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**MEDIA AND SYMBOLIC
VIOLENCE IN THE
ADVERTISING OF
MENSTRUAL HYGIENE
PRODUCTS**

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Abstract: The media are a tool for receiving information and it is precisely on their platforms that symbolic and media violence are reflected. The text aims to analyze and make visible how both forms of violence are reflected in menstrual hygiene advertising aimed at the female population. Research and some representative images that market these products were taken into account. It was found that the media and advertising continue to perpetuate this violence through content that presents menstruation as something undesirable and problematic. It is necessary to continue with research that accounts for these aspects that impede female well-being.

Keywords: Media violence, symbolic violence, advertising, menstrual hygiene.

INTRODUCTION

This research begins with the approach to the increase in ICTs and the use of electronic resources where the media use platforms and networks to disseminate products and services that present information that supports ideas that favor the inequality of people, coupled with this, there is a large number of problems that girls and adolescents have to access adequate information and material means to be able to overcome the needs derived from menstruation. Subsequently, in the second section, the importance of the body in the construction of the subjectivity of women and the enormous use of this process to generate an endless consumption of hygiene products and medicines are resumed, as well as presenting menstruation as a source of discomfort. either producing emotions such as shame or the feeling of inadequacy despite being a significant and natural biological process. In the third section, the notions of symbolic and media violence and its relationship with menstruation are established. The fourth specifies the methodology where research and some representative images that market

these products were taken into account. In the fifth, the results are presented at the text and image level, it was found that the media and advertising continue to perpetuate this violence through content that presents menstruation as something negative that requires excessive use of hygiene products that reinforce In addition, the mandates related to the neat and perfect body, the taboo of menstruation and the ideal of the female population. Finally, it closes with some conclusions and recommendations, since it is necessary to continue with investigations that account for these aspects that violate the human rights of women and prevent women's well-being.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as the Internet, are a fundamental part of the daily life of the current world population, according to the National Survey on Availability and Use of Information Technologies in Homes according to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020), in Mexico an approximate population of 84.1 million Internet users was estimated. Of the total population, 71.3% of women and 72.7% of men have access to this service. In addition, the main activities that are carried out with the use of the Internet are: communicating (93.8%), searching for information (91.0%) and accessing social networks (89.0%) (INEGI, 2020).

Digital marketing has had a greater boom in recent years, adapting to new media and networks where propaganda and advertising of different products and services can be reproduced, because social networks now have the maximum attention of all ranges of age are the most used platforms and those that generate an impact on the population, Hootsuite (2022) affirms that publishing ads

on social networks continues to be the safest way to increase the consumption of any brand, among these networks include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and tiktok.

Taking the above into account, advertising regarding hygiene and intimate care products for women continues to be present on these platforms, however, despite the changes that have taken place thanks to feminist movements and their contribution to corporality issues, autonomy, empowerment, redefinition of becoming a woman, deconstruction of misogynist ideas, the advertisements of the brands of these products continue to reinforce the mandates related to the neat and perfect body, the taboo of menstruation and the ideal of the female population.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021) conducted a survey of 5,000 adolescents in 2021, which reports that 86% of those surveyed consider that the information provided in schools is not sufficient, in addition 77% affirm that they do not have any free menstrual hygiene product in their educational centers and with the same percentage commented that there are no specific classes, talks or books that address, prepare or raise awareness about menstruation.

In another sense, the Menstrual Hygiene Program of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021) provides us with the following data in Mexico: 43% of girls and adolescents do not attend school during menstruation; 30% do not have access to sanitary napkins, so they use toilet paper; 66% consider the school bathrooms dirty and 73% do not have soap when they wash their hands.

Based on the above statistics, it is important to mention that a large part of the population in Mexico, in addition to not having facilities with minimal security or hygiene, menstruation and the processes that are intertwined with it, are an issue that

must be hidden as much within families as well as in the school context, a situation that implies an implicit prohibition to speak it, to obtain timely and open information and that, in addition, violates Human Rights by not providing the necessary conditions to exercise a dignified menstruation.

BODY, SUBJECTIVITY AND MENSTRUATION

It is necessary to talk about the corporality and subjective construction of women, related to menstruation, and as Pérez Álvarez (2018) explains, the interpretation of the body is seen as a surface where the socio-cultural situation is reflected, being precisely the question body that expresses itself symbolically, molding itself, receiving, processing and transmitting information about the culture in which it is interacting, thus directly impacting the way in which women perceive themselves. Similarly, (Rodríguez and Aguirre 2021), they affirm that the social demands of the body have been naturalized (2021).

In this sense, Cardozo (2015) points out that women are taught, from their first menstrual cycle, to deal with their body from consumption, due to the varied, vast and unnecessary personal hygiene products as well as the multiple and different medications that can be used to mitigate the possible psychological and physical consequences that the hormonal cycle has on the body, completely distorting menstruation and conceptualizing it as a hygienic crisis, that is, once the women's body is seen as a means of consumption which must be in perfect condition at all times and stages of life.

In addition, the women's menstrual cycle has this load of meanings that are related to shame, dirt, incapacity and other negative connotations, so it is understandable that, within the advertising used in Cardozo's study in 2015 and of these products in general,

always aim to hide any characteristic, be it physical, in bodily matters; as psychological, mostly related to the unstable mood of women.

Sosa, Lerner and Erviti (2014) carried out a qualitative research in the rural and urban area of the state of Morelos, in Mexico, with twenty-two women from 18 to 52 years of age and obtained as results that the participants have conceptualized the first menstruation as one of the most significant biological events of “becoming and learning to be a woman”, being this event, as well as menstruation in general, a fundamental part of the physical and bodily changes that they experienced at puberty. On the other hand, this transition from “girl to woman” also brings with it new sexual and gender regulations in the different contexts in which they are inserted and that positions them in a place where certain actions and behaviors must be carried out in accordance with what is socially accepted for the female population, reinforcing once again the gender stereotypes that have been imposed from the male gaze, making them dependent on their approval.

This is why everything that arises from the woman’s body, such as menstruation in this case, is conceptualized, from the patriarchal perspective, as something that has to be dominated, hidden, disguised and controlled, making visible that there are many taboos that prevent the woman feel good when she menstruates, since it is not talked about and is carried underground as if it were something bad (Darder, 2014).

Another aspect of the patriarchal culture is the concealment and devaluation of the menstrual cycle, since it is taught that the physical and psychological changes of the menstrual cycle must be accepted, with passivity and resignation, without attracting attention, carrying in silence and without expressing too much what occurs, because otherwise, it is considered to be an

exaggeration or weakness. The only area in which this is discussed is in medicine, pathologization and medicalization being one of the characteristics that are possessed to combat the symptoms, when in reality it is only the manifestation of a natural process (Darder, 2014). In addition to ignorance and consequently the breaking, separation and fight against one’s own body and the various psychological and affective changes as well as ignorance about the close relationship between hormones and neurotransmitters, if each phase is known and its characteristics, it could be understood to achieve the well-being instead of avoiding, suppressing or ignoring.

This is how by addressing female corporality and menstruation as a significant biological process for women, it becomes one more space to be culturally regulated from a patriarchal perspective and which also supports inequitable gender roles (Rodríguez and Aguirre 2021). On the other hand, it is associated with negative emotions such as shame, which in turn causes suffering, in addition to the fact that it is an event that is misrepresented and used by companies so that both hygiene products and medicines are consumed.

SYMBOLIC AND MEDIA VIOLENCE

Violence is an issue related to the construction of the women’s body and its processes, in this case that of menstruation. We find it from identifiable to subtle ways and that is why, having exposed the above, it is necessary to address it in order to identify it. Depending on the author, the taxonomy of violence is expanded. For the purposes of this research, we will refer to two types of violence that are observed in the media: symbolic violence and media violence, linked to each other and closely related to the ideas raised previously and that will be conceptualized

below.

Symbolic violence has been defined (Bourdieu, 2000) as that which is not seen, but is inserted in power relations and it is precisely under this condition of invisibility that it becomes difficult to identify and, at the same time, it is effective when produced. and reproduced through the discourses of femininity and masculinity. These discourses are projected in all areas and spheres in which we are immersed, from the family, school, cultural, social context, even in activities that we carry out daily such as listening to music, listening to the radio, watching television, browsing social networks, etc.

Due to this, Gómez (2015) states that, through the representation embodied by objects and subjects, a reality is reflected and perpetuated through language in its verbal, iconic or audiovisual form. In the study carried out on advertising slogans, it is asserted that propaganda has patriarchal backgrounds that are immersed in a capitalist market economy that continues to reproduce, perpetuate and reaffirm the stereotypes that have been attributed to the “feminine” and that are a reflection of the dominant symbolic violence, once again positioning women of all ages in a place of inferiority compared to the male population.

On the other hand, visual images exemplify the multiple ways in which human beings rebuild or modify stereotypes, in addition to exposing unbalanced power relations, arbitrary privilege and oppression, being a tool not only for social transformation, in the best of cases, but also for the stigmatization of menstruation, conceptualized as a physical process that is minimized, hidden and even ridiculed in the female body (Mora, 2020).

Now, since the definition of symbolic violence has been exposed, as well as its relationship with menstruation and the experience of women throughout their lives, it

is convenient to point out media violence and how they are related to each other.

In accordance with the General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence (2021), media violence is defined as any act through any means of communication, which directly or indirectly promotes sexist stereotypes, advocates violence against women and girls, produces or allows the production and dissemination of sexist hate speech, as well as gender discrimination or inequality between women and men, that causes psychological, sexual, physical, economic, patrimonial or femicide damage.

We also find it as that violence that is exercised by any person, whether physical or moral, who uses a means of communication to produce or disseminate content that proceeds against the self-esteem, health, integrity, freedom and security of women and girls, and that impedes its development, attacking equality.

Symbolic violence is exercised systematically in the patriarchal society in which we live, hence the importance of making it visible. In the same sense, media violence crosses the entire society given the breadth of the media and the use of platforms and networks worldwide and is the basis on which gender violence is sustained in all its manifestations, naturalizing other violence that can be linked to them. (Ogando, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research was carried out and content analysis was used as a technique, which, according to Gómez (in Monje 2011), seeks to describe the meaning of a message, be it a speech, a life story, a magazine article, a school texts, etc. In the same way, this technique helped to find implicit aspects of the content.

The information of articles collected within recognized databases with keywords such as

advertising, menstruation, symbolic violence, media violence, women, feminine hygiene, menstrual hygiene, sanitary napkins was systematized. The time range was between 2014 and 2021 in Mexico, Spain, Argentina; In order to know what contributions have been made to the topic addressed in the text, how the advertising of these products has impacted the perception and construction that women have of a natural process such as menstruation, in addition to the stigmatization and negative connotations that are attributed to the female body.

In addition, use was made of current advertising of the most demanded brands and that have products such as sanitary napkins and tampons for sale, in order to analyze how media and symbolic violence is reflected in commercials that are disseminated in the media, noting that, regardless of the research that has been carried out and the advances in social and cultural issues thanks to the reflection and introspection produced through feminist theory, the publicity that circulates within the media regarding the use of menstrual hygiene products, continue to use speeches that reinforce the idea that menstruation must be a dirty process that must be kept hidden and secret.

RESULTS

The results are presented at two levels: The first level refers to the texts: when reviewing the multiple investigations that have been carried out in different European and Latin American countries, we found that there are studies carried out on advertising and its relationship with violence. symbolic and media, being the media the tool through which this content is disseminated to be received by the population, specifically television and social networks. In the same way, advertising has been investigated in relation to feminine hygiene products such as sanitary napkins and

tampons, which are used for menstruation, a subject that continues to be taboo in today's societies. This natural and physical process through which all women go through at some point in their lives, today continues to have a negative connotation, both for the population that experiences it and for other people, generating multiple problems around them. However, despite the fact that the information collected through these texts is valuable and provides data that helps to understand how this phenomenon occurs, in the texts that we found, no investigations have been carried out specifically in Mexico, pointing out that, since symbolic and media violence is the basis of all violence against women, including the media and advertising, and taking into account the increase in violence in general, since from January to July 2022, 530 femicides have been registered (Secretaría de Seguridad y Protección Ciudadana, 2022), it is essential to promote studies on this, in addition to those related to menstruation.

The second level refers to the images: the images that are presented below are examples of the advertising that continues to be disseminated by the media, using the material of two of the best-known and largest brands of menstrual hygiene products in Mexico.

In the first case (figure 1) it is possible to appreciate from the colors, pink is used, which is always related to the female gender, in addition to proposing the phrase "you decide!", followed by "how to live your period", without take into account that physiological issues also intervene in this process, also noting that the word "menstruation" is not explicit and terms that suggest this process are assigned. The fact that they propose the "ultra invisible" product is highlighted, putting once again this condition of hiding menstruation, also insisting on how a woman looks, reaffirming the stereotype that they cannot change their mood and be smiling and in good spirits.

mood continuously.

In case two (Figure 2) we can observe this constant of using pink colors or palettes similar to this range of colors attributed to girls and women, later the phrase “It is essential that you feel safe”, taking this as if it were raised that menstruation is a reason not to feel like this and finally, he talks about how it “neutralizes odors”, situating menstruation blood as something that must not be perceived by any sense, once again pointing out this idea that the body is dirty or unhygienic during that specific moment of the cycle, also relating it to products such as douching.

It is possible to visualize that, from the analysis carried out previously and by other authors in addition to the advertising used as a reference, menstruation has been conceptualized by women as a process that must be hidden, that cannot be talked about and that positions the processes of their body as something dirty, unsanitary and unpleasant, for themselves and for other people. It must be noted that this conception of the body and the natural process has been built through the images, discourse and practices that have been held over the years, reproduced and promoted by the media to which they have access.

In addition, it is mentioned that the stereotypes and social stigmas that are held regarding the female body during the days of menstruation have had an impact on the way in which the female population perceives itself and is subjectively constituted, reinforcing the idea that changes hormones and everything that menstruation entails are attitudes, feelings and thoughts that are attributed to an endocrine issue, as well as the idea that it is exaggerated or used as a justification for men to make unfavorable comments about it.

As Villar, Mora and Maldonado (2016) propose, the search for a collective identity currently requires the construction of a figure drawn by women, accepting differences and

promoting a life free of violence.

CONCLUSIONS

Symbolic violence and media violence are imperceptible on most occasions and are subtly reflected in the advertising of various media that sell menstrual hygiene products. Likewise, it is essential to make visible the influence that advertising has with the use of images, words, speeches and other forms of expression in the subjective constitution of women, in addition to the violent and negative impact towards them.

Dignified menstruation is a human right that all women have, however, it is violated by advertising by continuing to reproduce the patriarchal discourse that poses menstruation as an undesirable event that must be hidden. This has unfavorable consequences for women, since it places them in a state of constant breakdown, questioning and discomfort with respect to their corporeality and all the biological processes they go through throughout their lives.

Another related aspect that associates menstruation with negative charges refers to excessive medicalization since it prevents us from seeing it as a natural process that female bodies go through during the fertile stage, it is not a medical problem or a pathology to be treated and it does not We refer to specific cases that must be addressed in this way. The unnecessary consumption of analgesics has repercussions on the health and economy of women.

In another sense, it is necessary to begin to name the parts of the body and the processes with the appropriate terms, since, by conceptualizing them, it is also possible to politicize, allowing an improvement in public policies.

Finally, it is important to start questioning the language and idyllic images used in advertising for this specific product market,



Figure 1

In your period you decide.

Note: Taken from In your period you decide [Attached image], by Saba, 2022, Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/kotexuruguay/videos/el-centro-absorbente-con-blockgel-de-las-toallas-kotex-esencial-neutraliza-odore/374796543897932/?locale=eo_EO)



Figure 2

Absorbent center with blockgel

Note: Taken from The absorbent center with blockgel of Kotex® Essential towels, neutralizes odors and absorbs instantly. May your period not be a barrier to doing what you want to do! [Attached Image], by Kotex, 2020, Facebook. (https://www.facebook.com/kotexuruguay/videos/el-centro-absorbente-con-blockgel-de-las-toallas-kotex-esencial-neutraliza-odore/374796543897932/?locale=eo_EO)

also appealing to promote and provide comprehensive sexual education, both in the family context, as well as in the school and health context. public, giving rise to self-knowledge, avoiding the stigma of the dirty body and from a feminist pedagogy, opening the field of study, reflection and action in order to improve conditions in all areas for women. It is necessary to continue with research that accounts for these aspects that impede female well-being.

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