

THE SUCCESS OF MASCOT MARKETING OF BUTTERBEAR



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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the success of mascot marketing through the case study of Butterbear, the mascot of a dessert brand in Thailand. By leveraging a playful and nostalgic character, Butterbear has successfully increased brand awareness and customer engagement since its launch in June 2023. The study examines how Butterbear's visual appeal, emotional resonance, and strategic use of social media, particularly platforms like TikTok and Instagram, contribute to building a strong brand persona.

The research uses the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to explore the dual routes of persuasion—central and peripheral—that Butterbear employs to attract a diverse fan base. The mascot's visual charm engages consumers on a peripheral level, while deeper narrative elements encourage cognitive engagement, fostering long-term loyalty. Additionally, the research applies the Narrative Transportation Theory to highlight how Butterbear's storytelling, themed events, and viral content deeply connect with audiences, creating immersive brand experiences.

Using qualitative research methods, including interviews with customers and observations at physical store locations, the study explores the emotional and behavioral impact of Butterbear on consumer interactions. The findings indicate that Butterbear enhances perceived brand quality and loyalty through its ability to evoke positive emotional connections, further solidified by customer-generated content and ongoing social media engagement. The research concludes with actionable insights for businesses aiming to implement successful mascot marketing strategies. By understanding the emotional and cognitive impact of mascots like Butterbear, brands can foster deeper connections with consumers and drive sustained brand engagement and loyalty.

KEY WORDS: BUTTERBEAR/ MASCOT

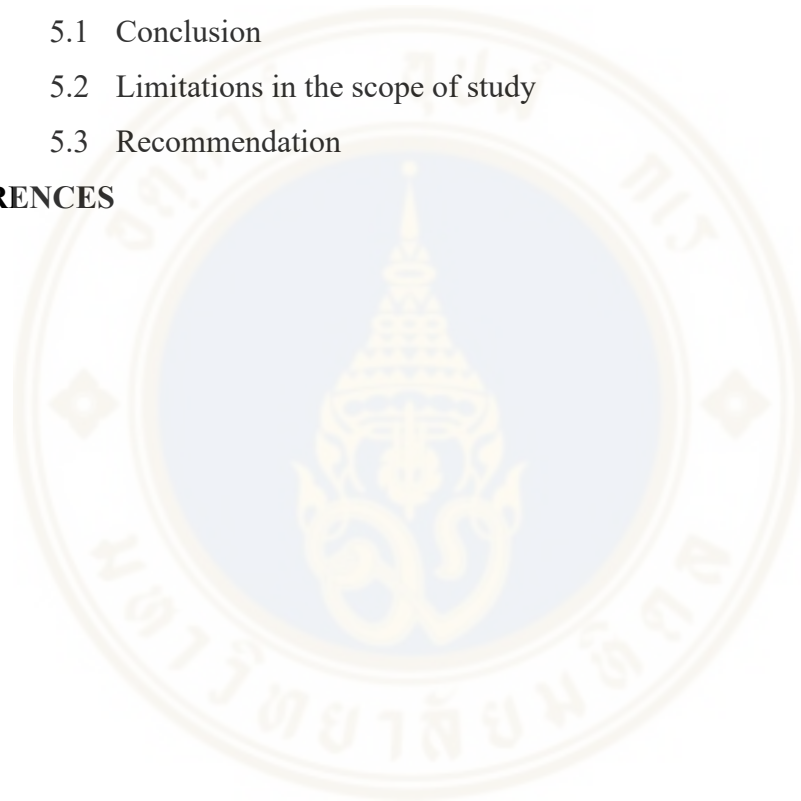
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's competitive marketing landscape, brands are constantly seeking innovative ways to capture consumer attention and build brand loyalty. One strategy that has seen a resurgence in recent years is mascot marketing. Mascots, those lovable characters representing a brand, can create a personal connection with customers, fostering brand recognition and positive associations. This paper explores the power of mascot marketing through the fascinating case study of Butterbear, a dessert shop mascot that has become a social media phenomenon in Thailand and beyond. Mascot marketing involves creating a character that embodies a brand's personality and values. This character acts as a brand ambassador, interacting with customers and appearing in marketing campaigns. A well-designed mascot can be a powerful tool for building brand awareness, particularly among younger demographics. Successful examples include Kumamon, the lovable bear mascot of Kumamoto Prefecture in Japan, which has significantly boosted tourism and local product sales, and the Michelin Man, who has become a global icon representing the Michelin brand. These mascots demonstrate how effective a well-crafted character can be in enhancing a brand's visibility and appeal.

Butterbear is a new dessert shop concept launched in June 2023. This brand extension from Coffee Beans by Dao, a successful Thai coffee chain, caters to sweet tooths with childhood favorites like fresh milk cream donuts, butter bread, and cookies. The founder's slogan, "A very buttery welcome to our world," encapsulates the brand's inviting and indulgent nature. Khun Boom Thanawan. The brand identity, from the menu to the packaging, revolves around a sense of nostalgia and playful charm, perfectly reflected in the creation of the Butterbear mascot. The success goes beyond just a cute face. The brand has invested in building a well-rounded persona for the mascot. They've created catchy songs, "It's Butterbear!," and "Narak Mhai Mai Roo" complete with a music video featuring another mascot as a dance partner. This playful content resonates with

viewers on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. Additionally, the brand keeps its social media channels buzzing with trendy content featuring Butterbear, often mimicking popular challenges or memes. This constant engagement keeps the mascot at the forefront of fans' minds and fosters a sense of community. Butterbear, the adorable mascot captivating hearts worldwide, has become a social media phenomenon. Zanroo, a social data analytics expert, delved into the brand's online presence using AI, analyzing data from June 1st to 12th, 2023, across major platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Sentiment analysis paints a positive picture. Over 9.78% of online conversations held positive sentiments towards Butterbear, with users praising its "naturalness" and "delicious taste." However, the data also reveals areas for improvement. While neutral sentiments dominated at 90.01%, there were concerns about the packaging's lack of distinctiveness and the perceived high price point. These factors, along with a small percentage of negative sentiment (0.21%) mentioning copyright infringement and product authenticity, could potentially impact purchasing decisions.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

The objective of this paper is to explore how Butterbear's mascot has contributed to the brand's success in terms of increasing brand awareness and enhancing customer engagement. This study aims to uncover the elements of mascot marketing that have been most effective for Butterbear, providing actionable insights for other brands looking to implement similar strategies.

1.3 Research Scope

This study focuses on the role of the Butterbear mascot in enhancing brand awareness and customer engagement. The time frame for the study will analyze data from the launch of the Butterbear mascot in June 2023 to the present date in 2024. This period allows for the observation of both initial and sustained impacts of the mascot on the brand. While Butterbear originated in Thailand, the research will also consider its

international influence, especially through social media platforms where the mascot has garnered a following beyond Thailand.

The study will use primary, secondary, and observational data sources, including social media analytics, customer interviews, and observations of mascot appearances. Primary data will be gathered through interviews with Butterbear customers and fans, while secondary data will include social media engagement statistics, tone of discussions, and existing literature on mascot marketing. The research will adopt a qualitative method by conducting in-depth interviews with customers, and brand specialist. The study will interview a total of five participants: four customers, and a brand specialist. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the mascot's impact on various aspects of the brand.

1.4 Expected Benefits

This research will provide detailed insights into how the Butterbear mascot has increased brand awareness and customer engagement, offering actionable strategies for other brands. It will highlight best practices for leveraging social media, foster deeper brand loyalty, and contribute to academic knowledge on mascot marketing. Business owners can refine their branding strategies, and startups can gain guidance on creating impactful mascots.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter comprises two main sections: the first section defines key terms relevant to the study, and the second section discusses theoretical frameworks used as the foundation for this paper.

2.1 Definition of related terms

2.1.1 Mascot

Garretson and Niedrich (2004) explain that the term "mascot" originates from the Turkish word for "an object believed to bring luck," which is derived from the French word "Mascotte." A mascot can represent all human, animal, and inanimate characters that symbolize products and services (Tek, 2004: 29). Generally, a mascot is a living entity (human, plant, animal) or an inanimate object used by businesses to promote their products or services to consumers.

2.1.2 Customer Engagement

Hollebeek (2011) describes customer brand engagement as the degree of a customer's motivation, brand-related, and context-specific mental state, marked by particular levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during interactions with a brand. Research on customer/consumer engagement (CE) began to gain traction around 2010 (e.g., Hollebeek & Belk, 2021; Clark et al., 2020). Early studies were mainly concerned with defining CE and exploring it within its broader theoretical framework to highlight its unique role and importance.

2.1.3 Fandom

Fandom is considered a subculture where individuals with a shared interest develop a sense of fellowship and compassion. These enthusiasts, known as fans, dedicate significant time and energy to following every detail related to their passion. They form social networks that distinguish casual followers from those deeply involved in the fandom. Fandom is not limited to a specific activity or interest; it can revolve around a person (such as a celebrity), fashion, genres, or various hobbies. Thus, fandom refers to a specific group of fans united by their fascination with the same subject.

The term originally applied primarily to sports followers (Stanfill, 2019). Modern fandom is believed to have originated with fans of the literary detective character Sherlock Holmes. When the character was killed off in the story, public mourning and gatherings occurred, leading to the creation of the first fan fiction (Poore, 2013).

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.2.1 Brand Equity Theory

Brand equity, Aaker (1996) categorizes brand equity variables into the following dimensions:

1. **Brand Awareness:** Brand awareness reflects the prominence of a brand in the consumer's mind, including their ability to recognize and recall it. According to Keller (1993), brand awareness involves several stages, such as recognition, recall, top-of-mind awareness, and brand dominance.

2. **Perceived Quality:** Perceived quality is the consumer's subjective judgment of a product's quality compared to its competitors. Unlike actual quality, perceived quality indirectly affects brand equity through various mediating factors. In this context, it pertains to how customers perceive the quality of hospital services.

3. **Brand Associations:** Brand associations consist of the meanings and connections consumers attach to a brand. They are vital for brand differentiation, influencing purchase decisions, and fostering positive attitudes. These associations can relate to product categories, usage scenarios, product attributes, and customer benefits, particularly concerning hospital services.

4. **Brand Loyalty:** Oliver (1997) describes brand loyalty as a strong commitment to repeatedly purchase or endorse a preferred product or service, regardless of situational influences or competitive pressures. Brand loyalty can be seen in actual purchasing behavior (behavioral loyalty) or in the intention to remain loyal (attitudinal loyalty). In this study, brand loyalty is examined based on consumer perceptions and their loyalty behaviors toward hospital services.

5. **Proprietary Assets:** Proprietary assets refer to the unique resources and capabilities that a brand owns, which provide a competitive advantage and enhance brand equity. These assets include patents, trademarks, channel relationships, and other intellectual property. According to Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1998), proprietary assets play a crucial role in strengthening a brand's market position and securing long-term profitability. In the context of hospital services, proprietary assets could involve exclusive technologies, specialized medical equipment, and strategic partnerships that contribute to a hospital's reputation and consumer trust.

In the Butterbear research, brand equity is explored through its impact on brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Butterbear, the mascot of a dessert shop, plays a pivotal role in enhancing these aspects by embodying a playful and nostalgic identity that resonates with consumers. Through Butterbear, the brand aims to increase recognition and recall among customers, create positive emotional and functional associations, improve perceptions of product quality, and foster strong consumer loyalty. By leveraging Butterbear as a symbol, the brand seeks to build a robust brand equity that enhances its competitive position and strengthens consumer engagement in the dessert market.

2.2.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), introduced by Cacioppo et al. (1986), provides a framework for understanding how consumers process persuasive messages through two distinct pathways: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route entails a thorough analysis of the information, requiring significant motivation and cognitive effort. In contrast, the peripheral route depends on emotional cues and demands less mental effort (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Yang et al., 2022). According to ELM, individuals in a high elaboration likelihood state will scrutinize facts and the

quality of content, while those in a low elaboration likelihood state will be more swayed by emotional appeals and straightforward cues (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

ELM has been validated as a dominant framework for understanding attitude change in persuasion (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985; Choi & Salmon, 2003; Cook et al., 2004). It provides insights into the delivery of information and is particularly relevant for social media marketing due to its dynamic nature. However, ELM has limitations, such as not specifying when a variable's dual role can be configured and failing to explain what makes arguments strong or weak (O'Keefe, 1990). Despite these criticisms, ELM remains influential and useful for marketers to enhance consumer engagement by understanding the characteristics of central and peripheral processing on social media (Petty et al., 2004).

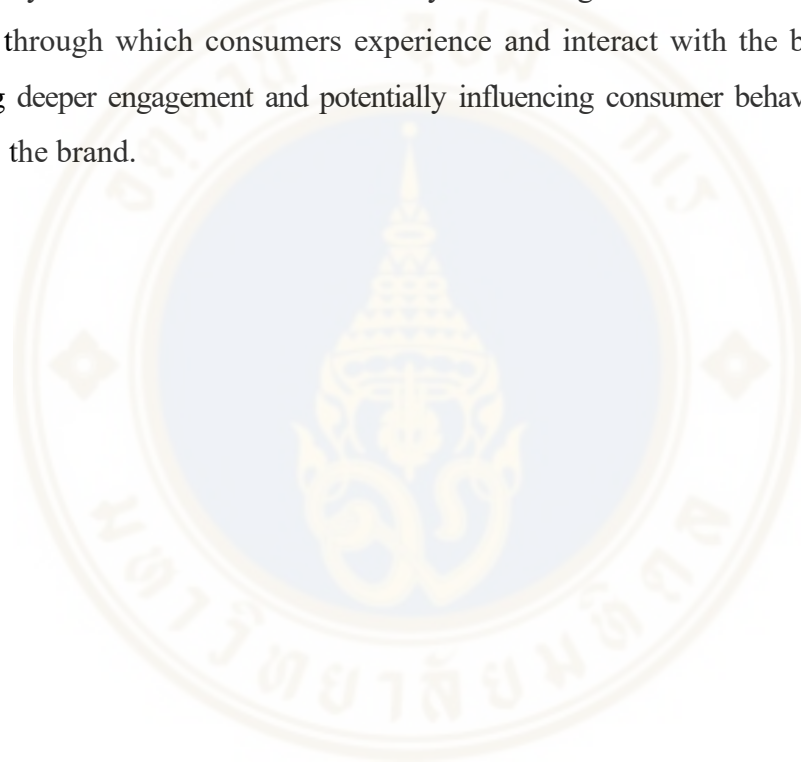
From the perspective of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) in this research, Butterbear's role as a mascot in a dessert shop illustrates how consumers process persuasive messages. According to ELM, consumers navigate two routes of processing information: the central route, characterized by deep cognitive processing where consumers critically evaluate information, and the peripheral route, where consumers rely on heuristic cues such as visual appeal and emotional resonance to form attitudes and make decisions. Butterbear's presence as a mascot influences both routes, enhancing brand engagement through its visual appeal and emotional connection while also stimulating deeper cognitive processing about the brand and its offerings among consumers.

2.2.3 Narrative Transportation Theory

Narrative Transportation Theory explores the potent role of storytelling as an educational tool in undergraduate learning. By engaging students with narratives or teaching messages, the process of narration has the capacity to influence real-world beliefs by transporting individuals into a narrative realm (Green and Brock, 2000). Gerrig (1993) describes transportation theory as the process where an individual, akin to a traveler, undergoes a journey through actions such as watching a film. During this journey, the individual mentally moves away from their starting point to seemingly distant narrative landscapes. Nell (1988) suggests that this mental journey involves

temporarily disconnecting from real-world facts in favor of the narrative's world, whether conveyed through written, audio, or visual forms. Upon returning from these mental travels, individuals often express a sense of transformation or change influenced by their immersive narrative experience.

In this study, Narrative Transportation refers to the concept that storytelling, facilitated by Butterbear as a mascot in a dessert shop, has the power to immerse consumers in a narrative world. This theory posits that engaging narratives can transport individuals mentally away from their immediate surroundings into a realm where they emotionally connect with the brand's identity and message. Butterbear serves as a symbolic vehicle through which consumers experience and interact with the brand's narrative, fostering deeper engagement and potentially influencing consumer behavior and attitudes towards the brand.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The objective of this thematic paper is to identify the factors contributing to the success of Butterbear's mascot. Specifically, it aims to examine how Butterbear's mascot has enhanced the brand's success by increasing brand awareness and boosting customer engagement. This study seeks to uncover the key elements of mascot marketing that have proven most effective for Butterbear, offering actionable insights for other brands interested in implementing similar strategies. To achieve this, the research employs in-depth interviews and observations, supplemented by secondary data, to comprehensively understand the elements contributing to Butterbear's success.

3.2 Data Collection and Methodology

This study employs both in-depth interviews and observations to gather comprehensive data on the factors contributing to the success of Butterbear's mascot. I conducted in-depth interviews with 5 respondents, divided into two groups: four customers who have interacted with the Butterbear mascot, and a brand specialist. The aim of these interviews was to gather detailed insights into how the mascot influences brand awareness, customer engagement, and overall brand perception. Additionally, this paper involves observational studies at the physical store at Emsphere during Butterbear's scheduled appearances every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The objectives were to observe the crowd size and composition on three separate occasions, monitor interactions between the mascot and fans, and evaluate fans' emotional and behavioral responses during meet-and-greet sessions. We also included online observation by analyzing viral video clips of Butterbear's appearances on various platforms to understand digital engagement. Furthermore, secondary data was utilized to review the CEO's perspectives and fan comments on online platforms, providing a broader view of Butterbear's impact. Combining

these methods, this study aims to uncover the key elements of mascot marketing that have significantly contributed to Butterbear's success, providing actionable insights for other brands seeking to enhance brand awareness and customer engagement through mascot utilization.

Table 3.1 Selected customers

<p>Sample 1: Aom (Female)</p> <p>Interview Date: June 26, 2024</p> <p>Location: Call Line</p> <p>Duration: 30 minutes</p> <p>Background: Aom is a 31-year-old currently employed as a Sales Representative at Goodyear, a leading tire manufacturing company known for its innovative products and global presence based in the Rangsit office. She discovered Butterbear in May 2024 through a viral TikTok video. After visiting the physical store and seeing the mascot in person, she fell in love with Butterbear's cuteness. Aom is very active on TikTok and Facebook, regularly posting news and pictures of Butterbear.</p> <p>Sample 2: Mint (Female)</p> <p>Interview Date: June 28, 2024</p> <p>Location: Call Line</p> <p>Duration: 45 minutes</p> <p>Background: Mint is a 32-year-old business development professional specializing in finding tenants for retail businesses. She has been a fan of Butterbear since December 2023 and had never been a fan of any person before discovering Butterbear.</p> <p>Sample 3: Namtarn (Female)</p> <p>Interview date: July 4, 2024</p> <p>Location: Zoom Online</p> <p>Duration: 45 mins</p> <p>Background: Namtarn is a 20-year-old marketing officer with four years of experience in the field. She discovered Butterbear through a cover dance clip of the "Magnetic" song on TikTok.</p> <p>Sample 4: Ake (Female)</p> <p>Interview date: July 18, 2024</p> <p>Location: MS Teams</p> <p>Duration: 45 mins</p> <p>Background: Ake is a Chinese fourth-term student majoring in Marketing at Mahidol University, having previously graduated with a degree in Fine Arts. She fell in love with Butterbear in December 2023 through Xiaohongshu, a popular Chinese social media platform from a viral video clip.</p>

Table 3.2 Selected expert

Expert 1: Noi (Female)
Interview date: July 20, 2024
Location: SCB Park Plaza
Duration: 50 mins
Background: Noi is a 52-year-old senior brand specialist with over 20 years of extensive experience in brand and product management, particularly in fuels retail and merchandise.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Primary Data Sources

Table 3.3 Interview questions to customers

Topic	Questions
Interview's background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could you please tell me a bit about your background and current occupation? - How long have you been interested in desserts or similar products related to Butterbear? - What initially drew you to become interested in Butterbear or this particular dessert brand? - Have you been involved in any other similar projects or brands in the past? - What do you think are the key factors that contribute to your appreciation or expertise in this area?
General Impressions and Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did you first learn about Butterbear? - What do you like most about Butterbear? - What makes Butterbear cuter and more distinctive than other mascots, in your opinion?

Table 3.3 Interview questions to customers (cont.)

Topic	Questions
Social Media and Online Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which social media platforms do you follow Butterbear on? - What type of content do you like that Butterbear posts on social media?
Events and Merchandise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you ever attended an event where Butterbear made an appearance? If yes, how was it? - Have you ever purchased merchandise featuring Butterbear? If yes, what do you think of those products? - What are your thoughts on the prices of Butterbear-related products?
Brand Impact and Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you think Butterbear helps create positive feelings towards this dessert brand? - How important do you think the Butterbear mascot is to this dessert brand? - How do you think incorporating Butterbear into the brand impacts the quality and taste of the products? - How do you feel when you see Butterbear appear in festivals or special occasions?
Future Engagement and Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will you continue to follow and support Butterbear in the future? Why? - Do you have any additional suggestions or comments about Butterbear? - Is there any special impression or story you would like to share about Butterbear? - In what areas do you think Butterbear should improve?

Table 3.4 Interview questions to experts

Topic	Questions
General Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you describe your background and your role within the brand management field? - How familiar are you with Butterbear as a brand and its mascot?
Mascot Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, what are the key factors that make a mascot effective in enhancing brand awareness? - How do you believe Butterbear's mascot has contributed to the brand's identity and recognition?
Customer Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What strategies do you think are most effective in leveraging mascots for increasing customer engagement? - How have you seen Butterbear's mascot being used to engage with customers both online and offline?
Brand Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How important is a mascot in shaping a brand's perception among its target audience? - Can you provide examples of how Butterbear's mascot has influenced customer perceptions and attitudes towards the brand?
Marketing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What elements of mascot marketing do you find most impactful based on your experience? - How can Butterbear improve or expand its use of the mascot in future marketing campaigns?
Challenges and Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the potential challenges in maintaining a mascot's relevance and effectiveness over time? - How can Butterbear address these challenges to ensure long-term success with its mascot?
Digital Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can Butterbear optimize its mascot's presence across various digital platforms? - What role do viral videos and social media play in the success of a mascot like Butterbear?

Table 3.4 Interview questions to experts (cont.)

Topic	Questions
Future Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What future trends do you foresee in mascot marketing that Butterbear should be aware of? - How can Butterbear’s mascot evolve to stay relevant and continue to drive brand success?
Additional Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any additional insights or recommendations you can provide on utilizing mascots effectively in brand marketing? - Do you have any other comments or observations about Butterbear’s mascot and its role in the brand’s success?

3.3.2 Secondary Data Sources

In this study, secondary data collection involves gathering information from multiple sources to understand CEO perspectives and fan discussions related to Butterbear. This approach aims to provide comprehensive insights into the brand's impact and perception within its community. Specifically, secondary data collection includes:

1. CEO Interviews: Secondary data from interviews with CEO, Boom Thanawan Wongcharoenrat provide a comprehensive understanding of Butterbear's brand strategy and market positioning. These media interviews reveal her views on the effective use of mascots in brand communication, illustrating how Butterbear’s mascot contributes to its market success and brand identity.

2. Online Monitoring: Monitoring various online platforms where discussions about Butterbear occur among fans. This includes analyzing social media platforms, forums, and fan communities to gauge the tone, sentiment, and engagement levels surrounding Butterbear.

3. Analysis of Fan Interactions: Analyzing the dynamics of fan interactions, including their discussions, preferences, and emotional responses towards Butterbear. This analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes, sentiments, and emerging trends within the fandom community.

By leveraging these secondary data sources, this study aims to enrich the understanding of Butterbear's brand perception, customer engagement dynamics, and the effectiveness of mascot-driven marketing strategies. This approach provides valuable

context and empirical evidence to support the findings from primary data collection methods, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of Butterbear's success factors.

3.3.3 Observation Plan

The objective of this observation plan is to gather data on the impact of the Butterbear mascot on customer behavior, engagement, and overall store atmosphere during its appearances at the physical store. The observations will help understand how the mascot contributes to brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and emotional connections with the brand.

3.3.3.1 Schedule

1) First Observation

- Date: 22 June 2024
- Time: 2:30 PM (Saturday)
- Location: Butterbear Store at Emsphere

2) Second Observation

- Date: 13 July 2024
- Time: 2:30 PM (Saturday)
- Location: Butterbear Store at Emsphere

3.3.3.2 Observation Plan

1) Crowd Size and Composition

Objective: Estimate the number of people in the store and analyze the demographic composition (age, gender, group type - families, friends, individuals).

Method:

• Estimate count the number of people entering the store during the observation period.

- Note the age groups and gender distribution.
- Identify if visitors are in groups or alone.

2) Customer-Mascot Interactions

Objective: Observe and document interactions between customers and the Butterbear mascot.

Method:

- Observe interactions (e.g., photo opportunities, conversations, high-fives).
- Note the nature of interactions (e.g., friendly, enthusiastic, indifferent).
- Observe the duration of each interaction.

3) Emotional and Behavioral Responses

Objective: Assess the emotional and behavioral responses of customers towards the mascot.

Method:

- Observe and record visible emotional reactions (e.g., smiles, laughter, excitement).
- Note any verbal expressions of enthusiasm or positive comments.
- Track any changes in customer behavior after interacting with the mascot (e.g., increased interest in products, prolonged stay in the store).

4) Overall Store Atmosphere

Objective: Understand the overall impact of the mascot on the store atmosphere.

Method:

- Note the general mood and energy levels in the store during the mascot's presence.
- Record any changes in staff-customer interactions and overall customer flow.
- Assess how the mascot's presence affects the store environment (e.g., noise levels, crowd management).

CHAPTER IV

FINDING ANALYSIS

After conducting in-depth interviews, observations, and gathering secondary data, we have synthesized the information to analyze the factors contributing to the success of Butterbear's mascot marketing. This chapter presents the analysis of our findings, highlighting the key elements that have driven Butterbear's success in enhancing brand awareness, boosting customer engagement, and fostering brand loyalty. Through a comprehensive examination of the collected data, we aim to uncover actionable insights into the effective use of mascots in brand marketing, with a particular focus on Butterbear's unique strategies and their impact.

4.1 Key Findings Analysis

4.1.1 Brand Equity

Creating a brand persona involves integrating identity, personality traits, goals, and a distinct character that embodies the brand essence. Brand equity is concerned with the added value that a brand name supplies to a product (Farquhar, 1989). The Butterbear mascot, a representation of the brand, plays a crucial role in building customer relationships and fostering brand loyalty. A successful mascot must possess standout qualities, including compelling storytelling. The mascot has a memorable backstory that becomes synonymous with the brand's DNA. It should be crafted to appear lifelike, with a personality that resonates with the brand's values. Butterbear's charming behaviors, from its walking style to dance moves and gentle mannerisms, create a relatable character that viewers find endearing, especially with its distinctive features like its brown fur, round eyes, and fluffy body, captivating fans at first sight.

4.1.1.1 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which consumers recognize and recall a brand. Keller (1993) emphasizes that brand awareness is a critical component of brand equity, as it influences consumer choices and fosters a sense of familiarity and trust. Mascots can play a significant role in enhancing brand awareness by serving as memorable symbols that differentiate a brand from its competitors (Koo, 2003).

The Butterbear mascot significantly enhances brand awareness through a multifaceted approach that includes leveraging social media platforms, distinctive character traits, and high-profile media appearances. By using platforms like TikTok, where Butterbear's videos have gone viral, the mascot has reached a broad audience and created a lasting impression. The distinctive features and charming behaviors of Butterbear make it easily recognizable and memorable. Frequent appearances at events and in viral content ensure that the mascot remains in the public eye, continually drawing attention to the brand. For instance, Butterbear performed as a solo artist on the T-pop stage in week 25 with the single "Narak Mhai Mai Roo," which generated significant public attention. This show appearance, which required audience votes, highlighted Butterbear's popularity. Additionally, Butterbear was featured on the country's top prime-time news show with a famous host, further boosting its visibility and brand recognition.

Customer testimonials further illustrate the impact of Butterbear's marketing strategy. Aom mentioned, "I first noticed Butterbear from a dance performance video clip in front of the mall on Children's Day. Among other mascots, Butterbear's dancing style made it stand out, less but more." This highlights how Butterbear's unique performances make it stand out from other mascots, emphasizing the importance of engaging and distinctive character behaviors in enhancing brand awareness. Similarly, Ake discovered Butterbear through Xiaohongshu, a popular Chinese social media platform. She noted that the brand store and the real Butterbear were adorable, and the store was recognized in the first half of the year. Ake's experience indicates effective international reach and social media marketing. Namtarn shared her thoughts, stating, "Having Nong Noey (Butterbear) as the main character of the store has made people who have never heard of the store come to know it. This creates a wide marketing trend. Butterbear's charm is unique. Unlike typical mascots that follow a pattern, Butterbear's actions resemble a little girl's, drawing much attention and interest." Noi, a brand senior

specialist, identifies two key factors that make a mascot effective in enhancing brand awareness, its cute and appealing appearance that resonates with the target audience and its distinct character that remains true to Butterbear's identity. Additionally, viral content and memes that generate social media buzz, amplified by fan engagement and interaction, play a crucial role. Noi believes that Butterbear's mascot significantly contributes to the brand's identity and recognition. Mascots are crucial in creating brand awareness among target audiences, similar to having a brand ambassador. They draw attention and help the target audience recognize and register the brand quickly. Consistency in the mascot's presence and actions reinforces brand identity.

4.1.1.2 Brand Associations

Brand associations refer to the attributes, benefits, and attitudes that consumers connect with a brand (Aaker, 1991). Positive brand associations are essential for building a strong brand image and shaping consumer perceptions. Mascots can enhance these associations by embodying the brand's values and personality, thus strengthening the overall brand image (Phillips, 1996).

Butterbear effectively cultivates positive brand associations through its design and personality traits, such as its smile, cuteness, and relatability, which evoke positive emotions in consumers. These emotions are then transferred to the brand, creating a strong, positive association. Butterbear's participation in various marketing campaigns, including seasonal and festival-themed events, consistently ties the mascot to joyful and memorable experiences, reinforcing these associations. Additionally, user-generated content (UGC) about encounters with the mascot helps expand the audience, increasing awareness of Butterbear's presence and further enhancing brand associations. Mint noted that "the reaction of Butterbear when meeting fans is unpredictable and natural," associating Butterbear with spontaneity and authenticity. This suggests that the brand's genuine interactions with fans create a strong positive image. Similarly, Aom remarked, "It represents childhood, relieves stress, makes people happy. The marketing team hit the right spot with storytelling – the Butterbear goes to school, does homework, dances well." Aom connects Butterbear with nostalgia and happiness, highlighting effective emotional branding and storytelling. Noi emphasized that customer engagement is another critical aspect of Butterbear's strategy. The mascot must have a clear, memorable character with a relatable story and an appealing image. The

actions and mannerisms of the person inside the mascot must align with the brand's image, providing a unique and engaging experience. Butterbear's mascot engages customers both online and offline. Online, its presence on social media sparks fan engagement, while offline, long queues for limited photo opportunities demonstrate its popularity and authenticity.

4.1.1.3 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is a consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988). High perceived quality is often linked to brand loyalty and can serve as a differentiator in competitive markets. Mascots can enhance perceived quality by suggesting that a brand is trustworthy and consumer-friendly (Keller, 2001).

The presence of the Butterbear mascot enhances the perceived quality of the brand's products. The mascot's lifelike appearance and relatable personality suggest a level of care and attention to detail that consumers associate with high-quality products. Furthermore, the engaging and positive experiences that consumers have with the mascot, both in-person and online, contribute to the perception that the brand is dedicated to providing exceptional products and services. Mint highlights this by saying, "The Butterbear's dance is precise with great attention to detail. The content resonates with working people, reflecting a well-crafted mascot that always surprises fans with various costumes and an appealing brand experience." Boom Tanawan Wongcharoenrat, the CEO, adds, "Our products, with adorable packaging and lovely messages, aim to spread happiness to those who care about or love each other." This association of the brand with joy, love, and care through its packaging and product offerings creates strong positive emotional connections with customers. Boom further explains, "We just wanted to make people happy. This feeling is conveyed through the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. This is why we include music and other sensory elements." Butterbear enhances perceived quality by creating a multi-sensory experience, integrating music and other elements to engage customers fully.

4.1.1.4 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's consistent preference for one brand over all others (Aaker, 1991). Strong brand loyalty can lead to repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Mascots can foster brand loyalty by creating an emotional bond with consumers, thereby encouraging repeat engagement (Keller, 2008).

Butterbear fosters brand loyalty by creating an emotional connection with consumers. The mascot's ability to evoke positive feelings and create enjoyable experiences encourages repeat engagement and purchases. Fans of Butterbear are more likely to remain loyal to the brand, as the mascot provides a sense of continuity and familiarity. Additionally, the consistent and creative use of the mascot in marketing campaigns keeps the brand relevant and engaging, further strengthening consumer loyalty. Butterbear's ability to adapt to various contexts, such as different seasons and cultural events, ensures that it remains a beloved and relevant figure, keeping the audience engaged over time and enhancing overall brand loyalty.

Mint's engagement across multiple social media platforms, including Open Chat, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, demonstrates a high level of loyalty and ongoing interest in the brand. Aom, another loyal fan, says, "I've met Butterbear twice, and I'm always curious about its costumes. I used to be a fan of Korean stars, and even though I couldn't talk to them, I still loved them. Butterbear has a similar charm." Aom's repeated attendance at events and comparisons to other beloved idols indicate strong loyalty and attachment. Boom Tanawan Wongcharoenrat, the CEO, acknowledges that Butterbear's identity and success are deeply intertwined with the engagement and feedback from its fans. "We listen to our fans and evolve based on their feedback. Many of Butterbear's characteristics developed from fan input, similar to how a child's personality grows over time," she explains. This adaptive approach ensures that the brand remains relevant and resonates with its audience.

4.1.1.5 Proprietary Assets

Proprietary assets refer to the unique resources and intellectual properties owned by a brand, which provide a competitive advantage and contribute to brand equity (Srivastava, Shervani, & Fahey, 1998). These assets include patents, trademarks, designs, and exclusive technologies that are integral to a brand's identity and market positioning.

Butterbear's proprietary assets encompass its logo, mascot design, music, and cartoon character, all of which play a significant role in enhancing its brand equity. The Butterbear logo, with its distinctive wording, is a crucial proprietary asset, serving as a recognizable symbol that represents the brand's identity. Its unique design helps differentiate Butterbear from competitors and ensures brand

consistency across various marketing channels. The unique design of the Butterbear mascot, characterized by its lifelike appearance, relatable personality, and charming behaviors, is another valuable proprietary asset. The mascot's design elements are meticulously crafted to resonate with the target audience, attracting attention and fostering an emotional connection with consumers, which enhances brand loyalty. The integration of music into Butterbear's marketing strategy adds another layer to its proprietary assets. Original songs and catchy jingles associated with Butterbear create a memorable auditory experience for consumers. For example, the "It's Butterbear" music video has gained 115K views on YouTube, and the "Narak Mhai Mai Roo" music video has garnered 6.6 million views as of July 31, 2024.

The cartoon character of Butterbear, used in various marketing materials like packaging, animated music videos, merchandise, and other media appearances, serves as a versatile asset that enhances brand storytelling. This character allows for creative narratives and content that appeal to both children and adults. By featuring in animations, commercials, and social media content, the Butterbear cartoon character helps maintain a consistent and engaging brand presence.

For instance, the CEO, Boom Tanawan Wongcharoenrat, emphasizes the importance of these assets in creating a multi-sensory brand experience: "Our products, with adorable packaging and lovely messages, aim to spread happiness to those who care about or love each other. We include music and other sensory elements to engage customers fully." This holistic approach to brand engagement underscores the value of proprietary assets in establishing a strong and memorable brand.

4.1.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) framework posits that consumers process persuasive messages through two distinct routes: the central route, involving deep cognitive processing, and the peripheral route, relying on heuristic cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Butterbear's role exemplifies the effectiveness of both routes:

4.1.2.1 Peripheral Route

Butterbear's visual appeal and emotional resonance attract attention and foster engagement. Its appearances in different themed costumes during various festivals (e.g., Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day, Songkran) always surprise and

delight viewers, showcasing new and charming behaviors that create a delightful experience. This approach leverages heuristic cues, such as the mascot's cuteness and relatability, to elicit positive emotional responses with minimal cognitive effort (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983).

In addition to its thematic costumes, Butterbear's chubby and adorable appearance, combined with its distinctive mannerisms like the gentle "Wai" greeting, enhance its charm and relatability. Unlike typical mascots that follow a standard script of greeting people, Butterbear embodies the mannerisms of a young girl, adding a unique human-like quality to its interactions. This distinctive trait makes Butterbear stand out and draws significant attention from the audience. The charming and playful personality of Butterbear brings an ordinary mascot to life, creating a vibrant and engaging character that has garnered a large following. Its popularity is unprecedented for a mascot, making it a focal point wherever it goes. The cuteness, gracefulness, and playful nature of Butterbear captivates people, generating widespread interest and affection. This unique appeal has turned Butterbear into a phenomenon, demonstrating the powerful impact of well-crafted mascots on brand engagement and consumer connection.

Aom provides an example of this influence: "The Butterbear dancing in front of the mall during Songkran caught my attention." Aom is influenced through the peripheral route by the mascot's appealing and entertaining presence in public spaces. Boom Tanawan Wongcharoenrat, the CEO, reinforces this approach: "We didn't come up with any sophisticated strategy; we just wanted to make people happy. This genuine desire is what drives us." The peripheral route is engaged through the brand's authenticity and heartfelt mission, making it appealing even without complex marketing strategies.

4.1.2.2 Central Route

For Butterbear's most dedicated fans, the central route involves deep cognitive processing of the brand's message and values. These fans care deeply about Butterbear's story and what it represents, paying close attention to its history and personality. This deep thinking fosters a stronger connection and greater loyalty.

Mint illustrates this deep engagement: "The Butterbear's improvisation and natural reactions make me want to observe every interaction myself." Namtarn echoes this sentiment, saying, "Butterbear's unique mannerisms reflect those

of a young girl, which makes her very engaging and interesting." Boom Tanawan Wongcharoenrat further elaborates, "The simplicity of Butterbear's happiness resonates with childhood memories. Many people had a teddy bear they confided in as children, which offered comfort and joy. Butterbear embodies this simple, hopeful happiness and is ready to learn from mistakes." Customers engage deeply through the central route by connecting with the brand's core values and nostalgic elements. By appreciating the unique and detailed character traits of Butterbear, fans develop a stronger emotional connection and greater loyalty to the brand.

4.1.3 Narrative Transportation

Applying Narrative Transportation Theory to Butterbear, the mascot of a dessert shop, reveals intriguing insights into consumer engagement and brand communication. Just as storytelling can transport individuals into a narrative world, Butterbear serves as a symbolic vehicle that transports consumers into the brand's narrative realm.

4.1.3.1 Compelling Storytelling

Butterbear's backstory and consistent appearances in various themed costumes, such as traditional Thai attire, allow it to convey a multitude of emotions like annoyance, shyness, anger, and happiness with just one facial expression. This creates a rich tapestry of memes that fans can relate to. This emotional range effectively fosters a strong connection with the fanbase, enhancing their emotional engagement and creating a positive fan experience. The mascot's distinct personality traits and captivating behaviors contribute to a compelling narrative that resonates deeply with the audience, adhering to the principles of narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000).

Aom highlights this connection, "The mascot goes to school, does homework, and dances well. It makes people happy and relieves stress." Aom is deeply transported into the narrative created by Butterbear's activities, enhancing her emotional connection and engagement with the brand.

4.1.3.2 Viral Content

Butterbear's viral TikTok content, especially the clip of it dancing to "Magnetic" by ILLIT, highlights its ability to engage viewers and transport them into its narrative world. This content garnered 4.7 million views and numerous positive comments,

showcasing its appeal across cultural barriers. Such engagement illustrates the power of digital storytelling in creating immersive brand experiences (Escalas, 2004).

4.1.3.3 Global Fanbase

This shows how a well-told story can travel across cultures and create a large group of fans everywhere, no matter where they're from. Just like research by Phillips & McQuarrie (2010) found, Butterbear's story is so engaging that it's bringing people together all over the world into a giant community of Butterbear fans.

4.1.3.4 Social Media Engagement Insights

Butterbear has achieved remarkable social media success, amassing over 10 million engagements across platforms. X (formerly Twitter) leads with 44,712 messages (82.93% of conversations) and 10,019,040 engagements. Facebook follows with 3,531 messages and 893,703 engagements, while Instagram has 2,563 messages and 4,895,572 engagements. TikTok, despite fewer messages (2,194), excels with 46,554,639 interactions.

The peak of engagement occurred on June 28 during Butterbear's appearance on "Rueng Lao Chao Nee," which drove substantial social media buzz. The keyword "ButterBear" appeared in 33,530 messages and generated 60,207,014 engagements, while the Thai name for the mascot garnered 22,268,429 engagements from 24,619 messages. Butterbear's success highlights the power of digital storytelling in fostering strong brand connections and driving consumer engagement through mascots.

By understanding Butterbear through the lens of Narrative Transportation Theory, marketers can leverage mascots not merely as symbolic figures but as powerful tools for creating immersive brand experiences. Analyzing consumer responses to Butterbear can provide valuable insights into how mascots influence brand perceptions, enhance emotional connections, and ultimately drive consumer behavior in the competitive dessert market.

4.2 Observations at the Physical Store - Mascot Showtime

During observations at the physical store, the live interactions with the mascot, Butterbear were particularly revealing. The scheduled showtimes, where Butterbear danced and interacted with fans, drew large crowds and created a joyful atmosphere. Customers of all ages were visibly delighted, taking photos and videos, which they eagerly shared on social media, further amplifying Butterbear's reach.

Butterbear's live dance performances were a major attraction, with photo queues limited to only 60 per day. Fans started queuing as early as 3-4 am, and the slots were filled by 5 am. This eagerness to queue highlights the mascot's key role in making the in-store experience memorable and encouraging repeat visits. Fans often posted content of their interactions, showcasing Butterbear's gentle and cute engagement, which fostered a strong bond between the fans and the mascot. Many fans also brought gifts, such as snacks, durians, chocolates, and handmade accessories for Butterbear, indicating a high level of emotional connection.

Butterbear has a substantial online presence, with 157K followers on Facebook, 715.6K followers on TikTok, and 10.8M followers as of July 2024 on the official brand page. Content about Butterbear's activities and events consistently generates high interaction rates, significantly more than typical brand pages. According to the Thailand Social Awards 2024, Butterbear ranked first among restaurant brands for social media performance in the first half of the year, with a brand score of 55.76, an own score of 61.69, an earn score of 44.74, and a sentiment score of 64%. Fans' interactions with Nong Noey often result in memes and videos widely discussed across all social media channels, enhancing Butterbear's online presence and keeping it constantly in the public eye. The real-time sharing of these experiences on platforms like TikTok and Instagram significantly enhances Butterbear's online presence and word-of-mouth marketing. Seeing Butterbear in person creates a deeper emotional connection with the brand, turning casual visitors into loyal fans. This strong emotional bond is evidenced by fans bringing personal gifts and sharing their heartfelt experiences online.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Butterbear's success in brand marketing is exemplified by its unwavering visibility, proactive fan engagement, distinct mannerisms, and strong identity. The mascot's consistent presence across various media platforms ensures ongoing visibility and interaction with its audience, thereby reinforcing brand loyalty and connection. With a charming smile that resonates across generations from Gen Z to Gen X, Butterbear has successfully endeared itself to a diverse fan base. The introduction of engaging merchandise further enhances Butterbear's appeal, meeting the demand for collectibles that embody its playful personality and warmth.

Butterbear's responsive fan service, characterized by interactive engagements and personalized interactions, fosters a supportive community that strengthens brand affinity. The mascot's success underscores its role in effective brand communication and community engagement. Through captivating storytelling, personalized fan interactions, and a robust visual presence on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, Butterbear has cultivated a dedicated following and bolstered brand loyalty among consumers. Its charming mannerisms, including signature dances and endearing traits, have become synonymous with joyful fan experiences.

The launch of singles and show performances indicates ongoing excitement and engagement, ensuring Butterbear's sustained relevance and anticipation in future endeavors. The mascot's expansive digital footprint, with active participation in open chats and a strong presence across multiple channels, highlights its adeptness in leveraging digital platforms to amplify brand presence and foster community interaction. This multi-channel approach not only broadens reach but also deepens fan engagement by offering diverse interaction and content consumption avenues. Butterbear's dessert and merchandise sales contribute significantly to its brand presence, extending beyond financial success. Products featuring Butterbear's likeness, such as plush toys, apparel, and

collectibles, not only generate revenue but also forge tangible connections with fans, deepening their emotional investment in the brand. The scarcity effect, evidenced by customers waiting for hours at EmSphere branches, enhances Butterbear's desirability and exclusivity.

In conclusion, Butterbear exemplifies a strategic blend of visibility, fan-centric engagement, distinctive mannerisms, and strong brand identity. By continuously evolving its narrative, effectively leveraging digital platforms, and expanding into merchandise, Butterbear not only maintains but strengthens its position as a cherished mascot. This dynamic approach drives enduring brand loyalty and community engagement, demonstrating Butterbear's pivotal role in contemporary marketing.

5.2 Limitations in the scope of study

The study's limitations include its potential failure to fully capture perspectives from non-consumers and diverse demographics, thereby restricting its generalizability. Competitive dynamics with other mascots or brands may not have been comprehensively analyzed, potentially overlooking crucial market insights. The time frame focused on the mascot's blooming phase may limit insights into long-term impacts and sustainability. Moreover, the lack of primary data, such as interviews with the CEO or founder of the brand, hinders a deeper understanding of how Butterbear's mascot was developed and its strategic evolution over time.

5.3 Recommendation

To enhance its market position and sustain growth, Butterbear should focus on several key areas. Firstly, enhancing its digital presence through more interactive content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram will maintain fan engagement. Secondly, expanding its product range beyond merchandise and desserts to include innovative and seasonal offerings will cater to diverse consumer preferences and boost revenue streams. Thirdly, fostering community engagement through fan clubs and interactive events will deepen emotional connections with fans and build a stronger community. Implementing sustainable practices in packaging and sourcing can enhance brand reputation

among environmentally conscious consumers. Keep presence online to consistent on visibility. Collabs with other brands which align your value which have mutual targeted audience

Moreover, Butterbear should strategize to penetrate new strategic locations outside Bangkok, such as Chiang Mai (CNX), Phuket, or other suitable destinations aligned with the target audience. This expansion will increase brand awareness and accessibility, capturing regional markets' interest and expanding its customer base. Improving queue management and service efficiency at physical locations will enhance overall customer experience. To maintain success, Butterbear should continue leveraging its charming personality across all marketing channels and uphold high standards in product quality and customer service. Innovation in marketing campaigns should remain a priority to resonate with target demographics and stay relevant in the digital age. These steps will help Butterbear strengthen its brand presence, foster customer loyalty, and achieve sustained growth in a competitive market.

For brands aspiring to achieve mascot success similar to Butterbear's, several key insights can be drawn from its strategic approach. Butterbear's success underscores the importance of defining brand identity and values. Understanding your brand's core mission and values is essential. Design a mascot that reflects these elements, ensuring it aligns both visually and personality-wise with the brand's core attributes. A memorable mascot with a distinctive backstory can become a powerful symbol, much like Butterbear's playful character has become beloved by its audience.

Effective use of digital platforms is also crucial. Engaging with audiences through social media and digital tools helps maintain visibility and build a vibrant online community, keeping fans connected and enthusiastic. Building a strong community through fan clubs and interactive events is key to fostering brand loyalty and deepening emotional connections. Such engagement transforms casual consumers into dedicated advocates. Lastly, continuous innovation is essential for brand success. Regularly updating marketing strategies and product offerings ensures the brand remains relevant and competitive.

In conclusion, Butterbear's strategies provide valuable lessons for other brands. By developing a memorable mascot, leveraging digital platforms, fostering community engagement, and innovating regularly, brands can enhance visibility, engagement, and growth, achieving sustained success in today's competitive market.

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