

“Miraculous Formula”: Revealing Deep-Seated Feelings of Vulnerable Consumers Raised By Infant Formula Commercials¹



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Abstract

The objective of the study is to unveil how infant formula ads affect and are perceived by vulnerable consumers on infant feeding. Three consecutive studies employing semiotics, ideological criticism, content analysis and semi-structured interviews were employed to analyze the ads and the perception of mothers as consumers vulnerable to subliminal messages of the ads. The findings revealed

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that education affects the perceptions and behaviors of mothers (high versus low education). Interestingly, income has a substitutional effect for education as mothers with low education but mid-level income display similar attitudes to mothers with high education and mid-level income. The study reveals the negative effect of the unethical conduct of advertising on mothers with low education and low income levels as a vulnerable consumer group.

Keywords: Advertising Ethics, Vulnerable Consumers, Infant Formula, TV Commercials.

"Mucizevi Formül": Hassas Tüketicilerin Bebek Maması Reklamları Tarafından Uyarılan Derin Duyguları

Özet

Çalışmanın amacı bebek maması reklamlarının, duyarlı tüketicilerden olan anneleri bebek beslenmesi konusunda nasıl etkilediğini ve anneler tarafından bu reklamların nasıl algılandığını açığa çıkarmaktır. Semiyotik, ideolojik eleştiri, içerik analizi ve mülakatlardan oluşan üç ardışık çalışma ile ele alınan reklamlar incelenmiş ve reklamların bilinçaltı mesajlarına duyarlı tüketici grubu olan anneler üzerindeki etkileri araştırılmıştır. Bulgular, eğitim seviyesine (yüksek ve düşük) bağlı olarak annelerin algılarının ve davranışlarının etkilendiğini göstermiş; sonrasında gelir düzeyi bazında yapılan karşılaştırma gelirin, düşük eğitim seviyesine sahip annelerde eğitim düzeyi farklılığını telafi edici bir etki yarattığını ortaya koymuştur. Çalışma bulguları, reklamlarda etik dışı öğelerin, eğitim ve gelir seviyesi düşük olan tüketiciler üzerinde olumsuz etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Reklam Etiği, Hassas Tüketiciler, Bebek Maması, TV Reklamları

Introduction

Advertising is one of the major tools used by marketers to create a predetermined product image and to positively affect the attitudes of

consumers. Firms trigger this process by activating the personal values of the audience. Being a part of consumption culture, advertising industry tries to create the ideal consumer by dictating the “ideal self” through the images painted by the ads. These ideals presented can be either in the form of beauty, love or friendship, or codes of conduct regarding family or business interactions. Through using such non-market goods, the ads tempt the audience in using the products presented, which promise an ideal life and the appeals make the audience to try to identify themselves with the characters presented.

Debate surrounding the conducts of advertising has been centered on the question of its morality. Whereas some researchers defend advertising with such assertions as not advertising but capitalism in fact is the underlying cause of several social problems (Phillips, 1997), some others criticize it for the “violation of human autonomy and a manipulation and control of consumer behavior” (Arrington, 1982). The ongoing debate of whether advertising is providing information, or creating desire has led to the discussion of advertising ethics which is defined as “what is right or good in the conduct of the advertising function. It is concerned with questions of what ought to be done, not just with what legally must be done” (Cunningham, 1999: pp. 500).

Modern day consumer culture, which could be defined as “image culture”, takes “we have to buy in order to become” (Waide, 1987) as its motto. Quoting T.S. Eliot’s expression that “human kind cannot bear very much reality”, Levitt (1970) argues that the persuasive appeals and idealized imagery lead to the desire of the “promises” portrayed in the ads. In the uneven match between consumer and producer, advertising plays the role of shaping personal values by using the sensitivity of the consumers.

Advertising industry is an inseparable part of daily life with the symbolic values that it carries, such as prestige, being different, being member of a group, upgrading to a higher level in society, etc. By highlighting its promising messages, the product advertised generally fades out in the background. Within this context, consumption is discussed

with its cultural dimensions under the effect of postmodernism. In other words, what is consumed is not only the things, but also the symbols and images (Aydin et al., 2015: pp.24). With this approach, the consumption experience goes beyond just meeting a vital need and is associated with social status.

This molding process is especially influential with vulnerable consumers who “are capable of readily or quickly suffering detriment in the process of consumption” due to some marketing or personal factors (Consumer Affairs, 2004). The people in this group are more “defenseless” against the attacks of the modern world through various media tools. Having inadequate or poor access to information, vulnerable consumers are generally subject to detriment in the consumption process. The meanings ascribed to the products advertised affect them negatively through the messages delivering the idea of “ideal” mother, person, lover, friend, etc. which they could never realize. Coveting these pictures drawn, the consumers feel that they have to use the products advertised to be like the “ideals”.

On these grounds, this study aims at revealing the effects of TV commercials on mothers – a vulnerable consumer group – on their infant-feeding practices and how they perceive these ads. We hypothesized that infant formula ads broadcast on TV would differently affect mothers according to their education levels, where mothers with low education levels are anticipated to be more susceptible to advertising strategies. The ideal selves displayed in the ads would result in perception of the product as a tool of achieving that ideal life. Therefore, we considered that especially mothers with low education levels would suffer from not achieving those idealized forms, both for themselves and for their babies. Through analysis of the ads with different methods and interviews with mothers of both high and low education levels, the study aims at analyzing the ethical aspects of formula ads and understanding how these ads are perceived by their audience and affect them.

Theoretical Background

The effect of advertising on society has been a topic of interest for marketers since mid-20th century (Drumwright and Murphy, 2009). Scholars agree on the perception that this topic should be thoroughly researched and perceptions of the public regarding the advertising should be monitored (Kopf, Torres and Enomoto, 2011). Various studies have tried to understand the role of advertising in society (e.g.: Holbrook, 1987; Richins, 1991; Pollay and Mittal, 1993; Gulas and McKeage, 2000; Fry and Polonsky, 2004). In most of these studies, advertising has been criticized in terms of the societal problems it causes. A review of scholars' views reveals that they consider advertising as a phenomenon "reinforcing materialism, cynicism, irrationality, selfishness, anxiety, social competitiveness, sexual preoccupation, powerlessness and/or a loss of self-respect" (Pollay, 1986). Therefore, we considered crucial to understand the ethical issues related to the effect of advertising on society.

As Farmer notes "any discipline that is partially involved in behavior modification and change is likely to be criticized constantly for its ethical posture" (1987). Advertising is among these disciplines and most authors agree on the perception that ethics in advertising is a topic which is far from exhaustion (Hyman, Tansey and Clark, 1994; Zinkhan, 1994). Defined by Cunningham (1999) as "what is right or good in the conduct of advertising function", ethics is a mainstream topic in the advertising literature (Drumwright and Murphy, 2004). However, the pervasive character of advertising necessitates its ethicality to be understood, considering its role both towards society and towards the consumers as human beings who are strongly influenced from the persuasive content of advertising. Under this influence, consumers decode the messages conveyed in the advertisements, but mostly, they process the meaning rather than the information (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Through this process, consumers capture the idealized images presented by the ads and compare themselves with these ads. This comparison leads them consuming more, which result in more identification with the ideal images presented. Being engaged in this cycle, consumers continually strive

to reach that image which they could never turn into. Being accused of causing people to interpret various values in terms of material possessions, “it encourages people to jump to conclusions through association and identification rather than through reflection” (MacBride, 1980). De-nounced for hindering the autonomy of consumers (Crisp, 1987; Cunningham, 2003; Sneddon, 2001), advertising has shaped the “consumers” of the modern world by instilling the “must-be” values. This effect permeates in every product category from cosmetics, to technology, or to household goods. As Richins (1991, pp.71) mentions, “... consumers are left with haunting images of perfection and wealth and the increasingly desperate realization that they will never achieve the idealized state depicted in advertising”.

Thus, it is possible to state that consumers are more focused on symbolic meanings attained via advertisements and brands. Consumption experience is evaluated from both cultural and social perspectives and consumption of desire-inducing marketing symbols has become crucial as it is an important construct providing space for consumers where they can build “a sense of self and what is important in life” (Kozinets, 2001). Consumer culture theory (CCT), which is referred as an umbrella for the perspectives guiding consumer researchers that deal with the dynamic relationship between consumers, markets and cultural meanings, explores the way consumers perceive the symbolic meanings embedded in advertisements, brands, or goods (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and construct individual identities for themselves (Belk, 1988). “CCT research has framed and revitalized core analytic constructs, such as brand loyalty, consumer lifestyles, retail experiences, advertising information processing, consumer satisfaction, and consumer involvement” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: pp. 876-877).

CCT is divided into four research domains by Arnould and Thompson (2005) where mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies constitute the stream of studies guided by critical and media theories besides consumer research theories. In the studies within this domain, consumers are perceived as agents who interpret the

life-style ideals presented in the ads (Okazaki, Mueller and Taylor, 2010). Advertising acts as the bridge transferring meaning from the culturally constituted world to the individual consumer through consumer goods (McCracken, 1986) and it influences consumers toward identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). “Studies operating in this research domain frequently draw from semiotic and literary critical theories to analyze the symbolic meanings, cultural ideas, and ideological inducements encoded in popular culture texts and the rhetorical tactics that are used to make these ideological appeals compelling” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 875). Consumer culture theorists consider popular culture texts as communicating certain ideologies and consumer types (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2011; Taylor and Okazaki, 2015) where “by decoding and deconstructing these mass-mediated marketplace ideologies, consumer culture theorists reveal the ways in which capitalist cultural production systems invite consumers to covet certain identity and lifestyle ideals” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 875). Within CCT, moral side of consumption is an interesting aspect to be understood where commercialization of ideal lives poses certain dilemmas and threats for consumers (Borgmann, 2000).

These dilemmas and threats would be more effective for some consumer groups. It is possible that consumers who were referred previously as vulnerable consumers would be influenced more from the idealized lives in the ads. An important consumer group and product category affected from the manipulative content of advertising is the mothers and their attitudes towards infant-feeding. The gold standard in the nutrition of babies is breast-feeding, and this is especially important for the first six months. However, with the introduction of infant formula first by Justus von Liebig in 1864, the feeding trends have begun to be reversed. His production of the formula as a substitute for breast –milk has been followed by other manufacturers such as James Horlick and Henri Nestle. Various factors have played a role in the adoption of the formula, such as the emergence of pediatrics as medical specialty, manufacture of new rubber nipples, changing role and image of women, etc. This emerging

industry has initiated promotion efforts to formulate breast-feeding and bottle-feeding images among women. Thus, symbolic identity became the determining factor of baby-feeding method which has turned into a “socio-cultural dilemma” (Nadesan and Sotirin, 1998, pp. 218 referenced in Hyderkhan-Broussard, 2005). Breastfeeding is on the one hand, the natural ‘power’ of women and on the other hand, it is the enslaving factor which keeps women lagging behind men in professional life.

Formula ads benefitted also from the strong emphasis on modern women through all media tools, emphasizing the challenges of breast-feeding and the conveniences that bottle-feeding provides. It is maintained that there is a strong connection between infant feeding practices and advertising activities of the infant-formula manufacturers (Apple, 1986). Highlighting the non-market goods in the ads such as love for one’s child, formula advertisements leave an imprint in the hearts of the mothers with a desire to consume the product in order to be “modern”. The mothers ascribe certain meanings to its consumption and they believe that the product would take them to the modern world and make a member of it. This would result in the feeling that they have done the right thing both for themselves and for their babies.

The current study inquires the effects of ads on the society and is grounded on the assumptions that the connotative meanings ascribed to the products advertised affect vulnerable consumers. With this purpose, we conducted three consecutive studies using different qualitative methods under the framework of a phenomenological design with a triangulation approach, which enables measuring the phenomenon from different perspectives.

First study analyzes the advertisements chosen for the research by using three different methods; namely semiotics, ideological criticism and content analysis. The findings of these methods are expected to provide an understanding of the encoded messages in the ads. With these findings in hand, the second study aims at revealing the perceptions of consumers and whether they perceive the messages of the ads in the same way as the authors have found in Study 1. In order to study this phenom-

enon, target audience of infant-formula ads was chosen as the sample for the study and two groups of mothers were interviewed. It was assumed that education levels of mothers would result in differences in the effect of ads on mothers and thus, the two groups were established accordingly. Insights from the interviews with mothers of low and high education levels provided interesting results. A participant in low-education group differed from other participants in terms of her income and her answers for interview questions were similar to that of mothers with high-education levels. This finding led us to another research, where mothers have low education but mid- or high-income levels. Thus, the third study provides a consequent improvement over the findings of Study 2 by using the same method for another sample of mothers to compare the findings.

For the validity and reliability of the research, enough time was spent with mothers in their houses and clinics to ensure their feeling comfortable with the researchers and to be able to understand their inner feelings on the issue. For the principle of multiplicity and triangulation in data sources and sample, semi-structured interviews were conducted with pediatricians, nutrition experts and nurses in addition to mothers besides analysis of ads with semiotics, ideological criticism and content analysis. And for the multiplicity and triangulation principle in data analysis, more than one researchers analyzed the semiotic, ideological and content analysis of the ads and phenomenological analysis of the interviews made with mothers (Ger, 2009).

Study 1

Sample

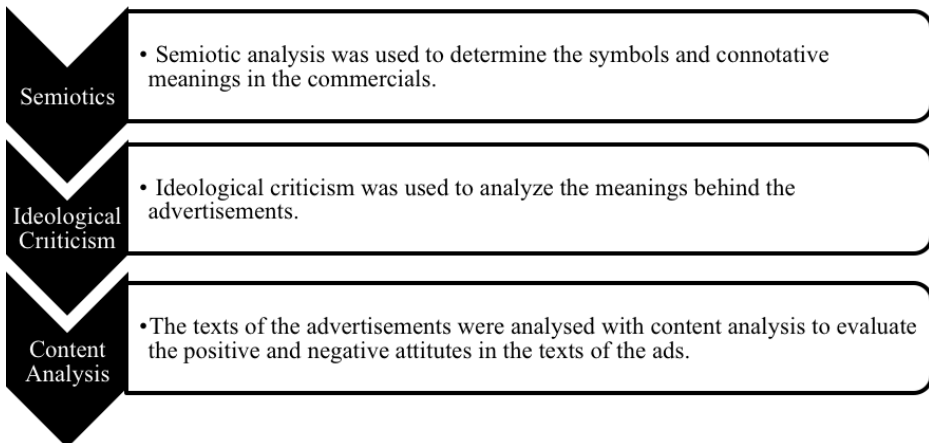
The objective of Study 1 is to understand the ethical considerations in marketing communications of infant formulas, and TV commercials of those formulas were selected as the unit of analysis. In the similar studies conducted before (Kelly, 1979; Easterling, Kenworthy and Nemzoff, 1996; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999), newspaper and magazine advertisements were mostly preferred. Yet, in this study we chose TV

commercials as the focal point as the time spent in watching TV is 3.5 hours daily on average, and this rate increases to 3.8 hours for women (RTSC, 2012), which is considered as a really high rate. In choosing the unit of analysis, we selected two brands, Milupa-Aptamil and Bebelac, as they were the brands whose commercials were being broadcast on TV in the study period.

Procedure

We conducted the first study in three phases (Figure 1) each of which answers one of the hypothesis proposed by the study, which can be listed as revealing the meanings that are transferred to the audience through symbols and connotative meanings, disclosing the ideological messages in the background and analyzing the texts of the ads to evaluate the positive and negative attitudes embedded in the ads. In evaluating the advertisements which could have a normative effect on breastfeeding and infant formula attitudes of the mothers, we used semiotics, ideological criticism and content analysis.

Figure 1. Analysis Used in Study 1



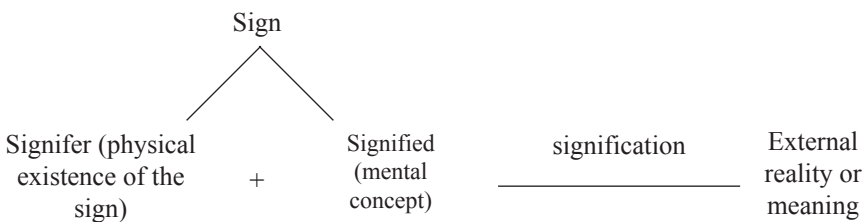
Methodology

Semiotics

Semiotics – the science of signs – has its roots back in the pre-Socratic era “where Hippocrates identified bodily manifested symptoms (signs) as conveyors of messages about physical and mental states” (Mick, 1986, pp. 197). It examines the way people perceive products of the surrounding culture in which they live (Tsotra, Janson and Cecez-Kezmanovic, 2004) and thus, it takes culture as the object of study (Lawes, 2002). As “we have come to recognize the connection between all of the systems by means of which we communicate”, signs become the main items in our lives and we give meaning to all signs in our daily interactions (Morgan and Welton, 1992). The analysis has a different approach from traditional qualitative research methods by taking an *outside-in* perspective (Lawes, 2002). Semiotics gained its independence in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, representing the two main paradigms of structuralism and pragmatism, respectively.

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure defined semiology – he named the science so and the Europeans followed in his tradition – as “show[ing] what constitutes signs, what laws govern them” (Bally and Sechehaye, 1959). Saussure divides signs into signifiers and signifieds, where each one represents sound-image and concept, respectively. And the relationship between them depends on the context, therefore the meaning ascribed to the signs can be different for different people. The relationship between signifier and signifieds in terms of meaning and its elements are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Saussure’s Elements of Meaning



Source: Fiske 1990, p.44.

Besides Saussure and Peirce whose models are the foundation of modern semiotic thought, there are many other semiotic theorists studying the topic, like Charles Williams Morris, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco. These semioticians provided new insights into the semiotic theory of Saussure and Peirce. Semiotics can be used in many meaning-conveying tools in addition to texts like print advertisements, television and radio commercials, photographs, films, etc.

The commercials selected for the study are two infant formula brands, Milupa-Aptamil and Bebelac. We analyzed them in order to bring the connotative meanings to the foreground, using Saussure’s tradition. For this purpose, we divided both commercials into three sections.

The first section of Milupa-Aptamil commercial displays a mother breastfeeding her baby at home. In the second part, the same mother is feeding the baby with infant formula again at home. The final section displays the exposure of the baby to the microbial danger of a stranger who caresses the baby right after sneezing (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Milupa-Aptamil Commercial



(Statement on the ad: “Feed your baby only with breast milk in the first six months)

In the second commercial, the Bebelac brand, the first section displays a baby asking for food from his mother. In the second part, the mother brings cow’s milk that is enough to meet the daily Vitamin-E need of the baby (27 liters). And in the third part, the mother brings the infant formula that meets the daily need of the baby as before but this

time much less in a feeding bottle (Figure 4). We analyzed all the scenes in both ads with the sign, signifier and signified concepts of Saussure. The findings for each commercial are displayed separately in Table 1 and Table 2.

Figure 4. Bebelac Commercial



The signifiers that were analyzed from different perspectives have various connotative meanings. For example, the women in the ads are mothers as signs; and they symbolize protection, love and feeding as signified. The colors used not only represent the concepts allied with them but also refer to the colors of the brands.

In the first commercial (Milupa-Aptamil), the signifiers that specially attract attention are the shape formed by the mother and the baby; and the prevailing colors in the advertisement. In the first section where the mother breastfeeds her baby and protects him by hugging, they are surrounded by the blue eclipse, which also refers to the colors of the brand. In the next part, the mother is feeding her baby with infant formula but this time her arms are loose and the same blue eclipse is protecting the baby which shows that the mother is not in control as before and the formula is more effective. In the final section, the mother is comfortable again thanks to the protection of the infant formula. When the colors used throughout the advertisement are considered, it is seen that in the first two scenes, white, beige and blue are dominant colors representing purity, cleanliness, attachment and also referring to the colors of the brand. In the last seen, the mixed colors and especially the red car passing in front of the baby represent danger. But, the blue eclipse again sur-

rounding the baby emphasizes that the baby is protected from all dangers as he is fed with infant formula. When the oral and written texts of the advertisement are considered, the formula is emphasized to be equivalent to breast-milk.

The most attractive signs of the second advertisement (Bebelac) are feeding bottle and laughing of the baby. In the second scene, the mother carries a very big feeding bottle with 27 liters of cow milk and in the third scene, the same bottle becomes smaller with infant formula in it. In addition, the laughing of the baby, where he feels frightened upon seeing the big feeding bottle and then giving a relieved laugh upon seeing the feeding bottle filled with the infant formula, is easily-remembered. This baby, compared to the baby in the other ad, is more like a “consumer” asking for food. Presentation of too much information via numerous written and verbal messages is another point attracting attention. It is possible to say that these messages create sort of an “information bombardment effect”. The advertisement says through written and verbal messages that cow’s milk cannot be used in sufficient amounts in infant feeding. Therefore, the ad emphasizes, the equivalent of this much milk could only be infant formula, and the mothers should feed their babies with it.

Ideological Criticism

We analyzed the signs that are revealed with the semiotic analysis and their meanings in detail with ideological criticism. According to Marx, on whose ideas this approach is established, advertising has the power to exert and impose the life-style and culture of the system holding power. The primary goal of the ideological criticism is to discover and make visible the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and the ideologies that are being muted in it (Foss, 2004).

One of the tools used in this process is advertising. According to Marx, advertisement imposes life-style and culture of the ruling class to the other cultures. “Advertising takes advantage of the desire we have for a better life for ourselves and our loved ones and uses our envy of oth-

ers and of ourselves—as we might be if we purchase the right things—against us”. “What advertising does, among other things, is manufacture desire and shape it, and thus create people who are insatiable and who have been conditioned to continually lust for more things” (Berger, 2007:43-44). With the consumption phenomenon encouraged in the period of ideological view, modernity and youth which are associated with western cultures became the most important features. And advertisements foster this process by spreading these features. Besides, modernity and being young also became important features. Through this process, the advertisements played a critical role in shaping “consumers”.

When we evaluate findings of the ideological criticism, it is possible to say that the house in the first advertisement (Milupa-Aptamil) is reminiscent of a modern house. The elegant furniture is of high quality. Moreover, the feeding bottle used by the mother is the most expensive brand and it could be easily noticed by the mothers. In addition, audience can see the diamond ring that the mother wears while holding her baby which is a sign of modern, rich women. The connotations of being a modern mother loving her baby could be associated with living in such a house, using that feeding bottle, having that ring and surely using that formula which could induce the audience of this ad to consume those products. Throughout the advertisement, the fact which is emphasized most is that a mother who loves and protects her baby and who at the same time wants to be rich, modern and beautiful should feed her baby with this formula. And after this, she could reflect this standard. Moreover, the statement “*is good for champions*” in the final scene is promoting the competitive nature of the modern world and inducing the parents to train their children according to the new rules. They have to be champions, or else they could not be anything.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Milupa-Aptamil TV Commercial

	Part 1 (breastfeeding at home)		Part 2 (feeding with infant formula at home)		Part 3 (danger in the street)	
	Sign	Signifier	Signified	Signifier	Signified	Signifier
Characters	Woman	A caring mother	Protection, love, feeding	Woman	A caring mother	Protection, love, feeding
	Baby	Defenseless baby	Needing care, passive object	Baby	Defenseless baby	Needing care, passive object
Objects	X	X	X	Feeding tool	Feeding bottle	Emphasis to product and brands
Setting	Home	Living room	Safety	Home	Living room	Safety
Colors	Color	White	Cleanliness, innocence, submission, attachment	Color	White	Cleanliness, innocence, submission, attachment
	Color	Blue	Peace, tranquility, Reference to the brand	Color	Blue	Peace, tranquility, Reference to the brand
	Color	Beige	Stillness, neatness, relaxation, tranquility	Color	Beige	Stillness, neatness, relaxation, tranquility
Sounds / Music	Music	Soft rhythm	Stiffness, tranquility	Music	Soft rhythm	Stiffness, tranquility
Visual structure	Form	Eclipse	Mother's surrounding and protecting arm	Form	Arm a little looser	Less protection of the mother, the formula is effective
Perspective	Woman	Eye level	Equality	Eye level	Equality	Equality
	Frontal	Frontal	Closeness	Frontal	Frontal	Closeness
Baby	X	X	X	Eye level	Eye level	Equality
	X	X	X	Side face	Side face	Disconnection
2nd woman	X	X	X	X	X	Power over the audience
	X	X	X	X	X	Closeness
Text	Feed your baby with breast-milk only in the first 6 months	Written centered on the bottom of the screen	Informative	Later, aptamil with immunofortis further supports the improvement of your baby's immune system	Oral statement	Emphasizes that the product maintains the function of the breast-milk, therefore can substitute it
	Breast-milk supports the immune system of your baby, protects it against diseases	Oral statement	Informative	Improved probiotic fiber mix	In the middle of the image	Terminology that the audience is not acquainted with, emphasizes being scientific
				With Aptamil, your baby has immunity.	Oral statement	Emphasizes that it improves the immunity of the baby like breast-milk
				Is good for champions	In the right bottom of the scene	The modern world conditions, competing babies, emphasizes that this brand makes you win.

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of Bebelac TV Commercial

	Part 1 (asking food from mother)		Part 2 (mother bringing cow's milk)		Part 3 (mother bringing formula)	
	Sign	Signifier	Signified	Sign	Signifier	Signified
Characters	Baby	Happy baby	Woman Baby	Happy mother Happy baby	Woman Baby	Happy mother Happy baby
Objects	X	X	Feeding tool	Big feeding bottle	Feeding tool	Normal size feeding bottle
Setting	Home	Living room	Home	Living room	Home	Living room
		Safety	Home	Open kitchen	Home	Open kitchen
Colors	Color	Orange	Color	Orange	Color	Orange
	Color	Beige	Color	Beige	Color	Beige
Sounds / Music	Effect	Click	Effect	Baby's laugh	Effect	Hummhum
					Effect	Click
Perspective	X	X	Frontal		Eye level	Equality
Woman	X	X	Low angle		Frontal + Profile	Closeness + disconnection
Baby	Eye level	Equality	Eye level		Eye level	Equality
	Frontal	Closeness	Frontal		Frontal	Closeness
Text	How many liters of cow's milk are you supposed to give your baby before one-year old for its iron need?	Questioning the knowledge of the consumer on feeding babies.	Exactly 27 liters	Oral statement	As Bebelac is developed taking breast-milk as reference, it will meet the basic nutritional needs of your baby completely and helps its healthy development.	Oral statement
	Before 1 year-old daily iron + Vitamin E = ?	Supports the oral statement. Makes this the most important point in feeding babies, questions the knowledge of the mothers, captures attention	It cannot drink this much milk everyday?	Oral statement	Reference is breast-milk + basic nutrients	On the left of the screen, words pour into the formula box.
			Consult your doctor for your baby's iron requirement	At the bottom of the screen	Happy baby line	On the right-bottom of the screen
			Moreover, the experts do not advice giving cow's milk before one-year old	Oral statement	Moreover, 250 oz is \$4.6.	Oral statement
			Moreover, the experts do not advice giving cow's milk before one-year old	In the middle of the screen, on the feeding bottle		Emphasizing the price of the product, encouraging consumption

The second advertisement (Bebelac) analyzed in the study also encourages such a modern and luxurious life. The house in the ad has American-style kitchen, which is generally the type of kitchen in high-standard houses in the country where the commercial is broadcasted and it is luxuriously equipped when again compared with the standards of the country (e.g. equipped with a French-door-style fridge freezer). The mother is young, thin and beautiful which is also the ideal woman image imposed through various media tools. The feeding chair on which the baby is sitting is a luxury for many parents. Moreover, despite the emphasis on the price at the end of the ad, the luxury of the house could induce the audience to live such a high-class life. All the items displayed in the ad are giving sub-messages of modernity, luxury, love and therefore impose consuming more to be like the “model” presented.

Content Analysis (Evaluative Assertion Analysis)

The third analysis we applied to the infant formula commercials was content analysis which was defined by Wright (1986) as “a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain predetermined categories” (Berger, 2000). Content analysis searches for certain words or concepts in a text in a systematic and objective way. It has been (Holz and Wright, 1979) and is still (Grafström and Windell, 2011; Chen et al., 2015) one of the widely used mass communication research tools. Researcher interprets, evaluates and judges about the text by looking at the number and meaning of the concepts, and the relationships among them. There are three main approaches in content analysis, namely frequency count analysis, contingency analysis and evaluative assertion analysis. Among these three methods, evaluative assertion analysis which was developed by Osgood, Saporta, and Nunnally (1956) differs from the other two approaches in that it measures the significance, intensity and direction of the meaning of statements (Osborne and Reimer, 1973). Therefore, we preferred this approach in the study in order to extract the evaluations of significant

concepts and reveal the “evaluative scaling of attitude objects as used in the messages” (Osgood, Saporta and Nunnally, 1956).

The measurement of negative and positive attitudes in the text by the evaluative assertion analysis has revealed supportive findings to semiotic analysis and ideological criticism. In application of this analysis, first we determined all the statements in the ads, including common meaning terms and connectors. Then, we gave a value ranging from -3 to +3 to the common meaning terms and connectors of the attitude objects according to their degrees. After determining these values, they are multiplied and divided into the number of attitude object. This multiplication provides the average attitude value for each attitude object. We applied this procedure to the texts of both commercials by three different evaluators. And their judgments were found to be same for the two ads. The results of the evaluative content analysis reveal that in these two advertisements, the texts used in Bebelac commercial form more positive attitudes than the Milupa-Aptamil commercial. Although there are no negative texts in Milupa-Aptamil ad, the Bebelac ad forms negative attitude against cow’s milk (Table 3).

The difference between texts of these two advertisements’ is considered to be the result of the difference of positioning strategies of the two firms. Whereas Milupa-Aptamil tries to influence the consumers via connotations, Bebelac tries to influence the consumers through written and oral texts directly.

Discussion of Study 1

When we evaluate the decoding of semiotic analysis, ideological criticism and evaluative assertion analysis together, we could generally conclude that both commercials encourage the use of infant formula instead of breast milk or other

Table 3. Evaluative Assertion Analysis of Milupa-Aptamil and Bebelac TV Commercials

	Attitude Objects	Common Meaning Terms	Degree	Connectors	degree	E x CM	
MİLUPA - APTAMIL	Breast-milk	x	x	strengthens	+3	+3	
	Breast-milk	x	x	protects	+3	+3	
	average attitude objects					6/2=3	
	Aptamil	x	x	supports	+3	+3	
	Aptamil	x	x	helps	+3	+3	
	average attitude objects					6/2=3	
MİLUPA - APTAMIL	Immunity of the baby	x	x	is	+3	+3	
	average attitude objects					3/1=3	
BEBELAC	Cow's milk	x	x	should give	+2	+2	
	Cow's milk	exactly	+3	should give	+2	+6	
	Cow's milk	this much	+3	doesn't include	-3	-9	
	average attitude objects					-1/3=	
						-1/3	
	Experts	x	x	don't advice	-3	-3	
	average attitude objects					3/1=3	
BEBELAC	Bebelac	completely	+3	meets	+3	+9	
	Bebelac	healthy	+3	supports	+3	+9	
	Bebelac	x	x	is	+3	+3	
	average attitude objects					21/3=7	

supplemental foods in baby feeding through the messages given by the symbolic and ideological connotations. All of the tools used in the ads such as the atmosphere, clothing, colors, written and verbal texts emphasize the modernity and consumption concepts and try to create the impression that a mother who loves her baby, who wants to protect it and who wants to be modern could be so by using that formula. "Advertising does not hypnotize us with its claims. It is rather that we willingly smother ourselves within advertising's warm embrace. It is a form of patronage that parades itself as a gift" (Arning, 2009). This gift encourages the audience to a comparison with the attractive models presented in order to achieve the idealized images. These images have negative implications on the audience, especially on the topics they are more susceptible, or when they have limited cognitive ability to evaluate the

presented images. On the whole, we can conclude that the formula ads broadcast on TV embody meanings which carry the messages designed to affect consumers.

Study 2

Sample

The second study aims at revealing the perceptions of the mothers, the vulnerable audience, regarding the TV commercials of infant formula and to understand whether they are affected from these ads. Before conducting the interviews with them, we consulted with a pediatrician and three nutrition experts who are working in the university hospital, and a nurse working in a state-owned clinic in order to acquire information about infant feeding and to reveal the evaluations of the specialist on ethical aspects of the topic. Thus, we expected to compare whether our findings in the previous study are similar to the opinions of the specialists. Following expert views, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the mothers who have babies.

In order to understand the ethical aspects in marketing communications, we evaluated the commercials that were analyzed in this study by taking the vulnerable consumers as the basis. A vulnerable consumer is defined as “a person who is capable of readily or quickly suffering detriment in the process of consumption” (Consumer Affairs, 2004, pp. 3). The vulnerable consumer group that was analyzed in this study was mothers who have babies in the age of taking supplemental foods. Mothers are susceptible to subjects related to their babies and feel the anxiety of doing the best for them. Therefore, they have become vulnerable consumers when their babies are the matter. Within this context, we aimed at revealing the perceptions of mothers regarding infant formula advertisements broadcast on TV and questioning ethical considerations of the manufacturers, and the results of their communications on mothers.

In determining the mothers, two groups were formed according to education level, which we considered as an important determinant in

evaluating the advertisements (Smith, 1996; Shavitt, Lowrey and Haefner, 1998; Soh, Reid and Whitehill King, 2007; Chaar and Lee, 2012) as it is one of the key drivers of the cognitive ability needed to process information (Smith, 1996).

In order to access mothers with low education level, we contacted with a state-owned clinic which is located in the suburbs of the city. After taking the necessary permissions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the mothers who were there for the controls of their babies. We controlled for the ages of the babies, selecting mothers who have babies within the age of feeding with infant formula. Four of the five mothers interviewed in this group have low level income whereas the fifth mother belongs to mid-level income group. In choosing the mothers with high-education levels, we contacted with the mothers working in the university and also used our networks in accessing suitable interviewees who have at least a university degree and have babies in the age of taking supplemental foods. All of the five mothers interviewed in this group have mid-level income.

Methodology

Semi-Structured Interview

Usually defined “simply as a conversation with a purpose” (Berg, 2000:66), interview is used in qualitative research especially for gathering primary data about many subjects such as the ideas, beliefs or practices of the individuals on a certain topic, on past or present experiences, etc. There are different kinds of interviewing methods according to the research purpose. Located between the extremes of structured and unstructured interviewing is the *semi-structured interview* which involves implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics. The interviewer directs these questions in a systematic and consistent order but also has the freedom to probe far beyond the answers (Berg, 2000:70). In order to reveal how the mothers feel when they see the commercials of infant formula ads and to find out whether findings of Study 1 were influential in the hypothesized manner, we made

semi-structured interviews with the mothers who have babies in the age of taking supplemental foods.

Procedure

In the first phase of Study 2, we interviewed with a pediatrician, nutrition experts and a nurse to learn about the facts on infant feeding and how these commercials are evaluated by the experts in terms of ethics. Thus, in addition to learning the truths about infant feeding, the similarity between the inferences of the authors and the health personnel about ethical conducts would be confirmed. In the second stage, we tried to explore the opinions of the target group of these advertisements in order to determine whether the findings from the analysis in the previous stages are perceived in the same manner by them. With this purpose, first we displayed the TV commercials to the mothers and experts, and then, conducted semi-structured interviews with them to reveal their perceptions about the ads. As mentioned previously, the ads displayed to the participants were the TV commercials of infant formula brands that were broadcast on TV during the study period. The commercials were first displayed to the experts and mothers so that they will remember the ads and their evaluations of each scene could be discussed separately. Showing the participants a visual (van der Doesa, Edelaara, Gooskensa, Lieftinga and van Mierloa, 1992; Mcquarrie and Mick, 1999; Parry et al., 2013; Kim, Lloyd and Cervellon, 2016) or a video (Zhou and Belk, 2004), and then making interviews with them is an often employed method in qualitative research. This approach was preferred as it was quintessential of such research questions.

Findings of Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with experts: Within the research, we carried out interviews with experts in order to find out detailed and supportive information on infant feeding. The interviewees are three nutrition experts, one pediatrician, and a nurse working in a state-owned clinic in the suburbs of the city. The views of the experts on infant feeding are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Evaluation of Expert Views

Expert	Feeding babies		Attitude before one-year old		
			Attitude towards breast-milk	Attitude towards Infant formula	Attitude towards cow’s milk
Nutritionist 1	Breast-milk	Supplemental foods (yogurt, fruit, vegetable, egg, etc.)	+ ^a	when have to ^{b+}	If cannot buy formula, by changing its form +
Nutritionist 2	Breast-milk	Infant formula if breast-milk is not sufficient and mother has enough income, otherwise cow’s milk	+	when have to ^b +	If cannot buy formula+
Nutritionist 3	Breast-milk	breast-milk & supplemental foods	+	when have to ^b +	If cannot buy formula+
Pediatrician	Breast-milk	breast-milk & supplemental foods	+	when have to ^b +	If cannot buy formula+
Nurse	Breast-milk	breast-milk & supplemental foods	+	If no breast-milk in the first 6 months	When have to ^b +

a: positive
 b: when the breast milk is not sufficient, when the mother works and cannot breastfeed, when the baby does not take any supplemental foods

When we asked the experts about their opinions on formula advertisements, they stated that it is not necessary to advertise infant formula because when a baby needs formula within the first 6 months, this should be given under the control of the pediatrician and therefore, advertising infant formula is just like advertising medicines. They state that if supplemental food is sufficient after 6 months, the babies would not need infant formula:

“If the baby can be breast fed and can also take supplemental foods after 6 months, it is not necessary to take formula!”

“If the baby is fed with breast-milk, the formula cannot be more protective. First of all, certainly breast-milk, it is the most protective. But if not, if the mother cannot breastfeed, and if the family can feed with natural food, formula does not provide any additional protection.”

The experts also think that the advertisements on infant formula misdirect the consumers. The subject that the mothers, who are considered in the vulnerable consumer group, are susceptible most is feeding their babies. It is especially difficult for mothers with low-education and – income levels to process the information they obtain on infant feeding. Whereas consumers with high-education levels attain reliable information and synthesize what s/he learns with his/her own experience and form an attitude regarding the brand by which the ads are evaluated; consumers with low-education levels are persuaded more easily by non-complicated ads with emotional appeals, that convey what is expected from them directly (Elden, 2016: 371-372). Thus, although they can reach information, consumers with low-education levels will be influenced more from emotional factors instead of the information obtained. In this regard, these consumers will have less opportunity and willingness to reach reliable information and will value reference information more. Therefore, they are inclined to accept what they hear from the people around them or what they see in the advertisements. Within this context, infant formula advertisements could easily deceive the vulnerable group. The experts mention this topic as follows:

“Yes, probiotics strengthen and activate immune system. But we should not see it as a magic wand. This is an exaggeration, but there is no such thing as ‘my baby takes Milupa, s/he will never be ill’. I mean, we should not be in the relief that there is a protective shield.”

“[the advertisements] [on the subject] deceives a mother who does not know much. The words that she does not know, when it says that ‘the pediatricians advise’. She remembers these.”

“In this advertisement, the effects on immune system are exaggerated a lot, the parents can think as if they have equipped the baby with a shield.”

The formula ads are also criticized from ethical perspective. The experts agree on the fact that the ads intend to appeal and emulate the consumer with the things presented:

“I do not approve the current formula ads, I don’t approve because its impression or effect on us is not the same with the audience. I mean, for example using children in the ads; smiling healthily, idealized child figures used in the ads to stimulate consumption cannot be approved.”

“A message that is interjected among other ads in the series of advertisements is not moral enough for me.”

“Like in all other ads, these ads are emulating, make things charming and give the impression to the parents that they would not be taking good care of their babies if there is no formula.”

Although the thing that should be mentioned in the ads is the importance of breast-milk in infant feeding and when infant formula should be used, they give the message that formula can replace breast-milk and can be used. But the experts agree upon the fact that none of the nutrients can replace breast-milk. Moreover, in the advertisement where a comparison is made with cow’s milk, breast-milk is not mentioned at all. This situation causes concern for experts:

“The breastfeeding rate in our country is in a trend against the developed countries. The period where only breast-milk is used is shortened. I mean, in this subject, against the developed countries we gave up some of our values. And I think that we are also experiencing the mistaken period of developed countries. Therefore, I think this is going to cause much more problems in the future.”

Interviews with the mothers: We made semi-structured interviews with the mothers to reveal whether findings of semiotic, ideological and content analyses are perceived similarly by them. After explaining the interview process to the mothers and taking permission from them, we recorded the interviews by a tape recorder. In the interview process, we first asked the mothers on the way they feed their babies (whether they breastfeed, use infant formula, cow’s milk or home-made supplements). Later, we inquired for how they decided to use this method in order to determine the people influencing them. Later on, we displayed the first

advertisement completely and asked the mothers about the point that attracted their attention most, the message of the advertisement and whether this message addresses to them. In the second phase of video display, we showed the advertisement according to the pre-determined sections and asked the mothers about their opinion on each part, their remarks on the elements of each part and how they feel in each one. We applied this process for all three sections of the two commercials. After displaying each advertisement in parts, we required the mothers to evaluate the reality of the ads. We asked whether they liked the ad or not and whether there was anything that they emulated. The demographic profiles of the mothers interviewed are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Demographic Profiles of the Mothers Interviewed

Mothers with high education level				Mothers with low education level					
Age	Age of the baby	# of children	Education level	Age	Age of the baby	# of children	Education level		
1	35	21 months	2	University graduate	1	23	19 months	2 (twins)	Secondary school
2	32	3,5 months	1	University graduate	2	24	4 months	2	Primary school
3	28	6,5 months	2	University graduate	3	32	5 months	4	Primary school
4	32	8,5 months	2	University graduate	4	28	36 months	2	High school
5	35	4 months	2	University graduate	5	39	30 months	3	Primary school

Mothers with high education level all act according to the way prescribed by their doctors and generally, they stated they do not have a negative attitude towards the infant formula. Yet, none of the mothers consider infant formula as an alternative to breastfeeding and they consider using it as a supplement both to the breast-milk and the additional supplements. At this point, most of the mothers have the same information as stated by the pre-interviewed doctors.

In the evaluations of Milupa-Aptamil ad, elements attracting mothers most was the protection provided by the formula and the sneezing

woman. Most of the mothers in this group do not believe in the protection of the formula:

“That immunofortis thing, making a protective shield for the baby, it isn’t possible. I don’t believe.”

“Thinking that Aptamil will protect my baby and relying completely on it is a total prejudice.”

“Although it says that it strengthens the immune system, how much could this be. I don’t find this believable.”

“[the message of the ad] is to feed the baby with Aptamil and protect it against the germs outside. It does not sound believable.”

The sneezing woman in the third part of the ad generally disturbed the mothers. However, they find it exaggerated that the mother in the ad does not feel anxious as she uses infant formula for her baby:

“I would have been annoyed in such a situation... The woman’s sneezing and loving [the baby] right after sneezing is exaggeration. Mother’s feeling comfortable is exaggeration.”

“Sneezing people, as always... I do not feel comfortable [in such situations].”

Mothers in this group generally did not pay much attention to the materials in the background of the ad. Even, one of the mothers has compared the environment/atmosphere to a clinic. The atmosphere is generally described as “*calm and quiet*”. One of the mothers answered the question on how she considered the environment in the second part as follows:

“The same. Quiet. They created an atmosphere as good as when the mother was breastfeeding. This similarity emphasizes again that formula is equivalent to breast-milk.”

The mothers watching the ad generally mentioned the affective elements:

“When you look, you only concentrate on the love the mother feels to her baby. You don’t even see the other things.”

“I identify it with myself. The look of the mother to her baby, the look of the baby to its mother.”

In the evaluation of the second advertisement – Bebelac – by the mothers with high education level, it was considered exaggeration by all of them. The statement in the ad saying: “the baby’s should take 27 liters of cow’s milk for the iron and vitamin E deficiency before they are one-year old” is considered as including scientific reality but at the same time having deceptive points:

“If this was not true, they could not mention it in the ad. The whole country watches this. The experts watch this. People knowing a lot on the subject watch this. Therefore, there must be scientific reality in it... If the baby must take 27 liters of cow’s milk for iron deficiency, it is true but you don’t feed the baby with milk only, it is quite ridiculous. They misguide the people. There is a little grain of truth. I mean for the conscious audience.”

Mothers noticed especially the emphasis on price. Three mothers perceived the message as “low price, buy us”:

“The price is important. You keep your money. In the first few months, you don’t risk it, but then, you say they are all the same... The money is important for people.”

One of the mothers found it strange that despite the emphasis on price, the house in the ad is quite luxurious:

“In order to remind the price, it is mentioned at the end of the ad but when this part is considered, the house looks good, it appears luxurious. However, a low-value formula.”

Similar negative associations were made in the second part of the ad:

“An elegant atmosphere. The luxury is evident from the french door style fridge freezer. It is not a simple place. In the other ad, there was only a simple sofa and a simple curtain. There was sunlight. Here, there is everything. But, its price is low. I think this is just sales appeal. I seemed like embellishment to me.”

In the Bebelac ad, comparison of formula only with cow’s milk, and not mentioning breast-milk attracted the attention of one of the mothers:

“It talks about the iron and vitamin E need of the baby. I didn’t understand why they did not mention whether these are present in breast-milk or not but they say cow’s milk has them. Probably, they are also in breast-milk but I don’t know why they didn’t mention it.”

The same interview procedure was applied to the mothers with low education level. When the results are considered, it can be seen that as the education level decreases, people around the mothers and the advertisements influence the mothers in addition to the advices of the doctors and determine the feeding method of the babies. This effect is also confirmed by the nurse working in the region where low-educated mothers inhabit:

“In this area, what the people around the mothers say is more important than what the doctors say.”

Mothers in this group generally liked the ads and except for the 5th mother, who has a higher income level than the other mothers; all of them stated that they would have used infant formula if they had the chance. Even, one of the mothers stated that when her baby stop taking breast-milk, she started feeding her with formula just because she was impressed from the ads, without consulting her doctor. This is an explicit sign of the effect of ads on mothers with low education level. Mothers with low education and low income levels stated that they would have used infant formula if they had enough income:

“[The ad] is realistic. People believe in this. If they have enough financial opportunity, they believe. Because if I were so, I would have said that this protects better. It shows, it says it protects better. I would have bought it if had money. I would believe.”

Within this context, infant formula ads pose a serious threat for this vulnerable group of consumers. The mothers in this group accept the statements in the ads as indisputably true. They confirm the information provided by the doctor from the ads and thus, they are misled:

“My other son (one of the twins) has thyroid. When we take him to the state-owned clinic, the doctor said “Do not give him cow’s milk until he is 1 year old”. I learned from him that it causes iron deficiency, deficiency of blood. When I saw this ad, I said “ohh, he was right”... I mean when we saw this ad, we said that the doctor told us the truth.”

“For those who do not know, it is good because it says do not give cow’s milk until one-year old. [the mother who watches the ad] would give less.”

Mothers with low education level generally declare that they do not consider weight as a sign of health. Yet, they still want their babies to be a little overweight. And the interviewed-nurse supports this view and says that what is said by the people around is important for these mothers:

“For the families living in this area, being overweight with plump cheeks is considered as a sign of health.”

“Mothers in this area want their babies to be demure, to conform to what they say. They want it to be overweight and plump. When they are among their neighbors, the mothers want them to say that ‘your baby is really good, how grown it is, well-done, you care it very well.’”

One of the mothers stated that being overweight is the sign of health for babies and she said she wonders whether her child would be like this if she feeds her with formula:

“I like chubby children. Would mine be so if I give it formula?”

When we asked the mothers in this group about the atmosphere of the ad and whether they feel any emulation to the lives presented, they first hesitate and state that they do not emulate and they are content with their own situation. But when probed further, most of them state they like the environment of the ad and want using formula:

“We also want to be rich, be in a wealthy condition. We want to live in our own house. Who would not want to live in good conditions... But what can we do? We thank God for this day!”

“Everybody would wish to raise her child in a clean and healthy condition... The house attracts my attention more.”

“I liked the environment, willy-nilly.”

“Infant formula ads emulate you.”

“What we can provide to our children is very limited. It gives the impression that if one’s financial situation is good, then she feeds her baby with formula and her house will be like this.”

“Everybody would love to live in good conditions, but life...”

“The ad is emulating.”

Among the mothers watching the ad, the encouraging effect to luxury and modern life were found, which we considered as the unethical aspect of advertising industry. Mothers state that the houses and the healthy, fat and happy babies in the ads encourage them to buy formula and they add that they would buy infant formula if they had the financial opportunity:

“This seems like American-style kitchen.”

“The atmosphere is kind of... Like, rich people use this formula.”

“It shows better. It makes you aspire. You are encouraged. You buy it and you say that the baby is comfortable, the mother is comfortable, the atmosphere is comfortable. Everything seems better. But normally, it is not so.”

“She seems like a relaxed mother. She must be working then. Because she doesn’t know children, she doesn’t deal with them...”

“If I had money, I would maybe use formula. It seems as if it is going to nourish more.”

“I would use [formula] for variety.”

The sneezing woman in the Milupa-Aptamil ad, which disturbed mothers with high education level also disturbed the mothers in this group as a danger for their babies’ health. This is one of the main points that the mothers are anxious about and therefore, it is highlighted in the ad to attract their attention.

Discussion of Study 2

In Study 2, we conducted two groups of interviews in order to determine the effects of infant formula ads on mothers. The first group of interviews consisted the opinions of the experts: a pediatrician, three nutritionists and a nurse. They all agreed on the use of infant formula when clinically necessary and under the control of the pediatrician. They also reconciled on the negative attributes of formula ads, and the fact that ads affect the audience in a negative way, especially the ones with limited cognitive ability to process the messages. We made the second group of interviews with the mothers of both high and low education level. The educated mothers, who also belong to mid-level income group, have similar attitudes towards infant formula with experts. They state that it should be used when prescribed by the pediatrician. The materialistic points in the ads did not attract their attention, and they do not emulate to the lives presented. Mothers in this group were more information-focused, questioning the ad and they were not paying attention to emotional appeals in the ads as the mothers in the other group. Mothers with low education level, on the other hand, displayed positive attitudes towards formula using. They stated that they would use it if they had financial opportunity, as four of the mothers in this group were in the low level income group. Mothers take the people around them as their reference groups in infant feeding. As previously anticipated, mothers in this group were affected from and persuaded by the ad more and emulated it. Even one of the mothers stated that she feed her baby with formula just because of the ad. The mothers are seriously affected from the ads in a negative way because they feel strong emulation to the lives presented which was revealed through in-depth interviews. They like the rich and luxurious lives and think that it could be accessed through infant formula. An interesting finding of Study 2 is that one of the mothers in the low education group has mid-level income whereas the rest of the group has low-income level, and she displays similar attitudes to the educated mothers. This finding directed us to the opinion that income level would be an important determinant of perception and interpretation of ads and thus, to thoroughly analyzing this difference in a further study.

Study 3

The findings of Study 2 revealed that mothers with high education level generally did not like the ad and none of them emulated to the lives presented in the ads. However, mothers with low education level state they would have liked to live a life like the ones presented in the ads, with luxurious houses, beautiful clothes and the like. Yet, one of the mothers interviewed in this group had an income-level higher than other interviewees. And her attitude provided similar results with the mothers of high education level. This finding led us to search for mothers in similar education and income levels and inquire whether the mothers in this group have similar attitudes towards infant formula like the mothers with mid-income and high education level.

Sample

With this purpose, we contacted with a private clinic for babies. The pre-interviews with the manager of the clinic confirmed the fact that the patients of the clinic were mostly families with low education but mid-level income. The demographic profiles of the mothers interviewed are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Demographic Profiles of the Mothers with Low Education and Mid-Level Income

Mothers with high education level				
	Age	Age of the baby	# of children	Education level
1*	39	30 months	3	Primary School
2	33	12 months	3	Primary School
3	32	42 months	3	Secondary School
4	30	24 months	1	Secondary School

*: This is the 5th mother in the group of mothers with low education level

After taking necessary permissions, we applied the same procedure to the mothers interviewed in the private clinic. When opinions of the mothers interviewed were evaluated, it could be said they liked the ads

and found them attractive. The mothers in this group displayed similar attitudes like educated mothers in terms of their references in infant feeding. Most of them consulted their pediatricians; however there is also an inclination towards the advices of people around, just like the mothers with low education level.

The mothers stated that they find the “health authorities” statement in the Bebelac ad reassuring and persuasive. Also, they mentioned that they chose the formula just by depending on the statements on the products: “immunofortis” and “strengthens immune system”. Yet, they agreed on the fact that infant formula does not protect their babies from the dangers outside as proposed in the ad:

“I mean she gives the formula and then sneezed next to the baby. It is infected anyway.

Isn't it? I think it is. For example, my niece had a baby, she also uses Aptamil. Recently, some people who had flu visited her and the baby infected... It still does not wholly protect.”

“...It generally mentions the protection of the formula but I don't think it protects, in fact it did not protect me. Until the baby was 1 year-old, it had fever every night...It is seen as it protects, but it does not. The baby got ill every month. You know, unfortunately... It does not protect that much. In the end, it is a baby. It is infected.”

“... because I thought that its immune system would be stronger, and I thought it would eat more...”

“ It is not protective. It is not as protective as it says...”

“... it attracted my attention, of course... but as I don't believe it much, I don't consider it...I was using that brand formula but I didn't thought that it protected the baby. But I used it.”

An interesting finding of the study is that mothers prefer Milupa-Aptamil, which is the most expensive brand in the market, either because it is expensive or because their pediatrician advices that brand. They first consider that it is more protective. But, after experiencing the formula,

they stated that the product does not protect their babies as expected. However, they still continue using the product just in case. Another reason behind their using the formula is that they believe it would help their babies to gain appetite. All of the mothers in this group stated that their babies got ill even though they used the formula and they do not believe in its protection.

Another interesting finding of the study is that mothers in this group evaluated the atmosphere and the mothers in the ads just like to the mothers with high education. They did not think that the ads are emulative or desirable. They stated that, the only thing that is emulative for them is the sucking of the baby or its eating formula. It could be seen that mothers in the mid-level income but low education level give the same responses with the mothers of high education level. About the houses and the atmosphere, the mothers generally used definitions such as “good”, “normal”, “beautiful”. When we asked about the mothers in the ads, they defined the women as “beautiful” and “knowing”. And they defined the baby as “healthy”, “having appetite” and “beautiful”.

Discussion of Study 3

We conducted the third study in order to investigate deeper the attitudes of mothers with low education but mid-level income and to reveal whether they display any similarity to the mothers of high or low education level. The results confirmed that mothers with low education and mid-level income exhibit similar attitudes to mothers with high education level in terms of their references in infant feeding, however they still regard people around them, just like the mothers with low education level. The effect of other people could be felt in their using formula just to make their babies heavier, even when they give supplemental foods and do not believe in the protection provided by the formula. From this perspective they are similar to mothers with low education level, the social influence determine their behaviors. When we inquired whether they emulate the lives in the ads, their replies were like the responses of the mothers with high education level. They defined the houses and the

mothers in the ads as “normal” which was because they had economical opportunity to live a life in the standards displayed in the ads.

Conclusion

We conducted the studies in order to understand the underlying ethical aspects in infant formula ads, which are prevalently broadcast on TV and how these factors are perceived by the target audience of these ads. For this purpose we made three consecutive studies by using various qualitative analysis techniques in analyzing the TV commercials of two different infant formula brands. The first two studies were made as part of a triangulation approach, which availed analyzing the research question from different perspectives, with multiple methods. The final study was made as a contribution to test the findings of second study, which revealed an interchangeable effect of education and income.

Similar to the studies with CCT approach that use semiotics, in depth interviewing, critical theories and ethnographies (Bengtsson and Ostberg, 2006) to decode the meanings, ideals and inducements in popular culture tools; current study benefited from semiotics, content analysis, ideological criticism and semi-structured interviews to understand the effect of “market-made commodities and desire-inducing marketing symbols” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p.869) on consumers. And the findings contribute to the research program of CCT on mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies suggested by Arnould and Thompson (2005). As the authors suggest, popular culture texts such as advertisements, films, etc. convey certain lifestyles and ideologies that arouse emulation in consumers. Revealing the embedded messages in these tools will help unearthing how cultural production systems cause consumers to covet certain lifestyles.

This effect is quite prevalent among vulnerable consumer groups, which have been subject to limited number of studies. Mothers constitute a major vulnerable consumer group, who need to be analyzed deeper in terms of their understanding of popular culture texts. This study, thus, tries to bridge this gap by understanding how mothers feel regarding in-

fant formula ads, and to discover the relevant ethical issues stated by Arnould and Thompson (2005) as an intriguing, emerging issue that needs to be studied further.

Women always carry on the responsibility to nurture their precious beings – their children and feeding constitutes the core of this concern (Cairns, Johnston and MacKendrick, 2013). And their decisions on feeding, which is affected from health professionals, parents and peers (Afflerback et al., 2013; Basch et al., 2013), occurs within a broad cultural context shaping the available choices and their associated symbolic meanings (Afflerback, 2013). Previous studies on the effects of infant formula ads on mothers provided similar results where mothers tend to accept advertising messages without any critical thinking and use the information presented as the basis for their decisions or as advices (Berry, Jones and Iverson, 2010). They are also confused by the product information irrespective of their education levels (Cattaneo et al., 2014).

The semi-structured interviews in Study 2 provide insight into how mothers interpret the formula ads and how they are affected from the embedded message in the ads. The findings indicate an unethical conduct of formula advertising where mothers with low-education levels watching the ads are negatively affected, are more inclined to use formula in infant feeding instead of breastfeeding, and emulate the lives presented in the ads. Similar results were obtained in the research by Parry et al. (2013) where the interviewed mothers “expressed doubt about superiority of their own human milk, ... and believed that infant formula is now very much like human milk” (p.121).

Findings of the third study, on the other hand, bring to mind the question of whether money could substitute education, and if an individual could gain awareness regarding negative effects of advertising just thanks to economic opportunities. For the sample of the current study, money acted as a substitute for education, yet this finding requires detailed analysis and more comprehensive testing to be stated as true. Hence, this question is considered the major finding of the study which should further be analyzed in subsequent studies.

The study is subject to certain limitations. The main limitation is the evaluative differences due to using qualitative techniques. However, we evaluated the findings of semiotic analysis and semi-structured interviews separately to moderate this effect. Also, only the commercials of the two brands broadcast recently on TV were taken for analysis, the printed ads and other brands were not included in the study. With regards to semi-structured interviews, quasi-naturalistic exploration structure of the study is another limitation as we did not have the opportunity to interview with participants when they watch the ads in within their daily routines, but instead, we displayed the ads to mothers to remind them.

As stated above, additional researches are required to complement the finding of interchangeable relationship between money and education. This effect should be tested for other samples with similar vulnerabilities in order to understand whether the relationship between these two factors is prevalent. In extension of this study, the socio-economic factors could also be expanded to high income level, number of children etc. Another significant further research would be analyzing other vulnerable consumer groups such as children and revealing the effect of popular culture texts on them through the lens of consumer culture theory.

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