




## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Authenticity Perceptions of Informational and Transformational Advertising: Decoding the Role of Construal Level Mindset

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## ABSTRACT

Femvertising, a progressive advertising approach, combines product promotion with empowering messages for women. Recent trends, especially in feminine hygiene, have shifted towards such empowering narratives, moving away from traditional stigmatized portrayals of women. This research investigates how femvertising impacts consumer perceptions in feminine hygiene advertising. Focusing on transformational versus informational advertising, we examine femvertising's effects on purchase behavior together with the role of perceived authenticity, and the impact of consumers' construal level mindset. The findings from four experimental studies reveal that transformational messages significantly boost purchase behavior more than informational ones. Key to this effect is the alignment of message framing with the consumer's construal level and the mediating role of perceived authenticity. These results provide critical insights for brands using femvertising strategies, emphasizing the importance of authentic, resonant messages aligned with the target audience's mindset.

## 1 | Introduction

The practice of femvertising has in recent years gained prominence in advertising through its promotion of products alongside female empowerment messages, thus challenging societal stigmas and stereotypes (Tsai, Shata, and Tian 2021). The femvertising approach addresses issues like gender stereotypes, body image, negative self-perceptions, and taboo topics such as menstruation (Champlin et al. 2019).

Femvertising is particularly effective in industries targeting women, such as feminine hygiene (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). Historically, menstrual product advertising has relied on fear and shame, promising security and confidence (Merskin 1999). Recent shifts in societal attitudes, driven by awareness campaigns, menstrual equity advocacy, and social

media, have fostered progressive and empowering communication in this industry (Michaelidou et al. 2022). Brands like Bodyform in the UK are leading this change with campaigns like “#bloodnormal,” which aim to destigmatize menstruation and eliminate symbolic representations like the ‘blue liquid’ in ads. Social media has further revolutionized brand engagement, providing platforms for authentic storytelling, community building, and real-time interaction.

While extant literature has touched on menstrual product advertising (e.g., Erchull 2013; Mucedola and Smith 2023), research exploring consumer purchase behavior in this context remains limited, possibly due to privacy concerns associated with intimate products (Piha et al. 2018), as displayed in Table 1. A closer look into the pertinent literature reveals that the limited research addressing menstrual product advertising

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**TABLE 1** | Past research on consumers' response to menstrual femvertising.

Reference	Elements Investigated Related to the Current Study			Method	IV	Mediators/moderators	Outcome(s)	Context	Related Findings
	Message Frame	Perceived Authenticity	Construal Level						
Drake (2017)			Purchase Behavior and Intention	Experimental design	Femvertising versus non femvertising ads		Ad and brand opinions, purchase intentions, and emotional connection to brands.	Menstrual care brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Femvertising positively influences ad and brand opinions, purchase intentions, and emotional connection to brands.</li> </ul>
Champlin et al. (2019)	x			Inductive qualitative method				Femvertising ads including a menstrual care brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Five messaging themes are elucidated among high-fit brands (i.e., overt femininity) and four themes among low-fit brands (i.e., breaking stereotypes).</li> <li>These themes shape brand messaging</li> </ul>
Kapoor and Munjal (2019)			x	Cross sectional survey of 200 female Indian participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public and private self-consciousness</li> <li>Social anxiety</li> <li>Social anxiety</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitude towards femvertising</li> <li>Forwarding intention</li> <li>Purchase intention</li> </ul>	Multiple brands including menstrual care brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive attitude toward femvertising increases sharing intention but not directly purchase intent.</li> <li>Forwarding intention and purchase intention vary by age group.</li> </ul>
Campbell, Freeman and Gannon (2021)				Visual discourse approach				Feminine hygiene and menstrual care brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three dominant discourses of menstruation exist: overt threat, uncontrollable and invisible.</li> </ul>
Lima and Casais (2021)		x		Netnography			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favorable and negative reactions to femvertising</li> <li>Authenticity/inauthenticity of campaigns</li> </ul>	Femvertising campaigns including a menstrual care brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Femvertising strengthens the emotional connection between women and brands.</li> <li>Consumers may react negatively if brands lack genuine understanding of feminist values or maintain sexist stereotypes.</li> </ul>

(Continues)

**TABLE 1** | (Continued)

Reference	Elements Investigated Related to the Current Study	Method	IV	Mediators/moderators	Outcome(s)	Context	Related Findings
Hainneville, Guévremont and Robinot (2023)	x	Interpretive study (17 individual phenomenological interviews)	IV		Women's perceptions of authenticity	Multiple brands including menstrual care brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The six identified dimensions of authentic femvertising are transparency, consistency, identification, diversity, respect, and challenging stereotypes.</li> </ul>
Mucedola and Smith (2023)	x	In depth- semi-structured interviews				Various menstrual care brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three themes emerged: gendered stigmatization, hyper-feminine depictions, and false narratives about periods.</li> <li>Dominant patriarchal images of women during menstruation persist in female-targeted advertising</li> </ul>
Yoon and Lee (2023)		Content analysis of 343 videos	Source and content of videos through features (i.e., tone, call-to-action, actor characteristics, settings, and activities)		Consumer response (number of views, comments, likes, and dislikes)	Femvertising campaign of a menstrual care brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The femvertising campaign generated positive consumer discourse and inspired user-generated content supporting the cause.</li> </ul>
Buckley et al. (2024)	x	In-depth semi structured interviews with Gen-Z women				Female empowerment ads, including those from a menstrual care brand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inauthentic messages can still be likable if relatable.</li> <li>Consumers experience guilty displeasure with purpose-driven messages.</li> <li>Fact-checking brand practices influences ad likability.</li> <li>Real meanings can be more powerful than positive ones.</li> </ul>
<b>Our study</b>	x x x	<b>Experimental design (study 1: 372 participants, study 2a: 243 participants, study 2b: 624</b>	<b>Message frame (informational vs. transformational)</b>	<b>Perceived authenticity/construal level</b>	<b>Purchase behavior</b>	<b>Fictitious menstrual care brands</b>	<b>Transformational messages significantly enhance purchase behavior more than informational messages.</b>

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Reference	Elements Investigated Related to the Current Study	Method	IV	Mediators/moderators	Outcome(s)	Context	Related Findings
		participants, study 3: 415 participants)	IV				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The effect depends on the alignment of message framing with the consumer's construal level.</li> <li>▪ Perceived authenticity plays a mediating role.</li> </ul>

has been either conceptual or qualitative, and has primarily focused on traditional communication channels like television commercials (Mucedola and Smith 2023) and magazine advertisements (Erchull 2013). While authenticity consistently emerges as a critical factor in consumer engagement, experimental and empirical research is sparse, especially regarding key mediating and moderating mechanisms. Authenticity in advertising is defined as the perception that a brand's messaging is genuine, trustworthy, and aligned with its values and the values of its target audience (Morhart et al. 2015). This construct is pivotal in femvertising, as consumers are increasingly seeking brands that authentically represent and support their experiences and beliefs. It is important, however, to note that authenticity is highly context-dependent (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). In the realm of brand activism, authenticity has been defined as the alignment of a brand's explicit purpose and values with its activist marketing messages and socially responsible corporate practices (Vredenburg et al. 2020). Yet, what consumers consider authentic in the specific context of femvertising remains a topic in need of further exploration and definition (Hainneville et al. 2023).

Our study is motivated by this evolving landscape of female empowerment and aims to investigate how different types of advertising messaging, specifically transformational and informational, affect consumer authenticity perceptions and subsequent behaviors. Informational advertising delivers factual information and highlights unique selling points (Laskey, Day, and Crask 1989), while transformational advertising creates emotional experiences, linking positive emotions to the product or brand (Puto and Wells 1984). Furthermore, consumers' construal level, which refers to their abstract or concrete thinking style, plays a significant role in how they process advertising messages; high construal levels involve abstract thinking, while low construal levels involve concrete thinking (Trope and Liberman 2010). This distinction is important for understanding how consumers interpret and respond to different types of advertising messaging, but it can also be applied to other areas. For instance, in sustainability domains, abstract construals support long-term goals (e.g., reducing carbon footprints), while concrete messages (e.g., "recycle today") resonate with low-construal thinkers (White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011). Similarly, in consumer finance, abstract messaging (e.g., "save for retirement") appeals to high-construal consumers, while concrete actions (e.g., "start saving \$50 now") are more effective with low-construal individuals (Fujita and Roberts 2010).

We further seek to shed light on the effectiveness of femvertising strategies in empowering consumers, reducing stigma, and influencing purchase behaviors. By understanding how consumers respond to different message styles, brands can tailor their strategies to resonate more deeply with their target audiences, ultimately driving consumer engagement and influencing purchase behavior in the evolving landscape of feminine hygiene marketing.

As highlighted in Table 1, our research contributes to current knowledge in numerous ways. We first contribute to the branding and advertising literature by showing how different message framing strategies (specifically transformational and

informational framing) impact consumer purchase behaviors. Such knowledge is useful in the design of femvertising messages among practitioners. Second, the introduction of construal level as a boundary condition enriches our theoretical comprehension of the interplay between message framing and consumer mindset. By specifically highlighting the alignment between message framing and construal level as a driver of purchase behavior, we emphasize the importance of considering both message content and consumer cognitive processes in marketing campaigns. Third, we contribute to the growing literature on authenticity and femvertising by demonstrating the pivotal role of perceived authenticity as a mediator in the relationship between message framing and purchase behavior, thus adding theoretical precision to the phenomenon. As brands seek to connect with their target audiences on a deeper level and foster engagement, our research highlights that authenticity acts as a bridge between the message framing and consumers' purchase behaviors. This underlying mechanism is particularly relevant for brands looking to navigate the evolving landscape of female empowerment-focused marketing practices.

Our article comprises four studies that collectively investigate the impact of message framing, construal level, and perceived authenticity on consumer purchase behavior in the context of feminine care products. Study 1 provides experimental evidence of the main effect of message framing on consumer purchase intentions, contrasting the impact of transformational and informational message framing. Study 2 builds on these findings, seeking to investigate the moderating role of construal level and replicate the main effect on actual behavior (Study 2a: consumer choice) while also exploring the mediating role of perceived authenticity (Study 2b: purchase intention). Study 3 delves into a moderated mediation model, examining how the alignment between message framing (transformational or informational) and construal level (high or low) influences perceived authenticity and purchase intentions. Collectively these studies provide valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of message framing and consumer mindset, shedding light on effective marketing strategies in the feminine hygiene industry.

## 2 | Conceptual Development

### 2.1 | Message Frames: The Transformational and Informational Dichotomy

Tversky and Kahneman's work on rational choices and framing (Tversky and Kahneman 1986) highlights how the presentation of information can significantly influence consumer decision-making. Their research shows that the way choices are framed can lead to different decisions, even if the underlying information is the same. This phenomenon, known as the framing effect, reveals that consumers do not always make rational choices based solely on objective information. Instead, their decisions are influenced by *how* that information is presented. In an advertising context, message frames determine how content is expressed in advertisements (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002).

Although message frames have been divided into a variety of typologies (Penttinen 2023), an established theory in marketing,

and the focus of the current research, is the informational/transformational dichotomy, encompassing two distinct message styles frequently employed to market products or services (Laskey, Day, and Crask 1989; Puto and Wells 1984). Informational advertising furnishes consumers with factual and verifiable information regarding an offering, often highlighting unique selling points or claims of superiority that are aimed at setting a brand apart within its industry (Laskey, Day, and Crask 1989). These messages essentially convey pertinent and substantial facts about a product or brand. It is imperative, though, that consumers perceive the advertising in question as being informative for them to be categorized as such (Puto and Wells 1984).

In contrast, transformational message styles focus on crafting emotional experiences for consumers, eliciting emotions such as warmth, excitement, and enjoyment, whilst linking these emotions to the product or brand (Puto and Wells 1984). Transformational messages employ emotional appeals, a consumer's self-image, and social motivators to encourage desired behaviors, such as purchase or brand engagement. The "transformation" in this type of advertising materializes when the audience associates the sentiments and emotions conveyed in the messages with the experience of owning or using the advertised product (Puto and Wells 1984). It's important to note that although these dichotomies are distinct in their typology, they are not mutually exclusive (Laskey, Day, and Crask 1989).

The informational/transformational dichotomy offers two distinct message frames that aim to elicit consumer responses through markedly different creative approaches (Tafesse and Wien 2018). Both message styles have demonstrated effectiveness in various contexts. The informational message style typically appeals to utilitarian values, focusing on practical aspects of an offering, while the transformational message style delves into the more hedonic and experiential aspects (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994). For products that inherently hold a personal significance, a substantial number of consumers actively seek brands that genuinely comprehend their unique needs and experiences (Belk 2013). Employing transformational messaging would serve to strengthen a heightened emotional bond by recognizing the emotional aspects of their personal lives, such as the experience of menstruation. This would include addressing feelings of comfort, self-assurance, and promoting a positive body image. Furthermore, transformational messaging has the potential to transcend the mere product status, becoming an integral part of a lifestyle or a larger movement, forging an enduring and emotional connection with the customer base (Naylor et al. 2008).

Transformational advertising leverages emotional appeals to create a deeper connection with consumers (Puto and Wells 1984). This emotional engagement has been linked to higher consumer involvement and stronger intentions to purchase (Batra and Ray, 1983). Moreover, emotional appeals in transformational messages enhance perceived value by associating products with positive experiences and personal identity (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Increased perceived value positively correlates with purchase intentions (Zeithaml 1988). Research shows that emotionally charged advertisements tend to be more persuasive and memorable, leading to higher



purchase intentions (Batra and Ray 1983). However, it's crucial not to underestimate the significance of informational messaging as many consumers still require clear and factual information about product usage, safety, and the associated benefits. Informational advertisements offer significant value, particularly in the initial stages of the purchase journey when consumers seek to understand the brand, its ingredients, benefits, and attributes (Tsiotsou, Hatzithomas, and Wetzels 2024). Therefore, we expect that:

**H1.** *Transformational advertising messages lead to higher purchase intentions compared to informational advertising messages.*

## 2.2 | The Role of Construal Level

Construal Level Theory (CLT), introduced by Liberman and Trope (1998), offers a framework for understanding how individuals perceive objects or events based on their perceived psychological distance. Psychological distance encompasses four dimensions: temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical (Förster 2009). As psychological distance increases across these dimensions, so does construal level (Trope and Liberman 2010). Construal level also reflects how individuals think about events or objects. Low-level construals are characterized by a concrete mindset, focusing on specific details of an event or object. In contrast, high-level construals are associated with an abstract mindset, concentrating on the bigger picture and the reasons behind actions (Freitas, Gollwitzer, and Trope 2004).

Understanding construal levels can be invaluable for marketers as it enables them to tailor advertising message styles to align with consumer processing styles. This alignment can create positive brand associations and ultimately boost purchase intentions (Ruiz and Sicilia 2004). Transformational advertisements are designed to create an emotional connection with consumers, often utilizing aspirational, empowering, or evocative content (Del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck 2009). These ads require consumers to engage in high-level construal, where they must extract and transform the emotional and symbolic content into a meaningful narrative that aligns with their values and aspirations (Ruiz and Sicilia 2004). For instance, a transformational advertisement might depict a journey of personal growth or an aspirational lifestyle, prompting consumers to think beyond the immediate and tangible benefits of the product to the broader, more abstract implications for their self-concept and future. The effectiveness of transformational messaging is moderated by the consumer's construal level. When individuals operate at a high construal level, they are more likely to resonate with the abstract, symbolic, and emotionally rich content of transformational ads. This high-level processing enables them to form deeper, more positive associations with the brand, thereby enhancing their purchase behavior (Bauer 2023). Conversely, when individuals operate at a low construal level, they focus on concrete, immediate, and practical aspects of the message, which may render transformational ads less effective or even confusing.

On the other hand, informational advertisements that provide straightforward and practical information about a product's

features and benefits, align better with low-level construal. Consumers in a concrete mindset prefer direct, clear information that reduces the psychological distance between them and the product, making it easier for them to make a purchase decision based on immediate utility and practicality (Trope and Liberman 2000). For instance, an informational ad might highlight the technical specifications of a gadget, appealing directly to the consumer's need for tangible, immediate benefits.

However, the relationship between construal level and message framing is not always straightforward. Emotions play a significant role in how messages are construed (Van Boven et al. 2010). Han, Duhachek and Agrawal (2014) found that emotions such as guilt are processed at low construal levels, whereas shame is processed at higher ones. This indicates that different emotions evoke different levels of abstract thinking, depending on their complexity. Femvertising, which uses empowering messages to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (Champlin et al. 2019), often evokes complex emotions that are better processed at high, more abstract levels of construal. These ads can thus be particularly effective for consumers operating at a high construal level, who can appreciate the more nuanced and emotionally charged messages.

On the whole, it is therefore plausible that consumers with an abstract thinking style will find emotional and empowering messages within menstrual product advertisements more appealing, leading to higher preference and purchase intentions. Conversely, those with concrete mindsets are likely to prefer informational message styles that directly connect them with the practical benefits of the product, which should also result in higher purchase intentions. Formally we expect:

**H2.** *The effect of message frame on purchase behavior (purchase intention and consumer choice) is moderated by construal level such that the positive effect of transformational messaging on purchase behavior is strengthened (weakened) when construal level is high (low).*

## 2.3 | Perceived Authenticity

The concept of perceived authenticity has garnered increasing attention among researchers and advertisers alike as a strategy to foster meaningful consumer relationships and enhance the reception of advertisements and brands (Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Morhart et al. 2015; Napoli et al. 2014; Shoenberger, Kim, and Johnson 2020). The concept encompasses the idea that advertisements should not only promote products or services but also resonate with consumers on a deeper level, fostering a sense of connection and trust. Specifically, Authenticity refers to a brand's messaging that is perceived as sincere, reliable, and consistent with both the brand's core values and the values of its target market (Morhart et al. 2015). While many researchers recognize the significance of perceived authenticity, there exist variations in its conceptualization and potential dimensions (Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Morhart et al. 2015; Ramkissoon and Uysal 2011;).

Authenticity is a multi-faceted construct that can be derived from various sources. For instance, the objectivist perspective of authenticity relies on evidence-based information to

substantiate a brand or product's claims, emphasizing transparency and factual correctness (Morhart et al. 2015). On the other hand, existentialist authenticity stems from an advertisement's ability to resonate with an individual's identity and personal values, fostering a sense of representation and emotional connection (Morhart et al. 2015). Authenticity can therefore be derived from a product's premium features and performance or, conversely, through establishing an emotional connection with customers (Gilmore and Pine 2007).

Research consistently affirms a positive relationship between consumers' experiences of authenticity and their emotional connection with a brand (Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Morhart et al. 2015). Beverland and Farrelly (2010) explain that consumers who experience authenticity in marketing materials feel more empowered in making informed purchase decisions. Emotional value resulting from perceived authenticity encompasses feelings of trustworthiness, genuineness, and relatability. For advertisers, the establishment of authenticity therefore leads to favorable consumer evaluations (Napoli et al. 2014).

### 2.3.1 | The Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity

In the context of menstrual product advertising, the concept of perceived authenticity plays a pivotal role in explaining the intricate relationship between message frames and consumer behaviors. Specifically, it is anticipated that transformational messages will generally be perceived as more authentic compared to informational messages, and subsequently enhance purchase intentions.

Transformational messages within menstrual product advertising often revolve around the "celebration of femininity or womanhood," even when these messages indirectly discuss the product's attributes (Del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck 2009). In contrast, advertisements that fall into the informational category explicitly provide details about a product's functionality, design, and may assert claims like "designed by a doctor" and "clinically tested." This distinction is significant because advertisements perpetuating the unrealistic "feminine ideal" are typically seen as inauthentic representations of menstruating individuals. These representations tend to evoke feelings of shame and low self-esteem among viewers (Mucedola and Smith 2023). On the other hand, advertising that feature retouch-free, realistic depictions of female bodies have been shown to positively enhance perceived authenticity (Napoli et al. 2014). Furthermore, it's worth noting that transparency, truthfulness, and consistency are fundamental drivers of perceived authenticity for brands (Shen and Kim 2012). These attributes are often prominently featured in transformational menstrual advertising that consciously avoids promoting the unrealistic situations commonly associated with menstruation. For example, campaigns like Libresse's "Viva La Vulva" have been praised for their realistic depictions of menstruation and female anatomy, which establish a genuine emotional connection with the audience. Instead of using symbolic representations like blue liquid, these ads use real blood and unedited body images to promote a sense of authenticity and relatability.

In the grander scheme, authentic brands possess a remarkable ability to resonate emotionally with consumers through well-established relationships (Morhart et al. 2015). This authenticity not only fosters emotional connections but also substantially enhances consumer perceptions of the brand's value (Papadopoulou, Vardarsuyu, and Oghazi 2023). Ultimately, these factors will therefore generate favorable evaluations and an increase in consumers' intentions to make a purchase.

**H3.** *Perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between message frame and purchase intentions.*

### 2.3.2 | Perceived Authenticity and the Role of Construal Level in Message Framing

In the realm of brand authenticity, it's important to note that not all brands need to embark on femvertising to maintain or enhance their perceived authenticity. The notion of femwashing, as highlighted by Hainneville, Guèvremont and Robinot (2023), suggests that some brands may superficially engage in feminist advertising without genuinely aligning their values with such principles. In these cases, the perceived authenticity can be questioned.

Perceived authenticity is a complex construct that encompasses various facets, as indicated by Gilmore and Pine (2007). It's not solely about presenting factual information but also about conveying genuine empowerment-based messages. This complexity underscores the importance of gaining a profound understanding of the target audience. Brands should strive to understand individual needs, preferences, and personal goals, as this understanding can guide them in crafting authentic messaging that resonates with their audience (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Morhart et al. (2015) further emphasize the significance of value congruence, where a brand's values align with those of consumers. This alignment is a crucial element in establishing and maintaining brand authenticity. When consumers perceive that a brand shares their values and beliefs, they are more likely to view it as authentic.

Regarding the effectiveness of different message frames, there is potential for transformational messaging to enhance authenticity perceptions to a greater extent than informational messaging. However, the optimal strategy depends on aligning the message frame with the thinking style of the target audience. When the message frame matches the construal level mindset, authenticity perceptions can be enhanced. Specifically, transformational messages, when paired with individuals who have high construal levels (more abstract thinkers), activate abstract ways of thinking. This alignment can lead to enhanced authenticity perceptions. Similarly, pairing informational messages with individuals who have low construal levels (more concrete thinkers) can activate concrete thinking, potentially enhancing authenticity perceptions as well.

Research has shown that the fluency with which individuals process information can influence their evaluations and purchase intentions. Therefore, matching the message frame with the thinking style can significantly impact brand authenticity and, consequently, purchase intentions (Labroo and Lee 2006; Lee and Aaker 2004). Against this backdrop, we assert that:

**H4.** *Perceived authenticity mediates the effect of construal level on purchase intentions such that (a) consumers with a low construal level exhibit higher purchase intentions when presented with an informational message, and (b) consumers with a high construal level exhibit higher purchase intentions when presented with a transformational message.*

Our conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

### 3 | Overview of Studies

We conducted four studies to understand the nuanced dynamics of informational and transformational message framing on consumer purchase behavior. Study 1 tested the main effect (H1). After establishing the effect of message framing on purchase intentions, we sought to replicate this effect on actual behavior and understand the moderating role of construal level (H2), alongside the underlying effects of perceived authenticity (H3). By employing a new alternative set of stimuli distinct from those used in Study 1, the aim of Study 2 was to examine how construal level and message framing influence consumer choices (Study 2a), and additionally explore the mediating role of perceived authenticity (Study 2b). Finally, building on the previous findings, the aim of Study 3 was to not only replicate and validate the previous results but also to uncover moderated mediation relationships. Therefore, study 3 examined the full model to demonstrate that aligning informational (transformational) messages with low (high) construal level mindsets (H4a and H4b) positively impacts purchase intentions through perceived authenticity.

#### 3.1 | Study 1: Establishing the Main Effect

The purpose of the first study is to provide initial evidence for H1 and to confirm that the main effect only occurs when consumers are exposed to informational (vs. transformational) advertising materials.

##### 3.1.1 | Stimuli Selection

Marketing materials were meticulously crafted to accurately convey informational and transformational message framing. Two distinct flyers were created for each condition, incorporating specific typology and elements associated with the respective message styles as suggested by Laskey, Day and Crask (1989) and Puto and Wells (1984). For the informational condition, we emphasized “factual product information,” “cognitive messaging,” and “superiority claims.” In the transformational condition, we highlighted “emotional richness,” “affective messaging,” and “consumer relatability.”

The chosen brand for this study was a fictitious one named PeriodPals, generated using the Namelix app—a cutting-edge AI-powered business name generator. This tool not only creates distinctive brand names but also checks for the availability of relevant domains, ensuring uniqueness ([www.namelix.com](http://www.namelix.com)). To mitigate confounding effects, we opted for neutral colors and

simple fonts. The ads also provided identical key features in both conditions to align with common attributes found in most sanitary towel products.

In the experimental design of Study 1, the ad taglines and messages were intentionally crafted to distinctly represent informational and transformational advertising. Specifically, in the informational condition, we incorporated the tagline “Setting the standard for feminine care excellence” beneath the logo and placed the advertising message “Elevate your period experience with unmatched protection” at the top of the flyer. For the transformational condition, we maintained a similar approach, but this time we substituted the tagline with “Embrace the strength of every aspect of your femininity.” The advertising message was crafted as “Your period doesn’t define you. It empowers you.” Before presenting the stimuli, we presented respondents with the following scenario.

Imagine this scenario: you’re in your regular supermarket, looking to purchase a pack of sanitary towels because you are currently unhappy with your current ones and open to trying something different. While browsing the aisle, you come across a banner advertisement for a new brand named ‘PeriodPals’. This product is priced the same as the sanitary towels you typically purchase and has all the features you normally seek when purchasing such items. The ad is presented below:

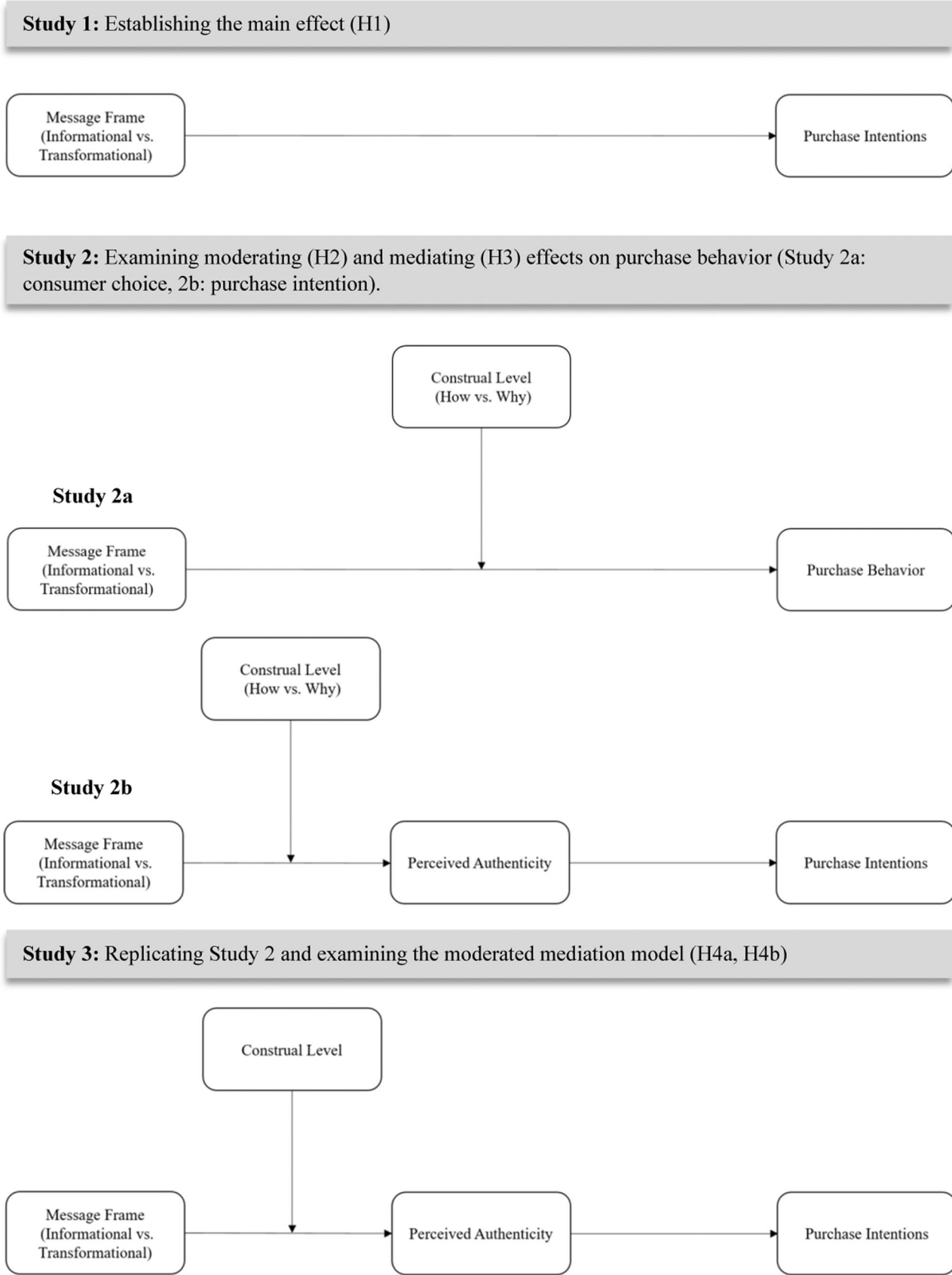
We deliberately crafted the scenario using clear and simple language to make it easy for participants to understand and engage with. Our goal was to construct a scenario that participants could easily relate to based on their own experiences. As a result, participants were able to respond in a way that reflected their actual preferences and behaviors in real-life situations. All the materials can be found in Appendix A1.

##### 3.1.2 | Pretest 1

To ensure that our messaging was perceived as intended, we conducted a pretest with female consumers ( $N = 58$ ). They were randomly assigned to either the informational or the transformational condition ( $N_{\text{informational}} = 29$ ,  $N_{\text{transformational}} = 29$ ) and were presented with the same information as in the main study. Following this exposure, they were asked to express their agreement with informational (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.72$ ) and transformational statements (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.89$ ; adapted from Puto and Wells 1984) designed to assess the degree to which an advertisement could be perceived as either informational or transformational.

The informational and transformational scales are distinct measures where higher scores indicate agreement with either the informational or transformational nature of an advertisement. Therefore, they should not be seen as opposing ends of the same spectrum. Following Puto and Wells (1984), we requested all participants to indicate their level of agreement with both scales. This methodology allowed us to statistically compare the two conditions and demonstrate that the informational





**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual framework.

condition was perceived as more informational compared to the transformational condition, and vice versa.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the anticipated main effect, wherein those exposed to the transformational condition scored higher on the relevant scale compared to those exposed in the transformational condition ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 5.38$ ,  $SD = 1.02$  vs.  $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.12$  respectively,  $p < 0.001$ ). Likewise, respondents in the informational condition reported increased ratings in the informational scale as opposed to respondents in the transformational condition ( $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 1.07$  vs.  $M_{\text{transformational}} = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.76$  respectively,  $p < 0.05$ ).

As a second check to verify that our message was interpreted as intended, participants were requested to provide brief descriptions of the ads they viewed in a designated box. After analyzing the qualitative responses and examining the frequency of terms we generated word clouds. These revealed that in the informational condition, terms such as “product,” “towel,” “period,” “sanitary,” and “features” recurred more frequently. In contrast, in the transformational condition, the terms “empowering,” “modern,” “positive,” and “powerful” were the most frequently repeated (see Appendix C1).

### 3.1.3 | Method

We employed a between-subjects experimental design with two conditions in which we manipulated the message frame

(informational vs. transformational). We recruited 400 UK participants from Prolific. In the beginning of the experiment, a “yes or no” filter question was posed: “Do you use sanitary towels?”; this criterion enabled us to recruit women who actively use and are experienced with the product in question. Subsequently, only respondents answering affirmatively ( $N = 381$ ) were retained for further analysis. Nine participants failed the attention check, leaving us with a total of 372 female respondents (Table 2) completing the questionnaire. Participants were randomly assigned to either the informational ( $N = 191$ ) or transformational ( $n = 181$ ) condition.

After presenting the respondents with the pretested scenario and stimuli (Appendix A2), we captured their perceptions of informational and transformational messaging on a 7-point scale from Puto and Wells (1984). To avoid priming effects, we introduced the dependent variable first. We measured purchase intentions towards the fictitious brand PeriodPals using a three-item 7-point scale adapted from Putrevu and Lord (1994) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Subsequently, to account for the quality of responses, we measured brand familiarity with one item and product involvement (Zaichkowsky 1994; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ), subjective knowledge (Flynn and Goldsmith 1999; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.90$ ), and willingness to pay (in £) (see Table 3). Brand familiarity, product involvement, and subjective knowledge were measured using 7-point Likert scales, consistent with the other scales employed in this study. Finally, we included demographic questions covering gender, age and education, and an attention check question (‘please respond to this question as

TABLE 2 | Study demographics.

Characteristic	Study 1 (%) (N = 372)	Study 2a (%) (N = 243)	Study 2b (%) (N = 624)	Study 3 (%) (N = 415)
<i>Age</i>				
18–24	8.1	9.1	8.5	8.7
25–34	41.4	39.1	40.7	35.4
35–44	38.7	27.2	37.5	42.4
45–54	11.8	16.5	13.1	13.5
55–64	0	6.2	0.2	0
64 or older	0	0	0	0
<i>Education</i>				
Less than high school	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.5
High school graduate	20.7	21.4	19.7	18.1
College degree	19.9	17.3	19.9	16.9
Professional degree	7.3	7.4	6.7	6.3
University degree	49.7	50.6 <sup>a</sup>	51.3	55.9
Doctorate	1.6	2.5	1.8	2.4
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	100	100	98.7	98.1
Male	0	0	0	0
Nonbinary/third gender	0	0	1.1	1.2
Prefer not to say	0	0	0.2	0.7

<sup>a</sup>This percentage was further broken down to Bachelor's degree (36.2%) and Master's degree (14.4%).

**TABLE 3** | Descriptive statistics for studies 1, 2, 3.

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Study 1 ( <i>N</i> = 372)									
1. Message frame	0.49	0.50	1						
2. Purchase Intentions	4.32	1.50	0.28 <sup>a</sup>	1					
3. Involvement (control)	5.31	0.80	0.05	0.32 <sup>a</sup>	1				
4. Subjective knowledge (control)	4.46	1.26	-0.01	0.19 <sup>a</sup>	0.30 <sup>a</sup>	1			
5. Willingness to pay (£) (control)	2.87	1.50	0.05	0.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.14 <sup>a</sup>	0.09	1		
Study 2a ( <i>N</i> = 243)									
1. Message frame	0.50	0.50	1						
2. Purchase Intentions	4.06	2.39	0.74 <sup>a</sup>	1					
3. Construal level	0.50	0.50	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.18 <sup>a</sup>	1				
4. Involvement (control)	5.35	0.77	-0.18 <sup>a</sup>	-0.12	0.02	1			
5. Subjective knowledge (control)	4.46	1.13	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.13 <sup>b</sup>	1		
6. Willingness to pay (£) (control)	2.86	1.25	0.09	0.05	0.11	0.13 <sup>b</sup>	0.12	1	
Study 2b ( <i>N</i> = 624)									
1. Message frame	0.50	0.50	1						
2. Purchase Intentions	4.58	1.47	0.23 <sup>a</sup>	1					
3. Authenticity	4.69	1.19	0.09 <sup>*</sup>	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	1				
4. Construal level	0.49	0.50	-0.02	-0.07	-0.05	1			
5. Involvement (control)	5.20	0.80	-0.01	0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.19 <sup>a</sup>	0.01	1		
6. Subjective knowledge (control)	4.49	1.17	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.25 <sup>a</sup>	1	
7. Willingness to pay (£) (control)	2.93	1.68	0.04	0.01	0.06	-0.04	0.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.04	1
Study 3 ( <i>N</i> = 415)									
1. Message frame	0.50	0.50	1						
2. Purchase Intentions	4.31	1.74	0.39 <sup>a</sup>	1					
3. Authenticity	4.88	1.02	0.17 <sup>a</sup>	0.41 <sup>a</sup>	1				
4. Construal level	2.83	1.45	0.08	-0.09	0.23 <sup>a</sup>	1			
5. Involvement (control)	5.21	0.86	-0.05	0.07	0.29 <sup>a</sup>	0.07	1		
6. Subjective knowledge (control)	4.40	1.30	0.05	0.01	0.09	0.12 <sup>a</sup>	0.28 <sup>a</sup>	1	
7. Willingness to pay (£) (control)	2.96	1.99	-0.05	0.06	0.05	0.13	0.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.03	1

Note: Correlations are shown below the diagonal.

<sup>a</sup>Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

<sup>b</sup>Correlations are significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed). Message frame was manipulated in all studies (dichotomous). Construal level was manipulated in Study 2 (dichotomous) and summed in Study 3 (0–5). The rest of the variables were measured on a 7-point Likert scale.

Abbreviations: M, mean; SD, standard deviation.

strongly agree’) to control for respondent quality. All study measures are presented in Appendix B1.

### 3.1.4 | Results and Discussion

The manipulations worked as intended, as participants who were presented with the informational condition reported higher scores ( $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.85$ ) in the informational scale than participants in the transformational condition ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.63$ ;  $F(1,370) = 4.05$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, those exposed to the transformational condition indicated elevated scores on the relevant scale ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.88$ ) as opposed to those exposed in the informational condition ( $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.11$ ;  $F(1,370) = 25.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with message framing (informational vs. transformational) as a categorical independent variable, and involvement, subjective knowledge, willingness to pay, age and education as covariates, revealed a significant main effect on purchase intentions. As predicted in H1, participants who were exposed to the transformational stimulus reported higher willingness to purchase the product ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) than those who were exposed to the informational ad ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ,  $F(1, 371) = 29.97$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Involvement was the only covariate having a significant impact on purchase intentions ( $F(1,371) = 30.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

These results offer strong evidence that employing transformational messaging for feminine care products enhances

purchase intentions. Nonetheless, the specific mechanism underlying this main effect still remains ambiguous. In our subsequent study, we therefore investigated the mediating influence of authenticity and further examined the moderating effects by manipulating construal level.

### 3.2 | Study 2: Replicating the Effect and Examining Mediation and Moderation

In Study 1, we find evidence supporting the idea that transformational framing enhances consumers' intention to purchase. In Study 2, we build upon these findings perform two experiments to examine the impact of message framing and construal level on purchase behavior (i.e., Study 2a: consumer choice; Study 2b: purchase intention) by employing a different framing manipulation inspired by Usrey, Saridakis and Theotokis (2024). This allows us to have greater confidence that the results are derived from the framing itself, rather than the specific execution of the frame.

#### 3.2.1 | Stimuli Selection

Following the same rationale as in Pretest 1 and Study 1, we created the new brand name “Flowzy” using the Namelix app, ensuring it is entirely fictitious with no existing registered trademarks or domains. Subsequently, marketing materials were prepared following the approach outlined by White, MacDonnell and Dahl (2011). A single-page, dual-section flyer was generated; one section presented the frame manipulation, delivering either a transformational or informational message (see Appendix A3).

In the transformational condition, the tagline phrase was “embrace your flow” and the advertising phrase was “Unleash confidence. Radiate power.” The informational condition featured the tagline “innovating feminine care,” accompanied by the advertising phrase “Elevating expectations. Redefining Excellence.” The other section of the page presented the construal manipulation, highlighting the “reasons (ways)” the fictitious brand offers various product attributes commonly found in similar menstrual products. We additionally introduced the words “why (how)” to vary the focus on why (how) the brand offers what it claims. In accordance with the construal level theory, the “reasons/why” condition included several abstract actions (e.g., explore the reasons Flowzy offers environmentally friendly materials: why? Green living, better living), compared to the “ways/how” condition, which included several concrete actions (e.g., explore the ways Flowzy offers environmentally friendly materials: how? Sustainable materials, eco-friendly packaging).

Thus, the materials were created to represent four conditions: informational/how, informational/why, transformational/how, and transformational/why.

#### 3.2.2 | Pretest 2

To test the effectiveness of our messaging and marketing materials, we conducted a pretest with 59 female consumers who

had experience with using sanitary towels. They were presented with the same scenario as in Study 1, and randomly allocated to one of the four conditions (informational/how:  $N = 15$ , informational/why:  $N = 15$ , transformational/how  $N = 14$ , and transformational/why:  $N = 15$ ). Following exposure to the ads, participants were asked to express their agreement with statements designed to measure the informational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ) and transformational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.90$ ; adapted from Puto and Wells 1984) aspects of the advertisement. Finally, a one item scale assessing construal level (adapted from White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011) was included in the pretest study. These measures enabled us to verify the accurate perception of our messaging and evaluate its effectiveness in conveying informational or transformational, as well as concrete or abstract, messages.

Subsequently, a 2 (message frame: informational vs. transformational)  $\times$  2 (construal level: how vs. why) between subjects ANOVA on the informational manipulation check revealed only a main effect for message frame ( $M_{\text{informational}} = 5.24$ , and  $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.65$ ;  $F(1,58) = 6.08$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). A similar analysis on the transformational manipulation check also revealed only a main effect for message frame ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.84$   $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.31$ ;  $F(1,58) = 3.17$ ,  $p < 0.10$ ). A 2 (message frame: informational vs. transformational)  $\times$  2 (appeal type: how vs. why) ANOVA on the construal level manipulation check item revealed only a main effect for appeal type ( $M_{\text{how}} = 2.28$ ,  $M_{\text{why}} = 5.17$ ;  $F(1,58) = 105.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Similar to Pretest 1, participants were asked to provide concise descriptions of the ads they viewed. In the transformational condition, prevalent terms included “positive,” “friendly,” “good,” and “exciting.” Conversely, the informational condition emphasized recurrent terms such as “sanitary,” “towels,” “advantages,” and “benefits.” In the concrete (how) condition, “flowzy,” “product,” “informative,” and “advert” stood out with the highest frequency ratio, while in the abstract (why) condition, participants favored terms like “friendly,” “environmentally,” “feminine,” and “good” (see Appendix C1). These answers are reported as an additional check for the effectiveness of our manipulations.

#### 3.2.3 | Method (Study 2a)

In Study 2a, we recruited 250 UK participants from Prolific for an online survey. After excluding seven for failing the screener question (“Do you use sanitary towels?”) and an attention check, the final sample included 243 female respondents (Table 2). We employed a two-cell design (construal level: how vs. why), presenting respondents with two products featuring either informational or transformational messaging. Each participant first viewed the construal level prime used in Pretest 2, followed by two side-by-side packaging designs (randomized: Option A: Transformational message and Option B: Informational message) for Flowzy, and were informed that providing feedback would enter them into a lottery to win a free pack of Flowzy towels. For practical and logistical reasons, the randomly selected winner was later notified and instead received a £5 Prolific bonus payment in lieu of the fictitious sanitary towel brand (cf. Sun, Guo, and Qian 2024).

Respondents then answered two questions on purchase behavior: a single-item 7-point bipolar scale to assess purchase intention (1 = Option A, 7 = Option B) and a two-item multiple choice question to choose between the options. To verify our conditions, we assessed construal level through one item adapted from White, MacDonnell and Dahl (2011) and applied the same control measures from Study 1 (Appendix B1).

### 3.2.4 | Results and Discussion (Study 2a)

ANOVA results revealed that our manipulation of construal level was successful ( $F(1, 242) = 51.71, p < 0.001, M_{\text{why}} = 4.36; M_{\text{how}} = 2.54$ ). In this study, we hypothesized that the primed construal level would affect consumers' preferences for different types of messaging frames. To test this, we analyzed the influence of construal level on consumer choices between transformational and informational messaging and found a significant result ( $\chi^2 = 22.677, p < 0.001$ ). Overall, 58.4% ( $N = 142$ ) of all participants preferred the transformational messaging (Option A), while 41.6% ( $N = 101$ ) chose the informational messaging (Option B). Among those primed with high construal levels ( $N = 121$ ), 73.6% selected the transformational message, whereas only 26.4% chose the informational message. Conversely, participants primed with low construal levels ( $N = 122$ ) preferred the informational message 56.6% of the time, while 43.4% selected the transformational message.

Next, we conducted a one-way ANCOVA finding a significant direct effect on purchase intention ( $F(1, 242) = 5.864, p < 0.05$ ). Participants in the high construal level condition preferred the transformational message (Option A;  $M = 3.64; SD = 2.37$ ), while those in the low construal level condition had a stronger preference for the informational message (Option B;  $M = 4.48; SD = 2.36$ ). Finally, among all the control variables, age was the only factor that significantly influenced purchase intentions ( $F(1, 242) = 4.26, p < 0.05$ ).

### 3.2.5 | Method (Study 2b)

We recruited a total of 654 UK subjects from Prolific. Initially, participants were asked a filter question: "Do you use sanitary towels?" This was to ensure that we targeted women with practical experience using the product being studied. Subsequently, only respondents who answered "yes" ( $N = 642$ ) were included for further analysis. Eighteen participants failed an attention check, resulting in a final sample of 624 female respondents (Table 2) who completed the questionnaire.

We used a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects experimental design, where we manipulated both the message frame (informational vs. transformational) and the construal level (how vs. why). The same materials used in Pretest 2 were utilized, and participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (informational/how:  $N = 157$ , informational/why:  $N = 158$ , transformational/how:  $N = 161$ , and transformational/why:  $N = 148$ ).

To measure purchase intention towards the fictitious brand Flowsy, we used three items adapted from Putrevu and Lord

(1994) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Brand authenticity was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (Morhart et al. 2015; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). To confirm that our conditions were perceived as intended, we assessed informational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and transformational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.91$ ) messaging using the same 7-point Likert scale (Puto and Wells 1984), and construal level through the BIF scale (Vallacher and Wegner 1989). We employed the same control measures as in Study 1 (see Table 3) (see Appendix B1).

### 3.2.6 | Results and Discussion (Study 2b)

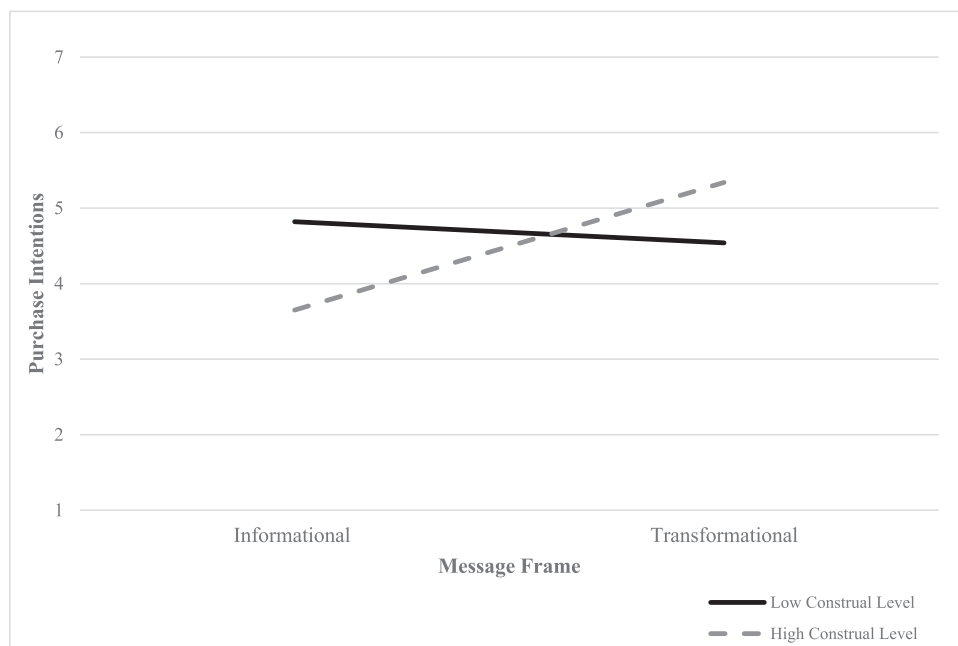
A 2 (message frame: informational vs. transformational)  $\times$  2 (construal level: how vs. why) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the informational manipulation check measure showed only a main effect for message frame ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.56, M_{\text{informational}} = 4.78; F(1, 623) = 4.34, p < 0.05$ ). Similar analysis on the transformational manipulation check also revealed only a main effect for messaging frame ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 5.04, M_{\text{informational}} = 4.76; F(1, 623) = 7.25, p < 0.05$ ). Finally, An ANOVA on the construal level manipulation check index revealed only a main effect for construal level ( $M_{\text{concrete}} = 2.16, M_{\text{abstract}} = 2.65; F(1, 623) = 35.09, p < 0.001$ ). The above results thereby revalidate our manipulation.

A 2 (message frame: informational vs. transformational)  $\times$  2 (construal level: how vs. why) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on purchase intentions revealed the predicted two-way interaction ( $F(1, 623) = 87.91, p < 0.001$ ). When participants were presented with the why condition (high construal level), they reported increased purchase intentions in response to the transformational frame ( $M = 5.34, SD = 1.11$ ) than to the informational frame ( $M = 3.65, SD = 1.57$ ). When presented with the how condition (low construal level), participants reported higher purchase intentions in response to the informational frame ( $M = 4.82, SD = 1.36$ ) than to the transformational frame ( $M = 4.54, SD = 1.26$ ). The main effect for message frame ( $F(1, 623) = 42.96, p < 0.001$ ) was significant, however the main effect of construal level ( $F(1, 623) = 3.08, n.s.$ ) did not reach significance. Involvement was the only control that showed a significant effect on purchase intentions ( $F(1, 623) = 9.18$ ). Thus, based on the results of Study 1a and Study 1b, H2 was supported. Figure 2 displays the results.

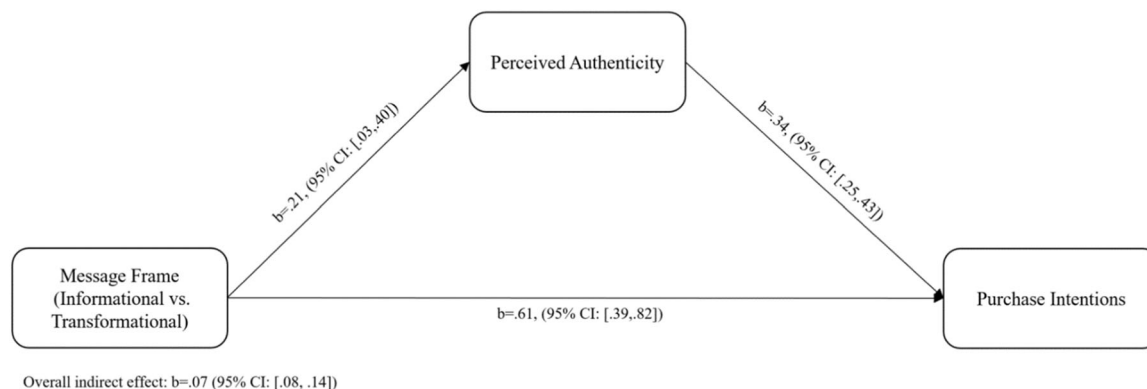
To further examine whether authenticity perceptions mediate the relationship between message frame and purchase intentions, we employed PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes 2013; Model 4, 5000 bootstrap resampling). Our findings indicate a positive indirect effect of message frame on purchase intentions through perceived authenticity ( $b = 0.07, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.083, 0.1432]$ , in support of H3 (see Figure 3). Specifically, participants exposed to the transformational condition reported higher authenticity perceptions, leading to higher purchase intentions. Conversely, those presented with the informational condition reported lower authenticity perceptions, resulting in lower purchase intentions.

We finally examined the potential alternative moderating role of perceived authenticity. If our effects are driven by perceived authenticity, we might expect an interaction between perceived





**FIGURE 2** | Study 2 moderation effect of construal level.



**FIGURE 3** | Study 2 mediating effect of perceived authenticity.

authenticity and message frame, or perceived authenticity and construal level, or a three-way interaction between them all to predict purchase intentions. Using linear regression, we entered perceived authenticity, construal level, message frame and all the interaction terms as predictors of purchase intentions. No interactions with perceived authenticity emerged (all  $p > 0.22$ ).

### 3.3 | Study 3: Replicating Study 2 and Examining the Moderated Mediation Model

The results of studies 1 and 2 provide evidence for the direct and indirect effect of message framing on purchase intentions through perceived authenticity. In addition, we uncovered a boundary condition wherein matching a transformational frame with abstract information is particularly effective in enhancing purchase intentions. As discussed previously, we do expect that a pairing of a transformational (informational) frame with a more abstract (concrete) mindset will lead to enhanced authenticity perceptions, and in turn to increased purchase intentions. Study 3 therefore aimed to validate the

robustness of these earlier findings and shed further light on the underlying mechanism driving the effects. We achieved this by measuring construal level as opposed to manipulating it as per Study 2, thus explicitly testing a moderated mediation model.

#### 3.3.1 | Method

We employed a between-subjects experimental design with two conditions, where we manipulated the message frame (informational vs. transformational) using identical stimuli to those employed in Study 1. From Prolific, we recruited 465 UK female participants. Following the screening question “Do you use sanitary towels,” 25 participants were excluded. Additionally, another 25 participants failed the attention check, resulting in a total of 415 valid responses (Table 2) who were randomly allocated to one of the two conditions ( $N_{\text{informational}}=208$ ,  $N_{\text{transformational}}=207$ ).

Participants reported their purchase intentions (Putrevu and Lord 1994; Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.97$ ) and authenticity perceptions

(Morhart et al. 2015; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.96$ ) for the fictitious brand PeriodPals described in Study 1. To ensure the intended perception of our conditions, we measured informational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.70$ ) and transformational (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.95$ ) messaging using the established 7-point Likert scale by Puto and Wells (1984). Construal level was assessed through the BIF index by Vallacher and Wegner (1989). Our study included the same control measures as in Studies 1 and 2 (Appendix B1).

### 3.3.2 | Results and Discussion

Our manipulation checks confirmed the effectiveness of our interventions. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with the informational versus transformational condition as the independent variable and the informational manipulation check as the dependent variable. The results aligned with our expectations ( $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.69$ , and  $M_{\text{transformational}} = 4.25$ ;  $F(1,413) = 12.64$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A similar analysis of the transformational manipulation check yielded the anticipated findings ( $M_{\text{transformational}} = 5.40$ , and  $M_{\text{informational}} = 4.11$ ;  $F(1,413) = 88.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

To test hypotheses H4a and b we ran a moderated mediation model by using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS Model 8 with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected CIs. We included message frame as the independent variable (informational vs. transformational), purchase intentions as the dependent variable, perceived authenticity as the mediator, construal level as the moderator and involvement, subjective knowledge, willingness to pay, education, and age as covariates.

A significant moderated mediation effect was found (index = 0.2474; 95% CI: [0.1286, 0.3740]). Our findings (Table 4) indicate that the indirect impact of message frame through perceived authenticity on purchase intentions was significant for both low construal levels ( $b = -0.32$ ; 95% CI: [-0.5162, -0.1580]) and high construal levels ( $b = 0.42$ ; 95% CI: [0.2188, 0.6498]).

As anticipated, participants exposed to a transformational message whilst being characterized by high construal levels reported higher levels of authenticity ( $M_{\text{lowCL}} = 4.11$ ,  $M_{\text{highCL}} = 5.60$ ) and purchase intentions ( $M_{\text{lowCL}} = 4.47$ ,  $M_{\text{highCL}} = 5.18$ ) compared to their low construal counterparts. Conversely, participants presented with an informational message and being characterized by lower construal levels reported higher levels of perceived authenticity ( $M_{\text{lowCL}} = 4.95$ ,  $M_{\text{highCL}} = 4.50$ ) and purchase intentions ( $M_{\text{lowCL}} = 4.70$ ,  $M_{\text{highCL}} = 2.96$ ) compared to their higher construal level counterparts. In summary, the effect of informational messaging on purchase intentions through perceived

authenticity is strongest for low construal levels, whilst the effect of transformational messaging on purchase intentions through perceived authenticity is strongest for high construal levels. Therefore, we find support for H4a and H4b.

## 4 | General Discussion

Across four studies, we explored the intricate relationship between message framing, consumer construal levels, perceived authenticity, and purchase intentions. Our findings consistently demonstrate that the choice of message framing significantly impacts consumers' willingness to purchase. Specifically, transformational messages repeatedly outperformed informational messages in eliciting clearer purchase decisions and higher intentions across all studies. This emphasizes the importance of crafting emotionally resonant and consumer-centric messages to engage and motivate potential buyers.

Moreover, we delved deeper into the interplay between message framing and consumer mindset by introducing construal level as a boundary condition. Our research revealed that when the message framing aligns with the way consumers process information (high construal level for transformational messages and low construal level for informational messages), purchase intentions are further amplified. This suggests that marketers should consider not only the message content but also how consumers mentally construe information when designing their advertising campaigns. Additionally, our findings consistently highlight the pivotal role of perceived authenticity as a mediator in this relationship, underlining its significance in influencing consumer purchase intentions. Ultimately, the studies provide valuable insights into effective messaging strategies that can help brands enhance their marketing efforts and drive consumer engagement and purchase decisions in the femvertising arena.

### 4.1 | Theoretical Implications

This research significantly deepens our understanding of the impact of message framing and construal levels, shedding light on a novel mechanism related to perceived authenticity. Our study contributes to the debate on brand activism and woke washing, emphasizing the need to distinguish between genuine brand activism and less authentic woke washing, especially in the feminine care sector where terms like femvertising and femwashing have emerged recently (Hainneville, Guèvremont, and Robinot 2023; Park, Koo, and Kim 2023). Our findings highlight the positive effects of transformational advertising, a form of femvertising, on authenticity perceptions, leading to more favorable consumer outcomes. This extends the literature

**TABLE 4** | Conditional indirect effects of message frame on purchase intentions through perceived authenticity moderated by construal level.

Conditional indirect effect of message frame on purchase intentions	Coefficients		Bootstrapping 95% CI	
	Effect	BootSE	Lower	Upper
Indirect path for low construal level	-0.3218	0.0892	-0.5162	-0.1580
Indirect path for high construal level	0.4204	0.1084	0.2188	0.6498
Index of moderated mediation	0.2474	0.6210	0.1286	0.3740

by showing how transformational advertising improves authenticity perceptions and consumer intentions, offering new insights into message framing in the context of brand activism.

Our work also extends the authenticity literature by linking perceived authenticity to consumer behavior intentions through message frames. Prior studies have shown how authenticity positively impacts consumer perceptions and advertising outcomes (e.g., Moulard, Raggio, and Folse 2016; Papadopoulou, Vardarsuyu, and Oghazi 2023; Park, Koo, and Kim 2023; Zhang et al. 2014) and how emotional appeals like transformational messages boost purchase intentions for hedonic services and products (Nuweihed and Trendel 2023; Zhang et al. 2014). Prior work has further shown how hedonic products activate authentic brand consumption (Guèvremont and Grohmann 2016). Notwithstanding this, our findings introduce a contrasting perspective by demonstrating that for utilitarian products like sanitary towels, brand authenticity can be significantly elevated, especially when employing transformational message framing. Consequently, we contribute to the femvertising and authentic brand activism literatures, addressing the pertinent call for research into the underexplored potential of utilitarian product categories to achieve similar outcomes (Södergren 2021).

Furthermore, we unveiled an interesting moderated mediation relationship. Transformational messages paired with a high construal mindset, and informational messages paired with a low construal mindset, lead to elevated perceived authenticity which, in turn, enhances purchase intentions. Our findings align partially with Park, Koo and Kim (2023), who identified a positive link between message concreteness and the perception of message authenticity. Nevertheless, we extend this understanding by shedding light on the specific circumstances that lead to an increase in purchase intentions. Moreover, previous research has explored the connection between message style and consumer construal levels (Ruiz and Sicilia 2004; Septianto and Pratiwi 2016), to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first one uncovering both the mechanism and the boundary conditions of the message frame—purchase intentions relationship within an advertising context.

In conclusion, our manipulation of framing may function as a proxy for perceived authenticity, as indicated by Hainneville, Guèvremont and Robinot (2023), who noted that message frames, especially in femvertising, can significantly influence perceptions of transparency, diversity, and identification. However, our findings suggest that message framing exerts effects independently of authenticity appeals, as perceived authenticity did not exhibit moderating effects. This study advances brand authenticity literature by providing a more complete understanding of how message framing and construal levels impact perceived authenticity and consumer intentions, thus offering valuable insights for both academia and practice.

## 4.2 | Managerial Implications

The findings of our research hold significant implications for brand managers and advertisers striving to connect with consumers on a deeper level and enhance the effectiveness of their

communication materials. Our results consistently demonstrate that a transformational message frame is highly effective in enhancing consumers' intentions to purchase feminine care products. Therefore, it is suggested that brand managers and advertisers in the feminine care industry adopt transformational messaging strategies in their advertising campaigns. Messages that emphasize empowerment, positivity, and emotional connections should be at the forefront of their marketing efforts. For instance, incorporating narratives that inspire and resonate with consumers, such as stories of women's empowerment and self-confidence through product usage, can create a stronger impact and drive purchase intentions.

While our results suggest that transformational messaging is generally effective, it is still important to recognize the boundary conditions under which this strategy may be less effective or even backfire. Brand managers should carefully consider the context and potential risks associated with engaging in socio-political issues. For instance, brands that are perceived as external to a cultural context or that engage in socio-political issues without a genuine and deep understanding of the local culture may face backlash. This highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and authenticity when adopting transformational messaging strategies.

Furthermore, it is crucial for brand managers to consistently acknowledge the diversity in consumers' cognitive styles. Our research findings have highlighted that individuals characterized by lower construal levels may still have a need for explicit and factual details regarding product characteristics. To address this diversity effectively, marketers should adopt a multifaceted approach that integrates components of both informational and transformational strategies. This would entail presenting essential product information alongside the inspirational messaging. For instance, marketers can develop content that emphasizes product features, advantages, and safety while seamlessly incorporating messages promoting self-confidence and empowerment. This holistic approach ensures that consumers with varying thinking styles are effectively engaged and catered to.

Finally, we showed that perceived authenticity plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer evaluations and ultimately drives purchase intentions. Therefore, authenticity emerges as a strategic imperative for brand managers and serves as a guiding principle that directs consumers toward brands that not only meet their needs but also resonate with their values and aspirations. For advertisers and brand managers, this underscores the critical need to ensure that their messaging resonates authentically with their target audience. It is not just about crafting catchy slogans or eye-catching visuals; it's about embodying the values and principles that the brand stands for genuinely. Authenticity cannot be manufactured or contrived; it must flow naturally from the brand's identity.

## 4.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

While our studies have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of message framing on consumer behavior, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations and identify

promising avenues for future research to further advance our understanding in this field. In all our studies, we employed fictitious brands to eliminate potential confounds. While this is a widespread practice in experimental research, it may not fully reflect the complexity of real-world consumer behavior, as participants might respond differently to fictitious brands compared to well-known, established ones. In particular, brand identity plays a crucial role in how consumers perceive and respond to advertising messages. The absence of established brand identities in our experiments means that our findings may not capture the full impact of brand identity on message framing effectiveness. To overcome this limitation, future studies could consider using real brands or conducting experiments within actual marketing campaigns. Doing so would offer valuable insights into how message framing strategies apply to well-known brands and real consumer decisions, thereby enhancing ecological and external validity.

Furthermore, we predominantly focused on female participants across various age groups and a specific product category, namely sanitary towels. While we did uncover intriguing findings that challenge existing knowledge about utilitarian products, the broader applicability of our findings may still be restricted, especially when considering diverse consumer groups and different product types. To increase the generalizability of our findings, future investigations should explore the impact of message framing in various product categories and with a more diverse range of participants. This could entail examining different demographic factors such as gender, age, income levels, and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, researchers can gain insights into how message framing strategies resonate across a wider spectrum of consumers.

While we controlled for several important variables, future research should consider others that may influence message framing effectiveness with real brands. These include brand loyalty, prior brand experience, cultural background, personal values, and situational factors like the context of advertisement viewing (e.g., online vs. in-store). Finally, our studies exclusively focused on positive framing, emphasizing the favorable aspects and qualities of products whilst incorporating empowering and superiority claims. This focus limits our understanding of the complete array of message framing strategies, including the influence of negative message framing (e.g., highlighting potential losses or drawbacks) alongside positive framing (e.g., emphasizing gains). To attain a more comprehensive understanding of message framing strategies, future research should explore the effects of negative message framing in conjunction with positive framing. Investigating how loss frames, which underscore potential negative consequences, impact consumer behavior can illuminate the dual impact of framing strategies and their nuanced effects on decision-making processes.

## 5 | Conclusions

This research underscores the importance of aligning advertising strategies with consumer mindsets and highlights the vital role of authenticity in femvertising. The findings suggest that for femvertising to be effective, particularly in the feminine

hygiene sector, it should not only focus on the content of the message but also on aligning with the consumers' mental processing and perceived authenticity. These insights offer valuable implications for brands aiming to leverage empowerment-focused marketing strategies to connect more deeply with their audience and influence purchase decisions.

### Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## Appendix A

### Manipulations Checks

*Informational condition (Pretests 1,2:  $\alpha = 0.72$ ,  $\alpha = 0.71$  respectively and Studies 1,2,3:  $\alpha = 0.75$   $\alpha = 0.78$   $\alpha = 0.74$  respectively; Puto and Wells 1984)*

- "This ad was very informative"
- "I learned something from this ad that I didn't know before"
- "I can accurately compare this brand with other competing brands on matters that are important to me"
- "If they had to, the company could provide evidence to support the claims made in this ad"

*Transformational condition (Pretests 1,2:  $\alpha = 0.89$ ,  $\alpha = 0.90$ , and Studies 1,2,3:  $\alpha = 0.84$   $\alpha = 0.88$   $\alpha = 0.89$  respectively; Puto and Wells 1984)*

- "This ad is meaningful to me"

- "While looking at this ad, I think about how [brand] might be useful to me"
- "I can relate to this ad"
- "This ad leaves me with a good feeling about using [brand]"

### Manipulations Checks

*Construal level (Pretest 2, Study 2a and Study 2b; adapted from White, MacDonnell, and Dahl 2011)*

To what extent did the advertisement focus on:

ways [brand] offers a number of features\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ reasons [brand] offers a number of features.

TABLE A1 | Experimental Materials (Pretest 1, Study 1, Study 3)





Informational condition	Transformational condition
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>ELEVATE YOUR PERIOD EXPERIENCE WITH UNMATCHED PROTECTION.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  <p><b>Period Pals</b> Setting the standard for feminine care excellence</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>PRODUCT FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Zero leaks technology</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Suitable for sensitive skin</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Cruelty-free</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Breathable cotton</li> </ul> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p>YOUR PERIOD DOESN'T DEFINE YOU. IT EMPOWERS YOU.</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 20px 0;">  <p><b>Period Pals</b> Embrace the strength of every aspect of your femininity</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>PRODUCT FEATURES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Zero leaks technology</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Suitable for sensitive skin</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Cruelty-free</li> <li style="text-align: center;">✔ Breathable cotton</li> </ul> </div>

TABLE A2 | Experimental Materials (Pretest 2, Study 2)

Informational/How condition	Informational/Why condition
<p style="text-align: center; color: #e91e63;">ELEVATING EXPECTATIONS REDEFINING EXCELLENCE</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 20px;"> <p><b>· FLOWSY</b> innovating feminine care</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #ffe0b2; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>Explore the ways Flowsy offers:</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>ADVANCED ABSORPTION SYSTEM <i>How?</i> The triple-layer tech keeps you confidently dry</p> <p>TAILORED FIT <i>How?</i> A diverse range of sizes based on body shape analysis</p> <p>COMFORT THAT MOVES WITH YOU <i>How?</i> Soft, breathable design for ultimate comfort</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MATERIALS <i>How?</i> Sustainable materials, eco-friendly packaging</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #e91e63;">ELEVATING EXPECTATIONS REDEFINING EXCELLENCE</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 20px;"> <p><b>· FLOWSY</b> innovating feminine care</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center; background-color: #ffe0b2; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>Explore the reasons Flowsy offers:</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>ADVANCED ABSORPTION SYSTEM <i>Why?</i> Stay confidently protected all day</p> <p>TAILORED FIT <i>Why?</i> Celebrate your uniqueness through a diverse range of sizes</p> <p>COMFORT THAT MOVES WITH YOU <i>Why?</i> Move freely with a comfort-first approach</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MATERIALS <i>Why?</i> Green Living, Better Living</p> </div>

**TABLE A3** | Experimental Materials (Pretest 2, Study 2a and Study 2b)<sup>1</sup>.

Transformational/How condition	Transformational/Why condition
<p>UNLEASH CONFIDENCE RADIATE POWER</p> <p><b>Explore the ways FlowSy offers:</b></p> <p>ADVANCED ABSORPTION SYSTEM <i>How?</i> The triple-layer tech keeps you confidently dry</p> <p>TAILORED FIT <i>How?</i> A diverse range of sizes based on body shape analysis</p> <p>COMFORT THAT MOVES WITH YOU <i>How?</i> Soft, breathable design for ultimate comfort</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MATERIALS <i>How?</i> Sustainable materials, eco-friendly packaging</p>	<p>UNLEASH CONFIDENCE RADIATE POWER</p> <p><b>Explore the reasons FlowSy offers:</b></p> <p>ADVANCED ABSORPTION SYSTEM <i>Why?</i> Stay confidently protected all day</p> <p>TAILORED FIT <i>Why?</i> Celebrate your uniqueness through a diverse range of sizes</p> <p>COMFORT THAT MOVES WITH YOU <i>Why?</i> Move freely with a comfort-first approach</p> <p>ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MATERIALS <i>Why?</i> Green Living, Better Living</p>

<sup>1</sup>In Study 2a, the leaflets containing two manipulations—construal level and message framing—were divided into two distinct parts.

**Appendix B**

**TABLE B1** | Constructs Used in Study 1, Study 2 and Study 3

Study	Construct (Cronbach's $\alpha$ )	Source
1,2,3	<p><b>Purchase Intentions</b> (Study 1: <math>\alpha = 0.95</math>, Study 2b: <math>\alpha = 0.95</math>, Study 3: <math>\alpha = 0.95</math>) <i>Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding [brand]. (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ It is very likely that I would purchase sanitary towels from [brand] in the future.</li> <li>▪ I would purchase sanitary towels from [brand] next time I need menstrual products.</li> <li>▪ I will definitely use [brand] sanitary towels in the future.</li> </ul>	Putrevu and Lord (1994)
2,3	<p><b>Perceived Authenticity</b> (Study 2b: <math>\alpha = 0.95</math>, Study 3: <math>\alpha = 0.96</math>) <i>Based on the ad you previously saw, to what extent the [brand] could (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not betray you.</li> <li>▪ Accomplish its value promise.</li> <li>▪ Be an honest brand.</li> <li>▪ Have a history.</li> <li>▪ Be a timeless brand.</li> <li>▪ Be a brand that survives times.</li> <li>▪ Be a brand that survives trends.</li> <li>▪ Give back to its consumers.</li> <li>▪ Have moral principles.</li> <li>▪ Be true to a set of moral values.</li> <li>▪ Care about its consumers.</li> <li>▪ Reflect important values people care about.</li> </ul>	Morhart et al. (2015)

(Continues)

TABLE B1 | (Continued)

Study	Construct (Cronbach's $\alpha$ )	Source
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connect people with their real selves.</li> <li>▪ Connect people with what is really important.</li> <li>▪ Add meaning to people's lives.</li> </ul> <p><b>Construal Level</b> (Index) <i>For the statements below pick the option, a or b, that best describes how you think about each action or event. There are no right or wrong answers.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Making a list               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Getting organized (b) Writing things down</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Washing clothes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Putting clothes into the machine (b) Removing odors from clothes</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Locking a door               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Putting a key in a lock (b) Securing the house</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Greeting someone               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Showing friendliness (b) Saying hello</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Taking a test               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Answering questions (b) Showing one's knowledge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Vallacher and Wegner (1989)
1,2,3	<p><b>Involvement</b> (Study 1: <math>\alpha = 0.76</math>, Study 2a: <math>\alpha = 0.80</math>, Study 2b: <math>\alpha = 0.79</math>, Study 3: <math>\alpha = 0.81</math>) <i>To me menstrual products are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unimportant - Important</li> <li>▪ Boring - Interesting</li> <li>▪ Irrelevant - Relevant</li> <li>▪ Unexciting - Exciting</li> <li>▪ Mean nothing to me - Mean a lot to me</li> <li>▪ Unappealing - Appealing</li> <li>▪ Worthless - Valuable</li> <li>▪ Not needed - Needed</li> </ul>	Zaichkowsky (1994)
1,2,3	<p><b>Subjective Knowledge</b> (Study 1: <math>\alpha = 0.90</math>, Study 2a: <math>\alpha = 0.87</math>, Study 2b: <math>\alpha = 0.86</math>, Study 3: <math>\alpha = 0.90</math>) <i>Please read the statements below and give the answer that is true for you in general (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree").</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ I know pretty much everything about feminine hygiene products.</li> <li>▪ I feel very knowledgeable about feminine hygiene products.</li> <li>▪ Compared to most other people, I know more about feminine hygiene products.</li> </ul>	Flynn and Goldsmith (1999)

TABLE C1 | Word Clouds From Pretests

Pretest 1

Informational condition



Transformational condition





**Pretest 2**

Informational  
condition



Transformational  
condition



