

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Advertising is not merely a commercial endeavor; it is a cultural force that plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions, societal values, and personal identities. As Williamson (1978) notes, “advertising doesn’t sell products but sells values, images, and concepts of success and worth.” In the contemporary media landscape, advertisements have evolved into complex cultural texts that do more than persuade—they reflect and construct ideologies about gender, family, and social roles. This is particularly evident in advertisements related to parenting, where deeply entrenched gender norms are often portrayed, challenged, or reinforced. As contemporary audiences grow more media-literate and socially conscious, there is an increasing expectation for brands to reflect values such as authenticity, diversity, and responsibility (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Holt, 2004).

The ideological power of advertising is especially visible in areas that are closely connected to everyday life and personal identity—such as family, household labor, and caregiving. These areas may seem private, but they are actually shaped by broader social and cultural expectations. Angela McRobbie (2009) and Williamson (1978) explain that advertising does more than sell products—it also spreads ideas and beliefs by attaching them to everyday items. In the home, advertisements often promote traditional ideas about gender roles, especially when it comes to parenting. They tend to show idealized images of the “perfect mother” or the “responsible parent,” which reflect and reinforce dominant

social values. As Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue, these portrayals are not neutral—they support certain beliefs about what it means to be a woman, a mother, or a good caregiver. By connecting these ideals to ordinary products like baby care advertisements, it helps normalize unrealistic standards of parenting that are often shaped by gender and class. In this way, ads for baby care products don't just mirror society—they help shape it.

Historically, baby care advertisements have shown a perfect and ideal image of motherhood—where mothers are always clean, calm, and emotionally satisfied. These kinds of portrayals are often discussed in media and feminist studies because they don't reflect the real experiences of most mothers. Scholars like Hays (1996) as well as Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue that the media often shows motherhood as something that should be perfect, self-sacrificing, and emotionally rewarding all the time. Douglas and Michaels call this idea "new momism"—a belief that being a mother is the most important thing a woman can do, and that she should give all her time, energy, and emotions to her children, every day, without rest. They explain that this ideal puts a lot of pressure on women and creates standards that are impossible to meet. These polished, unrealistic images of motherhood hide the hard work, stress, and emotional challenges that come with parenting. Instead of helping, they support traditional gender roles that expect women to carry most of the responsibility for childcare.

In response to the long-standing portrayal of idealized motherhood in advertising, there has been a growing shift toward more authentic and diverse representations of parenting. Contemporary advertisements increasingly acknowledge the emotional labor, gender dynamics, and everyday realities of family life. Gill (2007) identifies this shift as

part of a “postfeminist sensibility,” where themes of empowerment and authenticity are often interwoven with, or complicated by, traditional gender norms. While this sensibility may obscure deeper structural inequalities, it also opens space for more layered and relatable portrayals of caregiving in the media.

Within this shifting media landscape, after conducting a search on YouTube and making preliminary observations, *Frida Baby Presents Real Reviews: NoseFrida Edition* emerged as a compelling example of how advertising negotiates cultural expectations around gender and parenting. The researcher found this ad interesting since it seems departs from conventional baby product marketing. It was noted that the textual and visual elements featured in the ad make it not only attention-grabbing but also rich in symbolic content. Its blending of real reviews with exaggerated scenes creates a fertile site for semiotic analysis.

The decision to analyze this advertisement is grounded in its relevance to evolving trends in media and its capacity to illustrate how gendered meanings are communicated through commercial texts. Following a preliminary review of 18 baby product advertisements available on YouTube—selected based on recency, Western origin, and thematic relevance to caregiving—the chosen advertisement stands out for its alignment with contemporary shifts in media representation and its suitability for semiotic interpretation. Through its use of informal narrative strategies and emotionally resonant imagery, the advertisement offers a site for examining how caregiving and gender roles are constructed within consumer culture. Its focus on maternal experience also intersects with key concerns in feminist media discourse, positioning it as a relevant case for exploring how commercial messages participate in the circulation of ideological meaning.

As Williamson (1978) argues, advertisements function as ideological forms that organize meaning through signs, while Barthes' (1972) semiotic theory enables a deeper reading of how such meanings operate at denotative, connotative, and mythological levels. By selecting this advertisement, the study aims to investigate how visual and verbal elements work together to convey layered messages—some overt, others more implicit—concerning family, caregiving, and feminist discourse in contemporary consumer culture.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

To provide a clear focus and direction for this study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings presented in the advertisement Frida Baby Presents Real Reviews: NoseFrida Edition?
2. How does the advertisement convey feminist messages through visual and verbal elements?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe the denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings embedded in the advertisement Frida Baby Presents Real Reviews: NoseFrida Edition, using a semiotic approach.
2. To describe how feminist messages are communicated through both the visual and verbal elements in the advertisement.

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to the growing field of feminist media studies by illustrating how semiotic analysis can uncover ideological shifts in contemporary advertising. For scholars, it offers an examples for analyzing visual texts through the lens of gender and cultural theory. For advertisers and content creators, it provides insights into how authentic storytelling and inclusive representations can build emotional resonance with audiences. More broadly, it encourages viewers to critically engage with media content and question the gendered narratives that shape societal norms and expectations around parenting.

In relation to the English Study Program, this study is expected to be beneficial in several ways. Firstly, it helps strengthen the theoretical foundation of English studies by integrating linguistic, visual, and cultural analysis within a multimodal framework. Secondly, it promotes interdisciplinary learning by demonstrating how concepts from semiotics, gender theory, and cultural studies can be meaningfully applied within English language and literature education. In practical terms, the study may support the development of learning materials that offer relevant and engaging content for classroom use—particularly in courses involving media analysis, gender studies, and critical thinking. Finally, it has the potential to enhance the program’s academic reputation by contributing to its research output through journal publications and broader scholarly engagement.

## 1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses exclusively on the advertisement *Frida Baby Presents Real Reviews: NoseFrida Edition*. It selects eight scenes for semiotic analysis, with attention to those that explicitly or implicitly express feminist values and challenge traditional representations of parenting. The analysis is limited to visual and verbal elements within the advertisement and does not include audience reception or marketing effectiveness.

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

**Semiotic-Feminist Analysis:** A critical methodological approach that synthesizes Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics with feminist media criticism to examine how signs and symbols within advertisements encode, reinforce, or challenge dominant gender ideologies. (Barthes, 1972; Gill, 2007).

**Advertisement:** A form of mediated communication intended to promote products, services, or ideas, which simultaneously operates as a cultural artifact that reflects, reproduces, and occasionally resists prevailing social norms, including those related to gender, class, and identity (Williamson, 1978; Goldman, 1992).

**Feminist Message:** An expressive element within media texts that articulates values aligned with feminist ideologies, including the promotion of gender equity, critique of patriarchal systems, and the empowerment of women and marginalized genders. Such messages can be conveyed explicitly or implicitly through narrative, imagery, or symbolism (Hooks, 1994; McRobbie, 2009).

**Media Authenticity:** The perceived sincerity, credibility, and relatability of media content, particularly in how truthfully it mirrors everyday experiences, emotions, and

social realities. In feminist media studies, authenticity is often associated with resisting hyper-commercialized, idealized depictions and instead embracing the complexity of lived identities (Banet-Weiser, 2012).

**Gender Representation:** The ways in which gender identities, roles, and relations are portrayed across media platforms, influencing how audiences understand and internalize cultural expectations. Representations may serve to perpetuate traditional stereotypes or disrupt them by offering more nuanced, progressive depictions (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2002).

**Feminist Agency:** The representation of women and marginalized genders as active, self-determining subjects within media narratives, capable of making choices and expressing resistance within or against social constraints. It recognizes a spectrum of agency—from overt rebellion to subtle forms of negotiation, compliance, or redefinition of gender norms (Mahmood, 2005; Gill, 2008).

**Feminist Resistance:** Discursive or embodied strategies employed by individuals or collectives to challenge, subvert, or dismantle gendered oppression and patriarchal ideologies. In media contexts, resistance may be encoded through symbolic acts, narrative shifts, or visual subversion that question dominant norms and promote gender justice (De Lauretis, 1987; Hooks, 1994).