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# Stealth Marketing Effectiveness in the Cognitive Stage of Consumer Acquisition: A Demographic Study

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## Abstract

Stealth marketing has been a favourite tactic for many marketers to create buzz about a new goods or services. This tactic is inexpensive, occasionally invisible, yet, when used correctly, can yield great results. An alternative strategy for product promotion is called stealth marketing. This helps in better breaking the clutter and providing a more meaningful and effective association to the brand. The physical evidence shown in the context adds to the brand club and helps potential customers identify themselves with the brand in a clearer way. Stealth marketing techniques include covert advertising, product placement, word-of-mouth marketing, and viral marketing. A company might, for instance, pay actors to advertise its product in public or arrange for product placement in a well-known movie or television show.

This is a marketing technique used to attract exposure without pretending to be advertising for a new product, service, movie or book. These promotional strategies are also frequently called buzz marketing. This is a general term that covers a broad range of distinct marketing techniques. Some comparative studies have also been done in the area of how stealth marketing forays along with other forms of marketing. Several studies have also found stealth marketing to be manipulative and outrageous when seen from the customer's perspective. This study will help the academic community, industry stakeholders and the public at large in better understanding the use of stealth marketing and in turn fine-tune its use to better serve the

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community at large. However, there is a dearth of studies, which captures the effectiveness of stealth marketing at the cognitive stage of customer acquisition. In the cognitive stage the product gets customer's attention. This study focusses on measuring the effectiveness of stealth marketing at this front.

**Keywords:** Stealth Marketing, buzz marketing, Forms of stealth marketing, undercover marketing, product placement

## Introduction

Stealth advertising is an advertising tactic in which the consumer is constantly but implicitly aware that they are being targeted by commercials. While some contend that stealth advertising is a risky and immoral form of advertising, regulators have not historically categorised it as an unfair form of advertising.

Generally speaking, stealth marketing only functions when the audience is unaware of it or doesn't feel bothered by it. Customers may appreciate being able to test items out first-hand, like in the case of the Sony Ericsson T68i, while some may feel deceived as they were sold to while they were unaware of the product's promotion. The effect could be reversed in this manner until the viewers become aware of the practice. The effect is the same for phoney blogs and other forms of stealth marketing. Critics argue that the technique is excessively absurd and necessitates "knocking" clients. However, in some situations, the methods are also definitely successful. Creative thinking and a natural ability to gather momentum are essential for stealth marketing.

## Research objectives

- To study the difference in the cognitive stage of customer acquisition with respect to gender.

- To study the difference in the cognitive stage of customer acquisition with respect to age.

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- To study the variation in the cognitive stage of customer acquisition with respect to occupation.

- To study the variation in the cognitive stage of customer acquisition with respect to income level.

**Research hypothesis**

H0: There is no significant difference with respect to gender in the responses of cognitive stage

H1: There is a significant difference with respect to gender in the responses of cognitive stage

H0: There is no significant difference with respect to age in the responses of cognitive stage

H1: There is a significant difference with respect to age in the responses of cognitive stage

H0: There is no significant variation with respect to location in the responses of cognitive stage

H1: There is a significant variation with respect to location in the responses of cognitive stage

H0: There is no significant variation with respect to occupation in the responses of cognitive stage

H1: There is a significant variation with respect to occupation in the responses of cognitive stage

H0: There is no significant variation with respect to income level in the responses of cognitive stage

H1: There is a significant variation with respect to income level in the responses of cognitive stage

**Literature Review**

(Serra-Cantallops, 2018) In this study paper, the researcher explains how these brands are running a clandestine marketing campaign in Turkey. Three companies that produce alcoholic beverages and run successful covert marketing operations are selected. The campaign and its social media platform, Instagram, are evaluated over a six-month period using content analytic

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techniques. Additionally, it is clear that every brand name that has been adopted has a corporate identity that is quite similar to the original brand. Using narrative as a key marketing foundation and establishing a personal connection make their Instagram posts stand out.

(Akyol, 2019) Using content analysis methods, three alcoholic beverage brands that run evident stealth marketing campaigns are selected, and over the course of six months, their campaigns and social media platform (Instagram) are analysed. Analyses show that brands run their adverts under false names and identities to avoid being penalised for breaking the law. Furthermore, it's clear that all of the made-up names that brands use have a lot in common with the corporate identities of their actual companies.

(Roper, 2019) Increased use of deceptive marketing strategies leads to increasingly ethically difficult circumstances, particularly when those strategies purposefully conceal their messaging. This is particularly valid for the implicit endorsements and subtle promotion.

(Abdul Rahman, 2021) This article discusses the various stealth marketing techniques employed by various businesses. It is crucial to remember that the business may employ this marketing tactic without spending any money or having any specific objectives, and that people's activities may inadvertently affect it.

(Alkhafagi, 2021) Customers consider stealth marketing to be immoral when marketers use dishonest or immoral goals. If the rationale is sound, though, people may accept it and see it as moral.

## Research Gap

After reviewing the corpus of prior research on the subject, the researcher learnt that numerous studies have been carried out to ascertain the ethics and legality of stealth marketing. Studies comparing stealth marketing's tactics to other marketing strategies have also been conducted. Additionally, a number of studies have discovered that, when viewed from the viewpoint of the consumer, stealth marketing is manipulative.

## Methodology

The researcher discovered a study opportunity in the area of determining the efficacy of stealth marketing at the cognitive stage of customer acquisition after reviewing the body of existing literature. The researcher investigated the research opportunity, developed the research problem, and established the study objectives based on this assessment of the literature and the conversations with industry experts**.**

A non-probability sampling technique was employed in this study. Purposive and snowball sampling were combined by the researcher in the non-probability sampling category.

In order to collect responses from the sampling units – individual respondents, a structured questionnaire with close-ended questions and statements was formed. This questionnaire was revised based on the inputs from certain academicians and based on the suggestions from the responses collected as a part of the pilot survey.

## Results

## Demographic analysis

## G Graph: Gender composition



**Chart 1: Gender composition of sample**
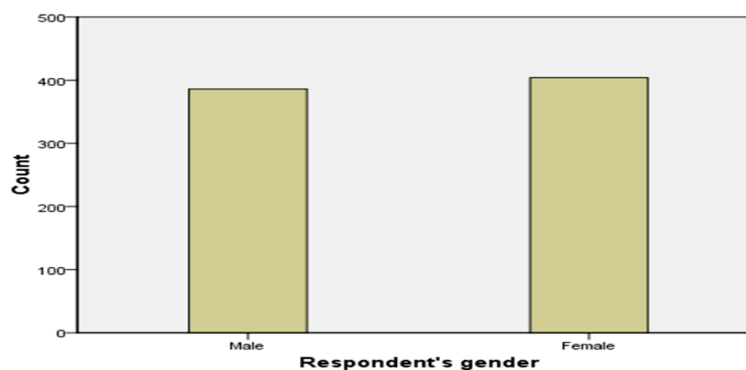
Interpretation: Out of the total sample of seven ninety, three eighty six were male respondents whereas 404 were female respondents

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**G Graph: Age composition**
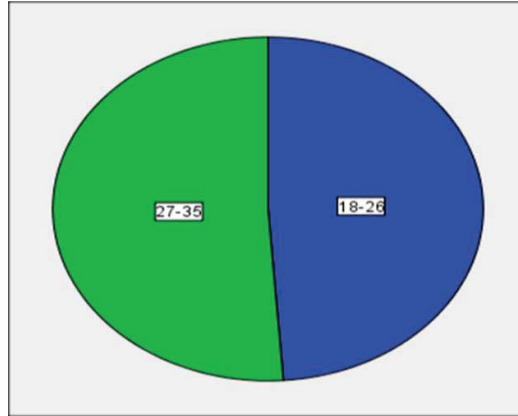


**Chart 2: Age composition of sample**

Interpretation: Out of the total sample of seven hundred and ninety respondents, 386 respondents were of the age group 18-27 whereas 404 respondents were of the age group 28-35

**G Graph: Geographical bifurcation**
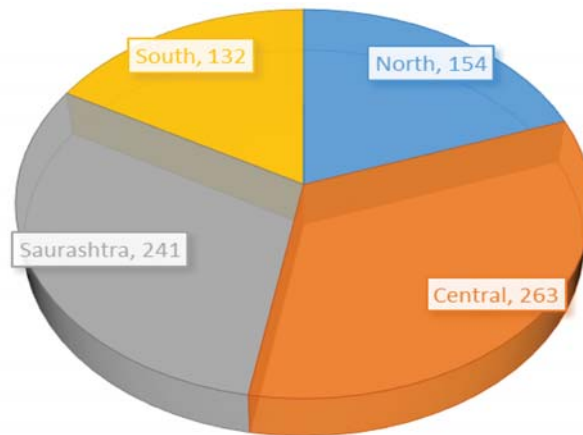


**Chart 3: Location (geographical area) details of sample**

Interpretation: Out of the total 790 respondents, 154 hailed from North Gujarat, 263 were from Central Gujarat, 241 were from Saurashtra region whereas 132 were from Southern Gujarat

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**Reliability**

*Scale: Cognitive stage scale*

### Table 4.1: Case processing summary – CS scale

| Case Processing Summary | | | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cases | | Valid | 790 | 100.0 |
| | | Excluded[a] | 0 | .0 |
| | | Total | 790 | 100.0 |
| a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. | | | | |

**One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

### Table: Descriptives for Income - CS

| Descriptive | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | | | | | | |
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| Less than 3,00,000 | 372 | 3.1376 | .58239 | .03020 | 3.0783 | 3.1970 | 1.40 | 4.60 |
| 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | 281 | 3.4313 | .64665 | .03858 | 3.3554 | 3.5073 | 2.20 | 5.00 |
| Greater than 6,00,000 | 137 | 3.5737 | .50458 | .04311 | 3.4885 | 3.6590 | 3.00 | 4.40 |
| Total | 790 | 3.3177 | .61890 | .02202 | 3.2745 | 3.3609 | 1.40 | 5.00 |

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**Table 4.20: Test of Homogeneity of Variance for Income - CS**

| Test of Homogeneity of Variances | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Levene Statistic | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
| CS_summated | Based on Mean | 1.722 | 2 | 787 | .179 |
| | Based on Median | .905 | 2 | 787 | .405 |
| | Based on Median and with adjusted df | .905 | 2 | 753.443 | .405 |
| | Based on trimmed mean | 1.485 | 2 | 787 | .227 |

**Table 4.21: ANOVA for Income - CS**

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 24.669 | 2 | 12.334 | 34.976 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 277.543 | 787 | .353 | | |
| Total | 302.212 | 789 | | | |

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**Table 4.22: Welch test for Income - CS**

| Robust Tests of Equality of Means | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | |
| | Statistic[a] | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
| Welch | 39.626 | 2 | 388.830 | .000 |
| a. Asymptotically F distributed. | | | |

**Post Hoc Tests**

**Table: Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD and LSD) for Income - CS**

| Multiple Comparisons | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent Variable: CS_summated | | | | | | | |
| | (I) Respondent's annual family income | (J) Respondent's annual family income | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Tukey HSD | Less than 3,00,000 | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | -.29368[*] | .04694 | .000 | -.4039 | -.1835 |
| | | Greater than 6,00,000 | -.43609[*] | .05935 | .000 | -.5754 | -.2967 |
| | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | Less than 3,00,000 | .29368[*] | .04694 | .000 | .1835 | .4039 |
| | | Greater than 6,00,000 | -.14241 | .06188 | .056 | -.2877 | .0029 |
| | Greater than 6,00,000 | Less than 3,00,000 | .43609[*] | .05935 | .000 | .2967 | .5754 |
| | | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | .14241 | .06188 | .056 | -.0029 | .2877 |
| LSD | Less than 3,00,000 | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | -.29368[*] | .04694 | .000 | -.3858 | -.2015 |

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Greater than 6,00,000 | -.43609[*] | .05935 | .000 | -.5526 | -.3196 |
| | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | Less than 3,00,000 | .29368[*] | .04694 | .000 | .2015 | .3858 |
| | | Greater than 6,00,000 | -.14241[*] | .06188 | .022 | -.2639 | -.0209 |
| | Greater than 6,00,000 | Less than 3,00,000 | .43609[*] | .05935 | .000 | .3196 | .5526 |
| | | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | .14241[*] | .06188 | .022 | .0209 | .2639 |
| *. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. | | | | | | | |

**Homogeneous Subsets**

**Table: Homogenous subsets for Income - CS**

| CS_summated | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Respondent's annual family income | N | Subset for alpha = 0.05 | | |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Tukey HSD[a,b] | Less than 3,00,000 | 372 | 3.1376 | | |
| | 3,00,000 - 6,00,000 | 281 | | 3.4313 | |
| | Greater than 6,00,000 | 137 | | | 3.5737 |
| | Sig. | | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed. | | | | | |
| a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 221.465. | | | | | |
| b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed. | | | | | |

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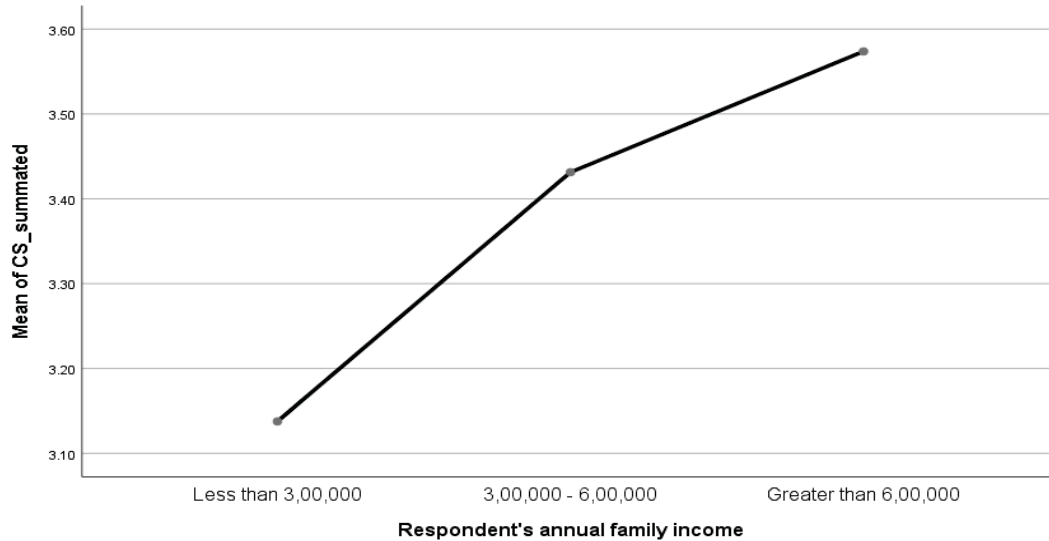
**Means Plots**



**Chart: Means plot for Income - CS**

Interpretation: The significance value of the test for homogeneity of variance is 0.179, which is greater than 0.5. Therefore the null hypothesis of this test is failed to be rejected. This means that the significance value of ANOVA test can be considered for analysis.

The significance value of One-way ANOVA test is 0.000, which is again lesser than 0.5. Therefore the null hypothesis of this test is rejected. This means that there is a significant variation in CS with respect to income.

On observing the Post-hoc tests, the researcher found that there is a significant variation in the cognitive stage with respect to respondents with income less than 3,00,000 and greater than 3,00,000.

Respondents with income greater than 3,00,000 are more positive in the cognitive stage scale.

**One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)**

**Table 4.37: Descriptive for location – CS**

| Descriptives | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | | | | | | |
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| Northern Gujarat | 154 | 3.2400 | .23462 | .02545 | 3.1894 | 3.2906 | 3.00 | 3.60 |
| Saurashtra | 241 | 3.1433 | .34997 | .03195 | 3.0801 | 3.2066 | 2.80 | 3.80 |
| Southern Gujarat | 132 | 3.8000 | .56848 | .05629 | 3.6883 | 3.9117 | 3.20 | 4.60 |
| Central Gujarat | 263 | 4.2000 | .00000 | .00000 | 4.2000 | 4.2000 | 4.20 | 4.20 |
| Total | 790 | 3.3177 | .61890 | .02202 | 3.2745 | 3.3609 | 1.40 | 5.00 |

**Table 4.38: Test of Homogeneity of Variance for location - CS**

| Test of Homogeneity of Variances | | Levene Statistic | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | Based on Mean | 17.625 | 3 | 786 | .000 |
| | Based on Median | 17.592 | 3 | 786 | .000 |
| | Based on Median and with adjusted df | 17.592 | 3 | 555.010 | .000 |
| | Based on trimmed mean | 17.577 | 3 | 786 | .000 |

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**Table 4.39: ANOVA for location - CS**

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | 44.004 | 3 | 11.001 | 33.445 | .000 |
| Within Groups | 258.208 | 786 | .329 | | |
| Total | 302.212 | 789 | | | |

**Table 4.40: Welch test for location - CS**

| Robust Tests of Equality of Means | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CS_summated | | | | |
| | Statistic[a] | df1 | df2 | Sig. |
| Welch | 877.185 | 3 | 247.221 | .000 |
| a. Asymptotically F distributed. | | | | |

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**Post Hoc Tests**

**Table: Post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD and LSD) for location - CS**

| Multiple Comparisons | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent Variable:   CS_summated | | | | | | | |
| | (I) Respondent's location | (J) Respondent's location | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
| | | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Tukey HSD | Northern Gujarat | Central Gujarat | -.00832 | .06132 | .999 | -.1662 | .1496 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.27701[*] | .06235 | .000 | -.4375 | -.1165 |
| | | South Gujarat | .08203 | .07169 | .662 | -.1025 | .2666 |
| | Central Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | .00832 | .06132 | .999 | -.1496 | .1662 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.26869[*] | .05389 | .000 | -.4074 | -.1299 |
| | | South Gujarat | .09035 | .06447 | .499 | -.0756 | .2563 |
| | Saurashtra | Northern Gujarat | .27701[*] | .06235 | .000 | .1165 | .4375 |
| | | Central Gujarat | .26869[*] | .05389 | .000 | .1299 | .4074 |
| | | South Gujarat | .35904[*] | .06544 | .000 | .1906 | .5275 |
| | South Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | -.08203 | .07169 | .662 | -.2666 | .1025 |
| | | Central Gujarat | -.09035 | .06447 | .499 | -.2563 | .0756 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.35904[*] | .06544 | .000 | -.5275 | -.1906 |
| LSD | Northern Gujarat | Central Gujarat | -.00832 | .06132 | .892 | -.1287 | .1121 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.27701[*] | .06235 | .000 | -.3994 | -.1546 |
| | | South Gujarat | .08203 | .07169 | .253 | -.0587 | .2228 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Central Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | .00832 | .06132 | .892 | -.1121 | .1287 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.26869* | .05389 | .000 | -.3745 | -.1629 |
| | | South Gujarat | .09035 | .06447 | .161 | -.0362 | .2169 |
| | Saurashtra | Northern Gujarat | .27701* | .06235 | .000 | .1546 | .3994 |
| | | Central Gujarat | .26869* | .05389 | .000 | .1629 | .3745 |
| | | South Gujarat | .35904* | .06544 | .000 | .2306 | .4875 |
| | South Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | -.08203 | .07169 | .253 | -.2228 | .0587 |
| | | Central Gujarat | -.09035 | .06447 | .161 | -.2169 | .0362 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.35904* | .06544 | .000 | -.4875 | -.2306 |
| Tamhane | Northern Gujarat | Central Gujarat | -.00832 | .05171 | 1.000 | -.1452 | .1285 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.27701* | .05911 | .000 | -.4333 | -.1207 |
| | | South Gujarat | .08203 | .07206 | .831 | -.1092 | .2733 |
| | Central Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | .00832 | .05171 | 1.000 | -.1285 | .1452 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.26869* | .05504 | .000 | -.4141 | -.1232 |
| | | South Gujarat | .09035 | .06876 | .718 | -.0923 | .2730 |
| | Saurashtra | Northern Gujarat | .27701* | .05911 | .000 | .1207 | .4333 |
| | | Central Gujarat | .26869* | .05504 | .000 | .1232 | .4141 |
| | | South Gujarat | .35904* | .07449 | .000 | .1616 | .5565 |
| | South Gujarat | Northern Gujarat | -.08203 | .07206 | .831 | -.2733 | .1092 |
| | | Central Gujarat | -.09035 | .06876 | .718 | -.2730 | .0923 |
| | | Saurashtra | -.35904* | .07449 | .000 | -.5565 | -.1616 |
| *. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. | | | | | | | |

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**Homogeneous Subsets**

**Table: Homogenous subsets for location - CS**

| CS_summated | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Respondent's location | N | Subset for alpha = 0.05 | |
| | | | 1 | 2 |
| Tukey HSD[a,b] | South Gujarat | 132 | 3.1621 | |
| | Northern Gujarat | 154 | 3.2442 | |
| | Central Gujarat | 263 | 3.2525 | |
| | Saurashtra | 241 | | 3.5212 |
| | Sig. | | .484 | 1.000 |
| Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed. | | | | |
| a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 181.645. | | | | |
| b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed. | | | | |

**Means Plots**
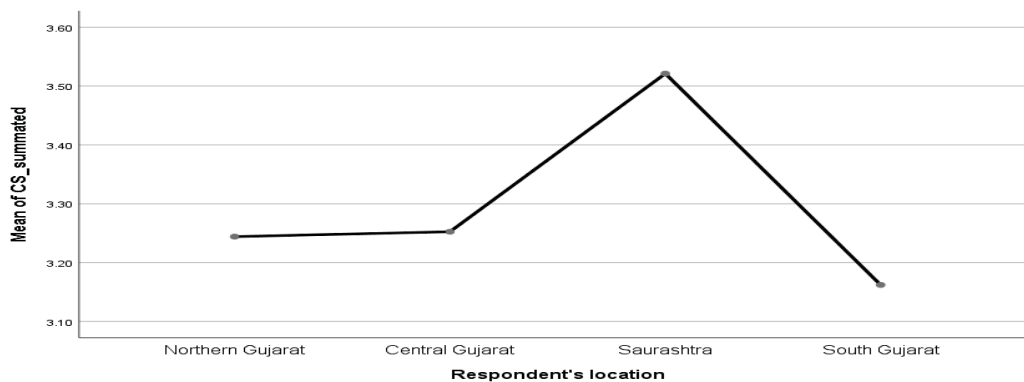


**Chart: Means plot for location - CS**

Interpretation: The significance value of the test for homogeneity of variance is 0.000, which is lesser than 0.5. Therefore the null hypothesis of this test is rejected. This means that the significance value of Welch test can be considered for analysis.

The significance value of Welch test is 0.000 which is again lesser than 0.5. Therefore the null hypothesis of this test is rejected. This means that there is a significant variation in CS with respect to location.

**Findings**

In accordance with the study's research methodology, a structured questionnaire was created to gather the responses from the chosen sample. Using SPSS software, the gathered data was examined, and findings were obtained.

**Scale reliability**

Primarily the scales were tested for reliability by the use of Cronbach's alpha. The values of Cronbach's alpha for the three scales are as follows:

| Scale | Cronbach's alpha value |
|---|---|
| Cognitive stage scale | 0.763 |

On checking the group statistics table, it was found that females have a more positive perception towards cognitive stage scale. The researcher too had found that in recent studies, females are able to better acknowledge the brand presence and generate belief systems about it as compared to their male counterparts.

On checking the group statistics table, it was found that the respondents of the age group 27-35 have a more positive perception towards cognitive stage scale. This can be attributed to the fact that most of these respondents have completed their education and are earning leading to a higher exposure, which lead them to easily acknowledge the brand.

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On checking the post-hoc tests, it was found that higher income respondents had a better knowledge of the various brands that are available in the market and hence when one such brand was showcased as stealth; the respondent readily identified it.

On checking the post-hoc tests, it was found that respondents hailing from Central Gujarat had a positive perception than others. Respondents from this area have a better knowledge of the various brands that are available in the market and hence when one such brand was showcased as stealth; the respondent readily identified it.

On checking the post-hoc tests, it was found that respondents falling in the "Others" category had a more positive perception than others. Respondents in this category are housewives, freelancers or unemployed persons. These people have a higher access to television as compared to their counterparts.

**Conclusion**

- This study has brought newer levels of depth in understanding of stealth marketing.

- Geographical location and income level have seen to be having an effect on the effectiveness of stealth marketing.

- People's thinking about themselves added to their demographic variables have had diverse levels of perception being brought to notice.

- Literature review also highlighted incidents where stealth marketing was used while diluting the ethical code of conduct. These uses dampen the original idea behind executing marketing campaigns and in turn create a wrong demand for the product.

- Females have been seen to be more prone to stealth marketing and hence female products should focus more on stealth marketing for promotion.

- Reality shows are a great platform for stealth marketing.

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