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## Impact of Drug Abuse Illustrations in the Media on Youth

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### Abstract

By acting as an information agent, the media balances the flow of information between many remote locations of a country and issues. The media has become an essential component of our daily lives. One such societal issue is drug misuse, which is extremely worrying because it not only affects the abuser personally but also their family, social environment, and young people simultaneously. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) survey found that youth substance misuse is still more prevalent than that of older individuals. Any nation's progress is seen to be driven by its youth. The gateway drugs, illegal drugs, and prescription drugs are frequently exposed in the media, whether intentionally or accidentally, whether in news stories, fictitious character contexts, documentaries, or in fake commercial messaging, etc. In this study, we sought to determine the role that the media played in the problem of drug usage, both positively and negatively. Several prior studies were considered for these purposes, and social media, TV shows, movies, and documentaries were also examined. It has been noted that it gives young people idolised role models such as musical groups, sports figures, and film and TV stars. These artists sing about drugs in their songs, act out drug use in movies, live glitzy, wealthy, or even criminal lives, or they make references to drugs in their music. On the other hand, the media plays a role in spreading awareness about drugs and their usage and effects on people.

**Keywords-** drug abuse, media, social media, TV, internet, youth

### Introduction

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2022 (UNODC,2022), there will be 284 million drug users globally between the ages of 15 and 64 in 2020, up from 269 million in 2018, which is a regrettable 30% increase over 2009. (UNODC, 2020) Additionally, a study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) in 2022 revealed that 93 million people died from alcohol usage, compared to roughly 230 million people who perished from cigarette use. Cannabis and marijuana are the most widely used narcotics in the world, with 209 million users, followed by 61 million users. 34 million amphetamine users, 21 million cocaine users, and 20 million ecstasy users in 2020, a 26 percent rise over the previous decade. Four hundred fifty thousand people died from using drugs, with 16,750 of them deaths thought to be from drug overdose. In comparison to the population aged between 15 and 64 years, cannabis use is more prevalent among young people aged 15 to 16 around the world (5.8% vs. 4.1%). In many nations, including India, this issue is among the most significant social, political, and health issues. One in eleven Indians, or 0.25 percent, are dependent on the hazardous use of cannabis, according to the Magnitude of Substance Use in India 2019 report. 7.7 million people require assistance for their opioid use disorder. Compared to other opioids like opium or prescription opioids, heroin dependence is more common. A large number of studies have already been conducted on this problem. Researchers like Sharma 2017, Reddy 2014, Sandhu 2006, Quadri 2013 and Arora 2016 studied the various aspects of the problem, like the nature and extent of the drugs, effects of drug abuse in youth, social psychological, and economic problems faced due to drug abuse. Like other influential factors, the media also plays a prominent role in developing behavioural and normative beliefs. (Berry et al 2016, Collins et al 2016, Akers 1995) The media has permeated every aspect of our daily lives. The goal of the media was to balance society. The media balances the flow of information between various distant parts of a country and numerous issues by acting as an "information agent." This, in turn, balances countries and creates a link that unites them. Our lives have significantly transformed due to the evolution of media from print to new age media like television and the internet. This facilitates improved communication and rapid advancement. People frequently adopt the values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies the media promotes, and adoption rates are particularly high among children and young people.

The gateway drugs (alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis), illegal drugs (MDMA, heroin, cocaine), and prescription drugs were all taken into consideration for this study in an effort to determine the role that the media plays in the spread of drug abuse and the impact of drug abuse's ample exposure present in various forms of media both intentionally and unintentionally. Numerous past studies were considered, and media coverage of substances was examined to meet these goals.

### Exposure of substance abuse in the Media

Generally, media has been divided into various forms by various media researchers, but in general, media has three types: print media, electronic media, and the internet. The Internet has taken over the audience drastically in the last decade. The area of our research concern is also the electronic media, which includes the TV shows and advertisements, Movies, Music, new age

media, Internet, OTTs, and Various Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Reedit, Twitter, and WhatsApp, concerned with the influential factors and communication for the drug arrangement of Substances.

### **Television (TV)**

A very liberal attitude can be seen towards drug abuse, as it is a part of daily television viewing. The storylines of every genre are featured with drug and alcohol use, whether it is Drama, Comedies, or thrillers. Literature review showed that exposure to substance-related content advertisement and promotion predicts new users (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). Pseudo advertisements on national television of alcohol and tobacco promotions lead to encouraging users and non-users to develop habits, and advertisements of mouth fresheners indirectly portray the chewing tobacco products with the same wrapper and branding. The same goes for the alcoholic drink's advertisement in the shade of drinking water and music CD advertisements, which convey the message of the encouragement of the same branded alcohol products. This justifies the agenda-setting theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), who argue that the agenda for increased production and sales, presenting advertisements, broadcasters play an important role. Media consumers with pseudo-advertisements are interested in what is shown there and the information attached to it.

### **Movies**

As it is said, movies are a mirror of society, and an illustration of drug abuse is not new in the cinema. Earlier movies like Hare Rama Hare Krishna portrayed drug abuse in 1971 in Bollywood, which defiantly inspired by Hollywood, various Hollywood movies like Puppet in the Chain (1970). In western movies, drug abuse can be seen glamorised in every third or fourth movie, like an everyday lifestyle, for example, popular movies like Pulp Fiction (1994), Blow (2001), Crank (2006), Hangover Trilogy (2009), The Wolf of Wall Street (2013), Dope (2015), Etc. Same goes with the Bollywood context where movies like Charas (1974), Janbaz (1986), Dev D (2009), Dum Maro Dum (2011), Gangs of Waseeypur (2012), Uda Punjab (2016), Kalakandi (2019), Kabir Singh (2019) and many more in which either the main cast or the indulge in drug abuse and glamorising abusing drugs in their daily life. It was also found in a study that audience responses to substance portrayal in movies are remarkably consistent in showing a moderate to strong association with a positive attitude towards substance use initiation. (Dalton et al, 2003)

### **Music**

Music also carries culture, especially Pop Culture. The rap genre has the most influence on the youth; they copy the style, signs, and even the clothing used in the music videos or described in the lyrics. The drug abuse concern is not untouched by this field, either. Various artists, whether they are from the West or the South Asian region, or the local folk artists, depict drug abuse in their lyrics, which somehow influences the youth in masses. Drugs inclusion in music is not the new thing it has been going on from ages for example "With a Little Help from My Friends" by the Beatles, White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane (1967), "U.O.E.N.O." by Rocko, "The A Team" by Ed Sheeran, "Blood on the Leaves" by Kanye West, "Dope" by Lady Gaga and many more talking about Indian context it can be seen from various times music like "Dum Maro Dum", "Slowly Slowly", "Manali Trance", "Babaji ki Booti", "Uda Punjab. Religious songs, songs from the cult of abusers, produce music like rap and techno, and also glamorise the abuse of drugs.

### **Internet**

Most recent surveys on the internet and American life show that 59 percent of adults went to the internet for health-related information, and 35 percent went for a specific issue. (Fox & Duggen, 2013). Lack of media literacy led the audience to follow or adapt the non-medical drugs and psychotropic substances. Merchandise and other product websites that have their own products and audience misguide the audience for their own profit by using blog articles and portraying drug abuse in a cool manner. Along with the articles, various micro-blogging websites and other social media platforms like YouTube have a large amount of content where taking drugs and influential factors can be seen easily.

### **OTTs (Netflix, Prime, Hotstar, etc.)**

The given platforms provide entertainment media and documentaries to educate. However, unfortunately, every type of content available to every age group where they can see substance abuse glamorisation and violence, too. Provided with just adult warning and a little tag line below an uncertain amount of content served on these platforms, where various TV Shows like Narcos, Breaking Bad, Peaky Blinders, Too Old to Die Young, El Chapo, and Anime like Bojack Horseman, which are pretty popular among the youth, show normalised drug use. Along with TV shows, movies like Bad Trip, El Camino, Menace, 21 Jump Street, and the most popular Marvel movies like Deadpool also project the main cast doing drugs for his cancer cure.

### **YouTube**

YouTube has been home to every solution we need in our daily lives. Tutorials regarding anything can be found there easily. In this pool, objectifying channels promoting or teaching ways to take drugs can be found easily. Social media celebrities' vlogs include their daily life, and the Use of drugs in their daily life. On YouTube, you can find videos about celebrities taking drugs on various channels, how to take drugs tutorials, information regarding the drug addict area, and where drugs can be found. Channels like VICE provide news about deviation. Wape channels, Travel Influencer channels, and Documentaries, in the shadow of providing information, override media policies.

### **Documentaries**

Documentaries about drug abuse have been very informative, talking about the use, abuse, and addiction effects and causes. But the projection of various kinds of drugs in those in the earlier half shows the bright side of the abuse, for example, *Take your Pills*, *How to change your mind about psychedelics*, *Heroin*, the trip treatment, *have a Good Trip*, the last shaman provides

Information regarding their particular interest, but projecting the drug positively or in the first half only.

### **Social Media**

There was consistent evidence found that adolescents and young adults' exposure to drugs has increased due to new media (social media), which has surpassed traditional marketing, as the youth have on-demand access to content and are active consumers of digital media. According to PREDOSE (2013), there were one million posts from 35k social media accounts, which allow free discussion on drug social media platforms and play significant roles in developing the interest of the youth, and according to the algorithm, providing content that interests the user more and more by marking advertising products regarding it. Wapping accounts, accounts providing music suggestions for drug abuse, Informational accounts about types of drugs, live videos, smuggling, and peddler accounts, region by region on Instagram, forums, groups on Facebook, and Reddit, where discussions and experience sharing are held on other microblogging websites. End-to-end encrypted platforms like WhatsApp have groups about where to find drugs and how to get them, including smugglers.

In the US, adolescents and young adults constantly access media and advertising content. Youth are exposed to various substance-related advertisements and peer-related information while engaging with some form of online media for an average of 8 hours per day, according to research (King et al., 2017). (Barry et al. 2016; Collins et al. 2016). This is concerning because current research indicates that exposure to the media significantly increases the chance of substance use continuing or worsening. It was discovered that media lies about drug and alcohol usage are common, which causes people with an addiction who are going through rehabilitation or relapse to fall for them once again, where, the majority of the time, the wonderful experiences are projected, simply promoting drug use and bad behaviour. Youth are drawn to drugs and drug addiction because of the incomplete image and positive portrayal of abuse in the media. Research by Heatherton and Sargent (2010) found that watching movies with smoking-related imagery enhanced adolescents' propensity to start smoking. When adolescent media exposure was compared, 27 percent of them reported smoking and 60 percent reported drinking, with an average of 8.6 hours of media each day.

### **Theoretical framework**

Media theories like Cultivation theory by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, 1976, state that media exposure shapes our reality by giving us a distorted view of the amount of violence and risks in our lives. The reflective-projective theory of Loevinger (1968) reflects society, and individuals project their own reflections. For instance, depending on each viewer's experiences, attitudes, and moods, the meaning of a television programme may vary. Additionally, these particular viewers tend to identify with fictional characters on television and in movies who are more like their idealised selves than their actual selves.

The social learning theory can help us comprehend how social media affects normative beliefs and behaviour. Briefly stated, the social learning hypothesis asserts that people model their behaviour after that of others (Bandura, 1977). It emphasises that a primary predictor of substance use behaviour and cognitions is personal experience as well as indirect learning about others. Using social learning variables, including peer norms, peer acceptability of use, and deterrents of use, for instance, early research by Akers (1995) applied social learning theory to adolescent drug and alcohol use, accounting for roughly 55% of the variation in alcohol or marijuana use. Many of the theoretical elements of Aker's work can be applied to the current study. For instance, Akers and Jennings (2015) list seven methods by which learning happens, several of which involve talking about norms. The frequency of criminal or delinquent behaviour is a consequence of norms, and learning occurs when criminal behaviour is rewarded more strongly than non-criminal behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

Accordingly, for the current study, one can draw the following conclusion from this framework: exposure to a high volume of media content regarding substances may reinforce normative ideas about peer usage and ultimately affect individual behaviours such as substance use. Although not without criticism, the use of mass media campaigns in drug prevention is rather prevalent. The efficacy of such efforts to lower young people's drug usage or their desire to use has been strongly contested by both policymakers and practitioners. This analysis aims to add to the discussion by reviewing the pertinent information. More humorous portrayals of drug use have the potential to desensitise viewers to the toll that drug use takes, even while many depictions of drug and alcohol use in various media emphasise the serious repercussions of substance addiction. Television shows, social media, and documentaries all provide contradictory messages about drugs, keeping viewers, especially children, in the dark about the actual dangers and repercussions. It seems that drug and alcohol-related plotlines are frequently used for comedic effect, ignoring or downplaying the negative consequences of substance use and misuse. Such humorous portrayals may give viewers a distorted idea of these chemicals' functions in reality.

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