#TABOOMATTERS

An Empowering Strategy in Feminine Hygiene Advertising

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ABSTRACT

The representation of blood in advertisements for feminine hygiene products has long been considered a taboo. Recently, ads have changed to reflect a more realistic experience around women and their bodies. However, relatively little attention has been given to the newest portrayal of female hygiene taboos in advertising. While some studies suggest feminine hygiene can touch upon taboos within a female empowerment discourse, prior studies have offered insights into how these advertisements promote an ideal femininity. Theoretically, this starts from two approaches that have located taboo, which consist of Douglas' ideas of purity and pollution and Habermas' notions of public and private spheres. Here, advertising has privatised taboo in the public sphere. Yet, there are few studies on how the recent feminine hygiene advertising makes use of taboo subjects to promote their products considering the attached social stigma. Therefore, this study explores how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos. Because a cultural shift in society that concerns the empowerment of women has resulted in feminist marketing, this study examines how taboo is represented and related to femininity in feminine hygiene advertising through digital media. For this purpose, a multimodal critical discourse analysis is conducted on ten feminine hygiene campaigns collected online, while also considering visual aspects. Based on the concepts of purity-pollution and public-private, that remain at the core of the feminine hygiene field, this study finds three discursive strategies by which taboo is marketed in today's society: taboo within the community; resisting taboo; and body re-appropriation. Through the expression of values of solidarity, defiance and health engagement, the taboo is advertised as meaningful and inherent to the female body. Specifically, the findings suggest that an integration of taboo into a discourse of public concern enables a niche of belief-driven consumers to strengthen their interest in the realistic portrayal of women's topics. With this, advertising makes use of taboo topics within feminine hygiene to support social change concerning the visibility of women in public. As such, this genre of feminine hygiene advertising stands out from previous advertising through a sense of activism towards restrictive ideals of femininity. This study concludes that advertising exploits taboo as a new female empowerment discourse.

KEYWORDS: *Taboo, Feminine Hygiene, Advertising, Brand Communication, Female Empowerment.*

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1. Introduction

In 2017, sanitary protection brand Libresse delivered #BloodNormal, a worldwide campaign that featured menstrual blood in the brand's advertisement video including the slogan 'Periods are normal. Showing them should be too'. This depiction of menstrual blood in Libresse's advertising campaign has been labelled as transgressive by the media since feminine product advertising has long been restricted by taboos (Jardine, 2017). However, with the surge in controversy, taboos have gained increasing popularity in advertising as other feminine hygiene brands have also directly alluded to topics such as menstruation, body hair and female genitalia. Thus, the topic of this research revolves around the inclusion of taboos in the advertising of feminine care brands.

Taboos are highly present in both society and public discussion, especially in times when advertising for well-known brands has triggered considerable controversy in the media (Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2004; Sabri, 2012). In advertising, sanitary products in feminine hygiene are considered a particularly controversial segment. Marketing and communication scholars have identified various dominant discourses of feminine hygiene in 20th-century advertising, which negatively framed personal hygiene topics (Kane, 1990; Mandziuk, 2010; Park, 1966). Thus, subjects such as menstruation are still among the most stigmatized social taboos because they have been associated with the strong negative characteristics of dirtiness (Freitas, 2008; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016; Thomas, 2016). This association of body functions with impurities has resulted in advertising that has made use of a blue liquid for the representation of menstrual blood, euphemistic images depicting women skydiving while wearing white jeans, and narratives highly paired with humour. Still at the beginning of the 21st century, taboo themes featured in advertising were mostly concerned with sex and death, while tampons and vaginal hygiene care were considered offensive taboo topics that should not be explicitly talked about in public (Sabri, Manceau, & Pras, 2010). Hence, advertising has fostered an image that women are in need of protection from personal hygiene taboos (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016).

According to Malefyt and McCabe (2016), in the past decade women have started to perceive personal hygiene topics in an alternative way in which they have the ability to effectively deal with such topics. For instance, the taboo of menstruation has been regarded as a natural physical and emotional change (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Therefore, women do not feel represented in traditional feminine hygiene advertisements, causing a lack of authenticity in advertising messages (Freitas, 2008). Furthermore, open discussions around issues have transpired, such as the natural ingredients of feminine hygiene consumer products and the regulation of the tampon tax. Of particular relevance to the context of this study is an increase in social movements concerned with women rights advocacy, such as

#MeToo and the Women's March (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). This development has produced a discourse of female empowerment in advertising, which includes the themes of questioning stereotypical gender roles and encouraging body positivity (Drake, 2017).

More recently, the concept of brand activism has gained popularity, by which brands position their social and political views on such issues (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Scholars suggest that representations of diversity and awareness of social issues in advertising have a significant appeal to consumers (Khamis, 2020; Walter, 2018). Additionally, studies have confirmed the importance of brands taking a stance on social issues to individuals (Sprout Social, 2020). As the 2018 Earned Brand study by Edelman suggests that two-thirds of consumers worldwide are belief-driven (Edelman, 2018), consumers who share the same attitude towards issues and causes are especially targeted. In response, brands have been changing their advertising efforts to a more diverse depiction of women in recent years, and they have attempted to be effective and proactive agents of change around issues that matter to their customers (Khamis, 2020). For this purpose, digital platforms play a particularly important role in the brand's positioning on societal issues, as they can enable rapid support from consumers (Edelman, 2018; Khamis, 2020). Thus, despite also being at risk of receiving visible backlash, an increasing number of brands are voicing societal and political views due to shifting consumer behaviours.

Feminine hygiene advertising has gradually used subjects related to women and their bodies, which are generally considered taboo in advertising, thereby creating a new genre of feminine hygiene communication. It primarily concerns the advertising through digital media content, which explicitly integrates intimate feminine hygiene themes into the brand's storylines. In addition, the advertisements aim to celebrate the female body and elevate personal experiences rather than displaying shame over these issues (Pasquarelli, 2018). Furthermore, a *Forbes* article has emphasized the incorporation of taboo topics in women's health messages as having the potential to help brands to connect with their audiences (2020). This premise is based on the notion that these topics provide meaningful real and raw conversations (Acton, 2017).

Nevertheless, little empirical research has examined the newest portrayal of female hygiene taboos in the past years and connected these hygiene taboos to messaging concerned with the representation of women. Prior studies focused on traditional advertising for feminine hygiene have offered insights into how these advertisements promote an ideal femininity by indirectly conveying female identities with the ideas of modern women's ability to control taboos (Kane, 1990; Klapisch, 1995). More recently, Champlin, Sterbenk, Windels, and Poteet (2019) have indicated how feminine hygiene advertising can touch upon taboos within a female empowerment discourse, addressing issues that have been stigmatized and where social views and boundaries have restricted representation in the past. In this context,

Drake (2017) emphasizes the need for future research to explore the empowerment of women in the advertising of varying industries. As such, feminine hygiene advertising's newest portrayal of personal hygiene taboos and their relation to subjects around women and their bodies offers such a space to be further explored.

1.1. Aim and research questions

Advertising that employs female hygiene taboos as a central theme has often been discussed in the media. However, research is scant regarding the manner by which feminine hygiene brands use taboo subjects to promote their products considering the prevailing social stigma attached to female hygiene. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore this new phenomenon of female hygiene taboos in advertising for how feminine hygiene brands rely on taboo narratives to gain popularity among women. More specifically, the purpose of this research is to examine how feminine hygiene brands leverage personal hygiene taboos in their digital advertising campaigns. Of particular importance for this study is a consumer demand for an authentic cultural value of brands (Khamis, 2020).

According to Holt, brands have several practices that seek to generate cultural relevance (2016). At this moment, the focus lies on examining the product from what it means in consumers' lives to advertise it (Holt & Cameron, 2010). Brands can foster innovative ideologies, transcending category conceptions and capable of propelling amplified subcultures to embrace new ideologies and practices (Holt, 2016). Instead of being solely focused on product benefits, these newer forms of advertising create valuable content that resonates with customers' beliefs (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Van Loggerenberg, Enslin, & Terblanche-Smit, 2019). Considering changes in societal perceptions and attitudes can alter the way people perceive norms and values and remove the taboos inherent in some services or products (Brennan & Jaworski, 2015), the current study seeks to explore how feminine hygiene advertisements employ taboo in their brand communication efforts.

Therefore, in view of a cultural shift in society concerned with the empowerment of women and feminist advertising as part of brand activism, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(Research question) How does advertising exploit feminine hygiene taboos in a cultural feminist era?

(Sub-question) How is taboo represented and related to femininity in feminine hygiene advertising in digital media?

The precise clarification of what female hygiene taboos mean in advertising is necessary. Taboo in advertising has been defined as products or terms that are banned by culture, and the promotion of which may cause offence due to the transgression of cultural norms (Sabri, 2012). Sabri categorizes feminine hygiene products as specifically constituting conversational taboos (2012). Thus, these taboos include subjects that have a conversational restricted status, such as menstruation (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016), body hair (Smelik, 2015) and female genitalia (Kane, 1990). Furthermore, the term cultural feminist is used in the present research to refer in broad terms to the changed cultural climate concerning women in the West, which has subsequently produced an approach to branding and advertisig that reflects the celebration of qualities associated with femininity. Hereby, cultural feminist pertains to the inclusion of feminist ideas in advertising, which uses what is termed as 'postfeminist' notions to refer to feminine attributes (Gill, 2008). In addition, due to the developments in digital technologies that have compelled advertisers to revise their engagement with female consumers and their representation of women (Gill, 2008), the focus of the current study concerns advertising on digital platforms.

Considering the aforementioned factors, this study explores how the taboo topics of female hygiene are represented in advertisements, specifically in relation to femininity, with the main goal of discovering how advertising exploits these topics within the cultural shifts towards female empowerment. The expectations of this study lie in the fact that this new genre of feminine hygiene advertising promotes taboo to pursue brand activism in support of women's issues in society in contrast to traditional feminine care advertising, and as part of an empowering strategy in advertising. Furthermore, this study assumes that advertising exploits taboo concerning feminine hygiene as a cultural strategy through the promotion of products that are associated with meanings in the interest of consumer identities. Thus, this research argues that taboo emerges as a new form of female empowerment discourse in advertising, which differentiates the brand from other advertising messages towards women.

1.2. Synopsis of the research method
The research method selected for this study consists of a critical discourse analysis that includes visual social semiotics as part of a multimodal approach. The analysis combines Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis with Reisigl and Wodak's discourse historical approach (2001) and Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996). The multimodal dataset of 10 feminine hygiene campaigns collected online is chosen for an analysis on how discursive strategies including visual elements function together to construct meanings around taboo. These are then interpreted both for the development and repositioning of meanings that are traditionally taboo subjects of personal hygiene and in

relation to femininity to investigate how the identified meanings in the advertisements apply to postfeminist notions, and consequently attempt to answer how advertising exploits taboos through the main findings.

1.3. Relevance

Advertising that exploits taboos has become a more common practice (Freitas, 2008; Vézina & Paul, 1997). Academically, however, studies addressing the proliferation of taboo subjects in advertising are generally lacking (Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, & Cherrier, 2016). In the context of the current research, very few studies have focused on the marketing or communication of taboo products (Sabri, 2012). Research has been mainly concerned with the distinction between provocative advertising and controversial products, with provocative advertising viewed as trying to attract attention by shocking consumers (Vézina & Paul, 1997); meanwhile, some products are inherently controversial, with female hygiene products falling into this category (Freitas, 2008). The academic research on controversial advertising that specifically addresses taboo topics has thus far consisted of quantitative studies that primarily analyse whether advertising for sensitive products shocks or offends consumers (Sabri, 2012). The present study therefore aims to contribute to this field of research by examining the taboo subjects of female personal hygiene in advertising for how they are exploited in the communication efforts of brands, which has not yet been addressed in academic research.

Social relevance

Sabri (2012) emphasizes that taboo in advertising plays an important role in society because of its impact on consumer consumption. Research has primarily highlighted the societal and moral threat of taboo in terms of dirtiness (Sabri, 2012). However, Michelson and Miller (2019) argue that taboos can be turned into goods, as their transgression can result in the adoption of new morals (Gollnhofer, 2015). Nevertheless, Gurrieri et al. (2016) note that the cultural and social effects of controversial advertising have been insufficiently considered. Therefore, as brands are encouraged to engage in cultural conversations oriented towards more niche and even controversial consumer groups (Khamis, 2020), the current research is expected to contribute to an understanding of how this type of advertising attributes new meanings to feminine hygiene taboos.

Practical relevance

Although taboo subjects have become popular in advertising, especially in the advertising of feminine hygiene, resistance to the use of taboos in brand communication is

still considerable. For example, taboos are still regarded as problematic for advertisers due to censorship in the mainstream media (Walter, 2018) and their close relationship to gender portrayals (Zayer & Coleman, 2014). Innovative feminine hygiene brands have disrupted the feminine health care market (Frost & Sullivan, 2018) and include taboo topics in their advertising; hence, taboos are presumably an effective tool for brand communication efforts. The results of this study provide new insights for marketers and advertisers into how they can creatively promote their products through female hygiene taboos as a means of differentiation, especially for marketers and advertisers that are creating new products in the feminine hygiene industry or are willing to re-market the way they have promoted sanitary products in the past.

1.4. Overview of the thesis structure

The first chapter of this thesis aimed to introduce the rationale for the study, which is the newest portrayal of taboo subjects in recent feminine hygiene advertising. Furthermore, it has contextualized the taboo with the communication efforts of women's care brands and the stigma surrounding feminine hygiene still existent in Western society.

The second chapter consists of a review of the existing literature within the feminist and cultural approaches to branding and advertising as well as on the concept of taboo, its role in society and prior usage as a communication strategy in advertising. In addition, the chapter includes the conceptual framework adopted in the empirical analysis. The concepts of purity and pollution as well as the public and private spheres are essential to construct the taboo and on which premises traditional feminine hygiene advertising has promoted their products.

The third chapter presents the method of critical discourse analysis following a multimodal approach selected for this study and explains how the analysis is conducted on 10 feminine hygiene advertising campaigns. The fourth chapter consists of the results of the analysis, in which three discursive strategies on taboo are exemplified and interpreted.

Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the main findings from the analysis for how the recent feminine hygiene advertising exploits taboo considering traditional feminine hygiene advertising and the female empowerment discourse. In addition, this thesis considers the theoretical implications of the research and suggests directions for future studies.

2. Theoretical literature and conceptual framework

Chapter overview

The relevant literature in this study is based on an interdisciplinary marketing approach focused on a moral consumption perspective. As the existing literature is extensive and cross-disciplinary, the theoretical perspectives and empirical research primarily stem from the media and communication field with a particular focus on marketing and advertising. Three main areas are considered: the theories on cultural brand strategies, a theoretical foundation of the concepts of taboo for its role in society, and studies on the advertising of traditional feminine hygiene.

The first section of the theoretical framework presents the literature from the field of marketing, which demonstrates how feminist ideas have been integrated as a strategy in brands' communication efforts and sheds light on the discussion of the female gender, specifically in relation to the female empowerment discourse, as a central theme in advertising in recent years. The second section consists of the conceptual framework for this study, whereby anthropological studies provide insight into the theoretical foundation of taboo and its role in society. Furthermore, the critical feminist literature highlights how the cultural perception of taboo has specific implications for its visibility in the public sphere and contributes to specific subtexts of taboos in advertising. These theories that elaborate on the advertising studies of feminine hygiene provide an insight into the specific way that female hygiene taboos have been associated with certain ideologies such as cleanliness based on notions of purity, pollution, public and private.

2.1. Literature review on a cultural-feminist approach to branding and advertising

Consideration for feminism as an approach embedded in brand communication efforts is necessary in the context of this research. This section provides an overview of the literature on the appropriation of feminist notions in the communication strategy of brands, more specifically in the context of cultural branding, brand activism and advertising. First, the literature on feminism as a resource for cultural branding is presented, followed by the literature that discusses the focus on women's social issues as a strategy of brand activism, and finally, advertising studies centring on a female empowerment discourse that differs from the traditional gender role stereotypes in advertising.

Feminism in marketing

Western brands have become the most important commercial means of marketing cultural expression (Holt, 2012). Holt's cultural branding strategy stresses the pivotal role of cultural expressions in creating value within consumer markets (2012). Hereby, cultural branding as a strategy uses emerging cultural opportunities in society for supporting updated ideologies and overcoming barriers to create a more intimate relationship with consumers

(Holt, 2016). Holt (2012) defines these cultural expressions as consisting of ideology, myth and cultural codes. This involves the use of myths to convey the ideologies that deeply shape the actions and values of individuals in their daily lives, supported by historically rooted cultural codes. Thus, research has revealed how brands become icons by aligning with the cultural possibilities that arise in society.

Considering the preceding points, feminist messaging has been incorporated in the marketing of brands. Goldman, Heath and Smith (1991) describe commodity feminism as the tendency to commercialize feminism as a way to achieve marketing goals. However, Holt argues that consumers seek brands that directly contribute to their identities (Holt, 2016). As a result, individuals can construct and negotiate the identity of the individual self and build emotional relationships with brands through the social and cultural meanings associated with them (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The former may therefore be the case when feminist ideologies are attached to products in the consumer market. However, Zeisler (2017) criticizes this trend insofar as it exploits a social concern of feminist politics in consumer culture.

Additionally, emphasis has been placed on cultural strategies that exploit cultural disruptions (Holt & Cameron, 2010). This refers to how brands can gain cultural significance by recognizing tendencies or underlying struggles that create new cultural patterns before reaching mainstream positions (McCracken, 2005). As has been the case alongside the societal advancement of feminism movements, societal changes can generate a potential demand for new cultural expressions, as social shifts open up new ideological possibilities. Cultural strategy in branding thus promotes barrier-breaking ideologies to connect more deeply with consumers (Holt, 2016). In particular, the rise of social media has enabled brands to create content that challenges cultural conventions and reaches subcultural groups (Holt, 2016). Marketing consequently engages in contradictions that exist in society. Furthermore, next to how meanings can be transferred through a brand product to consumers via advertising (McCracken, 2005), brand activism is of increasing value to consumers (Shetty, Venkataramaiah, & Anand, 2019).

Women's rights as social brand activism

Research has highlighted the popularity of brand activism as a business practice especially in recent years. Brands include social debates or special causes to promote their products (Knight, 2010), as they are in a position to define cultural practices and societal norms (Schroeder, 2009). In addition, a shift in the values of younger generations has occurred, as members of these generations expect a new attitude from brands with regard to global problems (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Therefore, brands engage with issues to demonstrate their concern for existing and emerging societal problems (Craddock, Boichuk, Cian, & Parmar, 2018; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Social brand activism refers to the inclusion of

issues such as gender and equality, LGBT, ethnicity and age, as well as community concerns (Craddock et al., 2018).

Studies suggest that female empowerment messages in advertising are a primary practice of brand activism (Champlin et al. 2019). Thus, issues related to women's rights such as gender equality have remained present in brand activism over the years (Zeisler, 2017). As brand advocacy for women's empowerment consists in part of a tactic of product marketing, brands are expected to treat social issues in their communications with caution because these messages derive from social movements (Shetty et al., 2019). To avoid criticism for a poor sense of authenticity as the underlying intention is to generate sales (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019), brand activism attempts to use honest and credible language that is different from traditional advertising (Knight, 2010).

Knight (2010) argues that activist branding has also often been associated with controversial meanings. Although Thompson and Haytko (1997) indicate that advertisers as intermediaries are surrounded by various institutions such as the interest of stakeholders, advertisers can also counter ingrained cultural meanings (Knight, 2010). Thus, advertisers are, for instance, informed by their own ideas on femininity, and their perceptions can modify the identities of consumers and their associations with the female body (Leiss, Kline, Jhally, Asquith, & Boterrill, 2018). Hence, since marketers look to achieve a deeper connection between the brand and consumers, brand activism efforts are usually considered as promoting values that attain to a progressive society (Shetty et al., 2019).

Female empowerment discourse in advertising

In recent years, the use of a female empowerment discourse in advertising has been embedded as a form of strategic advertising known as 'femvertising' (Åkestam, Rosengren, & Dahlen, 2017; Drake, 2017). Femvertising campaigns aim to challenge established gender stereotypes that have been commonly used in advertising with the aim of ending societal stigma (Åkestam et al., 2017). To this end, Drake's (2017) study suggests that femvertising uses a strategy of emotion to reach women who are particularly dependent on such messages. In addition, Banet-Weiser (2018) concludes that the use of a female empowerment discourse allows brands to differentiate their products by urging women to feel encouraged to enhance their self-confidence, thereby addressing general issues such as body positivity and self-love (Banet-Weiser, 2018), as well as common traits of inclusivity (Hsu, 2018).

Research focusing on a female empowerment discourse in advertising has mainly relied on the analysis of postfeminist notions, as it attempts to convey that women should empower themselves through their individual choices and consumption practices (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Gill, 2008). From a study of media texts, Gill (2007) identifies related themes

that apply to postfeminism, including ideas of individualism, subjectivation, freedom of choice, control over one's own body and sexual differences. Accordingly, studies on femvertising have found commonalities such as minimizing the objectification of the female body, depicting realistic representations of women and redefining masculinity and femininity (Becker-Herby, 2016). Similarly, Champlin et al. (2019) find the discourse of female empowerment in advertising to focus on overcoming traditional gender stereotypes, raising issues of body image and addressing concerns about talking less negatively about one's own self.

In the context of this research, a study by Champlin et al. (2019) found that advertising for feminine hygiene also includes female empowerment messages, such as an ad for Always, which tackles the reality of being a girl and trust issues in society, and an ad that addresses the case of girls receiving their period for the first time. However, Champlin et al. (2019) note that although this type of advertising touches on initiating conversations regarding gender equality and female hygiene taboos, it does not convey these issues as a subject of public and everyday conversation. These advertisements consequently simplify a complex matter of female empowerment instead of communicating more direct messages about the realization of changes in society. Thus, with consumers' increasing demand for authenticity, the effectiveness of the female empowerment discourse in advertising depends on how the brand treats the social issue (Champlin et al., 2019).

In summary, the literature suggests that the trend towards women's empowerment in society has encouraged brands to use this cultural change to differentiate themselves and reach female consumers in meaningful ways through the marketing of their products and brand activism practices with feminist notions. Furthermore, the emergence of women's empowerment as a trend in advertising aims to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and notions of femininity in society. In this respect, a female empowerment discourse has led to women being encouraged to take an interest in issues related to their bodies as well as private hygiene concerns.

This study aims to investigate how advertising exploits the controversial issue of taboo in light of the recent phenomenon in advertising. Therefore, it is necessary to examine advertising messages considering advertisers attribute new meanings to their products and based on the female empowerment discourse as a resource for negotiating ideologies in society.

2.2. Conceptual framework of taboo in advertising

This section presents the theoretical foundation on the concept of taboo through its role in society and consumer culture. An overview of the use of taboo as a strategy in advertising is thus briefly presented. This chapter also provides the theoretical concepts of

purity and pollution as well as public and private spheres to understand the premises on which feminine hygiene advertising has mediated personal hygiene taboos. In addition, a dominant discourse of cleanliness in traditional feminine hygiene advertising, with a particular focus on menstruation, is exemplified for the reappearance of the theoretical concepts that construct taboos.

Taboos are defined as cultural developments that are deeply ingrained in history (Larsen, Patterson, Sabri, & Walther, 2018). Taboo, which refers to a topic or activity that is omitted for social or religious reasons, restricts people's possibilities of both acquiring particular items and services and having specific thoughts and experiences (Larsen et al., 2018). Douglas (1966) also notes that many taboos are associated with the physical body. In this context, taboos are considered to be a form of mind-policing that regulates human behaviour and human thoughts, thereby impacting the choice of identity (Fershtman, Gneezy, & Hoffman, 2011). Society's cultural values and religious beliefs are therefore indicators of taboos, and assuming an identity signifies accepting the associated taboos and social norms (Fershtman et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Horberg, Oveis, Keltner and Cohen (2009) refer to disgust and purity as a fundamental principle in morality, which aims to protect the sacredness of both the physical and the spiritual. Alongside other domains for morality, disgust and purity are inherited components of ethical reasoning, which are present in any culture to varying degrees (Horberg et al., 2009). Thus, Douglas (1966) labels the consumption of taboo as being disorderly within a given culture. This characterization is due to how taboos are integrally concerned with questions of morality based on the functions of taboo in the establishment of social order (Nielsen & McGregor, 2013). In this sense, morality is seen to be socially constructed through discourses in society, which are often counteractive in what is considered to be right or wrong (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

From a marketing perspective, Michelson and Miller (2019) state that even the most extreme taboos can be transformed into goods and be traded. This premise is based on the notion that taboo-making and destructive processes run over time, creating a secure interconnection with consumerism practices within society (Larsen et al., 2018). Gollnhofer (2015) argues that although a taboo can indeed strengthen the established norms of consumerism, its infringement can also result in the adoption of new moral concepts about what is considered as acceptable. This aspect reinforces the fact that mass-mediated images consist of cultural meanings to stimulate consumers to purchase goods and engender implications for ideology (Hackley, 2002). Hence, consumers rely on certain discursive narratives to construct their identity by forming a new or shifting set of morals to existing subject-positions in the Western consumption culture (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

As suggested above, taboos have been used for strategic purposes in advertising through the use of images or phrases that are forbidden behaviours or actions in society (Freitas, 2008). Nevertheless, research into the concept of taboo still appears to be limited in the marketing field. As Sabri points out, a few studies have focused on the marketing or communication of taboo products, with entire areas of study remaining unexplored (2012). Nonetheless, previous studies on taboo in advertising have mostly focused on the controversial topics of eroticism, death and violence (Gurrieri et al., 2016; Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016). Thus, the focus of previous studies often lies on subjects regarded as shocking, most often in terms of provoking behaviour, and less concerned with the concept of taboo. Therefore, scholars have mentioned the lack of studies that discuss the increasing use of taboo subjects in advertising (Gurrieri et al., 2016).

Moreover, studies have brought to light the difficulty of glamorizing taboo subjects for feminine hygiene products, as most advertisements use terminology that conveys a negative attitude towards taboos such as menstruation (Thomas, 2016; Freitas, 2008). Therefore, studies have emphasized taboo-hiding strategies, especially within female hygiene advertising, while the foregrounding of taboos has not been the focus of strategic communication theory (Freitas, 2008). Consequently, previous empirical research has identified several strategies in relation to personal hygiene taboos, such as visual metaphors, euphemisms, and restraint and reluctance in dialogue (Thomas, 2016).

In *Taboo in Advertising*, Freitas (2008) presents a rhetorical analysis of English and Portuguese print, outdoor and television advertisements from 1997 to 2006 for how taboos have been promoted through both taboo-softening and taboo-enhancing strategies (Freitas, 2008). The findings suggest that humour plays an important role for ads in terms of talking about matters that are unacceptable. Furthermore, Freitas (2016) highlights humoristic approaches to taboo subjects in TV advertising, in which the deliberate and risky uses of humour are employed as a persuasive strategy for mitigating and softening taboo references, and thus increasing their acceptability to all the viewers.

As taboos in advertising have focused on topics of death and sex, researchers have given little attention to personal female hygiene taboo topics such as menstruation in the context of controversial advertising. This approach, in turn, is due to the social stigmatization of issues surrounding the female body, whereby menstrual taboo is the most embarrassing in Western culture (Freitas, 2008). After the consideration of articles on the topic, more recent previous studies only partially apply to the current research, as only a few studies discuss female body fluids such as menstrual blood and other topics such as body hair in a Western context (Freitas, 2008). However, none of the studies focus on the more recent phenomenon that brings taboos to the forefront of feminine hygiene advertising, suggesting the presence of a new trend in advertising that has not made it into literature yet. An understanding of the

theoretical concepts that are at the core of the constructions of taboos provides valuable insights into how feminine hygiene topics have been marketed over time.

Discourses of purity and pollution

A central aspect to the concept of taboo concerns the notions of purity and pollution. In her book *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas refers to purity as a cultural expectation that relates to wholesomeness and sanctity, and pollution as a perception of dirt, also labelled a taboo (1966). These notions likewise apply to the physical body, whereby a body is viewed as either pure or polluted (Douglas, 1966). In this manner, these terms serve to express a common understanding of social order, that is, "the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors" (Douglas, 1966, p. 3). The notions of purity and pollution also contribute to the construction of identity through inclusion and exclusion, leading individuals to fear being associated with a social taboo or coming into contact with it to be subsequently excluded from society (Douglas, 1966). Furthermore, purity concerns in society are replicated through cleanliness, whereas pollution is considered a danger or a threat (Douglas, 1966).

Of particular importance within the belief in pollution is the notion of dirt. Dirt is perceived as dangerous for contaminating the individual and others, which makes it a threat to the institutional model that aims to spread a holistic idea throughout society (Freitas, 2008). In the context of physical pollution, the avoidance of dirt involves attaining purity, which consists of a concern for hygiene to comply with the societal ideals of perfection (Douglas, 1966). Pollution is therefore "a matter of aesthetics, hygiene or etiquette, which only becomes grave in so far as it may create social embarrassment" (Douglas, 1966, p.74). Moreover, Freitas (2008) argues that pollution has a disruptive potential by bringing matters that should be kept private into the public sphere. Thus, taboo consists of a belief system that depends on community agreement to make it dominant.

With regard to taboos that concern the female body, the notions of purity and pollution have resulted in the control and denial of female bodily functions, as scholars emphasize how female hygiene issues such as menstruation are culturally considered as dirty (Freitas, 2008; Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996; Thomas, 2016). The taboo around menstruation goes back a long way in history due to its perception as impure in contrast to the stereotypical beauty standards of society. As Hufnagel (2012) argues, the menstrual period is primarily considered a curse, thus underlying the reason why it has been ignored in historical writings dealing with the most intimate areas of the human experience. Lee and Sasser-Coen (1996) contend that culture amplifies and reinforces those values by treating menstruation as a secret and a matter to hide through common words such as 'that time of the month' (Thomas, 2016, p.155). Accordingly, female genitalia are generally described as being unpleasant (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996). Therefore, studies on how female hygiene subjects are advertised in Western

society over time have identified messages that promote discretion because of the nature of pollution associated with them, which can only be treated with sanitary products (Freitas, 2018; Thomas, 2016).

From private to visibility in the public sphere

Taboo has been situated in relation to the notions of public and private. In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991b), Jürgen Habermas introduces public and private spheres in society, which date back to the 18th century. Habermas defines the public sphere as an area of social life in which individuals hold conversations that form public opinion (1991b). In the process, the public space is subjected to many idealized issues that indicate how daily life should ideally look like (Habermas, 1991a). By contrast, the private sphere refers to an area of an individual's private autonomy, which revolves around the domestic and is separate from state institutions (Habermas, 1991a). In this context, Habermas argues that the practices have their origins in the private sphere, with many of them eventually migrating to the public sphere through discussions about issues that are of general interest to society (1991b). As such, matters of taboo are excluded from the public sphere and relegated to the private, becoming marginalized.

The public sphere is constituted by discourses that are authorized (Habermas, 1991a). Hence, the public is typically associated with normative and civilized behaviour, whereas the private is associated with instinctive behaviour (Freitas, 2008). Erkkila explains that the private sphere is viewed as constitutive of intimacy, sex, femininity and family, whereas the public sphere includes the political, rational and masculine (2005). In this respect, and with regard to female hygiene, the control of pollution is an individual responsibility that is concentrated in the private rather than the public sector, directing sanitary activities to the domestic realm (Kane, 1990). For example, menstruation as a dirty body issue has resulted in women needing to control their polluted body in private (Thomas, 2016). Habermas' work on the functioning of the public and private spheres provides evidence of the way in which female issues, specifically concerning reproduction, have been forced into the private sphere.

Nevertheless, the mass media can disturb the public sphere, as private issues can be made visible (Habermas, 1991a). This aspect is due to the manner by which companies exercise authority for their own purposes through a controlled public discourse (Kane, 1990). According to Kane, advertising has adopted an ideology of freshness for linking the female body with the domestic, as these reflect a woman's self-image and indicate her value (1990). The sale of feminine hygiene products has therefore brought feminine subjects into the public domain (Harcourt, 2000). Thomas (2016) underscores that although feminine hygiene products help women in accessing the public sphere, feminine hygiene topics such as

menstruation continue to be emphasized as private through the use of a coded public discourse that highlights the need for regulating women's issues. Hence, Western culture has found a means of discursively maintaining the contemporary taboo in the public sphere (Thomas, 2016).

Moreover, the confinement of women's bodily hygiene to the private sphere can cause women to succumb to hegemonic cultural norms (Thomas, 2016). This situation relates to representations of feminine hygiene taboos as stemming from the social construct of the gaze. In *Capitalizing on the Curse: The Business of Menstruation*, Kissling (2006) states that advertising has supported the historical and cultural standing of taboo around the issue of menstruation to hide it and prevent it from interfering with the constructed ideal of femininity. In this sense, Malefyt and McCabe confirm that advertising concerns pleasing the male gaze, which explains why the feminine nature has been suppressed by fear and secrecy (2016). Nonetheless, a necessary factor to highlight in the context of the current research is that advertisements can consist of a medium by which social agency is continuously communicated (Leiss et al., 2018). As Ryan argues, counter-narratives and the public exposure of silenced issues bring women's interests into debate and provide minority groups with a chance to attain social representation (1992). In turn, social agency can be applied to honest representations concerning the female body.

Cleanliness in feminine hygiene

Several studies identify a common notion of cleanliness in feminine hygiene advertising (Kane, 1990; Park, 1966). In addition to the associated hygiene, the discourse of cleanliness consists of creating a personal feeling that is based on achieving purity and wellbeing (Ferranti, 2010). In this manner, Freitas argues that cleanliness in feminine hygiene advertising diverts attention from the impurity and contamination, which are closely related to female hygiene taboos (Freitas, 2008). Thus, throughout the 20th century, feminine hygiene products have been marketed alongside cosmetic beauty, medicinal health and cleaning household products (Park, 1966). Subsequently, these advertisements have insinuated that women require physical repair and are unclean, using terms such as 'panty shield' in reference to women's underwear (Park, 1966). The advertising of cleanliness consequently underlines the fear of the visible pollution of women's bodies.

The promotion of cleanliness as a commercial purpose also implies an ideological value in relation to femininity (Kane, 1990). Kane's study on American television commercials situates sanitation in the home and emphasizes feminine hygiene products as "rituals of purification" (1990, p. 82). A common element of advertisements is symbolism to represent purity, such as blue and white tones as well as water (Kane, 1990; Thomas, 2016). Thus, the advertisements analysed focused on transmitting an ideal state of freshness as the best way

to avoid pollution (Kane, 1990), enhanced by a general inclusion of terms such as 'clean', 'fresh' and 'refreshed' that appear in the product specifications (Jenkins, Crann, Money, & O'Doherty, 2017). In addition, the study indicated that the portrayal of women as objects moving through public space implies objectification and the artificial modification of the body as modes of achieving the social standard of the attractiveness of women in society (Kane, 1990). In this manner, the message is transmitted that the polluting functions of women's bodies are preventable through the use of feminine hygiene products; moreover, an ideal of femininity is conveyed through an underlying ideology of freshness and physical appearance.

Feminine hygiene has been promoted through a sense of modernity (Kane, 1990). A study of Kotex's early advertisements in the 1920s revealed that the feminine hygiene product focused on the ideal of the modern woman who could both display her body and hide her natural bodily processes (Mandziuk, 2010). That is, the modern woman could enter the public restricted by specific definitions of the female body and rules of hygiene that would allow women to become visible in society (Mandziuk, 2010). Therefore, feminine hygiene advertisements to this day strengthen the public's awareness of the need to meet these cultural expectations in terms of hygiene and beauty standards by which women are only allowed in public with the right hygiene and menstrual products (Thomas, 2016).

More contemporary female hygiene advertising has also focused on emphasizing a negative discourse of the dirtiness of female hygiene subjects (Freitas, 2008; Thomas, 2016). Female hygiene advertising thereby related the notions of cleanliness with the capability of disguising feminine bodily functions through the usage of feminine hygiene products. Houppert (1995) observes that despite the integration of feminist ideologies, women's hygiene products have continued to play with the same uncertainties of women. Rhetorical studies, for instance on Tampax advertising, have indicated that recurring themes mainly relate to shame, dirt and leakage, which aim to convince consumers of the benefit of concealment provided by their menstrual products (Freitas, 2008; Thomas, 2016). These references to the secrecy of menstruation reinforce the issues of feminine hygiene as private and taboo (Thomas, 2016). Hence, to maintain her self-confidence and social status, a woman must ensure adequate hygiene and buy sanitary products (Thomas, 2016).

Shifting discourse of menstruation

Based on consumer research in the 21st century, feminine hygiene advertising has begun to adopt menstruation within a natural discourse that differs from the dominant discourse of protection (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). These discourses of natural versus protection are interrelated to the ways in which menstruation is explicitly and implicitly represented (Klapisch, 1995). As previously discussed, advertising for feminine hygiene has exploited women's fear of exposure and promoted a whole culture of concealment (Houppert,

1995). Kissling notes that the creation of menstruation as a problem generates a consumer market for possible solutions (2006) with menstrual products to portray the female body as being unclean (Kissling, 2006; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Thus, advertisers reported menstruation as a hygienic crisis in need of concealment (Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, & Pyszczynski, 2002). Most feminine hygiene brands therefore focus on the theme of protection, which deems the menstrual flow as mastered and controlled, whereas others portray the menstrual flow as free of movement under control. Both depict menstruation as separated from the woman's normal life, considered a disruptive break (Klapisch, 1995).

Nevertheless, menstruation is viewed as a rather personal and delicate subject, as many women attribute it to a highly personal and private aspect of their lives (Klapisch, 1995). The feelings of pressure to keep secrets and maintain silence around the subject of menstruation reinforce the sense of fear and embarrassment in women. Women consequently privatize their natural cycle as a protective discourse from the discussion of menstruation in society (Kissling, 2006). In this sense, the concept of the male gaze is linked to the protective discourse on menstruation in advertising (Kissling, 2006). Thus, advertising aimed at women starts from what men like and what they have compromised to see.

However, other women are less concerned about discretion, as they believe that menstruation is simply a part of their lives and is therefore unnecessary to restrict (Klapisch, 1995). As such, consumer research in the past decades has identified a shift around menstruation as taboo through the women's perception of their menstrual cycle as natural (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). In their research involving in-depth interviews with women in the United States, Malefyt and McCabe (2016) have revealed that women experience menstruation as a natural body cycle. Their results indicate an emerging, more natural discourse on this issue, driven by the changes in the position of women in society, which have been promoted by the women's rights campaign and advocacy for women's health (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016).

Accordingly, Thomas (2016) has argued that images and discourses to sell feminine hygiene products while avoiding the reinforcement of the menstrual taboo can possibly initiate the dissolution of the taboos of secrecy and pollution. Klapisch (1995) has referred to women's adoption of menstruation from a secret to an ordinary phenomenon as the "de-dramatisation of the taboo" (p. 107); turning a purely intimate affair into a public affair has represented a shift from a cultural taboo to a more modern taboo. Nonetheless, Thomas argues the need for a discourse on menstruation, which frees women from embarrassment and social fears and provides them with an appropriate education on menstruation (Thomas, 2016).

Conceptual framework in brief

The conceptual framework has explored the role of taboo in society and how it has been mediated in the public sphere based on the notions of purity and pollution. A historical perspective to modern culture reveals how the clean versus dirty dichotomy has been elaborated on in the advertising of feminine hygiene based on the premise that women need to control their bodies from taboos. In this manner, taboo has been ingrained in Western culture as a private matter and consistently represented and emphasized throughout advertising and society as being a pollutant and of an unsanitary nature. Therefore, bodily functions were associated with dirt and pollution, whereas cleanliness and freshness were linked to the ideological and moral standards of femininity and modernity. However, in the past decade, consumer research has revealed a shift in the perception in relation to menstruation from being in need of protection to being a natural body cycle.

3. Method

Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach of this study. The aim of the chapter is to define a methodology for investigating the representation of taboo and its relation to femininity in recent feminine hygiene advertising through digital media, which allows determining how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos. In the first section of this chapter, a brief introduction to the research design is presented, followed by an explanation and justification of the selected methods. The second section provides a detailed description of the process of sampling and data collection. The third section reintroduces the key concepts from the conceptual framework and explains how they are operationalized in this study. The fourth section comprises the analytical framework and analysis process, and the final section gives an account of how the credibility of the study is ensured.

3.1 Study design and justification of method

The research method chosen for this study consists of a critical discourse analysis following a multimodal approach on 10 feminine hygiene advertising campaigns. The dataset contains both campaign videos and campaign information collected online. The analysis combines Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis with Wodak's discourse historical approach (2001) and Kress and Van Leeuwen's visual grammar (1996). As the current study examines how feminine hygiene brands represent taboos in their

recent advertising campaigns, qualitative research enables the uncovering of the underlying elements behind this particular phenomenon. Qualitative studies allow for the comprehension and identification of the experiences within a given context, as social practices and cultural traditions provide an intricate understanding of the meanings that comprise social reality (Brennen, 2012). Thus, as the current study focuses on the 'how' of taboo in feminine hygiene advertising, qualitative research methods consider the data to be profoundly meaningful in determining how meanings are formed by and in culture (Neuman, 2013).

The present research opts for a multimodal approach for identifying the critical aspects that provide meaning in the representation of female hygiene taboos through new media advertising campaigns. The term multimodality refers to different interacting modes for the construction of meanings (Kress, 2009). A multimodal approach is of importance for the critical discourse analysis of the current study because it is concerned with advertising material that uses various communicative resources in an integrated manner (Van Leeuwen, 2012). Thus, the evaluation draws on discourse analysis and visual social semiotics for the interactive meanings conveyed through both texts and images. This method enables a focused investigation on the representation of taboos through a more in-depth examination of the discursive strategies present in the selected feminist hygiene campaigns. The qualitative nature of this study entails an understanding of the research methods employed in its design (Brennen, 2012).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method for investigating the relationship between discourses and socio-cultural processes in different social spheres (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Critical discourse analysis views discourses as socially constitutive and constituted (Fairclough, 1995), for which it concentrates on the way in which the social abuse of power, domination and injustice in social and political contexts are staged, reproduced and contested by texts (Van Dijk, 2001). Moreover, CDA allows the uncovering of discursive practices in maintaining social relations and aims to reveal social change in more equal power relations within communications and society (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As CDA attempts to illuminate the linguistic aspects at work in social and cultural phenomena (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), it proves a suitable method for the present study.

This research aims to identify the ideologies present in the texts of recent feminine hygiene advertising. Discourse is thereby recognized as crucial for the formulation of ideologies through assumptions embedded in texts (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2004). In this sense, discourse is capable of spreading and hegemonizing certain ideologies or ways of thinking that are considered common sense in society (Van Dijk, 1998). Thus, discourse as an essential mode of social practice (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) enables a profound

investigation of the meanings that advertising messages construct in relation to power structures (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

More specifically, the ascribed ideological function to discourse serves to define groups and their position within a complex social structure in relation to other groups (Fairclough, 2001). This aspect is due to how social ideas form the basis of identification and mutual understanding in a particular group (Van Dijk, 2008). Hence, discourse implies both recreation and confrontation of ideologies, which convince readers of a particular worldview (Van Dijk, 1995). Nevertheless, attempts have been made to negotiate and question the dominant order of groups that try to change and undermine the existing discourse (Fairclough, 2013). According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), CDA approaches strongly align with the social groups that are oppressed. Thus, by focusing on the ideological functions of language and its influence on social relations and identities (Simpson & Mayr, 2009), the method is especially useful for analysing feminine hygiene advertising campaigns with regard to the underlying meanings that can challenge long-established cultural values and norms on taboo subjects.

Relationship between verbal and visual

Kress and Van Leeuwen note that visual constructions carry out meanings in the same way as linguistic ones, and therefore point to varying ways of interpreting experience and social behaviour (1996). This postulation signifies that modes in images have the same ability to generate meaning as lexical expressions in written text (1996). As a critical discourse analysis strongly focuses on linguistic means, focusing on visual elements in texts is necessary. Chouliaraki (2006) thereby suggests a multimodal approach as "each type of realism – perceptual, categorical and ideological – brings together its own combination of linguistic narrative with image" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 163). Focusing on both text-discursive and visual strategies therefore offers a valuable approach to examining how meaning is constructed around taboos in advertising campaigns for feminine hygiene.

To specifically uncover how semiotic modes construct meaning around taboos, a detailed and integrated analysis of campaign images is conducted through visual social semiotics (Van Leeuwen, 2012). Visual social semiotics enables the establishment of the ideological underpinning in visual imagery (Berger, 2010). Semiotic analysis, which deals with signs, is generally concerned with detecting the origins of specific meanings in units of analysis (Hall, 1997). In this manner, denotation pertains to the explicit and manifest meanings of an image, whereas connotation relates to the implicit and latent meanings (Van Leeuwen, 2004). As such, semiotics is useful for examining the representational, or denotative, and symbolic, or connotative meanings, of the persons, locations and objects present in different types of visual images (Van Leeuwen, 2004).

As advertising is composed of a multitude of interacting signs that are ideologically selected and arranged (Hall, 1997), the current study attempts to understand the implicit meanings conveyed by the images in advertising campaigns for feminine hygiene. Considering how visual social semiotics is usefully applicable to the analysis of contemporary images to assess how meaning is constructed (Van Leeuwen, 2004), this method is highly suitable for an interpretation of the way taboos are presented within recent feminine hygiene campaigns and the meanings attributed to them. In particular, visual social semiotics is also applied to advertising campaigns that are considered controversial because it can determine the specific ideas and values that are represented by the way they are presented (Van Leeuwen, 2004); visual social semiotics can similarly reveal ideological intentions regarding power relations and social injustices (Hall, 1997).

3.2. Sampling and data collection

The dataset in this study consists of 10 feminine hygiene advertising campaigns launched between October 2017 and March 2020 collected online. The units of analysis for this study consist of a visual corpus of 10 exemplary campaign videos and a text corpus of 10 exemplary campaign descriptions. Table 3.1. below presents an overview of the corpora. The campaign videos are published by the feminine hygiene brands on YouTube and the campaign descriptions are published on the brands' respective corporate websites. Considering the vital role of social media in the advertising efforts of brands (Edelman, 2018), YouTube is the most considerable platform for the sharing of advertisements through other social media channels (Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai, & Zhang, 2019). Additionally, textual descriptions accompanying the campaign videos are further selected, as multiple digital platforms are of importance for brands in their communication to provide consumers with consistent messaging and address various target groups (Connolly, 2020).

Corpora	Source	Units of analysis	Number of exemplary texts
Visual corpus	YouTube	Campaign video	10
Tex corpus	Website	Campaign description (including description under campaign video)	10

Table 3.1. Overview of exemplary texts in visual and textual corpus by units of analysis.

This study employs a purposive sampling approach for collecting feminine hygiene campaigns. Purposive sampling is specifically chosen to select the advertising campaigns concerning female hygiene products, which are both recent and controversial for their inclusion of taboo topics. The researcher's goal in the purposive sampling is to focus on

feminine hygiene advertising campaigns that best answer the research question of how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos. The sample is therefore selected according to certain criteria for the presentation of taboos in the advertising video. The chosen campaigns include at least one taboo subject that concerns personal hygiene and the female body. Thus, the advertising must emphasize the taboo in its narrative or directly bring it to the foreground, taking into account Freitas' criteria of how advertising more directly raises the taboo through rhetorical strategies of highlighting the experience and essence of taboo (Freitas, 2008).

The sampling also focuses on achieving a heterogeneous sample (Flick, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the material is sampled to encompass different aspects of the phenomenon of personal hygiene topics in the feminine hygiene advertising. Attention is paid to content diversity to provide variety to the results by ensuring a saturation effect, by which the same type of content reappears in the material and no new and valuable elements are detected (Schreier, 2013). Thus, the campaigns are carefully selected according to a variety of female hygiene taboos, ranging from bodily functions such as menstruation and body hair to female genitalia. To do so, different feminine hygiene products are considered in the selection, such as sanitary pads, tampons and razors, as well as vaginal care items such as intimate gels and personal lubricants.

Furthermore, the period under investigation – from 2017 onwards – marks a shift in advertising, in which menstrual blood is shown for the first time in feminine hygiene advertisements (Jardine, 2017). However, the number of advertising campaigns available for analysis is small due to the recent and rare phenomenon of female hygiene taboos in advertising. In addition, during the data collection process, particular focus is given to campaigns that have attracted considerable attention online, being in advertising magazines such as *AdAge*, as well as in well-known magazines such as *Forbes* and *The Times*. The researcher reviewed the articles for mentions of consumer controversy due to taboo depictions, media bans and nominations or wins at awards such as the Cannes Lions Grand Prix.

Another key point to consider is that this study focuses on campaigns in a Western context. Therefore, the campaigns in the sample refer to both national and international brands that are occasionally named differently depending on their geographic market presence. When confronted with the same campaign's video published via different YouTube accounts of the brand with some changes in length and language of the video, the researcher selected those campaign videos in the English language and with the largest audience size.

After the selection of the campaign videos, the researcher gathered the respective campaign descriptions. The video description under the campaign video on YouTube is

selected, which in most cases already includes a direct link to the campaign description on the brand's website. On the brand's corporate website, only specific textual information on the campaign itself is gathered, identified through the use of the campaign name, imagery or hashtag. The textual information accompanying the campaign is also considered when in the form of a blog post on the website.

To summarize, the data collected consist of a corpus of 10 feminine hygiene advertising campaigns launched in English in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Germany from October 2017 to March 2020. The advertising campaigns pertain to various hygiene brands, namely the ones advertising menstruation products such as sanitary pads and tampons (Libresse, Cora Life, The Female Company, The Flex Company), intimate hygiene care (Queen V, Bodyform), period underwear (Thinx), razors (Billie) and lubricants (Durex). Table 3.2. gives an overview of the advertising campaigns selected for analysis (details on each feminine hygiene brand can be found in Appendix A, Table A.1). Overall, the material reflects the criteria within critical discourse analysis, which is based on gathering sufficient data, while remaining a relatively small sample, to understand the topic on an in-depth level (Silverman, 2011).

Text/Video	Campaign Name	Brand	Launch Date
1	Blood Normal	Libresse Sverige	17-10-2017
2	Have the most comfortable period of your life	The Flex Company	11-10-2018
3	MENstruation #ifweallhadperiods	Thinx	03-10-2019
4	Pure and Powerful	Cora Life	31-01-2019
5	The Tampon Book	The Female Company	16-04-2019
6	Project Body Hair	Billie	26-06-2018
7	Red, White, and You Do You	Billie	24-06-2019
8	Viva La Vulva	Bodyform	23-09-2018
9	Ladies, Let's Lube	Durex	21-01-2019
10	That's What V Said	Queen V	03-06-2019

Table 3.2. Advertising campaigns selected for analysis.

3.3. Operationalization

The main objective of this study is to investigate how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos. To this end, the study investigates how taboos are presented in female hygiene advertising. The theoretical framework has led to an understanding of taboo, which consists of four terms. These terms include Douglas' ideas of purity and pollution (1996) and

Habermas' categorization of private and public (1991b). Using the taboo literature from a historical perspective, empirical research on the earlier advertising of feminine hygiene has provided insights into how the prevailing taboo discourses reflect ideas of feminine hygiene based on these four concepts. Table 3.3. provides an overview of the theoretical concepts, their definitions and references towards these notions found in traditional feminine hygiene advertising.

Concepts	Definition	References in advertisements
Purity	Cultural expectation of wholesomeness and sanctity, which includes individuals and objects to be seen as being pure (Douglas, 1966).	Reference to innocence (e.g. "pure" water, colour blue, colour white), to cleanliness (e.g. "clean"), to freshness (e.g. "fresh", "refreshed")
Pollution	Cultural perception of dirtiness, which involves individuals being seen as polluted when in contact with impurities (Douglas, 1966).	Reference to dirt (e.g. "discomfort", "leakage", "smelly"), to illness and physical repair (e.g. "unclean"), to danger and shame
Public	A part of social life that forms public opinion and is subjected to expectations and ideals (Habermas, 1991a).	Use of euphemisms (e.g. "that time of the month"), outside spaces, reference to modernity (e.g. "control") and physical appearance
Private	An area of individual's private autonomy, which regards issues and matters as being of domestic concern (Habermas, 1991a).	Reference to protection and concealment, to secrecy, and indoor spaces

(The concepts Purity, Pollution, Public, Private branch from "Taboo".)

Table 3.3. Overview of theoretical concepts on taboo with definition and references in feminine hygiene advertising.

As these concepts are at the core of the ideas of hygiene, their inclusion in the analysis phase of this study is necessary to determine how recent feminine hygiene advertising represents taboos in relation to femininity. However, as this study focuses on a recent phenomenon in the advertising of foregrounding taboos, it follows both a deductive and inductive approach. The outcomes of the analysis are hence specifically derived from the dataset, as well as under the simultaneous consideration of the notions of purity–pollution and public–private. This approach renders the possibility of determining how advertising exploits the long-rooted taboos of female hygiene.

3.4. Analysis framework and process

To conduct a critical discourse analysis from a multimodal perspective, this study is based upon Fairclough's analytical framework for empirical research on communication and society. Fairclough treats language as a communicative event, which embodies three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice (1995). Thus, Fairclough describes discourse as the usage of language as a form of social practice. In the present study, discourse is understood as a constructed understanding of the taboo in feminine hygiene advertising campaigns. Furthermore, the analytical framework followed enables a systematic and detailed analysis of feminine hygiene campaign images and texts for their discursive strategies in the representation of taboo.

Additionally, the analytical framework aims to provide a reductive, schematic and adaptive evaluation process focused on answering this study's research question (Schreier, 2013). Following Chouliaraki's notions of verbal–visual correspondence (2006), a multimodal critical discourse analysis onto media texts aims to explore how discursive strategies, including visual aspects, function to construct meanings around taboo. These strategies in texts are thus used to achieve a specific social, political or psychological goal (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In this manner, the linkage of text features with social practice provides an answer to the issue of how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos. Figure 3.1 presents an overview of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, followed by a more detailed description of the steps undertaken during the analysis.
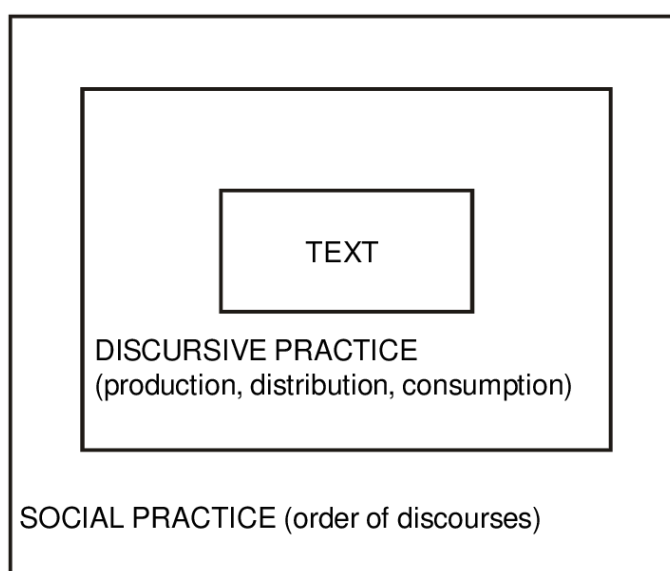

Figure 3.1. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1995, p. 59)

Textual practice

The first step in the analysis refers to the textual practice, which entails a detailed description of textual features (Fairclough, 1995). As previously explained, on a textual practice level, an examination of linguistic and visual elements in the feminine hygiene texts

identifies how meanings are constructed around taboo. Thus, the following questions are raised:

- · How is taboo represented linguistically and associated with social actors?
- · How is taboo represented visually and positioned in relation to social actors?

For the analysis of discursive strategies and linguistic means, this study adopts the tools for analysis from the discourse historical approach by Reisigl and Wodak (2001). The discourse-historical approach to CDA highlights the following five categories: (1) nomination strategies name and refer to social actors/phenomena/objects; (2) predication strategies attribute characteristics, qualities and features to social actors/phenomena/objects; (3) argumentation strategies persuade the audience of the truth and normative rightness of claims; (4) perspectivization strategies express involvement and position the speaker's viewpoint; and (5) mitigation and intensification strategies either alleviate or intensify the respective utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). These discursive categories serve as a guide during the analysis of the linguistic means employed within the text corpus.

For the analysis of the visual social semiotic resources and elements, this study follows the visual grammar approach by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996). Visual grammar, which involves the structures and elements of visual design in images, is analysed through a visual social-semiotic analysis of semiotic resources for its conveyed meanings (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Jewitt and Oyama (2004) categorize the elements of visual grammar into the following: (1) the representational meaning, which is conveyed by what is depicted in the picture on the basis of narrative or conceptual representations; (2) the interactive meaning, which refers to the interaction between what is depicted in the picture and the viewer, who is informed by contact, distance and perspective; and (3) the compositional meaning, which aligns the representational and interactive meanings of the visuals through information value, salience and framing as well as modality (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004). The visual corpus in the present study is analysed for these semiotic resources.

As this study acknowledges the interplay of language and visual images (Lazar, 2000), its analyses of linguistic and visual grammar are complementary to each other. Attention is paid to how taboo is represented through discursive strategies and their resemiotization within the campaign visuals. In other words, the semiotic resources are considered as patterns of representation, interaction and compositional meaning, which serve the resemiotization of each discursive strategy in the visual elements of the campaign videos.

Discursive practice

The second analytical step of discursive practice consists of an interpretation of the production and consumption of the text through intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1995). According to Fairclough, texts combine multiple discourses as well as draw upon earlier texts or restructure existing discourses to produce new ones (1995). Intertextuality specifically refers to the analysis of texts on a discourse level for how the campaign texts rely on existing discourses and which discourse traces are found within the text (Fairclough, 1995). Interdiscursivity pertains to how discourses are interlinked in different ways (Fairclough, 1995). Thereby, it is aimed at investigating how the campaign texts are established in a specific discursive context and how they can be articulated with other discourses. In this regard, the discursive practice is concerned with how the representation of taboo in the campaigns is connected to the theoretical concepts of taboo and former discourses in feminine hygiene advertising. The process of transferring specific elements into a new environment is called recontextualization (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). The key questions to guide the discursive practice in the current study are as follows:

- How is the representation of taboo associated with the notions of purity, pollution, public and private?
- How does the representation of taboo compare to dominant discourses in feminine hygiene advertising?
- How is the representation of taboo related to the female empowerment discourse in advertising?

Social practice

The third analytical step involves explaining the connection between discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). It aims to reveal the ideology hidden behind the combined lexical and semiotic choices used (Fairclough, 1995). In the context of the present research, the findings are interpreted as a social practice under consideration of the broader cultural context that concerns societal values and identity (Fairclough, 1995). Hence, the guiding questions for this step are as follows:

- How do the texts and images relate taboo to the broader notion of women's positioning in society?
- How do the texts and images relate taboo to broader notions of women's health and well-being?

The goal of the analysis process is to focus on how taboo is represented through the relationship between verbal and visual elements by evaluating each campaign in an

integrated manner. The connections between images and texts are drawn back and forth to understand the messages underlying each campaign, while taking into account the insights gained from the theoretical framework on an ongoing basis. Thus, the findings from each campaign are continuously compared to the ones of previous campaigns, issuing a constant comparison (Silverman, 2011). This approach allows the identification of the differences within a particular phenomenon and as well as alternative narratives for the theoretical framework.

Furthermore, theoretical and non-theoretical materials are simultaneously collected on the basis of new findings. The aim is to uncover novel insights by moving past what is evident and naïve interpretations. Hence, the interpretation focuses on both the development and repositioning of meanings that are traditionally taboo subjects of personal hygiene in relation to the notions of femininity. This approach allows the investigation of how the identified discursive strategies in the advertisements apply to postfeminist elements in the female empowerment discourse, and consequently how advertising exploits taboos through the construction of specific meanings.

3.5. Credibility

Moisander and Valtonen (2006) argue that research should be conducted with methodological rigor, through the use of suitable methods, relevant and sufficient data and innovative analysis. Therefore, to strive to produce a plausible analysis (Silverman, 2011), the present study provides a detailed explanation of the interpretative decisions to convince readers of the study's trustworthiness (Brennen, 2012).

What concerns the replicability of the study, the research process is made transparent (Silverman, 2011) through a description of the selected methods, data collection, as well as the analytical framework and the analysis process. Unchanged data, or "low-inference descriptors" (Silverman, 2011, p. 361), are similarly included within the reporting of the findings. More specifically, the linguistic means and visual elements within the found discursive strategies are illustrated. The goal is to achieve transparency and provide an understanding for the interpretation of the data. In addition, the researcher strives for awareness of the background of the research topic. As critical discourse analysis requires a transdisciplinary approach from various fields (Fairclough, 2013), marketing-oriented, anthropological and critical-feminist perspectives are included in the theoretical framework.

To meet the validity criteria involving the quality of the results, the researcher focuses on analytical induction through the principles of continuous comparison and analysis of variance (Silverman, 2011). This process indicates that the data are continually compared with the results from prior units of analysis, accompanied by an active search for deviating

cases that do not fit the researcher's initial expectations (Silverman, 2011). Thus, during the collection process, attention is paid to different aspects within the advertisements, which enrich the data for a more complex analysis. This step ensures meaningful comparisons between the campaigns through both different and identical characteristics (Maxwell, 2013). In turn, a well-rounded response to the research questions posed in the current study can be guaranteed.

As Berger (2013) stresses the importance of intertextuality in the analysis of discourses to strengthen the validity of a study, the researcher consequently pays close attention to intertextuality issues such as ideological, cultural, and social references, which help in identifying the discourses that are endorsed and challenged in feminine hygiene advertising. Nevertheless, each discourse is interpreted by the researcher in a somewhat personal and unique manner (Van Dijk, 2008), which explains why the interpretative analysis is subjected to the knowledge and understanding accumulated from personal experience and previous literature.

To counteract credibility problems, this study combines two different research methods of critical discourse analysis and visual social semiotics as a means of triangulation to validate the derived results (Creswell, 2009). As triangulation refers to "different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191), the current study makes complementary use of critical discourse analysis with visual social semiotics to provide a second method for the collection and validation of findings. Critical discourse analysis identifies the discursive strategies with a focus on contextual information (Fairclough, 1995), whereas visual social semiotics is specifically useful for identifying semiotic strategies (Van Leeuwen, 2004). Therefore, the triangulation technique allows a cross-validation of results as well as a more differentiated and thorough investigation by levelling out the strengths and weaknesses of the methods.

Notwithstanding the availability of other methodological approaches such as rhetorical analyses to the investigation of taboos in advertising, which might also be suitable for this research, the focus here lies on the underlying ideologies on taboo, which are present in the texts of recent feminine hygiene advertising. Through the identified discursive strategies on taboo, the issue of how advertising exploits taboos can be analysed based on the premises of specific societal norms and conversations on the empowerment of women. Finally, the complete data are taken into account, as the comprehensible treatment of the data contributes to validity (Silverman, 2011). Moreover, given the qualitative nature of the current research, the results of the analysis cannot be generalized.

Research design in brief

The methodology selected for the analysis initially focuses on the assessment of linguistic features and semiotic elements that together represent female hygiene taboos in the dataset and emphasizes the resemiotization of the elements between text and image. Second, the analysis involves an interpretation of the textual practice of the advertising campaigns in the dataset through intertextuality and interdiscursivity with respect to the theoretical concepts of the taboo, dominant discourses in traditional female hygiene advertising and postfeminist discourses. Third, the analysis entails an explanation of the discursive practice on a broader social level through the identified discursive strategies.

4. Analysis and results

Chapter overview

This chapter presents the results of the analysis on feminine hygiene campaigns. As expected, feminine hygiene brands make use of discursive strategies in which taboo topics are explicitly addressed. The findings of the analysis are categorized under three discursive strategies: taboo within the community, resisting taboo and body re-appropriation. The first sections report on the analysis of textual practice, which aims to demonstrate how discursive strategies, including semiotic resources, represent female hygiene taboos through the construction of specific meanings. A summary of the discursive strategies along with their linguistic means and devices is presented in Table 4.1. The visual social semiotic analysis is subsequently extended under each subsection. The last section consists of an interpretation of the textual practice for how intertextual elements draw upon the theoretical concepts of taboo as well as how interdiscursive elements apply to postfeminist notions in advertising.

Taboo within the community	Resisting taboo	Body re-appropriation
• Referential: - generic 'we' - repetition of personal pronoun 'us' and possessive pronoun 'our' - hortative 'let's' • Perspectivation: - lexis: references to nature - subjectivization 'we thought' • Intensification: - modal verb "will" - frequency 'right now' - quantification 'over half' - emotive verb 'felt'	• Argumentation: - numbers and statistics - description - interrogative mood 'strange-huh?' - repetition of 'we show' (action) • Perspectivation: - discourse marker 'contrary to', 'there is' - disassociation/Negation 'don't' - modal auxiliary 'should', 'could' - verb 'change', 'help' - diminutive/augmentative 'little more' • Intensification: - personification 'saves' - imperative 'stop', 'period' - repetitions '7%' - quotation marks "that time of the month"	• Referential: - personal pronoun 'you' and possessive pronoun 'yours' - affirmative imperatives 'grow it', 'comb it', 'get rid of it' - possessive pronoun 'their' • Perspectivation: - metaphorization 'new generation', 'empowered women' - declarative sentence 'we believe', 'we want' - positive adjectives 'special', 'confidence' • Predication: - evaluative attribution 'perfect', 'leak-proof'

Table 4.1. Discursive strategies and linguistic means in text corpus of feminine hygiene campaigns.

4.1 Discursive strategy of taboo within the community

The analysis suggests that the feminine hygiene advertisements represent taboo mainly through a sense of community, whereby all women that experience the natural process of taboo are presented within a collective group. With this, the aim is to legitimise taboo as being both normal and natural. The commonality of the taboo is constituted by the linguistic categories: referential, perspectivation and intensification. These engage the reader on a group-like level, simulating unity between the brand and the audience. Hence, the reader is explicitly addressed as a person within a group that shares the same experiences with tabooed subjects based on biological notions.

The referential (or nomination) category primarily forms the discursive strategy of taboo within the community. Nomination classifies social actors, objects and phenomena (Wodak, 2009) in the texts as to create a feeling of inclusion through pronouns and modality. In eight texts, the personal pronoun 'we' is employed to construct an in-group versus out-group construction. The generic 'we' is mostly paired with the personal and possessive pronouns 'us' and 'our'. With this, the focus lies on establishing identification within the reader as an in-group member. For instance, Extract 1 (Text 4) reads:

Purposeful. Period. Where others fear "that time of the month" we found our mission.

The generic 'we' signifies the inclusion of the brand's self and provides the reader with space to feel identified with the statement. In this case, the prior pronoun 'others' explicitly excludes out-group members that are fearful of experiencing the menstrual period. The further emphasis on the pronoun 'our' highlights the in-group member's shared sentiment of viewing the menstrual cycle as purposeful. Thus, this establishes an identity for readers that share the same viewpoint on the taboo. The former emphasised by 'mission'. Furthermore, in Text 9, the pairing of 'we' with the possessive pronoun 'our' further functions to categorise membership by expressing a commonality with the readers.

Extract 2:

> Turns out, <u>we</u> can feel less wet down there for 2/3 of <u>our</u> cycles. So it's perfectly <u>normal</u> to want a little lube. #Ladies<u>Le'ts</u>Lube

The text employs the personal pronoun 'we' in conjunction with the possessive pronoun plural 'our' in order to construct an in-group, in which the feeling of dryness of feeling genitalia is common amongst women due to the hormones of their menstrual cycles. The allusion to natural bodily function with the intonation on the nomination of 'normal' produces a notion of sameness within the group.

In addition to establishing a sense of membership, these texts make use of the modality construct of hortative sentences 'let's' (let 'us') in order to establish rapport with the readers. This is particularly evident with 'let's' at the beginning of Extract 3 (Text 10):

> <u>Let's</u> not beat around the bush… <u>we're</u> talking about vaginas (yeah, <u>we</u> said it).

In the text, the use of 'let's' entails the unity in talking about topics that are deemed unpleasant. In this context, the deconstructed "let us" points to teamwork in collectively naming the tabooed subject. Further, the generic 'we', as explicated above, also invites the reader to openly discuss the tabooed subject together emphasising the referential aim to underline a broader more common view.

Moreover, the discursive strategy of taboo within the community is constructed by perspectivation, which emphasises togetherness from a biological standpoint, expressed through modality and lexis. Perspectivation positions the author's point of view (Wodak, 2009) that taboo is a natural aspect inherent to all female bodies. In five texts, modality positions the speaker's point of view in connection with lexis that characterises taboo as natural. For instance, in Extract 4 (Text 1):

> Periods are a <u>natural part of life</u>, <u>so why</u> are they rarely given any screen time? <u>Surely</u> hiding something so <u>normal</u> only adds to the shame and embarrassment <u>many women</u> feel when it comes to their periods.

The indicative mood, which states that menstruation is a 'natural part of life', is followed then by the interrogative mood 'so why' as the brand commits to the statement through the intonation of 'surely', reinforcing the author's perspective. In this way, the text presupposes a modality of truth in the utterance that taboos are 'normal'. The interrogative mood aims to create a personal and equal relationship with the reader by simulating a conversation. Subsequently, it establishes the brand's positioning on the naturalness of the topic as well as trust with the reader to feel the same way. Hereby, the text pairs the naturalness of the taboo with it being part of 'many women', rather than focusing on the individual.

Similarly, subjective modalities express personal statements and intentions of the brand that convey taboo as part of a community. Take Extract 5 (Text 3), for instance:

> Nearly half of the world's population has a period, yet <u>we still </u>shy away from having open conversations about them. So <u>we thought </u>to <u>ourselves</u> – <u>what would</u> the world look like if everyone had them?

The text mentions individuals who fear to talk about taboo, considered in this case to be referential to the individual in society as a whole. The oppositional character of another group follows this through 'we thought to ourselves' and the emphasis on the adverb 'still' that both the author's themselves and the readers stigmatise feminine hygiene topics. This form of subjectification more directly draws focus on the brand and its intention to perspectivate the brand's opinion and to soften the generalisation implicit in the first statement. This way, an equal relationship with the reader is enhanced. Also, the rhetorical question 'what would' encourages the reader to consider the idea that taboo is a natural part of the body under a worldly perspective.

Additionally, five texts make use of modal particles that act as intensifying the epistemic status of propositions (Wodak, 2009). Linguistic devices to strengthen the notions of community consist mainly of modality and lexical expression. Again, taken from Text 3, Extract 6 reads:

> Here's the thing though, <u>right now</u>, <u>over half the population *will*</u> have a period in their <u>lifetimes</u>.

In the extract, the intonation on the modal verb 'will' strengthens the claim that taboo is an unavoidable occurrence. Intensification is achieved through the frequential expression of 'right now' and the quantification of 'over half the population', which insist on a large group of people that are in the same place and share the characteristic of taboo. These invoke

certainty in the author's tone of voice to emphasise taboo as a natural aspect to women's 'lifetimes'. As such, it aims to persuade taboo as a possession which all women have in common.

Another example of intensifying taboo within the community is evident in Text 9. Here, various linguistic elements combined emphasise the discursive notion that a large group of women experiences taboo through emotive verbs and rhetorical devices.

Extract 7:

> 73% of us have felt 'oof' down there during sex. Bit dry down there? We think it's time we stopped putting up with discomfort and started talking about it.

The text again constructs an in-group through '73% of us', making use of a verb of feeling in connection to the onomatopoeia 'oof', which signifies a natural exclamation. This draws attention to a common aspect of sexual activity within women. Additionally, the lexicon of 'down there', a reference to female genitalia likely understood by all readers, situated within a question that explicitly addresses the reader, creates a sense of conversation. As a result, the encoded emotional expression of 'putting up with' combined with the subjective 'we think' promotes the readers to see taboo as something that can be openly discussed, construed through identification and an equalised relationship.

In the campaign visuals, the resemiotization of the discursive strategy of taboo within the community is identified by conveying a sense of collectiveness and unified representation of women's and their bodies. Thus, throughout four of the campaign videos the depiction of taboo within a community is particularly evident through constructed group formations in which women are shown in the essence of being themselves. This to transmit the idea that taboo is characteristic of a community rather than in necessity of any type of solution or action. Table 4.2. presents the semiotic resources at play throughout the visuals of the campaign.

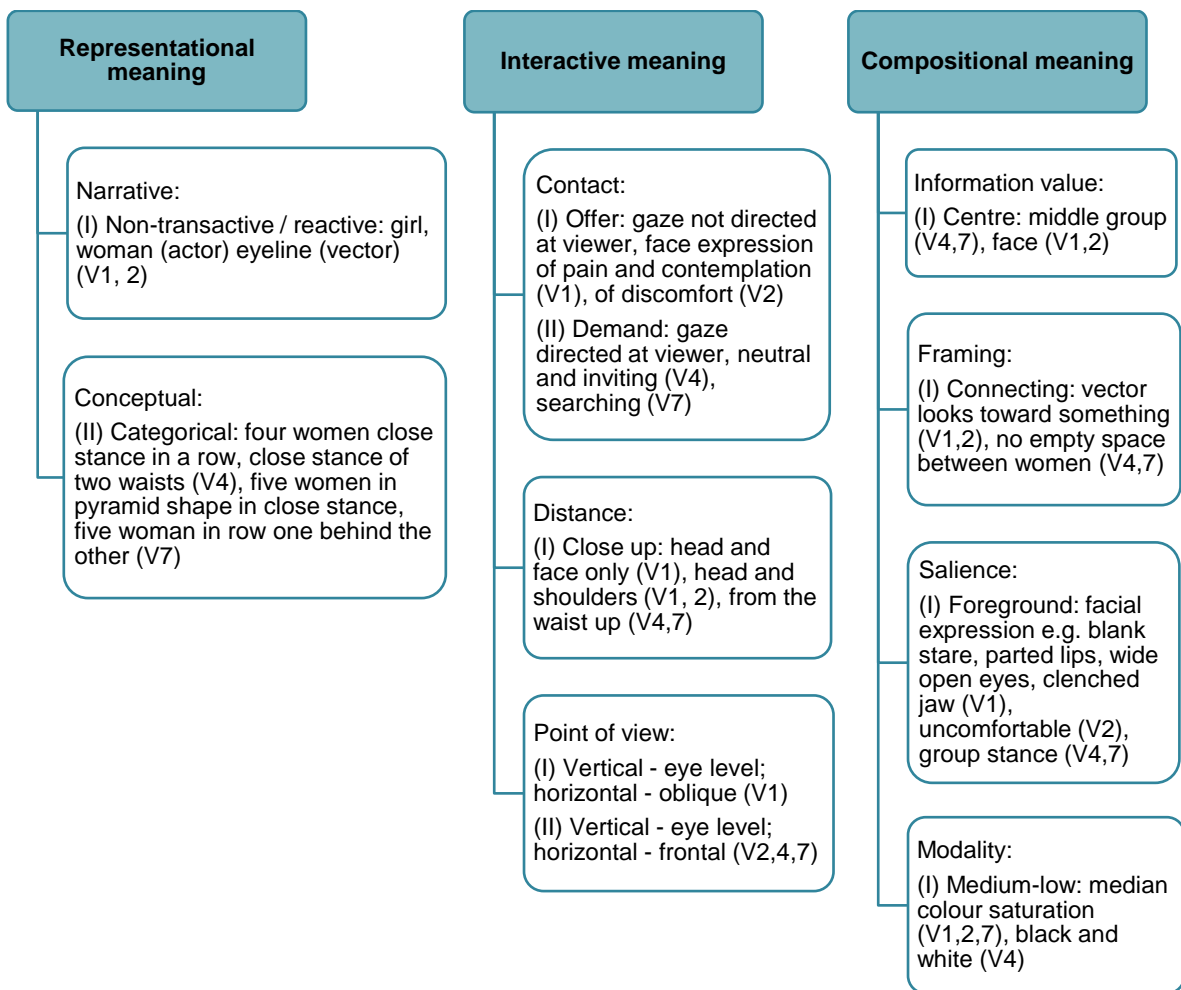| Representational meaning	Interactive meaning	Compositional meaning
Narrative: (I) Non-transactional / reactive: girl, woman (actor) eyeline (vector) (V1, 2)	**Contact:** (I) Offer: gaze not directed at viewer, face expression of pain and contemplation (V1), of discomfort (V2) (II) Demand: gaze directed at viewer, neutral and inviting (V4), searching (V7)	**Information value:** (I) Centre: middle group (V4,7), face (V1,2)
Conceptual: (II) Categorical: four women close stance in a row, close stance of two waists (V4), five women in pyramid shape in close stance, five woman in row one behind the other (V7)	**Distance:** (I) Close up: head and face only (V1), head and shoulders (V1, 2), from the waist up (V4,7)	**Framing:** (I) Connecting: vector looks toward something (V1,2), no empty space between women (V4,7)
	Point of view: (I) Vertical - eye level; horizontal - oblique (V1) (II) Vertical - eye level; horizontal - frontal (V2,4,7)	**Salience:** (I) Foreground: facial expression e.g. blank stare, parted lips, wide open eyes, clenched jaw (V1), uncomfortable (V2), group stance (V4,7)
		Modality: (I) Medium-low: median colour saturation (V1,2,7), black and white (V4)

Table 4.2. Visual social semiotic resources and elements in discursive strategy of taboo within the community.

Throughout video images, women are shown on a representational meaning level through reactionary processes, in which women and girls are depicted as passive in posture or staring out of the picture frames while experiencing the body. In this case, the actor becomes the object of observation and creates space for identification, specifically to the experience of taboo. Also, the videos make use of images of women of different appearance, ethnicity and body size, which are connected by a symmetrical visual representation and a close physical posture (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996), classifying them as belonging to a group with the same commonality of taboo. These semiotic resources represent taboo with the notions of commonality, and thus, naturality as part of a woman's body (Extract 2, 6). Throughout the images, there are several patterns of interactive meaning, whereby women's direct gaze at the viewer evokes a strong commitment on the part of the viewer to feel included. Therefore, semiotic resources acknowledge the viewer with a visually generic "we" as identified in the texts, in order to convey meanings of unification (Extract 1, 2).

Further, a near personal and intimate distance of the women to the viewer creates a sense of intimacy, and frontal and medium angles create a strong sense of engagement and

equal power relationship as "one of us" with the viewer. This intimate relationship portrays the viewers as friends (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996), similar to efforts of creating a conversation as identified in the texts (Extract 5, 7). The combination of the frontal and middle angles promotes an intensive engagement with the women and, by association, with the taboo, as their experiences with them are equally important for the viewers. Therefore, the pictures depict the taboo as a determining characteristic of women's experiences and as a common feature of womanhood. Also, a central informational value puts the woman in the centre, while a connecting framing emphasises women's shared identity and, lastly, low modality creates a general and timeless feeling. This composition created a sense of community by means of a close social relationship, as exemplified in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1. Pure and Powerful (0:35). Cora Women.

The findings reveal that across the variety of feminine hygiene campaigns, there is a preoccupation with representing taboo within the community. These discursive and semiotic strategies interplay to provoke a sense of solidarity within a societal group that shares the same sentiment and experiences around taboo. The sense of community is particularly emphasized through references that imply a large group formation among whom the taboo occurs.

4.2. Discursive strategy of resisting taboo

A second main observation from the analysis is that the feminine hygiene campaigns represent taboo with a notion of resistance, in which women as a societal group are expected to defy the idea of needing to hide the taboo. In this way, the texts aim to legitimise the visibility of taboo topics in society. The texts feature linguistic elements that evoke expectation

and obligation is redefining societal norms that govern taboo. The discursive strategy of resisting taboo is expressed through argumentation, perspectivation and intensification, which engage the reader on an authoritative level. As a result of this, the reader is confronted with knowledge claims regarding the necessity of shifting characteristics attributed to taboo and the urgency in supporting social action. Thus, the emphasis in conveying the resistance of taboo is put on refusing to comply with traditional taboo-related norms and the rightness in shifting these.

A strategy of argumentation mainly generates the discursive strategy of resisting taboo. The argumentation strategy, which provides justifications behind assertions in order to convince of their truthfulness and normative correctness (Wodak, 2009), functions in the texts as a means of generating a sense of justice and responsibility through generalisation, numbers and illustrative examples. In four texts, numerical evidence combined with illustrative and descriptive sentences is employed to support a shift of perceptions on taboo attributes.

Extract 8 (Text 7):

> For the past <u>100</u> years, razor brands have <u>pretended</u> body hair <u>doesn't exist</u>. Commercials show razors gliding over <u>smooth</u>, <u>hairless</u> legs. <u>Strange huh?</u> Introducing Project Body Hair. A celebration of hair… <u>wherever it is or isn't</u>.

The text first employs the number of years for the generalisation that all razor brands exclude body hair along with the negatively connotated verb 'pretended' and the negation 'doesn't exist'. Secondly, the claim is exemplified by referring to traditional characteristics of razor product advertising through the adjectives 'smooth' and 'hairless', which serve to further orient the reader towards the discriminatory treatment of body hair in the public media. Thirdly, the interrogative mood 'strange huh?' implicitly entails a question of the societal institutions that imposed these preferential norms. Concluding from this, the argumentative pattern justifies the ideological stance that feminine hygiene topics are marginalised due to beauty norms. Consequently, it intends to legitimise the reconceptualisation of body hair that is celebrated from not being existent to being 'wherever'. Thus, text makes assertions and arguments about what is not right in traditional taboo norms.

Additionally, other passages in the texts make use of numbers in combination with a heightened modality to give arguments for the necessity in shifting norms around taboo as a means to achieve social change, as can be taken from Extract 9 (Text 1):

> Our #bloodnormal campaign aims to call time on period taboos. We've conducted an online survey of among <u>10,017</u> men and women and found that <u>74%</u>* of them <u>want</u> to <u>see</u>

more realistic representation of periods in advertisements. <u>We show</u> true-to-life situations; <u>we show</u> blood; <u>we show</u> the world that the <u>only</u> way to <u>kill</u> stigma is to make the invisible visible.

In this text, statistical results of a conducted research are presented as a justification for the brand's focus on menstrual blood. By alluding to '74%' both males and females with the verb 'want', signifying demand, the focus on the topic is justified as being right or a correct thing to do. In addition, the repetition of the referential constructions of 'we show' creates a sense of activism within the readers in supporting the breaking of tabooed norms around menstruation. Also, the use of the lexicon of the emotive verb 'kill' and the adverb 'only' persuade the readers that supporting the visibility of marginalised topics is the correct way of ending with the stigmatising norms. Hence, argumentation has the effect of activating readers in support of the brand's social cause.

Moreover, perspectivation is also employed in the discursive strategy of resisting taboo, which aims to illustrate the feminine hygiene brands support for female hygiene taboos as to authenticate this point of view and influence the beliefs of the readers as well. With this, the texts make use of linguistic devices such as modality and discourse markers. Various of the analysed texts provide numerous examples of the use of modal auxiliaries (can, will, could, would, should) in the discursive construction of resistance concerning taboo. The modal auxiliary 'should' convey the ideological viewpoint that taboo normativity should be redefined. The former is granted in part through a commanding voice that evokes an expectation in readers to refuse to accept taboo as prohibited, but rather to adopt new norms on taboo in the future. A passage from Text 1 combines this strategy with a discourse marker of contrast to disassociate defining taboo meanings.

Extract 10:

Contrary to popular belief, women <u>don't bleed</u> blue liquid, <u>they bleed</u> blood. Periods are normal. Showing them <u>should</u> be too. #bloodnormal

The intention of the discourse marker 'contrary' is to contrast 'don't bleed' with 'they bleed', which through negation orient to society's misconceptions on taboo. Thereby, 'blue liquid' is juxtaposed with the real characteristic of 'blood' to disassociate between the distorted and real portrayal of taboo. Second, the indicative mood followed by the modal auxiliary 'should' entails a sense of obligation in how society needs to look at the taboo as usual and reinforces the claim as something that cannot be negotiated by the reader.

Additionally, an expression of intensity is employed throughout the texts to direct preferable attitudes and behaviours that can contribute to real change for female hygiene

taboos. These provide a perspective stance on the degree of urgency in the need to participate in social change. For instance, Extract 11 (Text 6) provides the following linguistic elements:

> There's a serious lack of female body hair on the internet. Search "woman" in any image gallery and you'll be scrolling for a while before finding a single strand. We're here to change that. Help us grow our image library by using #projectbodyhair or uploading your own photo. The internet could use a little more fuzz.

Similarly, the text makes use of the discourse marker of place 'there' to direct readers to significant insufficiency in the portrayal of body hair, as connoted through 'serious lack'. The verb 'change' as well as the expression of need 'help us' explicitly address the reader to engage in helping make the taboo of body hair visible. Nevertheless, the text further makes use of the modal auxiliary 'could' and the combined diminutive and augmentative adjectives 'little more' to invoke a spark of possible resistance and to limit the amount of hair to be shown as it is still a razor product which is being advertised.

Furthermore, texts that include a discursive strategy of resisting taboo employ linguistic devices as a means to intensify an increase the sense of action in not accepting the need of hiding taboo. These texts employ modality and rhetorical figures as linguistic devices for such aims. Text 5 includes usages of personification, imperative moods and repetitions throughout, as can be exemplified in the following Extract 12:

> THE TAMPON BOOK - The book that saves taxes 7% on caviar. 7% on truffles. 19% on tampons? The German tax system is not fair! We thought of something: Books are also taxed at 7%. That's why we hid your organic tampons in them! tamponbook.com Together with Scholz & Friends Berlin and illustrator Ana Curbelo. Stop taxing periods. Period.

In the extract, the book is personified with the strong emotive verb 'saves' in regard to its attempt to lower the tax on tampons. This has the effect of intensifying the heroic function of the book for resisting taboo. Further, the repetition of the number '7%' aims to heighten the sense of injustice between luxury goods being taxed less than tampons. Lastly, the imperatives 'stop' and 'period' reinforce the message, whereby a position of authority is assumed by the text to command a broader public about a political and social injustice in the taxing of taboo.

Therefore, this intensification strategy helps to legitimize orders of command. Text 4 makes use of the intensification strategy to create an expectation from the readers by claiming that there should be no stigmatisation of menstruation due to it being essential for human life.

Extract 13:

>That's why <u>we believe</u> <u>"that time of the month"</u> should never be a source of <u>shame, harm or uncertainty.</u>

The message is reinforced through quotation marks around "that time of the month" to portray the common euphemism for menstruation as being inaccurate, and the mentioning of three negative consequences of the stigma around menstruation. Here the reader is implicitly addressed as if he or she were subject to patriarchally imposed ideas of indirect talk of the taboo. Besides, the emphasis is placed on raising the reader's expectation to no longer hold taboo as harmful to the individual. The allusion to shame and secrecy also legitimise the correctness of shifting traditional norms on taboo.

In the campaign visuals, the resemiotization of the discourse of resistance is identified through the conveying of meanings of defiance through representations of taboo that are confrontational to the public eye. Thus, throughout seven of the campaign videos, taboo is represented through demanding depictions that transmit ideas of active change rather than compliance. Hereby, the participants depicted in the campaign videos function as leaders of resistance by engaging in normalized action in regard to taboo, also in front of others. Table 4.3. presents the semiotic resources at play throughout the visuals of the campaign.

Representational meaning	Interactive meaning	Compositional meaning
Narrative: (I) Transactional narrative/action:, man buying sanitary pads, woman asking for a tampon at the dinner table, hand pouring blood on pad, woman drawing image of warrior against blood-monster, woman engaging in sexual activity while menstruating (V1), woman in sun chair spreading legs legs (V7), women hiding her body in spotlight, women transferring knowledge of female genitalia anatomy (V8), man walking through locker room (V3)	**Contact:** (I) Offer: gaze directed at person within image, neutral (V1,3,8) (II) Demand: gaze directed at viewer, confrontational stare (V1), defiant stare and hands on hips (V7,8), unblinkingly looking down at viewers, head move – right to front (V7), defiant stare and raised eyebrow (V6)	**Information value:** (I) Centre: tampon and text (V5), bikini line and text (V7), unibrow (V6), non-existent genitalia, covering female genitalia (V8), red shirt with text "sangro no necesito tu aprobación", sanitary pad, tube with blood (V1) (II) Left/Right: woman - woman asking for pad, woman jumps into pool (V1) (III) Top/Ideal: tampon string - joy (V3), blood - tampon with blood (V4)
Conceptual: (II) Symbolic: barbie doll (carrier) without female genitalia (symbolic attribute) (V8), razor (carrier) with body hair (symbolic attribute) (V6), pad (carrier) filled with blood (symbolic attribute) (V4), tampon (carrier) with drop of blood (symbolic attribute), animated image of Obama (carrier) and text "men make the laws" (symbolic attribute) (V5), girl (carrier) with armpit hair and red bathing suit (symbolic attribute) (V4), girl (carrier) with red shirt and red rain drops (symbolic attributes) (V1)	**Distance:** (I) Medium: from the waist up (V1,3,4,7) (II) Long: whole figure (V8)	**Framing:** (I) Connecting – pool lines and ladder handles (V7), door frames (V1), window frames (V3), curtain/curtain shade (V8)
	Point of view: (I) Vertical - eye level; horizontal - frontal (V1,3,4,5,6,7,8) (II) Vertical - low angle; horizontal - frontal (V7)	**Salience:** (I) Colour contrast: red (V1,3,4,5,7) (II) Text: "breaking" (V6), "stupid" (V5), "heavy flow", "no blood should hold us back and warrior" (V1), "why do we still put up with uncomfortable sex?" (V9), "re-vulva-lution" (V10) (III) Sound: military drum (V5), "defy convention" (V4), sword noise (V6), "what the f-" (V8)
Setting: (I) Shower (V1), Ocean (V7), Pool (V1,7) (II) Laboratory (V1,4) (III) Classroom (V8), Library (V1)		**Modality** (I) Low: tones of blue and yellow (V1,3) (II) High: deep perspective (V1,7), full colour (V2,7), tonal contrast - black, white and red (V4,5), white, blue, and red (V7)

Table 4.3. Visual social semiotic resources and elements in the discursive strategy of resisting taboo.

In the campaign visuals, representational meanings consist of narratives that are created around actors interacting with the taboo and others in social settings. With this, locations in outdoor spaces such as schools and pools are an additional aspect of a representative meaning of visibility (Extract 13). These semiotic resources contribute to showing real representations of the taboo as well as normalized situations in which the participants engage openly with the taboo without reacting disrupted by it (Extract 8, 9, 10). The visuals also show the taboo in visible relation to female hygiene products and women's bodies, for which these become attributed and symbolic statements of confronting the norm

(Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Hence, feminine products are carriers of the taboo, and women have attributed an identity through these symbolic meanings as confronting oppressive behaviour. An interactive pattern of meaning consists of keeping the viewer at a social distance, while at the same time evoking a high level of viewer involvement through frontal viewing angles. Contact with the viewer is established by offer in the narrative scenes, which allow the viewer to observe the normative situations depicted. Also, defiant glances directed at the viewer in the conceptual images demand attention. Thus, some of the images convey a sense of expectation similar to the tone of urgency in the texts (Extract 11); others create a commitment to public action to achieve a societal change in the perception of female hygiene taboos (Extract 9, 12).

       The notions of expectation and possibility are mainly enhanced by the composition of low modality, on the one side, which separates the images from everyday reality to convey slightly futuristic scenarios in which taboo is normal and unsurprising. Meanings of defiance are reinforced by the consistent emphasis on the colour red, in juxtaposition to blue and white, which connotes power and danger. On the other hand, high modality by sharpness and colour contrast in black and white tones emphasise a sense of bad and good. Also, the prominence of words such as "breaking" and sounds of smashing and marching emphasise the language of revolution, which signals the challenging of patriarchal norms and ideals that surround the taboo, as suggested in the texts (Extract 12). In summary, resisting taboo is composed of symbols of confrontation as well as futuristic notions that convey changing norms with the public visibility of the taboo. The demanding social relationship in resisting taboo is exemplified in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Blood Normal (1:28). Libresse.

The findings reveal that across the feminine hygiene campaigns, a discursive strategy of resistance is constructed through a sense of defiance, which consists in publicly engaging with subjects that are related to female hygiene taboos. Hereby, the texts call for shifting norms on taboo by means of confrontational representations. Thus, the resisting of taboo is concerned with citizens' responsibility in defying social norms and progressing social change. Particularly, the texts invoke the idea that taboo can be assumed as a tool for resistance from oppressive societal norms.

4.3. Discursive strategy of body re-appropriation

A third observation from the text corpus of the feminine hygiene campaigns consists of the re-appropriation of the female body in its totality, including the taboo. This construction of re-appropriation is formed by discursive strategies that emphasise the right of personal choice and agency of women to the health and wellbeing of their bodies. The discursive strategy of body re-appropriation is composed of the referential, perspectivation and predicative categories, which engage with the readers on a personal level and provide a sense of power to the readers in having exclusive control over their own lives. Therefore, notions of freedom of choice and pride are conveyed by the linguistic elements that make up re-appropriating the female body.

The referential category forms the discourse of re-appropriation in a particular way by constructing social relations through personal pronouns and modality. Five texts include the second personal and possessive pronouns 'you' and 'yours' in order to construct a group in which the agency of the female subject is granted. With this, the focus lies on tapping into a sense of ability and integrity of readers by encouraging self-decisions regarding bodily topics, specifically those that are tabooed. In Text 7, for example, second-person pronouns in connection to affirmative imperatives encourage the readers' ownership of body hair. Consider Extract 14:

> What <u>you</u> <u>do</u> with <u>yours</u> is up to <u>you</u> - <u>grow it, get rid of it, or comb it</u>. It's <u>your</u> hair, after all.

In this extract, the repetition of the personal pronoun 'you' and the possessive pronoun 'your' addresses the reader directly and presupposes a highly valuable relationship with the individual reader. The verb 'do' followed by the affirmative imperatives 'grow it', 'get rid' and 'comb it' denotes action in the reader's control over what to do with their body hair. The enumeration of affirmative imperative moods softens a commanding voice to provoke a sense of choice rather than an obligation in the readers in owning the taboo.

As a part of the referential category, a group of women is classified that feel at whole with their bodies. The former is combined with the modality of permission, which invokes an emancipatory feel in re-appropriating the body. This is evident in Extract 15 (Text 4):

> We <u>see</u> a world where women <u>can</u> live fully-embodied—with confidence, pride, and reverence for the awesome power of <u>their</u> female bodies.

Beginning with 'we see a world where', the construction of a group of women that take charge of 'their' bodies are issued through an imaginary feel. Consequently, notions of happiness, based on a positive relationship of these with their bodies, aims to persuade readers on an emotional level of longing to be part of that group. This is further articulated through the use of the modal of permission 'can', in which the text puts itself in a position to permit the reader to take action in feeling the same sense of pride. Thus, linguistic devices aim to encourage the reader by creating a sense of ability.

Furthermore, perspectivation emphasises the brand's beliefs and involvement to similarly frame the re-appropriation of the female body as being essential for women's wellbeing. Thus, the texts invoke a sense of consciousness in the readers by expressing support for being a proud possessor of one's bodily experiences, regardless of whether they are tabooed. This is achieved through a metaphorization of women as an empowered group. Consider Extract 16 taken from Text 10, which describes the brand's advertising campaign 'That's What V Said':

> We're putting a <u>modern</u> take on a 1960s look to break the nostalgic boundaries of traditional feminine care marketing. We're using fun, satirical phrases that turn the term "That's What She Said" on its head and <u>setting the stage</u> for the <u>new generation of empowered women</u>.

In this context, the expression of 'new generation of empowered women' makes reference to future women that are not ashamed to educate themselves around the tabooed body part of female genitalia. Thus, as this group participates in reappropriating tabooed subjects of women's bodies, they are depicted as 'empowered'.

Declarative sentences that appeal to the reader's emotions are another linguistic device employed by the texts in giving a perspective of the brand's stance towards supporting the own appropriation of women bodies, and accordingly, of taboo. This is evident in Extract 17 (Text 8):

> At Bodyform <u>we believe that every vulva is special</u>, and that differences should be celebrated. From pubic hair to labia-lip size, <u>we want you to feel proud of what you've got.</u> After all, shame and embarrassment around this small (but incredible) part of the body can have a big negative impact on confidence.

The declarative sentences 'we believe' and 'we want' consist of mental verb processes, which allude to the emotions of the readers through the verb of feeling. Further, the strong positive adjectives of 'special' ascribed to taboo instill in readers a sense of pride in their female genitalia and consequently benefit from an increase in 'confidence'. As a result, this strategy helps the brand create intimacy and a sense of trust to persuade readers to feel the same sense of security in their female genitalia for the improvement of their mental health and wellbeing.

Predication, which assigns evaluative attributes to social actors, objects and phenomena (Wodak, 2009), is also employed within the discursive strategy of body re-appropriation. This is done as a way to designate positive traits and benefits that emerge from a better understanding and education on female hygiene taboos. Such examples apply to the campaign slogans of Text 4 "Purposeful. Period.", implicitly referencing the experience of menstruation as being of purpose, and Text 6, which refers to body hair as making the internet 'fuzzier'. Only a few texts directly attribute positive adjectives to describe the taboo on its own, as can be read in Extract 18 (Text 8):

> Over half think their vulva is <u>imperfect</u>. But there is only one <u>perfect</u> vulva. <u>Yours</u>! Care your way.

In this case, the attribution of the adjective 'perfect' serves to emphasise that each 'vulva' is normal in its way. With this, this text depicts the taboo itself as desirable in order to persuade women into accepting the shape and form of their female genitalia and, consequently, to legitimise women's re-appropriation of the body and subjects formerly considered taboo.

In addition, two texts include evidence of stigmatised vocabulary, which makes reference to unwanted aspects of taboo. This means that there are still allusions to taboo in regard to discomfort, which can be felt and perceived by women. The former is particularly evident in the following enumeration, wherein the feminine hygiene product is framed as the solution for unwanted issues provoked by the taboo. Consider Extract 19 (Text 2):

> Introducing FLEX: an <u>innovative solution</u> to those outdated period products. 12 hours wear. Leak-<u>proof</u>. Swim-<u>proof</u>. Sleep-<u>proof</u>.

In this text, the menstrual hygiene product is evaluated as being 'leak-proof'. The lexicon of 'leak' is in itself stigmatised as it signifies a negative characteristic of a contaminating female body. Thus, repetition of '-proof' designates a negative attribute to the taboo of menstrual blood, suggesting the need for protection. Nevertheless, although the vocabulary choice perpetuates the menstrual taboo, tensions are created in the labelling of 'innovative' and 'outdated', which implies acknowledging and taking control of tabooed topics in order to

assess and reclaim choices that are better for one's own health and well-being. Thus, the aim of the text remains still to legitimise the re-appropriation of the female body by emphasizing the choice women have in reallocating control towards innovative products in contrast to those that are 'outdated'.

In the visual imagery of the campaign, the resemiotization of the discourse of re-appropriation is identified through women's active ownership of the body, including tabooed bodily functions. Within eight of the campaign videos taboos are represented as interrelated with the physicality of the body. This is particularly evident through images that depict women actively engaging with their bodies while being free to choose over the decisions that pertain to all aspects of their being. Table 4.4. presents the semiotic resources at play throughout the visuals of the campaign.

Representational meaning

Narrative:

(I) Transactive narrative/action: woman (actor) holds mirror up to her female genitalia (goal), woman (actor) opens up arms towards her sides (V8), woman hand's (actor) hold up objects (V8,10), woman's hands (actor) shaving legs (goal) (V6), woman hand's (actor) hold up tampon (goal) (V2), women (actors) hold hands up in air (goal), woman (actor) lifts up arm (goal) (V6), woman (actors) move head from right to left (V7), woman dancing (V4), gymnastic pose (V1,4)

Conceptual:

(II) Attributed symbolic: woman's body (whole) with body hair and without body hair (parts) (V4,6), woman hands (actor) holding fruit in front of other woman (goal), woman wrapped in curtain (V8)

Interactive meaning

Contact:

(I) Offer: deferential/respect (V8), content smile (V8,10) (II) Demand: gaze with pleased smile (V6,8), gaze with indifferent expression (V6,7), gaze with celebratory expression (V9)

Distance:

(I) Close up: female bodies (V1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10)
(II) Medium: from the waist up (V6,8)
(III) Long: whole figure (V6,7)

Point of view:

(I) Vertical – look slightly up to actors; horizontal - frontal (V1,6,7,8)
(II) Vertical - eye level; horizontal - frontal (V2,4,7,8,9,10)

Compositional meaning

Information value:

(I) Ideal to real: body (given) and confident face expression (ideal) (V4,7,8), woman standing on ground level (given) and woman sitting on top level of ladder (ideal) (V7)

(II) Centre: mirror (V8), female body curve (V4), woman lying in upright posture (V6,7), armpit hair/armpit without hair (V6), objects in front of female genitalia (V8,10), women face (V10)

Framing:

(I) Connecting: stairs (V6,8), shape of women stance, ocean horizon, pool installation (V7), mirror (V8), room decor and doors (Video 6)
(II) Disconnecting: plants/nature (V8)

Salience:

(I) Foregrounded: skin (V4,6,7,8), facial expression of pride/ confidence (V8), representation of female genitalia (objects) (V8,10)
(II) Colour: pink and purple (V8)
(III) Focus: body movement spreading arms (V1, 4,8), curtain uncovers woman (V8), anatomy graphs on chalkboard (V2)

Modality:

(I)High: deep perspective, full colour (V1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10)

Table 4.4. Visual social semiotic resources and elements in the discursive strategy of body re-appropriation.

On a representational level of meaning, transactional narratives show women in processes of action with their bodies. Herein the viewer is the observer of women engaging with tabooed subjects. Additionally, images use symbolic attributive processes, in which meaning and identity are conferred from a symbolic attribute to a carrier (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). As such, images show women and parts of women's bodies with much skin posing for the viewer and holding objects that resemble female genitalia. The focus on the exploration and maintenance of the body is also underlined by celebratory notions. Thus, these semiotic resources highlight a sense of control of women over their body parts, as identified in the texts (Extract 14). The former enhances the freedom of women in the decision making and participation in the health and wellbeing of their own bodies.

Suggestive notions and direct display of the taboo are combined with woman's eye contact and face gestures of pride and pleasure, which appeal to readers' emotions. As a result, close up shots of female body parts in frontal angles create intimacy and convey a sense of self as the viewer can identify with the inherent physicality of the body. The salience of the facial expressions of happiness in the ownership of all bodily functions evokes notions of self-love. Additionally, gazes of indifference at a further distance and low vertical angles, in which the viewer looks up to the women, suggest some viewers may idolize the women depicted. In contrast, others may feel inferior to them. Combined with a top to bottom information value, women's sense of self-ownership and bodily confidence is framed as ideal. It connotes a sense of empowerment, also discursively conveyed in the texts (Extract 15, 16, 17). Through the high naturalistic modality as well as disconnecting framing that allows the women's bodies to be given separate identities, notions of individuality also enhance the portrayal of women as powerful. The idealised social relationship in re-appropriating the female body is exemplified in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Viva La Vulva (0:54). Bodyform.

The findings reveal a discursive strategy of body re-appropriation, which is concerned with women engaging with their bodies in a different way by embracing female hygiene taboos. The text evokes emancipatory and permissive mental processes in the acceptance and education of taboo subjects that provide beneficial consequences for women. Thus, the emphasis here lies on women's own choice in the maintenance of the taboo for the improvement of their own health and wellbeing.

4.4. Interpretation of textual practice

The analysed texts are produced upon the existing field of feminine hygiene, by which intertextual elements draw upon the concepts of purity and pollution as well as public and private spheres to shape the texts' meanings on taboo. Additionally, interpreting the textual practice for interdiscursivity reveals how the discursive strategies of taboo within the community, resisting taboo and body re-appropriation are influenced by other texts in advertising through the interdiscursive elements of postfeminism.

First, the discursive strategy of taboo within the community positions taboo between the notions of purity and public sphere. Taboo is represented as biologically natural and of an essentialist character for women's bodies, whereby its inherent nature to the female body includes emotional and physical aspects as part of the experience. Considering the public–private binary (Habermas, 1991a), the discursive construction of a sense of community through a group of women that share the same experiences, situates taboo into the public sphere. The conveying of meanings of unity and solidarity keep taboo in the public, and as a result, does not imply the privatization of female hygiene taboos. With regard to the purity–pollution binary (Douglas, 1966), references to the naturalness of bodily function such as menstruation position taboo as an inherent part of womanhood, instead of polluting nature. Thus, the notion of purity is manifested through the idea of taboo as private in relation to its essential role in being one's own self. Therefore, the public/pure construct simultaneously creates an ideal of the natural feminine with taboo at the core of the body. No allusion to the necessity of modifying the body is made, as the focus lies on experiencing taboo as a full-embodied experience (Gill, 2007).

Intertextually, the ideological stance of taboo as being common draws upon the emerging natural discourse of taboo in traditional feminine hygiene advertising (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Personal feminine hygiene is thus linked to a natural discourse instead of being related to the need of protection from polluting substances (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Interdiscursively, the discursive strategy of taboo within the community carries meaning from postfeminist discourses, which views women's bodies as natural sources of power (Gill, 2007). More specifically, the sense of community applies to the common trait of inclusivity in

the discourse of female empowerment (Hsu, 2018). However, the results of this study emphasize a strong sense of solidarity as women are depicted in groups, thereby going beyond the individualistic nature identified in most empowerment messages (Champlin et al., 2019; Tsai, Shata, & Tian, 2019). In this sense, this discursive strategy in the representation of taboo plays upon the feeling of empowerment of women's bodies differently by focusing on a collective public experience.

Second, the discursive strategy of resisting taboo positions female hygiene taboos within tensions of purity and pollution in the public sphere. Taboo is depicted with a sense of defiance in its capacity to confront patriarchal perfection standards in society and to achieve social change in the real representation of women. Considering the public–private binary (Habermas, 1991a), the sense of resisting taboo moves the associated female hygiene topics into the public sphere through an authoritative call of action towards individuals in collectively contributing to social change by opposing traditional patriarchal norms. Therefore, taboo is associated with public resistance against societal institutions. The ideal in the public sphere consists of the normalized attitude towards personal hygiene topics in public spaces. With regard to the purity–pollution binary (Douglas, 1966), references to the ordinary yet revolutionary potential of taboo creates tension between its nature as pure and polluting. Taboo is thus recognized as being powerful and dangerous due to its confrontational nature, while also being regarded to as ordinary in that it does no harm to the individual and others.

The discursive strategy of resisting taboo recontextualizes the concepts of purity and pollution, which have been employed to reference cleanliness and dirtiness, and attributes a new meaning of resistance. By opposing restrictions on taboo, this discursive strategy supports a new ideological stance on the deconstruction of taboo through defiance. Thereby, it opposes the idea of menstruation as dirty and in need of protection from the sight of others (Kissling, 2006; Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Hence, the advertisements support the visibility of feminine hygiene topics that are considered as taboo as a means of dispelling the shame and secrecy surrounding these topics. Thus, resisting taboo can be regarded as a counternarrative to the traditional feminine hygiene advertising that negatively frames the taboo and perpetuates stereotypical associations with femininity and the female body (Freitas, 2008). Concerning interdiscursivity, resisting taboo can be linked to the realistic portrayal of female bodies in postfeminist discourse, which is concerned with authentically depicting women and challenging gender norms (Becker-Herby, 2016). Furthermore, it provides a solution to the concerns of female empowerment in prior feminine hygiene product advertising, which include narratives that remind viewers of women's everyday struggles of inequality yet employ behind-the-scene instances and interview settings that do not foment a discussion of feminine hygiene topics in open conversations (Champlin et al., 2019). By contrast, representing taboo in relation to resistance conveys a more powerful and aggressive

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message towards societal change in taking public action on shifting taboo norms. The discursive strategy of resisting taboo therefore focuses on messaging that supports the advocacy for women's real portrayals in the public.

Third, the discursive strategy of body re-appropriation positions female hygiene taboos between the notion of purity in the public sphere. The focus lies on a health engagement with bodily functions through the embracing and freedom in choosing how to own these taboos, which results in a sense of confidence and pride. With regard to the public–private binary (Habermas, 1991a), the discourse of re-appropriation moves taboo into the public sphere through the open engagement of women with their bodies, which is likewise private in its uniqueness to each woman. An ideal is constructed in the public sphere of embracing taboo to gain confidence in one's own physical appearance, thereby prioritizing one's own mental wellbeing. Considering the purity–pollution binary (Douglas, 1966), references to the close interrelationship of taboo with the physicality of the body disregards taboo as polluting in nature. Instead, taboo is recognized as pure in the way that it plays a unique role in every woman's body and should be a source of celebration.

Intertextually, the ideological stance of re-appropriating the body is connected to some extent to women's control over their bodies. This perspective can be linked to the discourse of modernity in earlier traditional hygiene advertising (Mandziuk, 2010), which perpetuated the definitions of a modern woman with hygiene. The discourse of modernity reinforces the idea that the purpose of buying feminine hygiene products is to feel good about oneself based on a specific type of appearance (Kane, 1990); however, the re-appropriation of the body includes happiness in accepting one's own body as it is. Thus, it opposes the perfectionist beauty standards in society, which are connected to the objectification of the female body through the male gaze (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). The representation of taboo through a sense of re-appropriating the body does not exclude the notion of freshness. Instead, it is concerned with the recontextualization from the ideal of cleanliness, as protection against the taboo, to a notion of care. Interdiscursively, the re-appropriation of the body also relates to the confidence of women with their bodies within the discourse of female empowerment (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Hence, the discursive strategy applies to the current female empowerment discourse insofar as it concentrates on an intimate and personal level of empowerment in addressing body image and confidence (Champlin et al., 2019). Nevertheless, due to the inclusion of taboo, the results of the present study reveal this notion of body empowerment as being more centred on the construct of appreciating all body's functionalities.

To conclude, the representation of female hygiene taboos through the discursive strategies of taboo within the community, resisting taboo, and body re-appropriation position taboo in the public sphere. In addition, female hygiene topics are emphasised as private

insofar that they are meaningful to each woman and their body. The former is done, however, without the traditional privatization of taboos as a polluting matter. Also, the discourses draw upon the postfeminist notions of subjectivation, control over one's own body and freedom of choice (Gill, 2007), causing an overlap with the discourse of female empowerment through body positivity and self-confidence (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Table 4.5. summarizes the discursive strategies and arguments used to manifest taboo in relation to feminism in the recent genre of feminine hygiene advertising.

Discursive strategy		Argument	Instances in dataset
Taboo within the community	Contain/Deny	Taboo is not polluting as it is the essence of womanhood by being at the core of woman's bodies.	T1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 (see Table 3.2.)
	Pollution/Purity		
	Expand/Create	Taboo is a public matter of interest as it is a personal experience natural to all women.	
	Public/Private		
Resisting taboo	Contain/Deny	Taboo is not polluting as it is a real representation of women's bodies, resistant to restrictive ideals of femininity.	T1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 (see Table 3.2.)
	Purity/Pollution		
	Expand/Create	Taboo is of public interest as it supports the social agency of women.	
	Public/Private		
Body re-appropriation	Expand/Create	Taboo is celebratory as it is unique to every woman's physicality.	T1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 (see Table 3.2.)
	Purity/Pollution		
	Contain	Taboo is of personal interest as it is an aspect of emancipated femininity.	
	Public/Private		

Table 4.5. Discursive strategies and arguments used to manifest taboo and feminism in the feminine hygiene campaigns.

Chapter Summary

The multimodal critical discourse analysis enables the identification of three discursive strategies of taboo within the community, resisting taboo and body re-appropriation within an interplay of feminine hygiene campaign text and images, which convey meanings of solidarity, defiance and health engagement. Based on an interpretation of the textual practice by means of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, the analysis finds the recent feminine hygiene advertising to recontextualize theoretical conceptions of taboo as a matter of public responsibility and empowerment. The findings suggest that these discursive strategies on taboo draw from postfeminist notions, which link to the female empowerment discourse in advertising. These findings are discussed in the next chapter to explain how advertising exploits personal hygiene taboos.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the main findings of the analysis for the implications of how recent feminine hygiene campaigns represent and recontextualize female hygiene taboos while drawing from the discourse of female empowerment. It also attempts to answer the central research question of how advertising exploits taboo among cultural-feminist movements. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how the results of this study contribute to the academic literature. Finally, the limitations of this study are outlined and proposals for future research are presented.

5.1. Taboo is not polluting

Society has long limited the presence and visibility of female hygiene taboos as a private matter in the public sphere. This situation is due to traditional feminine hygiene advertising's use of a public coded discourse that perpetuates shame and secrecy around subjects such as menstruation, body hair and female genitalia (Freitas, 2008; Thomas, 2016). However, the results of the current study indicate that the new genre of feminine hygiene advertising stands out by promoting an intimate female hygiene subject through female-empowering messages of diversity and body acceptance as well as through activism towards the restrictive ideals of femininity. Thus, the findings suggest that taboo can be brought into the public sphere without intensifying negative meanings.

The feminine hygiene brands express the brand's values through the attribution of meanings of solidarity, defiance and health engagement to female hygiene taboos, thus attempting to define and convey experiences (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Kane, 1990). Thereby, the feminine hygiene campaigns in the present study relate the taboos to women's issues and the prioritization of wellbeing without perceiving them as polluting. This commodification of the taboo has several implications for ideology as it offers opposing interpretative viewpoints for consumers (Hackley, 2002). Thus, this new discourse in feminine hygiene advertising frames taboo as a public matter, which redefines the cultural attitude towards the taboo as a topic to be openly discussed (Malefyt & McCabe, 2016). Implied in this premise is the shift away from the perception of personal hygiene taboos as dirty (Douglas, 1966). Hence, advertising markets taboo as an impurity which is to be embraced due to how it is meaningful and inherent to the female body. As a result, new notions of femininity are created that oppose the one-sided and commodified ideals of the female body.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest the visibility of female body topics in the public sphere, which is integrated into discourses of public interest (Habermas, 1991a).

This initiation in the normalization of female hygiene taboos through visibility in the public sphere conflicts with different social discourses, which consists of standardized ideals of perfection and taboo-related norms imposed by patriarchal institutions (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In this manner, the commodification of feminism creates a structural process that recontextualizes the socio-cultural ideologies of taboo and generates several implications for broader societal issues. As Ryan argues, counternarratives and the public exposure of silenced issues bring women's issues into the debate (1992), by which the conveyed ideal of natural femininity through the advertisements initiates a conversation that allows female consumers to adopt a position on the subject. The promotion of public responsibility around taboo consists of a resource for women to negotiate their identity in the public space of Western society. Therefore, the findings challenge what is considered as an appropriate role for women in public (Kissling, 1966). Instead of reinforcing the idea that women's value is limited to the domestic sphere (Kane, 1990), the idea of public responsibility allows minorities, in this case, women who disagree with the secrecy surrounding taboo, to be given a social representation and a voice concerning their bodies (Ryan, 1992).

It can be concluded that the feminine hygiene advertising allows marginalized female topics to gain visibility in the public sphere (Habermas, 1991a). Moreover, this visibility of feminine hygiene topics in the public sphere subsequently results in the deconstruction of female hygiene taboos and speaks for women in society (Houppert, 1995). Therefore, feminine hygiene advertising can be considered as engaging in a critical conversation that can provoke social change by promoting public responsibility and empowerment of the female body.

5.2. Taboo as new female empowerment discourse

Given feminine hygiene brands' communication efforts in recent years to explicitly foreground taboo topics, this study has investigated the new phenomenon of how taboo is represented in new media advertising campaigns. The aim of this study has consisted in determining how advertising exploits female hygiene taboos for the marketing of feminine hygiene products. From the analysis, this research identifies the discursive strategies of taboo within the community, resisting taboo and body re-appropriation, and associated meanings of solidarity, defiance and health engagement.

Due to the field of female empowerment in advertising, this research has aimed to relate the discursive strategies for the representation of taboo in these campaigns to an appropriation of a female empowerment discourse. The former in an attempt to answer the main research question. Although advertising has previously regarded female hygiene taboos and notions of feminism as incompatible, this study concludes that taboo is exploited in the

light of the social movement of female empowerment to support social change concerning the marginalization of women's topics. Taboo is attributed to meanings that are part of the empowering messages to women and their bodies. Therefore, advertising associates taboo with values related to the empowerment of women to promote the identification of the individual consumer with the brand, specifically enabling a niche of belief-driven consumers to strengthen their interest in the realistic portrayal of women and their bodies through consumer behaviour.

This study confirms that this newer form of feminine hygiene advertising does not focus on the product as much as they convey a message related to social issues concerning women. By taking the trends of social brand activism and female empowerment discourse in advertising as an entry point, the current research argues that feminine hygiene brands attach new meanings to female hygiene taboos, thereby, creating value for consumers through female empowerment messaging. As the feminine care brands deal with a topic that is already divisive due to the nature of taboo, from women who support the protective discourse to women who have a naturalistic view of taboos, they recognize a disruption that enables cultural relevance through visibility in contested spaces (Holt & Cameron, 2010). Therefore, advertising exploits taboo as a resource for supporting countervailing cultural ideologies and beliefs in Western society. Hence, while taboo in advertising has been employed to discriminate women, it is now placed in the public sphere as an empowering discourse.

The cultural-feminist approach adopted in this study proves suitable for exploring taboo, especially in recent feminine hygiene advertising. Considering how brands attach social and cultural meanings to their products (Banet-Weiser, 2012), the analysis enabled the determination of how feminine hygiene brands represent the taboo and relate these brands to femininity. Discursive strategies and according semiotic elements are necessary steps to exploring how feminine hygiene brands reposition and attribute new meanings to the taboo that relate to feminine empowerment and contradict past narratives in female hygiene by explicitly using taboo as a communication strategy and situating taboo as a new female empowerment discourse.

5.3. Theoretical implications

Although the theoretical framework in this research includes extensive and cross-disciplinary literature, each of the theories proved necessary for the analysis of the selected feminine hygiene campaigns and the goals of this study. This study contributes to these theories through a critical reading of a smaller sample of recent feminine hygiene advertising campaigns that add as well as provide new insights to these theoretical considerations. This study has primarily argued that by presenting a topic as sensitive as female hygiene taboos,

feminine hygiene brands contribute to a newer female empowerment discourse, albeit extending the discussion to confrontational discourses on the most intimate topic that affects the female body.

First, this study confirms that feminine hygiene brands attach meanings to feminine hygiene products from cultural and social perspectives instead of feelings associated with the product's functionalities (Holt, 2012). The anthropological approach to branding includes the notion of feminism into theories on cultural strategy and advertising. As brands are recognized as crucial figures in increasingly dominant cultural discourses (Khamis, 2020), the results of the present study confirm that feminine hygiene brands participate in articulating the culture's understanding of femininity through conversations on women's bodies, including subjects considered taboo. Traditional feminine hygiene advertisements have created notions of appropriate femininity that keeps its feminine issues secret (Kane, 1990), but the ads in the dataset depict women acting self-determinedly over their bodies, breaking both social and hygienic taboos. These expressions represent a form of activism by challenging cultural taboos.

Second, this study delivers an understanding of how female hygiene brands counter the long-rooted meanings of pollution associated with taboo. Critical studies on taboo provided an understanding of the historical background of taboo and its role in society, and advertising studies outlined the body of research on taboo in media from a broader perspective. Although advertisers as cultural mediators disseminate specific culturally established meanings (Thompson & Haytko, 1997), the present study verifies that taboo can be turned into a commodity and commercialized (Michelson & Miller, 2019). Therefore, taboos can strengthen the established norms of consumer behaviour, but feminine hygiene campaigns provide a space for consumers to adopt new meanings and support its infringement (Gollnhofer, 2015). Furthermore, the present study suggests that taboo is neither glorified nor employed as a mechanism for shocking consumers to gain attention as in the case of past advertisements (Freitas, 2008) but is utilized as a tool for creating identification with consumers through an intimate disclosure and honest representation of taboo.

Finally, this research reveals that emerging feminine hygiene brands build new meanings and discourses according to shifting cultural norms. In the theoretical framework, studies on female hygiene advertising presented the dominant discourses over many decades and illuminated a shift in discourse specific to the taboo of menstruation. The results of this study suggest the recontextualization of traditional feminine hygiene discourses into new meanings as well as positioning as a new angle on the female empowerment discourse in advertising. As younger consumers are increasingly seeking more authenticity in advertising messages (Champlin et al., 2019), an authentic and honest side of the

conversation of empowerment is filled through taboo's inherent nature for female bodies and defining role in femininity.

5.4. Limitations

This study has discovered discursive strategies that recontextualize the concepts of purity-pollution and public-private in the field of feminine hygiene though a new discourse of female empowerment. In this way, this study delivers an understanding of how advertising deals with several female hygiene taboos: menstruation, body hair and female genitalia. As these taboos belong to the same category of feminine hygiene and stem from the same constructions of taboo, the focus has been on the exhaustiveness of taboo within a broader definition in feminine hygiene. Therefore, the results do not imply that they can be considered solely about one specific taboo such as menstrual blood or body hair, or even generalized to any taboo in advertising. The former should be considered by researchers who wish to further investigate the topic or a specific taboo related to the female body.

In addition, the data selected for analysis in this study concern the past three years because this timeframe allows for the observation of the foreground of feminine taboos as a new trend in feminine hygiene advertising. Thus, the researcher conceives the October 2017 #Bloodnormal campaign by Libresse as being the first to highlight a female hygiene taboo by showing blood that is insinuated as being menstrual. Furthermore, this research mainly focuses on digital media, as the collected data stem from the social media platform YouTube and from the feminine hygiene brand's webpage. However, this research excludes other advertising communication channels that could also be explored for this phenomenon.

A key aspect to clarify is that this study exclusively focuses on the discursive strategies and meanings constructed in 10 selected feminine hygiene advertising campaigns. The lack of previous studies on taboos in feminine hygiene advertising makes this research a preliminary explanation that requires further investigation to consolidate the identified discourse of female empowerment. It should also be made aware that this investigation predominantly involves a high degree of whiteness due to its Western context that leaves room for the consideration of a non-Western discourse. With this in mind, the researcher focused on reflexivity in order to avoid subjective interpretations that could affect the validity of the study. The mixed approach of critical discourse analysis and visual social semiotics at the textual level proved particularly important to this study to address possible discrepancies in the analysis of female hygiene advertising campaigns.

5.5. Future research

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to the lack of research between taboo, feminine hygiene and brand communication. Given the small amount of academic examination on this topic, this study provides insights into how these brands intend to reach consumers with valuable content online. The study suggests a focus on a specific subculture that is particularly passionate about the realistic representation of women's issues and their bodies (Holt, 2016). By showing how taboos are represented in feminine hygiene advertising and how they are related to female empowerment, this research contributes to the academic literature concerning taboo in brand communication. Therefore, the results can serve as a reference for scholars and practitioners interested in authentic conversations employing taboo, female consumers and postfeminism. As this newer form of feminine hygiene advertising is still quite recent, further research in this area is desirable.

Close attention to both the visual and linguistic indicators have allowed a critical review on how the feminine hygiene brands market their products and the underlying ideologies attached to female hygiene taboos. Although these findings have social implications, the results of this study cannot be generalised to a general viewer perspective. This means that viewers may react differently to advertising based on their cultural experiences and the extent to which they perceive the advertisements as empowering. Therefore, this study does not disregard different consumer interpretations of the analysed feminine hygiene campaigns. Hence, a worthwhile research direction is the further examination of female hygiene advertising, analysed from the consumer perspective as a resource of meaning-making that is focused on identity negotiation.

To conclude, as a next step, this study stresses looking at different consumer interpretations to analyze feminine hygiene campaigns. To investigate the socio-cultural influence of advertising on the formation of cultural identities in consumer culture, qualitative studies such as interviews with women can engender a more precise specification of the perceptions and tensions that the taboo can generate on negotiating consumer identities. To investigate the extent to which taboo consists of a new female empowerment discourse, quantitative studies could be conducted on the perceived empowerment of the ads in contrast to other female empowerment advertising messages for women in consumer culture.

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Appendix A: Overview of feminine hygiene campaigns and brand details

Campaign	Video Views	Brand & Parent Company	Brand mission and values retrieved from the official website	Brand Webpage
Blood Normal	2,891,899	Libresse Sverige / Bodyform (Essity)	"committed to helping women be their best selves" "products designed to give you the confidence to push your boundaries" "live fearlessly every day – regardless of whether you are on your period"	https://www.bodyform.co.uk/
Have the most comfortable period of your life	9,151,136	The Flex Company	"Free of leaks. Free of mess. Free of stress. FLEX gives you the freedom to be you, even while on your period" "Your period shouldn't stop you from living your life."	https://flexfits.com/
MENstruation	809,745	Thinx	"because every person with a period deserves peace of mind" "pushing back against discriminatory policies, promoting inclusivity, and moving the needle on menstrual equity" "make basic hygiene products accessible to everyone"	https://www.shethinx.com/pages/thinx-giverise
Pure and Powerful	38,314	Cora Life	"your period is a natural process—not something to be stigmatized" "your body changes from day to day. And so do the ways to care for it" "celebrate your freedom to choose"	https://cora.life/
The Tampon Book	15,629	The Female Company	"believe in the new generation of strong, modern women!" "break taboos, make your period sexy and make it happen,	https://www.thefemalecompany.com/ueber-uns/

			that every woman, at any time, in any place, has tampons available."	
Project Body Hair	92,569	Billie	"out to build a better shelf" "away with the Pink Tax and put body hair on the big screen."	https://www.my billie.com/page s/about
Red, White, and You Do You	1,328,631	Billie	"out to build a better shelf" "away with the Pink Tax and put body hair on the big screen."	https://www.my billie.com/page s/about
Viva La Vulva	1,515,841	Bodyform UK (Essity)	"committed to helping women be their best selves" "products designed to give you the confidence to push your boundaries" "live fearlessly every day – regardless of whether you are on your period"	https://www.bod yform.co.uk/
That's What V Said	19,945	Queen V	"female-powered team focused on normalizing the conversations surrounding women's health" "revolutionary feminine wellness products"	https://queenvlif e.com/
Ladies, Let's Lube	548,443	Durex UK (Reckitt Benckiser)	"worry less about how sex should look and celebrate how it can feel." "believe in sex that's open, honest, messy and fun." "We believe in recognising the problems, and fighting to fix them."	https://www.rb.c om/brands/dure x/

Table A.1. Overview of feminine hygiene advertising campaigns and brand information.