

Bodyform/Libresse: #bloodnormal

Source: Cannes Creative Lions, Shortlisted, Creative Effectiveness Lions, 2019

Downloaded from WARC



Bodyform, the feminine hygiene brand, used a digital film to break taboos and connect with women globally.

- Bodyform wanted to be the brand that took risks and used a smart media mix to help shift society's stigmatising attitude towards periods and compete with brands such as Always.
- Bodyform realised that you can't be what you can't see, therefore it needed to show actual periods for people to feel normal about them.
- At the heart of the multi-media campaign was an online film which showed a world where periods are normal, this was supported by playful period GIFs, the incorporation of negative reactions in reactive social videos and even pad-shaped lilos given away to the public.
- The #bloodnormal campaign reached over 800 million people, with 62% of women having a more positive opinion of the brand after viewing the advert and 35% viewing Bodyform as a brave brand.

Campaign details

Advertiser: Essity

Brand: Bodyform/Libresse

Agency: AMV BBDO London

Country: Global

Objectives

"This is what happens when whores and pimps become marketers."

This is the story of what happens when you decide to break toxic taboos related to your category when everyone has been too scared or oblivious to even touch on them.

Or, as some haters said, "this is what happens when whores and pimps become marketers."^{1 2}

Our #bloodnormal campaign encountered a lot of visceral rejections and negativity from inception to implementation. But the positive impact it's had has gone to show that sometimes, it's worth pissing off some people to make things right for many more.

How did a challenger brand in the FemCare category manage to activate, creatively and through media, a bold purpose and a powerful insight to become outstandingly meaningful to its consumers – women – to punch above its weight as a brand, but also change culture, revolutionise the entire category, overturn the media rules and transform an entire global company?

Rewind

Bodyform/Libresse (Essity) is a global brand, but in many markets it's the challenger to some mighty opponents. In the UK, it's #3 behind giants Always and Tampax (P&G).

Not only did they keep outspending us, they had been increasing their investment year on year (fig. 1) and Always was advertising almost all year round.



Figure 1 – Competitors increasing their investment year on year (SCA was former Essity)²

A few years before, we had created our brand platform, Live Fearless, to help women live the life they want without letting their periods hold them back, creating bolder communications starting to move away from outdated stereotypes. It was a step on, but overall we weren't getting the standout we needed.

We didn't feel we had unleashed the full potential of Live Fearless. And we started seeing how, on top of operating in a commoditised category, even 'confidence' was becoming commoditised: from Always, to Dove, to L'Oréal or Nike, everyone was telling women to feel confident. It was not only undifferentiating in the category, it was also wallpaper in culture.

We had to find a way to punch above our weight if we were to have any chance of surviving.

To understand better what could make us more meaningful to our audience, we spent time researching, digging into the cultural landscape, and we took a long hard look at ourselves and at the category.

In that process, we realised there were two major issues:

1. **The more we dug, the more we uncovered how everything about periods globally was cultural dynamite, triggering shame, disgust and rejection.** With so many issues to tackle, why would we go any further and tackle women's issues unrelated to the very stigma of periods? If we made period protections, our legitimacy and responsibility lay in our very area of expertise – women's periods.
2. **The category existed to provide solutions for women's periods but, by systematically avoiding the reality of periods, we had all inadvertently been perpetuating shame.** Most brands were using and abusing euphemisms, too shy to face into periods. And it struck us that even Always' 'Like a Girl' campaign had avoided to focus on periods.

These made us realise our responsibility and opportunity: In the face of a society still deeply stigmatising periods and a category ironically afraid of periods, despite not being the category leader, we wanted to be the much-needed lighthouse brand for women, taking risks to break harmful period taboos.

Objectives – we hoped that this could enable us to:

- Generate maximum fame for Bodyform as a meaningful, taboo-breaking brand – to gain a disproportionately high share of voice despite our lower spend.
- Awaken a passionate engagement among as many women as possible – getting them involved and driving our image of Bodyform being taboo-breaking.
- Convert their interest and engagement into boosted brand interest and purchase intent.
- Maximise internal faith in the brand purpose and the uptake of global assets by local markets.
- Start changing culture for the better around periods in a tangible way.

Creative work

"What periods would look like in a perfect world"³

The campaign was born out of the (globally validated) insight that the absence of positive representations of periods in media and mainstream culture was fuelling the toxic shame.

The creative idea was simple: Aggressive shock tactics or lazy denunciations wouldn't change the reality of the stigma.

We wanted to be the change we wanted to see. To affirm the right of periods to be and feel normal, we had to *be* the normality we wanted to see.

With #bloodnormal, we created a new paradigm of normality and positivity for periods in culture, where women could stop feeling disgusting, and men disgusted.

Killing shame with empathy

At the heart of our multi-media campaign was a powerful film – a love letter to periods – showing what periods should be like in a normal world.

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.

Because shame lives in the dark, we'd shed a light into all the dark corners of period shame (fig. 2).

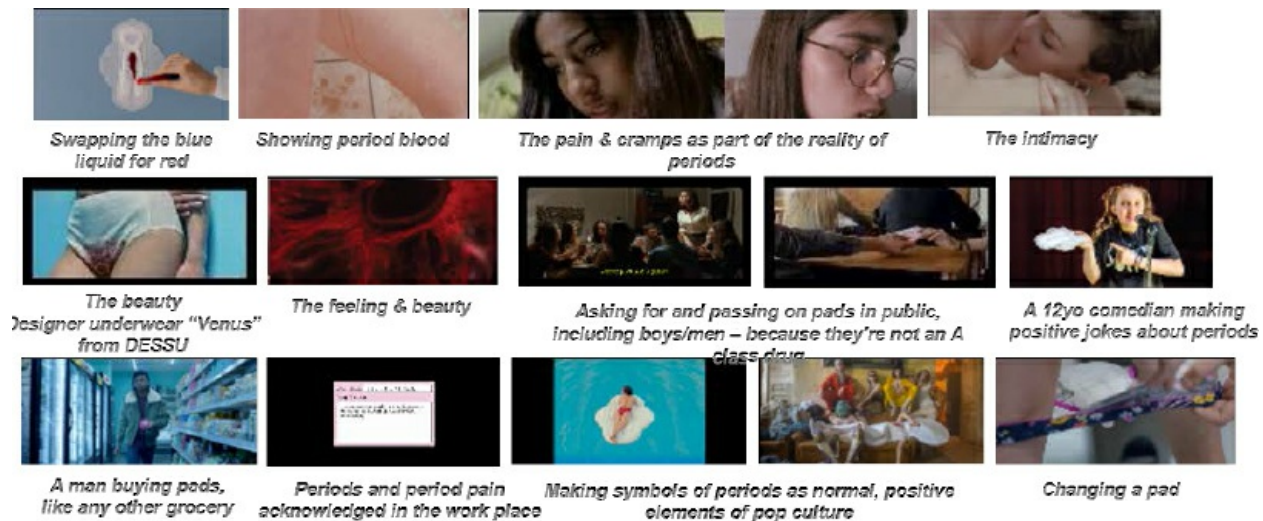


Figure 2 – Some of the dozens of taboos broken in the campaign

In a category that had historically avoided any reference to the reality of periods, being a mainstream brand using media at scale to finally represent normality for periods could have a ground-breaking impact.

But #bloodnormal was designed with the crazy ambition that we could actively start changing not only society but also culture and media, all through a virtuous circle for period positivity in representations (fig. 3).



Figure 3 – The ambition to change culture and media, not just society's attitudes

So, we didn't just create a film.

Infiltrating culture with period positivity

We designed a springboard into culture: More than an integrated campaign, it was an invitation to turn periods into a positive element in mainstream culture. And to make a start, we commissioned all sorts of cultural creativity with talents and influencers.

Our film contained the seeds of those activations, and went on to infiltrate different fields of culture where periods were still the big absent (fig. 4).

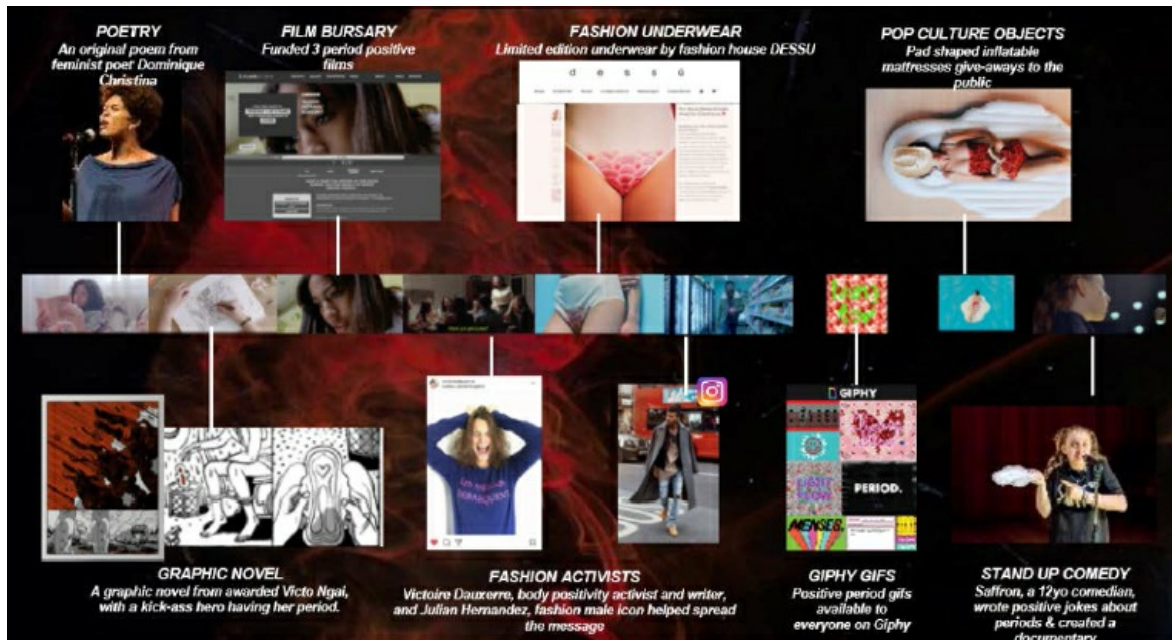


Figure 4 – The film contained real-life activations aimed at changing many corners of culture

Gaining the right to use media 'normally'

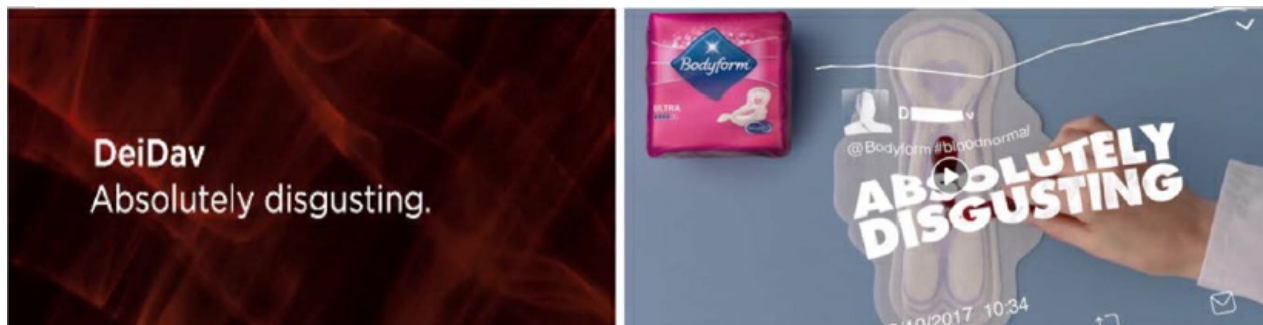
The second originality of our plan was, paradoxically, to be able to use 'normal' media touchpoints to spread our campaign message – easier said than done.

We knew our film was pushing the boundaries, but despite the long legal history of regulating 'indecenty', we hoped media owners would take the historical step with us. But we hit a wall. So many scenes were deemed indecent – underwear, kissing, showering and, of course, blood on a pad.

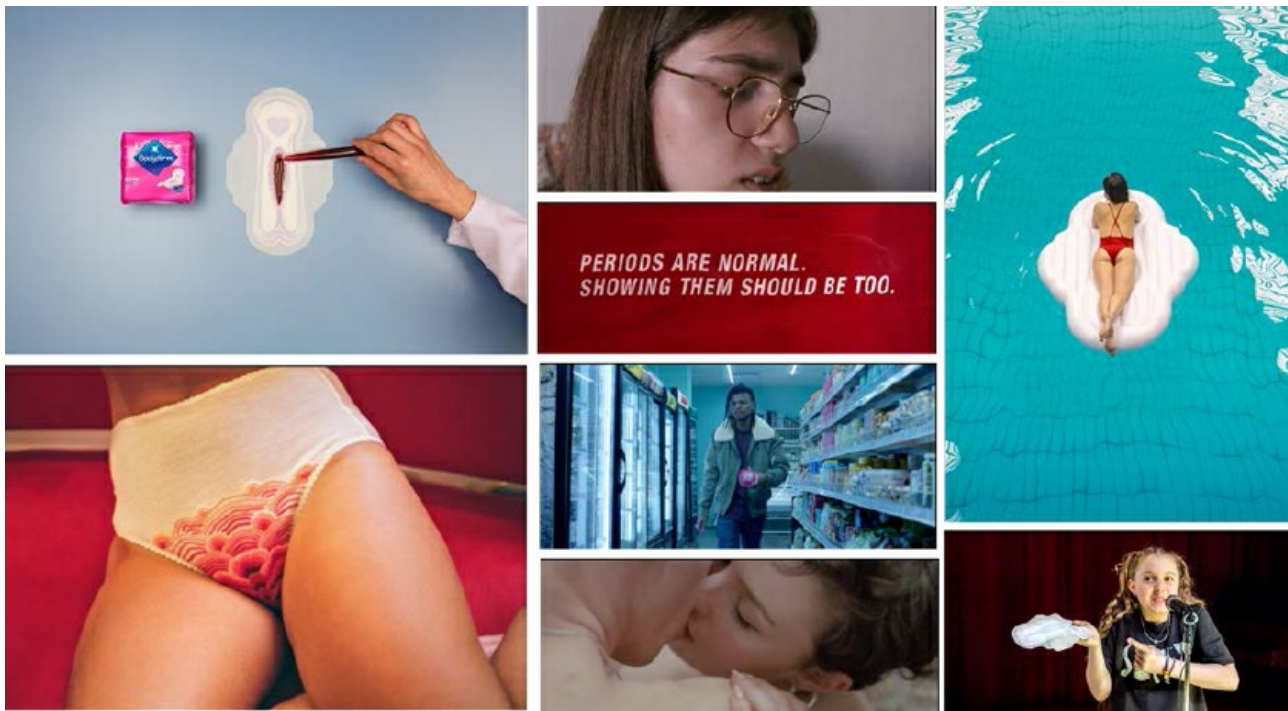
In a world that routinely sexualises women and is awash with other kinds of blood, it became clear the stigma around period blood was blurring impartiality. It could have been game over. We could have binned the campaign, or worse, diluted it to spare blushes at the expense of women's wellbeing. But we didn't.

We used some creative judo. Leveraging the broadcast rejection to give ourselves a louder voice and show how periods were still deemed offensive in mainstream media, we used online platforms to get our campaign out – not without having to fight for months, scene by scene, frame by frame, to gain the right to air it online.

And after launch, we even used the hateful comments against themselves to give ourselves a louder voice.



So, what might seem like a simple use of digital and social channels is in fact a historical first. With #bloodnormal, we created a precedent for the category. Sometimes, normality can be revolutionary.



Strategy

We had conducted a lot of research globally – quantitative, qualitative, digging into academic surveys, culture, media landscape...

And the more we dug into the issue, the angrier we got (fig. 5).

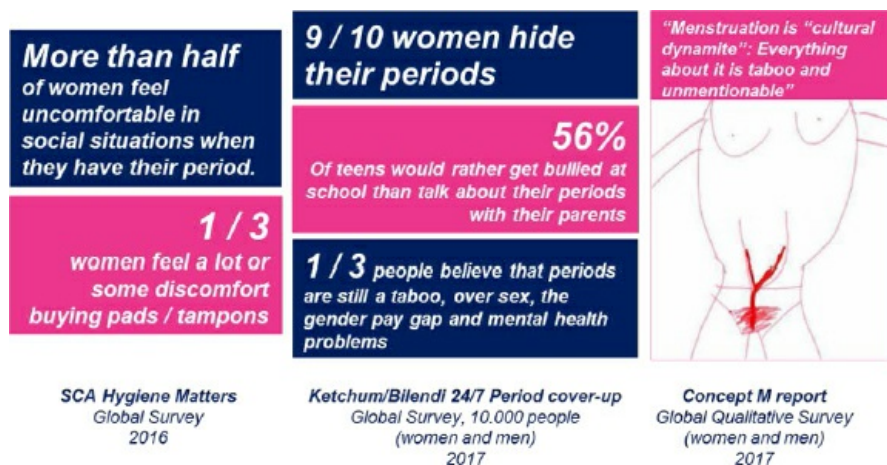
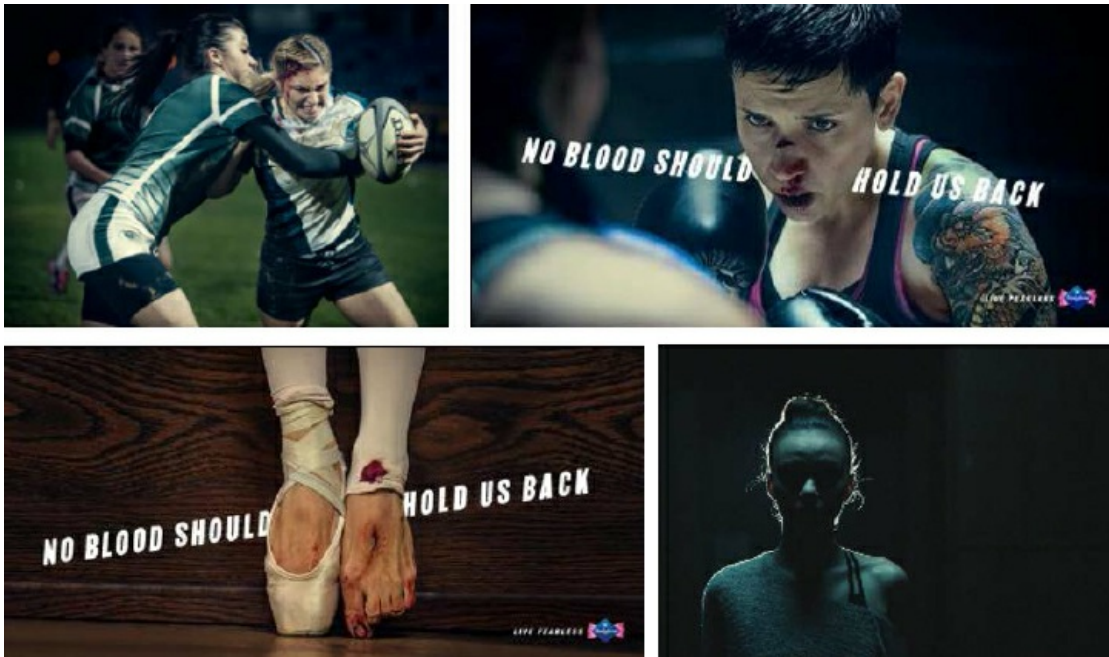


Figure 5 – A few examples of the taboo around period from our different pieces of research

In 2016, we had tackled the taboo of periods in sports, with a multi-awarded campaign – RedFit – that showed women bleeding in sports for the first time of the history of FemCare, and that supported women through content and mentoring around their periods so they could keep exercising.



Emboldened by the success of RedFit, markets like the UK and Nordics committed to invest more to hit harder against the taboo and smash the benchmarks of that first purpose-driven campaign.

Easier said than done. How could we possibly beat that? (fig. 6)



Figure 6 – RedFit was extremely successful at many levels

We made our real step forward was when we took a step back: As we had made period taboos our personal crusade, we had become obsessed with periods, reading about them, researching them, seeing them everywhere...

But this wasn't the reality – for society, periods were and had always been the great invisible.

The insight was suddenly clear: In 2017, there was still a glaring absence of positive representations of periods in media and mainstream culture, and it was fuelling the toxic shame.

Knowing how we all borrow experiences from media and culture – how young girls and boys live vicariously through them as they grow up – if there was no positive representation of periods, how could we expect girls to experience them normally, and boys to become comfortable, respectful and empathetic about them?

This insight felt incredibly powerful: It would allow us to tackle the root cause of period taboos, not simply their manifestations and consequences.

We found evidence of it in academic research, and it resonated with women globally (fig. 7).



Figure 7 – Our insight was validated by academic studies as well as global quantitative research

Given how representations shape our perception of normality, no wonder women around the world grow up feeling disgusting, and men disgusted.

Our task was clear: Start making a historical correction to the shame and invisibility.

Campaign composition

Type of Media/Channel	Date of Implementation	Budget or Media Spend	Country/Region of Placement
Online video	Oct - November 2017	£100,000.00	UK
Social Media	Oct - November 2017	£50,000.00	UK
R29 sponsorship	Sept - Oct 2017	£52,100.00	UK
PPC	Oct - Nov 2017	£1,750.00	UK
PR	Oct-Nov 2017	£30,000.00	UK
Social video	April 2018	£35,000.00	UK

Commercial results

Why it's worth pissing some people off

#bloodnormal didn't help us achieve what we had hoped for.

We achieved even more – benefitting women and society, benefitting our brand, changing an entire company, changing the media rules, revolutionising the category, changing culture and changing the industry.

We'll come to the effect on women, media, culture, category and industry, but for now, here's what #bloodnormal helped us achieve from a business and brand perspective:

We gained a disproportionate share of voice despite our limited budget

- For a £233k media investment in 2017, #bloodnormal reached over 800m and an earned media value of £3.2m – a media ROI of 13.7, surpassing our previous campaign RedFit and giving us the equivalent of a quarter of Always' (P&G) yearly budget.⁴
- Stole the #1 social share of voice vs. Always (from 37% to 90% within a month, and maintaining #1 the following month).⁵
- We achieved the highest cut-through of our history, surpassing all our norms and over twice the UK benchmark (18% vs. 8% online norm).⁶

It drove up all our key brands metrics⁷

- Nearly two-thirds of women left with a more positive opinion of the brand (62%).
- An increased perception of the brand being different from others (+24% vs. norm).
- Brave and taboo-breaking: highest shift in brand perception in the category (+119% agreed Bodyform is a brave brand, from 16% to 35%, Sept. to Nov. 2017), and breaking taboos (+117% agreed Bodyform is breaking taboos, from 18% to 39%, Sept. to Nov. 2017).
- We have achieved our highest share of attitudinal equity, overtaking Tampax (the market #2 in value share) and maintaining the #2 position since then (fig. 8).

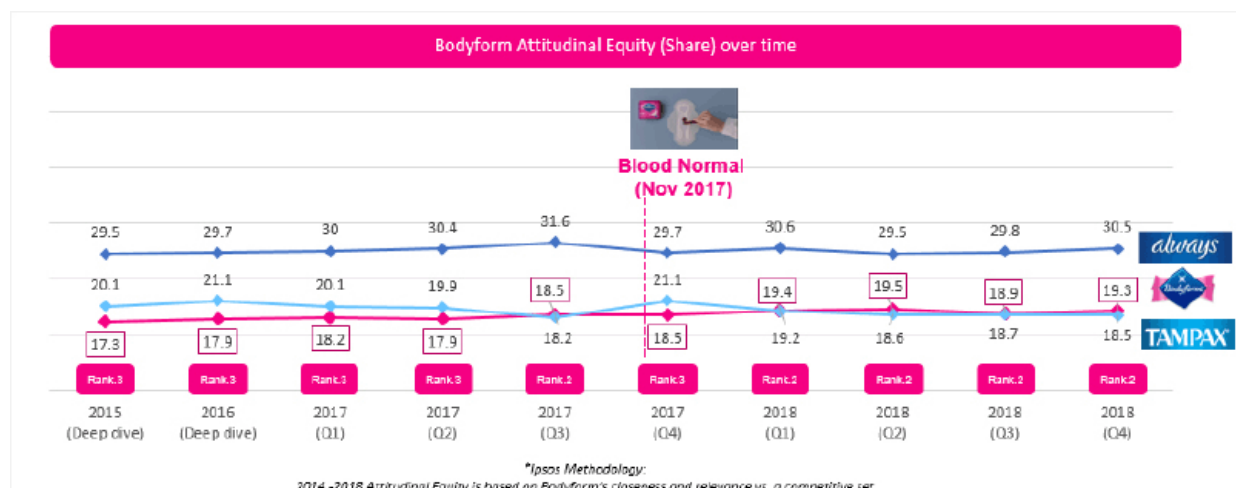


Figure 8 – Share of attitudinal equity over time showing Bodyform overtaking Tampax⁸

It had impact on purchase propensity that our competitor didn't have⁹

- Purchase persuasion was smashing the norms (27% vs. 18% norm, top box 'strongly agree'), three times more impactful than the Always' copy on air at the time ('My Fit' 9% vs. 18% norm).
- Nearly a quarter of women purchased the product or looked for it in store as a result of seeing the campaign (claimed behaviours, 22%).

It helped grow our market share in an incredibly tough context in Europe

- Over the last three years, on average across Europe, the brands declined by 0.5% being outspent by an aggressive P&G. But where #bloodnormal ran (Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, UK, France), the brand grew its market share by an average of 1.4%.¹⁰

A powerful effect internally at Essity

- It galvanised the entire company to have faith in our brand purpose (fig. 9, 10 and 11).

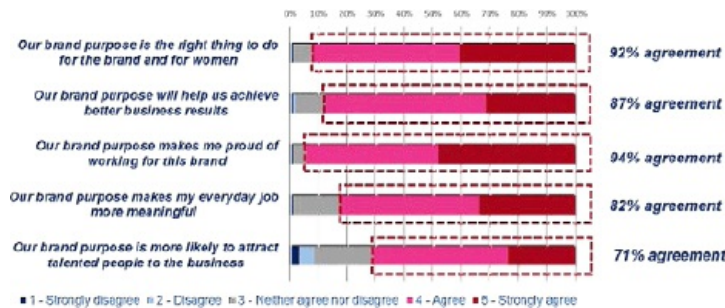


Figure 9 – Across all functions and markets beyond marketing and beyond Europe, employees were extremely proud to work at Essity and recognised this would deliver value and attract talent¹¹



Figure 10 – Emails received by the central team after the #bloodnormal launch, Oct 2017



Figure 11 – Gael de Talhouet, VP of Global Brand Building, proudly wearing the bloody costume

A global ripple effect at Essity, with markets emboldened to follow suit

The most difficult thing to achieve as a global brand is for markets to align. For a campaign that had started in the Nordics and the UK, the effect was unprecedented:

- **More markets than ever launching #bloodnormal:** RedFit had only been rolled out by the Nordics, Netherlands and UK. #bloodnormal has been rolled out by the UK, Nordics, Netherlands, France, Ukraine, Hungary, USA, South Africa, and now Argentina and Australia.



- **A collective pledge to never use blue liquid again (fig. 12)**



Figure 12 – Colombian brand Nosotras starting to use red liquid in ads and in in-store demos

- **Changing the way of engaging trade (fig. 13)**



Figure 13 – For the campaign following #bloodnormal – Viva la Vulva – the trade teams in the Nordics and UK have changed their corporate culture for more engaging meetings (vulva origami and vulva cupcake workshops)

Gaining unprecedented levels of industry recognition for Essity

- RedFit had won over 50 awards in 2016-2017. Hard to beat! But #bloodnormal was awarded more than 60 times, including the Glass Lion Grand Prix, the Bravest Brand of the Year (Marketing Society 2018), the WARC Awards Brand Purpose Grand Prix and the #2 top global campaign on the WARC Creative 100 for 2018.

Effects on the market

Normality can be revolutionary

Beyond the impact on our brand and business, #bloodnormal achieved even more than we could have ever hoped for.

Benefitting women and society

- It was praised globally as historical for breaking taboos way beyond advertising (fig. 14).

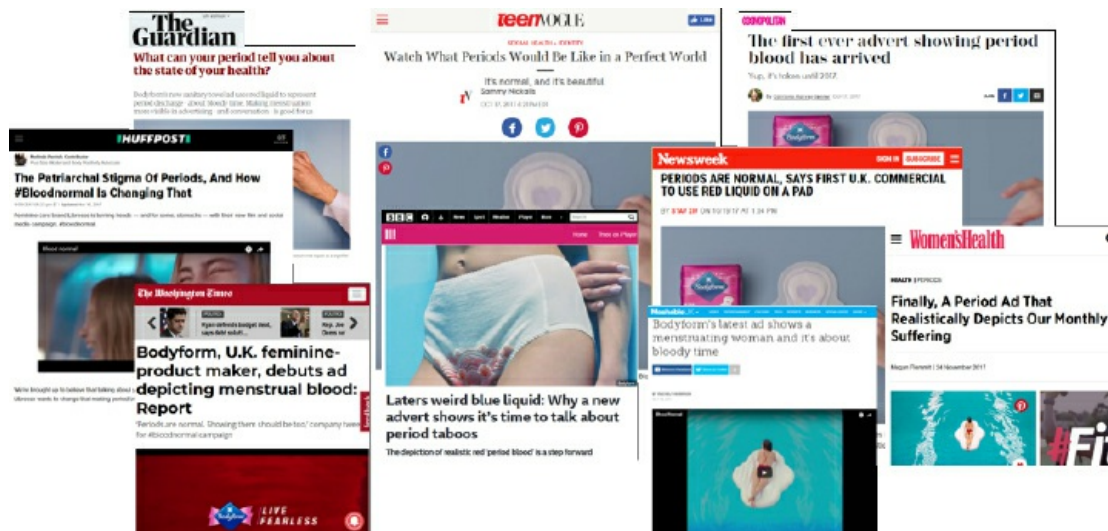
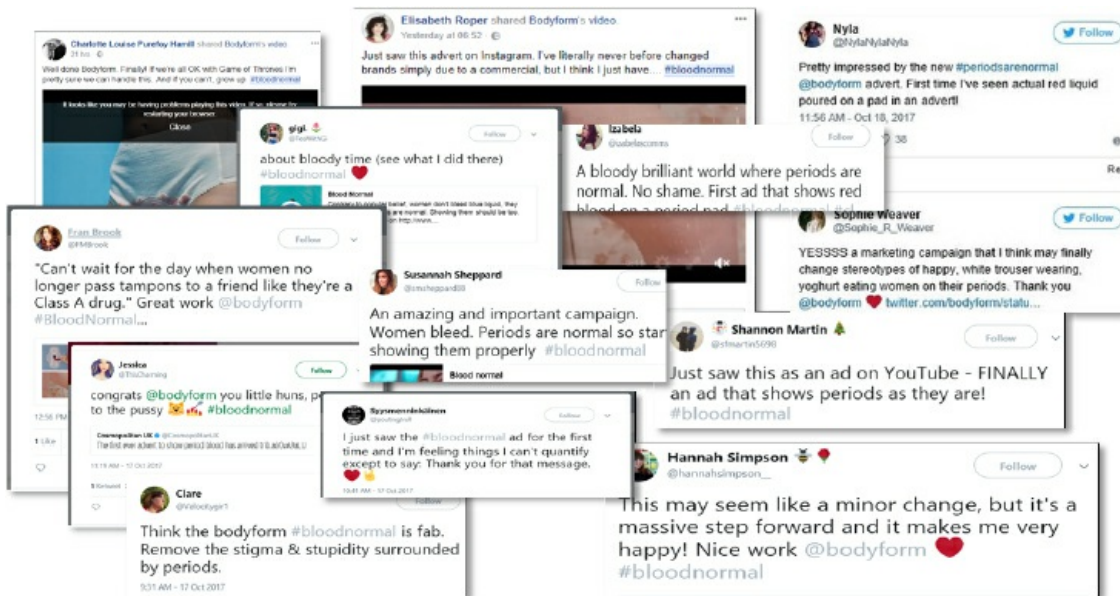


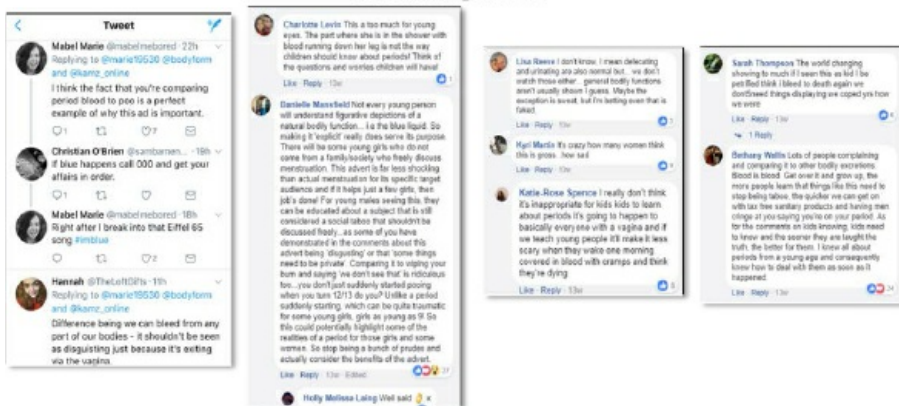
Figure 14 – A few press articles about #bloodnormal

- Despite creating visceral reactions, it left women feeling understood and created much-needed discussions.



12

A self-moderating community, testament to the relevance of our cause – people were making it theirs



- It was debated everywhere and even on TV across the globe, the very place where the campaign was banned from.

The collage features several key elements:

- Top Left:** A magazine cover for 'STYLIST' with the headline 'End period shame!' and a photo of a woman in a blue shirt.
- Top Right:** A graphic of a red blood splatter.
- Middle Left:** A tweet from @BBCTaboo mentioning a protest in London where people wore signs that said 'I menstruate, therefore I am'.
- Middle Right:** A Guardian article titled 'We're having a menstrual liberation! how periods got woke'.
- Bottom Left:** A photo of a group of people sitting on the ground, possibly at a protest.
- Bottom Right:** A poster for a campaign titled 'Pour ou contre une représentation réaliste des règles dans les pubs ?' (For or against a realistic representation of periods in pubs?). It includes a poll showing 17% 'Contre' (Against) and 83% 'Pour' (For).

[illegible]

CETTE VIDÉO MÉRITE-T-ELLE SA CENSURE ?



- After #bloodnormal, media and consumers called for competitors to follow suit and stop using red liquid – and it keeps happening ever since.

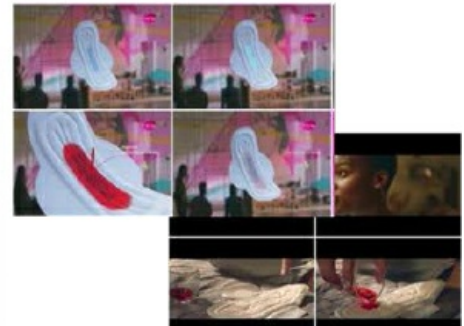
MEDIA & CONSUMERS CALLING OUT FOR CHANGE

In many platforms and countries, people debated the importance of the ad being shown on TV and competitors to follow suit



A NEW NORMAL IS SPREADING

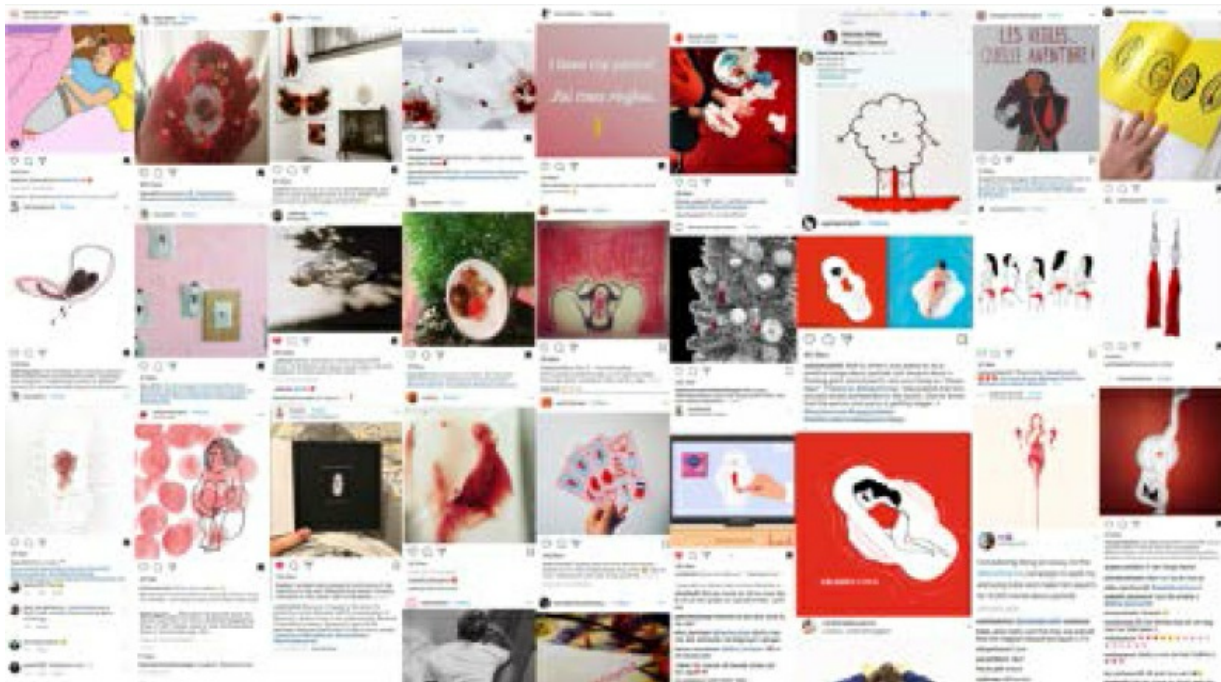
Since Bloodnormal launch, we've seen several competitors using red (or pink) liquid instead of blue, adopting the new normal.



Inspiring period positive culture creation – A beautiful ripple effect

#bloodnormal has become a springboard into culture, sparking positive creation for periods in many corners of culture.

- Many people started posting their own creations on social media, some of which we reintegrated in the campaign.



- And the new pieces of culture have been winning awards in their own rights.

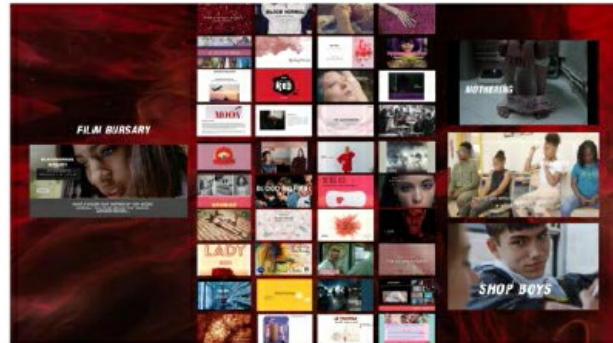
GRAPHIC NOVEL WINNING AWARDS

Victo Ngai, our collaborator who created a graphic novel including periods, has been awarded a Gold medal at the Society of Illustrators New York 2019.



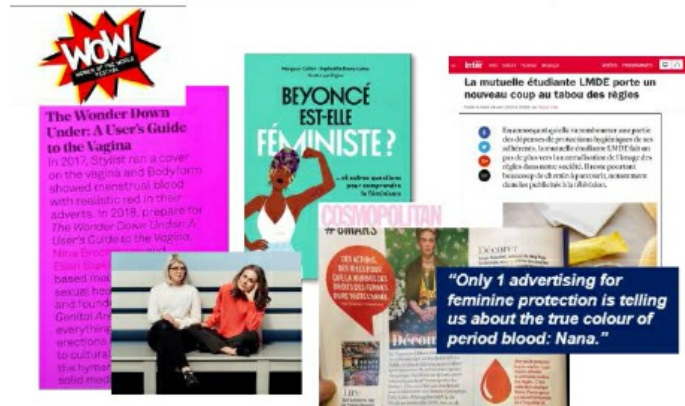
FILM BURSARY WINNING AWARDS

Lucy Bridger, our film bursary winner whose film we funded, won the best UK Short film at both the 2018 London Short Film Festival and the UK Film Festival for her film "Mothering".



- It's extraordinary to see how #bloodnormal is referred to commonly in media, books or events as a turning point for brands and feminism.

A HISTORICAL LANDMARK



RELEVANCE POST #METOO

The brand is being praised for contributing to a post me too world and fighting sexist stereotypes. DESSU, the fashion house we worked with, was praised for being a post #metoo lingerie brand that doesn't seek to sexualise women.



How did this campaign push the boundaries of effective creativity?

"Courage is as contagious as fear" – Susan Sontag

In all our hard times, we remind ourselves that there's no such thing as a comfortable taboo. If it's not uncomfortable, it's probably not a taboo. And if it's not scary, it's probably not that good.

Footnotes

- Online comment about the #bloodnormal video (Nov. 2017).

2. Source: Zenith Optimedia – FemCare media investment 2014-2016.
3. Source: Teen Vogue (Oct. 2017), 'Watch What Periods Would Be Like in a Perfect World: It's normal and it's beautiful'.
4. Source: Myriad UK, campaign reports UK 2016-2017.
5. Source: Media Bounty, campaign reports UK 2016-2017 – October to November to December 2017.
6. Source: Ipsos UK tracking, 2017.
7. Source: Ipsos, ibid.
8. Source: Ipsos FemCare UK brand health development, April 2019.
9. Source: Ipsos, ibid.
10. Source: Essity FemCare retail market share, BRM Consumer Goods, Q4 2018.
11. Source: Quantitative survey, SurveyMonkey, January 2018, Essity FemCare across 106 men and women 21-65 yo in 12 markets globally across marketing, innovation, research, R&D, R&D lab, technology, manufacturing, supply chain, IP.
12. Source: Talkwalker, global listening six months, January 2018.
13. Source: Talkwalker, global listening six months, January 2018.

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