

Original Article

Messages to new mothers: an analysis of breast pump advertisements

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Abstract

The mass media is replete with all kinds of advice, products and ideas about ‘motherhood’ with advertising being a major source of information on the latest products and consumer trends. Advertising is a key means of promoting ideas about infant feeding, and yet, there has been little in the way of critical analyses of breast pump advertisements in order to reveal the kinds of messages they convey about this method of feeding. This article makes an important step towards addressing this gap through analysing three advertisements for breast pumps from a popular Australian magazine for mothers. We utilize a social semiotic framework to investigate not just what choices are made in the design of the ads but also what those choices mean in terms of the overall message of the ads. Our analysis identifies three core messages: ‘breastfeeding and breast pumping are the same with the purpose being to produce breast milk only’, ‘using breast pumps facilitates quality time with the baby’ and ‘mothers need outside expertise (including breast pumps) to ensure baby’s development’. We believe it is important for those who provide information and support for breastfeeding women to be aware of the subtle, naturalized messages that ads convey so that they may better understand what may be underlying women’s decisions regarding methods of infant feeding. © 2016 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Keywords: infant feeding behaviour, infant feeding decisions, qualitative methods, breast milk expressing, multidisciplinary approaches, breast pumps.

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Introduction

There are various messages in the mass media about how to be a good mother, what a new mother should know and what the best products and services are for mothers. One of the more recent trends is the promotion of breast pumps in the mass media.

Breast pumping has been practised for millennia (Fildes 1986; Obladen 2012) and has generally been viewed as an adjunct to breastfeeding. Reasons for breast milk pumping have included a woman’s desire to provide breast milk to a sick or premature infant who is unable to breastfeed, separation of the mother from her infant for various reasons including returning to work and issues concerning breast pathology or maternal infection such as HIV (Binns *et al.* 2006). Increasingly, however, expressed breast milk (EBM), rather than being seen as an adjunct to breastfeeding,

is becoming an essential component of the breastfeeding experience (Geraghty *et al.* 2012). Women are now reported to be expressing and providing breast milk to their infants in situations where there are no medical or employment-related constraints (e.g. Binns *et al.* 2006). Such situations may include embarrassment about breastfeeding in public (Clemons & Amir 2010; Obladen 2012; Johns *et al.* 2015), the convenience of having someone else feed the baby (Binns *et al.* 2006; Labiner-Wolfe *et al.* 2008; Johns *et al.* 2015) and doubt as to whether their milk supply is adequate (Johns *et al.* 2013; Ryan *et al.* 2013). More troubling is the concomitant and growing trend in the commodification of breast milk and the commercialization and technologizing of EBM (Ryan *et al.* 2013; Team & Ryan 2014).

Two Australian studies known as the Perth Infant Feeding study I (1992–3) and II (2002–3) found that breast milk expression had significantly increased in

the period 1992–2003, with the proportion of breastfeeding mothers who EBM in the first 6 weeks post-birth almost doubling to 69% in the latter study (Binns *et al.* 2006). Although expressing is often purported to be an advantage to working women, many studies are demonstrating that women are expressing very early in the post-birth period and well before a need to return to work (Clemons & Amir 2010). Some babies are now exclusively fed EBM rather than being breastfed *per se* (Ryan *et al.* 2013; Johnson *et al.* 2012), with some women actually stating they prefer this method of feeding (Rasmussen & Geraghty 2011).

The Infant Feeding Practices Study II in the United States reported by Labiner-Wolfe *et al.* (2008) found that 85% of breastfeeding women of infants aged between 1.5 and 4.5 months had EBM. In their study, the most cited reason for expressing was ‘for someone else to feed their infant’. A number of studies have identified how men are wanting to ‘bond’ with their baby through feeding (Johnson *et al.* 2009; Marshall *et al.* 2007; Ryan *et al.* 2013; Team & Ryan 2014), and that this practice is increasingly encouraged through health messages and often facilitated by women through breast milk expression (Ryan *et al.* 2013; Team & Ryan 2014). Father–infant bonding is sometimes valued more than breastfeeding, and although advertising for paternal involvement through the use of breast pumps offers women ‘choice’ and men ‘experience’ (Ryan *et al.* 2013, p. 481; Team & Ryan 2014), this can be seen as ‘a market expanding strategy ... that separates women from breastfeeding babies and eventually leads to the introduction of infant formula’ (Team & Ryan 2014, p. 232).

Another key reason suggested for an increase in breast milk expression is the improvement in breast pump technology (Binns *et al.* 2006; Rasmussen &

Geraghty, 2011). Compared with the past, there are now quality breast pumps available to women including electric pumps that generally afford high levels of satisfaction (Ryan *et al.* 2013, p. 480). Regular breast milk expression has been shown to be positively associated with the use of electric rather than manual breast pumps (Labiner-Wolfe *et al.* 2008) with electric breast pumps being the preferred and most common method of breast milk pumping (Clemons & Amir 2010; Johns *et al.* 2015).

Morton (2013) argues that breast pump technology is part of an ongoing reliance in medicine on technology, arguing that ‘since the advent of electrical pumps, research on the mechanics of milk removal (has) primarily been supported by the pump industry’ (p. 276). This accords with the study of Ryan *et al.* (2013), and flagged by others such as Blum (1999), who suggest that EBM has become commodified and commercialized.

While the aforementioned reasons relate largely to convenience, technology, necessity and the promotion of father–baby bonding, there is also the belief that breast pumping can prolong the benefits of breast milk for the baby. Breast milk itself has been likened to ‘liquid gold’ (Burns *et al.* 2013). The WHO (2016) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months with continued breastfeeding in addition to appropriate solids until 2 years and beyond. These recommendations are mirrored by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2012) in Australia, which recommends exclusive breastfeeding until 6 months with continued breastfeeding with appropriate solids until 12 months and beyond. It is therefore not surprising that the benefits of breast milk are often linked to the use of breast pumps as these facilitate the provision of breast milk (Clemons & Amir 2010; Dale 2003; McInnes, Arbuckle & Hoddinott 2015).

Key messages

- Breast pump advertisements in this study:
 - present breast pumping as natural and humanised and suggest breast pumps facilitate quality time with a baby.
 - de-emphasise the closeness of a baby feeding at the breast, and do not verbally or visually depict bottle feeding.
 - conceptualise breast pumping as being natural and simple and on par with feeding at the breast.
 - suggest that the goal of breastfeeding and breast pumping is to produce breastmilk only.
- Being aware of the subtle and naturalised messages that ads convey is important in understanding how they may be influencing women’s decisions on infant feeding options.

Clemons & Amir (2010) found that most women prefer pumping to hand expression, suggesting that this may be due to breast pump marketing that promotes the idea that breast pumps are 'the normal and only way to express breast milk' (p. 263). While Clemons & Amir (2010, p. 261) found that 'the main source of information on breast pumps was from the ABA [Australian Breastfeeding Association] (47.1%, 360/764) midwives (36.9%, 282/764) and lactation consultants (29.1%, 222/764)', Rasmussen & Geraghty (2011) suggest the predominant source of information for women about milk expression is derived from lay literature such as magazine articles and internet postings. This may well be the case, as Clemons and Amir admit that their participants were not necessarily representative of the general population as they were mostly educated, married, over 25 and stay-at-home mothers whom they suggest are more likely to breastfeed. These women, they suggest, are also more likely to belong to the ABA, and as the ABA is a source of information and breast pumping products, their survey participants are more likely to use breast pumps (Clemons & Amir 2010, p. 264).

Brown & Peuchaud (2008) observe that the mass media and commercially driven advertising play a key role in shaping ideas about breastfeeding and attitudes towards breasts. Foss & Southwell's (2006) analysis of infant feeding content in *Parent's Magazine* over a period of three decades has shown a correlation between the prevalence of advertisements for hand feeding equipment (excluding breast pumps) and reported breastfeeding rates. While direct causation between these ads and breastfeeding rates cannot be stated unequivocally, the results do give pause for thought and suggest that an examination of the kinds of messages that are being delivered to new and expectant mothers about breast pumps is important to understanding the context in which women are making decisions about infant feeding.

Data

Three advertisements were selected from the Australian magazine *Mother and Baby + Toddler* (from the October/November 2013 issue, 'toddler' was dropped

from the title, making it simply *Mother and Baby*) published over a 12-month period from December 2012/January 2013 to October/November 2013. There were six issues published during this period with a total of 10 full-page ads for breast pumps.

Mother and Baby magazine was chosen as it is included in 'Bounty Bags'¹, or sample bags, which are distributed to pregnant women and new mothers in Australia. At the time of this research, the publishers purported that their magazine reached 93% of all new mothers and 82% of pregnant women. The selected advertisements present products from three different companies. Each ad includes images of mother–baby dyads as well as the breast pump products. We have chosen ads that include images of mothers and babies rather than those containing only images of breast pumps as we felt the former would hold more appeal to new mothers and would thus be a useful starting point for investigating the messages that such ads convey. Figure 1 shows an advertisement for the Medela 'Swing maxi' double electric breast pump, identified as the breast pump of the year for 2013 (*Mother and Baby + Toddler* October/November 2013, p. 66). The ad featured as a full-page ad in five issues of the magazine, and the ad we analyse appeared on page 133 of the Feb/Mar 2013 issue. We refer to this ad as the MSM ad. Figure 2 is an advertisement for the 'Miomee' range of breast pumping products from Tommee Tippee. The Tommee Tippee Miomee (hereafter referred to as TTM ad) single electric breast pump was listed as a runner up for the breast pump of the year. The ad we analyse appeared on page 134 of the February/March 2013 issue of *Mother and Baby + Toddler*. The third ad is a Babies R Us ad (hereafter referred to as the BRU ad). This breast pump is also listed as a runner up for the best breast pump award. This ad appeared in the December/January 2012–2013 issue of *Mother and Baby + Toddler*. Permission was granted by the owners to include the Medela and Miomee images. For copyright reasons, we cannot include the

¹According to the bounty bag website, 'Mother To Be' bags reach 78% of pregnant women nationally, and the 'New Mother Bag' reaches 80% of new mothers around Australia (<http://www.bountybags.com.au/> accessed 13 February 2014).



Fig. 1 The Medela Swing maxi advertisement. (Permission granted Medela Australia Pty Ltd)

Babies R Us advertisement image but we have included a diagram of the ad and an artist's impression of the mother–baby image in the ad later in the paper.

Method

The analysis of the breast pump advertisements utilizes a framework developed by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) for analysing images and multimodal texts (texts in which there is more than one mode of communication such as language and image). The underlying heuristic of this framework is a group of three primary functions: representation, interaction and composition. These derive from Halliday's (e.g. 1985, 1994) three 'metafunctions' of language: ideational (the way language expresses experience and the relations between aspects of this experience), interpersonal (the way language expresses social relations, attitudes, power and status) and textual (the way meanings are organized into a coherent message). Kress and van Leeuwen's

extension of these to images (ideational to representation, interpersonal to interaction and textual to compositional) recognizes that any mode of communication 'not only represents the world (whether in abstract or concrete ways), but also plays a part in some interaction and, with or without accompanying text, constitutes a recognizable kind of text (a painting, a political poster, a magazine advertisement, etc.)' (Jewitt & Oyama 2001, p. 140). The ads in our data set are multimodal texts, and our analysis shows how the language and images interact to bring about a certain 'reading'. This then leads to our classification of the core message of each ad. Reflexivity was addressed through a process of intersubjectivity between the authors who brought to the study two different perspectives: one a social semiotic perspective, the other midwifery. The framework is briefly outlined in the next sections.

Representation

Representation relates to the participants, including objects and human participants in a multimodal text

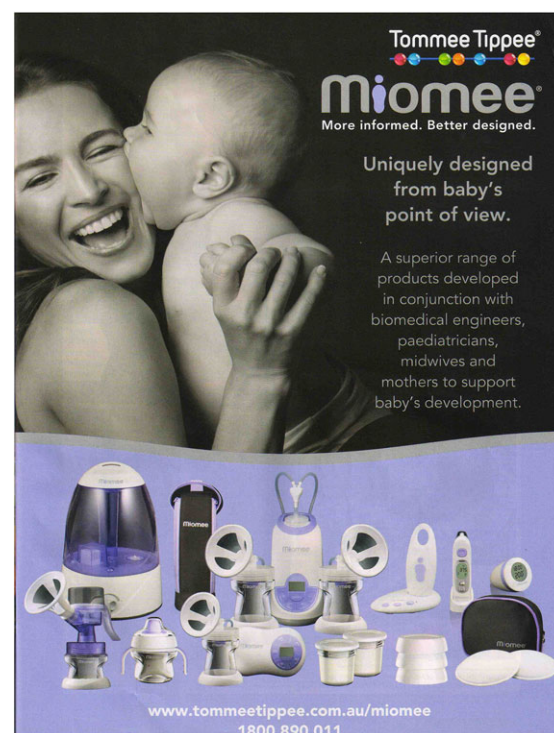


Fig. 2 The Tommy Tippee advertisement. (Permission granted Jackel Trade Marks Pty Ltd)

and their represented relations. These relations are of two primary types: narrative and conceptual. In narrative representations, there is some kind of action, reaction or process conveyed through the formation of vectors or connections. A 'vector' may connect two participants in a transactional process where one participant (the actor) acts on the other participant in a one-directional process. A two-directional process would be where 'the vector could be said to emanate from, and be directed at, both participants' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 74). In conceptual representations, participants are related through classification, taxonomies, part-whole relations, some kind of ordering or some kind of symbolism, identity or attribution.

Interaction

Interaction has to do with how images interact with the viewer. Interaction is classified into two broad categories: 'interaction' and 'truth value' (or modality).

Interaction

Interaction is about how an image 'addresses' a viewer through such resources as gaze, size of frame, angle and perspective. Typically, two main social relations are enacted between the image and the viewer: either an 'offer' of information or a 'demand' for goods and services (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 123). A demand is enacted when a person in an image is depicted as looking directly at the viewer, thus forming a vector between the viewer's and the image participant's eye(s). Where there is no direct address between the image and the viewer, the social relation is called an 'offer' as the participants in the image are presented for the viewer to 'observe'.

In real life, social relations are managed according to the distance that is established between interactants. Real-life social distance can be represented in images through the 'shot', which is essentially the 'size of frame'. Shots may range from extreme close-ups (typically suggesting intimacy), to a medium shot, through to a long distance shot (typically suggesting distance). By zooming in or out from a participant, images may portray people 'as *though* they are friends, or... strangers' and can depict participants as within reach

or beyond the viewer's reach (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 126).

The angle and perspective also play a role in establishing a 'point of view' towards the represented participant(s). For instance, a viewer may be positioned behind or over the shoulder of a represented participant, and hence 'involved'. Participants depicted as powerful typically position the viewer as looking up at them, while a level angle typically construes a sense of neutrality or equality of status. Additionally, a view from the frontal angle suggests a 'shared world', whereas an oblique angle depicts a world not shared and/or not involving the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 136).

Images are also categorized as either subjective or objective in terms of 'point of view'. Objective images depict what is impossible to see in one instance 'in real life'. An example of this is a botanical drawing simultaneously showing a plant with roots, flowers, seeds and leaves. A subjective image would be a photo of a flower in a garden.

Truth value (modality)

The truth value construed by an image has important consequences for how a viewer receives or responds to an image. For instance, viewers are often sceptical of the 'truth value' or the portrayal of 'reality' of images of celebrities because 'while the camera may not lie – or not much, at any rate – those who use it and its images can and do' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 154).

Nevertheless, the depiction of 'truth' is dependent on the type of image; for instance, cartoons are less 'natural' in their depiction of 'reality' than photographs and hence lower in their degree of 'truth value'. Truth is also often dependent on the context in which an image may be used. Truth value can be measured through a set of 'modality markers': 'colour', 'contextualization', 'representation', 'depth', 'illumination' and 'brightness'. These are all modelled as continua of 'more or less'. Images at the extreme ends of these continua are not necessarily highest or lowest in truth value. For instance, stick figure drawings at one end and photographs with hyper-real, ultra-vivid colours and too much detail (over-representation) at the other may both be considered low on the scale of 'truth value'

depending on the overall purpose of the image. A 'fully contextualized' background, too, may not necessarily mean a higher degree of truth value, simply because a 'less articulated' background may indicate depth and is the kind of background people are more accustomed to. Thus, generally, the highest degree of modality or 'truth value' is somewhere towards the higher end of the various continua, but not right at the end (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006).

Composition

Composition relates to not only how the representational and interactional features of an image are combined but also to how the advertisement as a whole is constructed. Composition is analysed across three main parameters: information value, salience and framing. Information value has to do with the placement of elements in various zones, such as left-right, top-bottom and centre-margin. Framing has to do with whether elements are located in the same space or separated through some kind of dividing lines. And salience has to do with the way in which certain features are made prominent, are highlighted or are downplayed. This may be carried out through size, foregrounding, colour contrasts and focus. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that 'salience can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others' (2006, p. 201). The element that is judged to 'weigh the most' is typically interpreted as 'the space of the central message' of the composition (p. 202).

Analysis and discussion

Our analysis focuses on the visual and verbal choices to reveal the overall message of each ad.

The Medela (MSM) ad (Fig. 1)

There are several verbalized participants and processes in this ad. A key participant presented in the top part of the ad and floating in the same space as the image of the mother–baby is 'Maxi-mum Benefits'. This can be read in at least two ways:

- 1 Maxi + mum = this play on words suggests the mother is 'maxi', i.e. the 'best', or that through using this product, she can maximize herself as a mother.
- 2 The use of the Swing maxi breast pump brings 'maximum' benefits.

Other verbalized participants are as follows: 'new swing maxi', 'double electric breast pump Swing maxi', 'proven advantages', 'more milk', 'a higher energy', 'less time', 'precious time', 'the most peaceful moments' and 'your lovely baby'. The processes (verbs) are as follows: 'offers', 'gain', 'benefit', 'relax' and 'enjoy'.

The expression 'proven advantages' in the blurb next to the product image may be seen as a synonym for 'benefits', with the proven advantages being 'gain more milk with a higher energy content in less time'. The next sentence lists other advantages, beginning with the word 'benefit' now used as a process rather than a noun or abstract thing. Because there are no grammatical subjects in the sentences, these may be interpreted as imperatives or as declaratives: 'gain', 'benefit', 'relax', 'enjoy'. Either way, these processes are not 'active doings'. Rather, they are either positive 'senses' or positive 'consequences' that may be attained if mothers use the 'Swing maxi' breast pump.

The word 'time' appears in both sentences in the blurb. Time is connected with both the action of breast pumping ('less time') and with the mother's relationship with her baby ('precious time to care'), and a synonym for time, 'moments', is used in the phrase 'peaceful moments with your lovely baby'.

In the visual elements of the ad, we can see that there is no vector between the mother and baby, so they are not in any 'narrative' relation; they are 'being' rather than 'doing'. Their depiction in close physical contact suggests they constitute a 'unit'. Overall, the image may be classified as a 'conceptual representation' and more specifically, as a 'symbolic suggestive' image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 105). But what is it 'suggestive' of?

To answer this question, we consider the interplay of the visual and verbal elements. The lack of background and hence any hint of location, the contented look on the mother's face coupled with the words of the text – 'relax', 'enjoy', 'peaceful moments' and so on – suggest a generalized sense of 'contented motherhood' in relation to baby. The relation between the mother–baby

image and the image of the breast pumps, which is also a conceptual image, suggests that the contentment of the mother–baby is connected with the products, the Swing maxi. The verbal text reinforces this idea with the words ‘proven advantages’, ‘benefits’, and so on. The idea seems to be that you can obtain maximum benefits from the use of the breast pump and therefore there is no need for any other way to feed your baby.

The close-up shot of the mother–baby and the presentation of a symbolic suggestive image in relation with the verbal text suggest that the woman demands the viewer to identify with her in sharing the ‘maximum benefits’ and proven advantages of the Swing maxi breast pump – to be an ‘in control and calm mother’ with an alert but quiet and contented baby (as depicted). The diminutive size of the breast pumps in relation to the large image of the mother–baby appears to both de-emphasize the product and emphasize the mother–baby relation. The products are there to be ‘contemplated’ by the viewer as an ‘offer’ but not at the expense of engaging with the mother. The angle of the shot allows involvement between the viewer and the mother but simultaneously construes a sense of detachment with the viewer due to the bodies of the mother and baby fronting each other. This sends the message ‘you, too, can have what I have [this type of relationship with your baby] through using these breast pumps’.

Further, the mother–baby image is cut just above the breasts, and the baby and mother are connected at their heads. The viewer is reasonably close to the mother, and there is a high degree of ‘truth value’ because of the image being a ‘naturalistic photo’ with no particularly noteworthy effects of illumination, colour saturation and so on. These features together present a natural, humanized view of breast pumps and at the same time de-emphasize breasts and the closeness of a baby feeding at the breast. The generalized message of a contented mother and baby reinforces the verbal text’s message related to ‘time with baby’ as being an outcome of using the advertised product. Thus, the message construed in the MSM ad has to do with the issue of time, and in particular, quality time with baby. This is a ‘maxi’ benefit of the use of this breast pump.

It is interesting to note that many mothers consider the time of feeding at the breast as ‘precious’, ‘relaxing’,

‘caring’ and so on (Schmied & Lupton 2001), whereas this ad cleverly reinterprets this conceptualization within the context of breast pumping. What is left ambiguous in the ad is exactly when mothers can enjoy quality time with their babies. The image suggests that it is outside any kind of feeding time as it does not depict the mother feeding the baby, but it also does not depict any other kind of activity. It simply depicts a state of ‘being’ – calm, relaxed and in control. The text, too, does not mention feeding baby at all. Rather, it refers to the energy and time-efficient process of breast pumping. The viewer is left wondering whether the ‘precious time to care, relax, and enjoy the most peaceful moments with your lovely baby’ are when bottle feeding or at some other unspecified time. Whatever the individual may conclude, the core message of this ad is that ‘using breast pumps facilitates quality time with the baby’.

The issue of time in relation to the use of breast pumps is well documented. Various studies report that a key reason for breast pumping is so that mothers can return to work and/or facilitate opportunities for someone else to feed their baby when they are not around as they can store supplies of breast milk (Labiner-Wolfe *et al.* 2008; McInnes *et al.* 2015). This in turn promotes a sense of confidence and being in control and lowers anxiety in women who wish to provide breast milk but not necessarily breastfeed (Buckley 2009; Team & Ryan 2014). Ryan *et al.* (2013) comment that the commodification of breast milk involves interpreting it as having ‘situational value’. That is, it has ‘currency in terms of... the earning potential of a breastfeeding working woman and/or measurable amounts of free time’ (Ryan *et al.* 2013, p. 473). The message of this ad seems to align with these findings.

The Tommee Tippee (TTM) ad (Fig. 2)

Compared with the MSM ad, the TTM ad has more verbal text sharing the same space as the image of the mother–baby. The text under the Miomee brand name reads: ‘more informed’, ‘better designed’. And although these phrases are smaller in font size, their visual salience is raised because they are in a slightly brighter font than the word Miomee. Underneath this text in a

relatively large font is the expression ‘uniquely designed from baby’s point of view’. And under this in a finer and smaller font is the nominal phrase ‘A superior range of products developed in conjunction with biomedical engineers, paediatricians, midwives and mothers to support baby’s development’. This text thus presents a cline of ‘experts’ – those most ‘distant’ from the act of breastfeeding and most ‘scientific-sounding’ to those closest, being mothers.

biomedical engineers ←————→ mothers

The long nominal phrase describes ‘a superior range of products’, which (we can assume) is that shown in the image in the lower part of the ad. The image of the products presents a ‘covert taxonomy’ for the viewer to observe in relation to this verbal description; the description giving the products a positive identity. An array of products and a verbal description appealing to expertise evoke a sense that infant feeding is a highly technologized field. Further, the expression ‘uniquely designed from baby’s point of view’ presented in the same space as the mother–baby image leaves the viewer to infer that there are others, more expert and able than the mother herself, who can understand what would be ‘baby’s point of view’ (although how they would know is a mystery!). The messages here appear to support the view that infant feeding is a complex technologized field requiring a number of experts.

The image of the mother–baby dyad in this ad (Fig. 2) is an example of both a ‘transactional’ and a ‘reactional’ process. The transactional process has as actor the baby who is making contact with the mother’s face (goal) as though biting her. But the mother is also the reactor, although not in the typical sense that Kress and van Leeuwen describe. That is, there is a no vector emanating from the mother’s eyes to the action of the baby. Rather, in this image, she has her eyes closed and her mouth open in a happy, laughing response to the baby’s action.

The verbal text primarily relates to the products and to expertise rather than to the mother and the baby or to ‘time’ as in the MSM ad. But why does the ad present a narrative image with the baby as actor and yet verbally focus on expertise, design and know-how? An answer to this question can be found in the last

few words of the description of the ‘superior range of products’: ‘to support baby’s development’. The viewer infers from the combination of the image and the text that the use of these products has played a role in bringing about this active healthy baby. The implicit flip side of this is that the mother is in some way inadequate as the sole person in charge of the development of her baby. Rather, she needs support from technology and both academic and medical professionals, and of course, the products that are produced through their joint ‘consultation’. The depiction of a happy mother implies that she is happy to leave important decisions about infant feeding to the experts.

The baby is positioned between the verbal text and the mother and in central position in the ad, thus giving it a high degree of salience. This further suggests that what lies behind this happy healthy baby, and consequently the happy mother, is a whole range of expertise and technology.

The range of products presented as a conceptual image at somewhat of a distance, and hence outside the viewer’s reach, adds to the ‘technical’ sense of this ad. It appears that both verbally and visually, there are many technical things that a mother needs and that the technology behind these products is ‘beyond’ the expertise of a mother.

The overall message of this ad is ‘mothers need outside expertise (including breast pumps) to ensure their baby’s development’, a finding by other researchers in the field of infant feeding (Barclay *et al.* 2013, Burns *et al.* 2012) and supported by research into the technologization of breastfeeding. For instance, Ryan *et al.* (2013, p. 467) argue that ‘breastfeeding as a process is being undermined by vested interests that portray it as unreliable and reconstruct it in artificial feeding terms, so playing on women’s insecurities’.

The Babies R Us (BRU) ad

Figure 3 provides a diagrammatic outline of the BRU ad.

The top line of text in the BRU ad located directly under the mother–baby image states ‘A system as natural and simple to use as you’. It is upon this verbal text that the message of the whole ad is constructed: breastfeeding is a ‘system’ and is on par with breast

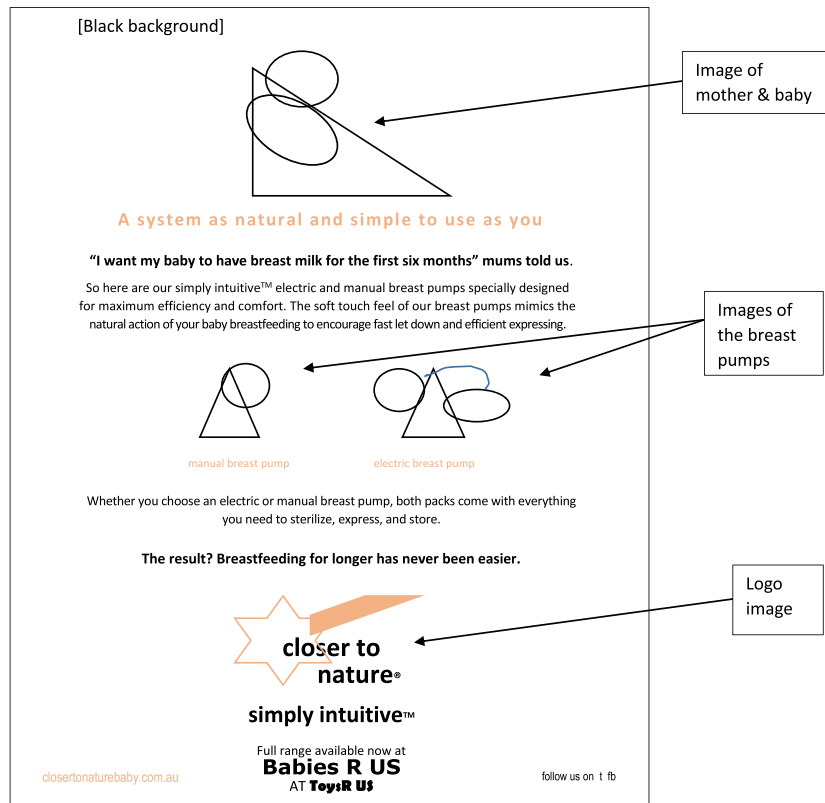


Fig. 3 A diagram of the Babies R Us ad.

pumping. In this ad, variations of the words ‘natural’ and ‘simple’ appear three times including in the slogans (‘closer to nature’ and ‘simply intuitive’, respectively). These echo the natural (naked) and simple (no background or any other visual distractions) image of the mother–baby dyad (Fig. 4) and conceptually align breast pumps with the idea of being ‘natural’ and ‘simple’ and on par with feeding at the breast.

The positioning of the displayed breast pumps is presented as the answer to a report from mothers: ‘I want my baby to have breast milk for the first six months’, which is presented as part of a problem–solution verbal construction. The use of the word ‘So’ in the next line leads to the description of the two breast pumps displayed in the ad: one an electric and the other a manual breast pump. This presents a naturalized positive argument for the use of breast pumps as the only solution for feeding newborns breast milk for the first 6 months. This problem–solution echoes the World Health Organization’s recommendation that mothers should breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months after childbirth (2016). This is considered the

‘gold-standard’ of infant feeding options, and one that is reinforced through various channels to new mothers, such as through the recommendations of midwives, doctors and antenatal groups. However, while the use of breast pumps provides breast milk, they also serve to bypass the act of feeding at the breast.

Returning to the idea of ‘natural’, one would argue that the captions of the images of the products, ‘electric’ and ‘manual’ convey anything but ‘natural’. However, the words ‘soft touch feel of our breast pumps’ in the verbal description echo the soft contented image of the mother and baby and effectively mitigate the labels ‘electric’ and ‘manual’. That is, although breast pumps are artificially constructed ‘appliances’, through the use of the descriptive expression ‘soft touch’, they are given a feminine, personal sense, evoking the tactile sensuality of breasts themselves. Furthermore, the phrase ‘mimics the natural action of your baby breastfeeding’ suggests that they are ‘on par’ with the sensation that a woman may feel when a baby feeds at the breast. These comments suggest that



Fig. 4 A drawing of the mother–child image from the Babies R Us ad (drawing by Chen Yisheng).

breastfeeding, for both mother and baby, is simply to obtain breast milk. The description ‘both packs come with everything you need to sterilise, express, and store’ gives the breast pumps a rather clinical description. But again, this clinical idea is mitigated by the final comment that serves as the ‘solution’ to the original problem posed (‘I want my baby to have breast milk for the first six months’, mums told us): ‘The result? Breastfeeding for longer has never been easier’. This is written in the same font size and colour as the original problem and hence bears a strong visual connection with this. However, breast pumps are not about ‘breastfeeding’ but ‘breast pumping’. So why do the designers use the word ‘breastfeeding’ in their solution? The point appears to be to reinforce the idea that breastfeeding and breast pumping are really one and the same thing; the purpose of breastfeeding is to obtain breast milk and nothing more, and that mothers are doing no more or less by breast pumping than they would by feeding at the breast.

Like the other two ads, there are no breasts shown in the BRU image, thus visually reinforcing the message that feeding at the breast is unnecessary to motherhood. However, this message appears visually stronger in this ad. Here, there is actually a void in the location of the woman’s breasts. Furthermore, the mother positions the baby to face the viewer and hence away from her body. This depiction bears no similarity at all to the way that a baby is positioned when breastfeeding or even bottle feeding. There is hence no depicted connection at all between breasts and baby.

The mother–baby image and the image of the products in the BRU ad appear to vie for the greatest visual salience. The brightness and illumination techniques highlight both the mother–baby dyad and the breast pump products rather equally against the black background. The mother–baby image is located at the top of the ad, which could suggest a greater salience, but the breast pumps are oversized in relation to the depicted mother–baby, and placing them in the central part of the ad gives them a prominent visual salience. The rhythmic image–text–image–text arrangement wherein text and image are not framed but are placed within the same ‘space’ conveys the message that all the elements belong together. These compositional choices subtly reinforce the idea that breastfeeding and breast pumping are on par as ways of feeding a baby. Thus, the overall message of this ad is that ‘breastfeeding and breast pumping are the same, the purpose being to produce breastmilk only’. This message is not unique to this ad. In another ad (not analysed in this paper), a mother is actually shown breastfeeding, but the ad is for breast pumps again with the ‘problem–solution’ format, and with the ‘result’ stated as ‘more milk faster; meaning your feeding routine is more flexible and the baby enjoys all the benefits of your breast milk longer’.²

The attempt to connect EBM with breastfeeding, the promotion of ‘product over process’ and the suggested compliance with the World Health Organization’s (2016) recommendation regarding breastfeeding are cleverly constructed both visually and verbally in the

²This quotation is from the AVENT breast pump range ad in *Australian Mother & Baby + toddler*, February/March 2013, pp. 80–81.

BRU ad. However, research suggests that EBM is not on par with breast milk obtained through breastfeeding and may actually involve a range of problems (Johns *et al.* 2013; Rasmussen & Geraghty, 2011). Nevertheless, the 'on par' discourse has been identified in midwives' interactions with women. For instance, Burns *et al.* (2012) observe that 'the focus on the production and acquisition of "liquid gold" [breastmilk] appeared to be privileged over the mother-infant relationship and relational communication between midwife and woman' (p. 1744). Furthermore, that a woman can provide all the advantages of breast milk plus a connection with her baby without breastfeeding suggests a certain ideology. Given that breastfeeding is morally constructed as the best way to feed an infant, providing EBM has been found to be a way of not compromising a woman's position as a moral mother when she is unable to or unwilling to breastfeed (Sheehan *et al.* 2010; Johnson *et al.* 2012).

Conclusion

It is interesting that in all three advertisements, the mother and baby are shown in intimate and close contact. However, this connection is 'head to head'; the breasts themselves have been cropped out of the image and/or obscured or erased. Thus, the breast-baby connection is not evident, suggesting that it is unnecessary to infant feeding and unnecessary to bonding and ultimate happiness for the child and for the mother. Instead, each ad presents as ideal a humanized, happy and contented conceptualization of breast pumping, yet nowhere is the activity of bottle feeding verbally mentioned or visually depicted. Given that 'bonding' is a cited advantage of breastfeeding, the messages of these ads invite critical evaluation, not at least in terms of what kind of knowledge and attitudes women may be entering motherhood and making infant feeding choices. Buckley's (2009) interviews of lactation consultants indicate that the use of breast pumps has increased as a result of successful marketing, and this raises the question of whether the choice to use breast pumps is also related to how women understand the role of breastfeeding in relation to breast pumping, and whether advertising has influenced that understanding.

We are not suggesting that these messages are the only messages that might be construed in ads for breast pumping, nor are we suggesting that these are the only messages that each product manufacturer conveys in their ads. Rather, these are the prominent messages revealed through this analysis of three advertisements. Other works, such as Ryan *et al.* (2013) and Team and Ryan (2014), have highlighted the role that advertising plays in promoting male partner involvement in infant feeding. Further investigations may reveal other kinds of messages for each product. We believe it is important to be aware of the subtle and naturalized messages that ads convey and how they are constructed so that those who are significant purveyors of information are better equipped to understand what may be underlying women's decisions regarding methods of infant feeding.

Davis-Floyd (2001) has argued that 'the way a society conceives of and uses technology reflects and perpetuates the value and belief system that underlies it' (2001, p. 55). The messages conveyed in these advertisements therefore can be viewed from this perspective; they reflect the Cartesian separation of the woman and her breasts brought about by a technocratic approach to breastfeeding (Bartlett 2005; Burns *et al.* 2012), wherein breastfeeding prioritizes breast milk as a 'product' (Burns *et al.* 2013) rather than breastfeeding as a symbiotic nurturing relationship between a woman and her baby. These advertisements, however, attempt to mitigate this separation by showing a contented mother baby dyad.

Our analysis highlights the visual and verbal ways in which mother-infant relations are constructed in breast pump advertisements. Perhaps, we could reiterate the comment of Ryan *et al.* that it is important to 'stop taking practices that undermine breastfeeding at face value and begin critical debate about them' (2013, p. 481). We present the analyses in this article as a contribution to this critical debate.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Contributions

AS and WB contributed equally to the research process and the preparation of this article.

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