



***“THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS  
WHEN WHORES AND PIMPS  
BECOME MARKETERS”***

Public tweet about the #bloodnormal campaign, October 2017

Marketing Society Awards 2018

Brand: Bodyform/Libresse (ESSITY)

Category: Purpose driven brands

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**When we launched our campaign #bloodnormal in October 2017, we knew we would get some hateful reactions.**

**But you don't break taboos without triggering visceral negativity.**

**Otherwise, it wouldn't be a taboo.**

This case study will tell you the story of how the Bodyform/Libresse (Essity) marketing team managed to galvanise their entire company to think and act more boldly than it could ever have imagined doing in order to bring to life its purpose and make a meaningful difference to its consumers: Women.

It will explain how a great purpose would have meant nothing without the courage and tenacity of a small group of committed people to actively tackle category conventions, break societal taboos, keep challenging attitudes inside and outside the company, and push relentlessly against media bans to establish a new standard in the category, and a new paradigm for women.

And it will provide some lessons we've learned along the way, proving why it is worth every fight to truly act purposefully.

- Campaigns with a limited media investment delivered outstanding earned media value and stealing the #1 social share of voice vs. Always, proving the relevance of our insights for women and society.
- Redfit and #bloodnormal delivered the biggest cut through in the history of the brand, and smashed norms on brand impact and purchase propensity vs. our other comms.
- Such purposeful campaigns strengthened the internal commitment within the company, creating passionate advocates who find their job more meaningful than ever.

When your brand platform is "Live Fearless" such disruption perhaps should come as no surprise.

WORD COUNT: 258

@r\*\*\*d

I'm disgusted by myself when I bleed. I would never want my son to see this ad.

@Hu\*

You're gross and the blood that gushes out of you makes me wretch.

@R\*yalr\*sewolf\*

Totally gross. It's not taboo, but just like gays and transsexuals I don't want this thrown in my face every five minutes.

@H\*\*\*\*o

Sorry ladies, but letting blood through your pants is like shitting pants...let's stay clean and civilised

@l\*\*\*\*j

We know it happens and we men, dont want to be involved in this.

@De\*d\*v\_\*\*

Absolutely disgusting.



# REWIND A FEW YEARS

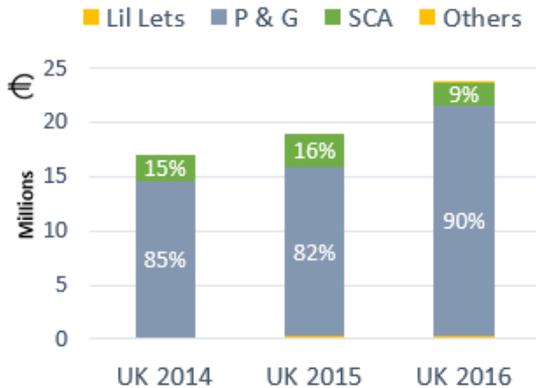
In 2013, recognising the need to elevate FemCare advertising beyond outdated stereotypes, we had created a brand platform: “Live Fearless”.

With it, we had the ambition to help women live the life they wanted without holding back or worrying about their periods. It helped us make bolder communications about periods beyond the usual category clichés, but overall we weren’t getting the stand out we needed.

In 2016, we were in a difficult situation: #3 in the UK market, far behind P&G giants (Always and Tampax): Not only were they outspending us, they were increasing their investment year on year and Always was advertising almost all year round.

As a challenger in a commoditised category, we couldn’t afford to compete on price and promotions, or to outspend them.

Competitors increasing their investment year on year (SCA was former Essity)



Zenith Optimedia, FemCare media investment 2014-2016 UK

Always was advertising almost all year round (50woa)



Zenith Optimedia, FemCare weeks on air 2015 UK

What’s more, “confidence” itself was getting commoditised among FemCare and Feminine brands. From Dove to Always, Pantene, L’Oréal, Nike, everyone was telling women to feel confident.

How differentiating, legitimate and effective could it be?

# SHARPENING OUR PURPOSE

We took a long and hard look at ourselves, at our category, and at what could benefit and resonate with women when it comes to period care. In that uncomfortable process, we made two fundamental observations:

## 1. Periods had enough enemies so there was no need to pick unrelated societal issues:

We discovered how much periods were still stigmatised, and how focusing only on that would help more than anything else.

More than half of women feel uncomfortable in social situations when they have their period.

1 / 3 women feel a lot or some discomfort buying pads / tampons

SCA Hygiene Matters  
Global Survey  
2016

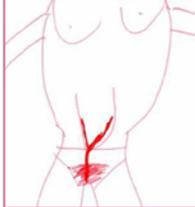
9 / 10 women hide their periods

56% Of teens would rather get bullied at school than talk about their periods with their parents

1 / 3 people believe that periods are still a taboo, over sex, the gender pay gap and mental health problems

Ketchum/Bilendi 24/7 Period cover-up  
Global Survey, 10,000 people  
(women and men)  
2017

"Menstruation is 'cultural dynamite': Everything about it is taboo and unmentionable"



Concept M report  
Global Qualitative Survey  
(women and men)  
2017

Indian girl kills herself after teacher publicly shames her for period stain



Girls 'too poor' to buy sanitary protection missing school

Social media is protecting men from periods, breast milk and body hair

Jessica Valenti



PERIODS: THE MENSTRUATION TABOO THAT WON'T GO AWAY

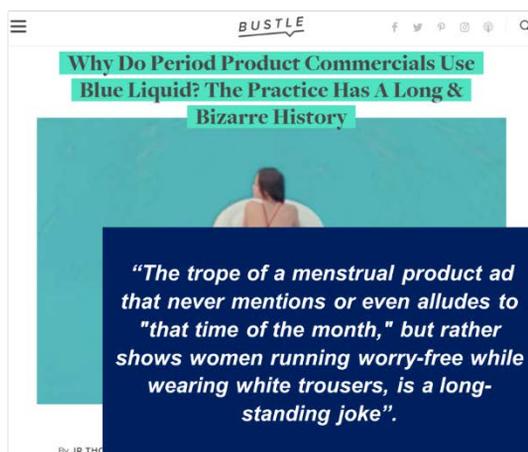


2. The whole period care category had always been afraid of periods: Ironically, our category, born to help women, had systematically avoided the reality of periods. Even those tackling broader societal issues (Always, Like a Girl) had carefully avoided any mention of periods.



Satirical newspaper "The Onion" - Instagram 2017

Mocked for being afraid of periods despite selling period products



Abusing euphemisms, sanitised vocabulary and unrealistic hyperboles

By being too shy or too high, we were all missing the point, and with it, the emotional potential of the category.

Obviously, part of the reticence to show or mention menstruation came from a long legal history of restricting “obscenity” and “indecentcy” in advertising.

So brands had to respect those rules to avoid bans or complaints.

Or had they? And who were we sparing?



*Family Guy, Griffin family exposed to a TV commercial using red liquid, shouting in disgust, 2012*

Periods are not only normal for half of the population, they’re a sign of health. Yet the historical abjection, denial and shaming of what is just a little blood had kept women feeling everything but normal about it.

We couldn’t just celebrate boldness and hope to create confidence: We had to be the first to take the leap, tackling the actual factors.

So we sharpened our purpose: **“Help create the conditions for women to live the life they want, by breaking period taboos”**.

Despite not being the category leader, we’d use our scale to help shift society’s attitudes. Even though it seems absurd for a FemCare brand, fighting for period normality would have to come with bravery.

### **ACTIVATING OUR PURPOSE**

To know our purpose was working, we’d have to:

- 1. Gain a disproportionately high share of voice despite our lower spend to outshout our competition**
- 2. Connect meaningfully with women, making them feel understood when it comes to periods**
- 3. Drive key brands metrics on equity and purchase propensity to strengthen internal confidence in the purpose**

# THE FIRST BIG LEAP OF FAITH: REDFIT (2016)

Our first episode in bringing to life our purpose was Redfit.

Blood in sport was seen as a normal thing, but period blood in sports was still an incredible taboo. The shame and lack of information on how women's bodies change when they have their period was stopping them from exercising to their true potential.

***In the UK alone, a quarter of women regularly missed out on exercise when on their period\*.***

The campaign was created to break the taboo and help women exercise on their period. At its heart was a powerful, taboo-breaking film where we showed real women practicing sports, pushing themselves even after blood had been drawn. Not giving up. If a little blood wasn't stopping them, why should their period?



"Blood"  
HERO FILM   



CONTENT PARTNERSHIP WITH  
EXPERTS IN SPORTS, NUTRITION  
AND RESILIENCE



DIGITAL HUB EXPERIENCE  
SUPPORT AND INFORMATION TO KEEP  
EXERCISING DURING PERIODS



BRAND SOCIAL  
MEDIA PLAN



PR  
AMPLIFICATION

We were nervous before launching Redfit:

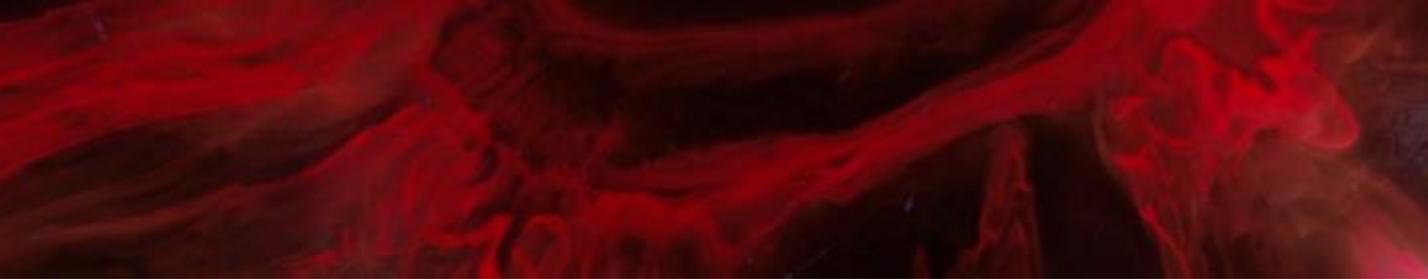
Not only was this a big change from the brand's previous marketing, but we had to fight hard to get our ad aired, as it was so unconventional for FemCare advertising to show blood.

But the overwhelmingly positive reception emboldened us to keep pushing.

[CLICK \(in full screen mode\)  
TO WATCH THE FILM](#)

[CLICK \(in full screen mode\)  
TO WATCH THE CASE STUDY](#)

\*YouGov for Essity, Menstrual cycle and exercise in the UK, 481 female respondents 18-45yo, April 2016.



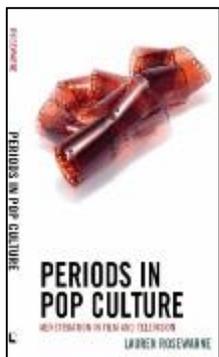
# GETTING BRAVER AND BRAVER: #BLOODNORMAL

Holding on to this thought of “no blood should hold us back”, we wanted to hit even harder against the taboos.

By digging deeper, we found a root cause that could help us do that:

**There was a glaring absence of positive representations of periods in media and mainstream culture, and it was fuelling the toxic shame.**

An insight validated by academic studies



*“For the incalculable women on screen and so very many sex scenes, menstruation is strikingly absent.*

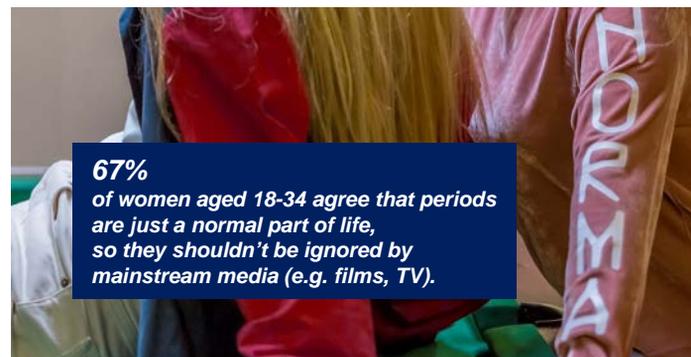
*When portrayed, menstruation is considered evil, disgusting and as the root of all female evil.*

*Girls in real life are viewing menstruation as a hassle, men are mocking it, loathing it and rarely understanding it.*

*On screen representations likely have some complicity.”*

Dr Lauren Rosewarne, University of Melbourne, School of Social and Political Sciences

Validated by academic studies



**67%**  
of women aged 18-34 agree that periods are just a normal part of life, so they shouldn't be ignored by mainstream media (e.g. films, TV).

Quantitative survey, Nov 2016, conducted by YouGov across Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Russia, France, UK, Malaysia, China, South Africa

To combat the taboos from their roots, we set out to create the normality the world needed to see, so women could stop feeling disgusting, and men disgusted.

Not through aggressive shock tactics or denunciations. But by creating a paradigm of normality and positivity for periods in culture.

For the first time in the history of FemCare, we swapped the infamous blue liquid for red, showed period blood trickling down a woman's leg, a girl publically asking for a pad, a man buying pads, the emotional journey of periods, the pain, the intimacy, and the beauty. Breaking not just one taboo, but dozens of them.



Swapping the blue liquid for red



Showing period blood



The pain & cramps as part of the reality of periods



The intimacy



The beauty  
Designer underwear “Venus” from DESSU



The feeling & beauty



Asking for and passing on pads in public, including boys/men – because they're not an A class drug



A 12yo comedian making positive jokes about periods



A man buying pads, like any other grocery



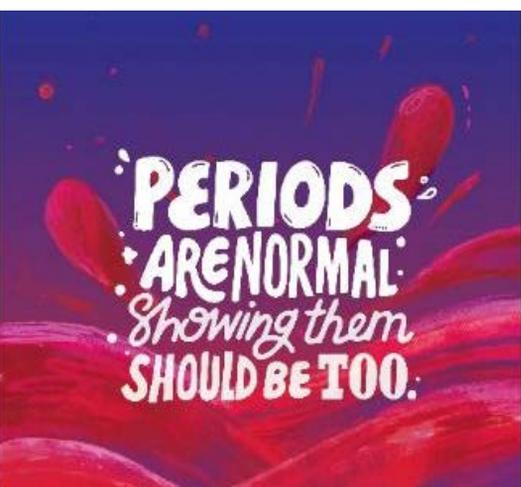
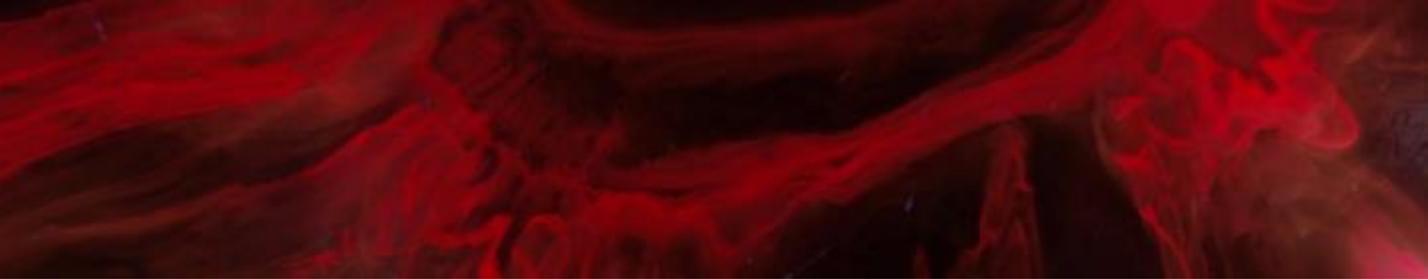
Periods and period pain acknowledged in the work place



Making symbols of periods as normal, positive elements of pop culture



Changing a pad



Our film was also a springboard: It contained the seeds of dozens of activations, all in collaboration with talent and influencers, to infiltrate different fields of culture where periods were still the big absent.

**POETRY**  
An original poem from feminist poet Dominique Christina



**FILM BURSARY**  
Funded 3 period positive films



**FASHION UNDERWEAR**  
Limited edition underwear by fashion house DESSU



**POP CULTURE OBJECTS**  
Pad shaped inflatable mattresses give-aways to the public



**GRAPHIC NOVEL**  
A graphic novel from awarded Vieto Ngai, with a kick-ass hero having her period.

**FASHION ACTIVISTS**  
Victoire Dauxerre, body positivity activist and writer, and Julian Hernandez, fashion male icon helped spread the message

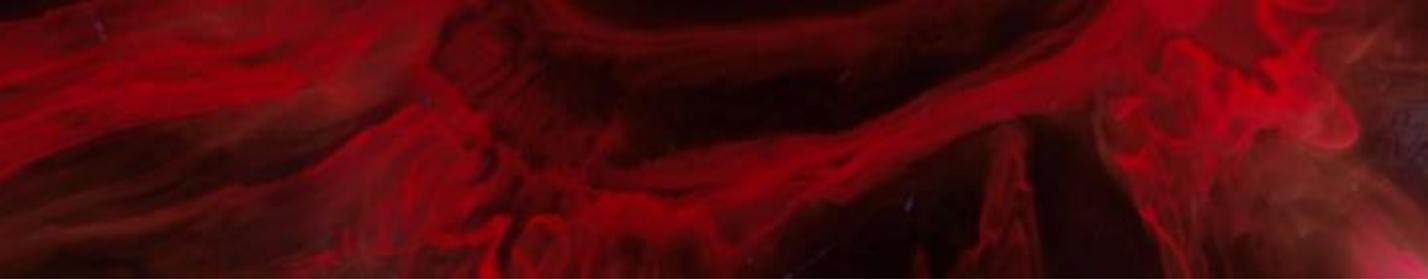
**GIPHY GIFS**  
Positive period gifs available to everyone on Giphy

**STAND UP COMEDY**  
Saffron, a 12yo comedian, wrote positive jokes about periods & created a documentary

Convincing everyone internally of taking all these risks was already hard. But getting media owners to air #bloodnormal proved unbelievably difficult. Scene by scene, frame by frame, it took months to gain the right to show what the world needed to see. Not all of them accepted, invoking the risk of “causing widespread offence” – but we’ll get there.

**CLICK (in full screen mode)  
TO WATCH THE FILM**

**CLICK (in full screen mode)  
TO WATCH THE CASE STUDY**



## WHY IT WAS WORTH EVERY BATTLE

Despite very limited budgets, our success enabled us to make a meaningful difference for more women and gain more brand positivity than we could ever have afforded and hoped for.

### 1. Gaining a disproportionate share of voice despite our limited budget

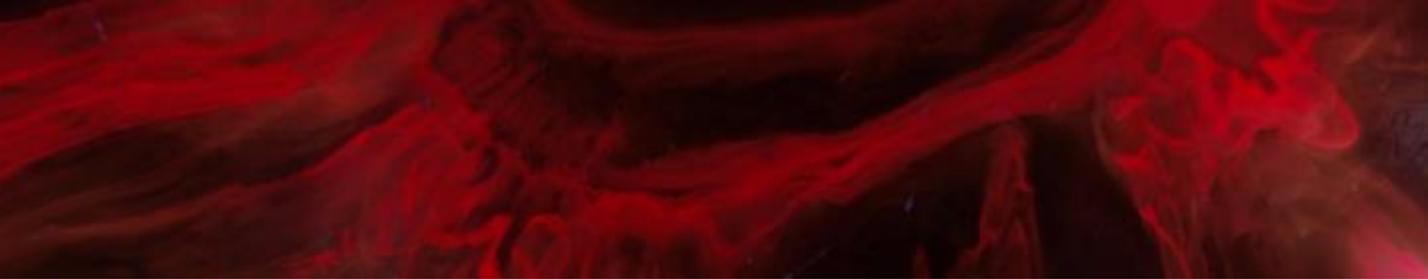
- [REDACTED] **NOT FOR PUBLICATION**
- [REDACTED] **NOT FOR PUBLICATION**
- #1 social share of voice vs. Always\*\*\* (From 5% to 74% for Redfit within month of launch, from 37% to 90% for #bloodnormal).
- Spread to over 25 countries, even where the brand doesn't exist.

\*Myriad, Campaign reports UK 2016 – 2017

\*\*Media bounty, Campaign reports UK 2016 - 2017

\*\*\*Zenith Optimedia, UK competitive spend FemCare category 2017





## 2. Connecting meaningfully with women and changing society's attitudes

### Praised globally for breaking taboos:

- Outstanding coverage by major global titles opening to broader societal debates about periods.
- Redfit was covered by broadcast radio, and #bloodnormal was the first time ever a Bodyform campaign had seen TV broadcast coverage: A huge win for the brand and for the cause, as the ad had been banned from TV.

### RED.FIT



It's 2016 and period ads have finally ditched the rollerblades and blue blood



Finally, a Period Commercial That's Not Afraid to Show Blood

### #BLOODNORMAL



Later's weird blue liquid: Why a new advert shows it's time to talk about period taboos

The depiction of realistic red 'period blood' is a step forward



**Loved and praised by women (and men!), creating much needed discussions, leaving women feeling understood:**

- 90% positive sentiment for Redfit at time of launch\*.
- With an even more taboo breaking campaign, #bloodnormal still achieved 72% positive sentiment, only 13% negativity, and very few indifferent\*.

\*Media bounty, Campaign reports UK 2016 - 2017

### RED.FIT

### #BLOODNORMAL

**Game changing for the category:**

**BRANDS BREAKING TABOOS:**  
*"It shouldn't be seen as an act of bravery for brands to talk about these things. It should be normal for Bodyform to show actual real blood when it's advertising period products."*

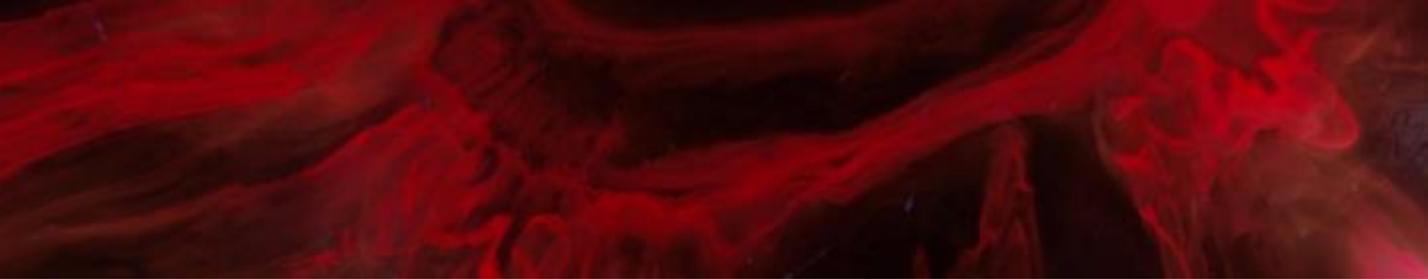
**"Who else is going to follow suit? This also opens up bigger questions that still plague us"**

**Gaining industry recognition:**

Redfit won 53 awards including 30 Gold and Grand Prix.

#bloodnormal has just launched but is already "#3 in Top 10 meaningful brands of the year" and honored for "Brand Bravery"\*.

\*The Drum January 2018, Campaign January 2018



### ***3. Driving key brands metrics on equity and purchase propensity, strengthening internal confidence in the purpose***

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

[REDACTED]

IPSOS UK Brand tracking 2016 and 2017



## A powerful effect internally:

### Campaigns that strengthened the entire company's pride and faith in the purpose

**I really love that. I will show it to my children : girl and boy.**  
*Manager Facilities & Projects EU South*

**My daughter in Mexico saw the Bodyform campaign through a blog. She was amazed... GREAT JOB, GUYS!**  
*HR Director Business Unit*

**This is awesome! Thanks for paving the way for some normal conversations around a normal thing like periods. Congratulations to all involved!!**  
*Communications Director*

**Modern, fresh and so right! #BloodNormal makes me proud to work for Essity. To act as role models and thought leaders to tackle period taboos. Keep up the good work.**  
*Corporate Brand Director*

**I love seeing articles discussing this ad on social media and know that I work for a company that cares! Keep up the good work!**  
*RST Process Engineer Converting*

**Fantastic!**  
*Global technical innovation manager*

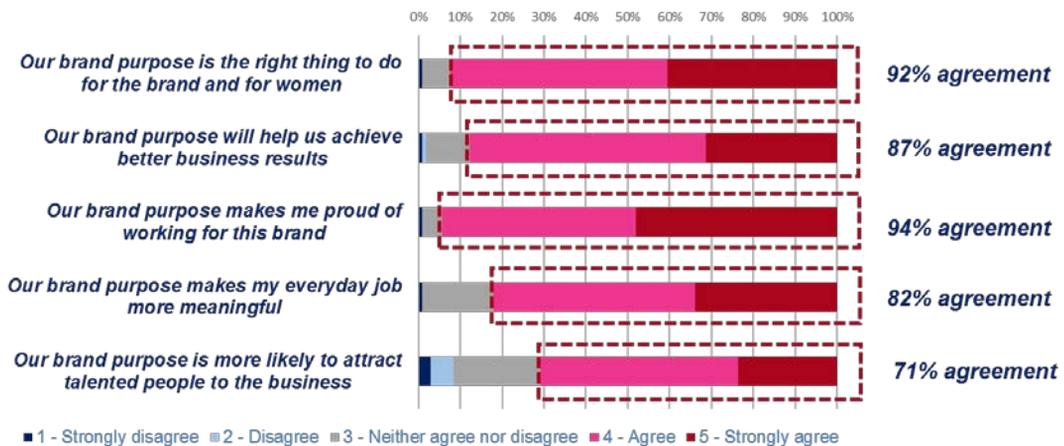
**Great. Thanks for making it, telling the truth! Great Job**  
*Talent Acquisition Specialist*

**Super good and inspiring work to fem care teams and all involved; proud!**  
*Corporate Brand Director*



Emails to the central marketing team, October 2017, post #Bloodnormal launch

Our Vice President Brand Building proudly wearing the pad costume from #bloodnormal film in the Essity offices, the day of launch



Quantitative survey within Essity FemCare teams, across 106 men and women aged between 21-65 in 12 markets. Across the following functions: Marketing, Innovation & Brand/Comms, Research/Insights, R&D Product Development, R&D Materials, R&D Lab, R&D packaging, Technology, Manufacturing, Supply Chain, IP. Survey Monkey, January 2018.

## **CONCLUSION: FOUR LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED**

In our journey of getting braver and better, we've reflected on a few key points that made everything possible.

### ***1. To stand for something, we had to work out what we stood against***

With "Live Fearless", we had the right intention, but defining our enemy (societal and category taboos) and our refusal to perpetrate the invisibility of periods, have been much stronger galvanisers than a positive statement.

### ***2. Don't be discouraged by resistance***

When we set out to break taboos, we knew the process to get our campaigns out wouldn't be the smoothest.

Fear of change is already a force of resistance within companies, and the nature of taboos is that we're all unconsciously victims of them. To overcome those negative yet human reactions, arming ourselves with resilience and empathy was key. Making them see what we had seen.



### ***3. Facts matter. Particularly when the truth is hard to believe***

We all know research can help inform and convince nervous decision makers. In our case, it was even more vital:

#### **To provide eye-opening facts.**

To all the sceptics (surely, with the progress of feminism, women's condition was fine now?) the power of facts was invaluable to turn them into advocates. From the Hygiene Matter report to the Global surveys and Qualitative research around period taboos.

#### **To build on truly relevant insights.**

For Redfit, we partnered with academics and experts to uncover robust insights about sports and periods. For #bloodnormal, we found evidence in academic literature, and ran several quantitative surveys to confirm the insight and its scale globally.

## **CONCLUSION: FOUR LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED**

### **4. *Courage is contagious.***

The X factor in success is that there's no such thing as a brave purpose, only people brave, crazy and determined enough to start taking risks and keep pushing.

Over time, we've been making more and more advocates internally and externally, including award-winning directors and talents who all personally invested in our campaigns.

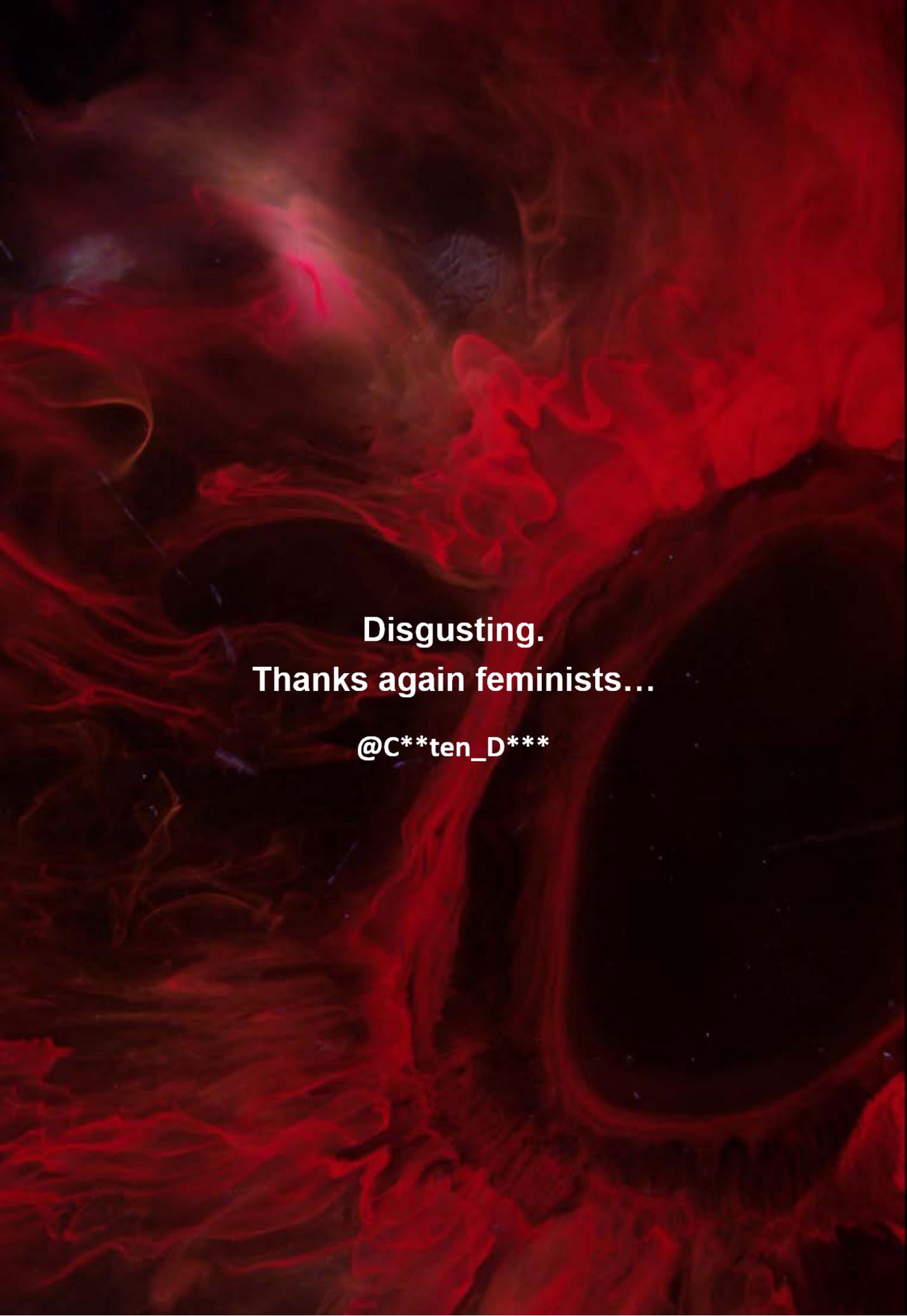
And when we launched #bloodnormal, even though we had prepared answers for the negativity we knew we would trigger, we were amazed to see so many men and women jumping in themselves to defend the cause, proving they had made it theirs.

Our purpose was working: it was proving right for our brand and for society.

Now, "Live Fearless" is not just an encouragement, it's a stamp of bravery. Because we were the first to take risks and lead the way.

*WORD COUNT: 1927*





**Disgusting.  
Thanks again feminists...**

**@C\*\*ten\_D\*\*\***