

## The Enduring Power of a Brand Mascot: The Utterly Butterly Amul Girl

**Venkatesh Ganapathy**

Research Scholar,  
School of Management,  
Presidency University,  
Bangalore.

**Dr. Chithambar Gupta**

Professor,  
School of Management,  
Presidency University,  
Bangalore.

**Dr. Radhika Arora**

Associate Professor,  
Presidency School of Business,  
Bangalore.

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of mascots on brand recall and buyer behaviour and attempts to identify the reasons for their enduring power. The Amul Girl mascot, a cherished symbol in Indian households, has been a cornerstone of Amul's branding strategy for decades. The mascot's simplicity, relatability, and witty commentaries have strengthened the Amul brand's place in the hearts of consumers, making it more than just a brand. This research explores the reasons behind the enduring power of the Amul Girl, focusing on her design, appeal, and the impact of her witty ads. The study highlights the importance of brand consciousness and recognition of brand mascots emphasising the potential for mascots to serve as alternatives to celebrity ambassadors. The study also highlights the importance of consistency in branding. The findings suggest that brand mascots create emotional connections with consumers, particularly children, leading to brand recognition and preference. Moreover, mascots differentiate products, enhance brand recall and build trust and positive associations with customers. The findings have practical implications for marketers looking to build a strong and recognisable brand identity that resonates with consumers, highlighting the importance of incorporating brand mascots into advertising strategies.

**Keywords:** Brand Mascots, Advertising, Consumer Preferences, Brand Recall, Marketing Strategies, Brand Recognition, Brand Consciousness, Target Audiences.

### INTRODUCTION

Marketing is about engaging customers throughout their journey and ensuring a great delivery experience when they buy a product or service. Digital marketing techniques and promotional tools (search engine optimisation, pay-per-click, social media marketing, email marketing, blog marketing, content marketing etc.) are deployed by marketers based on an understanding of customers' unique needs and requirements. There was a time when mascots were used to promote products as an integral component of advertising campaigns. Organizations have since then stopped using mascots. However, there is a renewed interest in mascots as advertisers are getting disillusioned with the risks associated with celebrity endorsements. Some mascots have managed to endure in the market due to their staying power and continued relevance. These mascots continue to support the brand-building efforts of the organization.

A mascot can be a fictional or human character, an animal or an object. It is designed to create a powerful impression in the minds of customers. Mascots are animals with human features or colourful cartoon characters or characters that symbolise normal human beings (like the mascot for Vijaya Bank or Air India's Maharajah). A mascot can be a character, a personified image that symbolically represents a brand. The French word "mascotte" meaning lucky charm is the source of the word mascot.

Brand mascots have been an enduring and integral part of advertising strategies for many years. They are often memorable and relatable characters that embody the values and personality of a brand, creating a unique identity that resonates with consumers. Mascots are a visual representation of a product or service that support the branding efforts.

As brand elements, mascots increase awareness about a product and lead to greater brand recall. Mascots are often considered an extension of a brand's personality. Though a few mascots are targeted specifically at children and teenagers,

it cannot be denied that well-designed mascots have universal appeal. They can also be cost-effective in supporting organizational efforts to build brand equity compared to the use of celebrity endorsements.

It will be therefore interesting to investigate the reasons why some mascots have enjoyed continued patronage over the years and the reasons for their success and enduring appeal. Amul Butter's mascot fits the bill to meet the research objective as the mascot is part of India's cultural legacy spanning more than five decades. The immense popularity of the Amul moppet among Indians and her everlasting charm is the driving force behind this research. The research is organized as below:

The history of mascots and their use in advertising is explored. This is followed by outlining the history of the Amul mascot in India. A review of the literature helps in understanding the nuanced role played by mascots in the brand-building efforts of an organization. This is followed by articulation of the research objectives and the research design adopted. This leads to the formulation of hypotheses and their testing using statistical methods. The results are then analysed and interpreted to present suggestions, recommendations and managerial implications. This is followed by the presentation of the conclusions of the study along with its limitations and avenues for future research.

### **THE HISTORY OF MASCOTS**

Between the 1860s and early 1900s (the industrial era), mascots were used for advertising food and beverage products. Quaker Oats Man promoted the oatmeal cereal in the late 1890s. Values like honesty were conveyed through the Oats Man. In 1937, Aunt Jemima advertised Quaker Oat Company's products like syrup and pancake mix. Initially, human characters were used to depict mascots followed by cartoon characters after the introduction of television as a medium of entertainment (1970s). Mascots are anthropomorphic, real or fictional figures used to market food and beverage products to children, teens and parents in the US.

In India, mascots with a strong identity and timeless appeal have used their persuasive powers to contribute to brand building efforts of organizations and influence customers to make a purchasing decision. Anthropomorphism is a brand positioning strategy where human characteristics or behaviour (visual and verbal elements) are attributed to a god, animal, or object. The Amul girl is also part of anthropomorphic advertising imagery.

### **DESIGNING A MASCOT**

A mascot has to be memorable, recognizable and represent a consistent character. It must be lively and user-friendly. Selection of the mascot must be done carefully based on the product/ service and brand attributes. The image of the selected graphic that is chosen as a mascot must align with the product characteristics and what the brand stands for. The creation of a mascot can be time-consuming. Designing a mascot needs a thorough understanding of the product, brand and customer mindset. Mascots also take time to create an impact on the audience. In some cases, mascots may need to be redesigned/ revamped to gel with changing times and changing consumer preferences. Designing a mascot involves knowing the concept of the character and the colour choices must be made according to the brand's pitch.

### **BENEFITS OF MASCOTS**

Mascots endear brands to customers helping them connect with the brand beyond advertising. The human brain processes images faster and remembers them better than text. Mascots transfer the brand idea quickly making the purchasing process emotionally charged. Mascots play a crucial role in viral marketing. Whether it is a product or a service or a website or a mobile app, mascots represent the visual imagery of the brand adding to the aesthetic appeal of the latter. Mascots enable audiences to identify with them easily. Their appeal extends to all customer segments promoting greater customer engagement. Mascots help differentiate a brand from other brands in the market. Mascots can support social media marketing efforts. Animated mascots can trigger curiosity and add the fun quotient to an advertising campaign.

### **LIMITATIONS OF MASCOTS**

In the US, many of the products using mascots do not meet targets set by the US government's dietary guidelines. Children (below 10 years of age) developing an emotional attachment to such products can end up becoming a social evil. Consumers also end up having heightened expectations from mascots.

### **THE BIRTH OF AMUL BUTTER**

Polson Dairy produced butter before Amul. It had developed into a well-known brand and monopoly by 1945. Farmers were prohibited from selling milk to other market vendors. In Gujarat, the farmers of Kiara also produced milk. But in small cities, they were taken advantage of by agents and traders. The cost of milk was set arbitrarily. Farmers approached Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel through local farmer leader Tribhuvandas Patel as a result of unethical trading practices. Farmers should establish a cooperative, suggested Sardar Patel. This would give them authority over marketing, processing, and procurement.

Sardar Patel assigned Mr Morarji Desai to call a gathering in the village of Samarkha on January 4, 1946. To collect milk from member farmers, it was decided to set up milk cooperatives in each village within the Kaira district. If this didn't work out, farmers were free to refuse to sell their milk to any milk contractor within the district. When the government rejected

their demands, milk farmers went on a 15-day strike. Later, the farmers' claim was granted by Bombay's Milk Commissioner.

June 1948 saw the start of milk pasteurization by the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers Union Ltd (KDCMPUL). A daily output of 247 litres of milk was being delivered by two village dairy co-ops. 432 farmers joined the cooperative movement by the end of 1948. The Union was now processing five thousand litres of milk each day. Dr. Verghese Kurien was brought on board in 1949 to oversee Amul's marketing and technological initiatives.

The Sanskrit term "Amulya" (priceless or precious) is where the word "Amul" originates. In 1954, value-added products like butter and milk powder were made from excess milk. In 1973, the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Limited (GCMMF) was founded to unite other cooperative unions under one roof.

### **THE AMUL MASCOT**

As India's oldest and most well-known brand, Amul and its mascot hold a special place in the hearts of the Indian population. With over 80% of market share, Amul butter is a market leader in the category. The product epitomises the brand with both the product and the brand complementing one another. The brand's singular commitment to the product is such that the word "Amul" has become synonymous with "butter". Amul has been selling butter since 1956.

Though Dr Verghese Kurien felt that the product needed advertising, it was only in 1966 that Sylvester da Cunha was hired to design a unique advertising campaign for Amul butter. Dr Verghese Kurien was the Chairman of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Limited (GCMMF). A mischievous little girl was chosen as the mascot. The mascot had to be easy to draw and memorable and it had to be hand-painted. The moppet as the mascot is responsible for the humour element in the advertisements of Amul butter. The mascot was inspired by a competitor's mascot (the Polson girl, a blonde child). This mascot was simple and gentle, dressed in blue and white stripes, seated around the table with cans of butter and buttering a toast.

Amul's mascot had life breathed into it. The mascot was naughty, mischievous, impish, spirited and exuberant. The little girl – a cute kid with no nose, a grin and a polka-dotted dress with blue hair tied up in a ribbon caught the imagination of Indians within no time. Sylvester da Cunha's wife Nisha thought up the tagline – Utterly Butterly delicious. There were reservations about the use of the word "butterly" as this wasn't considered grammatically appropriate. But this tagline was catchier than the earlier tagline - "Processed from the purest milk under the most hygienic conditions by a dairy co-operative in Gujarat."

Sylvester and Eustace Fernandez, the art director, decided to make an advertisement intended especially for housewives. Hoardings would be put up in key places. The mascot and statements about common problems would be shown on these hoardings. The target demographic has expanded significantly in the modern era to include seniors, teens, and kids. The Guinness World Record for the world's longest-running advertising campaign has been attained by this commercial. The banner commercial and the accompanying one-liners caused Amul butter sales to soar from 1000 tonnes annually in 1966 to 25,000 tonnes in 1997.

### **THE AD CAMPAIGN**

Outdoor advertising was resorted to through the usage of hoardings. Print media was expensive in the 60's. So, it was felt that hoardings would offer an effective way to connect with people. Amul's advertising spend is about 1% of its turnover.

The billboards carried simple visuals and minimal text to reduce costs. The first billboard appeared in 1966 along Marine Drive in Bombay. The billboard attracted immediate reaction and the public felt that the mascot was cute – an image that was strengthened when the ad showed the Amul moppet kneeling in prayer with one eye closed and the other on the pack of butter. The words "Give us this day our daily bread with Amul butter" accompanied the advertisement. The campaign soon shifted focus and began commenting on current affairs with Amul butter as the backdrop.

Dr Verghese Kurien trusted the agency and gave them the creative freedom and autonomy to release the banner ads without waiting for his approval. Though the advertisements are a part of the Amul brand's legacy, they also lend great value to the brand. The format of the ad is simple. The headline flashes the news with the tagline relating the subject to butter with the illustration binding all the elements together to deliver a unified message. Witty copy, striking visuals and novelty have made the Amul ads popular.

Making the hoardings has become a uniform process. The creative team meets every Monday morning to discuss potential topics to be featured on the hoardings. The most popular subjects include movies, sports, and politics. Five of the ten finalized subjects are pushed each week following a screening process.

Everything was painted by hand before. These days, the hoardings remain hand-drawn, but digital technology allows for a faster turnaround. It's crucial to display the hoarding at the appropriate time. Distribution tactics have changed even though the hoardings' content is still influenced by current events.

Newspapers indicate trends but social media presents a mirror to what society thinks. Thus, social media can be considered the weather vane to understand the public perception. The hoardings of Amul are now designed for Facebook. Regional ad

campaigns focus on news relevant to that area. A hoarding on international politics will attract more attention in Mumbai than in Bihar.

In India, Amul and its creative partner da Cunha Communications have put up around 6000 billboards. Every year, the campaign uses more than 120 creatives. It is distributed through more than thirty magazines, six TV networks, several hundred billboards, and social media. The creative can now be delivered anywhere, at any time, thanks to the usage of technology.

In 1994, Rahul da Cunha succeeded his father Sylvester in creating the ads for Amul. The advertisement's wording is written by Manish Jhaveri, while Jayant Rane is in charge of the drawing. Scrapbooks put together by the previous teams exposed Rane to the Amul moppet.

Proficient copywriting abilities are required to work on Amul's topical advertisements. Jhaveri is skilled in producing Hinglish content by fusing Hindi and English. In addition, he has kept the language lively and full of jokes and colloquialisms. An innovative blend of colloquial and regional vocabulary has enhanced the advertisement's attractiveness even further. Amul has conducted ads in Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, and Punjabi to accommodate regional preferences. The commercials for Amul butter offer more than just entertainment value. They educate individuals about current events. Nonetheless, the advertising firm strives to communicate more responsibly and takes care not to offend anyone.

The Guinness Book of World Records recognizes the Amul advertisement as the longest-running campaign in history. Because the commercials contain a humorous element, the brand's reputation has not been impacted by controversy. The quality of butter has stayed consistent with variants like garlic butter that have been introduced in the recent past.

Some impacted parties have, nevertheless, voiced their opposition. For instance, after cricket great Sachin Tendulkar's bags went missing, British Airways contacted the agency to voice its disapproval of the hoarding that read "British Errways." The visionary and firebrand Verghese Kurien, who founded the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets its goods under the Amul brand, is responsible for the campaign's fearlessness.

In the 1960s, there was one advertisement each month; in the 1970s and 1980s, there was one every two weeks; and in the 1990s, there was one every week. The advertising agency now runs up to five ads each week.

Because they value continuity, GCMMF has never switched the advertising agency. Because the agency feels that when a celebrity is enlisted for an advertising campaign, the star becomes more relevant than the product or service, it has never used a brand ambassador. This maintains Amul's advertisements straightforward and economical. The campaign's previous target was the common Indian housewife. The campaign now targets 16 to 25-year-olds who are opinionated, multitasking, and up-to-date. They also have short attention spans and experience the world via their cell phones. Several other mascots, like the Onida devil, the Air India Maharaja, or Asian Paints' Gattu, have been abandoned by their companies or have not been utilized to the fullest extent possible, yet the Amul girl has endured the test of time. The regular communication through hoardings, newspapers, and internet means is one of the reasons the Amul mascot has been so popular for so long. The reason the mascot has endured for so long is because of its emotional ties to Indians.

### **AMUL MASCOT'S BONDING WITH PEOPLE**

Consumer association with the Amul mascot is at a deeper level. The mascot has managed to strike a chord with all Indians although not all of them may be consuming Amul butter. In the age of instant gratification, the mascot's universal appeal has led to a high brand recall. The Amul butter brand and mascot are inseparable. The creation of the mascot and its timelessness was the result of an integrated and dedicated approach by the advertising agency. The little Amul girl with the polka-dotted dress served as India's conscience, offering witty commentary on politics, movies, and cricket long before Twitter and viral marketing. The Amul girl, who is quick to express her wit, has always been lively, gregarious, naughty, and joyful.

The mascot has endured from witty one-liners once a month to almost five a week. The moppet has never shied away from playing a crusader or a cheerleader. Her personality is similar to a real human. The Amul girl has been persistent in her pursuit of delivering a punch (a pun!) on the incident after the incident.

The little girl is not only cute but her astute social commentary and satire associated with current affairs have transcended the boundaries of time and appealed to different generations of Indians. Psychologically speaking, the criticism or praise from a child is received well. Cartoons help tone down the caustic aspect of the advertising campaign. Even when Amul girl has commented on everyone, very rarely have people reacted to the comments.

Since the mascot ensures high brand recall, she has also been featured on the Amul milk pack.

Another interesting and unique aspect of the Amul mascot is that it is constantly associated with news events which results in the mascot being in the news all the time with a funny take on the events happening in India or across the globe grabbing the attention of the audience. In that sense, the very existence of the mascot is closely associated with topical news. Amul's mascot is more news-dependent than product-dependent. The brand is a corollary of the main advert.

The enduring appeal of the Amul girl lies in the mascot adapting to what is relevant and using tongue-in-cheek humour to drive a powerful message. Amul's recognition by the Guinness Book of World Records stands testimony to the relentless pursuit of creativity.

### **GATTU WAS GOOD BUT COULD NOT SUSTAIN**

Gattu, the mascot of Asian Paints, was conceived in 1954 by legendary cartoonist R K Laxman. Laxman was smoking thinking about an idea for the Asian Paints mascot. Through the cloud of smoke, he visualized the image of a little boy with a paintbrush. Thus, the mascot was born. The name Gattu was chosen after a contest. The mascot made the brand popular and proved to be a powerful asset. In the 80's, people recognised a brand by its mascot. Post-globalization, the brand needed something universal. The brand was recognised by the mascot more. So, in the 1990s, not wanting to lose the brand, the ad agency Ogilvy told Asian Paints to let go of Gattu. However, the Amul mascot, in contrast, seems to have a timeless appeal.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Brand mascots are pivotal in boosting brand awareness and fostering customer connections, impacting purchasing decisions and intentions. They are viewed as a viable alternative to celebrities in advertising, aiding in brand recognition and audience engagement. Exploring how mascots affect customer decisions and brand loyalty can present unique perspectives. Mascots, such as the iconic Amul Girl in the Indian food sector, exemplify the effectiveness of mascots in advertising (Bhowmick & Dutta, 2020).

An understanding of how mascots attract consumers and influence consumer behaviour remains a grey area (Kwok & Ho, 2021). It will be interesting to explore the reasons consumers are attracted to brand mascots (Park et al, 2017). Consumers attach human-like qualities to non-human objects. This makes them accept brands that have strong and positive personalities (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2011). This is why mascots hold a great appeal.

Mascots can thus help in brand personification. Cuteness and increased frequency of seeing the brand mascots can attract customers. Colours in the mascot enable customers to remember the products and services (Park et al, 2017). Mascots are remembered more through cartoons.

Brand mascots offer a cost-effective alternative to brand ambassadors and significantly impact consumers' purchasing decisions. They foster positive relationships by creating emotional connections and addressing product needs. Animated mascots in advertising differentiate products, enhance brand recall, and influence emotions, particularly among children (Kochhar & Singh, 2019).

Advertisements that contain mascots garner greater attention and brand recognition, particularly among young children (Neeley and Schumann, 2004). Anthropomorphic mascots are used by marketers to influence adult and child buying behaviour (Jacobson, 2008) (Kochhar & Singh, 2019) as these mascots allow for a greater interaction with consumers resulting in an enduring relationship between the latter and the brands (Patterson, Khogeer, & Hodgson, 2013).

Using mascots to indulge in storytelling through social media websites (Schultz, 2012) and television (Fletcher, 2001) can improve familiarity with the mascot. Television, websites, digital billboards, newspapers and other print media can be used to promote mascots (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016) besides the use of social media and other digital communication tools. Mascots can trigger consumer interest in a product, and create a favourable impact on the brand image (Kwok & Ho, 2021) (Shimpi, 2021) with the attractiveness and trustworthiness of mascots building brand credibility (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). They can be used to encourage conversations with consumers on social media (Schultz, 2012) (Kochhar & Singh, 2019) and persuade customers to buy a product and build brand loyalty (Park et al, 2017). Animated mascots can be used to influence buyer behaviour (Kochhar & Singh, 2019) (Park et al, 2017) and make consumers feel happy (Brown, 2010). Strategies to increase the visibility of mascots on social media can help. In Thailand, mascots are available as stickers on social media that can be downloaded and used. This helps users identify with mascots (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016).

Mascots create a strong brand identity (Dotz, Morton, & Lund, 1996; Fournier, 1998) and are intellectual property assets of an organization (Chang, 2014). Mascots can enhance product identity and brand/ product recall (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). This is why brands like Michelin Man and Ronald McDonald have become so popular (Costa, 2010) with mascots becoming a part of a brand's design and identity, packaging and communications (Pina & Dias, 2021). As bonding tools, social engagement tools and carriers of information (Radomskaya & Pearce, 2021), mascots can be used to establish emotional bonds with children so that brand loyalty can continue to persist well into adulthood (Connell, Brucks, & Nielsen, 2014) (Kochhar & Singh, 2019). This is so characteristic of the Amul mascot. Mascots can be linked with memorable slogans, quotes, stories and nostalgia. This can create humour and trigger positive emotions towards brands and products (Hemar-Nicolas & Gollety, 2012).

Mascots are recognized as significant components in the advertising industry due to their ability to increase brand recognition and foster consumer connections. They have the potential to impact customers' purchasing decisions and intentions, making them a valuable tool for promoting products. Mascots also contribute to humanizing multinational corporations and establishing strong relationships with consumers, which is crucial for brand success. Mascots play a crucial role in enhancing brand awareness and customer connectivity, influencing customer decisions and purchase intentions, and serving as a potential alternative to actual celebrities for advertising purposes (Bhowmick & Dutta, 2020).

If we compare the use of brand mascots vis-à-vis celebrity endorsements, mascots have an advantage because the advertiser has full control over the narrative. Celebrity endorser's fame and market status may fluctuate and can present a risk for the advertiser.

Celebrities can be brand ambassadors for multiple brands. Consumers remember the celebrity more than the brand. But mascots can be associated with specific products/ services. A brand mascot provides instant differentiation and unique identification. A few research efforts in literature are dedicated to comparing mascots with celebrity endorsements in terms of their effectiveness. If brand mascots are famous, brands may not need celebrity endorsement (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Advertising using mascots can be cost-effective as compared to employing the services of celebrity ambassadors (Kochhar & Singh, 2019).

Trolling in social media has made advertisers wary about even making minor mistakes in their promotional campaigns. False claims about a product or service can erode brand value and can cause reputational damage. Increased trolling and scrutiny of celebrities are now making marketers mull over the use of mascots in their communications and promotions. Brands world over are reviving their mascots captivated by the fact that there is something nostalgic, reassuring and heart-warming about mascots.

Considering the relevance of mascots, it will be interesting to study the mechanism by which mascots can be designed. Mascots should be designed to hold a strong visual appeal and strengthen the product value (Kochhar & Singh, 2019). Well-designed cartoons can communicate realistic human emotions (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Effective mascots should consider a physical design that has combinations of colour and cultural preferences of target audiences (Yadav et al, 2017). Mascot design has to be flexible so that with changes in times, it can be altered to cater to changing customer perceptions and any changes in the goals of the organization (Schultz, 2012). However, contrary to this observation, the Amul mascot has never aged and has been a constant in Amul's advertising campaigns since 1966.

Three elements make up a character's image: emotional significance, self-image congruence, and symbolic representation. These elements influence consumers' intention to buy. Impulsive buying is more influenced by emotional value and self-image congruence, though. A character's symbolic quality aids in spreading brand recognition. Customers are drawn to the cuteness of characters and often buy character merchandise. Therefore, mascots are essential to marketing strategy (Chen et al., 2022).

The use of mascots in advertising products/services is not rampant anymore. As marketing tools, mascots play an important role in branding. Though mascots are inanimate, it is the brand that infuses life into them and gives meaning to people's minds. However, it is due to mascots that a brand can remain immune to linguistic and cultural barriers. Mascots give brands warmth and personality and build emotional connections with consumers. Established mascots have lineage, legacy and equity that they can depend on – but these need cultivation of values over some time along with sufficient investments. Based on the above insights, we now turn to secondary sources of information gleaned about the Amul mascot. Amul's projection of its mascot as an ordinary Indian citizen has created an emotional connection with Indian audiences (Singh, 2021) adding to its ever-lasting appeal. Scenarios built around the mascot can draw the attention of audiences (This is what Amul has been doing for years now) adding to the intrigue about the mascot. Socially relevant messages create a bond with customers by targeting their cognition levels (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016).

The iconic Amul girl with round eyes and blue hair either accompanies different personalities or transforms herself into different personalities. These personalities have been in the news that week and are so easily recognizable. The slogans/bylines never fail to pinpoint the values that the Amul brand espouses (Mamidi, 2018). Animated mascots in advertisements help in improving brand recognition among children (Neeley and Schumann, 2004).

The pre-requisite for relating to the Amul ads featuring the mascot is knowledge of current affairs. Advertisements that are witty, creative and innovative are remembered for a longer time. When the message in the ad requires cognitional processing by the audience, it will increase the memorability of the advertisement. This positive state of mind leads to a positive attitude in purchasing decisions (Mamidi, 2018).

Amul's print advertisements are contextual. Contextual advertisements focus on the content consumed by consumers and assume that consumer's content preferences are aligned with their product preferences (Pandey & Jaggi, 2021). Contextual humour as an advertising strategy creates a receptive attitude among consumers. The complexity of processing the information in the advertisement adds to its appeal. The Amul ads have shown that if humour is handled well, the advertisements can have an enduring appeal (Mamidi, 2018).

Amul advertisements, especially the one for Amul butter, are always considered unique. The billboards featuring the Amul mascot are placed at strategic locations in different cities of India and these are changed every week (Mamidi, 2018).

Though experts feel that humour-based advertising will distract audiences away from the product and will lead to difficulty in recalling the product, the same does not apply to Amul. The mascot, the brand and the product have been intricately tied to one another. Every advertisement has a surprise element making the audience chuckle. Interestingly these advertisements are targeted at a literate audience who are updated about the latest events. The advertisements also use puns to generate humour (Mamidi, 2018). If we look at all the Amul ads in the last 40 years, we get familiarised with the socio-political issues of modern India.

Considering that the ads are topical, one can study how times have evolved concerning technology, socio-economic reforms, political climate etc by doing a diachronic study of the ads (Mamidi, 2018). Brands earn respect when they can

insulate the social message that they wish to propagate from the marketing of the product. This also enables brand recall. Witty ads are not only novel but also bear a surprise element. Amul's ads featuring the mascot thus qualify as witty ads (Mamidi, 2018).

A mascot cannot be the sole tool for consumer engagement. Organizations must use other promotional tools like slogans, logos, and taglines as well (Yadav et al, 2017). Amul has been successful in doing this as the logo is famous and so is the tagline – Amul – The Taste of India.

Thus, based on the review of literature about mascots (in general) and Amul mascot (in particular), we arrive at the following research objectives.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify the critical success factors for the long-term sustainability of a mascot.
- To determine the association between preference for mascots and product buying decisions.
- To examine the association between age and preference for mascots.
- To examine the association between gender and preference for a mascot.
- To identify the most important attributes of a mascot

### RESEARCH DESIGN

A causal research design has been adopted. The questionnaire was designed to measure the impact of the mascot's appeal based on gender, age and occupation. The items for the Likert scale have been drawn from a review of the literature. The questionnaire and content were verified by marketing experts. The sampling method chosen is the convenience sampling method. Questionnaires were sent to 400 respondents and 242 responses were received. 10 responses were rejected as they contained incomplete information. 232 responses were chosen for the statistical analysis. The response rate is 58%.

### HYPOTHESES

H<sub>0</sub>1: The consumption of Amul butter is the same across all age groups

H<sub>0</sub>2: The familiarity with the mascot is the same across all age groups

H<sub>0</sub>3: Both males and females like the Amul mascot in equal measure

H<sub>0</sub>4: People across different age groups like the Amul mascot in equal measure

H<sub>0</sub>5: There are no differences in customer perceptions towards mascots and celebrity endorsements.

### RESULTS: ANALYSIS OF DATA

The questionnaire was tested for scale reliability. The reliability of the scales used in the survey instrument was checked using SPSS. The Cronbach alpha value is 0.917 indicating the reliability of the scale (Table 1)

Table 1: Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.917	0.918	12

The validity of the constructs was examined using exploratory factor analysis. The average loading of both factors was more than 0.7. So, the convergent validity is proved between the constructs. The variance extracted between the constructs is greater than the correlation square. This establishes the discriminant validity of the scale.

The mean value of the scale items is shown in Table 2. All the values are above 3 indicating that there is agreement about the scale items.

Table 2: Item Statistics			
	Mean	SD	N
Mascot helps in brand recall	3.7328	1.41946	232
Mascot increases brand equity	3.5690	1.16384	232
Mascots need to convey a social message	3.5172	1.15831	232
Mascots need to have an element of humour	3.3793	1.15586	232
Mascots influence a buyer's behaviour about purchasing a product	3.5302	1.28223	232
Mascots emotionally connect consumers with a brand	3.7414	1.21406	232
Mascots create a positive image of a brand	3.8190	1.15918	232
The mascot needs to be colourful	3.4655	1.13908	232
Mascots are silent brand ambassadors	3.6552	1.24214	232
Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media	3.4698	1.09661	232
Mascots play an important role in viral marketing	3.7888	1.17080	232

I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador	3.3448	1.22459	232
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**Table 3: Mean Scores of Scale Items**

Statement	Average Score
Positive brand image	3.82
Role in Viral Marketing	3.79
Emotional connection of mascots	3.74
Brand Recall	3.73
Silent brand ambassadors	3.66
Brand Equity	3.6
Influence of Mascots on buyer behaviour	3.53
Mascots-Social Message	3.52
Colourful	3.47
Social Media discussions	3.47
Humour element in Mascots	3.38
Buying Preferences	3.34

From the Table 3, it is clear that positive brand image, role of mascots in viral marketing, the emotional connection that customers build with mascots and the ability of mascots to enable brand recall are the scale items having the highest score.

The respondents were instructed to rank different aspects of the mascot. The results are tabulated below (Table 4). Amul Mascot is cute and bubbly – this aspect ranked the highest followed by the comments of the mascot on contemporary topics. The fun element in the advertisements ranked the third while the polka-dotted dress worn by the mascot ranked the fourth. Surprisingly, the mascot's concern about social issues got a lower rank among other aspects.

**Table 4: The most appealing aspect of the mascot**

	Total	Weighted Score	Rank
Cute and Bubbly	1022	4.41	<b>1</b>
Comments on Contemporary topics	910	3.92	<b>2</b>
The fun element in the ads	842	3.63	<b>3</b>
Polka dotted dress	736	3.17	<b>4</b>
Concern about social issues	697	3.00	<b>5</b>
Evokes memories of my childhood	665	2.87	<b>6</b>

In another question, the respondents were asked to rank the characteristics that they felt were important in a mascot. The mascot's attractiveness, trustworthiness, fun element and cuteness got higher ranks. The colour of the mascot was allocated the least weightage (Table 5)

**Table 5: Characteristics important in a mascot**

	Total	Weighted Score
Attractive	985	4.25
Trustworthy	958	4.13
Funny	894	3.85
Cute	762	3.28
Memorable	731	3.15
Colourful	542	2.34

Tables 6, 7, 8 & 9 present the demographic aspects of the sample chosen as part of descriptive statistics.

**Table 6: Gender**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	128	55.2	55.2	55.2



	Female	104	44.8	44.8	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Age group					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30	194	83.6	83.6	83.6
	31-40	17	7.3	7.3	90.9
	41-50	16	6.9	6.9	97.8
	51-60	2	.9	.9	98.7
	More than 60	3	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: Education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Undergraduate	10	4.3	4.3	4.3
	Graduate	59	25.4	25.4	29.7
	Postgraduate	148	63.8	63.8	93.5
	Professional Qualification	4	1.7	1.7	95.3
	Higher qualification	11	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: Occupation					
		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Housewife	3	1.3	1.3	1.3
	Student	174	75.0	75.0	76.3
	Self Employed	8	3.4	3.4	79.7
	Working Professional	47	20.3	20.3	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Consumption of butter					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Consumer	186	80.2	80.2	80.2
	Non-Consumer	46	19.8	19.8	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Table 11: Consumption of butter \* Age group Crosstabulation

Age Group				
20-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	More than 60 years
152	17	14	2	1
65.5%	7.3%	6%	0.9%	0.4%

Table 10 indicates that among the respondents who were surveyed, 20% did not consume Amul butter while 80% were consumers. From Table 11, it is clear that 65.5% of respondents in the age group 20-30 years consumed butter. Compared to the other age groups, the age group 20-30 years consumed Amul butter more. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis  $H_{01}$ .

84% of respondents were familiar with Amul's mascot (Refer to Table 12).

Table 12: Familiarity with mascot					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very familiar	99	42.7	42.7	42.7
	Familiar	96	41.4	41.4	84.1
	Somewhat familiar	27	11.6	11.6	95.7
	Unfamiliar	10	4.3	4.3	100.0

	Total	232	100.0	100.0	
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**Table 13: Descriptives**

Familiarity with mascot								
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
20-30	194	3.2113	.82805	.05945	3.0941	3.3286	1.00	4.00
31-40	17	3.0588	.82694	.20056	2.6337	3.4840	1.00	4.00
41-50	16	3.4375	.62915	.15729	3.1022	3.7728	2.00	4.00
51-60	2	4.0000	.00000	.00000	4.0000	4.0000	4.00	4.00
More than 60	3	3.3333	1.15470	.66667	.4649	6.2018	2.00	4.00
Total	232	3.2241	.81741	.05367	3.1184	3.3299	1.00	4.00

The mean values of familiarity with the mascot as per the age group are different ranging from 3.05 to 4 (Table 13). To test if the differences in the means were statistically significant, Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was conducted. The p-value is 0.220 (Table 14) indicating that the null hypothesis (Variances between the means are not equal) cannot be rejected. Therefore, as the variances are not equal, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to test if the differences in the means were statistically significant. Since the p-value is 0.380 (Table 15), therefore we fail to reject the null hypothesis  $H_{02}$ . The differences in the means are by chance and are not statistically significant.

**Table 14: Test of Homogeneity of Variances**

Familiarity with mascot			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.445	4	227	.220

**Table 15: Test Statistics**

Familiarity with mascot	
Chi-Square	4.197
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.380
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Age group	

The respondents were asked to rate the statement – “I like the Amul mascot very much” on a scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. 72% of respondents expressed their agreement with this statement (Table 16). The mean value of the score of the item “I like the Amul mascot very much” was 3.694 (Table 17).

**Table 16: I like the Amul mascot very much**

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	15	6.5	6.5	6.5
	Disagree	10	4.3	4.3	10.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	40	17.2	17.2	28.0
	Agree	133	57.3	57.3	85.3
	Strongly agree	34	14.7	14.7	100.0
Total		232	100.0	100.0	

**Table 17: I like the Amul mascot very much**

N	Valid	232
	Missing	0
Mean		3.6940
Std. Deviation		.99190
Variance		.984

From Table 18, the mean value of the score of the item “I like the Amul mascot very much” was 3.6875 (males) and 3.7019 (females). To test if the differences in the means were statistically significant, the Mann-Whitney test was conducted (as the distribution is not normal). The p-value is 0.655 (Table 19). We therefore fail to reject the null hypothesis  $H_{03}$ . The differences in the means are not statistically significant. Both males and females like the Amul mascot in equal measure.

Table 18: Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I like the Amul mascot very much	Male	128	3.6875	0.93699	0.08282
	Female	104	3.7019	1.06013	0.10395

Table 19: Test Statistics	
	I like the Amul mascot very much
Mann-Whitney U	6452.500
Wilcoxon W	14708.500
Z	-.447
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.655
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

Table 20: Test Statistics <sup>b</sup>	
	I like the Amul mascot very much
Chi-Square	13.112
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.011
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Age group	

A Kruskal Wallis test was conducted to test whether the mean values of the scores on the statement – “I like the Amul mascot very much” across different age groups were different and if these differences were statistically significant. From Table 20, the p-value is 0.011. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis  $H_{04}$ . The response to the statement “I like the Amul mascot very much” is different across various age groups.

Exploratory factor analysis was carried out using SPSS software. It is a dimension-reduction technique. The KMO value is 0.923 and the Bartlett’s test shows a p-value of 0. This indicates that factor analysis can be conducted. The Principal Component Analysis method was used (Table 21). Table 22 indicates the communalities of the factors extracted.

Table 21: KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.923
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1532.817
	D.f.	66
	Sig.	.000

Table 22: Communalities			
	Initial	Extraction	
Mascot helps in brand recall	1.000	.835	83.5% of the variance in this variable is explained by the two factors
Mascot increases brand equity	1.000	.777	
Mascots need to convey a social message	1.000	.544	
Mascots need to have an element of humour	1.000	.547	
Mascots influence a buyer’s behaviour about purchasing a product	1.000	.513	
Mascots emotionally connect consumers with a brand	1.000	.650	
Mascots create a positive image of a brand	1.000	.773	

The mascot needs to be colourful	1.000	.480
Mascots are silent brand ambassadors	1.000	.527
Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media	1.000	.594
Mascots play an important role in viral marketing	1.000	.673
I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador	1.000	.460
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

**Table 23: Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.364	53.036	53.036	6.364	53.036	53.036	3.855	32.121	32.121
2	1.008	8.401	61.437	1.008	8.401	61.437	3.518	29.316	61.437
3	.832	6.933	68.370						
4	.667	5.555	73.925						
5	.621	5.177	79.102						
6	.559	4.655	83.757						
7	.461	3.838	87.595						
8	.396	3.301	90.896						
9	.345	2.878	93.774						
10	.311	2.592	96.367						
11	.239	1.994	98.361						
12	.197	1.639	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

61.437% of changes in the preferences for a mascot are explained by the two factors (Table 23). Table 24 indicates the rotated component matrix from which two factors were extracted.

<b>Table 24: Rotated Component Matrix</b>		
	1	2
Mascot helps in brand recall	.905	
Mascot increases brand equity	.834	
Mascots need to convey a social message		.608
Mascots need to have an element of humour		.713
Mascots influence a buyer's behaviour about purchasing a product		.683
Mascots emotionally connect consumers with a brand	.643	
Mascots create a positive image of a brand	.765	
The mascot needs to be colourful		.578
Mascots are silent brand ambassadors	.613	
Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media		.722
Mascots play an important role in viral marketing	.652	
I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador		.631

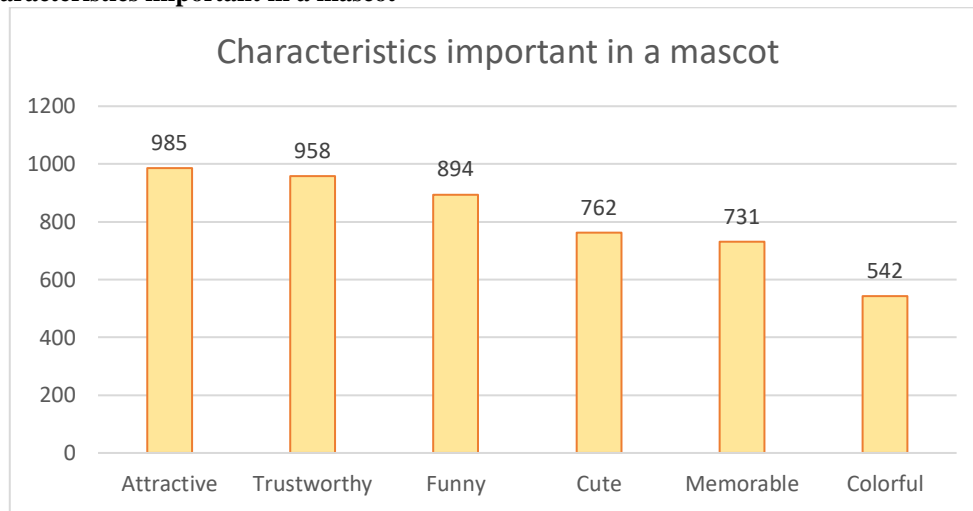
Thus, the two factors that are extracted are:

1. The impact of Mascot on Branding
2. Attributes of Mascot that influence buyers

Both these factors can explain 61.437% of the variance in the variables and their impact on buyer behaviour. Therefore, mascots play a powerful role in supporting the branding efforts of an organization. Mascots have certain attributes that strengthen the association between the brand and its customers. Figure 1 indicates the characteristics that are most

important in a mascot. So, while designing a new mascot, considering these attributes might be useful. The mascot must be attractive, and trustworthy and must have a fun element incorporated.

**Figure 1: Characteristics important in a mascot**



**Table 25: Regression Model**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.550 <sup>a</sup>	.303	.297	1.02708	.303	49.694	2	229	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media, Mascots need to convey a social message									
b. Dependent Variable: I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador									

**Table 26: ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	104.844	2	52.422	49.694	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	241.570	229	1.055		
	Total	346.414	231			
a. Dependent Variable: I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media, Mascots need to convey a social message						

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.972	.251		3.876	.000
	Mascots need to convey a social message	.207	.068	.196	3.061	.002
	Mascots should stimulate discussion on social media	.474	.071	.424	6.630	.000

a. Dependent Variable: I would prefer to buy a product advertised by a mascot than a product advertised by a celebrity ambassador

The questionnaire contained an open-ended question – What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Amul butter? A word cloud was generated based on the responses from the survey participants (Fig 2). The output shows that words like quality, taste, amul mascot, and amul girl are quite prominent. This indicates the positioning of the mascot in the minds of consumers. The sentiment score of all the comments was obtained. It is 21.6. This means that the overall sentiment is positive/ enthusiastic (Fig 3).



Fig 2: Word Cloud

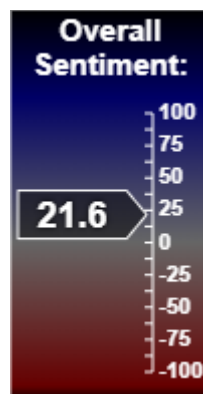


Fig 3: Sentiment Score

Table 28: One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Preference for mascot	232	3.3448	1.22459	.08040

Table 29: One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Preference for mascot	4.289	231	.000	.34483	.1864	.5032

Tables 28 and 29 indicate the results of the one-sample t-test. A test value of 3 was used to compare the results. The p-value is 0 indicating that mascots are preferred by customers over celebrity endorsements. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis  $H_0$ .

## DISCUSSION

Mascots must be attractive and trustworthy. A cute mascot with a fun element added can have a positive influence on consumers. One of the reasons for the enduring power of the Amul mascot is the mascot's comments on contemporary topics and its cute and bubbly appearance. These aspects of the mascot will ensure its long-term sustainability. Consumers prefer products advertised by mascots in comparison to those products that were advertised using celebrities. Furthermore, the paper examines the cultural and societal implications of using mascots in advertising, emphasizing the need for further research into the psychological aspects of consumer responses to animated mascots and how these responses vary across different demographics and target audiences. The findings help us understand the role of mascots in advertising and their ability to influence consumer purchasing decisions.

The consumption of Amul butter is not the same across all age groups. Consumers aged 20-30 consumed butter more often than other age groups. However, the familiarity with the Amul mascot is the same across all age groups. The statistical tests also reveal that the Amul mascot is liked equally by male and female consumers. However, people across different age groups differ in their affinity towards the mascot. The word cloud analysis reveals that the overall sentiment about Amul's mascot is positive.

Mascots need to convey a social message. They must have an element of humour. The mascots must be colourful and should stimulate discussion on social media. These are the attributes of mascots that can exert an influence on the buying decisions of consumers. Mascots can also lend support to the branding efforts of an organization.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research can help identify the attributes of a mascot that can influence buyers in making a purchase decision. Since the affinity towards the mascot is not the same across all age groups, designing a mascot is a process that must be planned in such a manner that it is aligned with the target segment's preferences. Branding initiatives in the organization can be supported by designing a suitable mascot. Celebrity endorsements of products can be exorbitant – mascots can be much more cost-effective and more impactful than celebrity endorsements. Businesses must use mascots as part of their social media marketing efforts. This will increase the reach of the mascot and enable the business to grow its customer base.

The enduring power of a brand mascot lies in its ability to create a lasting emotional connection with consumers. Mascots can also help to differentiate a brand from its competitors, providing a unique customer experience that sets it apart in a crowded marketplace. By creating a strong and positive association with a brand, mascots can influence consumer purchasing decisions and increase brand loyalty over time. As a result, brand mascots have become an essential tool for marketers looking to build a strong and recognizable brand identity that resonates with consumers.

## CONCLUSION

Consumers becoming more vocal has resulted in the evolution of brand communication. Consumers are more vocal. It is important to engage in a conversation with consumers. Mascot branding is generally resorted to by manufacturers of fast-moving consumer goods. Animals or cartoon characters are used as mascots for breakfast cereals or biscuits for kids. Mascots are also country-specific – barring a few exceptions like Walt Disney's Micky Mouse that have universal appeal.

Every successful mascot has a legacy that is built over time. Brand mascots can create nostalgia and enable a brand to establish an emotional connection with audiences. Mascots are considered ageless brand representatives of an organisation. Amul mascot truly exemplifies this. To gain critical mass, mascots need continuous nurturing over a long duration. Social media must develop stories around the mascots to increase consumer engagement with the brand. Marketing investments are needed to keep alive the image of the mascot in the minds of customers. Experts claim that mascots can be truly successful only when they blend seamlessly into the culture.

Mascots can attract the attention of consumers quickly and can cut through linguistic and cultural barriers. However, once they become widely recognized, mascots can make a significant contribution towards the brand's marketing effectiveness. Mascots can only be successful if they get ingrained in the culture and this needs time and sustained efforts to enliven the image of the mascot in the consumer's eyes.

The mascot's personality, values and image are managed by the brand team carefully over time. This is what makes established mascots enduring and eternal. It is possible to humanize the mascots using artificial intelligence. For example – cartoon series using the Amul girl targeted at children can be one of the ways to exploit the value of the mascot. With animation technology, mascots can only get younger and more robust. GCMFF must think of working with filmmakers to launch cartoon shows featuring the Amul mascot.

Celebrities advertise multiple brands so consumers may find it difficult to associate a celebrity with a particular brand. People remember the celebrity and often forget the brand. Marketing experts opine that in the era of trolls and increased social media scrutiny, it might be a better strategy to use brand mascots. A brand mascot leads to instant differentiation and unique identification. A celebrity's behaviour or involvement in a controversy can affect the brand image.

The Amul butter advertisements make people aware of what is happening around them. In digital marketing parlance, the Amul advertisements can be termed as components of moments marketing where the marketer tries to draw mileage out of contemporary topics (that are now called trending topics). Brands comment about current events and enter into the realm of societal conversations.

The Amul mascot has been delivering social commentary for the last 56 years. Cartoons have become an endangered species. Shift in the priorities of audiences is another development. Local issues have shot into prominence now more than ever. The challenge for the advertising agency is – how can they stay relevant to a millennial audience that has a shifting appetite and has a fascination with different media outlets.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

It will be worth exploring in detail the use of mascots as an alternative for celebrity endorsements in the current digital marketing ecosystem. An empirical study can be conducted to quantify the differences. It would also be interesting to investigate how the mascot provides an emotional connection between the product (brand) and the customer and the impact that this has on consumer behaviour. It is essential to find out how mascots can be made more relevant for the millennial generation as part of customer engagement efforts. A comparison of the appeal of mascots used for products and services will be interesting. Another suggestion is to explore the relevance of using mascots for e-commerce services. However, there is a potential research gap in exploring the cultural and societal implications of using mascots in advertising. Further research could delve into the psychological aspects of consumer response to animated mascots and how these responses vary across different demographics and target audiences.

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