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Semiotic Analysis of Selected Kids' Food Product Advertisements

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Abstract

This study investigated the referential and inferential semiotic elements embedded in the language of selected advertisements for kids' food products, with a focus on how meaning is constructed and how persuasion is achieved through linguistic choices. Anchored on Roland Barthes' theory of Denotation and Connotation and Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design within a semiotic analytical framework. Five advertisements for children's food products - Friso Gold, Gerber Grain & Grow, Nutrilac, Nestlé NAN OPTIPRO 3, and Nutribom - were purposively selected and analysed to examine the interaction between literal meaning and implied cultural significance. Considering the purpose of the study, three research questions guided this work. Findings revealed that referential (denotative) language dominated the surface structure of the advertisements, providing clear information about product type, ingredients, nutritional value, and age suitability. However, beyond denotation, the advertisements strategically employed inferential (connotative) meanings through evaluative lexical

choices, growth-related terminology, and references to naturalness and scientific credibility. These inferential meanings enhance the communicative and persuasive power of the advertisements by constructing symbolic associations with care, quality, responsible parenting, and optimal child development. The study further demonstrated that linguistic and visual signs operate synergistically to stabilise interpretation and reinforce brand identity. Cultural and ideological assumptions about parenting, childhood, and consumption are subtly embedded in the language, transforming commercial products into symbols of care and moral responsibility. Overall, the findings confirmed that the language of kids' food product advertisements functions not only to inform but also to shape consumer perception and behaviour through layered semiotic processes. The study contributed to semiotic, linguistics and advertising discourse by illustrating the effectiveness of combining Barthes' and Peirce's framework in analysing advertising language within children's consumer culture.
Keywords: Semiotics, Referential Tools, Inferential Tools, Kids' Food Products, Advertisements

Introduction

Advertisers use simple words, catchy slogans, persuasive expressions, and appealing descriptions to create positive impressions about their products. Through language, advertisers communicate information about taste, quality, nutritional value, excitement, and enjoyment. To achieve this purpose, advertisers carefully combine language, images, colours, symbols, and other visual elements to create attractive and persuasive messages. From a semiotic perspective, these signs can communicate both direct meanings about a product and indirect meanings based on emotions, values, associations, and cultural knowledge (Barthes, 1977). In the world of advertising, food product advertising is one of the most common forms of advertising, especially those targeted at children. Children are an important consumer group because they influence family purchasing decisions and are often attracted

to products that appear fun, colourful, and enjoyable. As a result, many food companies create advertisements specifically designed to appeal to children. Examining the verbal and the visual signs of these adverts is important in understanding how advertisements construct meaning and influence how consumers perceive the products advertised.

Previous studies on children's food advertising have examined the phenomenon from several perspectives, particularly the nutritional quality of advertised products, the frequency and nature of children's exposure to food advertising, persuasive marketing techniques, advertising appeals, thematic representations, and the use of child-oriented visual devices. For example, a multinational analysis of television food advertising found that non-core foods constituted a substantial proportion of food advertisements viewed by children and that child-oriented persuasive techniques were frequently associated with such products (Kelly et al., 2010). Similarly, Hebden et al. (2011) examined persuasive techniques used in food advertising and identified visual, audio, and emotive strategies designed to appeal to children and parents. Roberts and Pettigrew (2007), through a thematic content analysis of children's food advertisements, identified themes including grazing, exaggerated health claims, the denigration of core foods, and the association of food consumption with popularity, performance, and mood.

Other studies have focused specifically on the visual and promotional resources employed in marketing food products to children. Kraak and Story (2010) examined the use of promotional characters on food packaging and found that such characters were predominantly associated with less-healthful food products. Similarly, Castonguay (2013) investigated familiar children's characters and health-related messages in food advertising, while Carter et al. (2012) examined child-oriented packaging and reported extensive use of visual marketing techniques, including

child-oriented graphics, cartoons, celebrities, and health and nutrition claims. More recent research has continued to examine health claims, nutrition claims, product imagery, cartoon characters, colours, and other front-of-pack marketing features and their effects on parents' perceptions and purchasing intentions (Chung et al., 2024).

Studies conducted in the Nigerian context have likewise examined children's food advertising primarily in terms of advertising themes, persuasive appeals, and content. Oyero and Salawu (2014), for instance, found that children's food commercials on Nigerian television employed celebrity, music, adventure, rational, and bandwagon appeals, while their dominant themes included accomplishment, improved performance, exaggerated health claims, popularity, happiness, and fun. Samuel and Ekundayo (2018) also examined television food advertisements aimed at children in Lagos and Ibadan, identifying product categories, slogans, nutrition messages, and other content features.

Although these studies have established that children's food advertisements rely extensively on verbal and visual persuasive resources, much of the existing research has concentrated on identifying the presence, frequency, and effects of particular advertising techniques, appeals, themes, claims, or visual features. Consequently, less attention has been devoted to the linguistic and semiotic processes through which these resources interact to construct meanings within individual advertisements. In particular, there remains a need for closer examination of how referential elements that explicitly point to products, attributes, actions, or experiences interact with inferential semiotic elements whose meanings emerge through cultural, contextual, and associative interpretation. The research problem addressed by the present study, therefore, is not simply the presence of persuasive language or visual features in children's food advertising, but the insufficient understanding of how linguistic and semiotic resources operate

together to produce meanings that may extend beyond the literal content of the advertisements.

This study addresses this gap by examining the interplay between referential and inferential semiotic elements in children's food product advertisements. By doing so, it seeks to extend existing research beyond the identification of advertising techniques and themes towards an interpretation of the meaning-making processes through which verbal and visual resources jointly construct persuasive messages. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse the language and visual signs used in selected kids' food product advertisements in order to understand how meaning is constructed and how persuasion is achieved. The purpose of this study was to conduct a semiotic analysis of selected kids' food product advertisements. Therefore, this study was driven by this objective:

i. to identify and analyse referential and inferential elements in the selected kids' food product advertisements.

This study is significant as it highlights how language in kids' consumer product advertisements functions as a persuasive tool by conveying both literal and implied meanings. It contributes to scholarship in linguistics, semiotics, and advertising discourse by showing how referential and inferential elements shape consumer perception and brand interpretation. The study also raises consumer awareness of the persuasive strategies embedded in advertising language. Such insights help consumers to make informed decisions about the potential impacts and ethics of advertising targeting young consumers.

The following research questions guided this study towards attaining its objectives:

i. What referential and inferential elements are used in the selected kids' consumer product advertisements that enhance the communicative and persuasive power of these advertisements?

Review of Relevant Scholarship

Semiotics

Semiotics is concerned with the study of signs and the processes through which they produce meaning. Hartmann and Stork (1972) describe semiotics as encompassing linguistic and non-linguistic signs, while Eco (1976) explains that signs may take forms such as words, sounds, concepts, and visual representations. Thus, semiotic analysis extends beyond language to include images, colours, gestures, typography, and other representational resources through which meaning is communicated. Okeke and Chukwu (2015) similarly emphasise that signs function as carriers of meaning and may generate different interpretations depending on their communicative and cultural contexts. Hall (1997) further conceptualises representation as a process through which meaning is produced and exchanged through signifying systems. These perspectives establish semiotics as an appropriate framework for examining how children's food-product labels communicate both explicit and implicit meanings.

For the present study, however, semiotics is understood not merely as the identification of signs but as an analytical approach to examining referential and inferential meaning.

Referential and Inferential Tools

Referential meaning refers to the relationship between a linguistic expression and the person, object, action, quality, or situation it identifies. Speaks (2024) describes reference as the relationship between an expression and the object or property to which it refers. Referential meaning is therefore concerned with what words directly represent or identify. In children's food-product labels, examples include product names, food types, flavours, ingredients, and explicit product descriptions. Words such as chocolate, strawberry, and whole grain, for instance, directly identify particular flavours, ingredients, or product qualities.

Inferential meaning refers to meaning that is not directly stated but is understood through context, background knowledge, and cultural assumptions. Pragmatic research views communication as an inferential process in which readers or listeners use available information to arrive at meanings beyond the words themselves (Corredor, 2020). Thus, an expression on a food label may communicate more than its literal meaning. For example, words associated with fun, energy, happiness, or naturalness may lead consumers to form additional impressions about a product, even when such meanings are not explicitly stated.

The distinction between referential and inferential meaning is important to the present study. Referential meaning concerns what the linguistic elements of children's food-product labels directly identify or describe, while inferential meaning concerns what readers may understand or conclude from those elements in relation to context and cultural knowledge. Examining both forms of meaning therefore provides a basis for investigating how children's food-product labels communicate product information while also creating persuasive and culturally meaningful associations.

Kids' Food Products and Advertisement

Kids' food products refer to foods and beverages that are designed, packaged, promoted, or marketed in ways that appeal particularly to children. Such products are often distinguished by the use of colourful packaging, cartoon characters, attractive product names, playful language, and other visual and verbal features. These features are important because children may respond strongly to the symbolic and emotional meanings attached to food products. According to Okoye and Okeke (2023), advertising is a powerful medium for communicating ideas through the interaction of people, objects, symbols, and communication, and it is closely connected to culture and consumer behaviour. Empirical studies have similarly shown that children's food advertisements employ

various persuasive strategies to attract attention and create positive associations with products. Significantly, advertisements use different verbal and visual strategies to attract children and create positive meanings around food products.

Lewis and Hill (1998), in their study of food advertisements on British children's television, found that food commercials frequently used animation, humour, stories, and appeals to fun and happiness. Similarly, Folta et al. (2006) found that food advertisements targeted at school-age children used persuasive appeals that associated food products with physical activity and athletic ability. Kim et al. (2016) also found that children's food advertisements employed different persuasive appeals to attract attention and influence children's perceptions of food products. In Nigeria, Oyero and Salawu (2014) found that children's food commercials used celebrity endorsement, music, adventure, and bandwagon appeals as persuasive strategies. Samuel and Ekundayo (2018) further found that food advertisements on television in Lagos and Ibadan frequently used slogans and other persuasive techniques, while nutrition information was limited.

These studies demonstrate that children's food advertisements communicate more than information about products; they construct meanings through language, images, characters, symbols, music, and other persuasive elements. This provides a basis for the present study, which examines how such elements are used to create and communicate meanings in selected kids' food product advertisements from a semiotic perspective.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in two complementary semiotic theories: Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation and Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs. Barthes' framework is employed to distinguish between literal meanings (denotation) and implied cultural meanings (connotation and myth) in advertising

language. Peirce's model—comprising the representamen, object, and interpretant—is used to explain how signs generate meaning through interpretation and how consumers infer meanings based on cultural knowledge and repeated exposure. The combination of these theories provides a robust analytical lens for examining both explicit and implicit meanings in advertising discourse. These theories helped achieve a coherent analysis of the selected advertisements.

Empirical Review

Previous studies have applied semiotic approaches to understand how advertisements communicate meanings and influence audiences. One of such studies is that of Okoye and Okeke (2023) titled *"A Socio-semiotic Analysis of Covid-19 Newspaper Advertisement and their Ideologies."* The study investigated COVID-19 related online newspaper public service advertorials in order to identify the meanings embedded in the advertisements and the ideologies they project to the public. The researchers adopted the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, focusing specifically on the concepts of denotation and connotation to analyse the signs present in the advertisements. The findings revealed that images in the advertisements operate at both denotative and connotative levels to convey particular ideologies that are shaped by social and historical contexts. Through the analysis of six advertorials, the researchers identified several ideologies communicated through the visual signs.

The present study differs from Okoye and Okeke (2023) in its analytical focus. While their research mainly analyses visual signs in public service advertisements, the present study focuses specifically on the language used in children's food product advertisements. In addition, the present research combines Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation with the triadic semiotic model proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce in order to provide a broader interpretation of the communicative strategies

used in advertisements. The present study also pays particular attention to the referential and inferential linguistic tools employed by advertisers to attract and persuade child consumers.

Similarly, Unachukwu et al. (2020) conducted a study titled *"A Semiotic Analysis of GLO Oga SIM Video Adverts on NTA."* The researchers examined the semiotic interpretation of icons, indexes, and symbols found in selected advertisements of Glo Oga SIM broadcast on Nigerian Television Authority. The study adopted the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, particularly his triadic model of signs. The findings showed that the company carefully selected signs that could capture the attention and interest of viewers, encouraging them to switch to the newly introduced SIM card. The study concluded that advertisements are more effective when they employ familiar cultural signs, particularly human symbols that are recognisable within the language community of the viewers.

While they focus on telecommunication advertisements and mainly analyse visual semiotic elements, the present research concentrates on children's food product advertisements and examines the language used in the advertisements. Furthermore, the present study integrates both Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation and Peirce's triadic model of signs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how referential and inferential meanings are constructed in advertising language directed at children. These gaps form the basis for the present study, which seek to examine how linguistic signs and symbols in selected children's food product advertisements communicate meanings and influence young consumers.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design within a semiotic analytical framework to examine how meaning is constructed in the language of selected kids' food product

advertisements. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting linguistic signs and their embedded meanings rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The analysis is grounded in Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation and Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model of signs. The researchers sampled five kids' food product advertisements which were purposively selected for analysis. Purposive sampling ensured that the selected advertisements were information-rich, widely recognisable, and explicitly designed for children's nutrition. The data for the study were sourced from photographs of the packaging and product labels of selected kids' food products collected from supermarkets, retails outlets in Onitsha, and served as the primary data for the semiotic analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

What referential and inferential elements are used in the selected kids' consumer product advertisements that enhance the communicative and persuasive power of these advertisement?



Figure 1 Showing advert in Friso Gold Wheat-Based Milk Cereal

From a Barthesian denotative perspective, the Friso Gold package foregrounds clarity and nutritional assurance. The product name "Friso Gold" functions referentially by identifying the brand and

suggesting premium quality through the word "Gold." At the denotative level, however, "Gold" operates as a descriptor of product category rather than metaphor, signalling a superior variant within the brand's product range. The phrase "wheat-based milk cereal" is a strong referential linguistic element. It directly states the product's composition, leaving no ambiguity about what the product is. This explicit naming aligns with Barthes' notion of denotation as the "literal meaning of the image or text" (Barthes, 1972). The language avoids figurative expressions and instead prioritises factual description, which is essential in products intended for infants.

Similarly, the statement "An easily digestible first solid food for your baby" functions referentially by describing the product's purpose and suitability. Words such as "easily digestible" and "first solid food" point directly to physiological and developmental needs of infants. This literal communication reassures parents and positions the product as safe and appropriate. The age specification "6 months to 36 months" is another dominant referential element. It explicitly defines the target consumer group, removing interpretive uncertainty. In Peirce's triadic model, this age label acts as a symbol: the representamen (age range text) refers to the object (appropriate developmental stage), and the interpretant is the parents' understanding that the product meets infant nutritional requirements. Visually, the image of a mother feeding a baby operates as an icon in Peirce's terms, because it resembles a real-life feeding situation. Referentially, it communicates the intended use of the product—feeding and nurturing.

The accompanying bowl of cereal further reinforces this literal meaning, anchoring the product firmly within the category of infant food. Friso Gold's advertisement is dominated by explicit nutritional and functional language, emphasising safety, suitability, and clarity. The inferential meaning is constructed through the lexical choice *"Gold"* and the nurturing imagery of a mother

feeding a baby. It connotes premium quality, and ideal parenting. This enhances persuasion by aligning the product with moral responsibility rather than mere consumption.



Figure 2 Showing advert in Gerber Grain & Grow Toddler Cereal

The Gerber Grain & Grow advertisement also relies heavily on referential elements, though adapted for a slightly older child demographic. The product name "Gerber Cereal for Toddler" directly identifies both the brand and the consumer group. At the denotative level, the word "Toddler" is a precise age classification rather than a symbolic label, indicating the product's developmental focus. The phrase "Grain & Grow" operates referentially by combining two literal concepts: grain as a food source and growth as a biological process. Although "grow" can have inferential meanings, within this context it functions denotatively by describing nutritional support for physical development.

Further referential clarity is provided by "Hearty Bits Multigrain" and "Banana Apple Strawberry." These expressions list ingredients and texture, serving as factual descriptors. According to Barthes

(1972), such denotative language anchors meaning and prevents misinterpretation. Parents reading the label can immediately identify what the product contains. The expression "Spoon-hugging texture" still functions largely at a referential level, describing the physical consistency of the cereal. Although mildly evocative, it refers to how the product behaves when prepared, which is important for toddler feeding. Age marking "12 months+" functions similarly to Friso's age range. In Peirce's model, it is a symbolic sign that communicates suitability through socially standardised age classification. The interpretant is the parents' trust that the product meets toddler nutritional needs.

Visually, the photograph of the cereal in a bowl with fruits acts as an icon, resembling the actual prepared meal. The baby's face image reinforces brand identity and age relevance. Referentially, these visuals communicate edibility, texture, and appeal without requiring interpretation. The "Non-GMO Project Verified" seal is another strong referential linguistic element communicates safety and standard compliance.

The inference of *"Grain & Grow"* and *"Multigrain"* implies that growth is not only physical but also symbolic of healthy childhood progression. The inclusion of real fruit imagery infers freshness and authenticity. Parents infer that Gerber supports holistic development, thereby enhancing trust and long-term brand loyalty.



Figure 3 Showing advert in the Nutrilac Infant Cereal

From a Barthesian denotative perspective, the Nutrilac package prioritises clarity and nutritional identification. The brand name "Nutrilac" functions referentially by combining "nutri" (nutrition) and "lac" (milk), directly pointing to the product's nutritional and dairy-based nature. At the denotative level, this name identifies the product category without ambiguity. The phrase "Infant cereal" is a strong referential linguistic element. It explicitly states the product's purpose and intended consumer group. According to Barthes (1972), denotation provides a "common-sense" meaning, and in this context, the phrase leaves no room for interpretive complexity. It anchors the product firmly within infant nutrition rather than general food products.

Further referential clarity is achieved through the inscription "Wheat & Rice" (or similar grain indicators visible on the label). This directly names the cereal's composition. The language functions as a symbol in Peirce's model: the representamen (grain names) refers to the object (actual ingredients), while the interpretant is the parents' understanding that the product provides basic carbohydrates suitable for infants (Peirce, 1931). The age indicator "From 6 months" operates as another dominant referential element. It explicitly signals developmental suitability, serving a regulatory and informational function. This age marking minimises risk and ensures correct product usage, which is essential in infant nutrition advertising.

Visually, the bowl of cereal and grain imagery function as icons in Peirce's sense, because they resemble the real product and its ingredients. Referentially, these images communicate edibility, texture, and feeding context. The visual language works alongside the verbal text to reinforce literal meaning rather than symbolic abstraction. Nutrilac's advertisement relies heavily on explicit naming, ingredient listing, and age classification, demonstrating a dominant referential strategy aimed at trust-building and clarity.

Cereals culturally connote strength, energy, and sustenance, making the product appear inherently nourishing. The clean packaging and absence of playful imagery infer seriousness and nutritional reliability. The interpretant is that Nutrilac is a "no-nonsense" food designed to sustain infants adequately, thereby persuading parents/guardians who value practicality and adequacy over indulgence.



Figure 4 Showing advert in the Nestlé NAN OPTIPRO 3

The Nestlé NAN OPTIPRO 3 advertisement similarly foregrounds referential meaning but with a slightly more technical tone, reflecting its positioning as a follow-up formula for toddlers. The brand name "Nestlé NAN" functions referentially by identifying the manufacturer and product line. The addition of "OPTIPRO" operates denotatively as a formulation label, indicating a specific protein blend. Although "OPTIPRO" may carry inferential meanings, at the referential level it names a product variant within the NAN range. The numeral "3" is one of the most dominant referential elements on the package. In Barthesian terms, it denotes product stage classification. It directly communicates that the formula belongs to the third stage of infant feeding. Within Peirce's framework, the number functions as a symbol, understood culturally and medically as indicating age progression. This meaning is reinforced by the phrase "From 1 to 3 years", which explicitly defines the target age group. The representamen (age

range text) refers to the object (toddler developmental stage), and the interpretant is the parents' recognition that the product is suitable for children within that age bracket.

Another prominent referential linguistic element is the statement "Breastfeeding is best for your baby." Denotatively, this sentence communicates a factual and ethical disclaimer rather than persuasion. It situates the product within accepted nutritional guidelines and regulatory frameworks, reinforcing responsible branding. The phrase "Net weight 400g" is purely referential, offering factual information about quantity. Such details contribute to transparency and consumer trust. Visually, the clean white and blue colour scheme, along with the absence of cartoon characters, functions referentially to signal hygiene, safety, and clinical reliability. In Peirce's terms, these colours operate as indexical signs, pointing to medical and nutritional authority rather than entertainment.

The signs position Nestlé as ethical and compliant with medical standards, which builds trust—consumers infer that a brand that promotes breastfeeding must be responsible and scientifically guided. This significantly strengthens persuasive power among health-conscious parents.



Figure 5 Showing advert in the Nutribom

In the Nutribom advertisement, denotative language dominates the communicative structure, reflecting the ethical demands of infant food advertising. The brand name "Nutribom" functions referentially by explicitly signaling nutrition. The morpheme *"nutri"* directly denotes nourishment, while the full name identifies the product as a nutritional food item rather than a snack or confectionery. At the denotative level, the brand positions itself clearly within the infant nutrition market. The phrase "Banana and Apple" is one of the most dominant referential linguistic elements. It explicitly names the flavours and ingredients used in the cereal. According to Barthes (1972), such labeling anchors meaning by eliminating ambiguity. The parent is informed immediately about the product's content without the need for inference.

Similarly, the descriptor "infant cereal" (implied through context and design) functions referentially by categorising the product according to age and dietary purpose. This categorisation ensures that the product is understood as suitable for infants rather than older children or adults. The statement "from 6 months" (or "6 months+") is a clear denotative marker. It specifies the developmental stage for which the product is intended, functioning as a regulatory and informational sign. This aligns with Barthes' view that denotation often serves practical communicative functions in non-fictional texts such as advertisements for regulated products.

The textual signs *"Banana"* and *"Apple"* act as symbols. The representamen is the written word, the object is the actual fruit ingredients, and the interpretant is the parents' understanding that the cereal contains fruit-based nutrients suitable for infants. This meaning is socially learned and widely shared, making it a stable referential sign. The visual images of banana slices and an apple function as icons because they resemble real fruits. Their iconic nature reinforces the literal meaning communicated by the text. In

Peircean terms, the resemblance between sign and object ensures immediate recognition, particularly important in products targeting early childhood nutrition. The bowl of cereal and spoon also operate iconically. They represent the prepared meal and feeding context, signaling how the product is to be used. The interpretant formed is that Nutribom is a ready-to-prepare infant food designed for spoon-feeding, reinforcing its functional purpose. The weight and quantity information (e.g., net weight) functions as a symbolic referential element. It conveys factual data relevant to purchase decisions, reinforcing transparency and trust. The signs infer natural sweetness, health, and infant acceptance. Parents perceive Nutribom as a stress-free feeding option that babies will enjoy, enhancing emotional appeal and purchase intent.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of five children's food advertisements—Friso Gold, Gerber Grain & Grow, Nutrilac, Nestlé NAN OPTIPRO 3, and Nutribom—showed that advertising language is carefully designed to provide information while also persuading consumers. A major finding is the dominance of referential (denotative) language through product names, ingredients, age specifications, and nutritional descriptions. This emphasis reflects ethical and regulatory requirements for products intended for children. According to Barthes (1972), denotation provides the basic level of meaning, while Peirce (1931) explains that such signs function as socially recognised symbols that are easily understood by consumers. The study also found that inferential (connotative) meanings strengthen persuasion. Terms associated with growth, care, quality, and health encourage parents to view the products as beneficial and trustworthy even without the claims proven. Supporting Barthes' theory, these connotations embed cultural and emotional values within apparently factual statements, making the advertisements more persuasive.

Another finding is that language works together with visual elements to construct meaning. Textual signs anchor interpretation, while visual icons—such as bowls of cereal, fruits, feeding scenes, and infant imagery—reinforce literal meaning and guide interpretation. This supports Peirce's triadic model, which argues that meaning emerges through the relationship between signs, their objects, and the interpretations formed by viewers. The advertisements further use language to construct product identity. Descriptive labels such as "Gold," "Grow," "Optipro," and "Multigrain" extend beyond literal description to suggest quality, expertise, and developmental benefits. As Barthes argues, such connotations transform products into culturally valued objects rather than ordinary commodities, encouraging consumers to perceive them as premium and beneficial.

The study also revealed that language is central to establishing brand credibility. Technical and stage-based expressions such as "from 6 months," "from 1 to 3 years," and "multigrain" create impressions of professionalism and scientific authority. Nestlé NAN OPTIPRO 3, in particular, employs scientific language to position itself as an expert in child nutrition. This linguistic strategy enhances brand credibility and reassures parents that the product aligns with expert recommendations. Beyond credibility, the advertisements appeal to parental emotions and responsibility. References to growth, nourishment, and care address concerns about child wellbeing and imply that selecting the appropriate product contributes to good parenting. Barthes' concept of myth helps explain how such messages naturalise the connection between responsible parenting and product choice.

The findings further show that processed foods are presented as natural through references to grains, fruits, and cereals. This linguistic strategy creates perceptions of wholesomeness, safety, and familiarity, reducing resistance to purchase. Nutrilac and Nutribom particularly rely on simple ingredient descriptions to

reinforce these perceptions. Finally, the advertisements use language to differentiate brands within a competitive market. Friso Gold emphasises premium care, Gerber highlights natural growth, Nutrilac focuses on nutritional adequacy, Nestlé NAN promotes scientific expertise, and Nutribom stresses gentle nourishment. These recurring linguistic patterns stabilise brand meanings over time, encouraging recognition and loyalty.

Overall, the study demonstrates that advertising language influences consumer perception at multiple levels. Through denotation, the advertisements inform; through connotation, they persuade. Drawing on Barthes' semiotics and Peirce's triadic model, the analysis shows that language constructs perceptions of quality, safety, trust, and responsible parenting, ultimately strengthening brand identity and consumer loyalty.

Conclusion

The analysis revealed that referential language forms the structural foundation of these advertisements. Through explicit product naming, age specification, ingredient identification, and nutritional description, advertisers ensure clarity, transparency, and regulatory compliance. These denotative elements establish trust and position the products as safe, appropriate, and functionally reliable for children. However, the study also shows that meaning construction does not end at the level of denotation. Inferential meanings are strategically embedded within seemingly factual language to enhance persuasive appeal. Through evaluative lexical choices, growth-oriented terminology, and references to natural and scientific qualities, the advertisements invite consumers to infer superiority, care, and developmental benefit without overt promotional claims.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that advertising language plays a central role in shaping consumer perception of both products and brands. Linguistic and visual signs work in synergy to construct brand credibility, moralise consumption as an act of

care, and naturalise cultural assumptions about good parenting, health, and child development. In line with Barthes' concept of myth, these advertisements transform culturally specific values into taken-for-granted truths, while Peirce's interpretant explains how repeated exposure stabilises these meanings in the minds of consumers. Overall, the study confirmed that kids' consumer product advertisements do more than inform; they construct symbolic narratives that align products with care, responsibility, and developmental success. By applying Barthes' and Peirce's semiotic frameworks, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how advertising language functions as a powerful meaning-making system within children's consumer culture.

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