

Bleeding Votes: The power of period imagery in politics.

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1 Introduction

Literature

- Menstruation, or the “period”, is the natural process of shedding blood and uterine tissue when pregnancy does not occur.
- Compared to other bodily fluids (e.g., semen, breast milk), menstrual blood is perceived as especially disgusting. This stigma is reinforced by global marketing that promotes hiding menstruation as essential to normal functioning. Collectively, these patterns reflect a persistent social stigma surrounding menstruation.
- Conceptual metaphor theory proposes that metaphors, that is, reframing ideas through abstract language, shape how we understand the world. The prevalence of metaphors for menstruation (e.g.,: “**time of the month**”, “**red plague**”, “**shark week**”) reflect how deeply embedded this stigma is in everyday discourse.
- Metaphors have also been shown to shape political attitudes (e.g., immigration as a “disease”, nation healing from “colonial wounds”). So, what happens when a stigmatized topic like menstruation enters political discourse, in the case of “Tampon Tim”?

Purpose

- **This research investigates the effect of menstrual-metaphoric language on political ad appeal.**

Hypotheses

- Menstruation metaphor will influence the appeal of political advertising. It is not predicted if this will increase or decrease appeal.
- This relationship will be moderated by sexism, political ideology, and dehumanization of women.

2 Method

Participants

- Timeline: October 2024, preceding election day
- MTurk: Eligible voters in the U.S.
- N = 258, 57% Women, Age: M = 45.47, SD = 13.28,
- Political Identification: 45% Democrat, 22% Republican, 31% independent, 2% other

Randomized Conditions

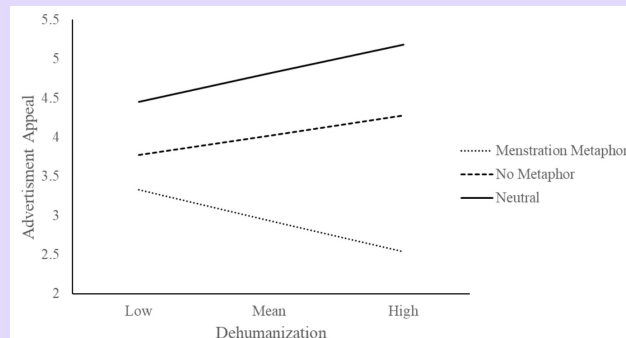


Measures

Advertisement appeal | Political Ideology | Sexism | Dehumanization of women

3 Results

Metaphors for menstruation significantly *decreases* political ad appeal, especially in those with strong *dehumanizing* beliefs about women.



Regardless of individuals' levels of sexism or political ideology, the menstrual metaphoric ad received the lowest ratings compared to non-metaphoric ads for the candidate and neutral ad encouraging voting.

This graph shows an interaction between **dehumanization of women** and **ad appeal** in the three conditions.

4 Conclusion

Summary

- **The hypotheses were partially supported, in that people felt lower appeal from the menstrual metaphoric ad compared to other conditions.**
- While sexism and political ideology did not moderate this relationship, dehumanization of women intensified negative reactions to the metaphoric ad.

Limitations & Future Directions

- Our sample was not normally distributed in sexism and political ideology, in that participants were mostly moderate in sexist beliefs and political ideology. This making it difficult to apply these findings to people in each extreme.
- Along the same lines, this sample is representative of white, middle-aged voters. Our data fails to represent the population of younger voters who may have different opinions of menstruation in the media.
- Given the election results, it is wondered whether Democratic ads, geared at highlighting the aversive experiences with the healthcare system related to birth and menstruation could have influenced our appeal on a wide scale.
- Further investigation into how these reminders of menstruation influence political figures' campaign success would be valuable.

6 Selected references

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