



Imagining the Invisible: Menstrual Representations in Indian Television Advertising

Geetha A J, Sanrita J Madtha

Abstract: *This study examines the visual and thematic representation of menstruation in Indian sanitary napkin advertisements on television, broadcast between 2006 and 2024. With menstruation often treated as a cultural taboo in India, media representations—especially advertisements—play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and social attitudes. The research aims to explore how menstrual issues, myths, and realities are represented through symbolic imagery and narrative strategies in these ads. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study analysed 35 advertisements from Kannada and Hindi television channels. Quantitative analysis identifies recurring themes, emotional tones, and visual motifs, while qualitative content analysis and semiotic tools decode the underlying cultural and ideological messages. The research is anchored in feminist media theory and semiotics, drawing particularly on the works of Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, and Roland Barthes to critique gendered messaging and myth-making. The findings reveal a dominant narrative pattern wherein menstruation is initially problematized—associated with shame, discomfort, or restriction—and then resolved through the sanitary product, which is portrayed as a liberating, empowering solution. While earlier ads relied heavily on euphemisms and sanitized imagery, recent advertisements show incremental shifts toward realism, including the use of red liquid and the depiction of stains. However, these gestures toward destigmatisation often coexist with commercial imperatives that commodify empowerment and reinforce normative femininity. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and truthful representations that transcend symbolic performances to foster menstrual literacy, challenge taboos, and promote bodily autonomy.*

Keywords: *Menstruation, Sanitary Napkin Advertisements, Feminist Media Theory, Semiotics, Indian Television Ads*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sanitary napkin advertisements occupy a unique space in Indian media, where they mediate between commerce, cultural taboos, and emerging narratives of empowerment. These advertisements often reflect and reinforce dominant cultural norms about femininity, bodily functions, and social propriety. As argued by [1], one of the most deeply embedded yet subtly conveyed perceptions in this media space concerns menstruation. This biological reality continues to be shrouded in silence and stigma.

In Indian society, menstruation is frequently treated as a private, even shameful subject, often reduced to euphemisms, or avoided entirely in public discourse [2]. Given this context, televised advertisements for sanitary products have become one of the few widely accessible sources of information about menstruation for many viewers, especially adolescents. These media texts, therefore, play a pivotal role in either reinforcing societal taboos or fostering a culture of openness and acceptance. The visual and verbal language used in these ads—ranging from the substitution of menstrual blood with blue liquid to metaphorical representations of "freshness" and "freedom"—carries semiotic significance that warrants critical scrutiny.

Sanitary napkin advertisements have long mirrored the socio-cultural taboos surrounding menstruation in India. Historically, these ads have adopted coded and sanitised imagery, often avoiding direct reference to menstruation and instead promoting euphemistic narratives of discomfort, freshness, or invisibility. [3] argue that such representations construct an idealised, frequently misleading view of menstruation, where the use of a sanitary napkin is portrayed as a complete solution to all menstrual discomforts, ignoring physiological realities such as cramps or emotional fluctuations.

During the 1990s, menstruation was represented in advertisements with a sense of reticence and discomfort. Direct reference to menstrual blood was absent, and the imagery used reinforced the notion that menstruation is an unclean, secretive, or embarrassing phenomenon. This visual and rhetorical sanitisation perpetuated the cultural silence around menstruation and contributed to the internalization of shame among young viewers.

The 21st century has witnessed a noticeable shift in the tone and content of menstrual advertisements in India. Driven by feminist advocacy, global branding strategies, and increasing public discourse around menstrual hygiene, advertisements have begun to depict menstruation more realistically and inclusively. Brands now attempt to position menstruation as a natural, shared human experience, often using bold imagery and slogans to challenge entrenched stigmas [4].

[5] Notes a paradigmatic shift in the semiotic codes used in advertising, with some brands replacing the traditional blue liquid with red, and introducing narratives that emphasize bodily autonomy and empowerment. Yet, scholars like [6] caution that such shifts may sometimes be more symbolic than substantive—superficially progressive yet still operating within commercial imperatives that subtly reaffirm traditional gender norms.

In the Indian context, sanitary napkin advertisements reveal a negotiation between global progressive trends and local cultural values. They serve as complex texts through which

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femininity, bodily discipline, and gendered expectations are articulated and contested.

This study aims to investigate the imagery of menstruation in Indian television advertisements for sanitary napkins, examining how these portrayals contribute to the cultural construction of menstruation and female embodiment. It aims to unpack the representational strategies used and their implications for social attitudes, gender norms, and menstrual discourse.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Menstrual Stereotypes and Social Constructs

Many early studies focused on how menstruation was constructed as a source of shame or secrecy [7] emphasized the socially constructed nature of menstruation in advertising, arguing that media perpetuated the need to hide menstruation. Most studies in this field have identified key themes in advertisements, such as embarrassment, concealment, and hygiene-based messaging, particularly targeting adolescent girls.

B. Reinforcement of Myths and Taboos

A dominant strand of scholarship, especially in the Indian context, highlights the reinforcement of negative stereotypes and menstrual taboos [8] identified recurring tropes such as professional inefficiency, physical discomfort, and restrictions placed on menstruating women. Samaddar's use of Critical Discourse Analysis found that menstruation is persistently portrayed as unclean or needing concealment.

C. Gendered Messaging and Visual Tropes

Several studies have examined how gender roles and body politics are communicated through visuals [9]. Using Crook's dimensions (product-claim and reward), these studies have shown how ads simultaneously promise empowerment while reinforcing feminine ideals of cleanliness, discretion, and control [10] showed how even progressive messages often retained sanitized visuals, such as using blue liquid instead of red to depict menstrual blood.

D. Evolving Narratives and Shifting Frames

There is growing academic recognition of evolving trends in menstrual advertisement narratives [11] noted a transition in Western advertisements toward greater openness, though still embedded within frameworks of hygiene and freedom. Claire [12] observed that while contemporary ads claim to empower women, many still contain implicit cues of shame and silence [13] found a mixed representation in Indian TVCs, where narrative shifts were noticeable, but embedded myths continued to be communicated subtly.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Despite the expanding global scholarship on menstruation and the representation of women in sanitary napkin advertisements, a methodological uniformity persists across many studies, most of which rely heavily on content analysis. Earlier research has predominantly employed qualitative content analysis, with some more recent studies also incorporating quantitative metrics. However, a critical gap emerges in the limited exploration of this subject within the

Indian context. While international literature offers comprehensive analyses of menstrual representation, Indian scholarship remains sparse, with only a few significant studies available.

These existing Indian studies tend to focus narrowly on the portrayal of menstrual myths or the use of euphemistic language in advertisements. There is insufficient attention to the broader spectrum of representations, including how advertisements negotiate between myth and reality, or how they visually and narratively frame menstruation in culturally specific ways. This research seeks to address these underexplored dimensions by offering a more holistic and intersectional understanding of menstruation as represented in Indian televised sanitary napkin advertisements.

IV. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The research draws on semiotic theory and feminist media studies to critically examine the imageries of menstruation in advertisements.

A. Semiotics

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols [14], offers a robust analytical lens for deconstructing how meaning is constructed through images, language, colour, and metaphor in advertisements. Sanitary napkin ads often employ a set of visual codes—such as blue liquid, pristine white clothing, and metaphors of flight or athleticism—to sanitise, aestheticise, or neutralise the menstrual body. These signs construct menstruation as a controlled and private experience, aligning with culturally sanctioned ideals of femininity.

By applying a semiotic analysis, this study seeks to uncover the underlying ideological assumptions encoded in these visual signs and explore how menstruation is symbolically negotiated in the media.

B. Feminist Media Theory

The research is also grounded in feminist media theory, particularly the work of [15] on the “male gaze” and [16] the concept of gender performativity. Although menstrual advertisements are primarily targeted at women, they still operate within patriarchal frameworks that demand women to appear clean, controlled, and emotionally resilient.

Butler's theory of performativity further illuminates how gender is constructed through repeated acts and representations. Sanitary napkin advertisements often instruct women on how to behave during menstruation—what to wear, how to move, how to hide discomfort—thereby reinforcing normative performances of femininity.

V. OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To identify the menstrual issues depicted in Indian television advertisements.
- To analyze the dominant themes presented in sanitary napkin advertisements.
- To examine the visual imagery associated with menstruation in these advertisements.
- To critically assess the interplay between menstrual myths and realities as conveyed



through themes, narratives, and visual representations in sanitary napkin advertisements

VI. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a comprehensive examination of the representation of menstruation in Indian television advertisements.

A. Data Collection and Sampling

For the study, Indian TV advertisements from 2006 to 2024 are considered in chronological order. This study examines 35 sanitary napkin advertisements that aired on Kannada and Hindi TV channels, categorised by their year of release. The purpose of selecting the TV ads spanning from 2006 to 2024 is that, after 1993, due to globalisation, many brands associated with sanitary napkins began to emerge. After 2006, many sanitary napkin advertisements began appearing, and several popular brands emerged, becoming available online from that year onwards. That is why sanitary napkin advertisements from 2006 to 2024 are being analysed for the study.

B. Analytical Procedures

In the first phase, quantitative coding was employed to categorise recurring elements, such as the frequency of specific themes or visual motifs, thereby complementing and substantiating the qualitative insights.

In the second phase, qualitative content analysis was employed to interpret visual imageries, symbolic representations, and thematic patterns in the ads. Semiotic tools were used to decode signs, colours, metaphors, and visual arrangements associated with menstruation.

The study's dual approach ensures a robust understanding of both the explicit messages and implicit cultural codes embedded in menstrual advertising.

C. Content Categories for the Depiction of Menstruation

Based on prior research and preliminary thematic observations, the content was analyzed across the following categories:

Menstrual Issues

Problem: Menstruation is often portrayed as a challenge (e.g., stains, discomfort, isolation).

Solution: The product's promise (e.g., protection, confidence, discretion).

Result: The outcomes portrayed (e.g., freedom, empowerment, normalcy).

D. Thematic Representations

Positive themes: Empowerment, confidence, athleticism, freedom, hygiene.

Negative themes: Shame, secrecy, restriction, fear of stain, isolation.

E. Visual Imageries

Picturisation of the product: Focus on pad design, wings, absorption, and packaging.

Stain portrayal: Use of colour to represent blood (e.g., blue, red, symbolic metaphors).

This categorization facilitated a systematic decoding of the advertisements' visual language, thematic patterns, and narrative strategies.

Colour symbolism: Predominant use of white, blue, pink, or red to imply purity, hygiene, or menstruation without direct depiction.

VII. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A. Depiction of Menstrual Issues

i. Depiction of the Problem

The findings regarding the depiction of problems in sanitary napkin TV advertisements state several key insights. Out of 35 ads considered, 20, i.e., 57%, depicted the problem associated with menstrual hygiene. In every ad, these problems are often showcased at the beginning of the advertisement. This strategic planning, as devised by the advertisers, strongly suggests a connection between the depicted issues and the solutions offered by the advertised products. By portraying the problem in the initial stage, the ad suggests that using these advertised products could solve the issues depicted in the sanitary napkin ads. Each advertisement diversely depicted problems by addressing various challenges faced by women.

Table-I: Depiction of the Problem

Sl. No	Depiction of the Problem	Number of Advertisements that Included the Particular Problems
1.	Father's confusion in buying gifts	1
2.	Approaching my daughter to speak openly	1
3.	Girls wonder how a girl can be so confident and comfortable during periods.	1
4.	Insecurity and Shame due to leakage	6
5.	Hesitation to participate in any competitions	3
6.	Lack of confidence	3
7.	Myth associated with menstruation (Touching Pickle, etc.)	1
8.	Address the Challenges faced during menstruation	2
9.	Embarrassment	1
10.	Stress and Tiredness	1
11.	Lack of concentration	1
12.	Ads with no mention of problems	13

The problems that were commonly depicted are –

- **Confusion:** One ad (*Raho Safe*) depicted familial discomfort, where a father struggled to choose a gift and the daughter hesitated to discuss menstruation, reflecting broader social taboos and communication barriers.
- **Discomfort and Insecurity:** Nine ads highlighted physical discomfort and insecurity due to heavy flow and leakage, often affecting girls' participation in physical activities, indicating the persistent stigma surrounding menstrual management in public settings.



- *Psychological Challenges:* Six ads portrayed menstruation as emotionally distressing, associating it with shame, embarrassment, and social anxiety, reinforcing its status as a source of psychological burden.
- *Other Limitations:* Ads like *Stayfree Secure Dry*, *Lady Fly*, and *Stayfree Secure Extra Large* emphasized practical restrictions, such as avoiding public interaction, postponing activities, and workplace discomfort, underscoring the everyday limitations menstruating women face.

Meanwhile, 15 ads, i.e., 43% of the ads, did not depict any specific problems. Instead, they focused solely on promoting the product, without mentioning the challenges women face during menstruation. By this, it is understood that most ads choose to depict the problems associated with menstruation as a significant highlight, while also promoting the product. By doing so, these ads aimed to present the advertised product as a solution to all the problems.

ii. Depiction of Solution

The solutions presented in the sanitary napkin TV advertisements reveal that all ads concluded with the introduction of sanitary napkins as the solution to the problems depicted in the beginning. The compelling portrayal of the sanitary pad serves as a powerful tool in addressing the challenges faced by women. Throughout the ads, the sanitary pads were depicted as a lifesaver for girls and women. By showcasing the sanitary pad as the ultimate solution, it conveyed the message of comfort, safety, and empowerment.

Table-II: The total Number of Advertisements that include the Particular Solution

Solution	Number of Advertisements that Include the Particular Solution
Product	All 35 ads

Each advertisement is associated with a specific solution, indicating the product as the solution to the problems depicted.

The following are how advertisers position their products as practical solutions to address the needs and concerns of their target audience.

The solutions can be depicted as follows-

- *Universal Solution:* All advertisements portrayed sanitary pads as the singular and comprehensive solution to menstrual hygiene challenges, implicitly suggesting that no alternative methods are viable or necessary.
- *Life Saver:* By positioning sanitary napkins as essential to managing menstruation, the ads emphasized their role in safeguarding women's health and well-being, thereby reinforcing the importance of addressing menstrual hygiene.
- *Normalization of Usage:* The consistent portrayal of sanitary pads as both natural and essential contributed to the normalisation of their usage. This framing aimed to reduce stigma and encourage open acceptance of menstrual products as an integral part of menstruation management.

Hence, the consistent portrayal of sanitary pads as the solution reflects the strategic marketing plan of every advertiser to promote their products effectively.

addressing its essentiality in breaking the challenges associated with menstruation

iii. Depiction of Results / Outcomes

The analysis of the results or the outcomes associated with using the sanitary napkins reveals a significant focus on the positive outcomes. Every ad depicted various positive outcomes, showcasing the impact of using sanitary pads by women during menstruation.

Table-III: Total Number of Advertisements That Include the Particular Results/Outcomes

Results/Outcomes	Number of advertisements that include the particular results/outcomes
Confidence and Comfort	17
Breaking the silence surrounding menstruation	2
Secure and free	4
Manages heavy flow and feels stress-free	5
Improved performance	1
Empathy and willingness to help	1
No missing out on school	1
Journey towards winning	1
Sport success	1

The above table represents the number of ads featuring each outcome depicted in the advertisements. Here, the ads that portray similar outcomes are grouped for further analysis. This structured format provides a comprehensive overview of the effects or impact of using sanitary napkins, as depicted in the advertisements.

The positive outcomes can be categorised as follows;

- *Confidence and Comfort:* Seventeen out of 35 advertisements emphasised how the use of sanitary napkins enhanced women's confidence and comfort during menstruation, enabling them to carry out daily activities with greater ease and reduced anxiety.
- *Normalizing the Discussion:* Two advertisements depicted sanitary napkins as catalysts for initiating open conversations about menstruation within families, thereby contributing to the breakdown of menstrual taboos.
- *Sense of Freedom:* Four ads portrayed sanitary napkins as empowering tools that offered women and girls a sense of freedom, allowing them to engage in educational and social pursuits without fear or restriction.
- *Improved Performance:* One advertisement (*Whisper Choice Ultra*) associated the use of sanitary napkins with improved performance in academics, sports, and cultural activities, framing menstrual management as a key factor in achieving success.
- *Safety and Hygiene:* Ten advertisements emphasised that the use of sanitary napkins ensured safety and hygiene



throughout the menstrual cycle, enabling women and girls to participate in physical activities with reduced concern about leakage and discomfort.

- *Feeling of Empathy:* The *Flossee* advertisement illustrated how menstrual product use fostered empathy and support within the family, particularly from husbands, who were shown sharing household responsibilities during menstruation.

However, all the sanitary napkin ads promoted positive outcomes of using sanitary pads, resulting in the physical, social, and emotional well-being of girls and women. By this, it clearly emphasises that the use of hygienic napkins not only addresses the challenges but also empowers women to fulfill their dreams.

B. Themes Explored in Sanitary Napkin TV Advertisements Positive Themes

The positive themes depicted in the sanitary napkin ads consistently focus on the concepts of empowerment, confidence, and a never-give-up attitude. These themes were instrumental in shaping the narrative around menstruation.

Table-IV: Total Number of Advertisements That Include a Positive Theme

Theme	Number of Advertisements that include the Particular Theme
Empowerment	5
Confidence	27
Never Give Up Attitude	5

The table above categorises ads that portray a positive theme of empowerment.

- *Confidence:* The most prevalent theme, appearing in 26 advertisements, was the promotion of confidence. These ads emphasized how using sanitary pads empowered women and girls to face various situations, such as sports, dance, and exams, with self-assurance and resilience during menstruation.
- *Never Give Up Attitude:* Five advertisements highlighted a “never give up” mindset, portraying sanitary pads as a solution to challenges like leakage, discomfort, and social stigma. This theme encouraged girls and women to confront menstrual limitations with courage and determination.

C. Negative Themes

The negative themes depicted in the sanitary napkin ads highlight a focus on insecurity, shame, and a lack of confidence. The negative themes are generally and strategically portrayed at the beginning of the ad to state the message that using sanitary pads is itself the solution to these challenges.

Table-V: Total Number of Advertisements that Include a Negative Theme

Theme	Number of Advertisements that Include the Particular Theme
Insecurity	9
Shame/ Embarrassment	2
Under Confidence	5

- *Insecurity:* Nine advertisements highlighted feelings of insecurity related to menstruation,

depicting how leakage and discomfort led girls and women to avoid academic and social activities.

- *Shame/Embarrassment:* Two ads addressed the shame and embarrassment stemming from societal stigma and personal discomfort, illustrating how these feelings discourage open discussion about menstrual hygiene. These ads aimed to challenge and reduce menstrual taboos.
- *Lack of Confidence:* Five advertisements portrayed scenarios where girls and women hesitated to participate in activities due to low confidence, underscoring the need for solutions that enhance self-esteem and empower menstruating individuals.

Table-VI: Visual Representation of Sanitary Napkins in Sanitary Napkin TV Advertisements

Picturisation of the Product	Number of Advertisements that Include the Particular Element
Actual product	27
Actual Stain	1
Actual colour (Red Gel)	5

- *Picturisation of the Product:* Twenty-seven advertisements visually showcased sanitary pads from various angles and settings, emphasizing design and key features. This picturisation served to normalise the product, familiarize consumers, and differentiate the advertised brand from competitors.
- *Stain:* Only one advertisement (*Raho Safe*) explicitly depicted menstrual stains on clothing, drawing attention to the real issue of leakage. This imagery aimed to create a sense of urgency around adequate menstrual protection.
- *Colour:* The portrayal of menstrual flow varied across ads. Five depicted it in red, symbolising actual blood, while seventeen used blue gel to emphasize cleanliness and freshness. Additionally, a few ads utilised colours such as pink, green, and purple to differentiate their products and appeal to consumer preferences.

D. Depiction of Myths & Realities

The analysis reveals that most sanitary napkin ads accurately portray menstrual realities, such as a father’s confusion in buying gifts for daughters at menarche, the avoidance of light- colored clothing, and the fear of leakage, causing hesitation to participate in activities. However, while sanitary napkins are presented as the universal solution, this is not entirely accurate. Though they effectively prevent leakage and staining, they do not address other menstrual challenges like cramps or mood swings.

A common myth promoted is that using sanitary pads inherently boosts confidence and guarantees success in competitions, overlooking the many factors, such as effort and determination, that contribute to achievement. Conversely, the comfort and security reported by many girls who switch from traditional methods to sanitary pads reflect genuine benefits.

Some portrayals, however, verge on unrealistic



exaggeration. For example, ads suggesting that sanitary pads enable girls to engage in physically demanding activities like jumping or climbing overlook the physical discomfort many experience during menstruation. Such depictions blur the line between realistic outcomes and idealized assurances.

Distinguishing this is crucial for an accurate understanding of menstrual experiences as represented in advertising.

E. Depiction of Myths and Realities Associated with Positive and Negative Themes

Sanitary napkin advertisements often depict positive themes such as empowerment, confidence, and a “never-give-up” attitude. While these messages can motivate and inspire many women, they may not reflect everyone’s experience. Similarly, ads also portray negative emotions like insecurity, lack of confidence, and embarrassment, which are real for some girls but not universal or solely caused by menstruation or product use. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge the diverse and individualised nature of menstrual experiences, which often goes beyond advertising narratives. Myths & Realities associated with_Visual Representation of Sanitary Napkins

Most sanitary napkin ads emphasize the product’s appearance but avoid depicting menstrual stains, likely due to cultural discomfort; approximately 45% of ads omit this realistic element. One notable exception broke this silence by explicitly showing stains, challenging taboos, and portraying the realities of menstruation. Meanwhile, about 50% of ads use coloured gels—typically blue or pink—to represent menstrual flow instead of red, although some have begun to depict a red gel to more accurately reflect menstruation. This shift toward more truthful visual representation signals progress in breaking menstrual stigma and fostering honesty in advertising.

VIII. FINDINGS

The analysis of Indian sanitary napkin TV advertisements from 2005 to 2024 reveals an evolving semiotic and ideological shift in the portrayal of menstruation. Earlier advertisements often embedded menstruation within broader family-oriented narratives, positioning it as a rite of passage or a concealed issue within domestic settings. In contrast, more recent ads adopt a direct, product-centric approach, emphasising technological innovation, comfort, and leak protection. This shift reflects not only marketing trends but also a transformation in how menstruation is discursively constructed—as a private issue to be managed efficiently.

Drawing on Laura Mulvey’s theory of the ‘male gaze’, early ads align with patriarchal visual regimes that desexualise and depersonalize menstruating bodies by avoiding direct references to blood or menstrual discomfort. Instead, menstruation is depicted as a manageable inconvenience, reinforcing gendered expectations of self-discipline and bodily control. The body becomes invisible, or is depicted only in sanitised, aestheticised forms.

A consistent narrative structure emerges across the corpus: negative emotions (e.g., shame, insecurity, isolation) are initially portrayed, followed by the product’s intervention, which leads to positive outcomes (confidence, empowerment, freedom). This binary aligns with Barthes’ notion of myth: the product functions as a *mythical solution*, transforming a

biologically normal process into a socially accepted, controlled experience. The visual imagery supports this transformation. The persistent use of blue, pink, or green gels in place of red blood acts as a cultural signifier that upholds the myth of menstrual purity and discretion.

However, a few recent advertisements disrupt this norm. Notably, the *Raho Safe* campaign breaks visual taboos by depicting realistic red stains, which can be interpreted through Judith Butler’s theory of performativity as a subversive act, challenging the scripted, hegemonic femininity associated with menstrual invisibility. These rare portrayals resist the dominant discourse and offer a counter-narrative, enabling menstruation to be seen and spoken of in public space, thereby unsettling normative gender performances.

The shift from awareness-based messaging to a product-centred narrative also mirrors the neoliberal turn in feminist discourse, where empowerment is increasingly framed as consumer choice rather than structural change. Ads promote the idea that individual well-being and social participation during menstruation are contingent on product use, suggesting that menstruation itself must be managed, hidden, and overcome to conform to modern femininity.

Thus, while some advertisements gesture toward destigmatisation and inclusivity, they often remain trapped within the logic of postfeminist commercialism, where empowerment is commodified, and the menstrual body continues to be both hyper-visible and invisibilised—visible in sanitized aesthetics, yet absent in its raw, bodily truth.

IX. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the tension between myth and reality in the portrayal of menstruation in Indian sanitary napkin advertisements on TV. While contemporary campaigns incorporate themes of empowerment and resilience, they frequently rely on symbolic visual language and performative scripts that reproduce cultural taboos. Mulvey’s gaze theory explains how the menstruating body is aestheticised and sanitised, while Butler’s performativity clarifies how these portrayals reinforce normative gender roles. Simultaneously, Barthes’ semiotics reveal how products are mythologized as solutions to deeply cultural—and not merely biological—phenomena.

Although a few progressive advertisements have begun to challenge these norms by depicting blood, bodily discomfort, and candid conversations, most continue to prioritise market imperatives over educational or cultural transformation. Empowerment is often conditional, granted only through consumption, rather than being represented as an intrinsic right.

To foster genuine menstrual equity, future advertisements must go beyond symbolic gestures. They should embrace diverse representations that include caste, class, and rural-urban divides, and promote menstrual literacy over product fetishization. Integrating feminist Media perspectives and cultural semiotics in both academic analysis and advertising strategy can pave the way for a more inclusive, honest, and liberatory menstrual discourse.



DECLARATION STATEMENT

After aggregating input from all authors, I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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