

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Evaluation of Internet News through a Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction

Kemal Balica¹, Mehmet Kirlioğlu²

¹Institute on Drug Abuse, Department of Toxicology and Pharmaceutical Science, Ege University, İzmir, Türkiye

²Department of Social Work, Karabük University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Karabük, Türkiye

ORCID IDs of the authors: K.B. 0000-0003-4225-2938, M.K. 0000-0003-0130-0841.

Main Points

- The analysis of 181 digital news pieces demonstrated that 55.8% had stigmatizing or inadequate language, while 1.1% were in line with the SCDC, hence signaling a big gap between ethical recommendations and journalistic behavior.
- Of the analyzed content, nearly one-third included explicit labeling and discriminatory expressions, and 17% presented narratives that might normalize or encourage harmful behavior; thus, digital news in Türkiye often amplifies stigma rather than supports communication for recovery.
- These findings highlight the need to make addiction-sensitive journalism and national media literacy programs a priority to reduce stigma, ensure ethical communication, and promote a public health perspective in addiction reporting.

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of addiction-related language in digital news on societal perceptions and stigma. It highlights the crucial role of journalists in Türkiye in reporting addiction with increased accuracy and sensitivity. Using the Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction by the Turkish Ministry of Health as a framework, 181 news articles from five leading Turkish news websites—Hürriyet, Milliyet, Habertürk, Sabah, and Sözcü—were analyzed. The results show that 55.8% of the articles used inappropriate language, whereas only 1.1% adhered to the recommended guidelines. This indicates a considerable gap in the effective application of these guidelines. The findings indicate that the media's portrayal of addiction may deter individuals from seeking treatment and that the Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction's recommendations have not been effectively incorporated into digital news coverage. Common issues include negative stereotypes about people with addiction, sensationalizing drug-related news, and stressing the economic value of illegal substances. Greater adherence to ethical standards in addiction coverage and comprehensive journalist training programs are essential for promoting ethical and responsible reporting on addiction, reducing stigma, and fighting misinformation. The results reveal a substantial gap between recommended practices and actual reporting, highlighting the need for improved media literacy.

Keywords: Addiction stigma, ethical journalism, media representation, misinformation, public perception, strategic communication

Introduction

The language used to discuss addiction significantly influences societal views, individual self-perception, and treatment outcomes. Stigmatizing terms such as “addict,” “abuser,” and “alcoholic” reinforce societal prejudices, which negatively affect treatment outcomes and people's willingness to seek

help (Atlam & Coskunol, 2022; Barry et al., 2014; Botticelli & Koh, 2016; Broyles et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2022; Zwick et al., 2020).

In the language of addiction, it is essential to use medically precise terms, personalized language, avoid judgmental expressions, and maintain hopefulness about recovery. Documentation and

Corresponding author:

Kemal Balica

E-mail:

kemalbalica@gmail.com

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communication should adopt respectful language and consistent terminology (Alinsky, 2022; Botticelli & Koh, 2016; Broyles et al., 2016; Zgierska et al., 2020). Furthermore, labels may lead health professionals to develop negative attitudes toward people with substance use disorders, which can hinder health service delivery (Ashford et al., 2019; van Boekel et al., 2013). Additionally, individuals who use substances or alcohol might withdraw from society and treatment due to communication and behavioral patterns that foster self-stigmatization (Şimşek & Ögel, 2023).

Moreover, the societal impact of language of addiction has prompted the publication of various guidelines, such as the International Society of Addiction Journal Editors Statement on Addiction Terminology (2015) and the Recovery Research Institute's (RRI) "Addictionary," which includes over 200 addiction-related terms. There is a "stigma alert" warning in 20 words in this dictionary (RRI, n.d.). There are also two separate resource guides obtained from RRI training materials and published on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website (SAMSHA, 2018a, 2018b). In the article titled "Words Matter - Terms to Use and Avoid When Talking About Addiction," published on the website of the National Institute of Drug Abuse, the terms that should not be used in relation to addiction are shared with appropriate alternatives (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2021). The common idea in these regulations is that the term person with a substance use disorder should be used instead of the terms junkie, abuser, addict, and whether a substance is detected in urinalysis should be conveyed as x positive or x negative instead of clean or dirty.

News plays a crucial role in informing the public. According to media frame theory, news cannot be presented objectively and impartially. The selection of information in news content, along with the points that are emphasized or not emphasized, creates a new reality. This new reality may lead to many concepts being recreated or misunderstood. News is influenced by many factors, such as the values of media organizations and their employees, market competition pressures, and government policies. The news that results from the interaction of all these variables changes in a way that influences readers' perceptions and attitudes (Le, 2024).

Media frame theory highlights how perceptions of news elements are reflected. However, to better understand how the perceptions and values of media employees develop, it is important to examine the effects of theories rooted in social psychology. Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963) and Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963) describe how individuals with addiction are socially demeaned when branded as morally flawed or dangerous, with such labels often causing them to internalize deviant identities, which then negatively impact their self-perception, social roles, and access to treatment and social integration. While Stigma and Labeling Theories describe the social devaluation of individuals with addiction, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Social Categorization Theory (Fiske et al., 2002) propose that perceptions of different groups can be shaped by the prominence of group identities in the media. Both theories demonstrate how prejudices and social hierarchies are perpetuated through the media by emphasizing distinctions between the general population and those with substance use disorders.

The media is one of the key areas used to spread accurate information about the terms related to addiction to the wider society. Consequently, topics involving addiction and addictive substances are highly newsworthy. Many issues, such as the trade and economic value of illegal substances, the link between criminal organizations and substances, security operations, and deaths following substance use, are of interest to the public (Gezen, 2018).

In addition to the independent initiatives of the Associated Press and Reporting on Addiction in the US, the Mindframe Alcohol and Other Drugs Guideline was developed by the Australian Ministry of Health, and the Strategic Communication Document on Combating Addiction (SCDCA) was published by the Ministry of Health in Türkiye. This effort aims to reduce stigma surrounding alcohol and drug use, encourage individuals who may need treatment or support to seek help, and mitigate potential harm (Associated Press, 2020; Everymind, 2019; Reporting on Addiction, 2022; Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2019).

In Türkiye, the SCDCA, edited by Sağlık Bakanlığı in 2019, was developed to "put forward a sustainable framework that includes the necessary communication strategies and techniques in communication activities to be carried out in order to increase social awareness and consciousness, prevent health risks and social risks, and ensure attitude and behaviour change" regarding addictions. It was stated that, through strategic communication, emphasis will be placed on highlighting that individuals are subjects, not objects, without using discriminatory or labeling language (p.32). In the SCDCA, the content of messages to be used in media tools was evaluated under twenty different headings. It is evident that these titles aim to ensure the expressions used in media tools are not labeling, as well as to promote access to accurate information about treatment and avoid encouraging harmful messages (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2019). Four of the twenty headings (headings 1, 10, 11, & 20) differ from the other headings in their mode of expression. While the other sixteen headings focus on issues to be avoided, these four contain empowering messages.

Although these guides were initially created for all media, the growth of technology and internet usage has shifted news consumption from traditional to digital platforms, enabled by the widespread availability of mobile devices and workplace computers. (Newman, 2023). Consequently, digital media tools have become a vital data source for assessing addiction-related news.

Addiction news in digital media influences the social aspects of supply, demand, and treatment of addiction. News articles about addiction on five of the most popular news websites in Türkiye were examined according to the twenty headings outlined in SCDCA (Similarweb, 2023). This approach will help identify the practical equivalents of SCDCA's headings and support the development of new suggestions. To date, there has been no evaluation of printed or digital media news content within the scope of SCDCA recommendations. Therefore, this research is expected to offer a unique contribution.

This paper explores how language used in digital media coverage of addiction influences societal perceptions and stigma surrounding substance use disorders. It also aims to determine whether the guidelines and recommendations outlined in

strategic communication documents, such as the SCDCA, are being adhered to in digital media, particularly in addiction-related news reporting. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to provide insights into how the media can help reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking behaviors, and foster a more compassionate and accurate portrayal of addiction.

Material and Methods

This study uses a qualitative research design with directed content analysis, which is well-suited for systematically examining how addiction is portrayed in the media based on predefined categories and for identifying patterns and themes within news content language (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach concentrates solely on communication language and message delivery, excluding visual content related to news. The method enabled a detailed analysis of how addiction language appears in the chosen news articles. Since three of the twenty titles in the SCDCA (titles 4, 5, and 6) relate to “marginalization, discrimination and reputation,” these were evaluated by the researchers under the category of “labeling.”

This research consisted of articles published by five of the most widely visited online news outlets in Türkiye: Hürriyet, Milliyet, Habertürk, Sabah, and Sözcü (Similarweb, 2023). These outlets were selected because of their large audience reach and their influence on shaping public opinion. Additionally, their editorial positioning (centrist, pro-government, opposition, tabloid) was considered to capture a broad ideological and stylistic diversity within Turkish digital media. The data was collected by scanning the news on the main screen of these five popular news websites at 10:00 a.m. every day from September 27, 2023, to May 21, 2024. Although the SCDCA was published in 2019, this time frame was chosen to fill a gap in the literature by observing how the principles of the SCDCA are reflected in recent digital news content in Türkiye.

As a result of the scanning conducted by the researchers between the specified dates, 181 news items about addiction were collected. In non-probability samples, researchers may determine that saturation has been reached when no new information or themes are observed. Based on this, data collection was halted by mutual agreement of the researchers after 181 news items, as no further information could be obtained (Guest et al., 2006). This was regarded as evidence that the data saturation in the qualitative research had been achieved. These news items were stored together with the news texts and links. When the data collection process was finished, the news articles were assessed by both researchers in terms of headlines in the SCDCA - Content of Messages section. Although no formal inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated, both researchers independently coded the data, compared their results, and resolved discrepancies through discussion until full consensus was reached.

Results

As presented in Table 1, approximately 56.9% ($n = 103$) of the news items matched the content specified in the guidelines. Other news items were excluded from the targeted content analysis because they did not match the content. Some of the news items matching the content in the SCDCA may fall under more than one theme.

Table 1.
Evaluation of News According to the Content in Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction

	Yes		No		News That Does Not Match the Content	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Compatible with the content in the SCDCA	2	1.1	101	55.8	78	43.1

Note: SCDCA = Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction.

As shown in Table 2, the news content aligns with 16 of the headlines in the SCDCA. News items do not match four titles (10, 11, 13, and 15). Considering the challenge of finding content related to positive messages in news coverage, the absence of matches for headlines with empowering explanations, such as 10 (highlighting treatment options) and 11 (presenting success stories), is understandable within the framework of digital news, which tends to favor more sensational content. Additionally, it is important to note the need to consider SCDCA headings 4, 5, and 6 collectively. Due to the difficulty in distinguishing these three items from each other, they were grouped under the label “labeling.” This theme was recurring (30%) and often featured stigmatizing phrases such as “addict,” “junkie,” and references linking individuals to crime and violence. Furthermore, 17.37% of the news was identified as encouraging misbehavior by providing explicit or sensational details regarding substance use methods, particularly in crime reports. Another significant finding is that 11.05% of the content mainly focused on the tabloid aspect of addiction, frequently highlighting celebrity drug scandals or sensational crime headlines. These trends indicate a persistent tendency within Turkish online news platforms to prioritize stigmatizing, criminalizing, and sensational narratives over health-oriented, informative, or rights-based reporting on addiction.

1. The risk of addiction is possible for everyone in society.

Murray has identified the situation as a public health crisis, particularly highlighting the alarming levels of drug use in Glasgow, Scotland, which the British Government must address to prevent further harm (Sabah, October 4, 2023).

2. The fleeting and illusory feeling of well-being caused by addiction should not be overstated.

In a recent incident in Beyoğlu, Istanbul, authorities confiscated two kilograms and 697 grams of cannabis during a police raid. The individual in custody, Ş.T., claimed that he used the drug because it was said to relieve a toothache (Hürriyet, November 6, 2023).

In another instance, during a trial, the defendant, Hüseyin P., commented on the heating properties of “Bonzai,” a synthetic drug, to the presiding judge, prompting a laugh in the courtroom (Sözcü, January 11, 2024).

3. Adjectives or language that promote the normalization of drug, tobacco, and excessive technology use should be avoided.

Table 2.
News Matching Content in Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction

Themes	n	%
1. The risk of addiction is possible for everyone in society.*	1	0.53
2. The temporary and illusory sense of well-being induced by addiction should not be emphasized.	4	2.1
3. Adjectives or language that normalize the use of drugs, tobacco, and excessive technology should be avoided.	2	1.05
4. The reputation of addicts should not be harmed.	57	30
5. Addicts should not be marginalized		
6. Addicts should not be subjected to discrimination.		
7. Generalizations that target specific individuals and institutions should be avoided.	11	5.79
8. Exaggerated expressions should be avoided	12	6.32
9. Providing unnecessary information should not result in wrong behavior.	33	17.37
10. Messages on how young people can resist and resist negative attitudes, expectations or peer demands should be included.*	0	0
11. The treatment process should be accurately explained *	0	0
12. Care should be taken not to give encouraging and intriguing implicit messages in visual, written or audio media messages.	7	3.68
13. Addiction should not be portrayed as a normalized or glamorized aspect of popular culture.	0	0
14. Addictive substances should not be normalized.	9	4.74
15. Addictive substances should not be romanticized.	0	0
16. The market value of addictive substances should be excluded	14	7.37
17. Techniques for combating addictive substances should not be disclosed.	2	1.05
18. The lifestyles of drug traffickers should not be promoted.	16	8.42
19. Sensational and tabloid-style coverage of addiction should be avoided, as it undermines the gravity of the issue and hinders a sensitive, thoughtful approach to addressing it.	21	11.05
20. Success stories should be incorporated. *	1	0.53
Total	190	100

*Headings containing empowering statements.

The candy, which contains psychoactive substances, is labeled with the government warning “not intended for use by people under 21 years of age,” and the packaging also notes that the product has not been approved by the FDA. In Jamaica, regulations introduced in 2015 classify the possession of up to 57 grams of cannabis by individuals over the age of 18 as a “misdemeanor.” (Sözcü, October 3, 2023).

6 kilograms of cocaine were stolen from the courthouse safe ... Everyone knew the officer was a smoker! (Hürriyet, Mynet, March 19, 2024).

4. The reputation of addicts should not be damaged.

E.A1*, who has a history of substance addiction, reportedly killed two cats and assaulted his mother and siblings when they intervened to stop him from attacking his 10-year-old son (Hürriyet, January 26, 2024).

S.D*, the elder sister of businessperson D.P.1*, was detained after admitting to drug use live on social media. (Hürriyet, October 1, 2023).

During a raid on singer K.'s1* home, 15 grams of skunk were seized. Singer K.1* said she was not a dealer but a user.

5. Addicts should not be marginalized.

Relatives of individuals imprisoned for drug-related offenses have expressed relief at their imprisonment, citing the harm caused to the family and environment. One parent stated, “We begged and pleaded with him to stay away from drugs, but he would not listen. Would a parent be happy that their child is in prison? In our case, we are happy because it has brought some relief to our lives.” This sentiment reflects the complex emotions families experience when dealing with addiction and its consequences (Milliyet, April 11, 2024).

6. Addicts should not face discrimination.

Law enforcement authorities carried out a raid at a workplace in Bursa’s Woodworking Small Industrial Site, detaining three foreign nationals suspected of involvement in drug trafficking (Sözcü, April 15, 2024).

Like a zombie film: The difficult situation of drug-addicted homeless individuals in the United States has attracted international attention, raising concerns in other countries. A journalist remarked, “We should pray that this doesn’t happen here,” while emphasizing the impact of drug use on urban areas in the US (Sabah October 4, 2023)

7. Avoid generalizations that focus on specific individuals and institutions.

“Police Cannot Enter”: A social media personality, identified as M.Ö., known for creating content about “Türkiye’s dangerous and inaccessible neighborhoods,” published a video featuring the Tatlıcak* Neighborhood on his social media account. During subsequent searches conducted by law enforcement, authorities seized 190 drug pills, 166 grams of heroin (in two separate packages), a cannabis plant, 25 grams of marijuana, two unlicensed pistols, one precision scale allegedly used for drug trafficking, and three shotguns (Mynet, October 9, 2023).

Rap music, in certain subgenres, is often linked to themes such as drug use, gang violence, and the promotion of a philosophy that justifies extreme behaviors as a way of escaping poverty. These themes may include depictions of violence, firearm use, objectification of women, and a skewed view of sexuality (Sabah, April 7, 2024).

8. Exaggerated expressions should be avoided.

The drama of a family destroyed by drugs: Save us from my brother. He set the house on fire and watched. Opening the window and shouting “I’m going to eat cat meat,” Altan killed two cats fed by the family and, with a porcelain plate in his hand, threw them from the third floor to the street. (Hürriyet, January 26, 2024).

When I didn’t give him money, he would give me an example of the child who cut off his mother’s head and say, “I will cut off your head.” One day again, he used violence until he broke my mouth and nose. I went to the police station, and they told me to go to a shelter. Then I went to the prosecutor’s office; I showed my bruises, and the next day they came and took me from the house. If he had not gone to prison, he would have killed me or someone else (Milliyet, April 11, 2024).

9. Providing unnecessary information should not lead to wrongful behavior.

WE USED OTHERS’ IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION! I was shown how to prescribe medication using the “my prescription” system by S.1* He mentioned that many doctors are unfamiliar with this application and offered to demonstrate it to them when prescribing medication. I accompanied M.1* and O.1* to different hospitals, where I prescribed medication using the ID numbers that MK.1* sent via WhatsApp (Sabah, November 19, 2023).

PLASTIC BOTTLE AND DRUGS FOUND ON HIM! The detained individual was identified as the person featured in social media images using drugs with a plastic bottle on a moving tram. He was charged with “possession and use of drugs” but was subsequently released from police custody (Hürriyet, March 5, 2024).

A “national emergency” was declared due to the emergence of a drug known as “kush.” This drug is prepared by combining several chemical substances with ground human bones to enhance its effects (Sözcü, April 5, 2024).

They were found to be involved in the separation and multiplication of cocaine impregnated in fertilizer in vineyard houses (Milliyet, Mynet, Sözcü, April 11, 2024).

12. Care should be taken not to send encouraging and intriguing implicit messages through visual, written, or audio media.

Location: Istanbul – An individual, referred to as “Pikachu,” was apprehended in the forest under suspicious circumstances (Milliyet, Mynet, April 13, 2024).

A drug operation resembling the tactics seen in films was carried out in Istanbul (Sözcü, April 11, 2024).

14. Addictive substances must not be normalized.

28 grams of bonzai (Sabah, April 8, 2024), 23 units of ecstasy (Hürriyet, October 3, 2023)

N.F.C.1*, associated with Cranberry Sorbet, was reported to have had phone conversations with a drug dealer. During one conversation, she mentioned her intention to try drugs for the first time. Another conversation involved a discussion about price fluctuations, with N.F.C. suggesting that the old price be maintained for the day. He used expressions indicating the types of drugs such as “1.5 T, half L, taxi” (Sabah, May 15, 2024).

16. The market value of addictive substances ought to be excluded.

A record seizure of 8 billion Turkish lira worth of illegal commercial goods and drugs was reported by the Ministry of Trade. This achievement resulted from successful operations carried out by the Customs Enforcement units in the first 3 months of 2024, marking an increase of approximately 300% compared to the same period in the previous year (Sabah, Sözcü, April 18, 2024).

In Spain, a \$686 million cannabis trafficking gang has been dismantled, according to a statement by the Spanish National Police. It was found that the gang, which was involved in a \$686 million cannabis fraud, had established a marketing system (Milliyet, April 13, 2024).

17. Techniques for combating addictive substances must not be disclosed.

In a social media post about the operation, Minister of Trade Ömer Bolat announced that a methamphetamine-type drug, with an estimated market value of around 500 million TL, was seized. The drug was attempting to be smuggled into the country hidden within a 1-ton cotton load (Mynet, October 4, 2023).

Police officers from the Sultanbeyli District Security Directorate identified an unusual swelling on the ground in a wooded area during a surveillance drone flight (Sabah, April 13, 2024).

18. The lifestyles of drug traffickers should not be promoted.

The transition from shopkeeper to mafia boss: “K.1* had no assets in the past and made his living as a shopkeeper. Today, his wealth has surpassed what I can count. His involvement in the drug trade marked the beginning of his rise to power” (Hürriyet, February 26, 2024).

Drug smugglers were apprehended following a shootout, during which large amounts of foreign currency and Turkish lira were seized. Two luxury cars, found in the garden and used by the smugglers, were impounded and taken to the police parking lot (Hürriyet, March 17, 2024).

19. Sensational and tabloid-style coverage of addiction should be avoided, as it diminishes the seriousness of the issue and hampers a sensitive, thoughtful approach to addressing it.

S.D.1*, the elder sister of businessperson and social media influencer D.P., admitted to using cocaine during a live broadcast on her social media account (Habertürk, Hürriyet, Sözcü, October 1, 2023).

He remarked, “Bonzai warms you up well, Mr. President,” to the presiding judge, which provoked laughter in the courtroom (Sözcü, January 11, 2024).

20. Success stories ought to be incorporated.

A.G.1*, a contestant on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* hosted by Kenan İmirzalıoğlu, shared her personal story with the audience, revealing that her three children were placed in a Child Protection Institution. During the competition, she discussed her experiences with substance abuse, stating, “The disease of our age is substance abuse, which affected our family like a lightning strike. I became a drug addict myself, but I eventually quit.” Gündüz, now working at the Bursa Association for Combating Drugs, expressed her pride in helping thirteen individuals recover from addiction. She concluded by saying, “Life passes in one way or another, but the most important thing is how you look at life” (Mynet, October 9, 2023).

Results

In total, 181 addiction-related news articles published on five major Turkish online news sites were analyzed in accordance with the 20 thematic headings of the Strategic Communication Document for Combating Addiction (SCDCA). The findings revealed that 55.8% (n = 101) of the articles used inappropriate or stigmatizing language, while only 1.1% (n = 2) fully adhered to the ethical and linguistic guidelines of the SCDCA.

A full 30% of the news contained stigmatizing or labeling expressions like “addict,” “junkie,” or phrases that associate users with crime and violence. Moreover, 17.37% of the news items contained explicit or sensational information that may promote misbehavior, especially crime news. About 11.05% were tabloid-oriented, focusing on celebrities with drug scandals or sensationalizing addiction-based events.

The analysis also showed that empowering and health-oriented messages recommended by the SCDCA were almost entirely absent. None of the reviewed articles contained content under Headings 10, 11, 13, or 15 — which emphasize treatment processes, positive resistance among youth, and the avoidance of normalization or romanticization of addiction. Instead, a significant portion of news stories emphasized criminality, tragedy, and the market value of illegal substances (7.37%), reflecting a tendency to frame addiction primarily as a law enforcement issue rather than a public health matter. Overall, the results of

the present study clearly show that there is a gap between the principles of the SCDCA and real journalistic practices in digital news media, with stigmatizing, sensational, and criminalizing narratives dominating Turkish online reporting about addiction.

Discussion

In this study, addiction-related news published on Turkish online news sites was evaluated in accordance with the 20 headlines of the SCDCA. When the results from this study are compared with those in the literature, it becomes evident that the tendency to use sensational language is not limited to Türkiye. A study conducted by Sunderland et al. (2023), examining 2007 news stories about alcohol and other drugs in Australia found that 38% of the news stories used sensationalist language, 22% used influencer language, and only 1% provided information to seek help. Similarly, it was McGinty et al. (2019) reported that 49% of media coverage during the opioid epidemic in the United States involved stigmatizing language. The findings of this study are consistent with international literature.

The findings also support the claims made by Sağlık Bakanlığı (2019) when developing the SCDCA. Notably, most news content consists of material that fosters stigma, emphasizes the criminal nature of addiction, and lacks solution-oriented messages. The frequent use of stigmatizing terms like “addict” and the association of individuals with crime and violence in 30% of the news content illustrate the mechanisms described in Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963), where people with substance use disorders are socially devalued and marginalized, reinforcing societal prejudices and limiting their access to treatment and social integration. Additionally, consistent with Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963), the tendency to label individuals using negative language and framing crime not only influences social attitudes but also contributes to the internalization of these attitudes by affected individuals, thereby hindering their help-seeking behavior and reintegration into society.

Another notable aspect of the findings is the prevalence of tabloid-style news stories that emphasize the tragic and sensational elements of addiction. These results align with Media Framing Theory (Le, 2024), which suggests that the way addiction is presented in media content is shaped by editorial values, market competition, and audience expectations, ultimately creating a reality that favors sensationalism over public health-focused narratives. Furthermore, the fact that the analyzed news items lacked content on resilience to negative behaviors or treatment options indicates that media outlets tend to avoid this aspect of addiction-related news.

This tendency reinforces the social categorization processes outlined by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), aiding in the exclusion of substance users from mainstream social groups and bolstering “us versus them” distinctions in public discourse.

In Türkiye, addiction-related content is mainly shown through crime and tabloid news. Particularly, phrases like “the person found dead in his apartment with a syringe in his arm,” “the family who destroyed the house while searching for drugs,” and “the person who killed his mother because she did not give him money

for drugs” illustrate this trend. These examples again show the media’s focus on individual tragedy, criminality, and moral decline, rather than public health issues or recovery options. This study’s findings support previous research and highlight that, despite existing national and international ethical guidelines on addiction reporting, there are notable shortcomings in media practices.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that collaborations with media organizations take place to develop journalist training programs focused on addiction-sensitive reporting, establish addiction-specific ethical reporting guidelines, and incorporate nationwide media literacy initiatives into public education campaigns to reduce stigma, misinformation, and promote help-seeking behaviors.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study uses a limited sample that examines news articles from the most popular internet news sites within a specific timeframe.

Assessing both the news articles and the accompanying images in line with SCDCA will improve the understanding of the overall message conveyed by the news. It would be advantageous to gather scientific data covering broader time periods while comparing traditional media tools, internet news sites, and social media platforms.

One limitation of this study is the use of the term “addict” in line with the language adopted in the SCDCA framework. While this terminology was maintained to ensure consistency with the official categories, it is acknowledged that the term is considered stigmatizing in current addiction literature. Future studies should prefer person-first and non-stigmatizing language to align with ethical guidelines and reduce unintended bias.

Future research could expand on this analysis by exploring how addiction is portrayed across social media platforms, traditional broadcast media, and influencer-driven content. Comparative studies between digital news media, social media, and influencer posts would provide valuable insights into the wider media environment shaping public perceptions of addiction.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Ethics Committee Approval: This study was exempt from ethical review as it exclusively analyzed documents and data available in the public domain, with no involvement of human subjects.

Informed Consent: As the study does not involve human participants, informed consent was not applicable for this study. This research was based on the content analysis of publicly available documents, such as news articles.

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