

BREASTFEEDING ADVERTISEMENTS AND CAMPAIGNS: PERCEPTION OF WOMEN MEMBERS OF VIRTUAL GROUPS

PROPAGANDAS E CAMPANHAS DE ALEITAMENTO MATERNO: PERCEPÇÃO DE MULHERES MEMBROS DE GRUPOS VIRTUAIS

ANUNCIOS Y CAMPAÑAS DE LACTANCIA MATERNA: PERCEPCIÓN DE LAS MUJERES MIEMBROS DE GRUPOS VIRTUALES

Melissa Hartmann¹, Matheus dos Santos Rodrigues², Juliane Portella Ribeiro³

ABSTRACT

Objective: to know the perception of women who participate in virtual groups hosted on Facebook, about the content disseminated by advertisements and campaigns from 1921 until today, involving the theme of breastfeeding. **Method:** Exploratory and descriptive research. Fifteen women members of two virtual groups hosted on Facebook participated. Data collection took place on the platform through a form associated with the photo-elicitation method. Subsequently, content analysis was used. **Results:** The participants identified that food industry advertisements over the years have contributed to the construction of the false belief that artificial milk is superior to breast milk, which later required campaigns to encourage breastfeeding. **Final considerations:** recent campaigns highlight the importance of both the support network and the guarantee of the rights of the nursing woman so that breastfeeding is established as recommended by the World Health Organization. However, the campaigns have built romanticism around breastfeeding and the mother figure; a fact that has culminated in her being held responsible for the success of breastfeeding. **Descriptors:** Breast Feeding; Infant Formula; Health Policy; Maternal -Child Health Services; Online Social Networking.

RESUMO

Objetivo: conhecer a percepção de mulheres que participam de grupos virtuais hospedados no Facebook acerca do conteúdo veiculado por propagandas e campanhas, de 1921 até à atualidade, que envolvem à temática de aleitamento materno. **Método:** pesquisa de caráter exploratório e descritivo. Participaram 15 mulheres membros de dois grupos virtuais hospedados no Facebook. A coleta de dados se sucedeu na plataforma por meio de um formulário associado ao método de foto-elicitação. Posteriormente, empregou-se a análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** as participantes identificaram que as propagandas do ramo alimentício, ao longo dos anos, contribuíram para a construção da falsa crença de que o leite artificial é superior ao leite materno, o que necessitou, posteriormente, de campanhas de incentivo à amamentação. **Considerações finais:** as campanhas recentes evidenciam a importância tanto da rede de apoio quanto da garantia dos direitos da nutriz para que o aleitamento materno se estabeleça conforme o recomendado pela Organização Mundial

da Saúde. Contudo, as campanhas construíram um romantismo em torno do aleitamento materno e da figura materna, fato que culminou na sua responsabilização pelo sucesso da amamentação.

Descritores: Aleitamento materno; Fórmulas infantis; Política de saúde; Serviços de saúde materno-infantil; Redes sociais online.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: conocer la percepción de las mujeres que participan en grupos virtuales alojados en Facebook sobre el contenido visto por propagandas y campañas, desde 1921 hasta la actualidad, que envuelven la temática de aleitamento materno. **Método:** investigación exploratoria y descriptiva. Participaron 15 mujeres miembros de dos grupos virtuales alojados en Facebook. La recopilación de datos se realizó en la plataforma mediante un formulario asociado al método de fotoelitización. Posteriormente, se utilizó el análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** los participantes identificaron que los anuncios de la industria alimentaria, a lo largo de los años, han contribuido a la construcción de la falsa creencia de que la leche artificial es superior a la materna, lo que posteriormente requirió campañas para fomentar la lactancia materna. **Consideraciones finales:** las recientes campañas destacan la importancia tanto de la red de apoyo como de la garantía de los derechos de la madre lactante para que la lactancia materna se establezca tal y como recomienda la Organización Mundial de la Salud. Sin embargo, las campañas han construido un romanticismo en torno a la lactancia materna y a la figura de la madre, hecho que ha culminado en responsabilizarla del éxito de la lactancia.

Descriptores: Lactancia Materna; Fórmulas infantiles; Política de Salud; Servicios de Salud Materno-Infantil; Redes Sociales en Línea.

¹Hospital de Clínicas de Clínicas de Porto Alegre. Porto Alegre (RS), Brasil.

¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1754-4044>

²Universidade Federal de Pelotas/UFPEL. Pelotas (RS), Brasil. ² <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9318-9177>

³Universidade Federal de Pelotas/ UFPEL. Pelotas (RS), Brasil. ³ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1834-4544>

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INTRODUCTION

The advertisements for breastmilk substitute formulas promoted by the food industry have contributed to the dissemination of untrue information on breastfeeding, promoting the construction of erroneous beliefs, such as the existence of weak and incomplete breast milk, which culminated in the decline of breastfeeding rates, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.¹

The negative impacts of this decline were observed in maternal health and a significant increase in infant morbidity and mortality rates, mobilizing international and national bodies in an

attempt to promote and protect breastfeeding.² However, even with the mobilization and initiatives promoted, many companies still invest in advertisements that destabilize families and cause the consumption of formula to replace breast milk in an erroneous manner. It is estimated that between 2014 and 2019 there will have been an increase of 6.8% in the consumption of breastmilk substitutes, associated with the growth of purchasing power of society.³⁻⁵ Data on the turnover of the artificial milk industry worldwide indicated that in 2014 there were 44.8 billion dollars in sales. Because of this, these companies work hard with advertisements that project into society the dependence on their product and, thus, families often end up assuming that the breast milk substitute is better and necessary for the growth and development of their child.⁶

Therefore, it can be seen that the advertisements of substitutes and technologies that help artificial breastfeeding have a significant impact on the early weaning rate in the country. Currently, the rate of women exclusively breastfeeding in the period from four to six months is only 11%, even though 96% of mothers start breastfeeding their babies at birth. Moreover, less than half, about 41%, of women continue breastfeeding until the first year of life and 14% until two years of age.³

The Ministry of Health (MH) and the World Health Organization (WHO), seeking to demystify the beliefs surrounding breastfeeding, have been promoting campaigns and advertisements annually.⁷ In this sense, a study carried out with 73 postpartum women in a maternity hospital in Espírito Santo, Brazil, revealed that they acquired various information pertinent to breastfeeding from posters displayed in the basic health unit where they had their prenatal care and also from campaigns and advertisements on social networks.⁸

It is observed that there is currently a tendency in the use of social networks as a search mechanism by pregnant and postpartum women due to the need to seek guidance, information, or even support in virtual groups.⁶ Groups that belong to and can be accessed by social networks, such as: Facebook, Instagram, Blogs, Whatsapp, among others.⁹

The use of virtual groups shows positive results regarding female empowerment, since it fosters the feeling of belonging to a group and the availability of scientifically based content, free of charge and with easy access.⁶

Health professionals, in view of the immediacy sought by today's society, can use social networks as a tool for health education, encouraging and demystifying breastfeeding in virtual groups¹⁰. A study evaluated Facebook for disseminating information and collecting data in research, showing that the social network has great potential to disseminate health-related information¹¹. In addition, it shows that the use of Facebook can provide low-cost, wide-ranging geographic information in the short term.

Recognizing this potential, the marketing of breastmilk substitutes and their accessories invests in social networks as a creative and technological tool that can disseminate the consumption of their brand and boost their profitability.⁶ Therefore, virtual environments permeate both advertising information and predilection for the use of breastmilk substitutes as well as initiatives to protect and promote breastfeeding.

OBJECTIVE

To know the perception of women who participate in virtual groups hosted on Facebook about the content conveyed by advertisements and campaigns that involve the theme of breastfeeding.

MÉTHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive study, developed in the virtual social network Facebook, specifically in registered groups that address the theme breastfeeding. Its development complied with Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council of the Ministry of Health, which addresses research involving human beings and was approved by Opinion No. 4,239,450 and Certificate of Ethics Presentation and Appreciation (CAAE) No. 35995320,1,0000,5316.

The collection occurred from September to November 2020 in two virtual groups Beyond Maternity Hospital and “Jeitinho Materno” (“Maternal Way”), which were selected for having the highest number of publications in the last 30 days preceding the collection. After selecting the groups through an electronic message issued by the researcher’s personal account, the women who established themselves as members of the groups were invited to participate in the study.

The inclusion criteria for the participants were being over 18 years old and posting in a virtual Facebook group that addressed breastfeeding. Women who were characterized as administrators of a virtual Facebook group that addresses the topic of breastfeeding were excluded. It is noteworthy that the number of participants was determined by data saturation, in other words, when the information is repeated and does not add relevant elements to the research.¹²

Data collection took place in the Google Forms platform. By accessing the electronic address of the platform, the participants were automatically directed to the Informed Consent Form, where they expressed their agreement to participate by checking the option: I know the objectives of the research and agree to answer the form. The data collection step was presented only after the consent of the participants.

A form associated with the photo-elicitation method was presented through Google Forms, exposing the participants images of advertisements and campaigns. The images were organized into five blocks in order to compile the historical moments associated with the dissemination of adver-

tisements of infant formulas and, subsequently, ministerial campaigns to encourage breastfeeding structured as follows: 1st) promotion of artificial milk and beliefs created around breastfeeding; 2nd) breastfeeding as a maternal duty, 3rd) promotion of breastfeeding, 4th) breastfeeding support network, and 5th) breastfeeding woman's right.

To understand the data, the content analysis proposed by Bardin was used, classifying the material by categories that help in the interpretation of the information accessed.¹³ To ensure anonymity, the participants were identified by the letter M, which stands for women followed by Arabic numerals indicating the order number of the interview.

RESULTS

Fifteen women participated, with a predominance of age between 25 and 30 years (33%) and married marital status (66.7%). Ten (66.7%) had children between two months and ten years old, four (26.7%) were primigravidae, and one (6.7%) had no children. Regarding color, 11 declared themselves white and four brown (26.7%). Most had completed high school (60%) and had paid jobs (66.6%), of which five (33.3%) had a signed contract, according to the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), and five (33.3%) were self-employed.

Women's knowledge about advertisements and campaigns

Regarding the advertisements and campaigns about breastfeeding, 11 participants (70%) had some knowledge broadcasted on TV, posters in Unidades Básicas de Saúde (Basic Health Units), projects and courses disseminated in social media.

I only saw one from the government, donate milk and the benefits of breast milk.

(M4)

Only if it is on TV because I rarely see incentives. (M1)

Only from news on TVs. (M12)

Only the ones on TV. And the breastfeeding day. (M14)

Yes, health centers. (M5)

Yes, the Complete Mommy Course with the You Can Breastfeed Project. (M3)

Golden August campaigns. (M13)

Advertisements promoting artificial milk and beliefs created around breastfeeding

In the photo-elicitation, by observing images of advertisements broadcast by food companies during the 1920s and 1970s, the women identified the role that marketing played in society by building the false belief that artificial milk is superior to breast milk, thus promoting the sale of infant formulas and the replacement of breast milk by them (Figure I).



Figure 1 - Advertisements that made up Block 1.

Totally clueless! It clearly says there that these milks are as good as the mother's milk. And I know that there is no comparison between mother's milk and artificial milk. Mother's milk is the single most valuable and nutritious milk. (M15)

It shows that they wanted to sell milk and so they made advertisements to encourage people to buy milk. (M3)

I think it is very wrong these companies that try to replace the food produced naturally, by us mothers, with these formulas. (M1)

The women participating in this research reveal that many beliefs about breast milk have been propagated and strengthened over the years, especially that of "weak milk". These myths, in turn, were the basis for the mistakes made in breastfeeding.

Ideas that are still widespread in our culture. For I see many women talking about weak milk in the 21st century. And promoting the trade of formulas. (M14)

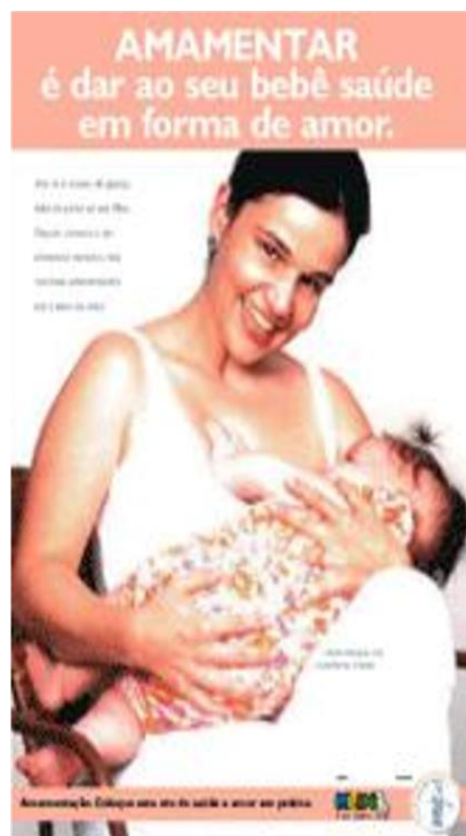
Totally wrong, but at that time there were not the studies that we have today. Even many of today's errors come from the children of those times. (M3)

There is no such thing as weak milk, nor of inferior quality. They are marketing to sell the product. (M13)

Incentive campaigns and maternal accountability for breastfeeding

Based on the observation of images from MH campaigns in partnership with the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), from 1999 and 2002,

the women understand that breastfeeding must be valued and encouraged and the images are motivational, seeking to rescue its importance (Figure II).



Semana Mundial de Aleitamento Materno 2002
Fonte:<https://rbli.fiocruz.br/campanhas-nacionais-semana-mundial-de-aleitamento-materno-smam>

Figure II - Ministerial campaign that made up Block 2.

Shows the importance of breastfeeding and thus encourages other mothers to breastfeed. (M2)

Motivational, because they try to encourage breastfeeding and reduce the use of formula. (M14)

Great advertising. It is valuing breastfeeding. (M15)

Campaign to relearn the importance of breastfeeding. (M13)

To encourage breastfeeding, the images show that when a woman breastfeeds she is giving love, life, and health to her child.

I agree with them, breastfeeding is undoubtedly a way to donate life, it contains all the means to give health to the baby. (M4)

The bond between mother and baby intensifies even more with each breastfeed. (M1)

The images transmit encouragement to breastfeeding and also show how much love is involved at this moment. (M5)

These images already show how much breastfeeding is necessary and is good for the mother and the baby, it also strengthens the mother-child bond. (M13)

When presenting campaigns from the MOH in partnership with WABA from 2009 to 2016, women report that they maintain a focus on encouraging breastfeeding through truthful and substantiated information (Figure III).



Figure III - Ministerial campaign that made up Block 3.

Encouraging breastfeeding. (M5)

Following the same logic, the more I study, the more the information becomes truthful and well-founded. (M3)

Awareness of the benefits of breastfeeding. (M6)

Here we already encourage more breastfeeding, and bring more information to pregnant and/or lactating women. (M8)

In addition, the women pointed out that the campaigns emphasize breastfeeding as an act that transcends infant feeding, constituting a way to offer affection and care to the child.

Breastfeeding is much more than just offering food. (M13)

Breastfeeding is quite a challenge. There should be more explanation about breastfeeding because at first it is not at all easy. But, it is the best way to show affection to the child. (M4)

In the present study, the interviewees understand that the campaigns center on the mother figure responsibility for the success of breastfeeding.

It shows the mother figure, as the responsible for breastfeeding, and it is her commitment to try to make it work. (M14)

Campaigns and the breastfeeding support network

When presenting the images of MS campaigns, a partnership between WABA, referring to the period from 2008 to 2017, the women perceived a change regarding the accountability for breastfeeding success. Previously, the accountability was centered on the mother figure, being expanded its understanding and the support network acquired a key role (Figure IV).



Figure IV - Ministerial campaign that made up Block 4.

- It shows the support of people around you in breastfeeding. (M2)*
- Family support is essential. (M1)*
- Support is fundamental. (M9)*
- Very good to get support from the family. (M12)*
- Represents that moms need a lot of support at this moment, that no matter how much they want to, they can't win everything. (M5)*
- Excellent initiative in encouraging the support network for women. Very good to involve other people, especially fathers, to show that everyone has an important role in this phase. (M3)*
- That when we have someone to help and encourage everything becomes easier. (M6)*
- Shows the humanization, the support we need that we can count on professionals and family members for this to be a tranquil and pleasant period for mother and baby. (M8)*
- Our support network is very important! (M15)*
- Perception that the woman needs a support network. (M13)*
- Shows the importance that other family members have during breastfeeding. (M14)*

Campaigns and the right of breastfeeding women

Based on the images of the MH campaigns, a partnership between WABA, referring to the period between 2006 and 2015, the women learned about breastfeeding as a right of the mother and child. This right must be guaranteed and reconciled with the return to work, because both are part of the woman's experience (Figure V).



Figure V - Ministerial campaign that made up Block 5.

Breastfeeding is a right of both mother and child. One can see throughout the images a great advance in the issue of breastfeeding. Little ants' work. (M13)

Brings reality; because we have to work and it is important to breastfeed. The two things can go together. (M14)

Regardless of whether the mother returned to work, I think companies that support breaks for the mother to breastfeed are essential. (M1)

The importance of the working woman go breastfeed her baby during working hours. (M10)

We have the right to breastfeed anywhere, including at work. (M8)

However, it is not always possible to reconcile breastfeeding and returning to work, a fact that culminates in weaning.

Not everyone has this right. Unfortunately, the reality is not quite like that; many women stop breastfeeding their babies because of their jobs. (M4)

DISCUSSION

The internet is the second most used media by Brazilians, second only to television. Sixty percent of social network users are women. Thus, the universe of social networks is a significant means to reach the community, and should be explored by health professionals and managers.¹⁴

A literature review aimed to explore what Brazilian mothers search for on the Internet when the subject is breastfeeding showed that women seek information, support, and exchange experiences about motherhood on social networks. However, the study warns about the quality of the information shared on the social network Facebook, especially in groups, where there is exchange of experiences, because it is often based on myths and beliefs of a given culture.⁹

Another study that evaluated the campaigns by the MH on Instagram during 2017 and 2018 found that the MH appropriated social and digital marketing strategies seeking to reach mothers

and women. The study also showed that the content disseminated by the MH showed little interaction from followers, weakening the potential to impact families. Thus, it emphasizes the need to articulate the demands of families with the content disseminated by the MH on social networks.¹⁴

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes points out the need to discourage advertisements about the use of infant formula advertised and promoted by food companies.¹⁵⁻

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Beliefs regarding the nutrition process of the newborn generate controversies and interfere in the consolidation of breastfeeding. A study aiming to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of grandmothers related to support or restraint in the breastfeeding process indicated that they refer to the need to offer water to hydrate babies under six months of age and complement them with porridge. In addition to the use of teas to calm the baby, reduce colic, and improve constipation. These orientations are offered by grandmothers based on their experiences and cultural influence.¹⁷

Arguments that convey the belief of weak or insufficient breast milk have been disseminated for many decades in order to promote the early introduction of other foods, as well as formulas to replace breast milk.¹⁸ An integrative review aimed at describing factors associated with early weaning from breastfeeding suggested that the false belief about weak milk is associated with the "watery" appearance of colostrum, causing women to believe that their milk is insufficient to meet the baby's demands.⁴

It can be seen that the physiological aspects of breastfeeding have been wrongly interpreted and disseminated by many industries that only aim to sell their formulas.¹⁸

In addition, historically, breastmilk substitute had the appearance of a consistent milk with several vitamins, a compound that would be ideal for the baby's growth. Many times, they were enriched with carbohydrates and families even added sugar to the composition, making it a hypercaloric milk and, consequently, leading babies to a level of obesity, which was valued by society as a version of health. Today, it is known that this growth curve is far from ideal, causing harm to babies in the short and long term. However, the ideas disseminated during the 1970s are still responsible for the untrue beliefs, influencing many mothers and families.¹

It is noted that even the marketing of breastmilk substitutes exerts a negative influence by disseminating information that induces early weaning.¹⁸ A study that analyzed 32 infant formulas, regarding the compliance of labeling and commercial promotion of these products in relation to current Brazilian laws, found that 56.2% had nonconformities related to commercial promotion. In addition, 65.6% alluded to the superiority and advantages of the product compared to breast milk, through expressions such as "Premium", "Supreme" and "ProExpert".¹⁵

The inconsistency between the Brazilian legislation proposed by NBCAL and the manufacturers' practice is relevant, since promotions and discounts in stores, suggestive advertisements and labels, financing and support in events are validated to circumvent the legislation and promote the use of infant formulas^{15,18}

For example, recently, the First Brazilian Congress of Online Pediatrics¹⁹ took place, which featured a Nestlé symposium, addressing Human Milk Oligosaccharides (HMOs) and Immunity: from theory to clinical practice. Also, food and pharmaceutical brands such as Danone, Nestlé, Sanofi, Novo Nordisk, and Ausnutria were sponsoring this event.

The campaigns work with the process of transforming a woman into a mother, which involves cultural values imposed by society. In this process, besides the change in self-image, the woman assumes the role of caregiver, which requires committed attitudes, such as fulfilling her duty to breastfeed and care for the baby.²⁰

It is noteworthy that this scenario causes great commotion and feeling of incapacity to mothers who, for some complication, are prevented from breastfeeding and need to introduce substitute formulas to nourish their children. This raises greater sensitivity in the development of campaigns, since the fact that breastfeeding does not exist does not imply that this mother can be considered cruel or that she does not love her child.²⁰

Scientific knowledge is available in various media and can be accessed by anyone, but it is often not easily understood. As documented by several studies, women had some guidance during the gravidic-puerperal period about breastfeeding, but it was not clear enough to be understood and practiced. The translation of knowledge may be more important than holding the scientific knowledge itself.^{8,21-22}

Health professionals need to use clear and reliable language within the reach of each user, so that health promotion actions actually reach the community. From this perspective, a study group developed a song that deals with the physiology of lactation as a way to reach students and allow knowledge to be learned, because by using their skills, professionals can contribute to increasing scientific knowledge on the subject and ultimately transmit it to mothers and families.²²

As soon as a baby is born, a mother is also born with a role imposed by society, a maternal identity, which demands from her several responsibilities, positioning, and brings with it a label, the woman has the duty to feed her child, creating bonds of love and affection. However, many women report difficulties and anxieties around breastfeeding, many times, they have no desire to breastfeed, but carry this feeling with guilt.²⁰

The control and social intervention on the woman's body has been historically reported, motherhood is characterized within a process of donation, generosity, and eternal love. It should

be considered that the set of experiences lived throughout the process of mother-baby bonding can produce feelings of affection and love through breastfeeding; however, this subjectivity and these feelings should not be a reproduction of what is socially and culturally accepted.^{20,23}

Regarding maternal accountability for the success of breastfeeding, a similar result to this research was found in a study with 18 nursing mothers in Viçosa, Minas Gerais, showing that, for the interviewees, exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) guarantees the child's subsistence and depends solely and exclusively on the mother. It also emphasized that, according to the interviewees, it is impossible to distance oneself from the mother in a sense of obligation.²⁴

However, it should be noted that the condition of being a mother and the act of breastfeeding are not intrinsic aspects to the woman, they are personal and social challenges to be faced, in a continuous search for her identity and recognition as a woman.²⁰

A well-organized support network can contribute to a more peaceful maternity, facilitating the lactation period.²⁵ The family support network is usually made up of other women who are close to the mother, influence her behavior using their previous experiences, and help maintain the household chores.²⁶ It is worth mentioning that fatherhood has been worked on in recent years as a direct influence on the consolidation of breastfeeding, and the father figure has even been included in campaigns and prenatal care.²⁵

Professional support, in turn, can occur through guidance, bonding, assistance in the management and technique of breastfeeding, and attention throughout the pregnancy-puerperal cycle.²⁶ However, researchers show that women are often aware of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, but they are vulnerable due to the absence of a support network, lack of knowledge, and lack of consistent information²⁷; which could be provided by nursing and health professionals.

As a way to guarantee both rights for women, that is, to breastfeed and work, there are currently several policies and campaigns that aim to assist working women who breastfeed, encouraging companies to extend maternity leave from 120 to 180 days, welcoming nursing mothers and infants, providing suitable environments for breastfeeding and milking.²⁸

Corroborating the findings of this research, a literature review described the factors associated with early weaning and pointed out that women returning within 120 days of childbirth impairs EBF and makes early weaning a public health problem.⁴

A study with 52 women with children under six months of age, who were not on EBF, revealed that 27% of the mothers who worked formally associated early weaning with returning to work. The main difficulties reported by them were: an inadequate workplace for breastfeeding, unhealthy conditions for milking milk, lack of information or interest from the company regarding breastfeeding policies, physical and mental fatigue.²⁸

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regarding the advertisements and campaigns about breastfeeding, most women were aware of at least one of them broadcasted on TV, posters in Unidades Básicas de Saúde (Basic Health Units), projects and courses disseminated in social media. Through the photo-elicitation, they identified that the advertisements of the food industry, over the years, contributed to the construction of the false belief that artificial milk is superior to breast milk, which subsequently required campaigns to encourage breastfeeding.

However, it is noteworthy that the campaigns have built romanticism around breastfeeding and the mother figure, a fact that, consequently, culminated in the mother being solely responsible for the success of breastfeeding. For this reason, the most recent campaigns point out the importance of both the support network and the guarantee of the rights of the nursing mother so that, in fact, breastfeeding can be established as recommended by the WHO.

In view of these findings, the importance of the health professional, not only in health education, to act politically, orienting the breastfeeding woman about her rights, as well as to discuss about the values and truths created based on food industry advertisements and campaigns about breastfeeding, emerges.

It is believed that this research contributed to the critical reflection of several women through its dissemination in virtual Facebook groups. On the other hand, the use of only one social network for data collection is pointed out as a limitation, since exploring other networks would allow us to reach a larger and heterogeneous audience in relation to the theme.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors also contributed to the design of the research project, data collection, analysis and discussion, as well as the writing and critical review of the content with an intellectual contribution and the approval of the final version of the study.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

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Correspondence

Juliane Portella Ribeiro

E-mail: ju_ribeiro1985@hotmail.com

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