

دور تقنيات التسويق الخفي في خفض التنافر المعرفي بعد الشراء  
دراسة تطبيقية على عملاء شركات الاتصالات بجمهورية مصر العربية  
**The role of Stealth Marketing Techniques in Reducing Post Purchase  
Cognitive Dissonance**  
**An Applied study on customers of Telecom Companies in the Arab  
Republic of Egypt**

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**Abstract:**

This research aims to investigate the role of Stealth Marketing Techniques in reducing Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance, in the field of application which is Telecom Companies' customers in The Arab Republic of Egypt. The research adopted the philosophy of positivism, the deductive approach, and the method of quantitative and qualitative analysis as the research methodology. The instrument utilized for data collection was the questionnaire. Consequently, (500) usable questionnaires were collected electronically through social media channels from Customers of Telecom Companies in The Arab Republic of Egypt. In addition, Using SMART PLS V4.0 to explore the causal relationships between the research variables. The findings reveal that there is a significant negative correlation relationship between Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance. In addition, this research also has significant practical

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implications and guidelines for the Telecom industry, and theoretical implications for researchers who are interested in research variables.

**Keywords:**

1. Stealth Marketing Techniques.
2. Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance.
3. Telecom Companies.

## المستخلص:

يهدف البحث إلى تحديد طبيعة العلاقة بين تقنيات التسويق الخفي والتنافر المعرفي بعد الشراء، وذلك بالتطبيق على عملاء شركات الاتصالات في جمهورية مصر العربية. ويعتمد البحث على الفلسفة الوضعية، والمنهج الاستنباطي، ومنهج التحليل الكمي والنوعي كمنهجية للبحث. والاستبيان هو الأداة المستخدمة لجمع البيانات، وبالتالي تم جمع (500) استبيان قابل للاستخدام إلكترونياً عبر قنوات التواصل الاجتماعي من عملاء شركات الاتصالات في جمهورية مصر العربية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم استخدام **SMART PLS V4.0** لاستكشاف العلاقات السببية بين متغيرات الدراسة. وتكشف النتائج أن هناك علاقة ارتباط معنوية عكسية بين تقنيات التسويق الخفي و التنافر المعرفي بعد الشراء. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يقدم هذا البحث تأثيرات عملية وإرشادات مهمة لصناعة الاتصالات، وأبعاد نظرية للباحثين المهتمين بمتغيرات البحث.

## الكلمات المفتاحية:

- 1-التسويق الخفي
- 2-التنافر المعرفي بعد الشراء
- 3-شركات الاتصالات بجمهورية مصر العربية

## Introduction

Many marketers encounter difficult challenges when trying to make marketing messages perceived. It has been suggested that ordinary customers could be facing by thousands of marketing messages each day. This type of message communication causes a high level of customer's confusion and derision of corporations. They are trying to avoid marketing communications delivered from any producer. This led to the use of different ways to seize the customer's attention particularly the stealth marketing (Martin and Smith, 2008). Last decade showed the rising of unconventional marketing methods like stealth marketing. This is because that the majority of customers are sitting most of their day in front of their computers or smart phones instead of watching TVs or reading the newspapers. This causes the marketers to change their strategies to reach their targets. People now rarely follow 30- 60 seconds commercial and "normally" click "skip the ad" button on the You Tube. This stimulates the marketers to be more creative to attract the customers to a product or brand. The personal character of the social media makes the marketer messages non effective. This leads to change the marketer way of communication campaigns to become more personal to reach the audience. The large number of TV channels and advertisements is a real threat to alternative marketing techniques. The obstacle is to let the customer could see your promotion for a product inside this large number of messages that is shown on the large number of channels (Akyol and Tokatlı, 2019).

The significance of this research is that it's applied to one of the leading sectors of the Egyptian economy since communications are the cornerstone of all business in the country because it plays a key role in

accelerating economic growth, where the sector contributed 5 percent to GDP in 2023 (Official website of the Egyptian Ministry of Finance).

Therefore, this research studies the relationship between Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance in telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

## **Definitions**

### **1. Independent Variable: Stealth Marketing Techniques**

A marketing method that includes efforts to tell the customers about a product/brand without caught by the law (Akyol and Tokatli, 2019).

### **2. Dependent Variable: Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance**

The result of consumers' unplanned impulse buying (Imam, 2013).

## **Exploratory research**

### **1. Pilot study & practical problem**

The researchers conducted a pilot study on a sample of 20 customers of Telecom companies from March 12, 2024, to March 19, 2024. Through these interviews, the researchers found the following: The discussions between the researchers and the pilot study sample revealed that some customers experienced purchase anxiety and expressed about their perceptions as follow:

- (1) I feel the Telecom Company is dishonest in presenting their services.
- (2) I made the purchase as a compliment to the company and its considerable effort in the presentation.
- (3) The process of evaluating alternatives for Telecom companies' services takes a long time.

(4) The prices of the company services worry me when making a purchase.

## 2. Academic Gap

A group of studies investigated the relationship between stealth marketing and other variables as :

- (1) Customer engagement (kaikati & kaikati, 2004)
- (2) Switching of Customers (Agrawal, 2020 ; bergel,2018)

A group of studies investigated the relationship between post purchase cognitive dissonance and other variables as :

- (1) Impulse buying behavior (Akbar et al., 2020 ; Chen et al., 2020)
- (2) Consumer Perceptions (Koller and Salzberger, 2007; Rasheed et al., 2017 ; Sharifi and Esfidani, 2014 and Telci et al., 2011)

Accordingly, the researchers conclude that previous studies have overlooked -within the limits of researchers' knowledge- the relationship between Sustainable Marketing and Customer Retention.

## Research problems & questions

Based on the academic gap, the practical gap, and researcher's observations, the problem of the current research was stated as follows:

The current research problem is to investigate the relationship between exercising Stealth Marketing Techniques in telecom companies in Arab republic of Egypt and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance.

In order to address the research gap, the following Two questions are asked:

- Q1.** What is the nature of the correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques, and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance)?

**Q2.** What is the effect of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among employees of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt?

### **Research Objectives**

By investigating the research gap and its questions, this research embraces the following objectives:

- O1.** Determining the nature of the correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques, and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance).
- O2.** Measuring the effect of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among employees of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

### **Research Hypotheses**

This research develops two central hypotheses based on previous studies in order to answer the research questions. These hypotheses are as follows:

- H1.** There is a negative significant correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques, and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance).
- H2.** Stealth Marketing Techniques significantly affects the Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among employees of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Independent Variable: Stealth Marketing Techniques**

#### **Techniques of Stealth Marketing**

According to Kaikati & Kaikati (2004), covert marketing employs a variety of techniques. Rodrigue (2006), Vilpponen, Winter, and Sundqvist (2006), Black and Nevill (2009), Roy and Chattopadhyay (2010), Shakeel and Khan (2011), Klepek (2014), Akyol and Tokatli (2019), and Choong et al. (2021) are among the few works that corroborate this. We'll go over each marketing strategy in detail below. There will be a careful evaluation of each method's applications given.

#### **Viral Marketing**

What is the chance that someone who is ill with a dangerous virus may infect his contacts? It is obvious that this pathogen has the potential to spread widely through person-to-person contact. In the sphere of marketing, the idea of viral transmission amongst patients was appropriated to characterize viral marketing as an electronic means of marketing goods and services (Abbas and Ali, 2020).

#### **Celebrity Marketing**

Celebrity marketing is a common marketing strategy that aims to promote brands, products, and services. This is dependent upon the celebrity projecting a good self-image into the brand or product. According to Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020), marketers could encourage consumers to purchase or utilize the offered product or service by encouraging them to copy the celebrity.



### **Brand Pushers**

When 80% of respondents said they would rather buy brand X, consumers are creating what are known as social norms. This shows how the clients are getting knowledge about the customs or expectations of people's conduct in that specific circumstance.

### **Bait-and-Tease Marketing**

According to Marks and Kamins (1988), evaluations of overestimation in commercial marketing are often based on customer dissatisfaction with the product relative to their high expectations.

### **Marketing in Video Games**

Video games piqued the interest of advertisers as a growing number of youngsters, young adults, and people aged 18 to 34 played them. Since men are more likely than women to play video games, the majority of advertising target adult males (Bigné et al., 2011).

### **Dependent Variable: Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance**

#### **Post-purchase dissonance behavior**

Unplanned impulse buying by customers leads to post-purchase cognitive dissonance (Imam, 2013). This is due to the fact that consumers purchase items based on their expectations; when these expectations and the actual product do not align, it is referred to as cognitive dissonance (Lake, 2009).

#### **Cognitive Dissonance**

Cognitive dissonance theory developed by Festinger (1957) states that people experience conflict when deciding between alternatives. They seek to reduce dissonance by increasing the perceived attractiveness of the chosen alternative and devaluing the nonchosen item, seeking out information to

confirm the decision, or changing attitudes to conform to the decision (Tanford & Montgomery, 2014).

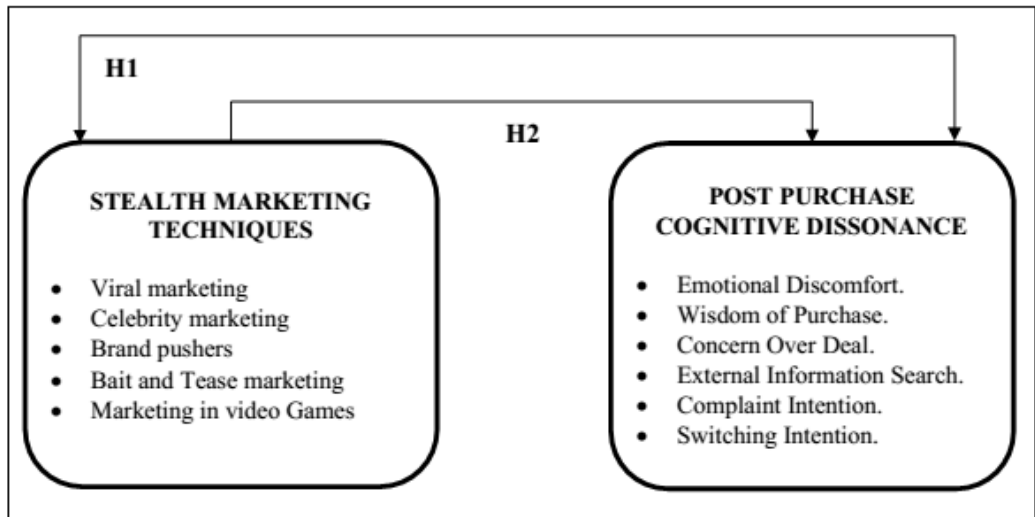
Many researchers (Menasco and Hawkins, 1978; Elliot and Devine, 1994) have measured cognitive dissonance with different items or with one or more indicators. Montgomery and Barnes (1993) and Sweeney et al., (2000) developed a dissonance scale to use in marketing. Direct measures of dissonance arousal have concentrated mostly on physiological responses. The primary definition of cognitive dissonance, according to Montgomery and Barnes (1993) cognitive dissonance scale, is "those feelings, emotions, and attitudes which consumers have when they experience dissonance and the situation has occurred." A multi-dimensional tool was presented by Sweeney et al. (2000). It included three dimensions: one related to transaction, one about purchasing wisdom, and one emotional. Numerous emotional elements that describe the emotional aspect of dissonance, such as angry, frustrated, annoyed, and melancholy, are on the negative end of the pleasure spectrum. Some things, like being irate, agitated, or irritated, symbolize the higher end of the arousal spectrum. Additionally, cognitive items relate to the perceptions of the wisdom of the made purchasing decision. These have anything to do with self-attribution. For instance, "I questioned whether I could have gotten a better deal. I believed I shouldn't have carried it out." The question "whether the choice was right and whether I really needed that product" is related to this aspect of cognitive dissonance. Finally, the salesman is primarily to blame for deal anxiety (Sweeney et al., 2000). The psychological anguish a person has after making a buying decision is known as the emotional dimension. A person's perception following a purchase that they may not have needed the chosen product or that it may not have been an

appropriate one is known as wisdom of purchase. Concern over deal refers to sales staff's identification of a customer after the sale that he may have influenced against his own beliefs (Sweeney et al., 2000). Numerous scholars have proposed that cognitive dissonance has both emotional and cognitive components (Montgomery and Barnes, 1993; Sweeney et al., 2000; Koller and Salzberger, 2012). The cognitive aspect pertains to identifying an individual whose beliefs are inconsistent after making a purchase, while the emotional aspect is defined as the psychological distress experienced by an individual after making a purchasing decision. This study adopted the assessment scale developed by Sweeney et al. (2000) to examine the emotional and cognitive elements of dissonance in the post-purchases. Sweeney et al. (2000) provided the 22-item cognitive dissonance scale. Three dimensions make up the scale: the emotional dimension, the dimension known as the wisdom of buying, and the dimension known as worry about bargain. By evaluating the scale's correlation with other associated dimensions including external information search, complaint intention, and switching intention, this study also tests the validity of the scale. According to Salzberger and Koller (2010), a complaint behavior is influenced by dissonance. When customers are unhappy after making a purchase, they may take various actions, including filing a complaint with the business, spreading bad rumors, appealing to a third party, and searching for external information. Kim (2011); Leonidou and Skarmeas (2015). Sweeney et al. (2000) discovered a strong correlation between consumers' inability to evaluate the product's quality and the emotional side of dissonance. According to Sweeney et al. (2000), deal anxiety has a significant effect on both satisfaction and perceived value. This study therefore anticipates that consumers with high

dissonance levels will make a greater effort to look for external information about the product they purchased, which will lead to a higher level of intention to complain and to switch.

### Conceptual framework for the relationships between research variables

Based on the above relationships, this study adopts the following framework, figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework for the relationship between research variables**

Source: Prepared by the researchers according to literature review.

### Research Significance

The Ministry of Finance statistics indicated that the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority had earned profits of £5.8 billion over the last year 2021, an increase of 24 percent over the previous year. The Communications Regulatory Authority has thus occupied fifth place in the net profit arrangement of economic bodies during the fiscal year 2021-2022 (Official website of the Ministry of Finance).

Telecom plays a significant role in providing the necessary technology for social communications. It's imperative to the success of organizations. The findings of this research will benefit both the development of the science and the development of the field of application.

### **1. The Development of The Science:**

As it focuses on specific sides of Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance, which were not discussed in this deep before. This research provides a wider investigation of these variables and the proper relationships between them. Also, it highlights new gaps that motivate researchers to investigate further studies.

### **2. The Development of the Field of Application:**

It establishes a new deeper understanding of the professional framework for top management to apply the aspects of Stealth Marketing . In the era of Industry 4.0, Service providers must be aware of the relationships discussed in this research and be able to use them to maintain an elevated level of competitive advantage.

## **Population and Sample Size**

### **1. Population and Sampling**

The population of the current research are the customers of the telecom companies in Egypt.

In the Arab Republic of Egypt, until this research is performed, there are (4) licensed telecom companies, which are: Etisalat Misr, Telecom Egypt (We), Vodafone Egypt, and Orange Egypt.

Therefore, the research population includes all customers of the telecommunications company operating in Egypt, the subject of the research, as shown in the following table.

**Table 1. Research Population**

Company	Number of customers	
1 Vodafone Egypt	40.795	million subscribers
2 Orange Egypt	29.856	million subscribers
3 Etisalat Misr	19.693	million subscribers
4 Telecom Egypt (We)	3.300	million subscribers

Source: Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2019.

## 2. Sample Size

The sample size required to be large enough to generalize the findings to a population. According to Sample Size Calculator, a sample size of 384 is required if the margin of error is 5%, which is the proportion utilized in social research, the confidence level is 95%.

## Data Analysis, Results, and Interpretations

Research data was collected during the period from March 2024 to May 2024. Using Google Form, the researchers designed an electronic version of the questionnaire which was published to Customers at telecom companies through social media channels like Facebook Pages, Facebook Groups, and WhatsApp Groups interested in telecom companies in Egypt. Total responds were (521), while accepted responds were (500). Researchers exported the collected data from Google Form to Google Sheet then to Excel Sheet in which items were coded and formatted to be ready for SmartPLS.

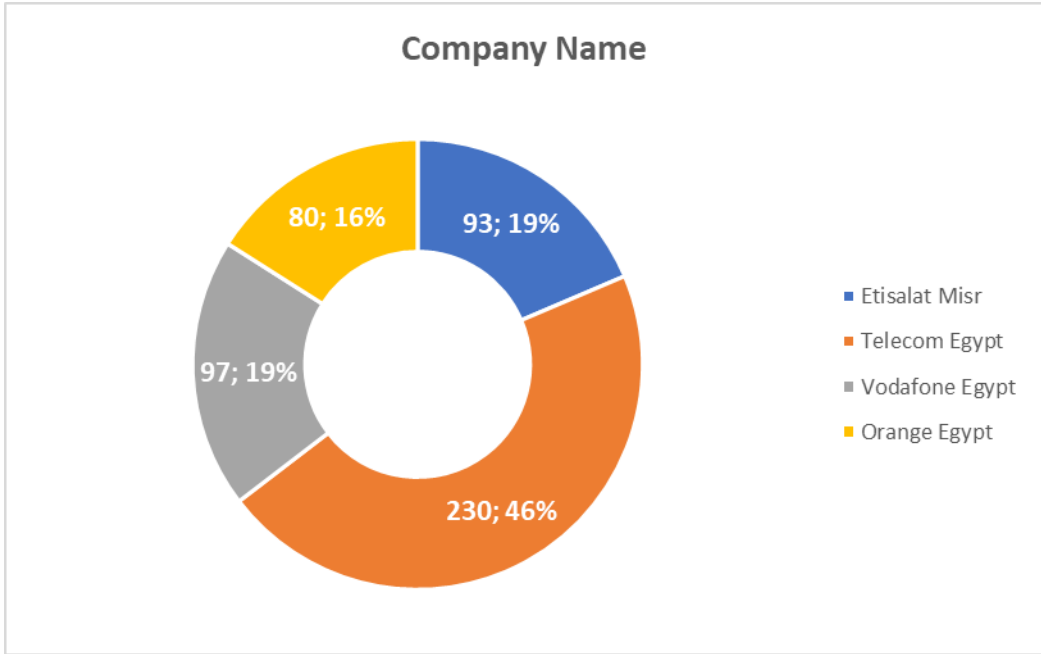
## Sample Description

Accepted responses to the questionnaire were (500), described as follows:

### 1. Sample distribution according to Company Name

As shown in figure 3, the number of segment (Etisalat Misr) was (93) Responses, while the number of segment (Telecom Egypt) was (230), and the

number of segment (Vodafone Egypt) was (97), and the number of segment (Orange Egypt) was (80), as shown in the next figure:

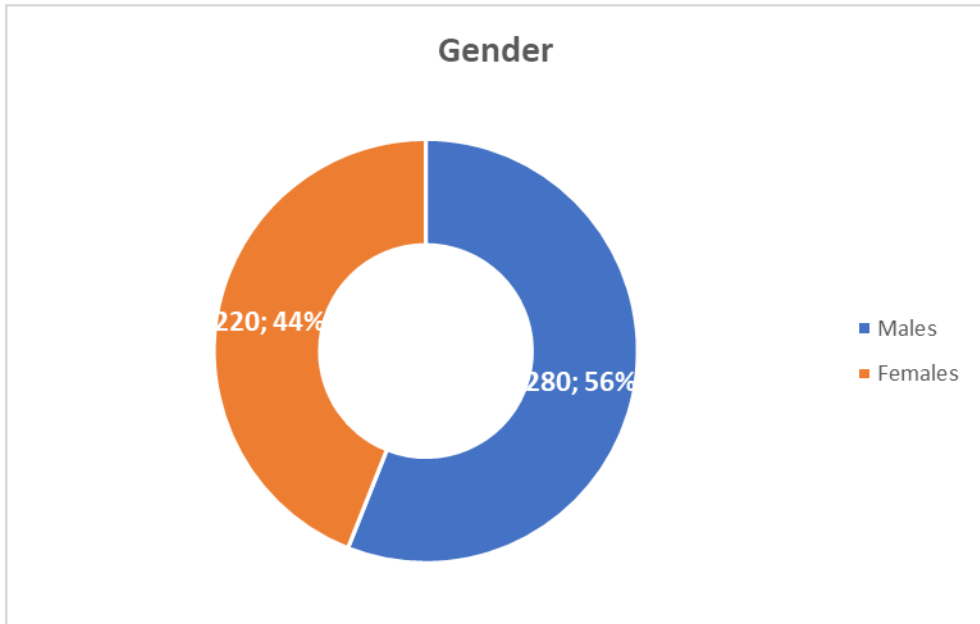


**Figure 2. Sample distribution according to Company Name**

Source: Prepared by researchers according to statistical analysis

## 2. Sample distribution according to Gender

As shown in figure 4, the number of males was (280) Responses, while number of females was (220) Responses:



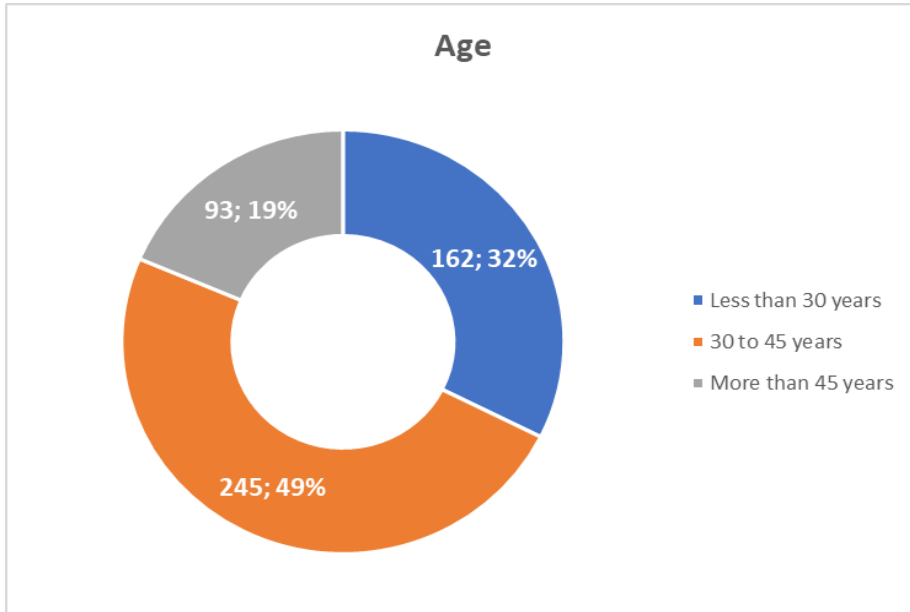
**Figure 3. Sample distribution according to Gender**

Source: Prepared by researchers according to statistical analysis

### 3. Sample distribution according to Age

As shown in figure 5, the number of segment (less than 30 years) was (162) Responses, while the number of segment (30 to 45 years) was (245), and the number of segment (more than 45 years) was (93):





**Figure 4. Sample distribution according to Age**

Source: Prepared by researchers according to statistical analysis

**1. Direct relationships between research variables (Stealth Marketing Techniques, Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance)**

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation factors matrix between Variables**

	Stealth Marketing Techniques	Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance
Stealth Marketing Techniques	1	0.747**
Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance	0.747**	1

Source: Prepared by researchers according to statistical analysis

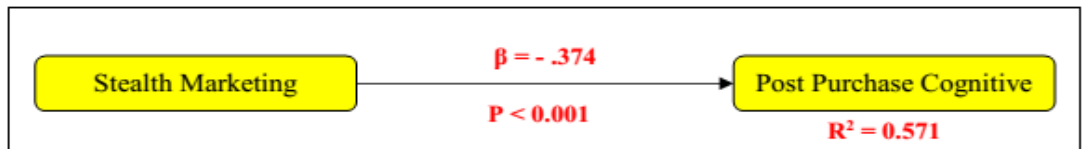
As shown in table 2, there is a positive significant correlation between all Variables (Stealth Marketing Techniques, Post Purchase Cognitive

Dissonance), and all correlation coefficients are moderately significant at the 0.01 significant level.

### 1.1. The relationship between Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance

As shown in figure 5, Stealth Marketing Techniques significantly affects Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among Customers of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt at P Value <0.001.

The value of the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  reached (0.571), which indicates that changes in (Stealth Marketing Techniques) contribute to explain 57% of the change that occurs in the dependent variable (Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance), and the rest of the percentage is due to other factors not mentioned in This model.



**Figure 5. Direct effects of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance**

Source: Prepared by researchers based on smart PLS V 4.0 Statistical analysis outputs.

## Findings and Recommendations

### Research Questions Revisited

Table 4 below shows the overall view for Research Questions, Objectives, Hypothesizes, and Results of Testing hypotheses as follows:

**Table 3. Research Questions, Objectives, Hypothesizes, and Results**

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Research Hypothesizes	Results of Testing Hypothesizes
Q1. What is the nature of the correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance)?	O1. Determining the nature of the correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance).	H1. There is a negative significant correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance).	Accepted
Q2. What is the effect of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among Customers of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt?	O2. Measuring the effect of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among Customers of	H2. Stealth Marketing Techniques significantly affects the Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among Customers of telecom companies in the Arab Republic	Accepted

Research Questions	Research Objectives	Research Hypothesizes	Results of Testing Hypothesizes
	telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt.	of Egypt.	

Source: Prepared by researchers based on Literature, Data, and Statistical analysis outputs.

### Research Findings and its Interpretations

Table 4. below shows the summary of research findings compared to literature:

**Table 4. Research Findings compared to Literature**

Research Findings	Compared to literature
There is a significant correlation relationship between the research variables dimensions (Stealth Marketing Techniques and Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance).	<i>Within the researchers' knowledge, there are no previous studies that have previously investigated this relationship</i>
Stealth Marketing Techniques significantly affects Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance among Customers of telecom companies in the Arab Republic of Egypt.	Within the researchers' knowledge, there are no previous studies that have previously investigated this relationship

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on Literature.

### Theoretical Implications

Based on current research, researchers recommend these topics for future research:

1. Study the effects of research variables applied on other Sectors, such as Banks.
2. Study the effect of Stealth Marketing Techniques on Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance by mediating other variables.

### **Practical Implications**

Based on the results of the current research, researchers summarized the practical recommendations in Table 6 as follows:

**Table 5. Research recommendations for the field of practice**

<b>Practical Recommendations</b>	<b>Notes for application</b>	
1. Telecom companies should provide customers with reliable information	Who?	Top management in cooperation with marketing department.
	How?	Establish a Sustainable Marketing unit.
	When?	Along the service cycle: Before, During, and Post-Purchase Stages.
2. Telecom companies should fulfill its promises to customers.	Who?	Customer Service department.
	How?	Using questionnaire.
	When?	Along the service cycle: Before, During, and Post-Purchase Stages.

Source: Prepared by researchers based on Literature.

In light of the discussion of the study's results, a set of other recommendations can be presented as follows:

- Telecom companies should pay attention to the privacy of transactions conducted with customers.
- Telecom companies should employees should strive to earn customers' trust.
- Telecom companies should employees focus on the continuous development of after-sales service.
- Telecom companies should have sufficient speed to serve the diverse needs of customers.
- Telecom companies should receive complaints and suggestions through multiple communication channels.

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