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### Stance-taking as an identity construction in advertising targeted at mothers. A comparative analysis

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# Stance-taking as an identity construction in advertising targeted at mothers. A comparative analysis

Pozicijos laikymasis kuriant tapatybę motinoms  
 skirtoje reklamoje: lyginamoji analizė

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## Abstract

The paper presents a comparative analysis of two audiovisual commercials targeted at mothers. While the Huggies commercial employs the mother identity established in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century media discourse, the Frida Mom commercial challenges this normative by constructing a more complex identity. The major argument is that stance-taking as a discursive practice enables the persuader to build the intended identity and thus to influence the persuadee's decision. The paper studies both verbal and non-verbal stance-taking markers employed by the secondary participants, voice-over and superimposed texts. It concludes that the modalities are complementary in the sense that the verbal certainty provided in a faceless style is completed by the visual positive affect and vice versa in case of the Huggies commercial, but in the Frida Mom commercial both verbal and visual modalities communicate either doubt and negative affect simultaneously, or the positive affect. Concerning the stance object, while the Huggies commercial focuses on evaluating the product being advertised and the positive aspect the product brings to the mothering practice, the Frida Mom commercial evaluates the mothering practice in a much broader sense, ranging from the negative affect towards the mental health issues related to breastfeeding up to the positive affect towards maternal love.

**KEYWORDS:** stance-taking, identity, mother, motherhood, audiovisual advertising, multimodality.

## Introduction

From the point of view of social semiotics (O'Halloran, 2004; Najafian & Ketabi, 2011), advertising is a social practice in which the persuader (the speaker) organizes and structures an advertising text in such a way that makes the persuadee (the target audience) buy the product being advertised. The persuasive intention is achieved by providing product information, and at the same time by communicating the persuader's stance towards the product and/or towards the public image the product or the brand are meant to evoke. To make the persuadee align with the advocated stance, the advertising text constructs an identity of the ideal target consumer with which the persuadee can easily identify. The discourse of advertising has created and sustained identities as certain social roles (Giddens, 1991; Magalhães, 2005; Berger, 2011) that Benwell and Stokoe (2006, pp. 165-203) call "commodified identities". In this sense, an

identity constructed in advertising becomes a commodity that carries certain ideological assumptions. These assumptions are endlessly reiterated across advertising and other discourses, both public and private, such as e.g., “commodified femininity” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, pp. 173–177, p. 202) or toxic masculinity (e.g., Parent & Copper, 2020). Applying the semiotic perspective on the discourse of advertising, Kettelman (2013, p. 53) argues “that the purchase, the possession and the use of goods, i.e. [sic] the consumption of goods in a broad sense, have become prime signifiers in our lives and are thus instrumental in the discursive construction of identity.” In other words, the advertising discourse enables the persuadee to buy, possess and thus to consume the commodified identity constructed in the advertising text. As a result, this commodity becomes “a natural and inevitable part of the lives of different individuals” (Saren et al., 2007, p. 129).

Regarding the concept of commodified identities, the intensive marketing to mothers in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the concept of commodified motherhood (Pugh, 2005; Krzyżanovska, 2020). The discourse of advertising encourages mothers to consume goods and this consumption is meant to help them achieve the ideal state of motherhood represented by the mother figure in the advertising text (Finch & Groves, 1983; DeVault, 1991; Paxson, 2004; Clarke, 2014). This ideal mother figure has been mostly depicted as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman capable of handling any type of problem occurring in her idealized household (Thompson, 2010, p. 749). Mothers are often depicted as sacrificing themselves for the well-being of their offspring and their husbands, mothering is often presented as the most important and most satisfying job that makes a woman complete. This idealized public image of a mother known as “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996) or “new momism” (Douglas & Michaels, 2004) has resulted in creating a set of myths about mother, mothering and motherhood, which have been condemned by scholars across social and cultural spheres (e.g., Chodorow, 1989; Thurer, 1994; Caplan, 2000; Papazian, 2010 or O’Brien Hallstein, 2015). However, the growing power of internet and social networking in the 2010s gave rise to alternative voices in which real mothers started sharing their styles of mothering. Owing to the increasing number of various experiences with motherhood as it emerged in the public discourse, yet without traditional media and patriarchal control, the normative of a perfect mother has been challenged and questioned (O’Donohoe et al., 2014). O’Reilly (2010) terms this confrontation and opposing view as “maternal empowerment”. This concept does not deny a woman’s right to devote herself to her offspring and husband but emphasizes a woman’s choice to be the authority and to fully realize her agency in mothering. This goes hand in hand with other empowering movements such as the LGBTQ+ community or Black Lives Matter. As a result of this public call for socio-cultural changes, media and marketers have started to reconstruct the public image of a perfect mother. Nonetheless, despite the alternative voices, mothering as practice still represents a huge financial market. As Krzyżanovska (2020, p. 568) adds “[c]onsumption, hence, became one of the primary vehicles through which mothers nowadays express their love and constitute their relationship with their children.”

The present paper argues that the reconstruction of the maternal identity in the advertising discourse can be achieved through stance-taking, i.e., through communicating the persuader’s attitudes, perspectives, and commitments towards what is claimed about mothers and mothering as well as how mothering is visualized in an advertising text. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 595) who see stance as an index of identity and who define identity as “a discursive construct that emerges in interaction” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 587), the paper presupposes that maternal identity is constructed by the mother figure’s behavior, the types of activities she is engaged in, and by her relations to and interactions with people and objects that surround her. Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p. 4) agree that identity “is actively, ongoingly, dynamically *constituted* in discourse” (original italics). This means that the maternal identity is negotiated in the advertising text and the persuadee is invited to align with the identity the persuader construct for the persuadee. The paper compares two audiovisual commercials in which new mothers practice their mothering skills in their early stage of motherhood. While the commercial for Huggies (2016) is based on the traditional model of a perfect mother that has no doubt about her mothering practice, the one for Frida Mom (2021) suggests that mothering is not a straightforward task because it brings several physiological and mental changes to a woman’s life that a new mother can find difficult to deal with and control. The mother in the Huggies commercial thus represents the identity as a perfect mother established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the one in the Frida Mom commercial copies the trend of the current sociocultural changes and endeavours to construct a new maternal identity. To compare these two different practices, the paper studies how the persuader presents their stance towards the mothering practice. Their voice is represented by the secondary participants of the mother characters, by the voice-over and by the superimposed text. Since the com-

mercials work with multimodal resources, the paper focuses on both verbal (language) and non-verbal (images and music) modalities. The objective is to study how the stance-taking towards mothering practice is realized, and which stance-taking markers of verbal and non-verbal modalities are used to construct the maternal identity with which the individual brands want to be associated.

### Theoretical Background

Stance is a representation of the speaker's viewpoint, attitude, opinion, judgement and belief on a certain matter or person. Biber and Finegan (1989, p. 92) define stance as "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message". This definition, however, concerns only the textual level but for a broader comprehension of stance in a public discourse, it is important to realize that stance is a public act that the speaker realizes through interaction and through communicative means such as language, gesture, and other symbolic forms (Du Bois, 2007, p. 170). The current paper thus understands stance as a multimodal construal (Barton & Lee, 2013; Dancygier & Sweetser, 2012) in which the stance is realized as a combination of both verbal and non-verbal modalities. While the former consists in how we use language in interaction, the latter comprises sound, visuals, and object manipulation and body movement within space. Following Mondada's (2013, p. 580) study, the research on multimodality in interaction should consider "all the relevant linguistic, embodied, and material resources participants mobilize for organizing social interaction in an audible-visible intelligible way." Besides what we say and how we say it, it is also our facial expression, gestures and body positioning that communicate what we think and feel. Stance-taking is thus embodied in how we communicate, and it unfolds as the interaction proceeds. Moreover, Horst et al., (2014) explain that the unfolding of stance within the course of interaction:

"consists of a succession of correlating interactive expressive movement units, each with a specific affective quality. It is such a continuous inter-affective interaction of the participants that creates the temporal development of affect over time and grounds the course of the conversation. The dynamic pattern of jointly created affect goes along with the negotiation of a shared attitude towards a given topic" (p. 2122).

This means that even though the advertising interaction is deprived of the persuadee's interaction, the persuader's stance is provided in several units of verbal, embodied and material characteristics that reveals the persuader's stance and allows the persuadee to align with this clearly articulated and performed stance. Since the analyzed commercials represent an audiovisual text, it might be said that the persuadee experiences the persuader's stance in a similar way as a watcher experiences a feature movie as discussed by Sobchack in her study on embodied experience (Sobchack, 1992, p. 9). What enhances affective experience in an audiovisual narrative is what Scherer et al., (2013, pp. 2081–2092) call the aesthetic composition of very short-termed patterns of narrative that besides the protagonists' acting also includes camera work, sound, lighting and other technical aspects important for the final outcome. Additionally, they argue that "[c]ommercials in television tend to modulate strong, unambiguous affective experiences most explicitly through both dialogue and audio-visual staging. Furthermore, the different multimodal form of staging can not only orchestrate affectivity but as well create embodied meanings" (Scherer et al., 2013, p. 2089). To sum up, the multimodal orchestration of textual and audiovisual units used in a commercial conveys explicit stance towards what is communicated about the product and its consumers.

As far as the structure of stance-taking is concerned, Du Bois (2007, p. 170) distinguishes between evaluation, positioning and alignment. Evaluation refers to which quality or value we articulate about the stance object. This quality or value is expressed as a degree on a scale. There are two basic types of stance, and these are evidentiality or epistemic and affect or attitudinal stance. The former conveys the status of knowledge that we have towards the proposition expressed in our utterances. This status can be expressed via certainty, doubt, precision or limitation and actuality. The latter refers to our personal feelings, attitudes, believes that we have or associate with other people, objects, entities, events, or situations (Gray & Biber, 2012, pp. 16–17; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 7) and its major distinction concerns the positive affect and the negative one (Biber & Finegan, 1989). Simply speaking, stance can evaluate our status of knowledge, what we know about the proposition expressed in our interaction, as well as mark our personal attitude and feelings towards the proposition.

Positioning means that the speaker articulates his or her responsibility that they have towards the stance, and they articulate their position to a particular sociocultural value (Du Bois, 2007, p. 143). Following Benwell and Stokoe's

(2006, p. 43) perspective on positioning, speakers can position themselves (and others) as victims or perpetrators, active or passive, powerful or powerless and so on. Within the context of advertising discourse, this means that the secondary participant of a mother figure can be positioned into different roles, ranging from self-confident mothers who know how to care for their babies up to those who must be told what motherhood is about.

Finally, “[a]lignment can be defined provisionally as the act of calibrating the relationship between two stances, and by implication between two stancetakers” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 144). In other words, by alignment we invite our partner in the interaction to agree with our stance or not. Moreover, alignment is crucial for establishing a shared stance object that “becomes the cornerstone of the dialogic construction of intersubjectivity” (Du Bois, 2007, p. 159). If we can share our point of view on something with our partner in the interaction, we construct this mutual subjectivity in a dialogue. In case of the analyzed advertising texts, the stance object does not have to be only the product or set of products being offered, but also the stance the persuader articulates towards motherhood and styles of mothering, simply towards how mothers perform their mothering skills in the first days after the delivery. From the point of view of discourse analysis, the stage of evaluation and that of positioning are crucial for orchestrating verbal and non-verbal modalities to convey the speaker’s stance, while the stage of alignment shifts the perspective on a stance object to the hearer and it is their choice to opt for the stance or to offer an alternative voice.

Considering the linguistic realization of stance, Gray and Biber (2012, pp. 19–23) offers the following grammatical stance devices:

- complement clauses
- stance adverbials
- modal verbs and semi-modals
- stance nouns + prepositional phrase constructions

As for the complement construction, complement clauses complete the proposition expressed by a noun, adjective or verb which articulate the stance, the level or scale of knowledge, e.g., *I’m happy that we’re going to see her soon*, where the underlined *that*-clause completes the proposition of the adjective *happy* that communicates the speaker’s positive affect. Besides complement clauses, there are also stance adverbials (e.g., *Obviously, it is not...*) and modal or semi-modal verbs, but these are “less explicitly a grammatical marker of stance, because the modal verbs are incorporated into the matrix clause” (Gray & Biber, 2012, p. 20). As far as the stance noun + prepositional phrase construction is concerned, these might include, e.g., *the importance of ...*, *the hope for...*. However, as Gray and Biber (2012, p. 20) express “it is not always clear that the prepositional phrase expresses a ‘proposition’”. Nonetheless, the present paper considers these lexico-grammatical constructions as markers of stance since stance is always expressed in a certain context and thus the proposition is always derivable from the co-textual aspects of a clause in which the stance markers are used.

As far as the relation between stance and genre is concerned, Gray and Biber (2012) claim that the epistemic stance is more evident and frequent in academic writing, while attitudinal one is pervasive in conversation. A significant feature of stance-taking is also what Biber and Finegan (1989) call a faceless stance which they understand as a style typical of written documents with a high level of evidentiality such as scientific texts or legal documents. It is in fact a stylistic feature that consists in the absence of any explicit lexical or grammatical devices that would indicate what the speaker thinks about the evidentiality, such as *I am sure that...*. In other words, texts whose major communicative goal is to provide information and facts absent stance markers and features. The reason is that the emphasis is put on the information presented, rather than on what the speaker thinks or feels about the information. It might be claimed that certainty is the unmarked case in such genres. As a result, the positioning and the speaker’s responsibility is taken for granted, and the stage of alignment gives space for the hearer to infer that the speaker is totally responsible for the information provided. Since the discourse of advertising borrows features from both formal and informal texts, including scientific and conversation registers (Myers, 1994; Cook, 2001; Hermerén, 1999; Urbanová, 2006; Pelclová, 2011, etc.), both types of epistemic and attitudinal stances as well as faceless style of stance-taking are to be expected in the analyzed commercials. The question is whether the persuader opts for positive or negative affect towards a new mother, and whether the persuader takes advantage of a faceless style or not when realizing the epistemic stance. another question that arises is the object of stance, which can be either the product being advertised or a parenting practice, or both.

## Methodology

The paper is a comparative analysis of two audiovisual commercials targeted at new mothers. The focus is on the multimodal stance-taking markers that communicate the persuader's point of view on the mother figure and her mothering practice. The first commercial called *The Second Hug* promotes Huggies Little Snugglers diapers and it was published in 2016. The other is entitled *Stream of Lactation* and it promotes a range of products designed for new mothers by Frida Mom and was launched in 2021. These commercials were chosen on purpose for this qualitative analysis to demonstrate how the persuader's contemporary stance towards mothering differs from that created in the last century. While the Huggies commercial works with the model of a perfect mother, the Frida Mom commercial is believed to react to contemporary sociocultural changes and endeavours to depict a mother who feels uncertain about her mothering practice. Nonetheless, the persuader's intention in both commercials is to construct an image of a mother figure with whom the persuadee can identify, and to convey such a stance towards mothering in the early stage of motherhood with which the persuadee can align. To build such an image, the paper presupposes that the verbal and visual modalities cooperate in this task. Therefore, it is expected that the means of verbal and visual stance-taking are cooperative and inclusive, not mutually exclusive.

The methodology used for the analysis combines Biber and Finegan's (1989) approach to stance-taking linguistic resources and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework of visual grammar together with studies devoted to semiotic aspects of facial expressions and bodily movements as discussed in selected chapters from Müller et al.'s (2013, 2014) edited volumes. The linguistic analysis focuses on affect-loaded nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs as well as on expressions that communicate certainty or doubts. Additionally, the sentence types are also investigated because the assumption is that commands, statements and questions represent stance markers, too. The linguistic analysis thus focuses on both overt and covert, or explicit and implicit stance-taking markers that help the persuader convey epistemic and/or attitudinal stance. The lexico-grammatical aspects are scrutinized in all forms of language used in the multimodal texts, that is in the secondary participants' (the mother figures visualized on the screen) textual input, in the voice-overs' words as well as in the texts superimposed on the screen. All these three forms are seen as the persuader's language input. Considering the visual modalities, the paper studies how the mother participant is represented, whether she is shown in a narrative or conceptual representation or in a combination of both, in which types of processes she is depicted (e.g., domestic chores, delivery, taking care of the baby, etc.) and which roles she is assigned, meaning whether she is an active or rather a passive participant in her mothering role. Furthermore, the paper also studies how this representation interacts with the viewer, i.e., with the persuadee. Since both commercials visualize the mother figure, and in the Frida Mom commercial there are in fact two mothers of different races, an attention is also paid to their facial expressions and bodily movement and engagement with objects depicted in the scene because facial expressions, gestures, body postures and objects manipulation are believed to cocreate the meaning communicated by the verbal stance (e.g., Kidwell, 2013, p. 105; Schönherr, 2013, p. 1336; Ricci Bitti, 2013, pp. 1342–1349, etc.) and their coordination is crucial for conveying and transmitting the message. To communicate the persuader's stance in an unambiguous manner, the cinematic techniques such as camera close-ups and distancing must be also taken into consideration. Last, but not least, the audio aspects, such as background music, its absence or presence of other sounds, are discussed too.

## Results

Even though the commercials offer different product type (diapers in the Huggies commercial and a set of products for breastfeeding in the Frida Mom commercial) and even though they depict a prenatal and a postnatal stage of a new mother, respectively, they both construct an identity as the new mother and convey their stance towards mothering. The difference is between how the mother figure is depicted, what she does or does not, and how the mothering practice is visualized. The discourse of advertising usually follows the problem-solution pattern (Hoey, 1983) in which the problem can be of any character but is always solved out with the help of the product and the company promoted in the advertising text.

In the analyzed commercials, the problem in the Huggies commercial is the well-being of the baby, while in the Frida Mom commercial it is the well-being of the mother. The problem is communicated by the secondary participants who in both cases are represented by a new mother. The mother in the Huggies commercial expresses doubts about her baby's physiological behavior by stating: "How're you doing in there, baby girl? Well, out here, the world is little different. You're probably gonna cry." The choice of the adverb of doubts *probably* mitigates

the certainty of crying. Considering that crying is babies' only way of communication in their earlier life stage, the choice of *probably* seems a little bit odd since it is obvious that the baby will cry and will cry a lot. Immediately, she assures her baby that everything will be alright: "But don't worry. You'll always be comfortable." These words are accompanied by the mother sitting in an armchair, pulling one diaper out of the pack of the advertised brand, and stroking gently the topsheet of the diaper. The direct command and the promise enhanced by the adverbial of time *always* assuring the permanent comfort communicate her high level of certainty about her baby's well-being. The mother thus communicates evidential stance. The same type of stance is traced in the female voice-over that evaluates the product: "The first hug they ever feel is from you. Make sure the second hug feels just as good. New Huggies Little Snugglers provide our best care to help keep baby's skin clean and healthy". A high level of certainty is expressed in what the voice-over claims about the first hug and about the product. This is communicated in a faceless stance manner since there are no markers of assuring the persuadee, such as *we know/we are certain/we assure you that the first hug...or we are hundred percent positive that New Huggies Little Snugglers provide our best care*. At the same time the attitudinal stance is expressed in the explicit adjectives the voice-over uses to evaluate the product ("our best care to help keep baby's skin clean and healthy") and the hug ("just as good"). Even though *best* and *good* are rather vague expressions, they result in evoking the positive affect because they guarantee the cleanness and healthiness of the baby's sensitive skin. What is peculiar, though, is how the persuader implies the evaluation of the second hug ("Make sure the second hug feels just as good"). The sentence structural pattern, namely the direct command, and the comparison structure ("just as good") shifts the responsibility of this attitudinal stance towards the persuadee. The persuader effectively conveys their positive affect towards the stance object, which in this case is the hug. However, at the same time they imply that the persuadee must acknowledge that the product can provide a hug of equivalent quality as the one provided by a new mother to her newborn. The text "How will you greet your baby?" superimposed on the screen at the very end of the commercial expresses certainty towards the proposition that the persuadee will greet their baby. However, the interrogative sentence type downplays the persuader's certainty about the persuadee's manner of greeting. From the point of view of pragmatics, the question gives the persuadee an option to decide about how they will greet their baby and whether the greetings will involve the product being advertised or not. Since the persuader does not use a direct command *greet your baby with Huggies*, this question might be interpreted as an instance of evidential stance, namely conveying doubts. Considering the purpose of the advertising genre it is evident that the question functions as a leading question that prompts the desired answer, i.e., with the Huggies Little Snugglers.

As written above, the problem in the Frida Mom commercial does not tackle the baby, but the mother herself. The secondary participants, represented by two mothers of different races, one Afro-American and the other Caucasian, share their experience with breastfeeding. Both express quite a high level of doubts as they ask themselves questions related to breastfeeding and to the emotional bond with their offspring: "Is it too early to call a lactation consultant?" "Do I love my baby?" "Am I bad mom if I stop now?", as well as undermining their breastfeeding skills, e.g., "Good mom should know how to do this." These doubts express their concerns about whether they are good mothers and whether they perform the breastfeeding in a correct way. In other words, they convey their mental state, and they doubt their mothering practice. At the same time, their confession also conveys certainty, especially when the mothers provide exact times, early morning hours and minutes, when they breastfeed: "3 am, 4:06 am, and 4:43 am", "and he's still crying", and "I just want to feed my bay". They also complain about the fact that her baby is still hungry despite being fed, which is what makes them worry about the quality of their mothering practice. Moreover, they also describe the actual process when the baby is supposed to attach to the breasts, but this often causes pain to the mother, saying "latch, and latch better" and "oh God, unlatch, unlatch, aw". Besides, they also evaluate how they feel about that constant breastfeeding, saying "I'm so tired and clogged" in which the word *tired* is uttered by both secondary participants simultaneously. The amplifier *so* boosts the force of the proposition and indicates a high degree of certainty. Considering the visual context and the whole problem of breastfeeding, the word *tired* communicates the negative affect. Moreover, their experience with night breastfeeding and clogged milk ducts is communicated with a faceless stance by stating "the pump is talking to me" to describe the loneliness and social detachment, or by "and my doctor said cabbage" to share the piece of advice the new mother tried following in order to unclog her ducts. The problem

of the blockage is further expressed with a high level of value judgements when the mother is surprised by the fact that she tries to unblock her milk ducts with utensils such as an epilator and an electric toothbrush, saying “work out the clog with my what?”, uttered with the rising intonation. Besides not having enough milk because of the plugged ducts, the other extreme problem new mothers might face is having too much milk and the irregularity of feeding, as it is communicated in “cluster feeding and so much milk”. These parts communicate their attitudes, mainly surprise and value judgement, towards lactation, and especially towards the two extremes lactation might bring. Besides talking about rather negative experience with breastfeeding, what they also share is their affect, namely love towards their offspring. This is communicated towards the end of the commercial when they say, “and I love his smell and wrinkled toes”.

Becoming a mother does not mean that a woman must watch her language as is shown in the very last scene. One of the mothers is taking a nap in an armchair but is suddenly woken up by her baby’s crying. When turning off the baby monitor walkie talkie that is on a desk next to the armchair, she accidentally hits the two small bottles of milk and swears “Of, f\*\*\*”. The taboo word is bleeped out, but its initial phoneme is clearly audible. This conveys her negative evaluation of the thing she has just done and communicates that mothering does not exclude swearing.

The aim of the commercial is to show that becoming a new mother involves mental disbalance and doubts about one’s ability to breastfeed, and that this is totally normal. To make a new mother’s life bearable, the company offers its Breast Care range with the final command “Care for your breasts. Not just your baby.” The command and the hedge *just* in this particular context communicate the persuader’s quite a high level of certainty about what the persuadee should do when becoming a new mother. Compared to the Huggies commercial, the persuader does not evaluate the products being offered. The attention is paid to the target consumer herself, the new mother who is invited to realize that it is not just the baby that deserves the persuadee’s care, it is also the persuadee herself. This brings quite a revolutionary perspective on mothering since so far the attention has been mostly paid to newborns and their well-being, while problems related to mental and physiological aspects of mothering have been rarely mentioned in advertising.

Considering the visual representation of the mother figure, all mothers depicted are involved in what might be described as a fragmented narrative because just some parts of their mothering are described and visualized. As for the individual realizations, the Huggies mother is mostly depicted in processes that might be labelled as mental and verbal. She thus performs the roles of a senser and that of a sayer – she talks to her unborn baby, strokes her belly, checks that everything is prepared, and she smiles all the time. After the baby is born, she is depicted in a transactional process in which she holds her newborn and applies the diaper being advertised. She thus performs the role of the actor, and she keeps on smiling, enjoying her new life. The mother’s body posture, constant smile, and engagement with the objects depicted and later with the baby communicate the positive affect she has towards being a mother. Throughout the text, she is presented as a mother who is perfectly prepared for the delivery and for the postnatal period, who knows what to expect and how to deal with her parenting responsibilities. She does not talk directly to the persuadee, she addresses only her baby girl. The persuadee is addressed by the voice-over and the superimposed text that in fact mocks the persuadee’s choice for the advertised brand as discussed above. The persuader positions themselves as a confident and powerful participant who knows that the promoted brand will bring comfort to a baby. The persuadee is positioned as an observer who has the option to align with the positive aspect towards maternity as it is constructed in the commercial.

In case of the Frida Mom commercial, the persuadee is treated differently and different aspects of mothering are articulated. The Afro-American mother starts the interaction with the verbal process of addressing the persuadee directly, saying “All right girls, you’ve got this”. She looks directly at the persuadee’s eyes, initiating a direct conversation and imitating a friendly relation with the persuadee by choosing the in-group marker *girls*. As she articulates “this”, the camera moves down to her baby and to her breasts. When breasts are shown in official media texts, these are predominantly hidden in a piece of garment and if shown naked, they are of perfect shape and size. Even though the aspects of shape and size are driven by one’s subjective evaluation, the objectification of breasts in public discourse resulted in a conventional representation of ideal bust. Nonetheless, the Frida Mom commercial presents real lactating breasts that are two or three times bigger than non-breast-

feeding ones, and often asymmetrical. This is of course caused by the hormonal changes and milk production. By visualizing the real lactating breasts and in fact the real process of breastfeeding, the persuader shares their stance towards how lactation is conventionally communicated in public discourse. The initial look designates the addressee of the message directly, and at the same time it invites the persuadee to align with what the demonstrative pronoun *this* refers to. It does not point only to the conventionally unacceptable breasts, but also to the mental health issues as they are articulated in the scenes that follow and that are discussed above. The persuader thus presents themselves as somebody who know that mothering, and especially in its breastfeeding stage, includes several negative aspects. The initial look, the in-group marker and the uncensored aspects of lactation offer the persuadee to align with the persuader's effort to disrupt the stereotypical representation of new mothers, and thus to participate in reconstructing a new media image of motherhood.

As far as the processes in the Frida Mom commercial are concerned, the initial scene is a transactional process in which the mother gives the persuadee the embodiment of breastfeeding. She also performs the role of a sayer since she communicates explicitly with the persuadee, and at the same time, the role of an actor as she acts as a breastfeeding mother, feeding her baby. The scenes that follow can be characterized as a constant switch between transactional and mental processes. Both mothers are involved in childcare, including breastfeeding, and their body care as well as in cognitive and psychological processes of being tired, exhausted, and questioning themselves about whether they are good mothers. Their concerns are reflected in their facial expressions which communicate what they are talking about – being tired, not being sure about what to do with not enough milk and with too much milk. The abundance of milk is depicted in the scene in which the mother opens the fridge, and the milk storage bags start falling down. This state of inexperience is underlined by the fact that they do not interact with any other secondary participants except for their babies; they are shown on being on their own, isolated from the surrounding environment during any daytime.

The visual stance is also communicated by the camera work. The Huggies commercial prefer medium shots when showing the mother stroking her belly and waiting patiently for the delivery. This communicates the social distance between the persuader and the persuadee. The close shots are used after the baby is born and when the functionality of the product is discussed so as to communicate the positive affect towards the baby and the product, respectively. In the Frida Mom commercial, the close shots alternate with the medium shots. While the former are used to underline the sensitivity and intimacy of the lactation, as well as the maternal love the mothers express towards their newborns, the latter are used to visualize lactating breasts, which is something that is still considered taboo in advertising and in public discourse in general. The camera in both commercials work with the frontal angle and eye-level angle. This implies the social balance between the persuader and the persuadee. However, as discussed above, in case of the Huggies commercial, the persuader's linguistic input (the commands whose actions are beneficent for the baby, and not for the mother) makes the persuader be more powerful than the persuadee. In case of the Frida Mom commercial, the persuader and the persuadee are presented as having the same power control over the interaction. The final command "Care for your breasts. Not just your baby" might be seen as putting the persuader into a social higher position. Nonetheless, the perlocutionary effect of the directive speech act that designates the persuadee to be the beneficiary mitigates this power imbalance.

As far as the sound is concerned, the Huggies commercial uses a gentle music throughout the whole text, while the Frida Mom commercial combines background gentle music with baby's crying and whining. Even though the sound is not a dominant modality in the Huggies, it underlines the persuader's positive affect conveyed in their linguistic behavior. In the Frida Mom commercial, the baby's cry is more significant than the background music. Since the cry does not cease, it might be interpreted as underlining the fact that babies in general cry a lot as it is their only means of communication and that it is their natural habit regardless of the mother's effort to eliminate or prevent it.

## Conclusion

The paper compares two audiovisual commercials targeted at mothers. Its aim is to identify the multimodal stance-taking markers the persuader employs to construct a mother figure and to convey the stance towards a new mother and her mothering practice in the early stage of motherhood. Even though the commercials promote different types of products, they can be compared in terms of their construction of the maternal identity and of the persuader's stance towards mothering.



In the Huggies commercial, the epistemic stance dominates the advertising text. This is reflected in both the secondary participant's, the mother's, utterances as well as in the voice-over's part in which their high level of certainty is communicated in a faceless style as far as the verbal modality is concerned. The mother's permanent smile might be interpreted as a visual stance-taking marker that accompanies the verbal certainty. Her facial expression and the embodiment of her prenatal expectation when she is 'just' expecting the delivery and checks that all the things needed are ready communicate her positive affect towards what she is doing and saying. In other words, while the verbal modality conveys a high level of certainty, the visual modality conveys a high level of the mother's positive attitude towards her mothering practice. The only doubt she expresses concerns the possibility of the baby's crying. This is presented as the only possible problem related to being a new mother as the commercial does not mention any other challenges the stage of new motherhood brings in a woman's life. Moreover, this might imply that as a fresh mom, one does not have to face any 'real' problems. The reason for the baby's crying is not communicated explicitly, but the nature of the product implies that one of the reasons might be the discomfort caused by diapers that cannot keep the baby's skin dry. The brand thus implies that its product avoids this type of discomfort and thus eliminates the cause of crying. The positive evaluation of the product is conveyed in the voice-over's choice of positive adjectives *best* and *good*, which are rather vague in their meaning. The product information is thus communicated via the voice-over's attitudinal stance, via emotions, and not via information. The product information is conveyed via the visual modality when the diaper is shown to absorb purple liquid spread on its topsheet quickly. To sum up, regarding the voice-over, the visual evidentiality accompanies the verbal positive attitude. On the other hand, when it comes to the mother, the visual positive attitude accompanies her verbal certainty. Considering the superimposed text, the verbal stance-taking marker combines the lexical certainty expressed in the proposition 'greeting one's baby' with the grammatical construction of doubt, as the leading question "How will you greet your baby?" mocks the persuadee's manner of greeting their child. However, since the question is positioned at the very end of the advertising text after the product has been already introduced and since the brand's original logo is located above the question and dominates the message, it is clear that the verbal doubt implied in the question is mitigated, or even negated by the visual modality. The stance object in this commercial is not only the product itself, but also the mothering practice that is presented as a skill a new mother might easily handle with the product.

The type of stance dominating the Frida Mom commercial is evidentiality, namely a high level of doubts conveyed in the secondary participants', the two mothers', verbal confession about their breastfeeding experience accompanied by the visual modality. The stance object is their lactation, either having too much milk or not enough milk and the appearance of the lactating breasts, and their maternal love. The verbal doubt is communicated in the form of questions the mothers ask themselves, while their faces communicate the pain, anxiety and insecurity they experience when breastfeeding, unblocking their ducts, healing their breasts and dealing with the milk abundance. Simultaneously, their facial expressions, the uncensored scenes of lactation, and the camera switch between close-ups and middle shots convey their diverse feelings towards mothering. A high level of certainty is conveyed in their verbal stance when talking about the times of night breastfeeding that culminates in their verbal negative affect evaluating their physical state of being tired, which is again reflected in their facial expressions. Unlike in the Huggies commercial, the Frida Mom mother identity is built as a complex identity in which both negative affect and doubts related to lactation are mixed with the positive affect towards maternal love. Since no product is introduced throughout the text, it might be said that the prevailing object of stance is the mothering practice, namely the lactation. This is presented as something that causes mental and physical changes to a woman's life, but at the same time the mental health issues and the lactation processes are presented as something totally natural. The embodied lactation experience in the Frida Mom commercial conveys the persuader's covert stance towards the range of products the company offers and that are meant to keep the mother's, not the babies' skin safe.

From the point of view of semiotics, it might be concluded that the Frida Mom commercial utilizes the potential of the semiotic modalities of an audiovisual text to reconstruct the mother identity in a public discourse and to communicate to new mothers that mothering is not always as joyful experience as shown in older commercials. The mother identity thus gains a new meaning and dimension, which might open the public discussion towards more empowered mothers and mothering practices.

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### Jana Pelclová

## Santrauka

#### Pozicijos laikymasis kuriant tapatybę motinoms skirtoje reklamoje: lyginamoji analizė

Straipsnyje pateikiama dviejų mamoms skirtų reklaminių filmukų lyginamoji analizė. „Huggies“ vaizdo įrašė naudojamas XX amžiaus žiniasklaidoje susiformavęs motinos vaizdas, o „Frida Mom“ meta šiai tradicijai iššūkį kurdama sudėtingesnę tapatybę. Pagrindinis argumentas yra tas, kad pozicijos užėmimas kaip diskursyvi praktika leidžia įtikinėjantį susikurti numanomą tapatybę ir taip daryti įtaką įtikinamojo apsisprendimui. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami tiek žodiniai, tiek neverbaliniai pozicijos priėmimo ženklai, kuriuos naudoja antriniai dalyviai, balsas už kadro ir užklotiniai tekstai. Daroma išvada, jog naudojami metodai papildo vienas kitą ta prasme, kad „Huggies“ reklamos atveju beveidžiu stiliumi pateikiamą verbalinį pasitikėjimą papildo vizualinis teigiamas afektas, ir atvirkščiai, tuo tarpu „Frida Mom“ reklamoje tiek verbaliniai, tiek vizualiniai metodai išreiškia abejones ir neigiamą poveikį tuo pačiu metu arba vien teigiamą poveikį. Kalbant apie pozicijos objektą, „Huggies“ reklamoje pagrindinis dėmesys skiriamas reklamuojam produktui vertinti ir teigiamam aspektui, kurį produktas suteikia mamoms gyvenimui, o „Frida Mom“ motinystę vertina daug platesne prasme: nuo neigiamo su žindymu susijusio psichinės sveikatos poveikio iki teigiamo motiniškos meilės džiaugsmo.

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