

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# Exploration of Media Literacy about Substance Abuse among Students: A Qualitative Study

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## Main Points

- The students' viewpoint with media and behavioral experiences can be used in planning educational and promotional interventions that support media literacy.
- This study approach can be useful for developing evaluation tools in this field.
- The study's approach has enabled individuals to evaluate their experiences with substance abuse related to media messages within the framework of multi-dimensional media literacy.
- Findings of this study can open up new views about media literacy on specific issues, such as substance abuse media literacy, along with general views about media literacy.

## Abstract

It is essential to identify the issue of media literacy about substance abuse as the most significant concern of the present decade. This requires deeply perceiving students' experiences regarding media literacy about substance abuse. This qualitative content analysis aimed to examine media literacy about addiction. The participants were 20 students from different universities in universities in Hamadan city, Iran. The participants were selected using purposive sampling with maximum diversity. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, and data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software version 2010. Considering the results of media literacy dimensions and factors of substance abuse, 6 categories with the following subcategories were selected: 1) purpose with 3 subcategories, such as "sales for economic gain," 2) construction with 3 subcategories, such as "internal and external beneficiary politicians," 3) audience with 8 subcategories, such as "curious people," 4) format and technique with 7 subcategories, such as "media techniques," 5) filter with 11 subcategories, such as "happiness," and 6) comparison with 8 subcategories, such as "free access." The students' viewpoints about media and their behavioral experiences can be used in planning educational and promotional interventions related to media literacy about substance abuse and developing appropriate evaluation tools in this field.

**Keywords:** Substance abuse, student, qualitative study, content analysis, media literacy

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## Introduction

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2017, a total of 271 million people (5.5% of the world's population) aged 15 to 64 years were drug abusers, indicating a 30% increase compared with their number in 2009. The highest use of opium and its derivatives was estimat-

ed in the Middle East and South-East Asia (World Health Organization, [WHO]; UNODC, 2016).

Because of its young population and geographical location, Iran mainly deals with this global problem, which is one of the most significant social, political, and health challenges in various countries (Rafifar et al., 2010). In 2010, a survey of the global burden

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of the disease in Iran indicated that mortality rates owing to drug abuse disorders per 100,000 people increased from 6.6 to 7.9 in men and from 0.26 to 0.72 in women between 1990 and 2010 (WHO; Akbari et al., 2019). Despite legal efforts in the country to prevent drug abuse, it has been growing among the Iranian young population in recent years, unlike the same age group in industrialized countries (Nazemi et al., 2012).

Results of epidemiological studies suggest an average age of  $17.8 \pm 3.9$  years for the onset of the first use of addictive drugs, which gradually increases with age. This age range is associated with the entry of young people into universities and the start of the studentship period. Accordingly, students can be considered among the high-risk groups concerning drug abuse (Arghabaei et al., 2018).

The first year in a university is considered as the most challenging time for students. This period includes social challenges of being away from families, meeting new friends from different cultures, and mental challenges such as successfully completing multiple assignments. This, in turn, can lead to mental disorders, such as depression, and increase the possibility of addictive drug abuse along with loneliness and estrangement (Ghaderi et al., 2019). Furthermore, media use levels are associated with the use of addictive substances, and the likelihood of substance abuse increases with exposure to images and media content on substance abuse, such as movies and clips (Costello & Ramo, 2017; Dal Cin et al., 2012; Depue et al., 2015).

The number of cyberspace users is projected to reach approximately 70% of the world's population in 2020, which is even higher than the total number of people having access to electricity and safe drinking water around the world. Moreover, Iranians' access to the internet is on the rise similar to the rest of the world, with 69% of Iran's population accessing the internet (eMarketer).

Therefore, there is a wide range of media messages and a tendency among the youth to use media. In this regard, understanding the harm and functions of cyberspace and media as well as acquiring media literacy skills and learning skills for critical analysis of media messages are the most essential and effective requirements to prevent risky behaviors, such as substance abuse, smoking, and unsafe sexual activity (Kesler et al., 2016).

The goal of media literacy is to enable individuals control their media planning and consciously expose themselves to media (Potter, 2018). Previous investigations on addictive substance abuse and media literacy were based on quantitative approaches. However, the possibility of understanding such phenomena highly depends on human culture and communication rooted in naturalistic philosophy. This study was carried out to explore the aspects of media literacy related to addictive substance abuse through qualitative research to design media literacy assessment tools related to drug abuse and preventive interventions. To the best of our knowledge, no information is available about the aspects of media literacy concerning addictive substance abuse in Iran. Therefore, this study aimed to explain students' viewpoints concerning media literacy about substance abuse.

## Methods

This study was conducted between December 2019 and March 2020 among university students in Hamadan City, western Iran.

## People Involvement

The researchers selected participants using purposive sampling with maximum diversity in terms of the field, degree, and amount of media use to achieve various opinions. This sampling strategy was applied to extend the information comprehensiveness and richness to increase transferability of the study. As advised by the scientific sources of qualitative studies, sampling continued until saturation (Bengtsson, 2016; Speziale et al., 2011), and we reached data saturation in this study after 20 interviews; thus, we selected a total number of 20 participants.

## Data Collection Procedure

All the participants submitted their written consent after they were assured of the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw from the study at any time and stage, and the confidentiality of all their information. It should be noted that we changed the participants' names to pseudonyms for privacy purposes. The inclusion criteria were as follows: being a student in one of the universities of Hamadan City, willing to participate in the study, having the ability to respond and participate in the study, and having access to social networks and the internet. The exclusion criteria were non-cooperation in conducting the full interview for a qualitative study and the absence of individuals from a specified place to conduct 2 follow-up interviews. As mentioned earlier, we obtained written consent from the participants after we explained the study objectives to them. To gather information, the semi-structured interview technique was applied. Interviews were initiated with open-ended questions followed by exploratory inquiries to obtain clarity.

A Ph.D. student majoring in the field of health education and promotion conducted all the interviews separately and face-to-face. Before the interviews, the interviewer attained adequate skills for interviewing the students equally and properly. All the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder.

Some examples of the interview questions were as follows:

- What do you think about the purpose of producing media messages about substance abuse, and why are these messages produced?
- In your opinion, who are the creators of media messages about substance abuse?
- In your opinion, what factors affect audience selection for media messages about substance abuse?
- In your idea, what lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, media messages about substance abuse?
- In your opinion, what format and technique are used to attract the audience's attention to media messages about substance abuse? What is sent from different media messages about substance abuse by local and social networks as well as other media?

## Procedure and Ethical Issues

The data collection procedure in this study was based on designing and acting a qualitative study using content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016). Accordingly, face-to-face interviews continued for 30 to 40 minutes. We audio-recorded the interviews and later transcribed the dialogues verbatim. Along with audio recording, we used note-taking and memos to record additional elaborated

data. Before beginning each recording, the students were asked to sign a consent form with additional data regarding the analysis, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their information. The interviewees declared that they were allowed to raise their questions at any time during the interview for the purpose of enriching the data. The interviewer would pause the recording throughout the interview if the interviewees wanted to provide fixed answers. The authors asked the students for their permission to use their direct quotes from the interview in any reports or presentations without mentioning their names.

This study was extracted from the Ph.D. thesis in Health Education and Health Promotion and was approved by the research ethics committee of Hamadan University of Medical Sciences (#9811018459, IR.UMSHA.REC.1398.827).

### Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using frequent reading and constant contrasts using the MAXQDA software version 2010 (VERBI GmbH Company, Berlin, Germany).

The transcripts of the interviews were coded, and attempts were made to assign maximum possible codes to the data. To increase the validity, 2 investigators performed the coding process individually and then shared their outcomes to reach the best possible decision and achieve consensus. Moreover, to perform the data analysis procedure, all the codes obtained from the categories and subcategories were reviewed by all the authors in cooperative meetings to reach ultimate codes. According to qualitative approach, data gathering was accomplished after achieving data saturation (Bengtsson, 2016; Speziale et al., 2011).

After analyzing the codes and removing the repeated ones, similar codes were merged together with data classification and main categories and subcategories related to media literacy were obtained.

### Trustworthiness

To increase the data accuracy in this study, the technique by Guba and Lincoln (1994) was used. The researcher also attempted to 1) choose participants cautiously; 2) have close, constant, and continuing arrangement with them; 3) involve them in interpreting the data (member checking); and 4) use views of colleagues and the participants at numerous points of the study, particularly during code extraction, final assessment (peer checking), and reliability assessment. Furthermore, the investigator attempted to extend the credibility of the study as much as possible by maintaining documentation through analysis stages and observing different processes by choosing an instructive method. The investigator also performed responsibility analysis with a close and complete description of the analysis method. Finally, the analyst supplied a context for others' judgments and appraisals concerning transferability by providing an extensive and thorough definition of the study site, situations, participants, and information analysis methodology.

### Results

A total of 20 students from Hamadan's universities with an average age of  $30.9 \pm 7.57$  years were interviewed, and 70% of them were women. Among the participants, 55% were Ph.D. students, 25% master's degree students, 50% dormitory students, and 40% were residents of Hamadan. Furthermore, 65% had a high computer access history, and 80% had a high internet access history.

In addition, 40% of the participants expressed their experience of using the internet regularly, that is, they were active internet users, and 40% of them used virtual social networks for maintaining relationships, spending time, providing entertainment, and obtaining information. Considering the results of media literacy dimensions and aspects of substance abuse in this study, eventually, 6 categories and 40 subcategories emerged from the data analysis (Table 1).

### First Category: Purpose of Media Messages Sent about Substance Abuse

From the interviews, it was evident that many of the participants believed that the purpose of providing media messages about substance abuse was to become addicted. "Perhaps, the producer's goal is to attract an audience for his program, which will lead to the fact that young people are very inclined to the main destination. In my opinion, this content is mostly produced because of the greater tendency of young people to abuse drugs" (Student No. 2).

The participants also argued that such advertising was for the benefit of sales and economic gain. "In my opinion, it is for economical purposes" (Student No. 3).

In addition, lobbying to reduce taxes, being unable to apply stricter laws, being taken advantage of by greedy politicians behind the scene, confusing the society, and engaging young people as political targets were mentioned as the objectives of producing media content related to substance abuse. "But, there are times that they want to engage society with a trivial idea to stay away from their own excellence and progress for whatever purpose" (Student No. 4).

### Second Category: Construction of Media Messages about Substance Abuse

Another major factor in media literacy about addiction was the producers of media content related to substance abuse. Some of the participants stated that internal and external beneficiaries (politicians) are among the producers of this content. "It may be a matter of diplomacy and ..." (student #4). Another student said, "Maybe, the governments of other countries or politicians are self-interested" (Student No. 10).

Most of the participants believed that manufacturers of addictive substances produced their own media content related to the abuse of addictive substances. "The mafia is the people who produce the addictive substances or are in the business of doing business or want to do marketing for their product" (Student No. 4).

One of the participants said, "Well, the director has this content" (Student No. 7). Students considered profiteering companies to be among the creators of such content.

### Third Category: Factors affecting Audience Selection for Media Messages about Substance Abuse

Another significant aspect of media literacy about addiction was the audience. According to the participants, one of the targets of advertising about addictive substances was people living in a society with a pattern of consumption of norms and customs. For instance, as one of the participants said, "Advertising should be appropriate for individuals and their goals. The audience has its own audience. So, depending on the age group, as well as the cultural and social context of that community, their target group is different" (Student No. 4).

Table 1.

*Identifying students' views on factors related to media literacy about substance abuse*

Categories	Subcategories	Samples of codes
Purpose of media messages sent about substance abuse	Tendency to abuse addictive substances	Addiction to addictive substances, profit and financial gain, marketing, sales, lobbying to reduce taxes and not enforcing strict laws, benefiting from profiteering politicians, and disturbing society
	Sales for economic gain	
	Political intentions	
Construction of media messages about substance abuse	Internal and external political beneficiaries	Companies producing content and advertisements, shareholders of drug addict factories, governments of foreign countries, profiteering politicians, creators of consumer markets, and drug addicts
	Manufacturers of addictive substances	
	Profiteering advertising companies	
Factors affecting audience selection for media messages about substance abuse	Favorable socio-cultural-geographical conditions	Requiring to use addictive substances, lacking personality development, being influenced by friends as well as risky and curious people, being enjoyable and tempting, and being a low-cost entertainment option, people of younger ages, people with high trust, people easy to influence and attract, people with high access, and individuals living in a society with a pattern of normative and customary consumption, which are considered to produce similar content
	Access level to addictive drugs (drug dealers and people involved in drug use)	
	People with low income	
	People with a low level of knowledge and information	
	Needs and demands of individuals	
	Curious people	
	Influence of peer groups	
Formats and techniques used to attract audience's attention to media messages about substance abuse	Highlighting pleasant outcomes	Creating value by highlighting benefits, using actors and athletes in advertising, using cinematic techniques such as camera movements and vibrant colors in advertising, focusing on specific brands, using a variety of shapes and colors of addictive substances, using attractive and luxurious features targeting young people, making extensive advertising, using vitality and pleasure in advertising using the youth, using pretty young women, putting emphasis on attractive features of young people and adolescents such as beauty, using fast delivery channels, putting emphasis on free delivery, claiming to be herbal, using attractive tone and expression
	Media techniques	
	Claiming to be harmless	
	Facilitating communication	
	Excitation	
	Persuasive methods	
	Aesthetics related to audience feeling (new and luxurious attractions)	
Lifestyles, values, and points of view represented in, or omitted from, media messages about substance abuse	Happiness	Experience of new and exciting emotions, hallucinogens, belief in the control and management of drug use, beauty such as eye-popping and slimming, increased focus, happiness, gaining friends' approval, emphasis on consequences of tangible consumption such as simulating an actor, believing in being effective for diseases, normal and customary consumption, eliminating fatigue, entertainment and gathering with friends, inducing a sense of joy and carefreeness, and getting rid of grief
	Relaxation	
	Herbal and not harmful	
	Feeling grown-up	
	Being normal and customary	
	Identification (tangible and understandable results)	
	Gaining acceptance by friends	
	Being effective in low-dose consumption	
	Gaining ideal moods	
Seeking pleasure		
Comparison-Contrast	Exciting	Easier access to a variety of content, differences in the accuracy of the submitted content, specialization in content design and construction, differences in creativity and artistic-visual aspects of content, copy of official content from other sources, wider search feature, ability to send and share information with other people
	Ability to search for more information	
	Sender credit	
	Using specialized design methods	
	Free access	
	Speed and convenience of sending content	
	Accuracy of information	
Differences in data publishing approaches		
Audience's sense of freedom and creativity (closed or open space)		

People involved in the consumption of addictive substances with different access levels were considered among the consumers of such content. Moreover, the factor affecting audience selection for media content was the abuse of addictive substances. Therefore, people may be involved in the consumption and abuse of these materials. In this regard, one of the students said, "People who are familiar with these substances need them, use them, or are involved in recreational entertainment from time to time. Most of them are in this group. Their goal is to get people involved. The same group is involved in a chain or chain for selling materials or for other uses; I mean conflict, finding a connection, or being important to the product for that group" (Student No. 1).

People in the low-income community were the target audience for the content, according to the students, "more expensive and less hassle-free entertainment for the audience" (Student No. 14).

One of the factors influencing the audience's choice of media content was the abuse of addictive substances by people with a low level of knowledge. For example, one of the participants said, "It is important for young people to have a low level of awareness and experience based on their youth" (Student No. 12).

Inexperienced people and individuals who are easy to influence and attract with simple ways were among the other parts of the target audience in terms of participation. Most of the participants considered experience as one of the factors influencing the audience's choice of media content. "Most young people choose their audience" (Student No. 11).

Most of the participants said that the level of demand and needs of people determines whether such advertisements address the audience. "For example, in cases where the student needs these drugs, or during entrance exam sessions where the stress is very high, he is looking for this advertisement to see that something can calm him down" (Student No. 10).

In the opinion of the participants, curious people were regarded as the major audience for the media. "More independent people may be more of an audience for the same creators. I mean, they are independent of life, as experience new things, and are curious" (Student No. 3).

One of the participants said, "Often young people who get together may be in the company of friends. As he does not want to be underestimated, he finally gets involved and uses it" (Student No. 9). Influential peer groups, as other parts of the audience, were also the targets of media content related to substance abuse.

#### Fourth Category: Format and Technique Used to Attract Audience's Attention to Media Messages about Substance Abuse

According to the participants, one of the significant dimensions of media literacy about addiction to convince and attract the target audience was to use techniques and methods mentioned as follows:

1. Highlighting positive consequences, creating value by highlighting benefits, and having a hidden purpose different from the main purpose of advertising are some of the methods used to persuade the audience to follow media content related to substance abuse. "They advertise some items under the guise of sexual enhancer and rejuvenator in which addictive

ingredients are also used. However, they only bold, for example, the rejuvenation feature and states that their product eliminates wrinkles" (Student No. 5).

2. Using media techniques, visual effects, and visual aspects and using cinematic techniques, such as camera movements, vibrant colors, and hidden advertising tricks are other techniques in this regard. One of the students mentioned: "For example, it uses a specific color or camera technique with certain effects to attract the audience" (Student No. 12).
3. Claiming to be herbal and not harmful; "First of all, it is herbal and harmless" (Student No. 12).
4. Providing a facilitated communication, using fast delivery channels, and putting emphasis on free delivery costs: "When you see these ads, it says, 'We'll deliver whatever you want quickly and deliver it to you. No matter you are in the east of the country, or the south, or in Tehran, or a remote city'" (Student No. 18).
5. Attempts were made to convince and attract young consumers and students by using vitality, pleasure of advertising, youth power, and emotions. One of the students said, "For example, I saw a friendly group of people who were happy to use this substance and without any harm" (Student No. 9).
6. Using esthetics related to the audience's feelings: A variety of shapes and colors of addictive substances, using beautiful and luxurious packaging attractive to young people, using vitality and pleasure in advertising through youth power, using beautiful young women, emphasizing on attractions of adolescents and young people such as beauty, and using attractive tones and expressions; "A young man between the ages of 17 and 20 does not think much about life. Rather, he thinks more about, for example, if her skin looks smooth and her eyebrows look like this...; she is more likely to see it than to see the abstract concept of being healthy" (Student No. 5).

Using persuasive methods, such as using actors and athletes in advertising, focusing on a particular brand, providing extensive advertising, and using specific addictive substances for adolescents and young people: One of the participants said, "For example, we see our best actors smoking when they're tired, or angry, but if we want to look at the effects, smoking can be very different. Other drugs are not be used by an actor or a cinematographer or an athlete" (Student No. 8) or "Lighting cigarettes, for example, is a certain brand that is specific to adolescents" (Student No. 4).

#### Fifth Category: Lifestyles, Values, and Points of View Represented in or Omitted from Media Messages about Substance Abuse

Other aspects of media literacy about addiction were lifestyles, values, and points of view omitted from media messages about substance abuse. In this regard, the participants emphasized identification and consequences of tangible consumption of drugs, such as simulating an actor, having instant excitement, believing in the non-addictive nature of advertised substance, and having ideal moods. They all considered hidden beliefs and facts. For instance, one of the participants stated "There is another issue that makes smoking look like a superstar" (Student No. 5).

Moreover, "why, for example, has the smoking tendency of women increased? One of the factors is weight loss using marijuana or increasing the concentration. However, these effects are temporary and I mean all substances have some benefits and the person who uses it, but the harms are more than the benefits" (Student No. 4).

### Sixth Category: Comparison-Contrast in Media Messages about Substance Abuse Sent by Local and Social Networks and Other Media

Students stated that there was a difference between content in different social networks in terms of paying attention to the sense of freedom and creativity of audience, providing accurate information, providing a specialized design, and so on. "But on national television or the Ministry of Health's channel, their clips are less. In comparison, in another social network, we have both free access and more open environment. Also, we can download any clip. On the contrary, on the radio and television or the Ministry of Health channel, we can put some restrictive clips" (Student No. 3) or "Also, the messages are different in terms of the sources sent and their accuracy" (Student No. 4).

### Discussion

This study aimed to explain different aspects of media literacy about substance abuse according to students' viewpoints. Our findings indicated dimensions of media literacy related to drug abuse. Similarly, some other studies have also achieved these dimensions and items in media literacy (Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Karaduman, 2015; Primack et al., 2009; Primack et al., 2006; Thoman & Jolls, 2008).

The findings of this study demonstrated that addictive substance abuse, individual economic gain, and political gain play an important role in the production of media content to encourage the use of addictive substances. In this regard, Wakefield (2003) highlighted the role of media as an observational instructor that could be considered as a persuader or protector against addictive substance abuse. Moreover, the UNODC in 2016 announced that drug traffickers in Central Asia annually earned \$28 billion in net profits from the sale and export of addictive drugs, suggesting the immense economic benefits of producers and promoters of addictive substances.

The results of this study suggest that politicians, advertising companies, drug manufacturers, and profit-seeking uninformed people are among the producers of media content, encouraging addictive substance abuse. Similar to our results, Austin and Pinkleton (2016) in their study and a report by the National Center for Non-Communicable Diseases in 2014 underscored the use of deceptive marketing strategies (for example, advertising and related advertising efforts) by addictive drug manufacturers, leading to drug abuse in adolescents and young people. When a product is produced, the manufacturer tries to sell the product using different advertising methods and changes in the product appearance. Moreover, manufacturers of addictive substances try to attract their consumers by indirect advertising and by changing their brands depending on the level of public awareness and sales growth. Therefore, it is necessary to implement preventive measures, such as promoting media literacy about substance abuse and informing the public, particularly the youth.

On the basis of the findings of this study, the need and demand, cognitive growth, age, and curiosity were the factors influencing the choices of target audience. Austin et al. (2016) observed that young people and adolescents were addressed as a young and inexperienced class with low cognitive growth by the media encouraging addictive substance abuse. Carey et al. (2019) stud-

ied curiosity and sensation seeking in the youth and adolescents as the risk factors for the intention toward addictive substance abuse. The youth and adolescents are generally at risk of substance abuse owing to the psychophysical, emotional, and social changes. These factors predispose the youth and adolescents to media content about substance abuse. Therefore, preventive interventions are necessary regarding substance abuse in students and their families to inform and correct their attitudes and perceptions about addictive substances.

Using persuasive techniques, highlighting initial pleasant consequences, making claims of being harmless, and misusing media techniques and tricks by the media content about substance abuse to attract and persuade the audience to pursue advertising and encourage substance abuse were some of the findings of our research. Oesterle et al. (2018) underlined the role of Facebook as a persuasive medium. According to their results, it tried to attract and retain its audience, particularly the youth, using media techniques and persuasion. Hassanpour et al. (2019) indicated the role of Instagram as a medium that encouraged substance abuse, particularly among young people. Rup et al. (2020) pointed out the use of legal and illegal brands to attract audience to media content about substance abuse, all of which are in line with those of this study. In general, persuasive methods, such as marketing strategies; retaining customers of addictive substances; using elegant, amazing, and breath-taking techniques; providing fake effects; and bringing excitement and competition regarding appearance are the most active methods used by sellers to sell drug to old customers and attract new ones. Hence, the design and implementation of new promotion interventions and production of creative content are essential as a purposive and effective strategy for the prevention of addictive substance abuse in the youth.

According to the findings, being addicted, having improved performance, having ideal moods, emphasizing the emotional aspect of consumers, and fostering a sense of identification were among the lifestyles, values, and points of view represented in or omitted from media messages about substance abuse. Singh et al. (2018) mentioned attaining ideal moods through weight loss and e-cigarette use in advertising. Weitzman et al. (2020) underlined that young people and adolescents used alcohol and were exposed to media for promoting addictive substance abuse to increase learning power and improve performance. It should be noted that the strongest type of television journalism in media content, referred to as "artistic illusion addressed creatively in the minds of content producers," is also found in content persuading substance abuse, which means what is observed is inevitably an illusion. Accordingly, people without media literacy skills and with no tools to recognize the truth may be attracted to a particular element and inevitably believe that what they see has happened in effect (Tyrrell, 1972). Media literacy, therefore, helps people to discover a concealed reality. Therefore, designing interventions for media literacy promotion will be effective in revealing hidden realities and selecting their esthetic type.

The audience's sense of freedom and creativity were among the differences expressed in the content produced by virtual networks. Ruohan et al. (2015) found differences in the accuracy of information and content of media, which are consistent with those of this study. It is noteworthy that narration may be lost

by the author and completed by the audience somewhere in the media content, particularly in computer games. Creative and discerning people evaluate media messages on the basis of their own experiences, beliefs, and values. Hence, it is essential to design interventions for media literacy promotion to identify beliefs, prejudices, and lies of media by students and young people.

#### Limitations and Directions/Suggestions for Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was that the study findings were not generalizable as with other qualitative studies. Nevertheless, our results can provide grounds for valuable interventions in the field of media literacy about substance abuse.

From the students' viewpoint, acquaintance with media and behavioral experiences can be used in planning educational and promotional interventions, supporting media literacy about substance abuse, and developing appropriate evaluation tools in this field.

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**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the Ethics Committee of Hamadan University of Medical Sciences (ID: IR.UMSHA.REC.1398.827).

**Informed Consent:** Written informed consent was obtained from the participation in the study.

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