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"A Study on the Evolution of Indian Mascots in Branding"

Sumeet V Gaikwad¹, Prof. (Dr.) Dhananjay Awasarikar²

¹MES Garware College of Commerce, Pune.

²Suryadatta Institute of Management, Pune.

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Abstract

Apart from logos, mascots, and other branding elements a brand is being built upon the faith and trust and on a consistent basis if the branding tools are used wisely then the desired outcome will be achieved. Mascots in a way can boost the brand identity and can play a vital role in changing brand the perspective of people towards the brand. Having a fine blend of a strong, appealing brand factor and promotion, the combination can do wonders to a brand's fortunes. The fact of communicating the value and identity of the brand has to match with its branding elements as well and this strategy needs to be understood well by the brands. When the branding tools matches up with the products and services offered then this will augur well for both the elements and it will help the brand to live up to its reputation.

Objectives:

- i) To study the evolution of Mascots in context with Indian companies.
- ii) To study the various branding methods adopted by Indian companies through Mascots.

Introduction:

Experts have an opinion about a brand mascot that should make the brand livelier and more alive make the brand narrative and appealing. Mascots will still help in creating a sustained relationship with your target audience if the brands get connected with its customers on a daily basis. No brand needs to worry about the dynamic technological advancements and ever-changing media landscape, mascots can be achieved the status being as cult and evergreen.

Dr. Verghese Kurien as he is fondly known as the "Father of the White Revolution" was looking for an advertising campaign for the product Amul butter. In 1966,

Sylvester da Cunha who led the DaCunha Communications in Mumbai, was given this assignment. He conceived an idea of a blue-haired girl in a red polka-dot dress, primarily focused for advertising on billboards and outdoors. Since 1966, the Amul girl has become the nation's most popular advertising character.

The decision to have an image of a girl was also a deliberate one as Amul wanted an image which would be used to appeal and attract the attention of their main customer segment which was Housewives of India.

Of course, the Amul Girl was used for promotion for their butter product only, but the brand realised soon that advertising only to the context of Amul butter for making people to get attracted towards the brand would prove difficult and not so effective. So, realizing this Amul decided to use the Mascot on a much wider scale and used in every other promotion for its overall brand and not just Amul butter. The Mascot has since then become a popular tool for advertising on billboards or hoardings or any other outdoor promotion. And as we all are much fascinated about the Mascot's comments and remarks on the current issues, be it social, political or sports, the Amul girl never fails to reach the targeted set of audience. This does not stop here but the comments of the Mascot are so hilarious and has a sarcastic essence to it.

The art director Eustace Fernandes sketched the famous 'Amul Girl' and Amul got its Mascot in the form of a cartoon character. The advertising campaign was finely blended with its popular catchline 'Utterly Butterly Delicious' which was created by Da Cunha's wife Nisha.

Many experts will opine that there is a variation in the concept of a logo, brand and its identity, a brand is more of a bunch of images and thoughts accumulated on the part of values, beliefs, communication, and acts. A Mascot can be completely used as a separate tool for branding as mascots help in recollecting the brand and aids in the recall value of the product.

We know about various brands that have reached every nook and corner of the country and have become a familiar name because of its various branding components. Some uses tag lines, a catchy jingle, and maybe a few of the actual product because of its quality and features. We have also seen there are brands which have got their name and popularity because of their mascot capabilities. For Instance, Gattu, the official mascot of Asian paints, developed by popular cartoonist R.K. Laxman for a then start-up company Asian Paints which was born in an automobile repair shop in the 1940s and then continued to make it big.

According to Ogilvy, the literacy rate in 1990's was less, and People tended to recognise a brand by some face or a mascot. So, whether it was Gattu or any other face or a mascot of the brand. Gattu was used for more than 50 years by Asian Paints. Also, the mascot, was used separately along with the logo of Air India which also made things a bit interesting as Air India decided to stress more on their Mascot with different themes.

According to the Executive Vice President, Marketing, Vodafone, Mr. Siddharth Banerjee, The Pug holds a special relationship with Hutch and Vodafone marketing scheme of things as people relate the Pug with Hutch and Vodafone even today and

the mascot exhibits reliability with our brand. The advertising campaign ‘Stronger Together’ highlighted Vodafone’s commitment in providing a best-in-class network experience and the brand came back to their much-trusted mascot ‘Cheeka’ for luring the younger audience and all kind of age groups for their customers in India. A great thing about the Mascot was even after a span of 10 years when the first advertising campaign which was launched from the year 2008 -2018, people did not forget the Pug at all, in fact the Pug helped the people to have strong recall. People immediately could recollect the Pug with Vodafone thereby refreshing the memories of many.

Rajeev Rao and Mahesh V of Ogilvy and Mather were the persons behind the creative idea of using the Pug and helping Vodafone to reach millions of people across India. Focusing on the creative aspect, Kiran Antony, Executive Creative Director, Ogilvy & Mather, said, “Refreshing Mascots are always difficult. In the case of Vodafone, People even today can recollect the Pug and Boy and of course the famous line ‘wherever you go, our network follows’. The main goal was to convey the new 4g network proposition, ‘we are getting stronger’, while not disturbing the simplicity and charm of our most loved branding element.”

Launch of the mascot – Pug (2003)

Hutchinson Essar, a telecom company introduced an advertising campaign which featured a cute Pug roaming everywhere. The theme of the advertisements was the Pug following a little boy who is the master of the Pug and wherever the little boy used to roam, the Pug too used to follow him. And the Pug was seen following his master in unlikely and remote locations as well thus prompting the catchline ‘Wherever you go, our network follows’.

The Pug was used in all the advertising commercials from 2003 to 2008 until Hutchinson Essar was taken over by Vodafone. The Pug was an instant hit among millions of people across India and all age groups simply loved it. The Pug went on to become the official mascot for Hutch cellular services. The mascot became the face of the company and people use to immediately relate the Pug with the brand thereby triggering an instant recall value for the brand. Such was the impact of the Mascot that any Pug was being seen by people on the streets, people use to call that Pug as Hutch Pug. The Mascot was named as Cheeka and Hutch had already branded their mascot with a name. This showed the clarity behind Hutch advertising team that they wanted the Pug to be showcased as a Mascot and the face of their brand. The advertising campaign was known as You and I and was created by Rajiv Rao and (the late) Mahesh V. who were the creative directors at Ogilvy and Mather, an advertising agency in Mumbai. The Pug was so popular that, its popularity not only helped the brand to become very familiar with the people but also helped its breed. As some reports stated that, there was an instant surge in the popularity of the breed of Pugs as well as people picked up an instant liking towards the Pug.

Vodafone Advertising Campaign

In 2008, Vodafone had acquired Hutchinson Essar and Vodafone continued to use the Pug for their branding strategies. Vodafone launched an advertising campaign which featured the pug highlighting about Vodafone’s customer care service. The intention of the communication was to focus that the brand is there to take care of all the customer doubts and queries and they can be reached anytime.

The message was communicated with the help of two cute commercials where a little girl in a school bus suddenly realises that she has forgotten her tie and in the following shot we see the pug following the bus with the girl's tie. In another commercial, the pug is seen licking postage stamps for the little girl before she pastes them on envelopes.

In the latest campaigns launched by Vodafone, when it wanted to brand their 4G data services, again Vodafone returned to their favourite and trusted mascot, the Pug. Vodafone projected the Pug to focus on the brand's 4G network connection. Vodafone was quite clear about their branding as the Pug was already a popular face for the brand over the years and utilising the popularity of the Mascot would bring an instant recall and association with the brand. Since the 4G campaign was a new one, Vodafone wanted someone who would establish an instant connection between the brand and the target audience as a fresh face would take more time to connect with the audience. Vodafone utilised their trusted mascot to its best and not surprisingly it made Vodafone to achieve the objective.

Airtel 4G Girl

Another major giant in Indian telecom Industry, Airtel also came up with an advertising campaign which neither featured a movie star, a sports player nor a well-known celebrity. The marketing team of Airtel rather chose to go with a fresh face for its advertising campaign of 4G services. The 4G girl of Airtel was majorly seen comparing the speeds of its 4G service with its rival brands. Sometimes the 4G girl was seen on the terrace of a building along with her bunch of friends comparing the 4G speeds and prompting her friends and the audience to take up the Airtel 4g challenge. This was something that was not witnessed before in the telecom industry as the environment of bunch of friends and asking to take up a challenge is commonly seen everywhere. This theme connected instantly with the younger audience as cell phones, youngsters and data consumption were the things the young audience connected easily. But because of the 4G girl's mannerism, she was also criticized and trolled on social media. Being too much aggressive on the 4G speed factor was a bit annoying as well for many. But nevertheless, the 4G girl became an instant hit among many and made Airtel's 4G advertising campaign gain a huge popularity. Sasha Chhetri was the name of the Airtel 4G girl.

Parle -G Girl

One more iconic brand India has witnessed over the years and that is Parle – G. We all are aware about the brand's prowess and popularity even today among all age groups. There would be hardly anyone who have not tasted Parle -G glucose biscuits. India has witnessed a great amount of resurgence in the case of confectionary biscuits and Parle -G has to be on top when it comes to the massive popularity and fame the brand has acquired over a period of time. We all are very much aware of the fact that the Parle -G girl has been the face of the brand since its inception. The Parle -G girl has always been on the advertising and marketing commercials of Parle G. Be it print media, TV commercials or digital channel, you will find the branding of Parle -G glucose biscuits with their Mascot i.e. the Parle -G girl.

Whenever we do see the face of the Parle -G girl who bears an innocent face and with cute and sweet looks, is one of the faces which gets remembered by many and that too in an instant manner. The fact that the Parle -G girl and Parle -G brand is

inseparable, and we cannot think Parle -G brand without the face of the cute little girl which has went on to become an official mascot for the brand. There were also interesting rumours about the identity of the Parle-G girl. While searching on the internet many came across with names like Gunjan Gundaniya, Sudha Murthy or Neeru Deshpandey. Recently, the product manager at Parle -G clarified that the above names mentioned as an identity of the Parle -G girl are just rumours and does not hold any truth. The image of the Parle -G girl is not real in nature, in fact it is an artist's impression which was drawn at for the branding purpose of the product. An artist known as Maganlal Dahiya had created this image in the year 1960. The Parle -G girl went on to become the nation's one of the most widely recognized mascot and its been seen on the Parle -G packaging right from the inception of the image.

The mascot has always offered a sense of positivity and familiarity with the audience. The very fact that Parle G glucose biscuits are known as common man's biscuit, millions across the nation consume Parle -G and hence can get directly associate with the face of Parle -G girl. In 1929, the Parle brand was founded in the confectionary market segment which was based out of Mumbai City(then Bombay). The company was manufacturing biscuits by the year 1939 and in 1947, it was decided to launch an advertising campaign to promote their glucose biscuits which Parle was manufacturing. In 2011, a survey held by Neilsen Parle G biscuits are the world's largest selling biscuits so far.

The Nirma Girl – Mascot of Nirma

A dancing girl in a white dress revolving around herself and is an easy guess for many of us Doodh ki Safedi -“Washing Powder Nirma”. The evergreen advertisement and the best-selling background score were made by Poornima Advertising, belonged to Gujarat.

The cute girl who featured on the packaging of Nirma was actually the daughter of Karsanbhai Patel, the founder of the company. The name Nirma was also coined from the Girl's original Nirupama who succumbed in an accident. In the memory of Karsanbhai's late daughter, the images were used on the product packaging of Nirma. The Girl went on to become the face of the company by gaining the status of a Mascot for the brand. The mascot was used very effectively on the detergent powder's packaging and this factor allowed the brand to get associated with the girl in swift manner. The sales of Nirma were at its peak for many years and people had substituted detergent powder for Nirma, be it urban or Rural area. The mascot helped in identifying the brand very easily as whenever people use to look at the Girl image on the packaging of the product, people used to recognize the brand Nirma instantly.

As far as the sales are concerned, Nirma stands seventh in the world when it comes to soda ash making. The revenue of Nirma is also said to be in tune of around INR 21,000/- crores. As in recent commercials the Nirma girl is not seen revolving around herself but the mascot has been the official face of the brand since its inception and goes on to feature on the product packaging and continue to carry on the legacy of this renowned brand by her image. The image is not only the Mascot, but it has been used as a branding logo as well which has got more prominence for the girl and of course for the brand.

Maharaja – Air India Mascot:

In 1946, Air India adopted an official face for its branding in the form of Maharaja. The Mascot which was initially thought to be used for its inflight merchandising, on note pads etc, went on to become the face of the brand for more than 70 years. The way Maharajah was utilised by the marketing team of Air India it was shown in different forms and avatars. Sometimes Maharaja was depicted as a naughty guy flirting with young women across the globe, sometimes a waitress or a Rockstar. You name it and Maharaja would be there at your service in any form. Majority of the people perceive the Maharaja as a royal person who is there to greet you and welcome you. The Maharaja displays royalty and gracefulness and this how the Maharaja was being depicted majority of the times. But as per the marketing team of Air India, they did not want to showcase Maharaja only as someone who is Royal but a person who is more willingly ready to offer best of its hospitality to its customers. The very fact that Maharaja was used in multiple forms also suggests that the marketing team did not want to limit the image of the mascot and they wanted to explore new dimensions to their already popular mascot. In 2015, Air India decided to do a makeover of their most popular Mascot considering a change as per the recent trends by giving it a new younger look.

Conclusion

The use of Mascots which appears to be simple in nature but if used effectively then surely the brands would get benefitted the most as far as their branding plans are concerned. In the case of Amul, Maharaja, Nirma Girl, Parle -G Girl or Asian Paints Gattu, all these are simple sketches or an image and majority of them are imaginary as well. But the creativity and idea how it is being shown is the prime factor for many brands. This also goes on to show that how a simple idea can be executed so creatively. In the case of Asian Paints 'Gattu', the mascot was used in the same old manner wherein no creative usage was being seen through the mascot and this prompted the brand to retire the mascot in 2006 as people also found the mascot to be quite monotonous.

The Brand Mascots are also the key due to the kind of communication they can establish and the meaning they can deliver with just one distinct image. The distinctive image or the character of the mascot can do wonders as their image can bear a positive reflection on the target audiences. Of course, brands need to make the use of their mascots very wisely as just as a mascot would prove fruitful for the branding communication strategies, mascots if depicted in a wrong way too can have an adverse impact of the mindset of the consumers.

It has always been a differentiating factor for many brands upon how to use the creativity and the best face for its brand which would suit the brand as per the product need as well. The use of mascots in a positive way has surely allowed many brands to leverage their respective images. In fact, majority of the brands have used their mascots so effectively that people are not only admire the brand but also the mascot. In some cases, the Mascot happens to be the central point of the brand and people notices and loves the Mascot more than the brand itself. One such example is that of 'AMUL', Anand Milk Union Limited. Majority of us are very well aware

of Amul Girl, who acts an official mascot and an official ambassador for their brand. The kind of branding and promotion Amul has been using with the help of the Amul Girl has made many people to get attracted towards the brand instantly.

Research Methodology:

Method of Research: The Descriptive methodology is being used for the purpose of the study as the information obtained is through books and online articles. This information gathered from the above-mentioned sources has been used to analyse and interpret about what kind of branding strategies and activities have been undertaken by Indian corporations with the help of Mascots as a branding tool.

Type of Data : Secondary.

In this study secondary type of data has been used for the analysis of companies when it comes to Mascot branding activities and its impact on the brand enhancement part. The need for Mascots and what measures a company to take to brand its image through various promotion activities through Mascots. Online articles, blogs, books have been referred for this study.

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