

Influence of Cultural and Social Factors on Branded Dairy Product Consumption: A Case of AMUL Consumers

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behavior in India is deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts, especially in rural and semi-urban regions where traditional food habits, family norms, and community values strongly influence purchasing decisions. This study examines how cultural beliefs, family customs, and social pressures impact the consumption of branded dairy products, using AMUL as a case study. Drawing on a sample of 350 respondents from Jhunjhunu district in Rajasthan, the research finds that cultural practices (e.g., fasting, festivals, food rituals) and social dynamics (e.g., family preferences, peer influence, class status) significantly shape dairy brand preferences. The paper concludes with recommendations for culturally responsive marketing strategies that align with social values to strengthen AMUL's market engagement.

Keywords: Cultural influence, social factors, dairy consumption, AMUL, rural consumers, branded products, family habits, traditions, India

1. INTRODUCTION (EXPANDED)

In India, food consumption is not merely an economic activity—it is a **social and cultural act**. This is especially true in rural areas, where **family rituals, dietary customs, and religious beliefs** govern not only what people eat but also **how, when, and why** they eat it. Dairy products like milk, curd, ghee, and paneer are integral to Indian cuisine, and their consumption is often tied to traditional meals, festivals, and religious ceremonies.

AMUL, as India's most iconic dairy brand, holds a special place in both urban and rural households. While its growth is often attributed to product quality, price, and branding, another critical yet underexplored driver is the **cultural compatibility of its products with traditional Indian values**. In regions like Jhunjhunu, where dairy plays a role in every meal—from morning tea to temple offerings—brands like AMUL have aligned themselves with cultural expectations to build trust and loyalty.

Social factors also play a powerful role. In joint families, elders influence buying decisions; among youth, peer groups and brand-consciousness shape perceptions; and in certain communities, branded products symbolize **status, safety, and modernity**. This research seeks to understand the **interplay of cultural and social dynamics** that drive the consumption of AMUL's dairy products and how these insights can help refine brand positioning in culturally rich markets.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

McCracken (1988) stated that consumption is a cultural process through which goods carry meanings embedded in traditions.

Kotler & Keller (2016) argue that culture is the fundamental determinant of consumer behavior, especially in low-income, collectivist societies.

Ramaswamy & Namakumari (2011) noted that family plays a pivotal role in shaping long-term brand loyalty for food products in India.

Patel & Shah (2015) found that dairy consumption during religious fasting, rituals, and festivals reinforces brand association.

Chaudhary (2019) observed that AMUL's success in rural India is also due to its compatibility with local food practices and vegetarian preferences.

Verma & Gupta (2017) linked product acceptance in dairy to shared household values and generational influence.

Tiwari & Singh (2021) emphasized the symbolic status of branded goods in rural India where social image and reputation matter.

Krishna (2020) highlighted that female elders often dominate grocery decisions in rural households, especially for milk and ghee.

Kumar & Prasad (2016) identified that social functions and festivals create temporary surges in branded dairy purchases.

Chatterjee & Bhargava (2022) stressed that peer behavior and media exposure among youth also significantly affect product choices in rural areas.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify key cultural practices influencing the consumption of branded dairy products
- To examine the role of social factors—family, peers, social status—in shaping consumer behavior
- To understand how AMUL aligns with or adapts to cultural and social expectations
- To suggest culturally sensitive marketing strategies for rural and semi-urban markets

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- **Research Type:** Descriptive and qualitative
- **Study Area:** Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan
- **Sample Size:** 350 respondents (across different age groups and family structures)
- **Sampling Method:** Stratified random sampling
- **Data Collection Tools:** Structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews, field observation
- **Analysis Techniques:** Thematic analysis, cross-tabulation, frequency analysis

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Cultural Drivers

- 76% consume dairy daily as part of religious or ritualistic practices (tea, curd, milk for puja)
- 64% prefer branded ghee during religious festivals due to **purity assurance**
- 49% associated AMUL's products with **"vegetarian and satvik"** attributes

5.2 Family and Gender Roles

- 59% of female elders were responsible for dairy product selection
- 53% of respondents said their brand choices were based on **family tradition**
- 47% linked their continued AMUL preference to **mother's or grandmother's past choices**

5.3 Peer and Social Influence

- 38% of youth said they prefer AMUL because **friends or neighbors use it**
- 44% of consumers viewed branded dairy as a **status symbol** at social gatherings
- 41% used AMUL milk for **gifting or hosting guests**, citing safety and reputation

5.4 Festival Consumption Patterns

- Festival seasons (Diwali, Teej, Raksha Bandhan) saw a 40–60% increase in paneer, ghee, and sweet consumption
- AMUL's **seasonal campaigns** (e.g., "Rakhi with AMUL mithai") had 58% recall

6. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that **cultural and social factors are key influencers** in dairy product consumption among AMUL's target consumers in Jhunjhunu. Religious beliefs around purity, family-centered decision-making, and the desire for social approval shape the preference for branded over loose dairy products. AMUL's long-standing **cultural alignment and trust-building communication** have reinforced its place in daily and ceremonial consumption alike.

The **intergenerational continuity of trust** (e.g., mother to daughter) plays a crucial role in maintaining loyalty. For youth, the product must align not only with values but also **social image**, which AMUL supports through reliable branding and packaging.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Cultural Campaigns:** Run regional campaigns that align with festivals and traditional rituals.
- **Target Female Decision-Makers:** Offer special SKUs or promotions for homemakers during festive seasons.
- **Community Engagement:** Sponsor temple events, village fairs, or nutrition awareness drives.
- **Generational Messaging:** Use storytelling in ads to link AMUL consumption across generations.
- **Leverage Local Influencers:** Collaborate with teachers, religious figures, or village health workers to reinforce product trust.

8. CONCLUSION

This study reinforces that **AMUL's stronghold in rural and semi-urban India is deeply connected to cultural practices and social relationships**. Brand loyalty is not only driven by price or quality but by how well the product fits into the **social fabric** of consumers' lives. For dairy marketers, understanding and embracing **local culture, religious norms, and family dynamics** is essential. As rural India evolves, the key to sustaining branded consumption lies in blending modern marketing with deep-rooted cultural insights.

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