

New Media as a Tool for Menstruation Hygiene Awareness: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, new media has emerged as a powerful tool for raising awareness about menstruation hygiene and breaking taboos. This systematic review explores the impact and effectiveness of various new media platforms in promoting menstruation hygiene awareness, such as social media, mobile applications, and online forums. Through a comprehensive analysis of studies conducted between 2010 and 2024, this review highlights the transformative role of digital platforms in disseminating information and empowering individuals with knowledge about menstrual health.

The findings suggest that social media campaigns, interactive apps, and online educational content have significantly improved menstrual hygiene practices among diverse populations. Social media campaigns leverage the widespread reach of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to disseminate information quickly and engage with a broad audience. Interactive apps offer personalized education and reminders, making it easier for users to track their menstrual health and receive tailored advice. These platforms not only provide accurate information but also create supportive communities where individuals can share experiences and seek advice without fear of stigma. The anonymity and accessibility of online forums and social media groups allow for open discussions that might not occur in face-to-face settings. This communal support is crucial in breaking down societal taboos and empowering individuals to take control of their menstrual health.

Additionally, the review identifies the challenges and limitations of using new media for this purpose, including issues related to digital literacy, accessibility, and the potential for misinformation. Digital literacy is essential for effectively using these platforms, and there is a risk for those with limited access to technology. This review underscores the potential of new media to revolutionize menstruation hygiene education and advocacy. The insights gained from this review can inform future initiatives and guide policymakers, educators, and health professionals in harnessing the power of new media to address menstruation hygiene effectively...

Keywords: New media, Menstruation hygiene, Awareness, social media, Digital platforms, Menstrual health, Digital literacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of media in shaping societal norms and behaviors has become increasingly significant in the contemporary world, particularly in the context of public health. As technology advances, the capacity of media to disseminate information and create awareness has expanded beyond traditional boundaries. This is especially true in developing countries like India,

where mass media serves as a vital tool for public health promotion. The ability of media to reach diverse populations, including women in both urban and rural settings, makes it an essential component in addressing health issues, particularly those related to menstrual hygiene management (MHM).

Why is Menstrual Hygiene important?

The average age of menarche (onset of menses) is 12.4 years and that of menopause (cessation of menses) is 50 years. The wide menstrual span necessitates that a robust and sustainable menstrual hygiene policy be formulated and its knowledge be disseminated. Health policy should be country specific addressing local cultural practices and needs of different age groups. Menstrual hygiene is not just a health issue; it is a revolution, a globalised public health topic. It is a matter of female's rights, dignity, and equality. Every year 28th May is celebrated as Menstrual Hygiene Day, wherein 28 signifies the average menstrual cycle length and May being the fifth month of the year signifying average 5 days of bleeding during periods. Undeniably, menstrual hygiene is paramount to women's health but is still plagued by misconcepts, lack of communication & conversation, limited puberty guidance and inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene(WASH).

Menstrual hygiene is a critical aspect of women's health that has often been shrouded in stigma and misinformation. In many cultures, menstruation is considered a taboo, leading to a lack of open discussion and education about menstrual health. This silence can result in inadequate knowledge about hygiene practices, which can have serious health implications for women and girls (Rahman et al., 2018).

Social stigma and lack of access to safe menstrual practices has far reaching psychosocial implications. Women are barred from entering places of worship & kitchen, eating pickles and curd, made to stay in isolation (viz menstrual huts) and in unhygienic circumstances making them more vulnerable and prone to genital infections with possible long term effects on reproductive health. Girls miss schools and working women skip their work owing to lack of access to safe sanitation and privacy at workplace. Wars , migrations and humanitarian crisis situations render girls and women vulnerable where menstrual hygiene management is not addressed.

Indian state of Maharashtra is known to have several "villages womb - less women." Drought which worsens every subsequent year, forces people to migrate and work as sugarcane harvesters. There is lack of civic amenities in fields and when women have periods it doubles down on their troubles. Absentism leads to penalty. Under these circumstances, they opt for hysterectomy leading to adverse long term health implications.

The promotion of menstrual hygiene awareness through new media platforms has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly as digital technology becomes increasingly integrated into daily life. The role of new media in public health communication is crucial, as it offers innovative ways to reach diverse audiences and disseminate information effectively. This literature review examines the role of new media platforms in promoting menstrual hygiene awareness, analyzes the effectiveness of digital campaigns, identifies demographic reach and engagement, evaluates the impact of social media influencers, and assesses the challenges and limitations of using new media for menstruation hygiene advocacy

Role of New Media Platforms

New media platforms, including social media, blogs, and mobile applications, have emerged as powerful tools for raising awareness about menstrual hygiene. These platforms facilitate open discussions and provide a space for sharing information that is often considered taboo in many cultures. According to Hennegan et al. (2019), effective awareness campaigns, including those through media and advertising, can positively influence perceptions and practices of menstrual hygiene. The ability of new media to reach a wide audience allows for the normalization of menstruation discussions, which is essential for breaking down stigma and promoting better hygiene practices.

In Bangladesh, for instance, new media has been identified as a convenient medium for raising awareness among women about menstrual hygiene. The interactive nature of social media allows users to engage with content, ask questions, and share personal experiences, which can enhance understanding and acceptance of menstrual health issues. Furthermore, the use of visual content, such as infographics and videos, can make complex information more accessible and engaging for audiences.

Research by Kuhlmann et al. (2020) highlights that social media campaigns can effectively reach young women, who are often the primary audience for menstrual health education. The study emphasizes the importance of using relatable content and language to engage this demographic effectively. Similarly, a study by Adebayo et al. (2021) found that social media platforms significantly increased awareness and knowledge about menstrual hygiene among adolescents in Nigeria, demonstrating the global applicability of these findings.

Effectiveness of Digital Campaigns

Digital campaigns have proven to be effective in promoting menstrual health education. Research indicates that social media campaigns can significantly increase awareness and knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices. For example, studies have shown that exposure to advertisements and educational content on social media correlates with improved knowledge and attitudes toward menstrual hygiene products. The interactive nature of digital campaigns allows for real-time feedback and

engagement, which can enhance the learning experience and encourage behavioral change .Educational webinars with expert led sessions, podcasts showing engaging conversations with activists, health care professionals and policy makers enjoy wide viewership and are an effective media tool in disseminating knowledge.

A systematic review by Hennegan et al. (2019) found that digital interventions, including social media campaigns, were effective in improving menstrual hygiene knowledge and practices among women and girls in low- and middle-income countries. Furthermore, a study by Kuhlmann et al. (2020) demonstrated that targeted digital campaigns could lead to significant improvements in menstrual health literacy among young women. The ability to tailor messages to specific audiences enhances the relevance and impact of these campaigns.

Moreover, digital campaigns can be tailored to specific audiences, making them more relevant and impactful. By analyzing user data, campaign creators can identify the interests and needs of their target demographic, allowing for more personalized messaging. This targeted approach is particularly important in addressing the unique challenges faced by different groups, such as adolescents or women in rural areas, who may have varying levels of access to information and resources.

Demographic Reach and Engagement

Identifying the demographic reach and engagement of menstruation hygiene content through new media is essential for understanding its impact. Research has shown that different demographic groups engage with digital content in varying ways. For instance, younger audiences are more likely to use social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube reels, while older may prefer Facebook or traditional websites. Understanding these preferences allows for more effective content distribution and engagement strategies.

Engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, provide valuable insights into how well content resonates with audiences. High engagement levels often indicate that the content is relevant and impactful, while low engagement may suggest a need for reevaluation of messaging strategies. Additionally, demographic analysis can help identify gaps in reach, allowing advocates to develop targeted campaigns aimed at underrepresented groups.

A study by Adebayo et al. (2021) found that social media campaigns targeting young women in Nigeria achieved high engagement rates, indicating a strong interest in menstrual health topics. Similarly, research by Kuhlmann et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of using culturally relevant content to engage diverse audiences effectively. This underscores the need for advocates to consider cultural contexts when developing digital content.

Impact of Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping perceptions of menstrual hygiene. Their ability to reach large audiences and create relatable content makes them powerful advocates for menstrual health education. Influencers can help normalize discussions around menstruation and challenge societal taboos, thereby fostering a more open and accepting environment. Research indicates that endorsements from trusted figures can significantly influence attitudes and behaviors, making influencer partnerships a valuable strategy for menstrual hygiene campaigns. Celebrity Shilpa Shetty is a brand ambassador for HPV vaccine which is against cancer cervix.

The impact of influencers is particularly pronounced among younger audiences, who often look to these figures for guidance and information. By leveraging their platforms, influencers can effectively disseminate educational content and promote positive menstrual hygiene practices. However, it is essential to ensure that influencers are well-informed and sensitive to the cultural contexts of their audiences to avoid perpetuating misinformation or stigma.

The present literature review is being done with a focus on awareness related to menstrual Health through new media tools with the following review questions:

- 1. How effective are new media platforms in promoting menstruation hygiene awareness compared to traditional media?
- 2. What demographics engage most with menstruation hygiene content on new media, and how does this influence awareness?
- 3. How do social media influencers contribute to changing public perceptions about menstruation hygiene?

Objectives of the study:

- 1. Examine the role of new media platforms in promoting menstruation hygiene awareness.
- 2. Identify the demographic reach and engagement of menstruation hygiene content through new media.
- 3. Evaluate the impact of social media influencers on changing perceptions of menstrual hygiene.
- 4. Assess the challenges and limitations of using new media for menstruation hygiene advocacy.

Theoretical Framework:

In this study, researchers have studied the research papers related to menstrual awareness, health communication, behavioral change and new media. Research papers have been taken from various national and international journals of high repute. The researchers have critically communicative

Agenda setting to create awareness

Agenda setting clearly defines that media sets an agenda before public, though this theory is established in connection to Mass media and political discourse, but the influential media is capable of setting social, cultural, environmental, and health discourse among people(Harris et al., 2018; Kozel et al., 2006;

Llamas & Mayhew, 2016). This theory clearly states that media frame opinion on particular issues among the masses (Llamas & Mayhew, 2016). People who are under heavy media exposure are highly exposed to such preventive content related to health. In 1968, during the American election, Max Mac Combs and Donald Shaw developed an agenda-setting theory. However, with the passage of time, this theory enters into most of the communicative approaches (Bang, Chae, Lee, Yu, & Kim, 2018; Kozel et al., 2006; Llamas & Mayhew, 2016). Harris et al., noticed that personal beliefs, ideations, and motivations open up a new pathway to analysis the effective use of media for the generation of social awareness at ground level (Harris et al., 2018).

Health Belief Model

There are several psychological health behavior models but the Health Belief Model for behavior change, which is helpful to know about people"s belief on health issues and engaging all activities for health promotion among masses. Health belief model one of the oldest and famous model to establish behavior change interference (Glanz & Bishop, 2010; Hausenblas et al., 2001; Kozel et al., 2006; Nishiuchi et al., 2016) Glanz K, Rimer BK (2005). According to the health belief model, health communication practitioners can design and develop effective strategies for health awareness. The health strategist further can utilize behavioral change communication approaches to change the attitude of the people and make them conscious about health etc. (Nishiuchi et al., 2016). This study also purposes that a campaign should be people centric-not generalized. A campaign should be people-centric if health practitioners expect higher chances of achieving success in such campaigns. (Glanz & Bishop, 2010; Kozel et al., 2006; Yoshitake, Omori, Sugawara, Akishinonomiya, & Shimada, 2019). In this study, researchers also highlighted the proper understanding of cultural beliefs and social structure of the area where a strategist is supposed to launch an awareness campaign. Yoshitake, N., Omori, M., Sugawara, M., Akishinonomiya, K., & Shimada, S. (2019) said that the validity of the Health Belief model exhibited that A structured questionnaire of TB prevention is closely monitored with the health belief model and indicates several variables to study health awareness phenomenon..

To answer the research questions, a systematic literature review of existing literature on

the subject was conducted under the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2015). This method was chosen because it helps to synthesize academic literature accurately and reliably. The PRISMA approach entailed an evidence-based checklist of items and a four-phase flow diagram. PRISMA is not intending to be a quality assessment tool, but this research study aimed at ensuring clarity and transparency when reporting systematic literature reviews. For the current study, a systematic search for articles was conducted to understand menstrual hygiene awareness through new media. After deciding the review questions, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, search terms, study selection and assessment of the risk of bias, data extraction, and how to analyze the data were decided.

Search terms

The search action was conducted using the Google Scholar database which was accessed through an institutional gateway that has access to several other databases. The search action included Menstruation awareness-related terms. For each construct, several keywords were used to ensure a broad coverage of studies. As a result, the following Boolean search action was conducted: "New Media and menstruation hygiene awareness", and "Menstruation Hygiene Practices and social Media".

Inclusion Criteria:

A number of criteria were specified to select the most relevant studies. To be included, articles had to fulfill the criteria defined below:

- 1. Availability of the full text,
- 2. Usage of keywords in the title,
- 3. Research paper focusing on new media platforms (e.g., social media, mobile applications, websites) used for menstruation hygiene awareness
- 4. Relevance of the abstract,
- 5. Studies conducted in various geographical contexts to provide a global perspective.

Study Selection

The study selection was made in three steps. First, the titles of all retrieved articles were screened for eligibility for the above-mentioned inclusion criteria. Second, the abstracts of all initially relevant articles were screened for eligibility by applying uniform criteria. Finally, the full text of all remaining publications was checked. All articles deemed relevant were coded in terms of: name of authors, published date, journal, the main aims, method, mentioned skills, definition and operationalization of skills, results, and conclusions. Coding of the articles was done to make sure all articles that fulfilled the criteria were selected.

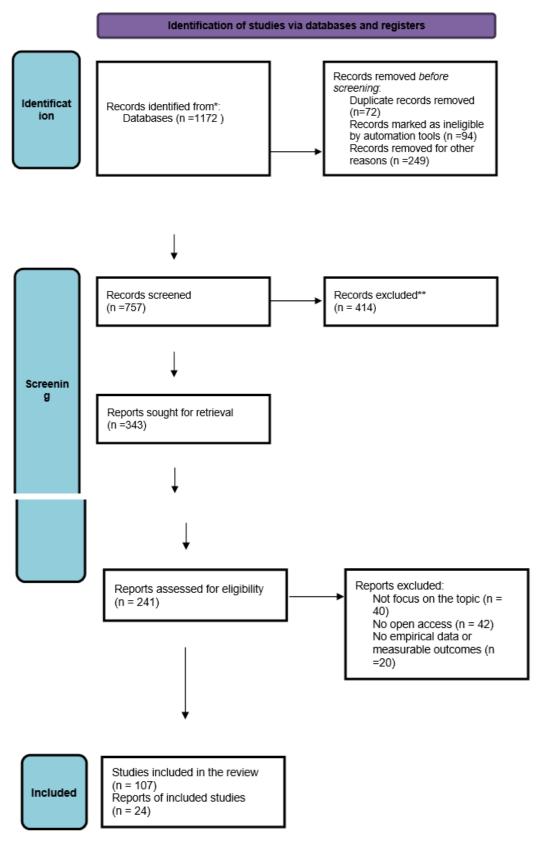
PRISMA flowchart

Given the restrictions of the availability of documents and the keywords between the customized range of 2010 to 2024, only 1172 articles were identified from the database. The first screening level included the availability of the full text, which resulted in 757 articles. After title screening 343 articles met all four inclusion criteria.

Exclusion Criteria:

- 1. Studies that do not focus on new media or menstruation hygiene.
- 2. Research papers where full text is not available and has no open access.
- 3. Research that does not provide empirical data or measurable outcomes.
- 4. Studies that only focus on menstruation hygiene.

After filtering the articles based on the above criteria, 241 articles have open access and full text is available. The articles were further excluded based on the keywords 'new media' and 'menstruation hygiene awareness' that are used in the abstract of the research article which summed up to 107 articles. The last stage of selection was based on the criteria of research articles that deal only with new media and menstruation hygiene awareness summed to 24.



Data Extraction

Data extraction involved systematically collecting relevant information from the included studies. A standardized data

extraction form was developed to capture key details, including:

- a. Titles and year of publication.
- b. Study design and methodology.
- c. Type of new media used.
- d. Key findings related to awareness and behavior change.
- e. Limitations and recommendations for future research.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process followed a systematic approach:

- Initial screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to identify potentially relevant studies based on the inclusion criteria.
- Full-text articles of the selected studies were then reviewed to confirm their eligibility.
- A flow diagram (PRISMA flowchart) was created to document the number of studies identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the final review.

2. METHODOLOGY USED

Researchers examining the methodologies employed in the studies are a diverse mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches that effectively address the complexities of menstrual health and stigma. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and case studies, provide rich, contextual insights into user experiences with menstrual tracking apps and the impact of social media on menstrual shame, allowing for a nuanced understanding of societal perceptions. Additionally, qualitative content analysis of media, such as menstrual memes and social media posts, reveals the ways in which these platforms can challenge stigma and promote awareness. On the quantitative side, surveys utilizing structured questionnaires enable the collection of numerical data from a significant sample, facilitating statistical analysis of awareness regarding female hygiene practices. Furthermore, the systematic literature review methodically synthesizes existing research on health-related misinformation, highlighting gaps and informing future interdisciplinary studies. This methodological diversity not only enriches the findings but also underscores the importance of employing multiple perspectives to comprehensively address the multifaceted issues surrounding menstruation and women's health.

Data Analysis:

The analysis examined several dimensions where new media impacts menstrual hygiene awareness, focusing on factors like user engagement, content themes, behavioral changes, and access to resources. The analysis focused on platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, identifying patterns of engagement, the types of content shared, and the role of influencers and advocates in spreading awareness. User data from menstrual health apps were studied to understand how these tools educate users about menstrual hygiene and encourage sustainable menstrual practices. Data on specific campaigns like #PeriodPositive, #EndPeriodPoverty, and awareness efforts around conditions like polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) were analyzed to measure their effectiveness in raising awareness and mobilizing action. The prevalence of misinformation and stigma surrounding menstruation was a key area of focus, examining how new media platforms either contribute to or combat these issues.

The data analysis revealed that social media platforms have become critical spaces for menstrual hygiene advocacy, education, and community-building. Across platforms like Instagram and Twitter, hashtags like #MenstruationMatters, #EndPeriodPoverty, and #PeriodPositive were analyzed to track how discussions around menstruation evolved over time. The analysis found that these hashtags generated substantial engagement, particularly during international awareness events like World Menstrual Hygiene Day.

Influencers play a key role in normalizing menstrual discussions, often using personal stories to engage their audience. Data showed that posts by prominent influencers and advocates received higher engagement, with users sharing, commenting, and interacting with posts about menstrual hygiene, menstrual products, and personal experiences.

The most popular content related to menstrual hygiene focused on debunking myths, menstrual product reviews, sustainable menstrual practices, and health tips. Posts that used infographics or visually engaging content were found to be the most effective in spreading awareness, as they were easily shareable and comprehensible.

Kev Findings:

The studies outlined to understand the role of new media in enhancing awareness and dialogue surrounding menstrual hygiene, significantly impacting societal perceptions and behaviors. One of the prominent findings is that digital and social

media platforms serve as powerful tools for normalizing discussions about menstruation, which has historically been shrouded in stigma and taboo. For instance, the film "Padman" and its accompanying social media campaign effectively raised awareness about menstrual health in India, demonstrating how engaging narratives can challenge cultural norms and foster community dialogue. This campaign not only highlighted the importance of menstrual hygiene but also encouraged women to embrace their experiences and advocate for better practices. Furthermore, the studies reveal that women who participated in open discussions about menstruation exhibited a greater willingness to pay for menstrual products, indicating that reducing stigma can positively influence consumer behavior and perceptions of menstrual health technologies.

Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of relatable content in digital media, particularly for younger audiences. Many young people seek to "fill in the gaps" left by conventional menstrual education through personal narratives shared on social media, valuing these relatable experiences over clinical information. This highlights a critical need for more inclusive and comprehensive menstrual education approaches that resonate with lived experiences. Menstrual tracking apps also emerged as valuable tools for enhancing women's understanding of reproductive health, with convenience being a primary driver for their use. However, the findings indicate that while these apps empower users, they also present challenges such as emotional distress and privacy concerns, underscoring the necessity for better app design and communication of limitations.

Moreover, the studies point to the persistence of harmful stereotypes in menstrual product marketing, where brands often prioritize profit over genuine concern for women's health. This calls for a reevaluation of marketing strategies to ensure they contribute positively to menstrual health awareness rather than perpetuating stigma. Social media's role in reducing menstrual shame is particularly noteworthy, as it facilitates open discussions and challenges societal norms, thereby promoting women's empowerment and health awareness. The systematic review of health-related misinformation on social media further emphasizes the need for public health strategies to combat misinformation and improve health literacy regarding menstrual hygiene.

Challenges and limitations:

The studies highlight several challenges and limitations in promoting menstrual hygiene awareness through new media. A significant challenge is the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases and affect the accuracy of findings. Additionally, many studies focus primarily on urban, middle-class populations, potentially overlooking the needs of underrepresented groups. The effectiveness of marketing strategies for menstrual products and apps remains limited, with many users unaware of available resources. Furthermore, the predominance of social media can sometimes dilute critical discussions, as consumerism may overshadow essential issues like period poverty and stigma, necessitating more focused and inclusive approaches.

3. CONCLUSION

The exploration of new media's role in enhancing awareness about menstrual hygiene reveals a multifaceted landscape where digital platforms serve as powerful tools for education, advocacy, and community engagement. The studies highlight the significant impact of various forms of new media, including social media, mobile applications, and films, in challenging societal taboos and fostering positive perceptions surrounding menstruation.

Research indicates that social media advertisements that prioritize education and awareness can lead to more favorable attitudes among potential users, suggesting a critical need for improved marketing strategies that focus on the benefits of sustainable and health-conscious menstrual products. Moreover, the use of menstrual tracking apps has emerged as a convenient tool for young women, enhancing their understanding of reproductive health. However, the studies also point out a lack of awareness and ineffective marketing strategies that hinder the potential reach of these applications. This underscores the necessity for targeted outreach and education to ensure that these digital tools are accessible and beneficial to a broader audience.

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have been identified as vital spaces for feminist activism and awareness campaigns related to menstrual hygiene. While they facilitate discussions and promote advocacy, the interplay of consumerism and aesthetics can sometimes overshadow the core issues of period poverty and stigma. This highlights the importance of maintaining a focus on intersectionality and inclusivity in digital activism to address the complexities of menstrual health comprehensively. By leveraging the potential of digital media, stakeholders can foster a more informed and supportive environment for discussions around menstruation, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes for women globally

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