources.

The current study was limited to respondents from (Jordan – Middle East / Egypt – Africa/ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Gulf Countries. Each of them represented the geographical area in which they are found.

Launching from results, discussion and conclusion of study; researcher suggested the following future studies:

- Examine the effectiveness of the instructions, regulations, and laws in the country in preventing price manipulation on social media platform
- Explore the role of activating the positive impact of influencers on social media platforms to mitigate this impact
- Study the impact of analyzing the types of advertisements on social media platforms in order to ensure the legalization and management of these advertisements in an easy and secure manner

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