



Module 5

Representations of substances abuse in mainstream channels

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Module description and DUs summary

Module aims

The Module 5 introduces an educational perspective about the topic of substances of abuse. Specifically, we will focus on the representation of such substances by analyzing, first of all, what are meanings and mechanisms (prejudices and stereotypes) that bring users closer to the consumption of such substances. Moreover, it will briefly trace the historical evolution of the phenomenon of substances of abuse take in account the role of the mass media both in the 1900 century and in the new Millennium.

DUs summary

DU 1 - Representations: meaning, mechanism, prejudice: medium and audience (EDU)

DU 2 - Phenomenological and historical representation of substances abuse in literature, films, songs, videogames and other mainstream channels - until 1999

DU 3 - Phenomenological and historical representation of substances of abuse, including NPS, in films, songs, videogames and other mainstream channels - from the 21st century



DU 1

Media and Representations

Contents

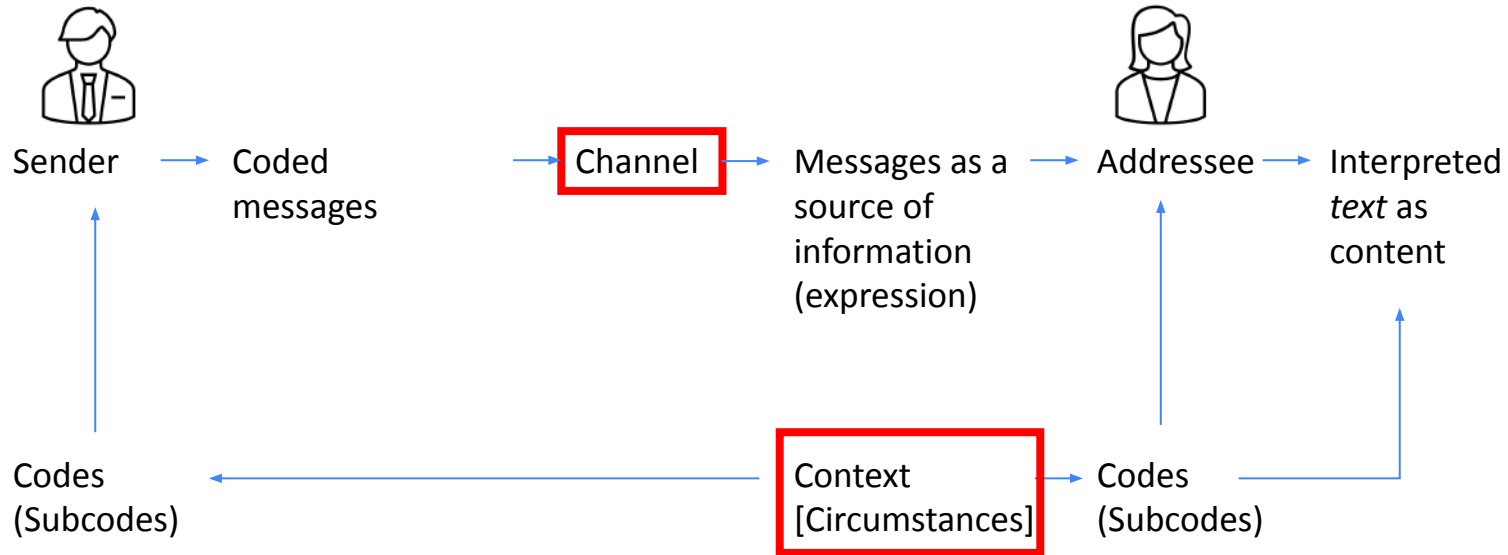
- The foundations of communication
- What is «Media»?
- How people perceive media?
- Media effects



The foundations of communication

Umberto Eco's communications model:

<http://www.signosemio.com/eco/semiotic-process-and-classification-of-signs.asp>



Eco, Umberto, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979 [1976].

What is «media»

The term media, which is the plural of *medium*, refers to the **communication channels** through which we disseminate news, music, movies, education, promotional messages and other data. It includes physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, radio, billboards, telephone, the Internet, fax, billboards and social networks.

It describes the various ways through which we communicate in society. Because it refers to all means of communication, everything ranging from a telephone call to the evening news on television can be called media.

When talking about reaching a very large number of people we say **mass media**. **Local media** refers to, for example, your local newspaper, or local/regional TV/radio channels. **Social media** refers to online communication channels where communities interact, share content, and collaborate.

Source: <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/media-definition-meaning/>

How people perceive media?

One of the most interesting theories formulated is the **Katz's Theory of Uses and Gratifications (UGT)**.

Before then, the audience was considered as a unique entity without any conscience or any preference: Katz's point of view remarked that it is much more than that.

Audiences are active in choosing the media they consume and are aware of the reasons they want to consume those media and consciously use those reasons to make media selections that will fulfill their needs and desires.

Source: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-uses-and-gratifications-theory-in-media-psychology-5217572>

Livingstone, S. (1997) The work of Elihu Katz. In J. Corner, P. Schlesinger, and R. Silverstone, (Eds.), International Handbook of Media Research. London: Routledge.

How people perceive media? (part 2)

1. Media use is motivated and goal-oriented. People always have a reason for consuming media, even if it's simply habit or entertainment.
2. People select media based on their expectation that it will satisfy specific wants and needs.
3. Media use is driven by individual social and psychological factors.
4. Media compete with other forms of communication, especially in-person communication, for selection and use in the fulfillment of needs and desires. Today, since so much of the media we consume is mobile, that competition is more immediate than ever as even when engaging in in-person communication, media accessed through mobile devices, such as text messages, social networks, and apps are also competing for our attention.
5. Because people are active media users, media messages don't exert especially

Media effects: how media affect our behaviour?

Demonstrating a correlation between media content and their effects on the audiences is hard. Researches found this relationship very weak and very much influenced by the context.

Does this mean that media do not have effects on the audience?

The answer is... it's complicated.

International Journal of Communication 16(2022), Book Review 2958–2960 1932–8036/2022BKR0009
James Shanahan, Media Effects: A Narrative Perspective (Key Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies), Reviewed by Marco Gui
Available at https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/19747/3800?fbclid=IwAR14G9S_5WwVhZBo2LSqzAwnTk5F0IAaxQsjA9b_t8N4o_Dur2Sj7XSzjxo

Media effects: how media affect our behaviour? (part 2)

Shanahan's media effects theory is that...

...media do not affect audiences directly (i.e.: a violent video game doesn't transform someone who plays it into a violent person)

but rather that...

...media contribute to shape into the audiences the way they perceive the world (i.e.: a violent video game narrates a violent world, with consequences to the behavior of the players such as fear of the otherness, less trust in others, going out less, etc...)

James Shanahan, (2022) Media Effects: A Narrative Perspective (Key Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies), Polity

DU 2

Phenomenological and historical representation of substances abuse until 1999

Drug use has been common since ancient times and has been common in almost every society.

“Early humans discovered that eating some plants gave a feeling of relaxation, happiness, drowsiness, or peace (...). Some gave a feeling of increased energy, alertness, and stamina. And some caused strange sensations, terrifying visions, or a profoundly different awareness” (Gahlinger, 2004, p. 5).

“Humans have been ingesting drugs for thousands of years. And throughout recorded time, significant numbers of nearly every society on earth have used one or more drugs to achieve certain desired physical or mental states. Drug use comes close to being a universal, both worldwide and throughout history” (Goode, 2008, p. 176).

Look at this timeline about drugs and alcohol

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9924-timeline-drugs-and-alcohol/>

Gahlinger, P. (2004). *Illegal drugs: A complete guide to their history, chemistry, use, and abuse*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Goode, E. (2008). *Deviant behavior* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Use and abuse

“We can remember how in Europe drugs use was already present in the times of the Greeks before, and of the Roman Empire, subsequently. The Dionysian rites and the mysteries of Eleusi are historical examples of the use of psychoactive plants” (Bragazzi et al., 2018, p.7).

Similar examples can be found in all continents and societies. “In most cultures throughout history, only a small number of drugs were in common use. The remainder were not explicitly forbidden; there was no need, since they lacked the cultural framework to make them desirable. (...) The prohibition of drugs in the twentieth century had its roots in a (...) reaction against cultural decadence. A hundred years ago, many of today’s illicit drugs were available in any high-street chemist. (...) Alcohol, and intoxication in general, was a clear and present danger: an offense against the sovereign spirit of reason and an invitation to disorder and self-destructiveness. (...) These social contradictions were projected onto dangerous objects of consumption, such as drugs and alcohol, creating taboos around their use” (Jay, 2010).

Bragazzi, N.L., Khabbache, H., Vecchio, I., Martini, M., Perduca, M., Zerbetto, R., Re, T.S. (2018). Ancient shamanism and modern psychotherapy: from anthropology to evidence-based psychedelic medicine. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1.

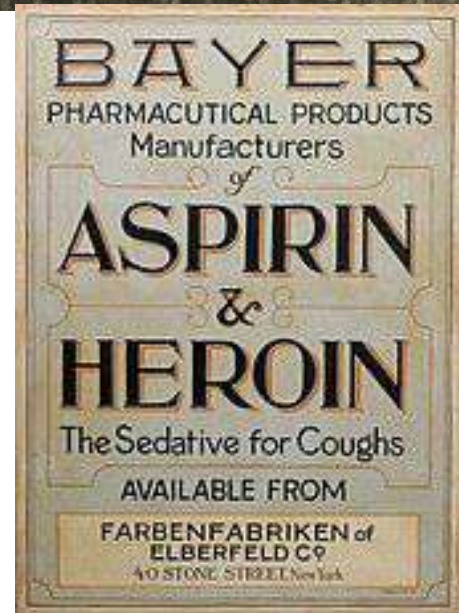
Jay, M. (2010). *High Society: Mind-Altering Drugs in History and Culture*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

Opium

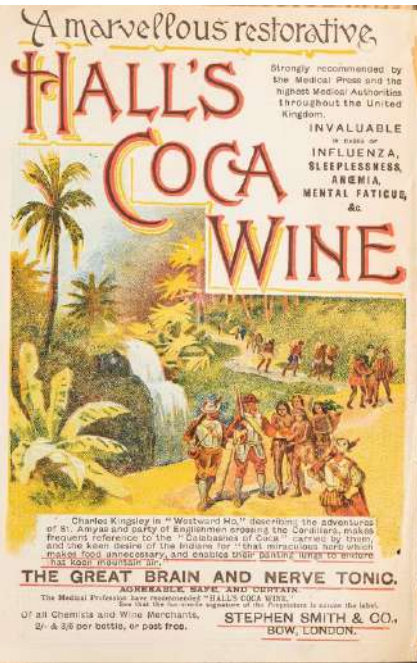
Opium is produced from opium poppy and morphine and heroin are a derivative. Opium was widely available in the 19th century, sold by barbers, tobacconists and stationers. "Opium's uses were manifold, from toothaches and bruises to cough and diarrhea. The working class used it as a stimulant prior to going to work, and mothers found laudanum (a form of opium) useful for quieting babies" (Ng, 2016, p.14). So it was normal to smoke opium in coffee shops or to use it with childre. Later while opium was considered "respectable" for the middle class, its spread to the working class caused concerns about opium abuse contributing to their "degeneracy". In addition to that, opium became associated with Chinese immigrants causing public sentiment and xenophobia; in particular, white women were supposed to be at risk of being corrupted by foreigners (Berridge, Edwards, 1987).

Berridge, V., Edwards, G. (1987). *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England*. Reprint ed. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.

Ng, S.V. (2016). Opium Use in 19th-Century Britain: The Roots of Moralism in Shaping Drug Legislation. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol.11, 6, p.14.



Cocaine



Cocaine comes from the coca leaf and its use can be traced back to ancient tribal customs of the Incas in the 16th century. Spanish *conquistadores* discovered coca leaf chewing among Incas. Coca leaves produced euphoria and other desirable effects. For example, the conquistadores gave coca to the Indians to keep them enslaved and secure more work from them (Brecher, 1972).

In the XIX and XX centuries cocaine was used to cure depression, obesity and asthma. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, in 1884 wrote an essay about cocaine, "Über Coca", in which he describes "a gorgeous excitement" upon first ingesting it, an "exhilaration and lasting euphoria," as well as noting the suppression of fatigue and hunger. Cocaine became the substance used by intellectuals for its capacity to enlarge creativity and critical skills: also well known fictional characters were presented as cocaine's consumers, as Sherlock Holmes.



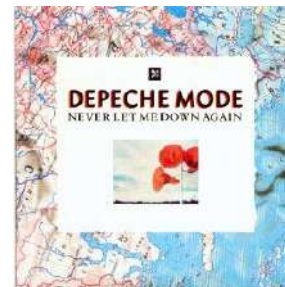
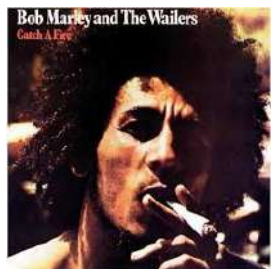
“In the East (...) the first ascertained evidence of using cannabis for therapeutic purposes dates back to the third millennium before Christ (BC) as described in the Nei-Ching text, written between 2700 and 2600. The plant was prescribed to treat diarrhoea, bronchitis, migraine, insomnia, appetite and nerve disorders. In India it is witnessed the use of cannabis in the second millennium in the sacred texts of the Vedas, where the demon of the nostrils Vide-Vadat, is symbolized by hemp, which also has the function of favouring ecstasy. In India, hemp is called bhang and takes a significant religious meaning as it is the favourite plant of Shiva God” (Bragazzi et al, 2018, pp.7-8). As the previous substances, in Western world also cannabis was used for medical treatments in XIX and XX century, and it was cultivated for its fiber and textiles, but after the II World War the commercial cultivation stopped by then, due to decreased demand compared to increasingly popular artificial fibers.

Bragazzi, N.L., Khabbache, H., Vecchio, I., Martini, M., Perduca, M., Zerbetto, R., Re, T.S. (2018). Ancient shamanism and modern psychotherapy: from anthropology to evidence-based psychedelic medicine. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1.



Sex, drugs and rock'n roll

.... rock performances have come to be associated, within the popular imagination, with a whole series of disturbances and disorders, from cinema seats destroyed by the hand of Teddy Boys, through Beatlemania, to hippie events and festivals, in which freedom was expressed less aggressively, through nudism, drugs and generalised spontaneity” (Hebdige, 2004, p. 216). Reggae music (with marijuana), blues and rock music (with heroin and cocaine), beat music (with LSD), house music (with acids), from 1930 until now, had its representatives (and unfortunately also its deads). We can assume that music reflects the main events that concern youth experiences, namely the ones related to practices and consumption (Vuolo et al., 2013; Calado, 2007). The enumerations to this type of themes in the lyrics and videos of artists or bands are countless (namely in: Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds – The Beatles; Brown Sugar – The Rolling Stones; Needle And The Damage Done – Neil Young; Light My Fire – The Doors...) (Martins, 2019).



Calado, V. G. (2007). Trance psicadélico, drogas sintéticas e paraísos artificiais – representações: Uma análise a partir do ciberespaço. *Toxicodependências*, 13(1), 21–28.

Hebdige, D. (2004). *Subcultura. El significado del estilo*. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós Ibérica.

Martins, A., Guerra, P. (2021). Rock'n'roll, drugs, stigmas and risks. *Cidades*. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cidades/4474>

Vuolo, M., et al. (2013). Taste clusters of music and drugs. Evidence from three analytic levels. *British Journal of Sociology*, 65(3), 529–54.

and movies?

“Alcohol and cigarettes are prevalent in films. Until 1950, the representation of drugs in movies was simple and clearly related to their illegality, the destruction of users and destabilization of society. In the sixties this representation, influenced by youth subcultures, became more complex and with alternative views, sometimes linked to rebellion, like in *Easy Rider* (1969), or to entertainment, like in *Nine to five* (1980). In *American Beauty* (1999) the use of marijuana is shared between different ages and look less problematic than the use of heroine, always represented as the way to destruction and death together with other problems (*Apocalypse Now*, 1979; *Scarface*, 1983); or the cocaine, seen as the consequence of the age of capitalism and the desire to reach high standards (*Bright Lights, Big City*, 1988; *Light Sleeper*, 1992). *Trainspotting* (1996), *La Haine* (1995), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) represent in different ways the use and abuse of drugs without judgment, but just showing reality (Markert, 2013).

Markert, J. (2013). *Hooked in film: substance abuse on the big screen*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.



DU 3

Phenomenological and historical representation of substances of abuse from the 21st century

Research findings

Exposure to smoking-related media messages is now known to be independently associated with adolescent smoking initiation:

- **Our findings suggest independent associations between marijuana and alcohol use and media exposure**
- **Music exposure is associated with marijuana use while movie exposure is related to alcohol use**
- **Factors mediating these relationships may include the contexts in which substances of abuse are presented within different media and the social and environmental contexts in which adolescents experience media”**

Source: Association between Media Exposure and Marijuana and Alcohol Use in Adolescents Primack, Brian A. et al. Journal of Adolescent Health, Volume 42, Issue 2, 3, [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(07\)00502-2/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(07)00502-2/fulltext)

the argument that the medium is the message is in a way of specific importance when it comes to movies

“a movie can both influence the **audience’s mindset** about a topic as well as resemble the **public opinion** about a topic”.

“there should be certain patterns in the way drug intoxication scenes are presented to the spectator. **The ways of representing drug intake are in a way linked to the ideology and belief system of the society.** Of course, movies can also aim to change the social attitude towards a topic by presenting the topic in a contradictory way of the general social belief system. However, a film may aim to not only change the mindsets within a society, but also the general attitude towards a topic can change in society”.

“all films somehow interlink with a certain ideology. Thus, **movies are not merely entertaining, nor simple representations**, but in fact “the party line, effectively blinding the masses with false consciousness” (Young, 2012:30).



Source: Katrin GRASSL (2018).The Representation of Drugs in Movies: Narrative and Social Functions, <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvugrhs/content/titleinfo/2878997/full.pdf>

drug abuse is the symptom of other mental, social and personal problems every individual can have. This leads to the question if drug users are portrayed as labile and instable and I would say that this is not always the case

“drug intoxication scenes underly narrative and social functions that fill scenes with meaning beyond the actual visual representation, is very much true. The exemplary films and scenes do work with strong meaning that goes beyond the mere representation and includes more so a **strong social critique**”.

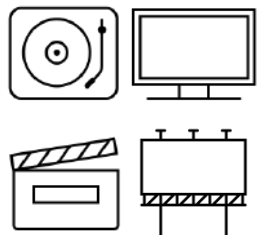
“...the topic of drugs is controversial and therefore already contains social critique and a social function in a way. Drugs do fulfill a social function in our society which means that **representations of such in movies do only portray the social function drugs can have in real life**. For instance, the spectator sees that a character smokes a cigarette while being stressed. This picture occurred numerous times in the analyzed movies and carries the trope of tension reduction through nicotine. In that sense, the **social function** of nicotine is linked to tension reduction and is universally understood by the audience”.

Source: Katrin GRASSL (2018)The Representation of Drugs in Movies: Narrative and Social Functions, <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvugrhs/content/titleinfo/2878997/full.pdf>

The Influence of Mass Media on Attitudes and Behaviors of the New Generation

The role of Emotions - they play a critical role in the way the mind works. Based on the emotions experienced, attitudes and motivations that drive a person to act in a certain direction are determined. Not too surprisingly, emotional centers are (even if a person is not aware of it) the primary target at which much of mass media communication is directed-with more or less intention (Walsh, Gentile, 2002)

New generations: the “favourite” target audience of massive communication - some of the many studies carried out in the New Millennium show that teenagers are the ones who spend the most hours ever in front of the TV (Mass Media's favorite vehicle). In fact, according to data from the Science Group of European Alcohol and Health Forum (2009), the status of potential new consumers attracts the attention of advertisers, making them the main targets of massive marketing campaigns, geared to build target brand loyalty.



Types of media and their relation with substances of abuse - some research shows that taking certain substances of abuse appears to be more correlated with certain specific media. For example, there is a strong link between exposure to **music** that incites cannabis use and actual cannabis use (Primack, 2009). Or, alcohol abuse is strongly linked to **movies** (Sargent et al., 2001).

In fact, many **movies** feature characters who are taken as role models despite having unhealthy habits (alcohol use, drug use, etc.). **Advertising**, in all its forms, also has a strong tendency to promote the use of alcohol and smoke as a vehicles to increase social acceptance (Wills, 2009).

Mass Media influence: a case study on one of the most highest rated reality show in USA

Celebrity behaviours and susceptibility of young people - the danger of spreading damaging behavior is very high especially among younger people, who are more attracted to (and tend to imitate) the behaviors of their idols (actors, rockstars, etc.) and are, as a result, more malleable (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2000). This issue is then likely to be amplified if, who are exposed to certain stimulus, are young people with emotion management problems or other disorders such as social anxiety etc. (Contardi et al. 2013). So, as already seen in the previous slides, the role of emotions in the interpretation and management of certain harmful stimuli conveyed by the media is confirmed as fundamental.

Reality show: endorsement or rejection of substances of abuse? An interesting study conducted in the USA returns a clear example of the negative influence of the media toward the topic we are talking about. Blair et al. (2005) analyzed numerous episodes of the most-watched reality show in the U.S. at the beginning of the Millennium - titled *The Osburne* - in order to analyze how many messages of endorsement or rejection related to substances of abuse appeared within it. In its whole, the study identified 91 depiction of substances of abuse and, the **balance between the endorsing and rejecting messages was in favor of the endorsements**. In addition, has been confirmed that "verbal" disapproval messages had potentially less impact on younger viewers, this is because **behaviors acted in favor of substances of abuse are more influential**. In the table below, we can see a summary of the data collected (Blair et al. 2005, p. 1518).

Substance	Endorsement	Rejection	Total
Alcohol	64% (30)	36% (17)	52% (47)
Tobacco	75% (12)	25% (4)	18% (16)
Drug	46% (13)	54% (15)	31% (28)
Total	60% (55)	40% (36)	100% (91)

“Mainstream media depictions of NPS markets impacted on trends in use and policy turns in various ways.”*

Media language in relation to
NPS

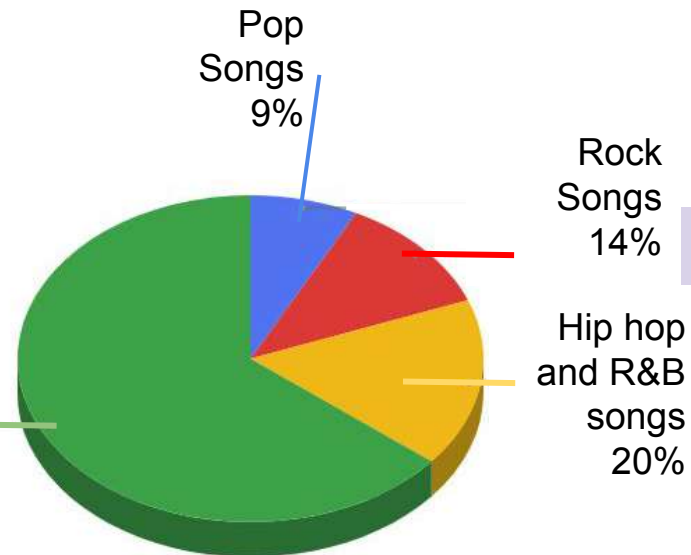
to direct public contempt
towards people in a
marginalised situation or with
poverty-related problems

People who for some reason are associated
with drug use



“[...] to representations of drug use in the
lyrics of contemporary popular music.
In 2005, a content analysis of almost
300 of the most popular songs”**

Rap Songs
77%



*Alexandrescu, L. (2018). 'Ethnobotanicals' and 'Spice zombies': new psychoactive substances in the mainstream media. *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, 25(4), 356-364.

**Motyka, M. A., & Al-Imam, A. (2021). Representations of psychoactive drugs' use in mass culture and their impact on audiences. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(11), 6000.

“Inaccurate representations of drug use portrayed in films may also distort the image of this phenomenon.” ** (Motyka, 2021)

“Filmmakers often address both health-enhancing and risky behaviors, and at the same time, films with scenes of drug use have the potential **to model behavior**”**



“According to Brian Braiker, methamphetamine has never had better marketing than in the ‘Breaking Bad’ series”**

In **47**
Oscar-nominated films from
2008 to 2011

Were identified a total of
515 scenes of drug use
in these films.

Mass media can both promote pro-health culture and foster anti-health activities



“Observation plays an essential role in social learning, during which the frequency of observed behavioral patterns favors a more substantial **impact on an individual.**” **

“respondents admitted that viewing mass media content with drug messages influenced their decision to use these drugs”**

“contents of popular culture which may influence drug use (e.g., films and books presenting drugs in a positive light and pro-drug declarations of famous and popular people admitting their experiences with drugs) are also of considerable importance”**

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