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Motherhood, Advertising and Anxiety.

A cross-cultural perspective on Danonino's™ commercials

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Abstract

This explorative and qualitative paper analyses how risk and anxiety are socially constructed and interlinked with mothering in advertising. Through an analysis of how risk and anxiety appear in Danonino commercials from 2001-2007, the focus is on how commercial communications both enact and co-generate these social constructions.

With a point of departure in a literature review of motherhood, anxiety, food and advertising, this analysis is based on 167 advertisements for the Danonino brand, broadcast in five European countries, and uses Hetzel's concept of 'tensive rhetorics'.

Our findings show that in the European commercials for the Danonino brand, five kinds of anxieties are dealt with: anxieties linked to the responsibility for providing healthy food to support the child's physical growth; anxieties associated with the responsibility for providing appropriate nutrients to foster child's intellectual development; anxieties linked to the social exclusion of a child from his/her peer group; anxieties raised due to repeated conflicts about

food intake that may threaten family bonding relationships and mothers' anxiety for not being present enough for the child due to their own busy schedules. While these themes appear in all examined contexts, some are more prevalent in some markets than others, and the way these anxieties are staged differ from context to context. The commercials first emphasize risk in culturally relevant situations and afterwards offer resolutions to recreate mothers' peace of mind.

1. Introduction

Being a mother has a significant impact on women's lives today, and becoming a mother and being a mother is proving to be more demanding from several perspectives¹. One aspect of this is the ever-growing demands on pregnant women e.g. the growing number of products they are encouraged to avoid: hair dye, perfume, alcohol, smoking, various food products, etc². Furthermore, there are growing demands on what mothers are expected to live up to once the child is born: washing all children's clothes before use to avoid chemicals; producing home-made baby foods from scratch; engagement in the child's development, schooling and career planning, etc³. In a 'risk' society there are plenty of things that should be avoided: from hidden chemicals or lurking diseases to the child getting hurt or not developing optimally. Media, and especially advertising, is found to enact risks and nourish acknowledged or latent anxieties, and to 'destabilize' the feeling of safety held by the individual⁴.

¹ Schütze, Yvonne. *Die gute Mutter: Zur Geschichte des normativen Musters "Mutterliebe"* (Bielefeld: B. Kleine, 1986); Seiter, Ellen. *Sold separately: children and parents in consumer culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993); Badinter, Elisabeth. *L'amour en plus. Histoire de l'amour maternel, XVIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980); Badinter, Elisabeth. *Le conflit : la femme et la mère* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).

² Fox, Rebekah, Paula Nicolson and Kristin Heffernan. "Pregnancy Police ? Maternal Bodies, Surveillance and Food". In *Changing Families, Changing Food*, ed. Peter Jackson (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009).

³ Badinter, 2010, *op. cit.*; Gram, Malene & al. 'Communication on food, health and nutrition. A cross-cultural analysis of the Danonino brand and nutri-tainment'. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 16 (2010).

⁴ Martens Lydia and Sue Scott. 'The unbearable lightness of cleaning': representations of domestic practice and products in Good Housekeeping Magazine (UK): 1951-2001. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, Vol. 8, 2005; Martens Lydia and Sue Scott. 'Under the kitchen surface: domestic products and conflicting constructions of home'. *Home Cultures*, Vol. 3, 2006; Schneider Tanja and Teresa Davis. 'Advertising food in Australia: Between antinomies and gastro-anomy', *Consumption Markets & Culture*, Vol. 13, 2010.

However, risk and anxiety are social constructions, and how they are played out differs, for example, with regard to food⁵ throughout European countries, due to cultural traditions about the symbolic significance of cooking or sharing meals, and also to a variety of systemic crises that have affected agricultural production in recent years (mad cow disease, milk contaminated by dioxin, vegetables presenting high rates of pesticides, bird flu, etc.). Furthermore perceptions of what is nutritionally adequate also differ to some extent in different periods and places⁶. This paper analyses how contextual and social aspects of food risk and anxiety are dealt with in the marketing of the Danonino brand when addressing mothers from children of 3 to 6 years of age across various European countries.

The present analysis is based on a corpus of 167 advertisements of the Danonino brand from France, Spain, Germany, Russia and Poland, broadcast between 2001 and 2007. We analyse how Danonino's commercial communications take into account, enact and co-generate anxieties connected to children and food in these European societies. This analysis of the commercials aimed at promoting a brand of food products for children, seeks to untangle the complex issues which inter-connect the concepts of anxiety, good mothering and children's appropriate food intake staged in the commercials. It is deemed particularly interesting to see how Danone stages anxiety in the five settings as both anxiety and good mothering are anchored in local contexts.

In this paper the actual health value of the Danonino dairy products is not discussed. The focus is on how these products have been promoted in the various European countries with regard to anxiety and responsibility in childcare. Moreover, the campaigns we analyse in this article were broadcast between 2001 and 2007, and thus should not be considered as representative of the present discourse of the brand as they do not reflect any recent modifications in the Danonino brand strategy. The Group's requirements for nutrition and health have been raised to the level of governance to address the issues of nutrition and public health. These commitments are reflected in its Nutrition and Health Charter, a document that includes in particular the practice of responsible methods of marketing and advertising to consumers and particularly children. (Danone Nutrition and Health Charter, 2009).

⁵ Kjærnes, Unni, Harvey Mark and Warde Alan. *Trust in Food – A comparative and Institutional Analysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁶ Coveney, John. *Food, Morals and Meaning. The pleasure and anxiety of eating* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006).

2. Literature review

Motherhood

The French philosopher Elizabeth Badinter criticizes the new and very heavy social demands on mothers she observes around her⁷. She argues that there is a growing pressure on women to limit their own desires and their activities to spend more time and take a greater part in the upbringing of their children. In her book “L’amour en plus” from 1980 she documents that motherhood and good mothering are complex social constructions and argues that motherhood is a social invention rather than a biological instinct, by illustrating how discourses about maternal love have been absent for centuries⁸. Today, women live their lives in a context of personal and cultural beliefs that all women are or at some point want to be mothers, since it is assumed that motherhood for women is a natural consequence of adulthood⁹ and it constitutes a social taboo if a woman with children does not place motherhood at the centre of her identity¹⁰. The traditional model of the mother focused on the home and raising her child, has been very evident throughout the 20th century, and still is today¹¹. However, what characterises good motherhood is anchored in cultural values and has to be defined through the context of the place and time¹², e.g. whether or not it is expected that mothers breastfeed, and if it is acceptable for women to work.

Food and anxiety

⁷ Badinter, 2010, *op. cit.*

⁸ Also discussed by Zelizer, Viviana. *Pricing the priceless child* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁹ Letherby, Gayle. “Mother or not? Mother or What? Problems of Definition and Identity.” *Women's Studies Int. Forum*, Vol. 17 (1994).

¹⁰ Thompson, Craig J. “Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle.” *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22 (1996).

¹¹ Johnston, Deirdre. D. and Swanson Debrah H. “Invisible Mothers: A Content Analysis of Motherhood Ideologies and Myths in Magazines.” *Sex Roles*, Vol. 49, (2003).

¹² Schütze, Yvonne. *Die gute Mutter: Zur Geschichte des normativen Musters “Mutterliebe”* (Bielefeld : B. Kleine, 1986).

One of the key tasks in good mothering is to provide appropriate food for the child¹³. This task is not evident even in recent decades which, in the Western world, have been characterised by affluence and abundance of food¹⁴.

Sociological studies on food consumption show that food is not just a matter of nutrition, but also of symbols and myths¹⁵, and is an important expression of identity¹⁶. Income, age, gender, cultural background and household composition also influence food consumption. A number of dilemmas are identified in relation to food culture: novelty vs. tradition, health vs. indulgence, convenience vs. care, and economy vs. extravagance. These dilemmas reflect consumers' and food providers' ongoing struggles¹⁷ and consumer literature has established that the meaning attached to food products and food consumption is all the more important for the post-modern consumer who shifts between different lifestyles and identities, and in so doing draws on consumption patterns¹⁸ even though food consumption is at the same time deeply rooted in habit and routine¹⁹. Furthermore food is intimately linked to social relationships²⁰, and even more so where children are involved²¹. At the same time food is a very important area of consumption, human beings eat to live, the child has to eat well to thrive, and food can be an effective means of negotiation in a power struggle²².

Despite being to some extent anchored in habit and routines, mothering and especially the responsibility related to providing the right food for children is mixed up with risk and anxiety related to more and sometimes ambiguous information about possible threats. The consumer

¹³ Seiter, Ellen. *Sold separately: children and parents in consumer culture*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Coveney, John. 2006, op. cit.

¹⁵ Fischler, Claude. 'Food habits, social change and the nature/culture dilemma'. *Social Science Information*, Vol. 19 (1980); Douglas, Mary. 'Standard Social uses of Food: Introduction'. In *Food in the social order*, edited by Mary Douglas, 1-39 (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984).

¹⁶ Atkins, Peter, and Ian Bowler. *Food in Society – Economy, Culture, Geography* (London: Arnold, 2001).

¹⁷ Warde, Alan. *Consumption, Food and Taste* (London : Sage, 1997).

¹⁸ Featherstone, Mike. *Undoing Culture – Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995);Firat, Fuat A. and Alladi Venkatesh. "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Re-enchantment of Consumption". *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (1995).

¹⁹ Warde, Alan, 1997, op. cit.

²⁰ James, Allison. 'Confections, Concoctions, and Conceptions'. In *Popular Culture: Past and Present*, Ed. Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett and Graham Martin (London /Open University Press, 1982); Caplan, Pat. *Food, Health and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2002).

²¹ Seiter, Ellen. 1993, op. cit.

²² Cook, Dan T. 'Semantic provisioning of children's food'. *Childhood*, 16 (2009).

faces permanent risks within the market economy²³ and a permanent concern about the "basic safety systems"²⁴. Individuals are faced with uncertainty and doubt²⁵, which also significantly increases the responsibility of the latter in managing their own individual risk – and that of their children, in a time where ‘project child’ is supposed to be at the centre of a woman’s life. Consumer scepticism is increased by the diffusion of contradictory scientific results that tend to provoke both the increasing perception of the risk and the weakening of the credibility held by scientific messages²⁶ and the invisible threat of being ‘potentially sick’²⁷.

The sociologist Claude Fischler, elaborated the concept of the ‘omnivore paradox’, describing how the human being seeks to diversify his or her diet by arbitrating between several risks associated with the absorption of new foods, leading sometimes to neophobic food behaviours²⁸. For the human being, this risk management results from of a wide range of physiological, but to a high extent also, cultural influences²⁹. There is some consensus among researchers to consider that the "magic thought" that “we become what we eat”, still prevails in our eating habits. Food thus constitutes an identity support, strongly contributing to the feeling of "ontological safety" evoked by Giddens, but the vague messages from the Health Authorities on foods³⁰ do not allow individuals to build their own eating competences or to consider themselves as competent eaters, particularly in the context of the health or agricultural scandals that have recently come to the forefront.

Thus, the OCNI (Not Identified Eatable Object) coined by Fischler³¹ raises an extremely distressing question for individuals: if we become what we eat, then what are we when we do not know what we eat? When taking the responsibility for feeding our child, how will we know what he or she will become? In a context where the body is less and less perceived as

²³ Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992).

²⁴ Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984).

²⁵ Bauman, Zygmunt. ‘A Catalogue of Postmodern Fears’ in *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodernism reality*, ed. Zygmunt Bauman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

²⁶ Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

²⁷ Coveney, John, 2006, op. cit.

²⁸ Fischler, Claude. ‘Food, self and identity’. *Social science information*, Vol. 27 (1988).

²⁹ Ibid.: 13.

³⁰ Corbeau, Jean-Pierre. *Nourrir de plaisir* (Paris: Les Cahiers de l'Ocha, 2008).

³¹ Fischler, Claude. 1988, op. cit.

“given” but as being “reflexively mobilized”³², the responsibility of parents in this future is underlined as being extremely worrying. Parents find themselves confronted with uncertainty about how to choose the best food for their young children.

Food in late modern societies constitutes a particularly representative field of socially constructed anxieties³³. The growing industrialisation of foods, the rising cost of agricultural raw materials, the obesity pandemic, the inadequate information available to today’s eaters (incomprehensible labelling, gaps in controls, inappropriate standards, misleading and/or ambiguous quality stamps, unverifiable claims) underline the risks in modern food products: “Industrialised food products give rise to questions which can rapidly become anxieties. Where do they come from? What transformation have they undergone? Who has handled them?”³⁴.

Perceptions of risk and anxieties differ within European countries, a reality which has been documented in a recent European study about trust in food³⁵. This underlines on the one hand that local conditions play a role for risk perception but also that risk and anxiety are socially constructed. National culture has been found to play a significant role in the assessment of what can be perceived as ‘good food’. In their study of feeding practices in five European countries, Synnott et al.³⁶ evidenced a number of cross-cultural differences. German and Scottish participants found that a ‘healthy diet’ should be as natural as possible and German participants believed that organic food ingredients were better for their infants. The Spanish and Italian participants were relying on authorities such as paediatricians for information on infant feeding practice³⁷. A healthy diet was connected with variety and balance in Italy and Spain whereas in Germany, Scotland and Sweden it was almost exclusively associated with fruit and vegetables³⁸.

³² Giddens, Anthony. 1990, op. cit.

³³ Coveney, John. 2006, op. cit.; Green, Judith M., Draper Allison K. and Dowler Elizabeth A. ‘Short cuts to safety: risk and ‘rules of thumb’ in account of food choice’. *Health, risk and society*, Vol. 5 (2003).

³⁴ Poulain, Jean-Pierre. *Sociologies de l'alimentation : Les mangeurs et l'espace social alimentaire* (Paris: PUF, 2002): 39.

³⁵ Kjærnes, Unni, Harvey Mark and Warde Alan. 2007, op. cit.

³⁶ Synnott, Keith & al. “Parental perceptions of feeding practices in five European countries: an exploratory study.” *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 61 (2007).

³⁷ Ibid.: 953

³⁸ Ibid.: 954

Media and Anxiety

This omnipresent risk that food products convey - and the anxieties which result from it - are co-produced through media messages. The fact that the media covers an array of topics that are enacted as important or worrying has been largely documented³⁹. Researches on "media panics" suggest a reinforcement of a distressing mode of information treatment⁴⁰. These distressing messages are also articulated in advertising. They depict a society deprived of institutions capable of guaranteeing the longevity and stability of social meaning, and introduce individuals to all the distressing excesses of social, economic, political, environmental, and health deregulation processes. There are numerous studies analysing the presence and the effects of distressing messages in advertisements⁴¹. Roland Marchand⁴², showed how, in the United States, the advanced techniques of marketing gradually took into account the concerns and anxieties of the ordinary consumer. The advertising communication specialists were the first to openly assert the 'therapeutic' dimension of their work, supposed to demonstrate that the company aims to solve some of the psychological discomfort - or lower the level of anxiety - that the consumer might feel during his or her purchase activities, caused by a set of industrial changes which are complex and difficult to understand for an ordinary citizen; a discomfort that the advertisers enact and co-generate with the aim of offering a solution to relieve it⁴³.

Advertising can be recognised as one of the "access points"⁴⁴ through which an institution can attempt to provide the pledge of confidence to the ordinary consumer. It proceeds through a "hyper-ritualisation" technique whilst strongly contributing to the establishment of standard expressions, normative attitudes or behaviours⁴⁵. Patrick Charaudeau identifies the topic of

³⁹ McCombs, Maxwell and Donald Shaw. 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media'. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36 (1972); Schneider, Tanja and Theresa Davis. 2010, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Critcher, Chas. *Moral Panics and the Media* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003).

⁴¹ e.g. Arthur, Damien, and Pascal Quester. 'Who's afraid of that ad? Applying segmentation to the protection motivation model'. *Psychology & Marketing* 21 (2004); Burnett, John J. and Robert E. Wilkes. 'Fear appeals to segment only'. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 20 (1980).

⁴² Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁴³ Martens Lydia and Sue Scott. 2006, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Giddens, Anthony. 1990, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Goffman, Erving. *Gender Advertisements* (London: Mc Millan, 1979): 84.

“anxiety” developed in media messages which covers all kinds of informational categories⁴⁶. A possible strategy for advertisers thus consists of exposing the risks and their associated anxieties in modern society in order to attract and retain the target. This topic of “anxiety” appears to receive greater attention from the audience, leads to a better memorisation of the message and brings a greater opportunity of triggering a behavioural change in the public.

This capacity of advertising to actually co-monitor individuals’ views about food is judiciously moderated by Alan Warde who points out both the strong influence of social and cultural habits on individual consumption practices, which ends in routines that prevent consumers from being too heavily influenced by advertising discourses, and the fact that most commercial interactions develop within social institutions and membership groups which allow the exchange of information, advice, or delegation of purchases⁴⁷. In the same way, authors relying on other pieces of Goffman’s work have also raised the importance of social rituals in giving meaning to consumption practices and shaping them⁴⁸. The supposed strength of the commercials’ hyper-ritualisation is indeed quite moderated by the social inclusion of the consumer. We can add that the growing suspicion among citizens and consumers about scientific results can be widened to all mediated discourses. These moderations can explain that many studies stress the difficulty for companies of dealing with anxieties in their communications strategies. Firstly, the individuals distressed by their lack of knowledge of industrial processes might seek alternatives to manufactured goods⁴⁹. In addition, studies show that a mother’s reaction to anxiety conveyed in advertising can quickly pass from trust to mistrust. When she considers the risks mentioned in a commercial are representative of her problems, the responsibility felt by the mother often leads her to undertake a behavioural

⁴⁶ Charaudeau, Patrick. « Une problématique discursive de l’émotion. À propos des effets de pathémisation à la télévision ». In *Les émotions dans les interactions communicatives*, ed. Christian Plantin, Marianne Doury and Véronique Traverso (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2000).

⁴⁷ Warde, Alan. “Consumption, Identity-Formation and Uncertainty.” *Sociology*, vol. 28 (1994); Warde, Alan. *Consumption, Food and Taste* (London : Sage, 1997).

⁴⁸ Marshall, David. “Food as Ritual, Routine or Convention.” *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, Vol. 8 (2005); Diasio, Nicoletta. *Au palais de Dame Tartine. Regards européens sur la consommation enfantine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004).

⁴⁹ Kneafsey Moya, Lewis Holloway, Laura Venn, Rosie Cox, Elisabeth Dowler and Helena Tuomainen. ‘Consumers and producers: coping with food anxieties through ‘Reconnection’?’ *Cultures of Consumption and ESRH-AHRB Research Programme*, Working paper n°19, 2004.

change. However for a brand, dealing with risks and anxieties might immediately become very negative if the least manipulative inclination is perceived⁵⁰.

Nevertheless, referring to risks and anxieties constitutes a topic regularly used by advertising executives in the field of maternity and childcare⁵¹. The anxiety felt by mothers with regard to their responsibility for childcare, is then enacted to encourage them to adopt the products presented as protection against the new risks that have been identified for their child: "The risks and the problems that a minority - often a small minority – of infants and children must face is enacted in a universalized way, becoming potential risks for each infant and each child"⁵². Prothero stresses that these risks and anxieties are exaggerated, often far removed from the actual risks to which the child is likely to be exposed, and that this has contributed to the world of standards and representations which make motherhood especially difficult for women in modern Western societies. Prothero clarifies two main axes through which the speeches about anxiety usually develop: the risk of hurting the child and the risk of not adequately fulfilling the maternal role.

Summing up from the above, motherhood and appropriate childcare and feeding are socially constructed and anchored in cultural values. Consumers find themselves in an arena with large amounts of information about potential risks, where everybody is potentially sick, and where they need to distinguish between advice, lack of trust, self-reflexion in a context where also cultural traditions, rituals, habits and routines are strong factors. However, what is trusted and what is considered 'safe' is associated with differing meanings across Europe. Media and particularly advertising plays a strong role in informing about risks and developing anxiety. In the following study on the Danonino brand it is particularly Prothero's two axes of the fear of hurting the child and not fulfilling the maternal role appropriately which have guided the analysis.

3. Methodology

⁵⁰ Cotte, June, Robin Coulter and Melissa Moore. 'Enhancing or disrupting guilt: The role of ad credibility and perceived manipulative intent'. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 58 (2005); LaBarge, Monica and John Godek. 'Mothers, Food, Love and Career-The Four Major Guilt Groups? The Differential Effects of Guilt Appeals'. *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 33 (2006).

⁵¹ Prothero, Andrea. 'The F Word: The Use of Fear in Advertising to Mothers'. *Advertising and Society Review*, Vol. 7 (2006).

⁵² Douglas, Susan and Meredith Michaels. *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* (New York: The Free Press, 2004): 300-301.

Through a text analysis – including verbal and visual rhetoric - of TV commercials, this qualitative and explorative study examines how a large corporation deals with risks and anxiety in their market communication.

The sample consists of commercials from five European markets broadcast between 2001 and 2007: 34 German, 37 French, 30 Spanish, 34 Polish and 32 Russian commercials. The sample is a convenience suitable sample offered by Danone®, but appears sufficient in order to offer an insight into how risks and anxieties about child-rearing and feeding are staged, to some extent differently from market to market, in the commercials. The selected countries were chosen to include various regional areas offering different social and cultural contexts for child-rearing and food intake. Danone® has carried out the campaigns in cooperation with local subsidiaries and agencies.

All the commercials were viewed by at least two of the authors. The qualitative analysis was carried out to search for themes relating to anxiety and motherhood inspired by the literature study, with an emphasis on the ‘dual structure’ of the situation played out in the commercial⁵³ – food intake being presented as risky and safe -, and especially how the concept of ‘tensive rhetoric’ used by Patrick Hetzel in relation to brand communication is applied⁵⁴.

What Hetzel calls a ‘tensive rhetoric’ is a very common way advertisers use to enact a campaign concept. It dialectically associates two terms that appear, at first sight, as a paradoxical injunction⁵⁵ (e.g. “be natural!” or “be creative!”) but with the purpose in the end to deliver a message that offers a way of solving such a paradoxical injunction, and that appeases the provoked tension felt by the targeted audience. Dealing with mothers’ responsibilities in Western societies frequently leads advertisers to enact the paradoxical injunction of being a good mother and successfully achieving a professional career to present the product promoted as a way to resolve this tension.

As will appear from the following analysis, diverse forms of risk and anxiety were staged in different ways across the countries in the sample. Most focus is put on the German and French

⁵³ Martens Lydia and Sue Scott. 2006, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Hetzel, Patrick. *Planète conso : Marketing expérientiel et nouveaux univers de consommation* (Paris: Éditions d’organisation, 2002): 267-268.

⁵⁵ Watzlawick, Paul. *La réalité de la réalité. Confusion, désinformation, communication* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

analysis as the most diverse scenarios are seen in these sections of the sample, where the argumentation in the commercials goes far beyond mere physical aspects of nutrition.

4. Anxiety in the Danonino Commercials

The Danonino commercials cover various types. Almost 28% of the commercials address children directly by promising adventure and enacting various playful activities like discovery, search for excitement and risk-taking. The product is portrayed as a magical mediator that gives access to playfulness in a fictitious and fairy-tale world. The message is addressed to children through animated characters and the brand character. Another type of commercial addressing children uses special offers, gifts or play sets included in the products or offered through the packaging. The playing activity relates to arts and crafts, enabling the expression of individual artistic skills or fostering social relationships among peers. These commercials do not address nutritional issues and thus do not explicitly mention any kind of anxieties related to food intake.

However, 72% of the commercials address mothers. One section of these commercials promotes the product by stressing the health benefits. The message content is focused on health and values of well-being excluding references to pleasure or entertainment. In contrast to the commercials aimed at children, these do not include any animated or brand characters. A final section of the commercials addressing mothers is focused on children in activity. In these commercials, children are engaged in play, which is most often synonymous with physical activity and sport. The mother attends the child's performance and children portray enjoyment, excitement as well as a sense of competition. The voice-over addresses the mother and these commercials do not employ animated or brand characters either. Health is approached through a presentation of the functional properties of the product. The explicit enactment of anxiety is found mainly in this group of commercials aimed at mothers.

The frequency of occurrence and content of different types of commercials differs from market to market as discussed by Gram et al.⁵⁶ In the following the use of anxiety is analysed, to trace - through verbal and visual rhetoric - the array of themes related to anxiety.

⁵⁶ Gram, Malene & al. "Communication on food, health and nutrition. A cross-cultural analysis of the Danonino brand and nutri-tainment." *Journal of Marketing Communications*, vol. 16 (2010).

Parental responsibility for child health and development, child-rearing and feeding and its subsequent anxieties are very clearly represented in the Danonino campaign, but this happens in differing ways in the various countries taken into account in the study.

The themes in commercials directed at children in all markets are fun and fantasy stories, and the topic addressed is about being strong and growing, and thereby being able to fight a dragon, a witch, an ice bear, etc. One could argue that implicitly this indicates an anxiety in children about not growing or not being strong enough to be able to manage on their own. The contradiction between the weak/not strong/not powerful child and the symbols of strengths (dragons, witches, bears) are resolved by the product offering strength and energy to the child.

In almost all commercials, the mother is clearly placed in the foreground as the main person responsible for ensuring her child's health. She is presented in testimonials to tell the audience how she used to be worried before she knew the brand and how she now feels safe with the product. 'Tensive rhetorics' is used here to present the tension between insecurity/anxiety related to the proper development of the child and the need to feel reassured, which is then resolved by the introduction of the product, offering, according to the commercials, a resolution to nutritional dilemmas and assuring that the child will eat healthy food and be grateful to the parent. The commercials that most use testimonial formats are the Russian, Polish and French commercials, where daily or frequent intake of the product is recommended – directly or indirectly in the commercial - to ensure adequate nutrition.

An example from a Russian commercial drawing on the testimonial form shows a mother who is picking up her child from Kindergarten or a playgroup, saying:

“I have been told that in our country, half of the population of children are in deficit of calcium and iodine. Then I started to worry. “What to do if my child lacks calcium, too? It seems like everything is fine, but maybe this is not the way it is; it is difficult to verify. It is important not to ruin anything from the start in childhood where everything is in the process of construction. When we learnt that Danonino is rich in micro-elements, we started to buy it more often. It is not a panacea, but it gives us, mothers, a certain self-confidence. Children quickly understand that they need iodine and calcium. Now Lesha [son] eats Danone's little yoghurts every day and I am happy”. (Russia, 2007)

This text clearly uses the tensive rhetoric indicating invisible risks (lack of calcium, children's lives that can be ruined from the start) and the product as the solution.



Figure 1. Example from a Polish Danonino commercial (2002)

A tangible anxiety about the disastrous consequences of bad nutrition - e.g. bone fracture because of lack of calcium and vitamin D - is both verbalised and visualised in Danonino campaigns. Parental responsibility and anxiety is explicitly verbalised by doctors and dentists, particularly in the French, Polish and Spanish samples. For example, in a French commercial with the help of a model of a human bone, a doctor shows how fragile the bone is when the child has not been well fed with calcium and vitamin D. In some countries from the sample, parental responsibility is called on proactively showing either explicitly (the fragile bone model) or implicitly (a tower of bricks built by children in a playground collapsing in the background).



Figures 2 and 3. 9 out of 10 children in France lack vitamin D / strong bones (French commercial, 2006).

In the German commercials, a very strong emphasis is placed on “without crystal sugar” and the fact that “no additives” are included. This shows that Danone is aware that German consumers are extremely wary of industrial foods and very concerned about organic production methods⁵⁷. Furthermore, in the German sample, the Danonino product is frequently shown in proximity to fresh fruit. This focus is not very strong in the French and Spanish commercials and is totally missing in the Polish and Russian commercials, as these appear to be markets with a less accentuated suspicion on industrialised food production.

In the German sample, some commercials are portraying the possibility that the child cheats, by not eating the healthy foods provided by his/her mother – e.g. as shown in the Cats commercial where children give their milk to the cat instead of drinking it and pushing away the fruit. A tension is thus presented between ‘children’s desires’ and ‘healthy eating’. There also appears to be a strong emphasis on the risk of conflict with the children when insisting on feeding them healthy foods that they do not like. This is a conflict that Danonino claims to be solving, by arguing that the brand products offer children a healthy food intake that children appreciate.

⁵⁷ Synnott, Keith & al. 2007, op. cit.



Figures 4 and 5. Children refusing fruit and milk – examples from German Danonino commercial (2003)

In the French and Polish commercials, medical doctors and dentists along with research institutes appear in the commercials. They are dressed in white coats symbolising expertise and authority, signifying expert knowledge about health and scientific certitude about what to do to lower anxiety about preserving and building the child's health. They offer one coherent explanation about what to do, e.g. one Danonino yoghurt a day, which is contrary to the perceived uncertainties and the general lack of institutional control within Western societies described in the theoretical section. The health experts are brought in to relieve anxiety – after having fuelled this same anxiety by demonstrating what might go very wrong - by reassuring the worried mother and create trust and confidence in the Danonino brand. Teachers and child-minders in Kindergartens are also used as experts, especially in the French, Spanish and Polish commercials.

No teachers appear in the German commercials, where mothers or voice-overs are used to explain about the products, and Germany is the only country in the study where German children are explaining the qualities of the products. Furthermore 'quality' stamps are used in the German sample as a symbol of scientific research and authority. The German commercials are in a much more positive story-telling mode, never applying scary undertones or threats. A number of German commercials expose the theme of children without energy, with low blood sugars, filmed in black and white, showing children struggling with their maths homework. The brand mascot appears and suddenly the colours are back in the film, there are more leaves on the trees, and the children who are fed Danonino yogurts are then fit to do their homework or continue their physical exercise.



Figures 6, 7 and 8. Children and nature regaining energy as they drink Danonino (German commercial, 2003)

One story indirectly takes the underlying anxiety which is very present in German society for not performing well in school, and presents a happy scenario of a boy who runs home showing his mother his top grade. Thus by showing this happy situation, the opposite is indirectly sketched as the negative and worrying situation (not achieving a good grade). ‘Playful’ learning is portrayed as a theme in several ads across the sample as the opposite of ‘painful’ learning, which is a source of anxiety to parents.

Danone plays into European markets dealing with differing problems and anxieties. Just like French society, German society is very competitive, and in Germany, children need to show at a young age that they have the potential for academic work if they are later to have the opportunity to go to the prestigious Gymnasium. So the parent’s and child’s anxiety about the child not having energy for school work is real. In Russia, the risk is that children do not have access to basic nutrients to meet their physical growth needs and the anxiety staged in the commercials appears not to be concerned with schooling at all but rather with getting the right nutrients to grow and develop as a healthy child.

A more abstract anxiety about protecting children is staged in a French commercial, “La patinoire” (2003), where the little yoghurts are called: “little pots of strong bones”. This commercial plays on the insecurity of parents as the plot is not about the concern for not knowing what is going on inside the child’s body, but is rather about what might happen when the child is out of sight: “We cannot always follow [our children] but we do our best to prepare them for when we cannot be there” (Voice-over). This can be interpreted as an attempt to take away anxiety from the parents, but to stress the obligation of taking responsibility by preparing the child for situations where he will need to be autonomous. French parents do spend more time away from their children compared with German parents, where the mother typically does not work (and rarely full-time) in opposition to France.



Figures 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13. Examples from French commercials (2003 and 2001)

The child's anxiety about not growing is enacted in several German commercials, clearly directed at mothers rather than at children. In one German commercial where the child

articulates his concern about not being big enough to play basketball with the bigger children, his mother calmly explains (while offering him a yogurt to eat), how he will have to be patient and reassuring him that as long as he eats properly he can be sure to grow.

A number of undesirable situations are sketched (the child rejecting healthy food, fragile bones, the child without energy, the worried mother), but at the same time Danonino is presented as the solution (offering calcium and vitamin D or iodine in a tasty and fun fashion, the child understands why these nutrients are important through pedagogical explanations and the mother feels safe and happy). At the same time the way this ‘tensive rhetoric’ is played out varies from being very explicit and almost threatening to implicit and positive across markets.

5. Discussion

Through the ‘tensive rhetoric’ set around a number of themes which, although treated differently according to national cultural backgrounds, appear to constitute cross-cultural axes, which are at play in the Danonino commercials aimed at mothers:

- (A1) anxieties dealing with children’s good physical health and normal growth portrays tension between parents’ knowledge about food products and the question of the long-term effects of food intake on children’s growth.
- (A2) the risk of intellectual failure generates tension due to the difficulty of assessing the role that food plays in cognitive development.
- (A3) the risk that children might be excluded from their peer group, illustrates the tension between the reproduction of a cultural system within family circles and the system of values prevailing within the peer group
- (A4) the mothers’ aspiration to be loved by their children generates tension between the desire to maintain a peaceful relationship and the unavoidable conflicts associated with the responsibility of educating children
- (A5) the mothers’ busy diaries making them less present than the image of the ‘perfect mother’ requires, ends in tension between the social and professional requirements in modern Western societies and the responsibilities of the maternal bond (such as being present to protect the child)

The product is offered to children who are in a strong growth period and the physical measurable growth ‘getting big and strong’ or the fear of staying small and fragile is enacted in several ads across the sample, but staged differently across the national samples: through the doctor in France, through the emphasis on natural and pure ingredients in Germany⁵⁸, through the focus on extra iodine in Russia.

The wish for success in school or the risk of intellectual failure is found most explicitly in the German sample where a boy is actually seen bringing home his top grade, to more vague future dreams about becoming what one wants (a pilot, an explorer, a scientist, etc.) and having success, as seen in Russian commercials.

In a commercial entitled “Skate” (2002) aired in France, teenagers are gathered in a sports facility to practice skate. One of them is seated apart eating a yogurt and the others address him ironically saying he has childish tastes. As a response to their scornful comments, he then invites the leader of the peer group to take up the challenge of realising a difficult figure. Having eaten the yogurt, he feels full of energy and self-assured, and successfully realises a perfect figure that ensures him a respectful acceptance by the peer group. The risk of being excluded from the peer group is sketched through mockery and the product – initially erroneously categorised as childish - directly contributes to enhance self-confidence to engage in peer relationships.

The desire to be loved by one’s children at the same time as they are fed ‘healthy food’ is in some commercials sketched as a dichotomy in line with Warde’s dilemma of health versus indulgence. The insistence on healthy food might mean conflict, but again the product is presented to solve this dilemma.

Finally the role of the mother is connected to anxiety. The mother is the main figure in most commercials where adults appear (a few men appear in more playful situations with the children). Mothers appear mostly in kitchens, smiling, well-dressed and energetic, where they often are seen to offer the product to children. As discussed above, mothers cannot always be there to protect their children, and especially French mothers are typically working fulltime outside the home, so the product is presented as this kind of protection.

⁵⁸ In line with Synnott, Keith & al. 2007, op. cit.

Danonino brand has developed its communication in close contact with local subsidiaries representing local market knowledge. In all markets mothers almost exclusively are addressed as the main caretaker of the child – both with respect to food and otherwise. Anxieties are invoked in several ways related to protecting the child against visible and invisible physical, intellectual and social threats and in relation to feeling unsafe about not living up to parental responsibilities of providing the right nutrients or failing to carry out other parental duties well enough.

Especially in the southern and eastern European commercials a representative for science is brought in, represented by doctors or dentists, or other types of child experts such as school teachers. These experts offer a clear-cut solution to insecurity about how to solve anxieties related to lack of overview of nutritional advice. In all markets mothers, and in Germany even children, are brought in to give testimony of how they have solved their insecurities.

The commercials in several instances follow the pattern of ‘destabilising’⁵⁹ the common conviction that children are generally well-fed in European countries and then offering a solution through the incorporation of the product in mundane child feeding routines.

Danonino®’s advertisements enact several concerns and anxieties that mothers have relating to their child’s upbringing and healthy eating. The enactment of maternal role takes place along with the future aspirations for their child who, according to the commercials, should end up tall, healthy, a high achiever in school, popular among peers, in a loving relationship with his or her mother, who has been allowed to live her own life alongside parenting.

Here a paradox exists that food manufacturers addressing mothers cannot resolve as easily as when they use ‘tensive rhetorics’: whilst claiming to offer a solution to the above maternal anxieties, Danonino® can but nurture and make even more tangible some anxieties with regard to all the possible things that might go wrong in childhood in relation to the dominant ideals for a good upbringing⁶⁰.

6. Conclusion

⁵⁹ Martens Lydia and Sue Scott. 2006, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Douglas, Susan and Meredith Michaels. 2004, op. cit.

The aim of this paper was to analyse how anxiety is part of Danonino's advertising campaigns targeting mothers across various European contexts, and how these anxieties are staged as inter-connected with the concepts of good mothering and healthy food.

The analysis shows that risk, anxiety and responsibility for children's health, along with psychological and social development, are enacted and co-generated in food advertising. In Danonino®'s commercials this is done in different ways, using implicitly and explicitly a more positive or a more anxious tone, depending on the social, cultural, and institutional characteristics of the target market.

Danonino's commercials stage five kinds of anxieties in the European market: responsibility for providing healthy food to meet the child's physical growth needs; anxieties associated with the responsibility for giving appropriate nutrients to foster children's intellectual development; anxieties linked to social exclusion from his/her peer group; anxieties raised by repeated conflicts particularly about food intake that may threaten family bonding relationships; and mothers' guilt for not being present enough for the child due to their own busy schedules.

The Danonino campaign takes into account cultural differences in advertising communication styles, in staging relevant topics of parental responsibility and correlated anxieties, and when mobilizing various authority figures to substantiate anxiety, to document product value, and to underline and relieve mothers' responsibility and anxiety. Whereas the German commercials stage anxieties over industrial food and insufficient nutrition, indirectly and positively, along with a strong focus on learning, French, Spanish, Polish and Russian commercials play more directly on risk and scientific expertise, suggesting what might happen from a physiological, psychological and even from a cognitive standpoint, if the child is not well-fed.

Our study highlights that advertising and anxiety about child rearing and child feeding are complex social constructions entangled in ideas of motherhood, and that what is defined as problems for children in their harmonious development, is deeply connected with cultural contexts.

Being a mother equals being expected to care, and it is understood that caring encompasses dealing with latent and invisible risks which are abundant in modern Western societies. As found in this study, Danonino®'s brand communication plays into this web of meanings, thus perpetuating, co-creating, actualizing but also putting up the archetypical figure of the

'Nurturing mother'. How mothers then actually perceive the uses of anxiety in this kind of advertising is an avenue for future research, where it would be interesting to gain more knowledge about what parents – in various cultural settings – do and where they find themselves between reflexive and habitual behaviour in the market place.

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