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Be Proud of Your Menstruation!

A case study of commodity feminist discourse in mainland China

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Abstract

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Adopting a critical discourse analysis approach, this study presents a case study around the “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign launched by the Swedish brand, *Libresse*, in the Chinese market. With the aim to explore how does the brand strategically use female empowering discourse to construct new meanings of menstruation for a regional market, and the socio-cultural factors involved. This study provides a comprehensive interpretation of the brand's promotional materials and the views of the female members in two focus groups. Taking the application of feminism in brand communication as an entry point and continuing the perspective of critical media studies, this study analyses the intersection and interaction between the values conveyed by brands and socio-cultural values in the practice of corporate intercultural communication in a global context. In particular, social justice issues are explored through the case of commodified female empowerment discourse.

Three main conclusions are drawn. Firstly, around the development of Orientalism in the new century, the unequal power relations implied behind the mismatch between the image of Chinese women in advertising and the view within the country are indicated. Secondly, the study confirms the emergence of new trends in the use of feminist ideas in the taboo commodities and suggests that empowerment has become a theme in the promotion of feminine hygiene products. Finally, the critical subjectivity of consumers is emphasized between the analysis of female consumers' criticality and affirmation of the femvertising.

Key words: Menstruation; Femvertising; Regional adaption; Orientalism; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

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1. Introduction

In contemporary society, brands are increasingly being given a function other than commerce, becoming an influential part of popular mass culture (Aronczyk & Powers, 2010; Storey, 2021). Brand culture embraces the popular ideas and opinions that emerge in society while transmitting and creating new discourses to a wide audience. Specifically, with the development of corporate social marketing, brands are increasingly incorporating political language into their communication narratives (Holt, 2004; Storey, 2021; Teng et al., 2020). In this way, companies are attempting to gain a foothold in the process of identity construction and values shaping among consumers, and ultimately establish a positive brand image (Holt, 2004).

After the #MeToo movement, there has been a trend of brands seeking to present an image of embracing “feminism” through their communication campaigns (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Different from the advertising of the last century, represented by the “Torches of Freedom” campaign initiated by the American Tobacco Company (Murphree, 2015), “feminist” advertising has moved further than a straightforward imitation of male behaviors. Known more widely as *femvertising*, or female empowerment advertising, the new commercial feminism accepts a greater range of feminist political arguments and focuses more on the reshaping of values in relation to women's social roles and their self-awareness (Åkestam et al., 2017).

Ideological constructs are noted and widely used by strategic communication practitioners in the practice of brands building consumer trust relationships (Holt, 2006a). In this sense, strategic communication assumes the function of meaning-making, with the aim of changing people's perceptions of things. In response, some scholars argue that there is a tendency for brands to move towards cultural hegemony (Artz, 2019; Arvidsson, 2007). The absorption and adaptation of political claims by corporations shifted the interpretation of feminism from individual women and the female community to the hands of brands (Gill, 2007). In this process, the politics of feminism are dissolved, and the resistance of feminism to mainstream values is assimilated into the dominant cultural and economic framework as a price tag called resistance (Gill, 2007).

Concerned with the broader social influences in strategic communication practice, several scholars have advocated the inclusion of sociological and cultural orientated approaches into the discipline (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). They continue the Frankfurt School's focus on the impact of communication on the public sphere, generating insights for introducing the critical perspective into future strategic communication research. In contrast to research on achieving marketing goals, however, there is still an academic gap in how brands rationalize their behavior through meaning construction, how social perceptions influence brand communication activities, and, in turn, how they are dominated by the normalized values presented by brands (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007; Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009). Particularly on the subjects of brand culture and the female body, although the question of how brands shape the idea of femininity is a topic that has been widely discussed in cultural studies, gender studies, and media studies simultaneously (Gill, 2008; Hundley & Jones, 2020). The mechanisms by which brands shape narratives about gender, the aesthetics of popular opinion, attitudes towards the female body, and the definition of femininity remain to be further explored.

Menstruation is a research topic highly relevant to the female body, and both of them are unavoidable elements in the advertising of hygiene products. Consider the long history of feminine hygiene products as a taboo category, as well as the different interpretations - and varying degrees of avoidance - of menstruation in different cultural contexts (Merskin, 1999). The use of feminine empowerment themes by brands targeting international markets has become more sophisticated, therefore, a closer look at an international brand's country-specific construction of feminine empowerment discourse in taboo products would be beneficial in providing a richer insight into the popular use of *femvertising* in brand practice, this case offers the possibility of such an interpretation.

Adopting a critical perspective, this study points out that brands, as commercial entities, engage in new norms of women's bodies and identities in their communication campaigns to exploit feminist perceptions for their own benefit for economic purposes. This study selects the “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign of the Swedish feminine hygiene brand, *Libresse*, in the Chinese market as a case study to explore how its advertising discourse constructs positive meanings for

women's periods. Also, in the context of cross-cultural communication, Chinese urban women as advertising audiences are accordingly studied to explore whether the brand achieves alignment with its key stakeholders through this communication strategy. Therefore, the aim of this research is to explore how does the brand strategically use female empowering discourse to construct new meanings of menstruation for a regional market, and the socio-cultural factors involved.

1.1 Contextual background

The “blood normal” campaign in China

Social media has become the main space for strategic communication campaigns. The timeliness of social media and the interactive nature of the audience allows any controversy to become more immediate, in addition to making brand campaigns have a higher communication intensity. In this context, the social impact of strategic communication is of particular concern, especially when companies use political topics for their campaigns, such as feminism. Contemporary feminist discussions in China have developed late for historical reasons, coupled with policy regulations that make it difficult to conduct offline activities (Yang, 2011). Compared to physical social movements, feminism discussion in China is more active in cyberspace and shows a tight connection to corporate activities (Fincher, 2021).

In 2017, Swedish sanitary napkin brand Libresse launched a brand marketing campaign called "blood normal" through its UK-based sub-brand, Bodyform. The campaign was later rolled out to the entire European market, as well as to Australia (BBC News, 2019; Roderick, 2017). Using social media as a platform, the brand claimed its aim was to promote the idea of fighting the stigma of menstruation and encouraging women to embrace their periods by posting videos on YouTube and creating hashtags on Twitter and Facebook to encourage people to engage in the discussion.

Two years later, Libresse extended the scope of its "Blood Normal" campaign to China. For the mainland market, the brand adopted a regional-adaptive strategy for the promotional material and named the Chinese version of the campaign “月经不隐藏” (Menstruation should not be hidden). Using the Chinese social media platform Weibo as the main campaign space, Libresse ran a series

of commercials for social marketing purposes. It is worth noting that, unlike the same versions of the video ads used by the brand in other countries, the brand has recreated most of the videos for the Chinese market and used those China-specific videos as the main promotional material for the campaign. These special edition Chinese commercials do not appear as mere Mandarin translations of the European versions, nor are they local adaptations of the casting of the commercials. Rather, while retaining the central theme of promoting the de-stigmatization of menstruation and the female empowerment ideology, the language approach and content presentation of the advertisements have been fundamentally revised.

The localization of their brand materials is linked to regional adaptation strategies in international marketing campaigns, where it is common for international companies to tailor their marketing materials to the local socio-cultural environment in their communication strategies, especially for products that are often considered taboo (Fam & Erdogan, 2005; Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). Based on the data performance on social media, the "Menstruation Should Not Be Hidden" campaign can be considered successful. From 2019 to 2022, Libresse has developed its marketing campaign with this theme for four consecutive years. According to the statistics of May 15th, 2022, its most recent commercial, posted a few days before the International Women's Day 2022, received 8,655 reposts, 1,370 comments, and 15,708 likes on Chinese social media, Weibo. However, statistics can present the results of communication campaigns, but it is difficult to explain the reasons. Due to the multiplicity of social elements involved, the "Menstruation is not hidden" campaign can be used as a case in two dimensions. From one perspective, how the discourse of female empowerment is combined with the communication of taboo products. From another perspective, how regional adaptive advertising is understood by the audiences in its target regions.

In short, when recognizing the interaction between brand communication campaigns and social culture, further exploration of the mechanisms of how women's empowerment advertising works becomes inevitable. Empirically, the "Menstruation Should Not Be Hidden" campaign (launched as a China edition of the "Blood Normal" campaign) by Libresse, a leading Swedish manufacturer of feminine hygiene products, was chosen as a case study for this research.

1.2 Scope of research

The academic contribution of this study falls within the field of critically grounded strategic communication research. Adapted a critical media analysis and feminist perspective, this study contributes to the knowledge regards the creation of meaning and the social impact of brand communication campaigns. By analyzing the regional adaptation version of the ‘blood normal’ campaign videos, this study examines how brands can strategically construct communication discourses through insights into the gender culture of specific countries. Or in other words, this study uses China, a market in social transition where traditional and modern ideas are intertwined, as a backdrop for a moral critique of brands' self-interest-based construction of the meaning of female biological phenomena.

1.3 Research gap and Research problem

In the field of strategic communication, although socially and culturally oriented approaches have evolved over the decades from the end of the twentieth century (Ihlen & van Ruler, 2007). There are still relatively few studies that focus on the social impact involved in brand communication activities with a critical point of view. To fill the research gap. two research questions are raised to gain insight into the process of commercial discourse in the application of feminist concepts from different perspectives.

RQ1.

How does Libresse discursively articulate the meaning of menstruation in the "Menstruation should not be hidden" campaign?

RQ2.

How do Chinese women's perceptions of the advertising-constructed meaning of menstruation interact with social reality?

One manifestation of the need for this research is in the ethical dimension of strategic communication. Women's empowerment advertising is a product of changing social consciousness,

and such branding campaigns centered on the removal of gender stereotypes have in turn influenced public opinion (Åkestam et al., 2017; Teng et al., 2020). However, the extent to which profit-oriented branding campaigns drive attitudinal change in the context of capitalism, and the extent to which they are nothing more than a lagging response to the advancement of social thought, is a direction of research that deserves further investigation. Moreover, in cross-cultural communication of taboo products, adapting the advertising content to specific regions is a common strategy. However, whether there is a discrepancy between a brand's intention to make ad content adjustments and the audience's response is a question that requires investigation.

2. Literature review

In this chapter, the literature review is organized around key themes of this study. It begins with an introduction to the emergence of female empowerment advertising and its intrinsic connection to popular culture. In particular, it points out the limitations of past studies that focused on advertising content and then suggests the need suggests the need to value audience perspectives.

Subsequently, the chapter reviews the development of international feminine hygiene products in cross-cultural communication studies and provides the current situation of China. Finally, the dynamic relationship between regional culture and branding in the construction of feminine empowerment discourse activities and the necessity of a feminist perspective for strategic communication research are summarized to clarify the need for this study as well as its connection to previous literature.

2.1 Femvertising: A market adaptation of the feministic ideology

2.1.1 The prevalence of female empowerment discourse in the media

The theme of female empowerment has been commonly used in the practice of brand communication even before the word *femvertising* was formally coined. As defined by Samantha Skey (2015, as cited in Varghese & Kumar, 2020), femvertising is a style of advertising that emphasizes women's talents, spreads pro-women messages and eliminates gender stereotypes.

Research on female empowerment advertising has long been associated with two themes: popular feminism and post-feminism. Popular feminism refers to the phenomenon of feminism becoming a prevalent trend. According to Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017), becoming popular culture means that various versions of feminism become accessible and even appreciated. There is no need to defend any version of feminism; they appear widely in various media and can be interpreted and disseminated by anyone.

Post feminism can be seen as the most visible version of feminism since the term “feminism” became popular. As its name suggests, the post-feminist rhetoric suggest that we have entered a post-era of struggle for feminism, where gender equality has been realized with the achievements of previous generations (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Post-feminism emphasizes the empowerment of individual women rather than focusing on the systematic oppression of women as a gender group (Gill, 2007). Because it is a lucrative version, it has been widely combined with individualism and neoliberal capitalism. Post-feminists assert that women can simply achieve anything, combine family and career, and become whatever they want to be, as long as it is through personal effort (Adamson, 2016).

The positive impact of female-empowering advertising on brand image and promotional effectiveness has been recognized by numerous studies, and the same evidence can be found in studies with samples from Asia and Europe (Åkestam et al., 2017; Teng et al., 2020). Compared to those advertisements that are overtly sexist, female-empowering advertisements are received more favorably by consumers, which is especially important for brand reputation building. This is because modern consumers are more inclined to use consumer behavior as a vote for the values conveyed by the brand and as an expression of their identity (Holt, 2006b).

2.2.2 The problematic of femvertising

At the same time, however, scholars, represented by Banet-Weiser (2018), have expressed concerns about the commercialization of feminism as a social issue. First of all, as a business entity with the ultimate goal of achieving economic efficiency, the brand perpetuates the politics of capitalist operations. That is, the ultimate goal of women's empowerment advertising is not to address gender equality, but to generate more revenue for the business. With a formidable command of multiple media channels, the power to interpret feminism, or at least the most visible version of feminism to the public, is in the hands of the brand, not the women.

Secondly, femvertising ignore the differences in women's economic status and the diversity within the female population (Irigaray, 1985). Even though it claims an appeal to aesthetic diversity, these

ads still portray women as young, decent white-collar workers in a typical middle-class state. As Gill (2007) pointedly noted that post-feminists claim they can be anyone, they still choose to be skinny and hairless.

Lastly, a mass media space dominated by femvertising may lead to confusion in public perceptions of feminism. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) continue Hall's (2002, as cited in Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017) claim that popular is an arena for power struggles by further stating that popularity, as a product of competition, can become a backlash against feminism. Although, different feminist claims competing in the media environment can increase the visibility of the term “feminism”. In order to gain the admiration and recognition of like-minded individuals, there is a problem of mutual exclusion and attack between individuals and collectives of different claims. And popularity is originally “a space where competing demands for power battle it out” (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017, p. 844). When feminism is used commercially and its popularity has economic value, this power struggle is intensified by the gains from competition. The realization of the concept of “freedom to buy” in brand narratives is a theft of the concept of “freedom of choice” from the political agenda of feminism, which sees consumption as a way to achieve political aspirations. At the same time, there are other issues that are ignored by the public. For example, sexism and the male gaze are still common in advertisements and films, while sexual harassment and the glass ceiling for female workers' careers are existing in reality (Gill, 2007).

Part of this feminist claim to gain visibility under competition in the marketplace has become more pervasive in the age of social media guided by the attention economy (Banet-Weiser, 2018). According to Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer's (2017) critique, the problem is not simply the commodification of feminism, but that these proponents of popular feminism embrace inequality's ideological nexus within the logic of commodification, such as “meritocratic” neoliberal individualism (p. 886). While feminism is used as a profit-making tool by some “lucky” female individuals, groups of women on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy are still being exploited. (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2007, p. 886).

Scholars of feminist and critical media studies have amply argued for potential problems in female-empowering advertising. However, most past research has relied on researchers to analyze and

compare advertising content from an academic perspective, and consumer voices have lacked attention. In this regard, Knudsen (2019) points out that it is necessary to view consumers as critical subjects. This is because researcher-led studies, especially in the field of marketing research, treat consumers as passive recipients of information and “accepting and internalizing objectification in texts at face value” (p. 168). The problem with this is that such research maintains a rhetorical dichotomy of gender inequality, considering the brand as a male position to craft marketing campaigns, and the consumer as a gullible and irrational thoughtless female, can only passively receive information (Fischer & Bristor, 1994).

There are limitations to underestimating the abilities of participants and overestimating the uniqueness of academic analysis (Hirschman, 1998). Therefore, it is worthwhile to highlight the different perspectives and experiences among women in further research on femvertising.

2.2 Menstruation in the advertising: Global and Chinese perspectives

2.2.1 Menstruation as a taboo

Prior to the 21st century, menstruation as a taboo concept appeared mostly in anthropological studies (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988; Douglas, 2022). Mary Douglas (2022) points out that the concept of pollution can be seen as a mirror of the whole social order and expression and the social hierarchy in which they are located. This can also be seen in the representation of menstruation in advertising because, as Kilbourne and Pipher (2000) argue, advertising is both a “perpetuator” and a “creator” of dominant social values (p. 67). Thus, like other things that related to the female body or femininity, menstrual blood has been exploited by businesses. The notion of taboo and stigma is presented as anxiety that can be addressed through consumer behavior. In the world of advertising, menstrual blood remains dirty and offensive, but these negative impressions can be addressed by choosing and buying the appropriate products.

In the late 1990s, Raftos et al. (1998) conducted a content analysis of advertising messages in Australian magazines and suggested that the advertisements conveyed information that femininity was tainted by menstrual blood. Therefore, menstruation should be hidden to fill the purpose of maintain a proper female image. This phenomenon of menstruation becoming a control over

women is consistent with Douglas's (2022) claim that stigmatizing interpretations of menstrual blood are a way to preserve the existing social order. Women perceive themselves as having hygiene problems during menstruation and avoid this topic whenever possible while consciously hiding the fact that they are on their periods. This stigmatized interpretation has influenced women's daily behavior and self-awareness of multiple generations (Havens & Swenson, 1988). With the assistance of menstruation, the traits and social responsibilities expected of adult women are distinguished from those of children and privileged men (Young, 2005). Unlike children, women are responsible for their own sexuality and have corresponding family and social responsibilities (Kane, 1990; Young, 2005). But they are also different from males because their bodies are impure (Kane, 1990; Young, 2005).

Two interpretations of this impurity have been suggested by scholars over the years. First, on the physical level, menstrual blood is a defilement of femininity; menstruation is then dirty and undignified, inconsistent with decent femininity, and therefore needs to be hidden (Douglas, 2022; Kane, 1990). Secondly, on a psychological level, this contamination is seen as a problem of female character or mentality (Stein & Kim, 2009). For example, emotional instability during menstruation is innate mental incompetence of females, and therefore the female is irrational (Douglas, 2022). Thus, the identification of menstruation with pollutants establishes stigmatization of normal female biological phenomena.

The stigmatization of menstruation has spread and perpetuated in modern society with multiple systems of communication, including everyday conversations, family education, advertising, and other media products (Merskin, 1999). Menstruation-related products, such as sanitary napkins and tampons, are designed to make it invisible to outsiders that a woman is having her period, they are given deodorizing properties, and they are made as small as possible in size (Kane, 1990). Significantly, menstrual blood is also hidden in advertisements for sanitary napkins - they are replaced by a blue liquid held in a test tube (Raftos et al., 1998).

2.2.2 Shifts of menstrual discourse in advertising: a trend to body positive

Studies in recent years have found some new changes in the marketing of taboo items (Michelson & Miller, 2019; Przybylo & Fahs, 2020). The reason behind this, As Michelson and Miller (2019) suggest, because taboos are established in relation to ethical standards, breaking taboos can also be achieved by establishing new ethical standards. Taboos can still be transformed into a resource for marketing by brands through the establishment of new ethical norms. Taboos can be transformed into marketing resources by establishing new ethical norms. Looking at the shift in the narrative of menstruation in advertising, the feminist movement and the related promotion of sexual and reproductive health education has promoted the belief that menstruation should be de-stigmatized and seen as a normal biological experience for women (Malefyt and McCabe, 2016). The advertised view of the de-stigmatization of menstruation was based on new moral claims initially promoted by these social movements.

Influenced by the consumer culture theory, Malefyt and McCabe (2016) points out that traditional menstrual advertising emphasizes ideologies related to cleanliness and cover-up, portraying women as “vulnerable” (p. 556). But through embodying the experience of their own bodies, female consumers create a counter-narrative "natural discourse" to counter the “protection discourse” of mainstream advertising. In “natural discourse”, menstruation is a normal physiological phenomenon related to the rhythm of changes in the female body (Malefyt and McCabe, 2016, p. 567). This shift corroborates the statements of Catterall, Maclaran, and Steven that “... whilst gender differences may be pervasive in culture, they are not immutable” (2000, p 4).

This shift has been led by some of the largest multinational corporations, notably those that have historically marketed through a misogynistic narrative as well. In a recent study Przybylo and Fahs (2020) analyzed ads from leading sanitary product companies since 2010 and concluded that new menstrual product ads do conceive of menstrual bleeding in a celebratory and liberating insight. They point out that these shifts have been achieved through the collaborative use of feminist discourses and reinterpretations of menstrual activity that continue to rely on a narrow understanding of the female body. This is in line with Fischer and Bristor (1994) critique of female empowerment advertising in general, that, the commercial use of feminist discourse still limits women to the imagination of what the market can offer, and this subject position is limited.

However, existing studies have many limitations in representing non-Western countries. Given that sanitary napkin advertising is a controversial commodity, regional adaptation policies are often used in global communications. There is potential for further exploration of the communication strategies of these international brands in other regions compared to the advertisements released in their domestic markets.

2.2.3 Menstrual advertising in China

Research in the field of marketing has been debating whether standardized or regionally adapted strategies should be used for advertising in the globalization era (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). A standardized strategy means using the same communication messages in all global markets. An adaptive strategy, on the other hand, requires brands to adapt the content of their communications to the characteristics of the region (Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997). Accordingly, Waller, Fam and Erdogan (2005) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of advertisements in four countries, concluding that in controversial products, cultural rather than regional differences are the main reason for influencing audience attitudes. This points the way to further research on regional adaptive advertising for contraindicated products. For example, in the context of globalization, where national perspectives are interacting, is an adaptive strategy based on the assumption of cultural differences always necessary. And, to what extent the content of such regional adaptive advertising needs to be changed (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1999).

Putting the issue in a country-specific context. China is a barely studied subject when it comes to feminine hygiene product advertising. Lin's (2013) research provides a historical insight into sanitary napkin advertising for China. In a study of the public sphere discussion of menstruation in China during the 1910s and 1930s, Lin (2013) notes that advertisements for feminine hygiene products appeared in Chinese newspapers and magazines in the early 20th century. These advertisements portrayed female menstruation as an unpleasant experience and began to associate concepts such as science and hygiene with their products. In particular, these advertisements emphasized the importance of women's personal practices in their narratives of changing new sanitary napkin consumption habits for hygiene concerns (Lin, 2013). At the same time, popular

science articles written for the public have emerged, arguing between the claims of traditional Chinese medicine and those of Western medicine. In general, “Menstruation became normalized as a natural, phenomenon that could be observed by individual women and discussed in public” (Lin, 2013, p. 311).

However, there is a lack of corresponding research on the changing trends of sanitary napkin advertising in China. From the founding of the Republic of China until the 1980s, the development of commercial advertising was stagnant under the influence of the planned economy (Ho & Sin, 1986). As one of the largest sanitary napkin consumer markets in the world today, China did not start introducing its first modern sanitary napkin production line until late 1980s (Daxue consulting, 2019). Since then, with the economic and social development after the "reform and opening up" policy, the number of sanitary napkin brands has increased, and the related advertisement has becoming back to visible (Fam et al., 2008). Notably, the marketing of tampons became the subject of scholarly attention after 2000. By analyzing the influence of social perceptions on people's acceptance of tampons, consumer perspectives became important to explore (Mou et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2018)

In their study of Chinese female consumers, Karan and Feng (2010) found that Chinese women present a *hybrid identity*. This is a consequence of the influence of both Western ideas, such as the emphasis on economic independence and the admiration for Western aesthetics, alongside Confucian values, for example, that women should be reserved, subtle, and family-oriented. However, China has undergone several structural reforms over the last hundred years, accompanied by changes in the dominant ideology (Lin, 2002). Women's social roles and self-awareness have coexisted with tradition and modernity as a result of the uneven regional economic development and the one-child policy, especially urban women, who have become more educated and have awakened to feminist consciousness (Fong, 2002; Hesketh et al., 2005).

Therefore, questions remained on how the younger generation of Chinese women understand the commercial use of menstruation and feminism under the influence of a mixture of the Confucian culture, communism (post-communism) ideology and the neoliberal capitalist environment.

2.3 Feminist perspective in strategic communication

According to Aldorrey and Toth's (2021) review of mainstream journals in the strategic communication discipline, there are limited papers that choose to discuss social justice and ethics problems. Of the few articles that address these aspects, most are related to strategic communication practitioners, such as the unethical practice of strategic communication works and the professional ceiling for female employees (Aldorrey & Toth, 2021). There is a lack of attention to the processes of meaning construction in strategic communication activities and their possible social implications.

Contrary to being ignored in the academia, the impact of strategic communication practices on social perceptions is intensifying. From one side, based on feminist critical interpretations, existing culture is a reproduction of the patriarchal order, and media content serves the male-dominant ideology (Edwards et al., 2014). The world and perspectives presented in media texts are not the entire objective world, but rather particular human perspectives conveyed on the basis of social structures, at the cost of excluding the perspective of the disenfranchised side of the structure (Artz, 2015). While from the other side, the commercial adaptation and appropriation of feminist-related concepts in advertising have become a common phenomenon, commercial organizations adapted the achievements of the feminist movement as communication resources and joined as participants. (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The use of female empowered subjects in brand communication has given urgency to the discussion related to the shaping of gender identities by consumerism and the power domination contained therein (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2007).

Hallahan et al. (2007) point to the need for feminist viewpoint in the field of public relations and strategic communication, one direction of which is to explore how gender influences organizational strategy and how dominant class reproduce existing ideas. Echoing this, scholars like Smith (2013) indicate that strategic communication research should involve an analysis of the role of power relations in its construction of meaning, as well as a critical reflection on its socializing influence. This focus on the social construction of discourse by power privileged groups overlaps with the feminist agenda.

2.4 Summary and relevance for the study

Female identity is constructed in social interactions, and popular culture shapes women's self-perceptions (McRobbie, 2000). In today's society, the power to define gender norms has shown a shift from traditional institutions to the cultural and consumer spheres (Aldorrey & Toth, 2022; Westkaemper, 2017). The interaction between the discourses and meanings constructed in communication and people's perceptions and behaviors confirms the need to introduce social and cultural theory into the discipline of strategic communication (Rakow & Nastasia, 2009).

Placing strategic communication in the context of globalization, the social environment has an important influence on the communication strategy of brands. A western-centered readings of feminism ignore the differences in individual experience (Crenshaw, 1990; Irigaray, 1985). In the case of menstrual stigma, although both Western and Eastern countries are faced with the dominant culture's abhorrence and avoidance of menstruation, the reasons for this phenomenon are not fully aligned (Kane, 1990; Merskin, 1999).

Consequently, the narrative of menstruation in advertising presents variations in different country. Even when a campaign is launched by the same brand, its specific content may change depending on the socio-cultural context in which the market is oriented. The social impact of the ideals conveyed by advertising needs to be studied from a more localized perspective, and the idea of audience should gain more attention.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework that forms the analytical perspective of this study is presented. As this study is interested in the construction of empowering meanings for menstruation in advertising, the relationship between discourse and power is the focus of this study. Fairclough's critical discourse theory has been chosen as the main tool for theoretical analysis. Critical discourse analysis is more than a research method; it is an academic proposition with an interdisciplinary nature (Locke, 2004). Thus, the chapter begins with the development of research on the concept of discourse, outlining the philosophical roots of the theory and the link between explanatory language and reality.

Next, consumerism and the hidden concept of cultural hegemony within it are briefly introduced in this section in response to the process of meaning constructing in advertising. Considering the context of cross-cultural communication, the theory of Orientalism proposed by Said (1979; 2003) is presented concretely.

3.1 The social theory of discourse: Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis is rooted in sociolinguistics, which advocates considering language as a social practice. According to Norman Fairclough (1995, p. 123), critical discourse analysis is the systematic exploration of the relationship between “discursive practices, events and, texts” and “wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes” with an aim to investigate how the power relations and power struggle plays a role in them.

CDA concerns with investigating the relationship between written or spoken language and its social environment, intending to understand the use of language in real-life situations (Fairclough 1989). The introduction of linguistic research into the wider social sciences can be traced back to the division of linguistic structures by the Swiss linguist Saussure, whose central claim was to distinguish sign from signifier and signified (Hawkes, 2005). In this framework, the meaning of

reality is given by language, and language exists not simply as a means of describing reality, but as part of what constitutes its meaning (Belsey et al., 2021).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a proliferation of literature and research on language and social practice. Social semiotics, for example, follows Saussure's central idea and advocate starting with the small unit of discourse and analyzing the 'signal' and the message it conveys (Halliday et al., 1989; Locke, 2004). Discourse analysis, on the other hand, is different in that it focuses more on the larger linguistic unit and the interactions and connections between people (Locke, 2004). In discourse analysis, a text has two meanings; on the one hand, it is a functional linguistic unit, a product that can be analyzed and interpreted. At the same time, the text exists as a process, being a form of communication of a dialogical nature (Halliday et al., 1989; Locke, 2004).

The centrality of language in the study of the humanities is inextricably linked to the 'linguistic turn' in the twentieth century. During this period, the language underwent a cognitive shift from being considered a medium for expressing pre-existing meanings in linguistic representations to a system for constituting meaning on its terms (Locke, 2004). Meaning is therefore established by language and other symbols, such as images, at a certain historical period and in a specific cultural context. In other words, meaning is not fixed but changes and acts in the real world through human communication and interaction (Belsey et al., 2021).

The theory of critical discourse analysis demonstrates a concern with the role of human social attributes in language use and the power affiliation of meaning construction (Fairclough, 2010). It is this focus on the larger linguistic unit that gives discourse analysis an advantage in exposing possible elements of injustice in social practice (Fairclough, 2010). According to Fairclough (2010), the criticality of the theory of critical discourse analysis is reflected in the interpretation of the influence of power relations on discursive practices. Thus, the research of critical discourse analysis scholars, as represented by Fairclough (1989; 1995; 2010), goes wider than linguistics and became widely applied to social science research.

The three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1995) has been widely used in research related to the processes of language use and the power relations that affect the meaning given to language. Fairclough's model “emphasizes the social and discursively embedded nature of the text” and allows “various differing foci for analysis” (Lock, 2004, p. 42). Discourse, at this level, refers to a wide range of semiotic elements in the social practice, including language, nonverbal communication, and communication in visual forms (Fairclough 1995).

The use of discourse can be analyzed at three levels (Fairclough, 1995). Firstly, there is the text dimension, which is a linguistic perspective that looks at the phonological and rhetorical approach to the use of words and sentences to interpret the text descriptively and then analyze the attitudes it attempts to present. The second is the discursive practice dimension, also known as the interpretation dimension, which analyses the role of the text at the level of social relations, such as the position of the speaker, the interaction between the speaker and the audience, the process by which the text is produced and its relationship to social conditions. The last dimension is the socio-cultural dimension, and this level of analysis situates language as a social practice within a larger system of social contexts.

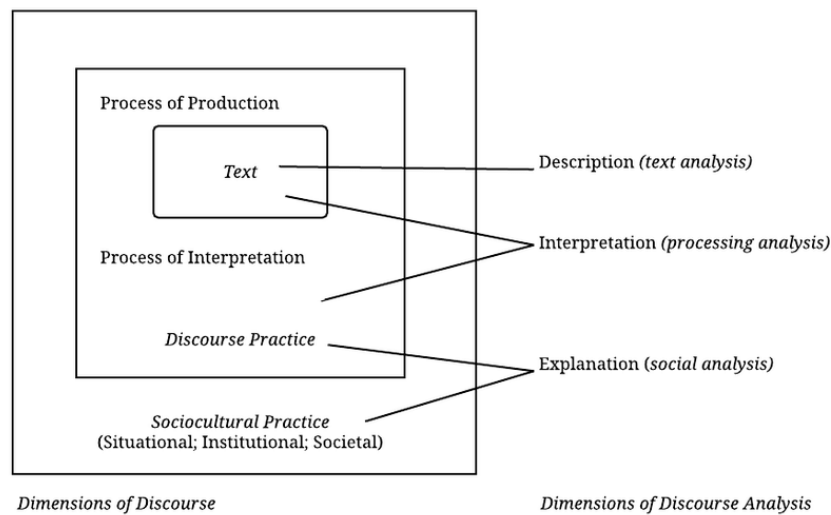


Figure 1. Three dimensions model of discourse (Fairclough, 1995, p. 98)

To sum up, language is a social practice that serves the construction of ideology (Locke, 2004). By analyzing the processes of language practice in specific historical conditions and social

contexts, critical discourse analysis ultimately strives to explain the role of power relations in the shaping of meaning (Fairclough, 1995; Locke, 2004).

3.2 Orientalism

Based on his reflections on colonialism and contemporary social problems, Edward W. Said (1979) proposed the theory of Orientalism, which argues that the West has constructed a culture of self-centered contempt for Eastern countries. In this system of knowledge, the East is backward and barbaric, while the West is civilized and modern (Said, 1979). Initially dedicated to explaining the relationship between the Islamic world and traditional Eurocentric civilizations, Orientalism has now been widely introduced into non-Eurocentric contexts, including the Far East (Vukovich, 2013). In the context of globalization, Orientalism is particularly important for understanding the White-centric and Western-centric ideas.

Employed Foucault's concept of discourse, Said interprets the Western world's studies and claims about the so-called East over the past few centuries as a discourse referred to as Orientalism. In Said's argument, Orientalism is not merely a fantasy of the West about a distant world, but a “created” systematic knowledge and practice (1979, p.6). This system of knowledge and discourse is centered on Western civilization and exists as a 'considerable material investment' over a long period of historical practice (Said, 1979, p. 6). He pioneered the idea that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident has evolved into the modern era to imply “a relationship of power, domination, and varying degrees of hegemony” (Said, 1979, p. 5).

Orientalism is not a false image of one culture to another, which can be broken by a more precise formulation of the facts, but a complete body of knowledge about the superiority of the West created through various social activities (Said, 1979). In this intellectual structure, the East exists as a counterpart to the West, but not as an independent, autonomous culture.

There are two main concepts that can be seen as the intellectual roots of Orientalism. The first is Foucault's discourse, which emphasizes the role of language in shaping reality. This is reflected in Said's Orientalism, in which texts claiming to contain a certain kind of Oriental knowledge are

constantly recognized by authorities, academics, and the general public, eventually developing the ability to create the reality they describe. In this process, in Said's words, "Expertise is attributed to it" (1979, p. 103). Knowledge about non-Westerners based on a Eurocentrism standard, and the corresponding way of behaving towards the 'other' became a tradition over time (Said, 1979).

Another one is the concept of *hegemony* noted by Gramsci (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2010; Said, 1979). Gramsci divides the power forms into 'political society' and 'civil society', unlike the former which controls people by institutional, coercive force, through dominance, 'civil society' dominates people through consent, in which culture plays a role. Cultural leadership is what Gramsci called hegemony (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2010). As Gramsci explains, cultural hegemony refers to the construction of views of the real world by the dominant segment of society, which is accepted by the rest of the population and becomes social common senses (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2010). In Orientalism, this cultural superiority is reflected in the notion of a superior European identity compared to all non-European peoples and cultures (Said, 1979).

Orientalism is a cultural-political form of knowledge (Said, 1979). Entering the 21st century, many scholars have proposed the relevance of China to Said's theory (Vukovic, 2013; Yan & Santos, 2009; Zhang, 2019). Because since 1970, China has become the object of a new kind of 'otherness' due to its changed position in the world and in Western political culture. In contrast to the original version of the East-West dichotomy, Sinology sees reformed China as a country in transition to the West and to modernity. In other words, under the new Orientalist interpretation, occident is beneficial for China, because it promotes a more liberal, egalitarian, and modern China. And this is seen as an inevitable trend in the process of globalization. In this regard, Vukovich (2013, p. 3) points out that the idea of "becoming sameness" remains the maintenance of the dominant position of the Occident. Because behind the progress and development, the original Chinese culture continues to be perverse 'other' in an inferior role (Vukovich, 2013).

4. Methodology

This chapter provides a general description of the research strategy of this study. It first articulates the post-structuralist research paradigm that guided the overall research design, and then discusses the contribution that discourse analysis can contribute to this study. Next, the link between the two research questions is explained and illustrated. Accordingly, this chapter describes the sample selection, data collection and analysis methods in two steps. It also concludes with an explanation of the research ethics and the assurance of research credibility.

4.1 Research paradigm: Feminist poststructuralism

The epistemology of poststructuralism is applicable to this study because it claims to transform the real world and address the problems that exist in society, particularly regarding the operation of power relations, the construction of meaning, and the conduct of discourse (Irigaray, 1974; Prasad, 2017).

Integration with Feminism, Prasad (2017) offers a concrete and concise explanation of feminist poststructuralism: drawing on the core notion of “discourse” in poststructuralism, this branch of feminism is concerned with how language and other types of representations play a role in “constructing gendered subjectivities across a range of social domains” (p. 186). Feminist poststructuralism has two central claims, the first of which emphasizes contingency in the shaping of gender identity. Continuing Foucault's work on the relationship between discourse and power, Butler (1990) proposes contingency in the construction of gender identities. According to her, there is no fixed model for the shaping of gender and sex itself, nor is there a so-called 'trait' for a particular gender, and the performance of gender is related to the socio-cultural environment in which the individual lives. The way the performance is a result of social culture and the behavioral norms attached with it (Butler, 1990). Although her theory has been subject to numerous criticisms in later generations, she has pioneered the argument for a fluid relationship between gender identity and discourse (Schwartzman, 2002).

Secondly, feminist poststructuralism advocates a greater discussion of the socio-historical factors contributing to the oppression and the analysis and discussion of specific issues concerning the issue of oppression and liberation (Kroløkke & Sorensen, 2005). This perspective has relevance in modern societies with increased globalization, especially given that modern feminist development emerged in the West and that its ideas have had difficulties incompatibility and in negotiating and evolving with local cultures in post-colonial countries and Eastern contexts (Irigaray, 1989; Kroløkke & Sorensen, 2005). It is therefore the in-depth exploration of those groups of women who have been neglected by the traditional feminist that demands a differentiated discussion of the social realities and historical reasons for their presence that makes feminist poststructural tradition stand out.

4.2 Research design

Qualitative research focuses on language and discourse and looks for meaning in cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts, such as finding out how a media product is constructed by the society in which it is made (Brennen, 2021). Concern more on the cognitive differences among human beings due to their experiences, positions, and environments (Merriam, 2009). Since the purpose of this study was to explore the effect of power relations in female empowerment discourse and is based on a poststructuralism epistemology that emphasizes individual experiences and the influence of specific cultural context, a qualitative research approach was chosen to be implemented.

As indicated by Yin (2013), a case study is particularly suited to situations where it is infeasible to dissociate the variables of a phenomenon from its context. To improve knowledge interaction between femvertising and the cultures that contribute to their audiences' perceptions, a case study could facilitate the realization of an in-depth description and interpretation of the phenomenon in a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). *Multiple sources of information* are needed to enable a thick description (Cresswell, 2007, p.73; Merriam, 2009). In accordance with the requirements of the research aim, the data collection in this study consisted of two steps. Discourse analysis is first conducted for collected materials. Two focus groups are then used to provide another perspective

on the brand's discourse from the perspective of the audience to explore the social culture reflected in it.

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 *The First Step: selection of marketing materials*

Given the multiplicity of communication methods, the way brands conduct communication campaigns is not limited to the use of single media channels and promotional materials. Setting specific conditions for the selection of materials helps to control the scope of the study. This study focuses on the analysis of Libresse's marketing materials posted on the social media platform, Weibo. Sina Weibo offers some basic services similar to the Twitter US, such as posting posts with hashtags to participate in discussions on specific topics and using @ to mention other users (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014). People can interact by reposting or by commenting on the post sent by others (Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014). Weibo is one of the most visited web pages in China and is widely used by brands as a platform for advertising and brand communication campaigns (Chen et al., 2020; Rauchfleisch & Schäfer, 2014). Similar to other brands, Libresse operates its own official account on Weibo. By sending text, graphic, or video posts and interacting with the public, Libresse operates marketing communication campaigns. By May 1, 2022, Libresse's official account had sent 1,588 posts and gained 511,235 followers.

To ensure a complete collection of promotional materials for the campaign to provide a richer and more complete interpretation, the author collected a total of 181 posts with the hashtag #menstruationshouldnotbehidden from the official Weibo account of Libresse (薇尔) between September 19, 2019, when the campaign was officially launched (marked by the first hashtag), and March 9, 2022, to filter out its value-oriented video advertising, I formally selected three video ads for analysis, ranging in length from 1 minute 3 seconds to 1 minute 31 seconds.

| No. | Date | Title of the advertising | Length | Views |
|-----|------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------|
| 1 | 16/10/2019 | 400 times: A new chapter | 1Min 31 Sec | 9.6 M |

| | | | | |
|----------|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------|--------|
| 2 | 18/5/2020 | Menstruation not hidden | 1Min 03 Sec | 10.6 M |
| 3 | 1/3/2022 | Do menstruation need to be hidden? | 1Min 30 Sec | 26.9 M |

Table 1. Collected Ads

The specific selection of materials was based on several principles:

Firstly, advertising in the form of videos. As previously mentioned, the aim of the study was to explore the elaboration of the female empowerment video ad on the physiological phenomenon of menstruation. Promotional materials other than video ads, such as posters, graphics, textual materials and retweets of collaborative influencer promotional posts were excluded.

Secondly, the promotional materials were only released in mainland China. As the study focused on the Chinese socio-cultural environment, only the video advertisement for the mainland market was selected. The video ad "The Story of Menstruation" released in 2021 was not selected because it was the Chinese translation of an international version.

Thirdly, advertisements aimed at constructing narratives of menstrual normalization. Since the research questions in this study are related to the construction of values and ideologies conveyed by brands, advertisements that are purely for the purpose of selling goods, such as video advertisements for promotions and new product publicity, were not to be opted for.

Finally, the advertisement is made by the brand as the communication subject. The diversity of advertising in the social media era complicates the choice of material. In this case, the brand releases a portion of its video ads in the form of informal conversations with influencers or ordinary women, short interviews, which are not chosen because the narrative subject is a personal story. Most specifically, the brand's 2021 annual advertising video "Tell Your Period Story" has not been retained. Although it is presented in a creative pseudo "documentary" format that can be seen as an advertisement organized by the brand and representing its values, the "interviewees" still speak with plenty of personal narrative and sensationalism of a more individual nature.

4.3.2 The Second Step: Sampling and the focus group participants

In the second step, two focus groups were conducted separately. Employed a semi-structured approach, the focus group discussion started to be guided by several topics proposed by the researcher. The interview guideline was designed around the content of three advertisings selected in step one. Once the discussion started, the conversation evolved in a more flexible direction based on the respondents' feedback and their interactions with each other.

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research does not require a large sample of data but attempts to achieve a depth of understanding within a certain range (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 66). To achieve an in-depth discussion of the problem, qualitative research requires a detailed framing of the scope of the study to identify participants with specific characteristics. The recruitment of respondents for this study followed therefore the principle of purposive sampling. Specific panelist recruitment requirements are described below.

As this campaign is set to take place on social networks, according to the official user development report released by Sina Weibo 2020 (Weibo Data Center, 2021), the monthly active users of Weibo reached 511 million in September 2020. In terms of age, users born in 1990s and 2000s reach more than 80%, with the post-90s, currently the largest number of users between 20 and 30 years old, reaching 48% of the total number of users. From the gender ratio, 54.1% of female users were born between 1990 and 2000, while the percentage of female users among users born after 2000 reached 61.6%.

Since the brand in the case sells menstrual products that are mainly for female users, the main audience of its campaign platform is also young women, therefore, the gender of the respondents was set to female. The age range of the sample was set to 20-30 years old. Considering the vast geographical area of the Chinese market and the diversity of people's consumption habits, consumption concepts and gender consciousness among cities with different levels of economic development. The target group for this sampling was set in first-tier cities, which are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen (the largest cities in China, 2020). Some of the respondents had long-term living experiences in different cities, as shown in Table 2.

To ensure the quality of the data provided by the focus groups, the selection of group members was guided by the following two principles. The first principle is ensuring the homogeneity in the focus group members, meaning that participants are of similar age, gender, education level and knowledge of the topic. The homogeneity of the group allows for “bringing together people who have enough in common to allow the development of a productive conversational dynamic” (Conradson, 2005, p.133).

The second principle was to ensure that the panelists were not familiar with each other. The researcher created an interview recruitment poster and reposted it on Weibo (a public social platform) and WeChat Moments (a personal social channel) to find potential interviewees. At the initial stage of contacting participants, potential respondents who already knew the researcher were excluded due to the social nature of WeChat Moments, and therefore the participants and the researcher did not know each other. Some participants who knew each other previously were deliberately split into two different groups to avoid their views influencing each other and interfering with the expression of other participants.

| No. | Age | Occupation/Industry | City |
|-----------------|-----|--|--------------------|
| <i>Group 1.</i> | | | |
| 1 | 24 | Finance and Economics | Beijing |
| 2 | 28 | English Teacher for Children | Guangzhou/Shenzhen |
| 3 | 26 | Data Analyst | Shanghai |
| 4 | 27 | Sociology | Shanghai |
| 5 | 27 | Interaction Designer | Shanghai area |
| 6 | 22 | Bachelor student | Beijing |
| 7 | 22 | Bachelor student /Food Science and Engineering | Guangzhou |
| <i>Group 2.</i> | | | |
| 1 | 22 | Bachelor student/ Labor and Social Security | Beijing |
| 2 | 29 | Advertising planner | Shanghai |
| 3 | 26 | Data Analyst | Shanghai |
| 4 | 23 | Master student/ Environmental Science | Shanghai/Shenzhen |
| 5 | 22 | Master student / Translation | Beijing |
| 6 | 24 | Cultural tourism | Beijing |
| 7 | 23 | Public Relation | Shanghai |
| 8 | 22 | Environmental Science | Beijing |

Table 2: Respondent Information

The quality of data provided by the focus groups was related to whether participants chose to actively discuss and share ideas. Creating a comfortable environment was, therefore, conducive to facilitating group discussions and avoiding tensions between interviewees (Hennink, 2014). To achieve this, discussions in both groups were scheduled on weekend evenings during Chinese time and were conducted via real-time video software Zoom. To ensure privacy and respect for the interviewees, participants did not know each other's real names and ages.

For ethical reasons, the purpose of the study and the use of the data was explained in detail to the participants by the researcher prior to the group discussion. In particular, the researcher ascertained their acceptance and willingness to participate in an open discussion on the topic of 'menstruation' and signed an informed consent form. Following the principle of 'self-determination', the researcher explained that any participant should voluntarily stay and have the right to withdraw from the discussion on any occasion and for any reason, which the researcher emphasized before the start of both discussions (Hennink, 2014). To avoid potential harm to interviewees, attribution was not provided in the used quotes because some interviewees shared their privacy (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). The speaker's background was mentioned when it is necessary, e.g., "A current university student"(Hennink, 2014).

The two focus group interviews were conducted on April 2, 2022, and April 8, 2022. The length of the interviews was 1 hour and 59 seconds and 1 hour, 3 minutes and 8 seconds, respectively. 7 respondents participated in the first group and a total of 9 respondents participated in the second group. Since one interviewee joined in the middle of the interview and expressed her unwillingness to turn on the camera for interaction. For respecting her preference and for the quality of the interviews data, only 8 respondents' interviews were documented for use in the follow-up analysis.

4.4 Analysis procedures

Since the purpose of this study involves the investigation of the relationship between the language of advertising and the ideology it is intended to convey, and considering post-structuralist epistemology, critical discourse analysis was chosen as the main method for conducting the analysis of empirical material.

There is no standard format for to conduct CDA, as Locke (2004) argues that although critical discourse analysis can be learned and used as a research method, it is more than a research tool and should be seen as a “scholarly orientation” (p.2). The theoretical dimension of CDA is as important as its methodological dimension, and therefore the scope of its use as a research method needs to be context-specific and cannot be used as a tool in isolation, which means, the method of data analysis was determined by the subject of the study (Fairclough, 2010). Therefore, in line with the main interest of this study, what Fairclough calls “*A dialectical-relational approach*” was used throughout the analysis process (2010. p. 226). Since this approach follows the tradition of critical research, it focuses on the injustices that exist in society. Around this selected issue of injustice, the dialectical-relational approach continues Bhaskar's (1986 as cited in Fairclough, 2010) idea of 'interpretive criticism' and consists of four steps: *Discover a social wrong at the semiotic level - Identify the obstacles to solving this wrong - Consider whether the social order needs this wrong - Identify possible ways to solve this obstacle* (Fairclough, 2010).

In this case study, Fairclough's three-dimensional model was used as a theoretical tool to interpret the materials of the “Menstruation should not be Hidden” campaign for identifying possible problems in the application of commercial discourse. The marketing materials are part of the commercialization of feminism, while the focus group discussions are another component of the “*genre networks*” that points to how the existing social order is maintained (Fairclough, 2010, p. 245).

In summary, the close link between this study and the theory of critical discourse analysis can be seen through two points: Firstly, the focus on the social role of the brand in engaging in discursive interaction and the relationship it seeks to achieve with its audience. Secondly, a focus on the social culture that advertising embodies in its use of advertising language and, accordingly, the impact it seeks to have on society.

4.5 Translation

The data for this study consisted of two parts, firstly, the brand's communication materials and then the focus group interviews. Both sets of data were collected in Chinese and coded and analyzed in simplified Chinese, and the final quotes were translated into English by the researcher.

In the No.1 video, the advertisement comes with the original English subtitles, but after comparison, the researcher found that the English translation provided by the brand has some expression differences with its Chinese subtitles. Since the selected video was targeted at the Chinese market, the Chinese subtitled version was used as the text for the discourse analysis.

4.6 Reflective statement

As one component of qualitative research, the researcher is responsible for the authenticity and reliability of the research (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, as a researcher, it is necessary for me to articulate my position here to illustrate how my personal experience may have influenced the study. As a feminist from an Asian country, I am concerned about the subordinate position of women in today's society. I am focus on how capitalist discourses that influence women's identity when living in a world where popular culture is pervasive in all aspects of life.

I hold a critical attitude toward female empowerment advertising. While it presents elements such as self-confidence and self-love presents a different kind of femininity, it still limits the possibilities of femininity in new ways. While the integration of popular culture contributes to the achievement of challenging traditional social norms of femininity in a more 'moderate' way in China, which lacks the conditions and opportunities for social movements, women should not be dependent on any authority for the perception of their bodies and their value, nor should they give up the chance of expression their claims more intensely.

Considering the trustworthiness, this study follows the three principles proposed by Merriam (2009, p. 213): *internal validity*, *reliability*, and *external validity*. Because qualitative researchers cannot capture objective "truths," triangulation is an important method for enhancing the correspondence between research and the objective world. In this study, multiple data sources were used, and multiple methods were utilized for data collection. Two focus groups were conducted separately

to enable a cross-checking. For reliability, the document materials used, as well as audio recordings of focus group interviews, are preserved for audit trail purposes. In terms of the external validity, each step of the study is described specifically, and in the subsequent analysis section, all the details are demonstrated to increase the transferability of this study.

5. Analysis

“Advertising is the most influential institution of socialization in modern society.”

(Jhally, 1995, pp. 78-79)

5.1 Discourses in the “Menstruation should not be hidden” Campaign

RQ1. How does Libresse discursively articulate the new meaning of menstruation to drive brand identity in “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign?

In accordance with what has been mentioned in the previous chapters, the language of Libresse's advertising can be analyzed on three dimensions of discourse. In this section, the three video advertisements are presented in the chronological order in which they were released. Through the theoretical lens of critical discourse analysis, the presentations of the advertisements on menstruation are analyzed in detail, layered on three dimensions: the text, the discursive practices, and the socio-environmental factors behind the discourse. Finally, the analysis of the second and third dimensions is reviewed at the end of this section due to the focus on meaning construction. The aim is to provide a summary of the meaning given to menstruation in these three advertisements and the power relations embodied therein.

5.1.1 Text

Language can be considered as a symbolic system, and when serving as a vehicle for meaning, the usage and placement of symbols varies according to their purpose (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). When a speaker's use of language and text is predicated on achieving a purpose through communication, his or her text is no longer neutral but carries a value orientation. Advertising, as a purposeful communication with persuasion as its main appeal, has a relationship between persuasion and guidance in the interaction between the advertiser and the audience. The identification of the contextual characteristics of the presentation and reinforcement of purpose through language is where the criticality of CDA analysis lies (Locke, 2004).

From the perspective of the tone in the videos, all three advertisements attempt to develop a narrative around the proposition of whether menstruation needs to be hidden through a female narrator. Recognizing this helped define the underlying context of the entire “Menstruation Should Not Be Hidden” campaign, which is the brand's attempt to invest itself in the female community and engage in dialogue with other women. As the first advertising for this campaign, *400 times: A new chapter* uses the storyline of 'the female experience of menstruation' to depict the state of a woman's life and the female dilemmas she faces at different ages. From her first period to her hundredth and hundreds of periods, the commercial uses the “number of periods a girl has” as a metaphor for her age. The theme of this video is “what kind of menstrual experiences different individual women have at their respective stages of life”, presented by flipping through diaries and flashing the camera back to scenes from their memories.

The ad begins with a shot of two hands opening a diary and the narrator, an anonymous, sweet-voiced woman, whose tone is upbeat and light-hearted. She begins with “*Do you know? That there are only has 400 periods in a women’s life*”, presenting the number of periods a woman has in her lifetime as an “interesting piece of general knowledge”.



Figure 2. A pair of female hands slowly open the diary

In the two later commercials (No.2 & No.3), the anonymous female narrator was replaced by Chinese actress Zhou Dongyu, Zhou serves as the narrator and appears in several scenes of the video. It is worth noting that Zhou Dongyu is the endorser for Libresse in the Chinese market, she was born in 1992 and has won many prestigious awards in the industry for her work in films (IMDb, n.d.). A calmer tone is used in the two advertisements in which she plays the role of narrator, and

there is no overt optimism or pessimism in the narrative mood of these two ads, with the narrator tending to be straightforward. Her tone is more subdued than in the first ad, as she opens with “*Menstruation (pause), do you need to hide it?*” (See Figure 3.), trying to convey the message that there is a social consensus that “menstruation is being hidden”.



Figure 3. Zhou Dongyu and the Chinese slogan of the campaign appeared at the same time

In its use of vocabulary, the brand distinguishes the ‘past’ from the ‘present and future’, separating the meaning of menstruation in its traditional sense from its meaning in the values of Libresse. While in the world constructed by Libresse, menstruation is an event to be cherished. It uses the following words and phrases in its advertising to describe menstruation and women in their period:

“Ritual, a moment to be celebrated, cherished, blooming, an important memento”

In contrast, the campaign attempts to depict existing, traditional interpretations of menstruation in negative terms through a series of contrasts, such as:

“Enduring, restraining, being blocked, being knocked down, the randomly crossed pages of the calendar”.

Specifically, in the No.2 video, Zhou, the narrator, helps the brand to construct an "old narrative" about menstruation using a metaphor that fits her social role.

“(Menstruation) is like NG footage in the public eye, has to be cut”

In the use of phrases, the old and new meanings of menstruation are contrasted frequently in all three advertisements. Take, for example, the latest video advertisement (No. 3):

*“I see more and more people join with Libresse,
Choose to express themselves confidently, **rather than** put away their opinions.
Choose to put it on the table, **rather than** being ashamed to see it.
Choose to express it openly, **rather than** getting used to hiding it”*

By comparing people's attitudes to life before and after choosing Libresse, the narration of advertisings indicates how the choice of this brand can lead to a change in attitudes towards menstruation - or at least, a rebellion against the 'ordinary' gaze that can be shown through the act of buying this brand.

5.1.2 Discursive practice

In all of the three chosen ads, Libresse tries to establish a state of solidarity with the female community by using a female narrator as the spokesperson of its own 'voice'. By portraying the repression and constraints women face in their daily lives, the brand tries to anthropomorphize itself and express its empathy for this situation and its call for women to stand together and confront the stigmatization of menstruation.

The monologue of Zhou Dongyu mentioned above could be seen as an example:



Figure 4.-Figure 5. Zhou Dongyu speaks to the camera

“(Menstruation) is like NG scenes in the public eye (Figure 4.), has to be cut (Figure 5.).”

NG is a common expression in the Asian film industry, used as an abbreviation for ‘not good’, can be understood as ‘outtake’. The narrator as an actor compares menstruation to a shot that needs to be cut in order to make the audience feel her distress more directly. In this way, empathy for menstruation as a ‘female dilemma’ in the traditional sense and in the public view is achieved with the audience. The speaker is a real woman who replaces the vague ‘brand’ as the initiator of the entire advertising message. However, as a celebrity, she speaks in a way that shows a different social status from the general female population, presenting a ‘leadership’ characteristic in the discourse, which will be further explained in the discussion chapter. This sense of superiority and leadership is also reflected in her dress, as the brand's spokesperson, Zhou wears a red suit and exquisite makeup. This is in clear contrast to the other female characters in the ad, whose role is to show how repressed women can be during their periods (Figure 6; Figure 7).



Figure 6 - Figure 7 Women who feel pain because of menstruation

Specifically, in terms of attempts to show standing with the female group, Libresse tends to appear as a rescuer and an “older sister” in the campaign, interacting with the audience through pronouns such as “we” “our” and “you”:

“Libresses (薇尔) allows you to have a new attitude, a new feeling, a new comfort experience”

This use of pronouns is even more prevalent in Videos No. 2 and No. 3:

*"Over four hundred physiological periods, should not be just randomly crossed pages on a calendar, they're important anniversaries of **our** lives which should be marked in red"*

*"I see that more and more people
together with Libresse (薇尔), choose to express themselves with confidence"*

*"This is **our** action and answer, may more people, **together with Libresse (薇尔), menstruation should not be hidden"***

The discourse on 'leadership'; can be found in the same sentence where words like "you" and "we" are used:

*"**Libresse allows you; together with Libresse"***

The use of these languages devices reveals the social relationship that Libresse seeks to establish with its audience through the advertising discourse. Throughout the "Menstruation should not be hidden" campaign, Libresse tries to act as a special participant in a group of women. As a member of a women's group, but also as a change agent in the plight of women and as an empowerer of 'normal females'.

In addition to the 'female' identity, the ad also emphasizes the brand's other identity, which is from Nordic countries.

*"**The Nordic brand- libresse 薇尔** (In this sentence, the Chinese name of*

Libresse appears after the English name, and it pronounced in Chinese as 'Wei Er')

Let you change the attitude

Change a new feeling

Refreshing a comfortable new experience"

In the final segment of the first commercial, which has the significance of announcing the official launch of the campaign in China, after showing the diversity of aesthetic and optimistic life possibilities of the girls who chose this brand, Libresse emphasizes that it is a Nordic brand with the above sentence. Such an identity was highlighted in either of the two later ads, but caught the attention of the focus group members, which will be analyzed further in the subsequent section.



Figure 8. The Nordic brand

With the presentation of its foreign brand identity, Libresse chose to include English subtitles under the Chinese subtitles of the first commercial, which was not available in the subsequent years of the video.

5.1.3 Sociocultural practice

In general, the women in the ad video are distinguished into two states. The two states do not mean 'two different types of people', but rather two contradictory states of the same woman in her life. Such a contrast echoes the 'old meaning of menstruation' and the 'new meaning of menstruation' in the previous discursive practice section, reflecting the two states of affairs before and after the response to the Libresse appeal.

From one point of view, Chinese women are in a state of confinement and repression due to social conventions. This state is reflected in both the attitudes of others and their own behavior. The attitudes of others can first be seen in the scene of “the first menstruation time” in advertisement No. 1. In the image below, a girl is sitting on a bed (as if she is sick) with a fearful and shy expression on her face, covered with a quilt. Her father places a glass of water at her bedside table, then the camera moves from the glass to the Libresse sanitary napkin placed next to it, emphasizing that the daughter in the scene is in the middle of her own period. The father puts the water down and says in a caring tone, “*Daddy put it here*” before quickly leaving the camera, leaving the girl alone to pick up the sanitary napkin and look at it with curious eyes.



Figure 9. The girl has her first menstruation

This phrase, “*Daddy put it here*” translated as “*Here is the water*” in the official subtitled English version appeared below. An additional note is needed here on that in Chinese culture, where young women are usually persuaded to drink hot water when they have their periods (Wong et al., 2013). In this scene, the woman in her period is the one who needs to be protected and cared for, and the male role of the father takes on this responsibility. This reflects the reality in China where women during their biological period are seen as vulnerable and need to be given preferential or special treatment.

This can also be found in another scene where a female employee in an office feels embarrassed and lowers her head after realizing that she has her period. At that moment a male colleague hands her a packet of sanitary napkins and she smiles gratefully. The male as redeemer is subtly represented, even in the scenes where another woman is present - her figure in the distant background - and it is still the male who takes care of a ‘vulnerable’ girl during menstruation.



Figure 10. - Figure 13. The girl got her period in the office

In terms of women's own behavior, the act of women hiding sanitary napkins in public was widely used in the video No.3. In the gym, a girl hid the sanitary napkin in her sleeve and whispered to the girl next to her “*Don't be seen*” (see Figure 15.); A woman in high heels lifts a box containing sanitary napkins and kicks it into the bottom of her desk (see Figure 16.); A woman sitting at the workstation hurriedly covered the delivery box that had just been delivered, the box had the sanitary napkin brand logo printed on it (see Figure 17.- Figure 18.).

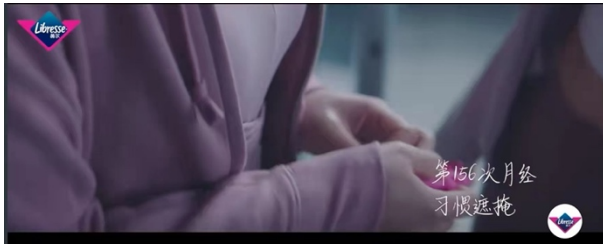


Figure 14.- Figure 17. Girls hide their sanitary napkins in public spaces

Chinese women's menstruation is interpreted in such a way that, under the existing, old perceptions, it is negative and women in their own menstrual period are vulnerable and protected objects. This unpleasant state is associated with the non-selection of Libresse products.

In contrast to this is the call for women's desire to remove constraints, a need that is constantly emphasized and amplified. This is manifested in the demonstration of women's self-confidence. In the second state of women's life, women want to find their voice, and this demand is magnified in the commercial.

As the second clip in video No.1 shows, a young woman in the workplace wants her opinion to be heard. To emphasize how difficult her situation is, in this scene the other members of the meeting room are all male and they are noisily discussing their ideas. And as the only female employee, the young white-collar worker is silent. After repeatedly turning over her document in her hands, she finally musters up the courage to say out loud:

"Please consider my proposal seriously".

After saying these words, she smiled confidently and left the office without a backward glance, accompanied by *"After being bounded, I learn not to hide"* in the narrator's voice. The camera then

switches to a third scene, in which only women, young and beautiful, wearing exaggerated make-up, are gathered. In this scene, a girl gathers the courage to express to her male colleague that her work project needs to be taken seriously, but she still uses the salutation 'please', which is not a word commonly used when speaking with their peers in China.



Figure 18. The silent female employee surrounded by male colleagues

And in the subsequent scenes where only women appear, each woman is more flamboyant compared with the last scenario, and they don't seem to need to hide their periods anymore. Notably, the camera lingers on their exaggerated high heels, showing off their 'confidence'.



Figure 19.- Figure 20. The first scene shows a group of girls entering the bathroom to fix their makeup, a girl borrowing sanitary napkins from her friend, the camera falls on their high heels. The next scene is them dancing happily in the street.

By depicting menstrual scenes at different stages of life, the brand shows through the advertisements the situations and struggles that woman may encounter at different ages. The ad

features different individual women, but they share the same trajectory of female growth in a specific social context. Menstruation epitomizes the plight of women in this series of ads, and the choice of Libresse not only addresses the embarrassment and inconvenience that comes with menstruation itself - but also challenges the neglect and devaluation of women that is prevalent in the real world.

5.1.4 Conclusive findings of RQ1

To sum up, the analysis of the advertisements can be divided into two categories: linguistic and non-linguistic features. In terms of linguistic features, the ads attempt to create a female perspective scene through the narration of female narrators. Pronouns are used extensively in the choice of words to reinforce their group attributes. In addition, the ads use positive, upbeat words and a light-hearted and optimistic tone to establish the important position and leadership role that Libresse plays in promoting the de-stigmatization of menstruation, and to construct the process of menstrual perception change as implementable and full of bright prospects.

From the non-linguistic perspective, the female menstrual dilemma is constantly portrayed and shown, but correspondingly, scenes of resolution emerge following quickly. By empathizing with the female dilemma of menstruation, and showing the spirit of resistance, Libresse appears as an elite image of a change agent and leader in the campaign for menstrual empowerment. And through the advertising words and English subtitles, Libresse implicitly expresses its identity as a foreign brand. The three commercials were used as examples to introduce discussion during the focus groups to facilitate participants to share their views and opinions with each other. Based on respondents' discussion on the chosen marketing materials, the next section presents the answers to the second research question.

5.2 Views of Chinese women

RQ.2 How do Chinese women's perceptions of the advertising-constructed meaning of menstruation interact with social reality?

The focus group perspectives in this study help provide an alternative perspective on the construction of meaning in the commercial use of feminist language and its connection with the

social environment. It complements the understanding of the whole process by which brands interpret menstruation and the female menstrual experience. Aiming to achieve this, the following paragraphs focus on respondents' discourses about accepting and rejecting brand messages, and the power relations reflected in the dialogue process and interactions.

Distinct from the analysis of the marketing materials, young urban women, as the primary audience for advertising, provide a new entry point into China's gender cultural environment in their discussion of the research materials. How international brands market the theme of women's empowerment in the Chinese social environment is presented during the discussion.

Four themes emerged from the focus groups around the discussion of Libresse's discourses regarding meaning-building on menstruation: *1. portrayal of the current state of menstrual shame 2. leadership and elite privilege 3. sisterhood and empathy 4. female empowerment and Menstrual Pride*. To be clarified, all four themes are discourses systematically constructed through symbols including textual and visual elements, interacting with verbal features. These themes run through all three ads and appear simultaneously or crosswise in many scenes.

Before digging further into the relationship between language and reality, it is important to note that menstruation as a taboo concept in Chinese society can be seen in the alternative uses of the term “menstruation” by the focus group participants. These terms referring to menstruation include “the old aunt (大姨妈)” “that (那个)” which are explained in separate parentheses when they appear in quotes for readability.

5.2.1 The general attitudes of audience

Overall, the 15 members of the two focus groups showed considerable consistency in their attitudes toward the three videos. Respondents generally felt that the use of “Menstruation should not be hidden” as a selling point for brand communication was intended to differentiate Libresse from its competitors and gave some negative comments about this intention. However, at the same time, the brand's desire to present the de-stigmatization of menstruation as a central topic was recognized.

In terms of language use, respondents repeatedly used transitive words such as “but” and “better than” and “still good” when evaluating the content of the ads.

*“From my personal opinion, **Compared to** some other commercials that call menstruation 大姨妈 (great aunt), or even outright cover it up kind of ads. this ad is **still better**”*

Most participants seemed to hold a mixed attitude toward the discourses in the three videos. On the one side, they found the way the ads exploited menstruation for financial purposes to be problematic. But on the other side, they did not think the ads shown unsatisfactory or offensive. This is because “*it still evokes social attention of the de-stigmatization of women menstruation*”.

Of the four themes identified, “*sisterhood and empathy*” was the theme that received generally positive feedback from the panelists, while “*leadership and privilege*” specifies the reasons for most of the criticism of the ad. As for the scenes and elements related to the remaining two themes, their opinions seem to be more complex. In the process of clarifying their opinions and providing reasons for their interpretation, their discourse reveals the interaction between advertising and reality.

The ambivalence of respondents presenting a love-hate sentiment toward femvertising is consistent with findings in past studies (Åkestam et al., 2017; Sternadori & Abitbol, 2019; Hainneville et al., 2022). femvertising are largely affirmed by consumers because they believe these subjects will have a positive social impact, such as breaking gender stereotypes and confronting the plight of women (Åkestam et al., 2017; Teng et al., 2020). However, younger generations raised in a consumerist culture are more sensitive to commercial culture, realizing that brands are placing ads to make a profit and beginning to question the true motives of those ads (Hainneville et al., 2022).

5.2.2 Sisterhood and empathy

“Empathy” was a term that was frequently mentioned by the interviewees in both panel discussions. Appreciation for the “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign was concentrated on content

related to this one topic. This is concentrated in the depiction of different scenes of women's lives in the video.

*“It should be the scene of the girl in the gym... I kind of forget the details, but that scene made a deep impression on me. Because **many girls can just get their 大姨妈 (old aunt, period) very suddenly** in the gym, in the classroom, or in some important occasion. If (they) are surrounded by elders or If most of the people around are male, the situation will be more awkward. At this time if a friend lends a helping hand, **I think I would** be very grateful.”*

*“In the beginning of the third video presents some images such as covering the buttocks or secretly handing the sanitary napkin, I think this should be something **every adolescent girl will see or have experienced**. This makes me very **empathetic**.”*

In addition, some respondents indicated that although they themselves had not experienced severe discrimination or differential treatment because of menstruation, they agreed that the scenes shown on the videos were real in many places. Two interviewees talked about how someone they knew, who was a roommate and a neighbor, was ridiculed and even verbally abused when they had their first period. These events led them to believe that the ad was valuable in proposing the idea that people should de-stigmatize menstruation.

The impact of adopting celebrity endorsements is twofold. Some respondents perceived that hiring women as endorsers was successful because it made them feel more relatable. They refer to the phenomenon of feminine sanitary napkins endorsed by idolized male celebrities, which became popular in China a few years ago, and use it as a comparison, arguing that people of the same gender are certainly more persuasive in such events. In addition to her gender, the choice of this endorser has been further discussed by group members.

“I think it must have some reasons for them to choose Zhou Dongyu..... Just like once before Victoria's Secret also chose Zhou Dongyu, trying to argue that small

*breasts can also wear sexy lingerie... That was quite subversive. It seems that Zhou Dongyu was chosen because **she was brave enough to stand up and do something subversive.***”

Zhou Dongyu is not universally known as a Chinese beauty; she is skinny and has monolid eyes. In modern Chinese mainstream aesthetics, double eyelids are an important measure of a woman's beauty (Zhang, 2012). Double eyelid surgery is one of the most popular medical cosmetic surgery procedures in China (Hwang & Spiegel, 2014). And Zhou was in a sense perceived by the interviewees as a rebellion against the uniform aesthetic standard.

5.2.3 Leadership and voice of the privilege

In the discussion around the scenario of being associated with *Leadership and urban privilege*, many panelists mentioned the presence of endorser Zhou Dongyu in the latter two commercials. Because although she is completely absent from the No.1 video, the discussion about her recurred in both panels due to the amount of time she occupies in the latter two advertising videos.

As mentioned in the previous section, celebrity endorsement may also have a detrimental effect. Dissatisfaction with publicity through endorsements stems from the perception that female celebrities are different from other women in terms of social status. This way of presenting an ideal female image in advertising may be effective in the communication of certain product categories, such as cosmetics or anti-aging products (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Lin, 2007). But it is offensive in the case of menstruation, an event highly relevant to women's collective experience. One interviewee said that celebrity endorsement is like *"a kind of preaching"*. This idea also resonated with others in the group conversations.

*"I'm a celebrity and I'm telling you I'm not afraid', so **what am I supposed to do as an ordinary girl?**"*

*"I don't want to hear anything that comes from **so-called authority**. I would want to hear from people around me, people who are just like us. I think it might make me feel more equal."*

One interviewee commented on the celebrity's superiority complex:

“No matter how much she tells us that we don't have to be ashamed of our periods, she still looks like a decent person herself, wearing a fancy red suit, right? She seems to be reinforcing the impression that girls are supposed to be ‘goddess’..... But perhaps the first thing to accept is that every girl is different... Even if I don't decent, even if my menstrual blood leaks out, I can still be fine.”

A final point related to the theme of leadership is the Scandinavian identity that the brand emphasizes. Although in the chosen video ad Libresse only has one sentence mentioning that it is from Northern Europe, the fact that it is a foreign brand caught the attention of the respondents.

*“The point is we do needs to eliminate menstrual shame, because right now it's a situation where we still have it. So, it's needed to have a lot of real media, like this, to mention this issue. **But maybe not in such a deliberate way**, and I just realized this is a **Nordic brand** when I look at it, so maybe that's why it has such a strategy.”*

*“Because as soon as I saw it, I felt that **the brand wanted to improve its reputation in China**, that's why he wanted to promote the attitude thing to get a resonance with us girls.”*

In the second group discussion, a member noted that she had seen one international version of Libresse's ad released a few years ago and said she would prefer to forward the more direct and provocative international version to her friends rather than this Chinese edition that revolves around the issue of menstrual shame.

“That foreign video from the beginning there are constantly various injuries suffered by the girl, and then bleeding such footage. In fact, I know it is also a sanitary napkin advertising, but I will associate ... I feel that it wants to express this kind of bleeding is the same as, like people always said that ‘the injuries

*suffered by men are badges. You know, **why should I even be ashamed to bleed?** That (international version) ad will make me feel **a sense of empowerment** and I will share it with my friends. That sense of power on display would make me think it was a good ad. But I won't share with my friends an ad that talks about menstrual shame, I don't think it's helpful”*

5.2.4 Menstrual Shame & Menstrual Pride

As this portrayal of menstruation being hidden and the rebellion against such a status quo are two interrelated subjects. These two themes will be presented in an integrated manner in this section.

As the interviewees said in their affirmation of the campaign's theme, these young women believe that the shame of menstruation is a reality. It empathizes with them even if they are not the ones who experienced it, they can still easily relate to the stories of others. But they offered a different perspective on the current state of menstruation among Chinese women. They argue that the level of women's awareness of their rights and the sexual education young people receive in contemporary China is not as frustrating as it was in the past. The depiction of women's shyness in advertising is largely divorced from reality.

“I think the shyness to mention menstruation is the brand's arbitrary conjecture about Chinese women.”

Based on their own experiences and perceptions of the Chinese environment, they believe that some scenarios are over-interpreted by the brand.

*“We do have menstruation being hidden, but it might have to be looked at regionally because China's too big. I think these younger girls who live in first-tier cities use terms like 大姨妈 (old aunt) though. But they don't do it out of shame, **they just think the word great aunt is cuter**. They just want to use a cuter nickname to describe a menstruation. Because **the word “menstruation” is too***

formal, it's like when you talk to your doctor about period situation. But 大姨妈 (old aunt) sounds cuter and takes away a bit of that serious feeling.”

In addition to geographic developmental differences, women's attitudes toward menstruation are also related to the age stage they are at.

*“During my adolescence, the first time I went to buy sanitary napkins, I was terrified of being seen. It may be that over time, your period becomes regular and you **don't feel ashamed anymore.**”*

*“Not feeling shame about menstruation starts when, you recognize yourself as a woman. It's after I've had sexual experience and I've started to explore my body that **I don't feel that having period is a special thing.** Then you start to recognize yourself as a woman, and you feel that being a woman is nothing to be afraid of, nothing to worry about, you feel that it's very normal to have period, so **I don't struggle with menstruation anymore.**”*

The advertisement's depiction of how difficult it is for Chinese women during their menstruation is inconsistent with their perceptions of the current state of their lives.

*"If everyone is talking about it openly, I will also talk about it openly. If everyone is like that (not in discussion), **I don't have to make a special appearance.** I sat next to a man (in the office), but I don't purposefully try to hide when I need to take out my sanitary napkin. The most I can do is to take out the sanitary napkin and put it in my pocket to go to the toilet, rather than just holding it in my hand, **there is no need for it.** I mean... normally even if you want to take a packet of tissue to the toilet you will also put it in your pocket. This is what I thought.”*

Corresponding, the response to the theme of “*Female Empowerment and menstruation pride*” was ambivalent. They consider it as a positive move for an influential company to promote the destigmatization of menstruation, even if this theme serves for its brand communication campaign.

However, since respondents generally do not perceive the current state of all women in China to be as portrayed in the ads, explicit rebellion is not widely recognized.

Furthermore, the apparent commercial purpose of the campaign calls into question the authenticity of the idea of empowerment. Doubts arose around the ability of advertising as a form to act as a catalyst for change in the social environment. For some respondents, mentioning menstruation in public did not offend them, the visual elements used did not make them feel unattractive, and the narrative approach did not fail to make them feel untrustworthy. But whether the ideas presented in the commercials were "conducive" to promoting social development and equity, and whether they could contribute to the achievement of social justice in real life, raised their concerns. In other words, whether the feminist ideas in commercials have value beyond the commercial context is the focus of controversy.

*“I think it (the ad) makes sense to promote the idea that menstruation shouldn't be hidden, but **does it make any difference** after saying something meaningful like that?”*

*“Because I've always felt that eliminating the shame of menstruation, it's a small part in the middle of a longer process. It's not like I'm telling you today that you shouldn't be ashamed of your period, and you'll start not feeling ashamed tomorrow, and then people's views change. **It has to do with many other claims of female empowerment.**”*

*“The enlightenment of knowledge is just the enlightenment of knowledge, but **the change of mind and the enlightenment of knowledge are not the same thing at all.** You learned a piece of knowledge, but if your attitude doesn't change, you'll still be ashamed of the incident”*

In summary, respondents view the selected cases as conveying a positive socially meaningful perspective, and the idea that menstruation should not be hidden is favored because it reminds them of their own situation or that of other women. Whether the menstrual environment in China is deplorable to require people to protest with their actions, what the consequences of such protests

are, and whether the brand has as strong a leadership in such protests as it shows in its advertising were the focus of debate and criticism by the respondents.

5.2.5 The social reality embedded in communication between focus group participants

Focus group members focused their criticism of the content of the ads on three main perspectives. The first was to question the authenticity of Libresse's role and corporate proposition in the topic of women's empowerment, and the second was the connection between the current state of menstruation in China and the advertising scenario. The third reason was the discrepancy between the "menstrual shame" presented in the ads and their own experiences as Chinese women.

The respondents' negative evaluation of advertising and its meaning construction was manifested in several dimensions. The most frequently stated was the perception of and aversion to commercial elements in advertising. Some panelists indicated that, *"I think such slogans are too dogmatic," "there is a strong commercial purpose,"* and *"it's too commercial"*.

In defining what content and expression is "commercial", respondents addressed the exposure of brand products in advertising. Some respondents said that as an advertisement trying to market with *"its attitude"*, there were too many shots of the products shown in both three videos as if constantly reminding the audience to focus on the products the brand sells.

In the second group, members shared what they considered to be more successful women's empowerment commercials to compare with the case campaign. For example, the SKII-sponsored commercial titled *'Marriage Market Takeover'* revolves around the prevalent marriage market in China and the topic of unmarried women, discussing that women should have the right to decide whether to marry or not (Rapp, 2016). It has been resonating with a relatively larger number of interviewees because there are not a lot of merchandise-related scenes throughout the video. This repetitive display of commodities raises consumer suspicion, but the more critical issue is consumer distrust of the brand as an economically oriented entity.

"Because personally..... I don't think one single ad can make really drive social opinion, or change a social phenomenon, or stimulate discussion"

While expressing a partial rejection of the status quo of menstruation as represented in the advertisements, respondents present their feelings of powerlessness regarding the menstrual problems that remain in Chinese society. This sense of powerlessness about their own abilities was reflected in the respondents' descriptions of their menstrual experiences; for example, they acknowledged that menstruation being hidden inconvenienced them or other women, but they did not want to be the ones to challenge the stereotypes in their lives, especially in the workplace.

*“I think... It's not that I'm personally embarrassed to talk about it, it's just that I'm in a workplace where all the other women I work with are like that, including my bosses. When they came to me to borrow sanitary napkins, they just quietly walked up to me and asked if I had brought. So, **it was natural for me to follow the survival path of that occasion.**”*

*Because I don't want to be 出头鸟 (the bird out of the group would be shot first, Chinese colloquialism, meaning stand out among a group). To be honest, it has nothing to do with my personal life. I mean, if my friend thinks menstruation is something to be ashamed of, I might tell her ‘There’s no need to feel that way’. **But I don't have to do this at my workplace.**”*

When further discussing the topic of menstruation in the public sphere, such as advertisements and other media, or in the classroom. Respondents indicated that in their experience, menstruation was not hidden either.

*“Nowadays, when people think of menstruation, **I would consider it as a normal thing** like people need to go to the toilet or have other physiological needs. In biology class, the teacher will teach you about menstruation, and I think **that it should be a normal thing, not something to be avoided.**”*

*In daily life, **I don't think we need to emphasize it, but we don't need to avoid it, just treat it as a normal thing and that's should be enough.**”*

One of the interviewees, who is a currently college student, mentioned her experience with the “mutual aid sanitary napkin box” project on campus and said that it had received a lot of support.

Launched by a Hong Kong school around 2020, the sanitary napkin support program has received responses from many university students in China over the past two years (Yang, 2021). The program takes the form of placing a box full of sanitary napkins in women's restrooms to help women who suddenly get their periods but don't bring any with them (Yang, 2021). The campaign takes the form of taking one sanitary napkin when you are in need and placing one back later, calling for the elimination of the stigma of menstruation while providing convenience for women (Yang, 2021).

*"Maybe because our university is not very famous, it did not cause any controversy. And because we have a lot of young teachers in our university... they are really supportive of us, and they also have given us funds ... I have posted a WeChat moment at that time, and many male classmates in my class clicked 'like', it's just... **we are not avoiding that matter.**"*

Respondents' responses indirectly reflect the menstrual shame in Chinese society exists in more subtle power relations. For example, there was a fear that mentioning concerns about menstruation would make them "special girls who want to change the rules". The hidden of menstruation is not as obvious as it is presented in advertising scenarios. The problem with menstruation doesn't exist when people are afraid to say that 'I'm having my period today'. There is no embarrassment about pulling out a tampon in public, and women who are menstruating are not subjected to the ridicule of male colleagues in the workplace. Instead, a more direct movement to call for the destigmatization of menstruation is taking place in the lives of a younger generation of Chinese women. Urban Chinese women, represented by the focus group members, do not present a "pre-Libresse" state as advertisements showed, waiting for a brand or celebrity appeal and rescue them.

5.2.6 Conclusive findings for RQ.2

In the process of the brand's attempt to present its attitude towards menstruation to achieve resonance with the consumers, it is affirmed by the consumers to stand in the position and tone of the women to talk to the audience. The portrayal of ordinary women's lives was also recognized, and most of these scenes were appreciated by the focus group members and made them empathize.

However, respondents were explicitly critical when the ad attempted to present how menstruation is invisible and to rebel and change the status quo through their choice of brand. As well-educated young women living in large Chinese cities, they felt that the shame of menstruation presented in the ad did not align with the actual menstrual problems they were facing. The concealment of menstruation in the ads is limited to more obvious and straightforward aspects, such as the vulnerability, curiosity and shyness shown by women who are facing menstruation for the first time.

Furthermore, the message is apparently unsuccessful in portraying a female celebrity as a representative of breaking the shame of menstruation and thereby establishing the brand as a leader in changing the menstruation problem in China.

6. Discussion And Conclusion

At the final part of the thesis, some conclusions and final discussions can be formulated based on the findings of the study. Starting from the research purpose, this chapter identifies the contribution of this research to the use of commercial feminism within the field of strategic communication. The chapter is divided into three sections around the branding materials and domestic perspectives of the consumers provided in the empirical material.

By responding to the research questions, this chapter points out the importance of the diversity of women's experiences and regional cultures to *femvertising* research. Lastly, it concludes with reflections on the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

6.1. Orientalism overtones in representation of Chinese women

“Texts exist in contexts”, and the existence of intertextuality makes people’s creations widely affected by previous knowledge and social conventions (Said, 2003, p. 13). The cultural products created by human beings can hardly avoid the influence of their living environment, the creation of advertisements is no exception. In cross-cultural communication, Orientalism as a system of knowledge has hidden influences in products about the non-European world and in assumptions about its audience.

In this study, such influences are replicated and reproduced in the discourse about Chinese women. As a special Chinese edition commercial, the image of women presented in it and the way of thinking operating behind it is a direct reflection of Orientalism in the new historical period. According to Vukovich (2013, p.1), new Orientalism treats contemporary China as a source of “otherness” and does not see China as a heresy completely different from the West, but as a “generally equivalent” in the middle between absolute difference and absolute sameness. China is modernizing, but it has not yet become “us” (Vukovich, 2013, p.1).

Due to the need for modernization, Chinese women were included in marketing campaigns when capital transformed feminism and used its claims as marketing material. It is profitable to run an advertising campaign in China with the theme of breaking the menstrual taboo, as the “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign demonstrates, Chinese women have the same need to overcome menstrual taboos as women elsewhere. However, the emergence of the China Special Edition suggests that assumptions about the Chinese audience are different from those of the wider Western cultural sphere. In the original “*blood normal*” campaign, the display of sex and sexuality completely disappears in the China special edition, focusing instead on Chinese women who are afraid to take out their sanitary napkins in public. This can be interpreted as an attempt to show understanding and respect for the local culture in intercultural communication. But is this adaptation easier for local audiences to understand, as the brand believes, or does it instead become a testament to new Orientalism. This is where the perspective of the domestic Chinese audience needs to be brought in.

In modern society, the influence of Orientalism is perhaps no longer as obvious and perceptible as it was when Said (1979) conceptualized it two third century ago which can be summed up in terms such as "stereotypes". Globalization and the development of instant communication technologies have made the East less of a fantasy faraway place. But it is still the “other” that exists in assumptions. After the ‘reform and opening up’ policy, China begins to become civilized, modern, and liberal in the new Orientalist perspective. It seems less primitive, but still conservative. The Chinese can accept a partly modern opinion, but seem not all of it, and brands still require to be careful to view them as a different kind of people.

In the Chinese special edition commercials, the representation of taboos is constructed as menstrual shame, as an unmentionable thing in public places. The image of the Chinese woman is in a state of sexual education deficit, expecting to be protected by her father and respected by her male peers. They can be rescued by the choice of the brand. And this pioneer of change, after modifying the entire content of its promotional video to make its communication more ‘local’, has still implicitly identify itself as a Nordic company.

The presentations by the focus group members, who are representatives of the younger generation of female urban women, point to the problems in such an adaptation. They were keenly aware that the brand was perhaps speculating on the current state of menstruation in China, or more broadly, on the current state of Chinese women and their attitudes towards sex. Menstruation is not hidden in the urban areas of contemporary China in the form that the brand assumes. Chinese women's attitudes towards sexuality are not as conservative as the brand makes them out to be. The international version of the video did not offend any interviewees who had seen it, but rather, it was preferred by some interviewees because it was more straightforward and “empowering”.

This study suggests that the communication messages designed by the brand failed to align with the perceptions of their main audience. Furthermore, this redundant regional adaptation and portrayal of urban Chinese women reflects Vukovich's (2013) critique on the new Orientalism phenomenon that, exemplifies the “ultimate inferiority of local, Chinese reality” (p. 3).

6.2 Taboo as a new material for female empowerment discourse

According to Foucault's (1994) theory, body is a malleable site, compiled by social power through the gaze. The process of the ever-changing interpretation of the body contains within it the contestation of gender ideologies by different power agencies (Foucault, 1994). As reflected in this campaign, menstruation has transformed from a taboo to a vehicle for writing a discourse of women's empowerment. Asserting its opposition to the taboo, Libresse builds a new world around an optimistic rebellion against the "menstrual dilemma" through a carefully orchestrated combination of rhetorical and visual elements.

Contrary to earlier studies that suggested that feminine hygiene products are a purge of defilement, or a compensation for moral imperfection (Haven & Swenson, 1988; Merskin, 1999). This study identifies that a new commercialized discourse on taboos has emerged as a rebellion against old stereotypes, social conventions, and customs. Or conversely, taboos become new material for feminine empowerment advertising, emerging as a rebellion against ideas that oppress women.

Malefyt and McCabe (2016) noted such a shift in their study of menstrual product advertisements. The language of menstruation in advertising shifted from a “protection discourse” that portrayed

women as vulnerable to a “natural discourse” that emphasized the importance of a comfortable experience. They point out that advertising appropriates existing images from culture and associates them to implicit consumption opportunities (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016, p. 4). As a result, brand symbols take on a cultural meaning. The new advertising discourse is influenced by the awakening of female subjectivity and embodied experience, taking from feminist culture.

This study provides empirical material to confirm that this shift is also occurring in Asia, although, as stated in the previous section, it is based on a Western perspective. Further, this study suggests that a new change has occurred with the further integration of the “nature discourse” with the theme of female empowerment. The menstrual discourse in advertising in the new decade is reflected in the “Menstruation should not be hidden” campaign, which not only centers on menstruation as a normal part of the body’s routine, but also contains more rebellious connotations.

In the new discourse, menstruation is not a stigma that needs to be covered up, or even just a normal physiological phenomenon. Menstruation is something that women should be proud of and celebrate. The de-stigmatization of menstruation is therefore a form of resistance that reflects ‘feminist consciousness’. Although in the language controlled by the brand, this resistance is mild and interspersed with the re-emergence of a “protection discourse” -the scenario when male colleagues appear as rescuers in the workplace. However, this resistance takes up more space and is the centerpiece of the storyline. Although the activities of the international version were not within the scope of this study, female resistance has been an important theme in the conservatively modified Chinese version. Overall, the analysis of the empirical material further continues the exploration of the development of menstrual discourse in advertising by suggesting new and changing trends in menstrual advertising, which can be summarized as: *production discourse - natural discourse - resistance and empowerment discourse*.

6.3 A positive answer to realistic dilemmas

The theme of female empowerment combined with resistance in the name of taboo is seductive to consumers. New female empowerment advertisings are beginning to acknowledge that women are in certain predicaments and are committed to new interpretations and responses to those

predicaments. In the narrative of the chosen campaign, the status quo of menstruation being hidden can be improved through women's mutual support, with the brand acting as the leader of this resistance campaign. The ad begins by acknowledging the existence of these dilemmas by depicting the minutiae of women's daily lives. To appeal to the female demographic, the brand presents this pain in an exaggerated performance. By personifying the brand, it becomes a part of the female group. According to the analysis of two focus groups, this approach was recognized by some female consumers. They believe that the video series is leading people to view women's daily lives from a female perspective. In particular, their comments on the latter two ads reflected a positive assessment of the ads' depiction of ordinary people's lives.

Analysis of the empirical data shows that the younger generation of Chinese women have a more pronounced perception of the purpose of using the concept of advertising to serve brand marketing. Living in promotional culture, consumers are more sensitive to the language of capitalism, while at the same time, they show tolerance for commercial purposes in the media. Although they are aware of the potential inauthenticity and unethical nature of using menstrual dilemmas in brand promotions, this is not enough for them to criticize brands' use of feminist concepts. In their view, the inclusion of female empowerment in advertising discourse about menstruation is, overall, a positive move for capitalism.

For example, while there is an aversion to celebrity preaching and a belief that hiring a female celebrity to show resistance to the stigma of menstruation is alienating, Zhou still received some praise for her gender, and for her non-mainstream beauty looks. Respondents' perspectives focused on the fact that their femininity and their empathy for other women's life situations made the series of ads acceptable to them as a whole, even if they were accompanied by some sort of commercial purpose.

This can be explained as a successful alignment between the brand and its stakeholders (Volk & Zerfass, 2018). It is achieved through the strategic communication practitioner's proper perception of the social environment (Volk & Zerfass, 2018). As Bloor and Bloor (2007) conclude, discourse should be considered as a system of signs, but it is not a straightforward system. In femervising practices, despite the intention of brands to adapt feminism concepts commercially through

creative approaches, ostensibly appearing to support the feminist movement or speak as feminists. Motivationally, it has always been aimed at contributing to brand image building and increasing sales. Even when brands refine and appropriate feminist political claims with deceptively drastic means such as replacing blue liquid with red ones-it has remained a persuasive and oriented communication activity.

The use of pronouns has succeeded in creating a collective understanding of the objective “menstruation”, and the female audience perceives a “mutual knowledge” - a stigma of menstruation exists in society (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). In their book, Bloor and Boor (2007) distinguish among the categories of mutual knowledge and point out that the formation of mutual knowledge is a process that contributes to the constitution of collective ideology, which entails issues of identity and power. In this case, advertisers use such terms to assume that the audience shares their opinions. Through this, people’s views and attitudes towards a specific event are guided in a direction that is favorable to the brand.

In the analysis of the linguistic pieces, it is clear that the language used in the three Libresse videos is consistent, which is optimistic and light-hearted. Although the campaign attempts to present women’s menstrual experience as a common suffering, the narrator, both the anonymous woman in No. 1 and Zhou Dongyu in the No.2 and No.3, the spokesperson in the next two commercials, do not see menstruation and its metaphorical injustice to women in the social system as an insurmountable problem. Rather, they see it as a conquerable difficulty that can be encountered on the way to growth.

Lastly, the study exposes that the menstrual dilemma exists in a more subtle and underhanded way in the contemporary Chinese context, rather than the way it is presented in advertising, existing as something to be embarrassed about or openly ridiculed. The dilemma of menstruation exists in the cultural interpretation of the female body as different from the male body. On the surface, it has become possible to discuss menstruation openly, but in scenarios of self-interest, such as the workplace, women actively avoid the fact that they have menstruation and keep silence by accepting the social norms that exist as a private matter. This avoidance and self-gagging due to biological differences are beyond the reach of femvertising.

In the context of the chosen advertisements, this event is the discriminatory and hardship-filled state of Chinese women due to menstruation. The brand portrays a situation of widespread dissatisfaction with the secretive state of menstruation and attempts to call the audience to question this status quo with it (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). After raising questions, the brand appears in this story as a rescuer. It offers a solution to this social problem, with its product and what it identifies as a 'Libresse attitude'. With Libresse, menstruation can be transformed from an abomination to a joyful celebration. In fact, however, the panelists declared on more than one occasion that they did not personally feel that they were facing a serious menstrual dilemma. Some respondents indicated that they had received a relatively well-instructed menstrual education during their formative years. They admit that menstruation can still be seen as a taboo in China, but the situation is nowhere near as worse as it is presented in the ads. And solving the one problem of menstruation does not mean that all women's rights issues are solved.

6.4 Conclusion

An awareness of the main concepts of feminism is necessary when analyzing the discourse of building female empowerment. Guided by critical theory, it is not intended to point the way to a better commercial use of feminist ideas, but to draw ethical attention to brand communication in order to clarify the appropriation of political issues by feminist empowerment advertising.

The act of creating an iconic image of superiority over other women is inherently anti-feminist. The problem that arises is that it separates a segment of women from the female community. In commodity feminism, the most obvious expulsion lies in the fact that women who choose specific commodities are distinguished from those who do not through the act of consumption. Whereas, in the cross-cultural adaptation version questioned by this study, the assumption of separating Chinese women as the more conservative and bashful segment of the female group involves the logic of whiteness-centrism in Orientalism.

The collective, cultural issue of menstruation offers the possibility of exposing the feminist backlash that exists for both behaviors. Women suffer injustice and devaluation because of their

collective identity, but the situation they face is different. Discussing gender injustice in an entertaining way and using a uniform standard to explain the plight of women in different cultures is problematic. In female empowerment advertising, even taboo concepts rooted in cultural interpretations like menstruation can be eliminated through consumption and optimistic active resistance. And when it comes to non-European women, as Hooks (1986) put it nearly forty years ago, “Divisions will not be eliminated by wishful thinking or romantic reverie about common oppression” (p.127).

6.5 Limitation and further research

This study takes a discursive and cultural approach to explore the construction of meaning in a female empowerment advertisement and its comprehensive intersection with the reality. Due to the varying role of menstruation as a taboo concept in different cultures, the findings of this study focus on mainland China. Future research could conduct a comparative study of the brand’s strategies and attitudes of audiences across cultures to provide a cross-culture angle of the social interactions of female empowerment discourse. For example, a comparison of regional adaptations of ads used by different brands in the same category in specific countries

As the study indicated, most of the current studies related to the trend of menstruation presentation in advertisements are based on samples from European and American markets, and there are still fewer studies related to other regions of the world where there are no laws prohibiting the appearance of sanitary napkin advertisements. The role of taboos in introducing regional cultures cannot be underestimated. In particular, the regional perspective that locals can contribute. The voice of the audience offers current cultural information for international exchange on the one hand, and helps to undermine biases due to the researchers on the other.

Lastly, Orientalism is an important theme in cross-cultural studies. The influence of Orientalism is not limited to the traditional sense between East and West countries. The phenomena of internal Orientalism and reverse Orientalism also require the attention of researchers (Hill, 2000; Schein, 1997). The interviewees in this study were positioned in first-tier cities, a focus on rural areas is a

potential direction for the further development, since the focus group participants made some assumptions about the situation in non-urban areas.

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Appendix

1. Links of the commercials

| No. | Date | Title of the advertising | Link |
|-----|------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 16/10/2019 | 400 times: A new chapter | https://m.weibo.cn/3080404093/4742149620630013 |
| 2 | 18/5/2020 | Menstruation not hidden | https://m.weibo.cn/status/4505888754795716 |
| 3 | 1/3/2022 | Do menstruation need to be hidden? | https://m.weibo.cn/status/4428110197931208 |

2. Poster for focus group recruitment

Focus group 招募
广告中的月经叙事

研究背景

Hello, 这里是阿 W，我在观念传播学、研究传播和媒体的知识影响相关，因为公众号文章的形式来帮助你表达这些观念传播。

如果你对媒体中出现的“月经”现象有一些想法或分享，欢迎和我联系，我想做一个和广告中月经叙事相关的分享，希望能听到更多来自女性性的声音。

这个讨论不需要你有任何背景支持，或论文，只是你真实的想法（你可以认为各种原因不来月经）都欢迎加入我的讨论。

受访者要求

- 性别性别为女性
- 20-30岁
- 能够在北上广深
- 愿意参与视频采访或进行一场线上的有关卫生巾广告影响的讨论
- 小段视频（看researcher和5-10分钟的视频或音频）
- 讨论内容不需要保密，但请尊重参与者的研究，受访者可以选择不参加，提供知情权
- 访谈费用将以现金法提供，同时提供（如果是你的话）费用可以就详谈和讨论！

我的联系方式

联系我

WeChat: zheng524
Email: zhuyue2020@gmail.com

3. Informed Consent Form (Template)

Informed Consent Form (Be Proud of Your Menstruation!

A case study of commodity feminist discourse in mainland China)

This consent form is part of the process required for ethical treatment of participants in research. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about the research process or procedures, please ask.

Invitation to Participate

I'm researching the perceptions of young female consumers in first-tier Chinese cities about menstrual narratives in advertising.

This research is conducted by Yiyun Zhu for her master thesis at Lund University.

Research Purpose

This paper looks at “how does the brand strategically use female empowering discourse to construct new meanings of menstruation for a regional market, and the socio-cultural factors involved”

Research Method

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to participate in a semi-structured focus group interview. For example, you will be asked: Do you have any particularly memorable clips from the ads shown? What did you like or dislike about the clips and why? How do you interpret the presentation of menstruation in these three ads?

Your answers will be reported together with data from other research participants.

Benefit

By participating, you will contribute to a better understanding of why other people might influence your attitude towards certain brands.

Confidentiality - Anonymity - Security

If you decide to participate, your identity as a participant in this study, and any other personal information gathered about you during the study, will be kept strictly confidential and will never be made public. All data containing personal information from which you could be identified will be deleted after the data analysis. Electronic data will be password protected. When the study is completed, all data containing personal information will be destroyed. The published results of the study will contain only data from which no individual participant can be identified.

Voluntary participation

You are being asked to make a voluntary decision whether or not to participate in this study. If there is any part of the information that is not clear, please feel free to ask for clarifications. If you would like to consult with someone not associated with this study that will be all right, too. If you decide not to participate, or if you later decide to discontinue your participation, your decision will not affect your present or future relations with the researchers or Lund University. Upon request, a copy of the information, data, and results will be made available to you. You will always be free to discontinue participation at any time, and all data collected up to that time as a result of your partial participation will be destroyed without being used in the study. If you decide to participate, please provide your signature as indicated below.

What Your Signature Means

Your signature on this Consent Form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in this research project and agree to participate as a participant. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any consequences. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant:

Investigator : Yiyun Zhu

Contact Information: yi1283zh-s@student.lu.se