Do formula marketers use social media to undermine breastfeeding?

California Breastfeeding Summit
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San Diego, CA

Overview of today

Introduction: What is BMSG?

Infant formula marketing: An overview

Analysis of infant formula marketing on social media

Implications and closing
Acknowledgments

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- 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

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

The 4 Ps: Price and place
The 4 Ps: Promotion

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

The 5\textsuperscript{th} P: Personalization

- Elaborate, multi-platform digital strategies
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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

What claims do marketers make about their products?

Marketing claims focus on **health benefits** to children:
- Provides nutrients
- Compares favorably with breast milk
- Fights colic and spitting up
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
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.

How else did marketers promote their products on social media?

- 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.

Conclusions
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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