

Exploring Menstrual T.V. Advertisements: Unravelling media's role in Perpetuating Women Victimization

Dr. Jasleen Kewlani¹, Ms. Kavita Saharan²

¹Assistant Professor of Sociology, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala, Punjab, India
Email: jasleenkewlani@gmail.com

²Senior Research Fellow, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala, Punjab, India
Email: kavita.saharan03@gmail.com

Received: 07 Jan 2025; Received in revised form: 11 Feb 2025; Accepted: 15 Feb 2025

©2025 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)



Abstract— *Menstruation; is a unique and natural phenomenon, whereby a woman undergoes for a major part of her life, which is almost forty years. However, this crucial process is always understated through different mechanisms of society; be it the patriarchal system of society, the women themselves, the culture of a particular community, or the media that paints the majority of perceptions about societal events. Media through menstrual advertisements had played a significant role in the representation of women. Lack of awareness; embarrassment; secrecy; and stigmatization, all illustrate a grim and depressing picture of women's lives, and the media further aggravates their victimization. Menstrual Advertisements reflect the taboos by reinforcing the belief that menstruation (which is a natural and biological feature of women's lives) creates a lot of difficulties in their normal routine and livelihood culture, often encouraging menstrual concealment. The present article attempts to analyze the changing connotations and victimized depiction of women through these commercials. Also, it examines whether these advertisements are just commercializing and promoting specific brands, or bringing awareness among people regarding menstruation, and its broader implications on diversity and inclusion. The findings aim to elaborate on the media's impact in shaping society's beliefs and perceptions regarding menstruation.*

Keywords— *Menstruation, Menstrual Advertisements, Women Representation, Victimization of Women, Stigmatization, Awareness, Diversity and Inclusion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A girl while busy with her phone, enters the kitchen. In the search for something she touches a jar of pickles and her grandmother sitting comfortably on the sofa, knitting a sweater watches her and is astonished, "Haw! She touch the pickle". In the backdrop, a gentle melody emerges, carried by a young girl's whisper-like voice saying, 'She touch the pickle, oh yeah, she did'. Responding to her grandmother's amazed gaze, the girl playfully extends her hands once again towards the pickle jar and runs outside for the morning walk. As the girl races forward, she crosses a group of old ladies and one of them is holding the jar of pickle. The girl again touches the jar and one of the old ladies says, 'Arre Haan Baba, she touch the pickle'. In the seamless transition, the scene transforms into a sun-drenched tennis court where the girl hits the racket and exclaims in her joy. A large group of women cheers her by saying it loud, 'Yeah, she touch the pickle'. In the company of other two women, the girl

proudly raises the pickle jar up high in the air (as a token of victory) and exclaims, "I touch the pickle. Periods ke dino main kehte hain don't wear white, don't go out, don't play, don't touch the pickle. I say girls break the taboo, go ahead and touch the pickle". In the final moment, the screen is graced by the logo in bold letters with the backdrop voice of a girl, 'Whisper Touch the Pickle, Kadam Badhaye Jaa'.

On the surface, the advertisement might challenge the societal taboos of not touching the pickle while menstruating. It also reflects the picture of empowering women who embrace and accept the natural experience of their lives. But beneath the surface, the narration is rooted in complex woven threads of fabrication, the perpetuation of social stigma, and strategic emphasis on product promotion. The present research article delves into the comprehensive analysis and shifting connotations of menstrual product advertisements across various time zones

and it also explores how these commercials craft and influence the perspectives of their audience.

II. MENSTRUATION: A FEMININE CYCLE

Menstruation, a natural and unique process, is a monthly crucial occurrence that possibly all adolescent girls and women experience in their lives for almost forty years. The event triggers a female body during puberty and her reproductive organs start developing, including menstrual bleeding. Beginning with Menarche, at the mean age of thirteen and marking its end at Menopause, at the mean age of forty-five to fifty years, it plays a crucial role in shaping other aspects of her life. The menstrual bleeding lasts for three to five days and occurs with a cycle of twenty-five to twenty-eight days. Monthly occurrence signifies better reproductive health of her body. Here, it is imperative to note that globally, women constitute half of the world's population, i.e. 49.58 % (3,905 million) (*World Bank Open Data*, n.d.). This fact articulates that a significant portion of the female population experiences this crucial event and is going through their reproductive years. However, negligence toward this natural occurrence has been increasing for a long time.

Despite being an influential and natural phase of women's lives to a more significant extent, people in developing countries still consider it shameful and secretive as they have a propensity to keep it behind closed doors. Even though the menstrual cycle is a crucial measure of good well-being and the reproductive cycle (Bobel et al., 2020), it is usually addressed in a whispered way and seldomly mentioned before the family members; especially male members. Some menstrual etiquettes and a '*culture of silence*' related to menstrual activities are taught to a girl at the very beginning of her adolescent phase. She is groomed and counselled in a specific way of behaviour for becoming a 'grown woman' and most significantly she is taught to maintain secrecy concerning the occurrence of their menstruation. Paulo Freire proposed the notion of the 'culture of silence' in his seminal work 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (2005), a phenomenon that is especially significant in the context of impoverished and disadvantaged populations in developing nations and their education systems (Freire, 2000). Individuals in positions of authority within these cultures, according to Freire, sustain a culture of silence to ensure the subjugation and marginalization of the less fortunate. In the same comparable manner, the concept of a culture of silence has implications for women in India in terms of menstruation. Owing to existing male domination, they are nagged and oppressed to adhere to menstrual restrictions, taboos, and beliefs and additionally transmit them to the next

generation. Hence, sweeping menstruation under the carpet and presumptions supported by the patriarchal structure promote the subordination of women.

Mitoo Das, in her study '*Menstruation as Pollution: Taboos in Simitola, Assam*', talks about the restrictions and rules that a woman has to abide by during her menstrual period (Das M, 2023). She explores that a woman has to stick to her bed, she is not allowed to cook food; to touch plants, and her entry into the prayer house is also prohibited. While in many other parts of India, restrictions such as, seclusion during periods, restrictions from going to school; to play and touching men during menstruation, restriction to attend certain household activities, restrictions to touch the holy book, participation in public sphere, (Behera et al., 2015; Dr Shamima Yasmin, 2013; Mudey et al., 2010; Van Eijk et al., 2016).

In the process of following these rules and restrictions related to menstruation in a patriarchal culture, women tend to face domination and live in constant threat, discrimination, and stigmatization. Her right to explore her bodily functioning and to discuss it freely is being violated by rigid regulations and social control. Kanchan Mathur while writing on 'Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women's Empowerment in India', explores by saying that "virtues... the typical image of a "good woman" is still one who upholds the honour of the family, maintains the "culture of silence" prevailing in the private domain..." (Mathur, 2008). Therefore, for the sake of conforming to the prescribed social and cultural role, women, under constant pressure, alter their emotional, psychological, and physical spaces. Women discipline themselves both deliberately and unconsciously to uphold tradition, harmony, and social and familial honour.

As women strive to protect the family honour, they often seek to adopt the cultural and societal standards embodied in ideal types of being a 'good woman', an 'empowered woman', having 'a perfect body type', and the like. However, these commercials paradoxically, by representing these images through repeated depiction, reinforce these idealized identities. Max Weber, a renowned sociologist, in his book, "The Methodology of Social Sciences", notes that,

"An ideal type of certain situations, which can be abstracted from certain characteristic social phenomena of an epoch, might - and this is indeed quite often the case - have also been present in the minds of persons living in that epoch as an ideal to be striven for in practical life or a maxim for the regulation of certain social relationships" (*Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences*; , n.d.).

These ideal types incorporated in advertisements of sanitary products become the guiding principles in the mind of the audience throughout the practical decisions and also subtly shape the dynamics of social relationships.

The representation of women and menstruation through cultures and discourses has always been delicate and sensitive in nature. The discourses that signify the need to conceal bodily functions, particularly those associated with menstruation, are supported by a variety of cultural mechanisms and ideologies in every civilization. As Louis Althusser explains; "Ideology is encountered in the practices of everyday life and not simply in certain ideas about everyday life...[it] is the way in which certain rituals and customs have the effect of binding us to the social order: a social order that is marked by enormous inequalities of wealth, status and power... they offer pleasure and release from the usual demands of the social order, but that, ultimately, they return us to our places in the social order, refreshed and ready to tolerate our exploitation and oppression until the next official break comes along" (Storey, 2015). Thus, such ideologies, by offering a supposedly distinct channel of representation, encourage the idea of protection and shame to maintain control. Media all along, in any culture, plays a pivotal role in representing menstruation and also paints the majority of perceptions about events in society. Menstrual Advertisements actively contribute to shaping cultural attitudes by encouraging menstrual concealment and promoting this aggravation of subordination and victimization of women.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Media and menstrual commercial advertisements, from year to year, propagated the notion of hiding menstrual occurrence, taboos, and beliefs related to it. The present paper, with major focus on exploring and analysing the evolution of menstrual advertisements in different time zones, attempts to interpret the ideas behind these ads by using the thematic analysis method. The research paper with specific objectives examine progression in terms of content and messaging, determine the cultural and social factors that affect the portrayal of menstruation, and last but not the least, assess the impact of these commercials on the Indian women as a target audience. The time zones selected to reflect various periods in development of menstrual marketing and shifts in marketing tactics in India, are divided into three parts, i.e., the first is from 2006 to 2010, the second is from 2011 to 2015, and the last is from 2016 to the present. Although, several commercials have been viewed and analysed but after acknowledging the limitation of small sample, only six ads out of these ads are selected (two each for a time zone). In order to ensure the diversity

and depiction of different brands and time zones, the sample is selected with the help of descriptive and random sampling methods from the array of available commercials. Further, the ads are narrated by systematic examination of their content, text, form, and frame and to uncover the recurrent themes and trends in these ads, thematic analysis method has been employed. Based on the narration of these commercials and taking all their elements into consideration, the ads are interpreted and analysed.

The criteria for the selection of these ads are given in **Table: 1** below:

Criteria for the Selection	
Brands:	Stayfree, Whisper, Kotex, Freedays, and a Menstrual Cup.
Target Audience	Indian Women (15-45 years)
Languages:	Hindi and English
Source:	YouTube (also aired on various channels)
Time:	Not more than one and a half minutes

The researcher has scrutinized and analysed these selected commercials through the lens of a theoretical framework, including the Product claim vs. Reward dimension.

Product Claim Versus Reward Dimensions:

The Product-claim versus the Reward dimensions were first described by Crooks (2004) as the major distinction between language and non-linguistic components within the commercials (Crook, 2004). Del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck (2009) explain that the product claim dimension imparts information about the product to the audience but they are provided with the underlying benefits of using the product by reward dimension (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009). They quote:

Product-claim dimension: Advertisers offer information or claims about the product. The modes ascribed to this dimension are the linguistic message, which can be viewed on the screen-superimposed, that is – and/or transmitted by a voice-over, a narrator, or by the characters of vignettes or mini-dramas. (p. 3)

The commercials prominently emphasize product claims, articulated in a more vocal way in contrast to the reward dimension. The communication within the product claim aims to be conspicuously lucid and unequivocal. Manufacturers craft it meticulously to eliminate any hint of subjectivity, variation, or inconsistency in its interpretation. The majority of the duration and space is dedicated to

delineating a product's benefits, distinctive attributes, accessibility, and convenience (Yagnik, 2012). Weiner in his study noted that TV ads for menstruation products have traditionally focused on features like greater soaking capacity, long-lasting qualities, and fragrance-enhancing ingredients (Weiner, 2004). On the other hand, the reward dimension might not have a strong connection with the actual benefits of the advertised product, but it nonetheless affects the observer as quoted by Del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck (2009):

Reward dimensions: This dimension normally appeals to the more emotional side of viewers and implicitly promises them less tangible benefits which are, at first sight, unrelated to the product itself. Music, images, and non-verbal communication are the modes advertisers employ at this level. (p. 3)

The visuals within the advertisements extend beyond product representation. They effectively tap into the audience's innate socio-psychological context. This element holds particular significance in shaping the brand narrative within menstrual hygiene product ads. Manufacturers amplify the product benefits through this dimension. Menstruation introduces various social and professional challenges for women and by spotlighting these challenges, the producers cultivate the notion that a woman's natural bleeding acts as a barrier to her career

triumphs. However, the narrative promises that if she adopts a particular sanitary napkin, she will be at the heights of her success. The idea of blaming menstruation for women's professional setbacks is deeply ingrained in societal perception and these notions reside subconsciously, remaining unspoken yet profoundly influential. So, the reward dimension speaks more to the consumer's emotional side and less to their intellectual side (Del Saz-Rubio & Pennock-Speck, 2009).

IV. A NARRATION OF SELECTED ADVERTISEMENTS

1) 2006 to 2010:

a) Advertisement 1: (2006-Kotex)

The scene in the ad begins in a gym cum meditation room, where on the gym side boys are doing some gymnastic activities, and girls on the other side, doing meditation in front of their trainer. One of the girls starts dancing and in the next moment, other girls also accompany her. On the other side, the boys left their activities and started enjoying the dance. The girls perform different dance moves and suddenly all of them sit back in their seats. The trained opened her eyes and the product demonstrator's voice says- '*Aaj ke zamane ka masti bhara style, nya Kotex Style, ab dryness cover ke saath/ Today's fun style, new Kotex Style, now with a dry cover.*' (Benetone Films, 2006).



Fig.1: The end scene of Kotex Ad reflecting by using Kotex sanitary pad one can do any kind of activities during menstruation.

b) Advertisement 2: (2008- Kotex)

The ad, 'those five days', begins with a song, '*Do you hate being a girl on those five days?*' and the female models reply- '*yeah, yeah, yeah*', and only the words '*On those five days*' are recurring for three times where girls in the ad

show their palm to represent these five days. Here, all the female models in the ad are shown wearing manly clothes and wish to wear womanly dresses. The background voice says: '*Ever wished you were a guy on those five days, now Kotex Style with zig-zag lines helps prevents bunching and keeps you absolutely dry, so celebrate being a girl*'. One of

the models takes out the Kotex sanitary pad from her bag and later, after its usage, wearing the beautiful pink gown, she throws away the manly clothes, entering confidently in

front of everyone and being surrounded by men (Modelandiaa, 2008).



Fig.2: Scene from Kotex Ad in which a woman showing her palm to represent ‘those five days’ of menstruation.

2) 2011 to 2015:

a) Advertisement 1: (2012- Whisper)

The scene in the ad opens on school grounds where only girls are doing exercise during winters and one of these girls, has wrapped her sweater around her waist (to hide her lower waist), feeling uncomfortable while doing exercise. The voice of this girl, in the background voice, asks her friend- ‘Un dino mein hamesha itna uncomfortable kyu feel hota h/ why do I always feel so uncomfortable on those

days?’ and her friend took her from the ground in between and says, ‘Tumhe chahiye mera new Whisper Ultra Soft, ye hamesha de ek soft ehsas, or sukhe sirf ek second mein/ You need my new Whisper Ultra Soft, which gives the feeling of softness and dries in only one second’. After using the product, the girl becomes so confident and she starts playing badminton without feeling uncomfortable and the last line says- ‘bas ab kadam badhae ja, new Whisper Ultra Soft/ now just keep moving, new Whisper Ultra Soft.’ (Asylum Films Official, 2012).



Fig.3: Last scene from Whisper Ultra Soft demonstrating after using this particular sanitary pad, one can move freely, the voiceover saying ‘bas ab kadam badhae ja’.

b) Advertisement 2: (2014- Freedays)

The ad begins with the scene where a little girl imitates her mother's looks, and habits while wearing a saree, combing her hair, and reading a magazine, and during the process of imitating her mother, she becomes an adolescent. One morning, while leaving for school, she suddenly reminds that she forgets something, she comes back and puts *Freedays sanitary pad* in her bag. Here her mother's voice in the background says, 'Aaj tak wo mujhe dekhti thi, pr ab, m usse dekh rhi hu/ Till today she used to see me, but now I look up to her'. In the next scene, a lady tells some mothers

and their daughters, sitting in front of her, that- 'Masik to sabhi ladkiyon ko hota hai, usme sharam ya jhijak kaisi, shi masik intezam hoga to badhna tum sabke liye ek khushiyon bhara safar rhega/ Menstruation happens to all girls, what is the shame or hesitation in it, if you have proper monthly arrangements then growing will be a happy journey for you all.' At last, the product demonstrator, as well as an Indian hockey player, repeats the same line- 'Jab beti hui h badi to khushiyan kyu na badhe/ when the daughter gets younger then why not increase the happiness.' (NHM Haryana, 2014).



Fig.4: The last scene of Freedays Ad about product demonstration saying, 'Sahi Masik Intezam, to Badhna ho Sukhad/ If monthly arrangements are correct, then growth will be pleasant'.

3) 2016 to till now:

a) Advertisement 1: (2020- Stayfree)

This menstrual ad came up during the time of lockdown in the Corona pandemic and both men and women speak some lines on behalf of adolescent girls explaining their feeling during their periods. Firstly, a girl says sadly,- 'Mere periods shuru hogye h/ My periods have started', then a lady (nearly in her 50s) says- 'Pehli baar ho rhe hai mujhe to kaafi ajeeb lag rha h/ Its happening to me for the first time, so I'm feeling really weird', then a boy (who is in his 30s) showing a tensed feeling, says- 'Periods mein mujhe asaan kaam bhi mushkil lagta hai, bahut dard hota hai/ During my periods, even simple tasks seems difficult to me. It hurts a lot', followed by an uncle (nearly in his 70s) upsets, and says, 'mai kisi ke pass baith bhi nhi sakti, or jab mai uthti hu, baar baar nishan check krta hu/ Even I can't

sit close to anyone, and when I get up, I keep checking for stains', again an old age lady (in her 60s) says worriedly, 'Ghar main ek hi washroom hai, to pad change karne mai mujhe sharam ati hai/ There's only one washroom in the house....so I feel ashamed while changing my pad', and last an elderly man (nearly in his 70s) says- 'Mujhe pad ko kachare mai chupana padta hai....har baar/ I have to hide the pad in the trash bag...Every time'.

And at last, the background voice of a female speaks up- 'She may not understand what she is going through, she just needs to know and you too. Over 2 million girls will get their first period in lockdown. Your daughter or sister could be one of them. Talk to her, tell her, IT'S NORMAL, IT'S JUST A PERIOD'. And in the last scene, the same girl, shown in the beginning, is smiling and then the logo of Stayfree is reflected (Stayfree India, 2020)



Fig.5: An elderly man expressing the feeling of hiding sanitary pad on behalf of menstruating girl.

b) Advertisement 2: (2019, Menstrual Cup Ad)

The scene begins when two out of one girl's roommates notice a tiny box in the room, and she opens it and finds out a bell-like thing in it. She, totally unaware of the thing, start finding its usage. Suddenly, her roommate comes in and asks her by giving a gesture about what she is doing with the thing. The girl, out of curiosity, asks about the bell-like thing and her roommate responds- 'Menstrual Cup'. But then, as the girl has no idea about it so her roommate

explains to her its usage by saying- 'You can use it during your periods, instead of pads and tampons, So, you hold it, fold it in half and make a U and then insert it. It opens automatically and fits into your vagina. It collects all the blood. At the end of the day, all you have to do is, just take it off, throw the blood and clean it. That's it, No Pain, No Leak and it's absolutely comfortable. The girl hurriedly snatches it from her and asks if she can keep it. (PEE SAFE, 2019)



Fig.6: The girl expressing her joy after knowing the benefits of menstrual cup.

V. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This section offers a deeper understanding of the interpretation of menstruation ads, emphasizing the major

themes that have emerged through a thorough thematic analysis and are elaborated in a detailed manner.

Social Restraint and Bondage: Restraint and bondage are the inability of a woman to participate in various activities

during the days when she menstruates. In Indian culture, menstruation is often stigmatized as filthy and unclean, influenced by various religious and cultural beliefs. These restrictions restrict women from performing daily activities such as cooking food, attending rituals and customs during auspicious occasions or marriages, touching the pickle, and entering the holy place or any social spaces (Kågesten et al., 2016; Kaundal & Thakur, 2014; Kumari, 2017). The ad referred to at the beginning of this article depicts how avoidance of touching pickles during menstruation is taboo in Indian society. In another commercial of Whisper Extra Dry, it was portrayed that a girl, despite being pulled by her peers to be part of a dance at a social function, refuses to participate and keeps sitting in a secluded place. A voiceover narration continues by saying, “Personally speaking, I did not feel like attending any social functions”.

Similarly, some other illustrations such as not being able to attend school or college, running after kids and being able to play with them, being unable to multitask efficiently (Yagnik, 2012), not being able to perform in dance functions, being unable to wear white or light coloured clothes or perform any kind of gymnastics, and so on, are the elements shown in these commercials which underscores that the natural process of menstruation creates a lot of bondage while performing the normal activities of mundane life. Although, the depiction of menstrual restraints has evolved throughout time, yet the fundamental notion of demonstrating menstruation as problematic and challenging for women has never changed.

Silent Reference while Guarding Menstrual Secret:

During the initial two time zones (from 2006-2010 & 2011-2015) the absence of direct reference or no reference to menstruation was the trademark of all sanitary pad commercials, however, gradually the word ‘period’ began to replace the indirect reference. For instance, in the former ad during the first time zone, not a single reference to menstruation is found and the commercial seems to be a reflection of product promotion only. Similarly, in the later ad of the same time zone, the phrase ‘those five days’ is used without specifying which five days are being referred to, and it was not explicitly mentioned in the product demonstration. In the following time zones, other phrases such as ‘Un dino mein’ (during those days), ‘upari gelapan’ (the upper discomfort), and many other indirect euphemisms have been employed. Even in many other narratives from these ads, there is mutual consensus or agreement of maintaining the silent reference between the producer and the audience where they understand the subject matter of what is being talked about without referring to the word ‘period’ or ‘menstruation’. By employing these euphemistic words, the commercials deliver the message of keeping the secret under the carpets

and contribute to the belief that it is a private matter that is required to be hidden.

However, there is a subtle change in the approach of referring to this natural occurrence in these advertisements became evident during the third time zone (from 2016 to till now), where it was noted that the producers started incorporating direct references by using words like ‘period’, ‘stain’, ‘pad’, and ‘napkin’. Despite this shift, these ads never explained and provided genuine information about the biological process ultimately continuing to focus only on product promotion. This changing notion portrays how these ads play upon the notion of awkwardness and silence around menstruation and perpetuate the idea that menstruation should be discreet, private and in some cases, even stigmatized. In addition to this, most of the brand names such as Don’t Worry, Stayfree, Whisper, and Carefree, all convey the same idea through their narratives that if anyone else learns about it, it will be embarrassing- so it is required to be guarded.

Brand Influence on Feminine Freshness: The need to maintain the secret of ‘being on period’ encourages the idea of upholding the ideals of ‘perfect bodies’ in accordance with prevalent societal standards. The notion of looking perfect and being a beautiful woman is encouraged by these ads, with the absence of smell or stain. The voiceover in these ads and the product itself promises to prevent menstrual staining and bad odour, which technically calls for the notion that menstruation is dirty and filthy and acceptable. Naomi Wolf in her book, ‘The Beauty Myth’, says it perfectly,

“Unfortunately, the beauty backlash is spread and reinforced by the cycles of self-hatred provoked in women by the advertisements, photo features, and beauty copy in the glossies. These make up the beauty index, which women scan as anxiously as men scan stock reports. It promises to tell women what men truly want, what faces, and bodies provoke men’s fickle attentions—a seductive promise in an environment in which men and women rarely get to talk together honestly in a public setting about what each really desires.” (Wolf, 2002)

For instance, at the end of the Kotex ad, a woman is shown wearing a pink gown, impressing the men around her, and celebrating being a girl only after using the sanitary pad of a particular brand. Therefore, despite accepting and normalizing the unavoidable natural process that occurs in women’s bodies, these commercials enhance the pressure on them to maintain an appearance of beauty and flawlessness at all times. This leads to highlighting the wider social message to emphasize an idealistic look over

women's biological well-being and acceptance of normal bodily events.

Instant Metamorphosis: Unveiling a New YOU and Redefining Professional Success: Menstrual commercials adhere to a common narrative structure which typically commences with a scene where a woman is visibly distressed and struggling because of menstruation. The narrative is followed by the product demonstration with its benefits plus providing the panacea for the hardships and discomforts provided by menstruation. Most significantly, the climax of the commercial often depicts a remarkable transformation. With the mere use of the product from a particular brand, the same woman initially shown as depressed was now portrayed as more confident, happy, and remarkably successful.

Notably, this expression has been a subject matter of almost all ads during each time zone, where it is emphasized that menstruation construct woman as inefficient, and incapable, and make them unable to concentrate on their work, and the solution rests solely in the pad of a particular brand. The voiceover at the end of these commercials delivers the final message, such as, *'Today's fun style, new Kotex Style, now with a dry cover', 'Ever wished you were a guy on those five days, now Kotex Style with zig-zag lines helps prevents bunching and keeps you absolutely dry, so celebrate being a girl'* (from narratives of ads mentioned in this articles). There are other ads with such a concluding gist creating the belief that only the demonstrated brand will absorb more blood, will sustain for a longer time, have stain-free period, better protection, and most significantly, women could overcome the difficulties caused by menstruation, regain their focus, and ultimately achieve their goal.

Exclusively Females: Menstrual Ads Redefining Private Spaces (No Men Allowed):

The spaces employed during these menstrual advertisements in the initial two time zones were always meticulously demonstrated. The talks between the females about the issues of bad odour, stained clothes, and unclean bodies always happened to be in private spaces, moreover in hushed terms. These supposed private spaces include aloof corners, bedrooms, places away from the presence of men, and any secluded space in which women can at least converse about their periods. These spaces and shushed conversations indicated the projection of menstruation as a 'private affair' of women only, the affair about which women can't reveal in a normal setting. As Houppert, in his book *'The Curse: Confronting the Last Unmentionable Taboo: Menstruation'*, mentioned: "Nice girls may talk about bleeding in the privacy of their...bedrooms, but nice girls never talk about it elsewhere" (Houppert, 1999). It has also been emphasized by the menstrual advertisements that

the product should be kept out of the gaze of other than menstruating women, i.e., men and children. These perspectives of hiding sanitary pads as well as the occurrence of menstruation substantiate keeping the sanitary napkin a 'private affair'. Therefore, the male image, in the menstrual product ads is fabricated and constructed in such a way that he doesn't have to do anything with the whole idea of menstruation. He is frequently represented out of the picture and only pictured in a situation where he has to exercise his authority and power.

Though, commendable changes can be noticed during the last time zone (from 2016- till now), where men are represented as supportive, empathetic, and aware of menstruation. There are instances where men are shown in clear and active participation in the conversation about the event and normalize the discussion around it. For example, in one of the commercials of the last time zone, the male actors, narrating the lines on behalf of young girls, can be seen as supportive role models. This reflects a powerful message of men being empathetic and understanding in terms of normalizing period pain and challenges.

However, a different perspective on this inclusion, with certain potential drawbacks and challenges, can be noticed. Sometimes, men in these ads are shown as saviours and heroes for mentioning or acknowledging this natural event but this might perpetuate the idea that women need men or their approval to validate their bodily experiences.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In India, demand for feminine hygiene product is anticipated to be increased in near future due to expanding awareness related to personal hygiene. As per the Mordor Intelligence Report, in 2023, the approximate size of all the sanitary pads, tampons, panty liners and related products is USD 0.78 billion which means worth \$0.78 billion and it is predicted to be reached the size of USD 1.56 billion (*Feminine Hygiene Market in India - Menstrual Hygiene Statistics*, n.d.). The numerous actions initiated by Indian government to improve menstrual awareness among women is major reason behind the increasing market of this industry and also the expanding promotions in social media contributes a lot. However, the recent innovation of introducing commodities, such as menstrual cups and, tampons in the Indian culture is increasing by time but is still an untapped potential and considered explicitly irrelevant because the market is under the control of sanitary napkins. The shift from cloth to the sanitary pad itself was a glacial march and now we have the struggle with this innovation as well. National Family Health Survey reports that the use sanitary napkins have increased from 42 to 64

percent (*MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES*, n.d.). The expansion in use of female hygiene product is indeed closely related to media promotion of these products which means manufacturers emphasising on the portraying the prevailing stereotypes, influencing the consumer behaviour, and attaching women's value to her appearance.

The aim of this research paper is not to look down upon any menstrual product or any specific company but to bring out the loopholes in the process of representing the natural and biological phases of women's lives in these and many such advertisements. Women are always being victimized by the representation of them in various sources in any culture and ignorantly, unquestionably accepting their subjection. These menstrual ads aggravate her exploitation in different ways, be it by hiding her natural occurrence of menstruation, be it accepting the authority of men, or be it the gender roles that she thinks are her obligations to perform. The silence and embarrassment around menstruation still contribute to pervasive stigma around it and this notion is majorly promoted by advertisements, supporting women's victimization. Discourses have the power to create meaning, produce knowledge, and regulate people's conduct. Hence, we need to change this scenario by bringing change into our demonstrating culture which influences the majority of perceptions in society.

The sanitary napkin advertisements seem very emotional, and sentimental and give a very fairy or magical message, which seems to have the capacity to change people's opinions with a blow. But the reality is far different from these pseudo representations. Using the words 'freedom', 'choice', and 'it's time to change the world' seems to promote liberty and emancipation, however, these words are the major reasons for reinforcing the shackles and so many layers of control over women, ultimately emphasizing her victimization.

REFERENCES

- [1] Asylum Films Official (Director). (2012, October 27). *Whisper Ultra non woven*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eo1-DCbZbGs>
- [2] Behera, D., Sivakami, M., & Behera, M. R. (2015). Menarche and Menstruation in Rural Adolescent Girls in Maharashtra, India: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of Health Management*, 17(4), 510–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972063415612581>
- [3] Benetone Films (Director). (2006, November 27). *Kotex Ad—India*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIU3gQvWRyA>
- [4] Bobel, C., Winkler, I. T., Fahs, B., Hasson, K. A., Kissling, E. A., & Roberts, T.-A. (2020). *The Palgrave handbook of critical menstruation studies*.
- [5] Crook, J. (2004). On covert communication in advertising. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36(4), 715–738. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(03\)00039-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(03)00039-0)
- [6] Del Saz-Rubio, M. M., & Pennock-Speck, B. (2009). Constructing female identities through feminine hygiene TV commercials. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(12), 2535–2556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.04.005>
- [7] Dr Shamima Yasmin, D. S. Y. (2013). Menstrual hygiene among adolescent school students: An indepth cross-sectional study in an urban community of WestBengal, India. *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences*, 5(6), 22–26. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0853-0562226>
- [8] *Feminine Hygiene Market in India—Menstrual Hygiene Statistics*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2023, from <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/india-feminine-hygiene-market>
- [9] Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed). Continuum.
- [10] Kågesten, A., Gibbs, S., Blum, R. W., Moreau, C., Chandra-Mouli, V., Herbert, A., & Amin, A. (2016). Understanding factors that shape gender attitudes in early adolescence globally: A mixed-methods systematic review. *PloS One*, 11(6), e0157805.
- [11] Kaundal, M., & Thakur, B. (2014). *A Dialogue on Menstrual Taboo*. 26(02).
- [12] Kumari, S. (2017). Social, cultural and religious practices during menstruation. *Jharkhand Journal of Development and Management Studies Xiss, Ranchi*, 15(3), 7451–7459.
- [13] Mathur, K. (2008). *Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women's Empowerment in India*.
- [14] *Max Weber on the methodology of the social sciences*; (n.d.).
- [15] *MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 17, 2023, from <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1945842>
- [16] *Menstruation as Pollution: Taboos in Simlitala, Assam*. (2023).
- [17] Modelandiaa (Director). (2008, February 5). *Kotex Tvc india*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5Rdv3Z4tDE>
- [18] Mudey, A. B., Kesharwani, N., Mudey, G. A., & Goyal, R. C. (2010). A Cross-sectional Study on Awareness Regarding Safe and Hygienic Practices amongst School Going Adolescent Girls in Rural Area of Wardha District, India. *Global Journal of Health Science*, 2(2), p225. <https://doi.org/10.5539/gjhs.v2n2p225>
- [19] NHM Haryana (Director). (2014, March 25). *FreeDays (Menstrual Hygiene TVC) Rani Rampal*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2caxEi9vnmI>
- [20] PEE SAFE (Director). (2019, August 20). *#OneCupOneGirl—Pee Safe's Reusable Menstrual Cups*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sF8kWK4hoI>
- [21] Stayfree India (Director). (2020, May 28). *It's Just a Period*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1loAM4QG134>
- [22] Storey, J. (2015). *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction* (Seventh edition). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- [23] Van Eijk, A. M., Sivakami, M., Thakkar, M. B., Bauman, A., Laserson, K. F., Coates, S., & Phillips-Howard, P. A. (2016). Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Open*,

- 6(3), e010290. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010290>
- [24] Weiner, R. (2004). A candid look at menstrual products-advertising and public relations. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 49(2), 26.
- [25] Wolf, N. (2002). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Perennial.
- [26] *World Bank Open Data*. (n.d.). World Bank Open Data. Retrieved September 14, 2023, from <https://data.worldbank.org>
- [27] Yagnik, A. S. (2012). Construction of Negative Images of Menstruation in Indian TV Commercials. *Health Care for Women International*, 33(8), 756–771. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2012.684814>