

Stigmatizing Narratives: Analyzing Drug Use Depictions in U.K. Digital News Media

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Abstract : This research explores the portrayal of drug use in U.K. digital news media, a topic of critical importance due to its influence on addiction treatment, recovery efforts, and public perceptions. Substance use disorder (SUD) as one of the most stigmatized health conditions globally, with media representations playing a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes. Despite the impact of media portrayals, there has been no comprehensive analysis of drug-related representations in U.K. digital news media for over thirteen years. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing contemporary digital news depictions of drug use, focusing on how these portrayals influence public perception and contribute to stigma. This research will examine tabloid, national, and regional East Midlands press sites to understand current trends in drug-related reporting. The study will build on previous research, such as the 2010 UKDPC study, which revealed that drug users were often vilified, and that coverage was predominantly focused on criminal justice rather than recovery. Given the rise in drug-related deaths in the U.K. and the exacerbation of the drug crisis post-Brexit, this analysis is timely and crucial. The findings are expected to reveal how digital media continues to perpetuate stigma and misinformation about drug use. By comparing these findings with U.S. studies, the research will contribute to a better understanding of cross-cultural differences in drug-related media representations and inform policy discussions. The U.K. Government's ten-year plan to combat illegal drugs, which emphasizes reducing stigma, will benefit from this research by highlighting the need for improved media representations. Additionally, the study will engage with recent U.K. and international research on media stigma towards SUD to provide a broader context and comparative perspective. Ultimately, this study aims to drive changes in media reporting and contribute to the development of more effective public policies and interventions. By addressing current gaps in research and providing evidence-based recommendations, this work seeks to support the U.K. Government's objectives and improve the media's role in addressing drug-related issues.

Keywords : addiction, UK news media, media representations, depiction of drug use

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