Honorable Mention, *The Navigator*'s Best Writing Award

Advocacy as Persuasion: A Rhetorical Analysis of Reusable Menstrual Product Advertisements

Lillian Floyd

Introduction

Younger generations are increasingly interested in social activism. Some of the biggest names in climate change activism, such as Greta Thunberg, belong to Generation Z or the Millennial generation. Millennials are contributing to climate change activism more than any other generation, with Generation Z following close behind (Tyson, et al. 3). Additionally, Generation Z is changing the way in which society thinks about gender. They are breaking down gender stereotypes and pushing for the consistent inclusion of "more options other than 'man' and 'woman'" on official forms (Kenney 2). These younger generations are discussing the taboo. They are refusing to turn a blind eye to pollution or allow gender stereotypes to rule their lives.

But Generation Z and Millennials are not the only ones getting in on the game of activism. Many companies are shifting their focus to these social issues in order to attract younger consumers. CEO of Reimagine Gender, Lisa Kenney, says "companies are starting to realize that this shift is no longer something they can ignore" (2). If a business wants the attention of the younger generations, they must attune to their interests and ways of life.

Reusable menstrual product brands are doing this very effectively. Traditional menstrual product brands have a history of targeting cisgender women in a way that focuses on stereotypical femininity (Sitar 777). While those traditional brands have moved into the territory of breaking down stereotypes of femininity, the reusable brands are widening that scope in order to truly target Generation Z and Millennials. In this paper, I will analyze three different reusable menstrual product brands: Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle. Ranging in size and consumer reach they provide a full scope of reusable menstrual product advertising tactics. The advertisements of Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle target Generation Z and Millennials through brand activism rhetorical appeals centered around breaking down the menstrual and sexual taboos, environmental protection, and a broader definition of gender.

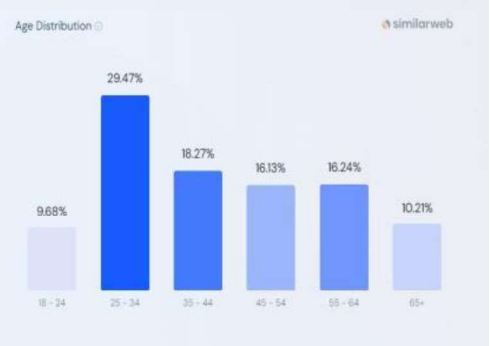
The Demographic

As previously mentioned, the reusable menstrual product brands Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle range in size as determined by brand

recognition and availability. Saalt is the largest of the three. Their products are often listed at the top of 'best menstrual cups' lists on popular websites, such as *CNN* and *Women's Health* (Shaw; Davis, et al.). Saalt is most known for their menstrual cup, though they also sell period underwear and menstrual discs. Their products can be found at a variety of in-person stores, including Target, Walmart, and CVS, or ordered online to a wide variety of countries (Saalt).

Flex is quite similar to Saalt, with the exception of brand recognition. Their products often don't appear on 'best menstrual cups' lists on popular websites and when they do, their products are at the bottom of the list. Flex is equally known for their menstrual cups and discs; however, they also sell menstrual disc cleaning supplies and menstrual related supplements. Like Saalt, their products can be purchased in-person or online. Though their accessibility is still expansive, they have a smaller reach of countries to which they ship (Flex Fits).

Saalt and Flex also have similar website demographics, as seen in the two infographics below.



(Saalt.com)

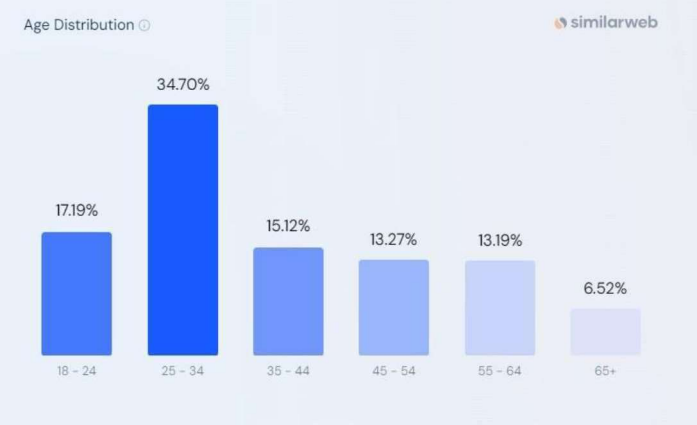
(Flexfits.com)

The majority of visitors to the Saalt and Flex websites are consumers between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. Assuming most visitors to the website have the intent to buy Saalt products, it is reasonable to assume that most Saalt customers are between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. This covers both older Generation Z and younger Millennials. The next highest age group is thirty-five to forty-four. These are the oldest of the Millennials. This could either reflect the interest of that age group or the interest of their children. Most beginning menstruators will not be buying their own products, and their parents, who will be buying products for them, fall in that thirty-five to forty-four age group. It is important to note that the dropped interest after the age of forty-five is likely due to menopause and the subsequent lack of need for menstrual products.

Period Aisle, formerly known as Lunapads, is the smallest of the three brands discussed in this study. Their products are not well-known and almost never discussed on popular culture websites. They got their start with reusable pads, but now also sell menstrual underwear and cups.

Rather than being stocked at big name stores like Target or Walmart, customers can only purchase Period Aisle products in-person at independently-owned small businesses. There are only twenty-one stores in North America selling the products and only seven stores elsewhere in the world (Period Aisle). This results in the majority of their consumer reach being done through their website. When ordering from their website, customers outside of the United States and Canada face increased shipping and customs fees, making it less accessible. Due to this, Period Aisle has a very small customer reach.

Period Aisle's small reach and focus on online retail may explain why their demographic is slightly different from Saalt and Flex.



(Periodaisle.com)

Like Saalt and Flex, most visitors to the Period Aisle website are women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. However, their second largest age demographic is different. For Period Aisle, the second most common age group is eighteen to twenty-four. This means that Period Aisle is capturing the attention of younger members of Generation Z.

Between the three brands, the full range of both Generation Z and Millennials are captured as the target demographic. This is important to note because marketing strategies have had to change for these generations. Marketing specialists have acknowledged "a major shift in viewing patterns, and all signs point to mobile devices" (Munsch 12). Many brands used to rely on channel surfing and televised commercials, but they cannot do that anymore. Generation Z and Millennials are "digital native(s) that are distracted multitaskers" (Munsch 22). They spend less time watching television and more time scrolling through social media, on which they have infinite options of what to view. Due to this, brands have to work especially hard to capture the attention of younger generations. They must hook young consumers by appealing to their interests.

Literature Review

Marketing Discourse on Advertisements

The history of visual advertisements has marked an important shift in the early 2000s. When studying this shift, technology development researchers, Corina Rotar and Alexandru Potor, saw a "rise of brand logos" and an increase in images "displaying people rather than objects" when compared to advertisements in the past (111). Modern advertisements introduce products as a way of life by displaying what the consumer's life could be like if they bought the product in question. The visual aesthetics of advertisements is crucial for this modern focus. Advertising researchers Ileyha Dagalp and Jonatan Sodergren believe that "the role of aesthetics is not a moral one to improve the lives of consumers (i.e., good, beneficial) but to gratify their senses (i.e., beauty, pleasure)" (5). By choosing specific color schemes, actors, camera angles, and other visual elements, advertisements can create a desire for that life and transfer that new sense of desire onto the product itself.

Many companies have continued this indirect advertisement for their products through brand activism. They use the textual elements of narratives from advocacy movements to "show that the brand takes a stand on sociopolitical issues" (Dagalp & Sodergren 13). Brands do this with a wide variety of advocacy movements, from equality to environmental protection. Rather than advertising products, brands advertise themselves as good companies that consumers should support. It is a type of "values-driven brand activism" that allows consumers to "vote with their wallets" (Lee & Yoon 146). By showing that the brand stands for a social cause, the consumer can support the brand in order to support the agenda of the cause. Brand activism provides the prospect of purchasing the brand's products as an opportunity for the consumer to make a positive impact on society. These advertisements appear as if they are selling desirable change, not material goods.

Analysis of Traditional Menstrual Product Brands

Brands that specialize in traditional menstrual products, such as disposable pads and tampons, often employ this concept of brand activism. In the early 2010s, these brands shifted their advertisement approach to prioritize "communication tactics that advocate for feminist values" (Campbell, et al. 228). Their chosen social movement to make their brand look desirable was women's empowerment. In order to promote the concept of delicate discreteness, advertisements for menstrual products in the 1980s used a lot of pink and lilac flowers and never referenced blood (Sitar 777). Rather than the "sweet feminine tones and angelic white doves of the past," menstrual product advertisements in the 2010s featured women "playing rugby and weightlifting" (Campbell, et al. 229-230). Companies used the space of their advertisements to change the narrative around women's nature and capabilities. They displayed women as strong and powerful. The Always brand did this with their #LikeAGirl campaign that focused on "girl empowerment and championing for girls" (Lee &

Yoon 148). By showing girls being athletic and reclaiming the phrase 'like a girl' as a tool for empowerment, Always built the self-esteem of their consumers in order to build interest in their brand. It was a campaign that "energized the public and started a social movement" (Lee & Yoon 148).

Jungyi Guo, et al., communication researchers, call this specific type of brand activism that focuses on women's empowerment and breaking down gender stereotypes "femvertising" (378). Even other products surrounding menstruation partake in this marketing strategy. Carly S. Woods, a communication researcher, found that many contraceptive pill brands build on this "long tradition of marketing discourses borrowed from social movement rhetoric" (279). The brands she studied particularly use the contemporary feminist ideal of "choice, or the illusion of choice" (267) in order to sell their products.

While menstrual product femvertising exists all over the world, it is more common in the United States than some other countries. Houda Driss Chabih and Mohamad Hamas Elmasry compared the menstrual product advertisements in America to those in the Middle East. They found that ads shown in the Middle East used more "secrecy terms," were "less likely to label menstrual fluid as 'blood,'" did not use red liquid, and showed women in isolation (Chabih & Elmasry 40). This style of advertisement falls more in line with the western advertisements that existed before the shift towards brand activism and femvertising.

This marketing approach of brand activism and femvertising has been found to be very successful, particularly for encouraging online consumer engagement and improving brand image (Lee & Yoon 154). It gets consumers' attention and makes them feel as though they are a part of something bigger. However, some scholars believe that these attempts at women's empowerment focused menstrual product commercials only serve to hurt the people they claim to help. Annemarie Jutel, a gender studies researcher, believes these marketing ploys reduce "women's biological cycles to embarrassing, restrictive, and dreaded occurrences with strict rules of behavior" (225). By focusing on women outside of the constraints of menstruation, these commercials have the potential to reinforce the concept of menstruation as a burden. At their core, advertisements focusing on social causes are still capitalistic in nature. They use the rhetoric of advocacy, but the ultimate goal is still to encourage consumers to buy products.

Critical Lens

In order to further explore the visual rhetoric of advertisements and the combined pathos and ethos of brand activism, marketing discourse can be combined with the critical lens of gender studies and rhetoric. In her book about studying visual materials, Gillian Rose says those materials can be thought of "in terms of three sites: the site of *production*, which is

where an image is made; the site of the *image* itself, which is its visual content; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users, or what this book will call its *audience*" (19). The meaning of a visual advertisement is influenced by each of these three stages. Because there are "different social practices that structure the viewing of particular images in particular places," context is needed in order to truly understand the meaning of visual materials (31). In order to understand an advertisement, a scholar must pay attention to the societal context.

One of those pieces of context can be provided by the gender studies lens. Menstruation is often linked to gender, so it is important to consider a society's concept of gender when analyzing menstrual product advertisements. Rhetoricians Sonja Foss, Mary Domenico, and Karen Foss discuss gender as a performance of gendered behaviors that enforce "cultural categories of gender" (165). Their work reinforces Judith Butler's now commonly accepted theory of gender performativity. Most members of Generation Z and the Millennial generation believe this theory to be true. The common thought today is that gender is a human-made construct based on arbitrary stereotypes. However, as a construct, gender is continually influencing and being influenced. These rhetoricians say that "much in the same way that the repeated gender performances of individuals create and maintain a stable gender identity, repeated gender performances also function to tell cultural stories and maintain cultural gender categories" (Foss, et al. 167). The way in which people perform gender is both influenced by societal ideals as well as society's concept of gender. For this reason, advertisements concerning gender, such as menstrual product advertisements, both are influenced by societal concepts of gender and in turn influences those same concepts. Combined with special attention to environmental symbolism, this creates a visual ecofeminist rhetorical lens.

Breaking the Taboos of Menstruation and Sex

Saalt and Flex both ignore menstrual and sexual taboos and opt instead to use plain straightforward language that appeals to Generation Z and Millennials. "As citizens and consumers," members of these younger generations "are more pragmatic" (Confetto, et al. 758). They discuss topics of life as they are and prefer the brands they buy from to do so as well. In the video advertisement titled "Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs," the customer service representative says "You don't need to whisper period, I've heard it all" (4:04). This communicates the idea that periods are nothing to be ashamed of and they can be talked about in an honest way. Similarly, Flex's advertisement titled "How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," uses the word 'vagina' freely throughout the video and their website states that they "believe in a world where vagina isn't a bad word" (Flex Fits). They take a clear stand on the concept that discussing vaginas and menstruation should not be considered inappropriate for the public.

There is a historical tradition of shame surrounding menstruation. In the early days of commercialized menstrual products, terms like 'hygiene products' and 'sanitary products' were used, "implying that there is something unhygienic about it" (Sitar 721). For a long time, period product advertisements promoted secrecy and shame. That established the open discussion of menstruation as taboo, being considered an inappropriate topic of discussion. Traditional brands like Tampax and Always have worked to change this, and Saalt and Flex are continuing that work.

Yet, Saalt and Flex take it even further. In addition to using clear anatomically correct language, these brands discuss sexual activity and model the insertion of their products. Both Saalt and Flex advertise that customers can have "mess free period sex" with the use of their reusable menstrual discs ("How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," 2:10; "Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs," 2:40; The ocean says YES to FLEX," 1:15). In the Flex advertisement "The ocean says YES to FLEX," this information is accompanied by the female marine biologist making suggestive facial expressions while she looks at a sexy merman tossing his hair back and forth.

(The ocean says YES to FLEX," 1:15)

Through this, Saalt and Flex not only break the taboo of publicly discussing sex, but they break the taboo of women acknowledging their sex drive. Flex plainly demonstrates this appeal by beginning one of their commercials with a woman sitting at an office desk saying "Hi, I'm Terra and I love to F***, but I hate my period" ("How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," 0:00). While the word 'fuck' is bleeped out, it is heavily insinuated. This breaks taboos of cursing on public media, discussing sexual activity on media, and women claiming their sexuality. Terra is unashamed of her strong sex drive; in fact, it seems to give her confidence. Having this scene at the very beginning of the commercial also helps to catch the audience off guard in order to capture their attention. When a consumer is subconsciously used to sex and menstruation being taboo, the blunt discussion of both topics will make them stop and pay attention. It sets a casual and authentic tone for the advertisement. Once they have that

attention, they are able to persuade the audience that their menstrual products have the power to improve lives, particularly sex lives.

Saalt and Flex also break the visual taboo of public advertisements. Saalt uses a vaginal model molded into a rocky cliff to demonstrate how to insert both their menstrual cups and menstrual discs ("Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs"). Flex does something similar, but with digital drawings. They have an animation on the screen of female anatomy with a menstrual disc being slipped inside while the woman in the commercial explains what is happening using scientifically correct language, such as "vaginal fornix" ("How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," 1:25). While neither of these visual demonstrations resemble the fleshy human body, having displays of vaginal anatomy still breaks through the historical taboo of discussing female reproductive health. Flex also breaks the taboo of visual menstruation on their website. Their 'About Us' page contains this image.

(*Flex Fits*)

Similar to historical shame, there is a historical tradition of hiding menstruation. Advertisements in the 1960s "depicted [menstrual products] as a means of concealing the signs of menstruation" midst of this taboo, Flex fights for the opposite. The imagery of an art canvas being painted on with a menstrual disc and red paint representing vaginal blood establishes freedom of expression as a core value for Flex. It is advocacy through art, forcing people to see and acknowledge menstruation. As a brand, they stand for the importance of breaking taboos surrounding the open discussion of menstruation. They are telling their customers that they will fight for their freedom to discuss their bodily functions. This will especially appeal to the previously mentioned pragmatism of younger customers. Both Saalt and Flex have made it a point to not only ignore taboos surrounding menstruation and sex, but intentionally break them. They aim to make a change in society in order to gain the support of consumers who crave similar changes.

Environmental Appeals

In addition to being more pragmatic, Generation Z and Millennials tend to be "more mindful of sustainability," particularly when it comes to their consumption of goods (Confetto, et al. 758). They are concerned with the state of the environment and how their purchases impact the environment. Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle use a combination of three different appeals related to nature in order to connect themselves to the social movement of environmental activism. The first is connecting menstruation and femininity to nature. The Saalt mascot in "Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs" is the image of either Mother Earth or a nature goddess from ancient Greece.

("Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs" 0:32)

She is a tall curvy woman dressed in loose flowy garments in a light shade of brown. They use similar natural color schemes on their website as well. On their 'About Us' page, Saalt's founders are dressed in green, brown, and white flowy clothing. Their hair is loose in the wind as they stand in front of a rocky cliff side.

(*Saalt*)

When Saalt chooses a character or person to represent them, they portray that person as connected to the Earth in an almost primal way. This allows them to borrow ethos from the reliability of the Earth and use pathos to invoke a sense of wild freedom and grounded connection in the consumer.

In the video advertisement, the Mother Earth figure takes the group of characters from the grocery store to a magical forest dimension in which Saalt cups grow on trees and waterfalls represent the intensity of different menstrual flows. She invites them to "manage [their] monthly *naturally*"

("Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs," 0:26). Through this fantasy setting and slogan, Saalt perpetuates the idea that both their products and menstruation in general are completely natural. It tells the consumer that menstruation is beautiful like a verdant forest, while leaving out the difficulties of menstruation and unpleasant aspects of nature alike. Being able to connect their biological function of menstruation to nature may help consumers themselves to feel like nature goddesses. It allows consumers to identify with the power of the waterfalls and the grace of butterflies in the advertisement.

Giving consumers a feeling of confidence and power through connection to nature could allow for a transfer of those positive feelings onto the menstrual product or the brand itself. If people in advertisements who use these reusable products find confidence and power through their connection to the environment, then the consumer will believe they can also find confidence and power by using those same products. However, some feminist scholars believe connecting women to nature is regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in the unreflective experiencing of life (Plumwood 20).

Due to this, connecting women to nature has the potential to backfire on these reusable menstrual product brands. An audience more versed in feminist ideology and the historical implications of connections to nature being used to paint women as cattle may not be persuaded by this appeal. Despite this negative history of the appeal, the use of nature connection in these advertisements are wholly positive in our modern context. As Generation Z and Millennials increase their interest in the environment, they also increase their sense of connection to nature. Fantasies of the cottage-core lifestyle include living closely with nature. The image of Saalt's mascot is desirable to these younger generations because it aligns with the cottage-core lifestyle that many want to live. However, just in case of negative interpretation of this appeal, these brands also use another environmental appeal to make their priorities clear.

Protecting the Environment

Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle all make claims surrounding how their products reduce waste and aid in climate crisis activism. Flex states that their products "produce 60% less waste than traditional period products" and they "reduce energy usage and emissions that come from transit" because their production facilities are in close proximity to their warehouses ("How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," 2:05; *Flex Fits*). They paint themselves as sustainable and good for the environment. Period Aisle does something similar in their introduction video. The two co-founders describe

the way they consider the environmental impact of every aspect of their business ("Meet Aisle"). They want their customers to know that being an environmentally aware company is one of their priorities. As "values-driven brand activism is on the rise," sustainability claims like this become incredibly important (Lee & Yoon 146). Consumers often want to believe that the brands from which they are making purchases stand for something larger than themselves. They want to support social causes by buying from particular brands. Generation Z and Millennials who are concerned about the concerning state of the environment can buy from these brands in order to feel like they are doing something to help the cause.

Advertising experts, Nigel D. Steenis, et al, stress the importance of sustainability claims made by brands coming from a place of truth. They found "when discrepancies between the firm's claimed sustainability and its actual sustainability arise, consumers feel deceived" (Steenis, et al. 166). This finding may seem obvious, but it is important to consider when it comes to brand activism. Should consumers discover information contradicting the sustainability claims made by Saalt, Flex, or Period Aisle, they will feel betrayed by the company. This will reflect worse on the brand than if they had never made the claims in the first place. However, these brands should be able to safely avoid such scandal, as third-party research reveals reusable menstrual products have the potential to reduce menstrual product waste by "79%" (Blair, et al. 4). Having this evidence supporting the appeals of environmental protection makes this marketing strategy very successful. The use of social media for marketing has the ability to "spread awareness and activate engagement" (Confetto, et al. 766). Being able to directly engage with environmental advocacy gives consumers a sense of impact as well as a sense of trust in the brand.

Consumers' Fear of Chemicals

While these brands are selling products that actively reduce waste, they also appeal to a more fear driven environmental appeal. Flex and Period Aisle both appeal to a fear of chemicals. With trends like cottage-core, younger generations are more interested in using 'all-natural' products. They want products made out of bamboo rather than plastic. This has brought about a general fear of anything labeled to contain chemicals. In their "How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life" advertisement, Flex makes the statement that their products use "no chemicals" (1:60). They do not define what they mean by 'chemicals' and when taken literally, their statement is inherently false. Everything on Earth is made up of chemicals. The air we breathe is made up of oxygen, nitrogen, dihydrogen monoxide (H_2O), argon, and carbon dioxide. This could be considered misleading, but it appeals to younger generations nonetheless. In popular culture,

'chemicals' have come to stand for anything toxic or existing in a combination not naturally found on Earth. So, while water is technically a chemical, this popular concept would label it as natural. By stating that their products do not contain chemicals, Flex is essentially calling their product natural. So natural, as if it could be plucked off a tree like in the Saalt advertisements.

Period Aisle does something similar in their short form video, "PSA: PFAs." In this educational style video, Period Aisle explores the ways in which PFAs can "contaminate our water and air ways" and have "adverse health impacts" (@periodaisle. "PSA: PFAs"). They do not cite all chemicals as being bad, but rather cite "harmful chemicals" such as PFAs (@periodaisle. "PSA: PFAs"). They also include lab reports showing that their products are proven to be clear of PFAs.


SGS

Test Report SL122002519404O1TX-1 Date:April 20,2022 Page

COMPONENT LIST / List of Materials

Sample No.	Component No.	Description	Material	Color	Rema
A	1	Gusset lining	Synthetic Fibers	Black	/
A	2	Middle layer with plastic backing	Synthetic Fibers	Black / clear	/
A	3	Shell	Synthetic Fibers	Grey	/

Perfluorinated Compounds (PFCs)

Test Method: With reference to CEN/TS 15968:2010. Analysis was performed by LC-MS / LC-MS-MS and GC-MS.

	CAS-No.	Result 1+2+3
Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS)*	1763-23-1	n.d.
Perfluorooctane Sulfonamide (PFOSA)	754-91-6	n.d.
2-(N-methylperfluoro- 1-octanesulfonamido) - ethanol (MeFOSE)	24448-09-7	n.d.
2-(N-ethylperfluoro-1-octanesulfonamido)-ethanol (EtFOSE)	1691-99-2	n.d.
N-methylperfluoro-1-octanesulfonamide (MeFOSA)	31506-32-8	n.d.
N-ethylperfluoro-1-octanesulfonamide (EtFOSA)	4151-50-2	n.d.
Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA)+	335-67-1	n.d.
Perfluorobutane Acid (PFBA)	375-22-4	n.d.
Perfluorobutane Sulfonate (PFB	375-73-5	n.d.
Perfluoropentane Acid (PFPA)	2706-90-3	n.d.
Perfluorohexane Acid (PFHxA	307-24-4	n.d.
Perfluorohexane Sulfonate (P	55-46-4	n.d.
Perfluoroheptane Acid (PFHp	375-85-9	n.d.
Perfluoroheptane Sulfonate (	375-92-8	n.d.
Perfluorononane Acid (PFNA	375-95-	n.d.
Perfluorodecane Acid (PFDA	335-76-2	n.d.
Perfluoroundecanoic Acid (P	2058-94-8	n.d.
Perfluorododecanoic Acid (P	7325-1	n.d.
Perfluorotridecanoic Acid (P		n.d.
Perfluorotetradecanoic Acid		n.d.
Perfluorooctanesulphonic ac (H4PFOS; 6:2)		n.d.
Perfluoropentanesulfonic ac		n.d.
Perfluorononanesulfonic aci		n.d.
Conclusion		PASS

Note: n.d. = not detected
mg/kg = ppm

(@periodaisle "PSA: PFAs")

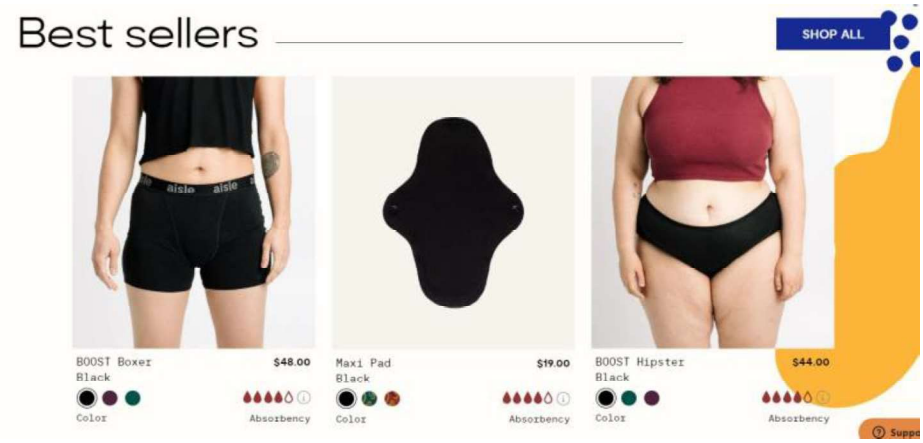
The logos of those documents served to support their argument that Period Aisle products are so natural that they are wholly safe. Additionally, making the documents public conveys a sense of confidence and integrity on the part of Period Aisle. These claims from both Flex and Period Aisle attempt to make viewers afraid of chemicals in order to use that fear to persuade them to purchase their products. If the consumer desires a natural lifestyle in which they live closely with the Earth, 'chemical' free products will help them achieve that.

Gender Stereotypes

Menstrual products have traditionally targeted cisgender women of a menstruating age. When walking down the aisle of traditional menstrual products at the grocery store, customers are likely to see many

pink packages, flowers, butterflies, and other stereotypically 'girly' designs. The products perform the "cultural gender categories" (Foss, et al. 167). Saalt and Flex both keep this general target of cisgender women, but they do so in a way that breaks down some of those restrictive stereotypes. As discussed previously, their rebellion against the menstrual and sexual taboo helps to empower women to speak about their menstrual health. Though they mostly have feminine presenting actors in their commercials, those characters are portrayed as powerful and authoritative. Saalt's mascot is a goddess and Flex's "The ocean says YES to FLEX" video centers around a female marine biologist who is taking charge of her sexual life. There is one primary exception to the mostly female cast of characters. In the "Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs" video, there is a dad supporting his young daughter who is just starting her period. He is portrayed as being ignorant on the topic of menstruation, particularly in how menstruation relates to sexual activity. Yet, he is also portrayed as being willing to learn. He and his daughter learn about menstrual cups together. This invites men into the conversation of menstruation as well as appeals to women who may be frustrated by a lack of trust that their male partners will be active caregivers to their children. Saalt and Period Aisle are communicating that menstruation is not just a women's issue; rather, it concerns a wide range of people.

Period Aisle furthers this by explicitly rebelling against the gender binary. In their "Meet Aisle" video, Period Aisle states that they want to create "a place for everyone who menstruates to have a more comfortable, sustainable, and inclusive period" (2:30). They take gender out of their marketing by demonstrating a more fluid performance of gender. By using terms like 'menstruators' and 'everyone who menstruates' instead of 'women,' Period Aisle opens their products to transgender men and nonbinary menstruators. Their founders explicitly say they are a brand for "any gender" ("Meet Aisle," 3:04). On the front page of their website, the brand advertises both masculine and feminine styles of period underwear.



(*Period Aisle*)

Along with the gender-neutral color scheme of the website, it can be seen that Period Aisle stays true to their mission of more inclusive period products. One of their advertisements on Instagram even features a customer saying that the boxer style period underwear "makes me feel so confident and really helps with my gender dysphoria" (@periodaisle, "It's giving period protected"). For many menstruating transmen, they have not had the option of masculine style period products. Period Aisle is giving them that option.

In addition to appealing to multiple genders, this also appeals to a more fluid and neutral performance of gender. Boxer style period underwear can be worn by any gender, just as hipster style period underwear can be worn by any gender. There are more options for a wider range of consumers. Each customer can choose whichever style they find to be the most comfortable or stylish, no matter which gender they identify with. This is especially effective considering that Period Aisle targets the youngest demographic of the three brands. They are appealing to the increased inclusivity of gender queerness as well as supporting the concept of gender as a construct, both popular ideologies among Generation Z.

For the Modern Menstruator

In addition to appealing to the activism interests of younger generations, these three reusable menstrual product brands paint themselves as the modern choice. Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle may use or build off of the successful tactics of the traditional brands, but they do so while portraying those brands as barbaric and unsafe. Saalt includes an exaggerated mini history lesson in their advertisements in which they explore what women throughout history used before the Saalt cup was invented ("Saalt Menstrual Cups and Discs," 0:54). This demonstration lumps traditional disposable products like pads and tampons in with the ancient ways of dealing with menstruation. Contrasting the menstrual cup with these methods communicates to the consumer that Saalt's menstrual cups are the way of the future. Cups are the modern woman's product of choice. When making this comparison, the Saalt mascot even mentions that Saalt aims to treat periods as a natural process rather than a wound, insinuating that traditional products are as barbaric as battle wounds.

In order to paint themselves as modern and desirable, the reusable brands throw traditional brands under the bus as something of the past. Flex uses a HUGE menstrual pad to show the inconvenience of traditional products.

("How to Not Let Your Period Ruin Your Life," 0:35)

Rather than showing the average traditional product, Flex caricatures their competitors in order to drive home their own desirability. Whereas traditional products are huge to not only carry around but to have in your underwear as well, Flex showcases their products as small, compact, and convenient for people on the go. Period Aisle communicates their superiority to traditional products through means of quality. They say that their products "perform three times better than your average disposable product" ("Meet Aisle," 3:58). Rather than comparing their products to other reusable brands, each of these brands exaggerate the downfalls of traditional brands in order to make themselves look better. They establish their reusable products as the product of choice for Generation Z and Millennials, while leaving disposable products as those of their mothers and grandmothers. It's not your mother's period product; it's the way of the future.

Conclusion

Brands that sell menstrual products must always be aware of the interests of the younger generations. They cannot establish lifelong customers because menstruators eventually hit menopause and no longer need their products. Rather, these brands must keep their finger on the pulse of the youth and adapt to their ever-changing interests. The youth of almost any given era are concerned about activism. They want to enact change within their society, but the focus of that activism often shifts slightly from one generation to another. Saalt, Flex, and Period Aisle have all been able to identify the primary focuses of Generation Z and Millennials as pragmatic speech that breaks menstrual and sexual taboos, environmental concern, and a more fluid/neutral concept of gender. They are then able to use those social issues for their own brand activism. They make claims about how they support the cause and back those claims up with action so consumers can trust their dedication. By supporting the social issues, they are able to attract other supporters of the social issues as potential customers.

Analyzing product advertisements like these is a great source of information about society, particularly the menstruating population. As the menstruating population is mostly made up of cisgender women, transgender men, and nonbinary menstruators, these advertisements show the values of repressed members of society. The strong focus on the environment and the rebellion against gender stereotypes indicates that those concerns are important to younger generations. In the future, this study could be expanded by analyzing the appeals of reusable menstrual brands in relation to the race and socioeconomic class of consumers rather than age. Advertisements reflect the interests of society as well as enforcing them. In turn, seeing advertisements focusing on those concerns, such as environmental activism, will make consumers even more aware of and interested in the social cause. It is a two-way street of influence. Due to this, academics can also look at the advertisements of brands that continuously focus on younger generations to examine how society values are likely to shift.

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