

Adolescent Perceptions of Menstruation on Twitter: Opportunities for Advocacy and Education

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Introduction

Menstrual health and hygiene is an important part of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. While many adolescents celebrate menstruation as an important rite of passage, many seek discretion around menstruation due to stigma.

Social media sites like Twitter have the potential to benefit adolescents through the provision of social support and information but may also perpetuate myths and misinformation.

Many youth have used Twitter and other social media to combat stigma and raise awareness about other culturally taboo topics, but previous work has not explored youth conversations regarding menstruation.

The purpose of this study is to assess whether Twitter can provide useful insights into how youth perceive menstruation.

Methodology

The research team searched 162,316,839 publicly available tweets of 71,443 users in the HLP Twitter Youth Cohort for tweets that matched menstruation-related keywords: a pad, my pad, my period, her period, your period, tampon, diva cup, menstruate, that time of the month.

This cohort was previously identified by using birthday-related keywords to query the Twitter Streaming API from July to September of 2019, then using precise regular expressions to select users between the ages of 13 and 25, inclusive.

The expressions were manually validated at 91% precision using a subset of 500 tweets.

Analysis was conducted on 1,000 tweets. Twelve parent categories emerged from these tweets that were identified by content analysis using a grounded theory approach. Categories were then sorted into three major themes.

Results

Health concerns

Health and complications

My period pains are so bad painkillers don't even work

Sexual and reproductive health

My period is now 12 days late time to start thinking of baby names

LGBTQ health and biases

*Being a guy and having your period is so invalidating it's like god is telling me to d*e*

Education

You're probably using the wrong type for your type of flow bc I don't feel it when I use a tampon

Fostering stigma

Shame and stigma

Why is my period making me so emosh

Inconvenience and limitations

If I get my period on my wedding day I'm calling it off

Self-deprecation and harm

*My friend asked me if I know anything to speed up your period
My answer: kill yourself*

Superstitions, myths, and religion

I started my period on the day of the lunar eclipse. Watch out bitches I am POWERFUL.

Access and affordability

Every woman has used toilet paper as a pad sometime in their life due to inaccessibility or lack of funds or lack of resources. Feminine hygiene being a luxury is bullshit.

Promotion of positivity

Awareness and community

On my period sis

Strength and resiliency

Psa: I can be moody without being on my period!!!!!!

Environment and sustainability

Yeah the diva cup is eco friendly and shit, but at what cost?

Discussion and Conclusions

This qualitative content analysis of Twitter user posts about menstruation provides insights into youth perceptions about menstrual health and hygiene.

The themes identify that Twitter may serve as a potential source of information for youth.

Youth openly tweeted about issues that are typically perceived as sensitive and personal.

There was also overwhelming emphasis placed on the negativity, inconvenience and shame that surrounds menstruation, including physical and emotional distress.

There was rare mention of the celebratory aspects of menstruation as it reflects maturation, development, or positive reproductive potential.

Most categories contained tweets that were directly or indirectly related to advocacy or education, which supports the potential use of Twitter as a platform to combat stigma and raise awareness regarding menstruation.

Social media sites like Twitter may be a helpful tool to improve public health messaging regarding menstruation, transform health outcomes and promote equity among youth who menstruate.

Acknowledgements and References

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