

Do formula marketers use  
social media to undermine  
breastfeeding?

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berkeley **media** studies group

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## Overview of today

Introduction: What is BMSG?

Infant formula marketing: An  
overview

Analysis of infant formula  
marketing on social media

Implications and closing

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# Acknowledgments

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- Thanks to **Karen Farley** and **Laurie True** of the California WIC Association and **Jeff Chester** of The Center for Digital Democracy for their thoughtful contributions.
- We thank the researchers and advocates from around the country who participated in our convening to develop a research and advocacy agenda around infant formula marketing.



# Berkeley Media Studies Group

- Research on news coverage of public health issues
- Media advocacy training and strategic consultation for community groups and public health advocates
- Professional education for journalists



## The Problem: Varied and immersive marketing



## The problem: Infant formula marketing

- Infant formula marketers spend millions targeting parents with **direct-to-consumer advertising**.
- Marketers are increasingly embracing **immersive digital tactics** – but these approaches are poorly understood.
- Widespread infant formula marketing may be a **barrier to successful breastfeeding**.

# Marketing: An introduction

Marketers:

- Design **products** they think people want
- **Price** them according to the audience they are trying to reach
- Put them in **places** where that audience will be
- **Promote** the product to get the audience familiar with the brand
- Use digital tools to **personalize** the pitch



## The 4 Ps: Product



# The 4 Ps: Product

**1** RECOMMENDED BY PEDIATRICIANS

**MAKES 33% MORE** (vs. 25% more) **25% MORE** (vs. 25% more)

**ENFAGROW® PREMIUM™ TODDLER NEXT STEP™**

**Brain-nourishing nutrition for your toddler**

**3 Toddler 1-3 yrs.**

**Non-GMO**

**Rapid cognitive needs added support**

**2x brain nourishing DHA than Similac Go & Grow!**

**Nutrients to round out the diet**

85% of brain growth happens by the time a toddler turns 3 years old. But, the transition from formula or breast milk to cow's milk can lead to an 80% drop in DHA consumption compared to infant formula or breast milk. That's why, Enfagrow Premium Toddler Next Step has 25 mg of DHA to help assure that rapid brain development is adequately supported.

Enfagrow Premium Toddler Next Step Natural Milk Flavor Powder has 2X the DHA & ~30% less sugar than Similac Go & Grow Milk Flavor!\*

Because 8 out of 10 toddlers don't get enough veggies, we designed Enfagrow Premium Toddler Next Step to have 22 total nutrients to complement your little one's diet.

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# The 4 Ps: Price and place



Photo credit: Public Citizen



## The 4 Ps: Promotion



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## The 5<sup>th</sup> P: Personalization

A screenshot of the Similac website. The navigation bar includes links for SIMILAC PRODUCTS, MY PREGNANCY, BABY DEVELOPMENT, HOW TO FEED A BABY, WHY SIMILAC?, and SAYING REHAB. The main content area features a banner for the 'Baby Journal App' with the headline 'The Most Comforting Resource Since The Binky'. Below the banner, text reads: 'The Similac Baby Journal app helps you track eating and sleeping habits, development milestones, and more. Download your free app today!\*'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Download on the App Store' and 'GET IT ON Google play'.

- Elaborate, multi-platform digital strategies
- Always “on” and personalized
- Friends and trusted bloggers are “brand ambassadors”

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## Our charge

How do formula companies use social media channels to target parents?

We collected and coded >1000 posts from 2015 and 2016.

- Tweets
- Facebook posts
- Sponsored blogs



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## What claims do marketers make about their products?

Enfamil @Enfamil · 18 Oct 2017  
Looking for ways to help with your baby's spit up? Enfamil® AR is clinically proven to reduce it by 50%. [bit.ly/2smwpng](http://bit.ly/2smwpng)

Similac US  
January 16, 2017 · 🌐

Our biggest breakthrough in immune support: Similac Pro-Advance™ & Similac Pro-Sensitive™.

**A first of its kind!**  
Only from Similac®  
SIMILAC.COM

Marketing claims focus on **health benefits** to children:

- Provides nutrients
- Compares favorably with breast milk
- Fights colic and spitting up

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# What claims do marketers make about their products?

Marketers also emphasize **lifestyle benefits for parents:**

- Convenient
- Facilitates transition from breastfeeding
- “Parents need options”
- Fathers can be involved in feeding



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Enfamil  
August 27, 2017 · 🌐

Thinking of transitioning from breastfeeding to bottle feeding? We can help: <http://bit.ly/2uGxB61>

Like Comment Share

👍👎👤 1.2K Top Comments ▾

## How else did marketers promote their products on social media?



Marketers tap into the **emotional aspects** of parenting by:

- Sharing parenting tips;
- Framing formula companies as defenders of formula-feeding parents;
- Aligning the brand with parents' dreams.

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## Conclusions

- Marketers use a range of social media platforms to reach parents.
- Most posts emphasize health or lifestyle benefits.
- Social media marketing makes formula companies part of customers' parenting journey.
- More research is needed to answer additional questions.

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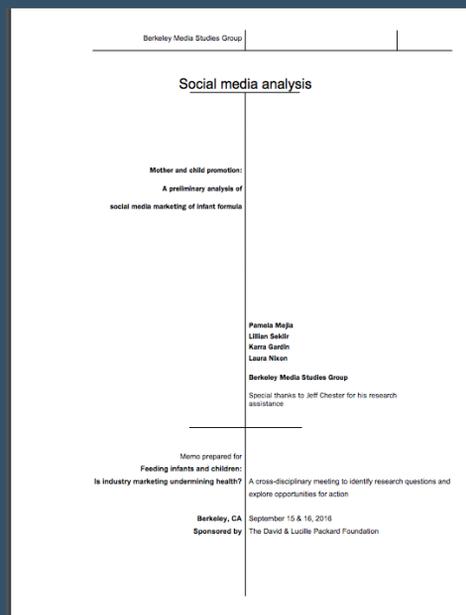
# Closing thoughts and reflections



What surprised you about our findings?

What would you like to learn more about?

What questions do you still have?



<http://www.bmsg.org/resources>

# Thank you!

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