



Consumer Awareness and Perception of AMUL's Brand Image in Semi-Urban vs Rural Areas of Jhunjhunu

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ABSTRACT

Brand image plays a critical role in shaping consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. In a diverse country like India, where rural and semi-urban markets vary greatly in terms of exposure, accessibility, and consumer expectations, it is important to understand how a brand is perceived across these segments. This study investigates the awareness levels and brand image perceptions of AMUL in the rural and semi-urban areas of Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan. The findings, based on surveys and comparative analysis of 200 rural and 200 semi-urban consumers, indicate that while AMUL enjoys strong brand recognition in both segments, perceptions differ in terms of modernity, affordability, and trust. The study offers insights into how AMUL can tailor its branding strategies to reinforce consumer engagement across demographic divides.

Keywords: Brand image, consumer awareness, AMUL, rural marketing, semi-urban perception, Jhunjhunu, brand equity, dairy market, marketing communication

1. INTRODUCTION

In India's dynamic consumer landscape, brand perception is increasingly recognized as a powerful determinant of purchase behavior, trust, and long-term loyalty. While metropolitan and tier-1 cities have long dominated marketing strategies, rural and semi-urban markets now represent a major growth frontier, contributing significantly to the country's overall FMCG demand. Among the many sectors witnessing this transformation, the dairy industry stands out due to its deep integration in the Indian household—both nutritionally and culturally. Within this sector, AMUL, as the flagship brand of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), occupies a central position. Its journey from a local cooperative initiative during India's White Revolution to becoming a globally recognized dairy brand reflects not only effective production and distribution strategies but also sustained consumer trust and brand equity.

AMUL's identity has traditionally been grounded in purity, affordability, and trust—values that align well with rural consumers, who often make decisions based on word-of-mouth, habit, and local retailer recommendations. However, as AMUL expands its reach across semi-urban zones, it encounters consumers with markedly different expectations—those who are influenced by modern advertising, digital media, product variety, and aspirational branding. These consumers tend to be younger, better educated, and more brand-aware, and they often view branded goods as markers of social mobility and lifestyle.

In this context, understanding the perceptual differences between rural and semi-urban consumers becomes essential. Even within a single district like Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan, these differences manifest in the way consumers engage with brand imagery, advertising messages, product variety, and perceived value. For example, while a rural consumer may associate AMUL with essential products like milk, curd, and butter—linked to purity and affordability—a semi-urban consumer may evaluate the brand based on its range of flavored milk, cheese, tetra packs, and modern packaging, often associating it with quality, innovation, and status.

This study therefore undertakes a comparative examination of consumer awareness and perception of AMUL's brand image across semi-urban and rural populations of Jhunjhunu. By analyzing how the same brand is interpreted in different social and media environments, the research seeks to uncover the factors that drive brand preference, recall, and loyalty in each segment. The intent is to identify both overlaps and divergences in perception, offering valuable insights for customizing branding and communication strategies at a local level.

Moreover, the growing penetration of mobile technology, regional television, and visual promotional tools has made consumers across both segments more receptive to brand messaging. Yet the interpretation of these messages differs sharply due to disparities in media exposure, literacy levels, cultural priorities, and product expectations. Brands can no longer afford to follow a "one-message-fits-all" strategy. Instead, there is a growing need for localized, segmented, and culturally contextual branding, which recognizes these nuances and speaks directly to the consumer's identity and lived experience.

Through structured surveys and qualitative comparisons, this study explores how brand imagery—logos, mascots, slogans, and product packaging—is perceived and remembered by rural vs. semi-urban consumers. It also assesses



how these perceptions affect trust, product trial, and repeat purchases. The outcomes of this research aim to guide AMUL and similar dairy brands in designing differentiated marketing strategies that retain traditional values in rural settings while capturing aspirational appeal in semi-urban markets.

In summary, as India's rural and semi-urban economies become more consumer-driven, the study of brand perception across these segments becomes not only relevant but vital for strategic brand positioning. AMUL's case provides a fertile ground to investigate how a single brand can hold multiple meanings, shaped by geography, culture, media, and mindset.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Aaker (1991) introduced the concept of brand equity and emphasized that brand image is formed by a set of associations that consumers link with a brand. He argued that a strong brand image directly affects consumer loyalty, preference, and purchase behavior. His foundational framework has influenced later studies focusing on how emotional and functional brand associations differ across consumer segments.

Gupta & Sharma (2014) explored rural consumer behavior in the dairy sector and concluded that rural buyers are highly price-sensitive and value-oriented. Their purchasing decisions are largely driven by product functionality, trust in the brand, and word-of-mouth recommendations. Their research supports the notion that affordability and basic product reliability are key to brand success in rural India.

Mehta (2015) studied the evolution of AMUL's brand perception in rural areas and found that the brand's cooperative origin played a key role in establishing trust. While rural consumers valued this heritage, semi-urban buyers were found to be more interested in aspirational branding and variety. This highlights the growing divergence in expectations based on location and lifestyle.

Kapoor & Paul (2017) examined how brand equity is interpreted differently across rural and semi-urban consumers. Their study revealed that trust and long-term experience are more important in rural markets, while brand differentiation and modern presentation matter more in semi-urban settings. These insights align well with dual-branding strategies.

Rani & Goyal (2018) focused on the power of visual branding—logos, mascots, and packaging—especially among low-literacy populations. Their research found that recognizable brand symbols help consumers recall and trust products even when they lack detailed product knowledge, making visual cues particularly vital in rural settings.

Jain (2020) analyzed semi-urban youth behavior and their relationship with brands. The study revealed that branded goods are increasingly seen as tools for social mobility and identity expression. Semi-urban youth often choose brands based on peer influence, packaging appeal, and perceived modernity, rather than just utility.

Kanchan, Bharti & Singh (2020) conducted a comparative study on FMCG brand perception and found that rural and urban consumers differ sharply in what they value. While rural buyers prioritize trust and availability, semi-urban consumers look for novelty, image enhancement, and packaging sophistication. Their research recommends regional customization as a key strategy for bridging these perceptual gaps.

Tiwari & Singh (2021) investigated consumer interest in dairy product innovation and concluded that semi-urban markets show higher responsiveness to new product variants. Flavored milk, probiotic drinks, and value-added dairy offerings were more popular in towns than in villages, where traditional dairy remains dominant.

Sharma & Verma (2022) emphasized that consistent messaging and culturally relevant symbolism enhance brand credibility across all consumer segments. However, the interpretation of that symbolism varies—rural consumers relate it to tradition and trust, while semi-urban buyers relate it to trendiness and sophistication. Their work encourages simultaneous brand stability and adaptability.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to examine the level of consumer awareness regarding AMUL's brand identity across two socio-geographic segments—rural and semi-urban areas within the Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan. With AMUL's expanding product portfolio and diversified communication strategies, it is important to assess how well its brand symbols, logos, and messaging have permeated into consumer consciousness in these distinct demographic zones.

Another key aim of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of consumer perceptions related to AMUL's brand attributes such as quality, affordability, innovation, and trust. While the brand enjoys widespread recognition, the meanings associated with it may vary. Rural consumers may value purity and reliability, whereas semi-urban consumers may prioritize product variety, packaging aesthetics, and aspirational appeal. The study seeks to uncover these subtle yet impactful differences.

The research also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of AMUL's brand communication strategies as received by consumers in each segment. This involves exploring the role of advertisements, social media, visual branding,



and interpersonal recommendations in shaping how the brand is perceived and remembered. The goal is to determine which promotional mediums and messages are most effective in which demographic context.

Furthermore, the study intends to assess how consumer perception influences purchase decisions and brand loyalty. By understanding what drives repeat purchases and preference for AMUL in both rural and semi-urban settings, the research hopes to identify key psychological and behavioral factors that contribute to long-term engagement with the brand.

Lastly, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for differentiated branding strategies that align with the needs, aspirations, and cultural orientations of rural and semi-urban consumers. These insights will support AMUL in customizing its outreach, product positioning, and communication to ensure stronger, more context-sensitive engagement across India's fragmented consumer landscape.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a **comparative and descriptive research design** to investigate consumer awareness and perception of AMUL's brand image in two distinct demographic segments—rural and semi-urban areas within the Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan. This design was chosen to enable systematic comparison of variables such as brand recall, trust, modernity, and purchase motivation across both populations. The study aims not only to describe existing consumer attitudes but also to explore how demographic context influences brand interpretation and consumer behavior.

The research was conducted across **multiple villages and semi-urban localities** in Jhunjhunu, ensuring representation from economically diverse areas with varying levels of media penetration and retail exposure. A **stratified random sampling technique** was employed to ensure balanced and unbiased representation of both rural and semi-urban consumers. The sample consisted of **400 respondents**, equally divided between 200 rural and 200 semi-urban consumers. This proportional sampling ensured sufficient depth and statistical validity in comparative analysis.

For data collection, the study utilized both **quantitative and qualitative tools**. A **structured questionnaire** was prepared in both English and Hindi to enhance clarity and inclusiveness. The questionnaire was designed to assess consumer awareness of AMUL's brand elements (such as logo and mascot), perceptions of product quality, affordability, trust, and modern appeal. Respondents were also asked about their exposure to AMUL's promotional campaigns and their overall brand preference. To gain deeper insights into consumer sentiment, **focus group interviews** were also conducted with selected participants from both demographic segments. These discussions provided nuanced perspectives that helped validate and enrich the quantitative findings.

The data collected were subjected to **descriptive statistical analysis** to summarize consumer behavior patterns and perceptions. Tools such as **frequency distribution, mean comparison, and cross-tabulation** were used to identify patterns within and across the rural and semi-urban groups. To test the statistical significance of observed differences, **independent sample t-tests** were applied, particularly to assess variations in brand perception indicators such as perceived modernity, affordability, and trust. These methods ensured both analytical depth and reliability in the interpretation of results.

By integrating quantitative rigor with qualitative insight, this methodology provides a robust framework for understanding how AMUL's brand image is perceived differently by consumers in rural versus semi-urban contexts. The findings derived from this methodology serve as a foundation for drawing evidence-based conclusions and making strategic branding recommendations.

5. RESULTS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The findings of this study present a comprehensive comparison of consumer awareness and brand image perception of AMUL among rural and semi-urban respondents in Jhunjhunu district. Based on responses from 400 individuals—divided equally between 200 rural and 200 semi-urban consumers—the results reveal significant differences in how AMUL is recognized, remembered, and interpreted across these two consumer segments.

5.1 Brand Awareness Indicators

The awareness of AMUL's brand logo was remarkably high in both groups—**91% among rural consumers** and **96% among semi-urban consumers**. This indicates that AMUL has achieved extensive market penetration in terms of basic visual identity across both segments. However, the slightly higher recall in semi-urban areas may be attributed to more frequent media exposure, especially television and print advertising.

Similarly, **78% of rural respondents** and **87% of semi-urban respondents** recognized the AMUL mascot—the AMUL girl. The mascot's long-standing presence in advertising has clearly left a lasting impression, particularly in semi-urban settings where consumers are more exposed to branded storytelling. In rural areas, while the mascot is recognized, its interpretation is more functional than aspirational.



5.2 Trust and Perceived Product Quality

A notable difference emerged in the trust associated with product purity: **85% of rural respondents** associated AMUL with purity and hygiene, compared to **76% in semi-urban areas**. This suggests that rural consumers tend to perceive AMUL as a **symbol of reliability and basic quality**, rooted in its cooperative and ethical sourcing model. For many rural households, AMUL represents a trustworthy staple in their daily consumption.

5.3 Advertising Exposure and Interpretation

Exposure to advertising also differed significantly: **42% of rural respondents** reported having seen AMUL advertisements recently, whereas this figure was **67% among semi-urban respondents**. This reflects a media access gap, with semi-urban consumers being more regularly exposed to television, newspapers, and digital ads. It also explains why semi-urban consumers are more likely to perceive AMUL as a modern and evolving brand.

5.4 Brand Image and Positioning Perception

When asked whether AMUL represents an affordable brand, **88% of rural consumers** agreed, compared to **59% of semi-urban consumers**. This highlights the importance of **price sensitivity in rural areas**, where affordability remains a key driver of brand loyalty. In contrast, **82% of semi-urban respondents** perceived AMUL as a modern brand, while only **49% of rural consumers** held this view—indicating a clear divergence in brand image interpretation.

Moreover, when it comes to dairy preferences, **36% of rural consumers** favored traditional dairy sources (e.g., local vendors or home-sourced milk), while only **21% of semi-urban consumers** did. This difference reflects the stronger hold of **customary practices and informal networks** in rural regions.

Finally, the perception of AMUL as a **status-enhancing brand** was held by **61% of semi-urban consumers**, compared to only **28% of rural respondents**. This underlines that **semi-urban buyers connect branding with lifestyle aspirations**, viewing AMUL not just as a utility but as part of their social identity.

Summary of Comparative Insights

- **Brand recognition is universally high**, but deeper interpretations differ.
- **Rural consumers prioritize trust, affordability, and familiarity**, often influenced by habit and local credibility.
- **Semi-urban consumers emphasize innovation, variety, and aspirational branding**, heavily influenced by media and peer behavior.
- **Exposure to advertisements and interpretation of modernity** varies significantly between the two segments.
- **A single brand message may produce different meanings**, depending on the cultural, economic, and media environment of the audience.

These findings highlight the importance of **contextual branding** and provide a foundation for designing **segmented marketing strategies** that resonate with the emotional and functional priorities of each consumer group.

6. DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of rural and semi-urban consumers in Jhunjhunu district reveals critical insights into the **divergent ways in which AMUL's brand image is perceived** across these two demographic settings. While AMUL maintains strong brand awareness in both segments, the interpretation of what the brand represents—and why it is chosen—differs significantly. These differences are shaped by variations in media exposure, consumer lifestyle, educational background, economic conditions, and cultural expectations.

Among **rural consumers**, AMUL is perceived primarily as a **symbol of purity, affordability, and reliability**. The brand's cooperative roots and long-standing presence in India's dairy market have reinforced its image as a trusted household name. With **85% of rural respondents associating AMUL with product purity** and **88% affirming its affordability**, it is clear that rural consumers connect with the brand on the basis of **functionality and tradition**. Trust is further strengthened through consistent product availability and word-of-mouth endorsements from local shopkeepers. However, rural consumers exhibit limited exposure to newer AMUL products and campaigns, with only 42% reporting recent ad exposure. This underscores a **gap in brand modernization and innovation perception** in rural areas, which are still dominated by conventional media and low digital penetration.

In contrast, **semi-urban consumers** interact with AMUL in a more **aspirational and image-driven manner**. With **82% perceiving AMUL as a modern brand**, and **61% associating it with status**, semi-urban buyers are clearly influenced by branding aesthetics, variety of products, and media visibility. The higher ad exposure rate (67%) in this segment, combined with greater product awareness (e.g., cheese, flavored milk, probiotic drinks), reflects the impact of **targeted advertising and digital outreach**. Semi-urban youth, in particular, tend to relate



to brands through the lens of social identity and lifestyle enhancement, as also supported by the findings of Jain (2020) and Kapoor & Paul (2017).

These findings are consistent with prior literature suggesting that **brand equity in rural markets is shaped more by experiential trust**, while in semi-urban settings, it is increasingly influenced by **branding innovation, product differentiation, and visual presentation** (Aaker, 1991; Sharma & Verma, 2022). The AMUL mascot and logo—both widely recognized—continue to serve as powerful symbols of brand recall, with rural consumers interpreting them in functional terms, and semi-urban consumers viewing them as markers of brand heritage and contemporary appeal.

A critical insight from the study is that **the same brand can carry multiple meanings** in different cultural and economic contexts. While AMUL's core values of quality and trust are acknowledged across the board, the degree to which it is seen as modern, fashionable, or premium varies. This reinforces the need for **tailored brand communication strategies** that recognize these interpretive differences rather than applying uniform messaging across segments.

Furthermore, the discussion reveals that **traditional dairy preferences remain stronger in rural areas**, where local milk vendors and unbranded options are still seen as viable alternatives. In semi-urban regions, consumers are more inclined toward processed and packaged dairy products, indicating a **shift in consumption behavior tied to urbanization and exposure**.

In sum, the findings emphasize that **brand perception is not static but contextual**, and it must be continually re-evaluated through localized consumer research. AMUL's current strength lies in its dual identity—as a legacy brand trusted by rural consumers, and as an evolving, aspirational brand for semi-urban buyers. The challenge and opportunity lie in maintaining both identities without alienating either segment.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative insights drawn from this study indicate that AMUL's brand image, while strong across both rural and semi-urban segments, resonates differently with each. Therefore, a **differentiated branding and communication strategy** is essential to deepen engagement, sustain loyalty, and expand market share. The following recommendations are proposed to optimize AMUL's positioning and promotional effectiveness in these two distinct consumer environments:

1. Implement a Segmented Branding Strategy

AMUL must pursue a **dual branding approach** that aligns with the differing expectations of rural and semi-urban consumers. For rural markets, communication should reinforce **trust, purity, affordability, and tradition**—values that have historically driven brand loyalty. Conversely, in semi-urban areas, where consumers seek modernity, variety, and social relevance, branding should emphasize **innovation, packaging sophistication, and lifestyle alignment**. Campaigns should reflect these differing aspirations through visual cues, product highlights, and storytelling techniques.

2. Customize Communication Channels and Content

Media exposure varies sharply between rural and semi-urban zones. Hence, AMUL should use **vernacular-language content and traditional media (radio, wall paintings, village fairs)** in rural areas, while adopting **digital-led marketing (WhatsApp promotions, social media reels, influencer tie-ups)** in semi-urban markets. For example, short video ads tailored for mobile consumption can engage semi-urban youth, while rural storytelling formats such as folk songs or dramatized radio jingles can reinforce familiarity and trust.

3. Enhance Product Differentiation by Segment

Product preference also differs. In rural areas, consumers are more inclined to purchase **staple dairy items** such as milk, curd, ghee, and butter. Here, AMUL should maintain strong availability and promote product purity and affordability. In semi-urban markets, where demand for **value-added and premium dairy products** (like cheese, flavored milk, probiotic drinks, and paneer) is growing, AMUL should push variety, innovation, and packaging aesthetics. In-store sampling, combo packs, and modern shelf displays can enhance product appeal.

4. Strengthen Retailer Engagement and Education

Retailers act as brand advocates, especially in rural areas where consumers often rely on their recommendations. AMUL should conduct **retailer training programs** that educate shopkeepers about product benefits, pricing, and promotional offers. Providing **point-of-sale materials**—such as AMUL-branded boards, fridges, shelf-talkers, and brochures—can enhance visibility and consumer confidence at the store level.

5. Leverage Cultural Integration and Community Events

AMUL should continue to engage in **localized marketing** by participating in rural festivals, fairs, school nutrition programs, and women's cooperative events. These offer opportunities to showcase product quality while



reinforcing brand values. In semi-urban areas, **youth-centric activities**, college sponsorships, health awareness campaigns, and sports tie-ins can position AMUL as a modern, socially responsive brand.

6. Monitor Segment-Specific Brand Perception Regularly

Consumer perception is dynamic. AMUL should establish **periodic monitoring mechanisms** such as surveys, retailer feedback loops, and digital listening tools to track how its brand is viewed in both markets. This real-time insight will allow the brand to adapt its messaging, pricing, and product offerings in line with emerging trends and consumer expectations.

By adopting these recommendations, AMUL can maintain its **core strengths in rural markets** while simultaneously **expanding its aspirational value in semi-urban zones**. The key lies in recognizing that consumer values are not uniform—and neither should brand strategies be. Through **targeted segmentation, cultural sensitivity, and localized engagement**, AMUL can further cement its legacy as a truly national brand with deep local roots.

8. CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore and compare the levels of **consumer awareness and brand image perception of AMUL** in rural and semi-urban areas of the Jhunjhunu district in Rajasthan. The results reveal a compelling narrative of **dual brand engagement**—wherein a single brand like AMUL holds different meanings, expectations, and emotional value for different consumer segments based on their geographical, economic, and socio-cultural positioning.

Among **rural consumers**, AMUL continues to be perceived as a brand of **trust, purity, and affordability**. Its cooperative heritage, reliable product quality, and local availability have cemented its place in rural households. Rural buyers rely heavily on word-of-mouth, traditional media, and local retailers, making brand familiarity and habitual usage the key drivers of loyalty. However, this segment exhibits relatively lower exposure to AMUL's newer product innovations and promotional campaigns, highlighting the need for deeper outreach and communication at the grassroots level.

In contrast, **semi-urban consumers interpret AMUL through a more aspirational and brand-conscious lens**. For them, AMUL is not only a trusted dairy provider but also a **symbol of modernity, variety, and lifestyle enhancement**. Increased access to television, internet, and digital marketing channels has influenced their brand interactions, prompting interest in packaged, value-added dairy products. The higher recall of advertisements and greater alignment with status indicators among semi-urban respondents suggests that AMUL's visibility and aspirational messaging are effectively resonating with this demographic.

The key insight drawn from this research is that **consumer perception is contextually shaped**—even within a single district like Jhunjhunu. AMUL's consistent brand identity is interpreted in functionally traditional terms by rural buyers and in emotionally aspirational terms by semi-urban consumers. This implies that **uniform branding strategies may fall short** in fully engaging the diverse Indian consumer landscape. Instead, AMUL must embrace a **localized and segmented marketing approach**, balancing its legacy of trust with a forward-looking narrative of innovation and inclusivity.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader discourse on **rural and semi-urban market segmentation**, offering practical insights into how FMCG brands can better connect with consumers across India's demographic spectrum. It emphasizes the importance of **cultural sensitivity, communication tailoring, and dual-channel engagement**—factors that will increasingly determine the success of branding in the evolving Indian market.

In conclusion, AMUL's brand equity remains robust across both consumer segments studied. However, to ensure **sustained relevance and market expansion**, the brand must evolve from a one-size-fits-all model to a **multi-dimensional strategy**—one that reinforces core values in rural markets while simultaneously promoting innovation, variety, and aspirational identity in semi-urban zones. By doing so, AMUL can continue to uphold its legacy as **"The Taste of India"** while effectively addressing the changing tastes of India.

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