



INNOVATIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES IN DENTISTRY: THE POTENTIAL OF THE DOLL AS A BRAND IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

The creation of 3D-printed corporate mascots is a complex scientific and social process. It requires the use of 3D printing technologies, engineering, and design, while taking into account ethical, legal, and moral considerations. Creating a unique and personalized mascot allows for an emotional connection with patients. Mascots have the potential to have a significant impact on businesses, including dental clinics. In this sense, they help to create a strong and memorable brand identity. This potential represents an opportunity to use corporate mascots as a marketing element, especially on social media as a distinctive element from the competition.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, brand image is key to stand out from the competition in order to generate customer trust. A powerful way to achieve this is through the creation of a corporate mascot or mascot that supports the values and identity of the company (Prakoew et al., 2022). In the case of a dental clinic, the mascot needs to be friendly and sympathetic in order to reduce the anxiety and fear that a large number of people experience when visiting the dentist. These traits create a more pleasant and satisfying experience for patients. In addition, the added value is that the corporate mascot can be used in various marketing and advertising strategies in order to strengthen the presence of the dental clinic in the market.

In this sense, brand image is a fundamental factor for the success of dental clinics. For this reason, achieving a solid and coherent visual identity can help differentiate the company from the competition, generating trust in patients. Therefore, the product will always foster a loyal relationship with the brand. In this scenario, the creation of a mascot is a very effective strategy to transmit the company's personality, which as a climax will always pursue an emotional connection with the public. In the case of dental clinics, as mentioned above, this doll's mission is to reduce the anxiety and fear felt by people attending the dental office. That is to say, with a friendly and sympathetic corporate mascot, a more relaxed and welcoming atmosphere can be achieved in the clinic. This is especially helpful in terms of patient experience, which ultimately has an impact on patient loyalty to the dental practice. In addition, the corporate mascot will be used in various marketing and advertising strategies, such as social media, advertisements or promotional materials, to strengthen the clinic's presence in the market.

Now the process of selecting a corporate mascot for a dental practice will depend on a number of factors, such as the company's values and identity, the target audience or current trends in graphic design and branding. Some popular choices may be animals related to dental hygiene, such as toothbrushes or smiling teeth, or friendly and recognizable characters that can be easily associated with the brand.

In short, the creation of a corporate mascot can be a very useful tool to strengthen the brand image of a dental practice, with the aim of improving the patients' experience. The right choice of the corporate mascot will allow the effective use in marketing and advertising strategies, and can become a symbol recognized and loved by the public, which can translate into greater benefits for the dental clinic and a better positioning in the market.

There are many corporate and sports mascots around the world, each with its own history and legacy. Of these, only a few are famous and recognized worldwide. Such is their success that they have left their mark in the history of marketing and advertising. However, many other corporate and sports mascots have not achieved success and recognition, so it can be said that they have failed to connect with the public and enhance the brand image of the company or event.

Over time, mascots, as reported by Apostolopoulou et al. (2010), have been present alongside successful companies, as well as in sporting events. In this sense, these resources achieved an emotional connection with users, remaining several generations in the collective unconscious. Such is the validity of the connection that the public remembers transnationals, such as those that appeared in the Olympics, and that are witnesses of an unwavering loyalty.

According to Botella et al. (2002), one of the first global events after the fall of the Berlin Wall was the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Placing a city at the center of world expectations was a challenge. The organizers made the most of the commercial power of Freddy Mercury, as well as an impressive lighting of the Olympic cauldron. In sports, as reported by Wenner (1994), everyone remembers the performance of the greatest basketball team in history: the famous dream team.

However, Olivé et al. (2012), point out that another sign of success was their mascot. The mascot was named Cobi. As a representative of the Summer Olympic Games, held in Barcelona in 1992, it is considered one of the most successful and popular mascots in history. However, it is difficult to determine whether it is the most successful within the Olympics, as each edition of the Olympic Games has its own mascot and its own context.

Cobi's designer was the Catalan cartoonist Javier Mariscal. The mascot quickly became a symbol of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. The friendly and colorful design, inspired by the Catalan shepherd dog, was very well received by the public and became an iconic element of the image of these Olympics.

In addition, Cobi was used in various marketing and advertising strategies, such as in the sale of official merchandising, in the promotion of sporting events or in the dissemination of Olympic values. It was also used in various educational and social campaigns, such as in the promotion of sports among children or in the fight against doping.

To be sure, it is difficult to determine if Cobi is the most successful mascot in the history of the Olympics, however, it is certain that he had a great impact on the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, to the point that he became the iconic symbol of the image of the Games.

According to Wattanacharoensil et al. (2021), corporate mascots are characters or representations of animals or objects that identify a company or brand in its advertising and promotional campaigns. In this context, Xu and Yan (2023) state that the mission of corporate mascots is to create a distinctive and memorable image of the company in order to establish an emotional connection with customers and the general public. Evidently, it coincides with Harun et al. (2017), in that this type of mascots need time to be able to develop and bond with the market.

However, according to Su and Li (2023), there are disparate fates for corporate mascots to such an extent that some enjoy high success, while others are part of banishment or disdain. Within this dichotomy are a wide range of examples. Mickey Mouse is a representative case of success for the Disney company, to such an extent that he has appeared in numerous films, video games, television series and products. Ronald McDonald, a human character based on a friendly and colorful image, is the most recognized mascot in the fast food world. Tony the Tiger, an anthropomorphic tiger, is the main character in advertising and promotional campaigns for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes cereal. Michelin Man is also an anthropomorphic doll representing the Michelin tire company. The world of television, among many others, has Pikachu, who, in addition to being the centerpiece of the Pokémon franchise, is one of the most recognized icons of Japanese pop culture.

Just as some mascots are part of the business and marketing success, many others were a resounding failure. After Cobi's huge fame, his successor Izzy at the Atlanta 96 Olympics could not carry on the legacy because of the unattractive design and not at all related to the culture and history of the host city. In the same line of the Olympic Games, Tefi, the mascot of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, was also unsuccessful, due to an unattractive design that was far removed from Greek culture and history. The Noid, the mascot of the Domino's pizza chain, was associated with the term paranoia, and had to be withdrawn. We must also mention Spud MacKenzie, who as the mascot of Bud Light beer had to be withdrawn due to the controversy of promoting excessive alcohol consumption. In this sense, what is stated by Ahmad & Thyaga (2017) is affirmed, who refer that the success or failure of a mascot to connect with the public is the design and the appropriate choice of the corporate or sports mascot.

Designing a corporate mascot for a dental practice is a complex process that requires careful planning and execution. It starts with the definition of the objectives and values of the clinic in order to be clear about what you want to convey. Then you have to investigate the target audience, to know who the mascot is aimed at, in order to achieve the connection in terms of tastes, preferences and needs.

The next step to achieve, according to Cham et al. (2022), is to get a solid concrete to guide the mascot design process. The solid concept must be clear, coherent and easily identifiable by the target audience. It also has to represent the personality of the dental clinic so that it can convey the values through appearance and behavior. In this way Esmaeilpour and Nashtae (2020), consider it flexible enough to adapt to different marketing and advertising strategies.

In this way, the dental clinic coinciding with what Bennett and Thompson (2016) manifest, when they wish to create a corporate mascot, either through an anthropomorphic character or a sympathetic animal, the solid concept that it handles has to be that of "friendly" and "reliable", so that it can offer help to patients in terms of dental treatment.

In order to design the appropriate mascot, Ko et al. (2022) argue that it is necessary to work with professional and experienced designers, so that they can translate the concept into an attractive and effective design. Once the initial design is achieved, following Palladino et al. (2022), proceed to evaluate and adjust the design according to the needs and expectations of the target audience and the dental clinic.

According to Wan and Chen (2023), once the mascot is created, the mascot has to be used effectively to strengthen the dental practice's presence in the market and connect with the target audience, as well as enhance the brand image of the practice.

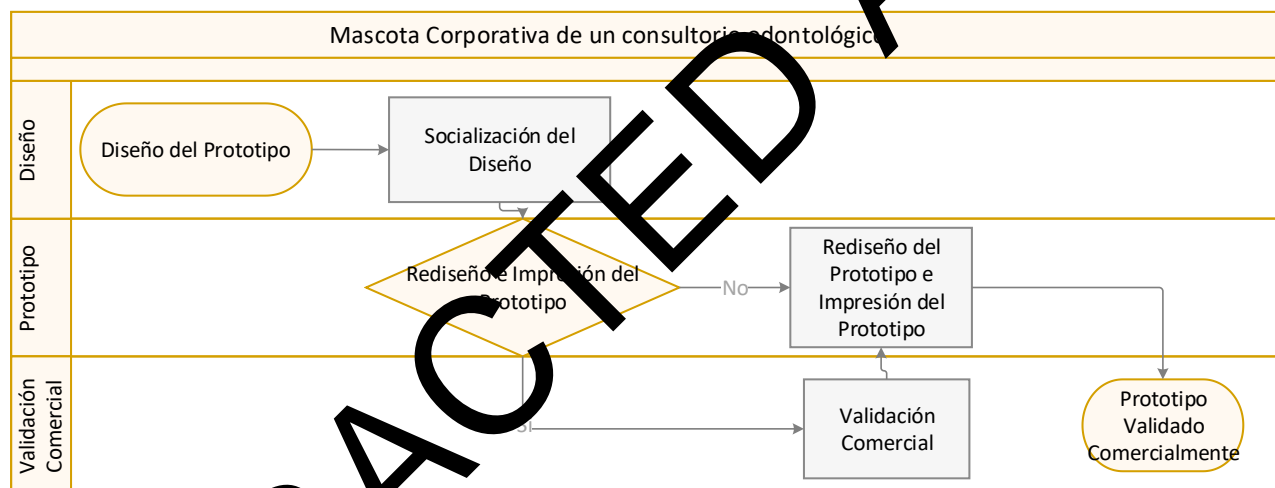
2. Methodology

The methodology consisted of designing and prototyping the corporate mascot and then submitting it to the dental office's target public through market research (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012). This involved conducting surveys to obtain information considering the target audience, consumer habits, interests and needs. The procedure consisted of defining the objective of the research in order to know the acceptance of a corporate mascot design. Then we proceeded to the selection of the population served during the month of June 2023, at the Perfect Smile Dental Center in the city of Chaparral, in order to obtain reliable results. The questionnaire was then designed to collect the necessary information. The questionnaire had the characteristics of being clear, concise and easy to understand for the respondents. Subsequently, the data were collected by applying the survey. Finally, data analysis was carried out to study product positioning (Aaker and Shansby, 1982).

The study was quantitative in orientation, which conformed to the quantitative, descriptive, observational, prospective, cross-sectional and analytical approach.

The outline of the study design to obtain the prototype of the corporate mascot was as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Design and Prototyping of the corporate mascot.



Source: Farje et al., 2023

To characterize the corporate mascot, we proceeded to design the mascot, defining the elements that would allow it to be identified with the dental office, considering the anthropomorphic characteristics, to then make designs with pencil and paper, in order to later digitize the design and carry out the 3D printing. The prototype was then presented to the members of the Dental Center for redesigning and finally 3D printing, which resulted in the final prototype, achieving a symbolism with respect to the dental office (Golossenko et al., 2020).

The prototype is currently in the stage of intellectual protection under the industrial design modality, whose process is being carried out at the offices of the National Institute for the Defense of Competition and Protection of Intellectual Property (INDECOPI). The industrial design has the assignment of the file of the National Direction of Inventions and New Technologies (DIN): 1997-2023/DIN. The prototype is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. Final Prototype.



Source: Farje et al, 2023

The data collection instruments were applied to the population under study, who were patients attending the Perfect Smile Dental Center in the city of Chachapoyas, as shown in Table 1.

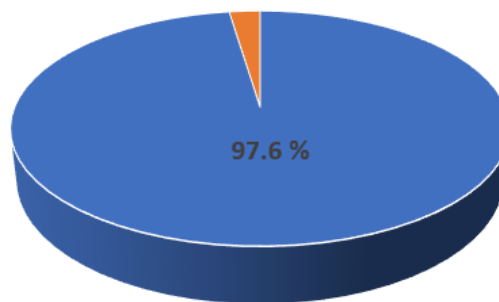
Table 1. Study Population June 2023

	Fi	%	total
Male	300	71.4	300
Female	120	28.6	120
Total	420	100	420

Source: Farje et al, 2023.

The study population was asked whether the corporate mascot has unique and innovative characteristics in order to obtain their opinion on the potential for the mascot to be a popular character. An overwhelmingly positive response was obtained in this regard, as evidenced in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Mascot potentiality.



Source: Farje et al, 2023.

Likewise, when asked about payment, the majority of the population chose the cost of 50 soles, with the possibility of having the choice between a luxe version and a basic version, to be purchased in the same dental office after dental care; and likewise, with regard to social networks, to use marketing, the population under study chose the social network Instagram as the most important to use, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Population preferences

	Price	In-office purchase		Luxe and Basic versions		Use of social networks	
50 soles	54.8%	Yes	96.4	Yes	100.0	Instagram	35.7%
75 soles	23.8 %	No	2.4	No	0.0	Facebook	33.8 %
100 soles	19.0 %					Tik Tok	26.2 %
More than 100 soles	2.4 %					Other	4.8 %

Source: Farje et al, 2023.

3 .Results

The creation of a corporate mascot can be a very effective strategy to enhance the brand image of a dental practice and strengthen its presence in the market. However, as stated by Ilicic & Brennan (2023), the exact influence of a mascot on the success of the clinic depends on several factors, such as the appropriate choice of the mascot, its effective use in marketing and advertising strategies, and the patients' perception of the brand, in order to achieve brand positioning (Kim et al., 2011).

First of all, the right choice of mascot is critical to have a positive impact on the clinic's image. A mascot that is cute, friendly and easily recognizable can help create an emotional connection with patients and foster their loyalty to the brand. On the other hand, as evidenced by Eyni et al. (2023), a mascot that is not appropriate for the clinic's identity or that is not attractive to the target audience can have the opposite effect, generating indifference or even rejection of the brand.

In addition, it is important to use the corporate mascot effectively in marketing and advertising strategies. A well-designed mascot can be used in various promotional materials, depending on the market segment, such as brochures, posters or advertisements, to strengthen the clinic's presence in the market and attract new patients (Morden, 1987). In this line, it is necessary to accept the statement of Adeline et al. (2023), who narrates the importance of social networks in cell phones, in addition to the fact that it can also be used in social networks and on the clinic's website to create a closer and more human image of the brand.

Finally, it is necessary to include the contributions of Bottini et al. (2018), on the perception that patients have of the brand, and that this can be determinant in the success of the clinic. A corporate mascot can help improve this perception, if it is seen as a positive and differentiating element of the clinic. However, following Lund and Smit (2015), if patients perceive the mascot as a superficial or unnecessary element, its impact on the clinic's success may be limited.

The influence of a corporate mascot on the success of a dental practice depends on several factors, such as the right choice of mascot, its effective use in marketing and advertising strategies, and the patients' perception of the brand. If used properly, corporate mascots can be a very useful tool to enhance brand image and foster loyalty to the practice, achieving brand personality with a corporate mascot.

4. Conclusions

Achieving the corporate mascot called dental doll was a process that required the combination of knowledge and skills from different professions. The idea of the doll was a long and creative process, which required imagination and critical thinking. The other stages involved creating plans and drawings to obtain the design, to later obtain the prototype which, after being presented to the audience, obtained an acceptance that was gratifying for the research group, since the potential of the dental doll as a brand image was demonstrated.

The dental doll as a corporate mascot can be used as a brand image and the potential of the doll is that it helps to improve the image of the dental clinic, since it allows to connect with patients in a more personal and emotional way. It should be noted that by generating empathy and trust among patients, it can be used to support social causes and promote corporate social responsibility, as well as being perceived as friendly, accessible and human, it can also be used for customer service or patient education.

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