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Article

The Contribution of University Media to Reducing the Phenomenon of Drug Addiction in Iraq: A Field Study

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Abstract: This research aims to reveal the contribution of university media, as a preventive tool, to reducing the phenomenon of drug addiction among university youth in Iraq, in light of the country's shift from a transit corridor for drugs to a consumer market, and students' growing reliance on digital platforms as a source of information. The research is descriptive in nature and adopts the survey method, drawing on the uses and gratifications theory. A questionnaire was used to collect data from a simple random sample of (400) male and female students at the University of Baghdad who follow the university's pages on social media platforms, and the results were interpreted in light of the dimensions of university media and the dimensions of the addiction phenomenon. The research found that students rely primarily on the digital dimension of university media: (58%) of them follow the university's pages on social networking sites, and (93%) follow it daily. Meanwhile, awareness methods are dominated by traditional in-person approaches such as seminars and lectures (47%), while interactive digital formats are absent. (91%) of students considered the quality of university media in this field to be below a good level, and its contribution to reducing addiction was moderate (3.38), highest in the social dimension and lowest in the cognitive dimension. The gratifications obtained were also found to be affected by age alone, not by gender or marital status. The research recommends moving awareness campaigns to digital platforms with interactive content, strengthening the cognitive dimension and students' refusal skills, expanding partnerships with health institutions and anti-drug authorities, and establishing permanent health media units in Iraqi universities, thereby enhancing the university's role in protecting its students from the dangers of this scourge.

Keywords: University Media, Drug Addiction, University Youth, Dimensions, University of Baghdad

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1. Introduction

Drug addiction is one of the most dangerous social phenomena facing contemporary societies, given the devastating impact it has on individuals—affecting both physical and mental health—on families—undermining their cohesion and stability—and on society at large—threatening its security, economy, and values. Iraq has not been immune to this phenomenon; while in previous decades it was classified merely as a transit country for narcotics, official data and specialized reports from recent years indicate a gradual shift into a consumer nation. This transition has been accompanied by the growing prevalence of various narcotics and psychotropic substances—particularly among the youth—fueled by the country's instability, porous borders, rising unemployment, and rapid social and cultural transformations.

While security and legislative measures to combat this phenomenon are essential—such as those enshrined in the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law No. 50 of 2017—international experience has demonstrated that a security-focused approach alone is insufficient to eradicate the problem. It must be supported by a preventive and awareness-raising strategy that addresses root causes rather than just consequences, aiming to fortify individuals—cognitively, psychologically, and ethically—before they fall into the cycle of drug abuse. In this context, educational and media institutions play a pivotal role as the first line of defense in fostering preventive awareness. In this context, the university occupies a distinctive position; it encompasses the demographic segment most vulnerable due to age, yet simultaneously possesses the greatest capacity to influence its social environment and foster awareness within it. The university's mission extends beyond education and scientific research to include community service and contributions toward addressing societal issues. University media—in its various forms, such as campus newspapers and magazines, student radio stations and channels, official websites and social media pages, as well as seminars, campaigns, and awareness-raising activities—serves as a potent tool in fulfilling this mission. This effectiveness stems from its proximity to the student body, its credibility derived from an academic identity, and its ability to engage young people in their own language and through the platforms they frequent.

However, the question remains: to what extent does Iraqi university media actually perform this role? Does it treat drug addiction as a central issue demanding a planned, sustained awareness campaign, or does it limit itself to sporadic coverage tied to specific occasions? Do its messages reach students and influence their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors? It is against this backdrop that this topic was selected.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Problem

In recent years, Iraq has witnessed a critical shift regarding the drug phenomenon, transitioning from a transit country to a consumer nation. Young people—particularly university students—have become the demographic most at risk, driven by accumulated economic, social, and psychological crises, as well as the ease of promotion and access facilitated by the digital environment. While security and legislative measures are essential, they are insufficient unless supported by a preventive, awareness-raising approach that reaches young people within their own environments.

By virtue of its educational and intellectual mission and its social responsibility, the university possesses a powerful tool for this role: university media. This medium reaches students daily through websites and social media platforms. However, questions remain regarding the extent to which this media effectively fulfills its preventive role, the nature of the methods and techniques it employs, and the degree to which it satisfies students' needs in confronting this phenomenon. Thus, the research problem is defined by the following central question:

What is the contribution of University of Baghdad media to curbing drug addiction among university youth?

2.2 Research Hypotheses

1. There are statistically significant differences in the gratifications students derive from university media regarding addiction prevention, attributable to demographic variables (gender, age, marital status).
2. There is a statistically significant relationship between the methods used by university media to curb addiction and the students' motives for following it.
3. There are statistically significant differences in the levels of satisfaction achieved by students, attributable to the methods employed by university media to curb addiction.

2.3 Significance of the Research

2.3.1 Academic Significance:

The research contributes to enriching Iraqi media studies—specifically in the fields of specialized media and health/awareness-raising media—and addresses a gap in research

regarding the role of university media in tackling social issues. Most previous studies have focused on general media outlets or on the security, legal, and medical aspects of the phenomenon.

2.3.2 Practical Significance:

The findings can benefit university administrations, their media and public relations departments, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and anti-narcotics agencies. This assistance aids in evaluating university media performance and formulating more effective awareness strategies based on scientific data rather than conjecture.

2.3.3 Societal Significance:

The research addresses a phenomenon that threatens a vital segment of society—university youth—upon whom the country relies for building its future.

2.3.4 Research Objectives

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the extent and nature of university media attention regarding the phenomenon of drug addiction.
2. To examine the content, methods, technical formats, and persuasive appeals used in awareness-raising messages.
3. To measure the extent of student exposure to these messages and their level of trust in them.
4. To determine the impact of university media on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels regarding drugs.
5. Identifying the obstacles facing university media and proposing a vision to activate its preventive role.

2.4 Research Structure

The nature of the research necessitated its division into three chapters, preceded by this introduction and followed by a conclusion summarizing the key findings and recommendations. The first chapter addresses the methodological framework, covering the research problem, questions, hypotheses, significance, objectives, methodology, population, sample, instrument, scope, and terminology, as well as a review of previous studies. The second chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework; its first section examines university media—addressing its concept, functions, uses, channels, and dimensions—while the second section explores the phenomenon of drug addiction in Iraq, covering its concept, causes, and dimensions. The third chapter is devoted to the field study (practical framework), presenting the procedures and results of the questionnaire administered to a sample of 400 students from the University of Baghdad; the findings are interpreted in light of the dimensions of university media and drug addiction, alongside hypothesis testing.

2.5 Study Population/Sample

400 subjects, with a justification for the sample size.

2.7 Research Instrument

A questionnaire comprising four thematic sections, along with details regarding its validity and reliability (0.834).

3. Results

((Previous Studies))

The researcher reviewed a number of recent Arab and foreign studies relevant to the research topic. From these, ten studies published between 2021 and 2026 in peer-reviewed journals were selected and arranged from the most recent to the oldest. They are presented and discussed below:

3.1 Arab studies

1. Study by Mahmoud Hamdi Ahmed and Ammar Saad Mustaf (2026): "Iraqi University Youth's Reliance on Satellite Channels as a Source of Information for Raising Awareness About the Dangers of Drugs" .[1]

This study aimed to examine the extent to which Iraqi university students rely on satellite channels as a source of information regarding the dangers of drugs, to identify the role these channels play in raising awareness of such risks, and to determine the specific channels and program formats that fulfill this function.

The researchers employed a descriptive survey method, using a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 200 male and female students at the College of Media, Al-Iraqia University, within the framework of Media System Dependency Theory.

The study found that Al-Sharqiya and Al-Iraqiya were the leading channels upon which respondents relied heavily. It revealed that satellite channels play a positive role in raising awareness about the dangers of drugs, and that talk shows and documentary reports are the most effective and influential program formats for educating university students on the issue.

2. Study by Nada Omran Hussein (2025): "Media and the Ethics of Press Coverage Regarding Drug-Related Issues in Iraq: An Analytical Study of Al-Sabah, Al-Zaman, and Al-Mada Newspapers".[2]

This study aimed to identify the characteristics of press coverage regarding drug-related issues in the Iraqi media. It employed a descriptive approach using content analysis, applied to the newspapers Al-Sabah, Al-Zaman, and Al-Mada for the period from January 1 to March 31, 2024. The study found that Iraqi newspapers devoted a moderate level of attention to reporting on drug-related issues and placed a strong emphasis on the local scope.

3. Study by Jamal Hammoud Al-Bahri (2025): "The Role of Media in Addressing and Raising Community Awareness Regarding the Dangers of Drugs" [3]

This study aimed to assess the importance of Yemeni media outlets that publish or broadcast content regarding the dangers of drugs, measure the impact of local media on public awareness of the risks of drug abuse, and identify the challenges facing the media's role in combating drugs. Additionally, it sought to determine the extent to which this media role reaches the administrative staff, faculty members, and students at Dhamar University.

The researcher investigated the university community and its surrounding social environment in the city of Dhamar, while also analyzing awareness-raising programs and press reports. The study derives its significance from being one of the few Arab studies to focus on the university community as a setting for measuring the media's impact on drug awareness.

4. Study by Murtada Hassan Ali Al-Shammari (2024): "Media Coverage of the Drug Phenomenon in Iraqi Online Journalism: An Analytical Study of Al-MadaNewspaper's Website as a Case Study"[2]. This study aimed to identify the frameworks used by the Iraqi online press to address the issue of narcotics. The researcher employed a content analysis method, conducting a comprehensive survey of all relevant articles published on the Al-Mada newspaper website over a six-month period in 2024, totaling 71 items. The results revealed that the arrest of drug traffickers was the most prominent topic covered by the site, while inadequate deterrence or punishment was identified as a primary factor contributing to the spread of drugs in Iraq. Furthermore, the media coverage highlighted the establishment of rehabilitation centers and treatment facilities as a solution to mitigate the risks associated with this phenomenon. The study recommended the creation of specialized mental health clinics for treating addicts, staffed by qualified psychologists.

5. Study by Raed bin Ali Abdulrahman Al-Amroud (2021): "The Role of Media Campaigns in Enhancing Media Awareness Among Youth Regarding Drug Prevention: The 'Nebras' Program as a Case Study"[4]. This study—derived from a master's thesis—sought to examine the media campaigns launched by the Saudi Ministry of the Interior to combat drug abuse, as well as the key awareness-raising information provided by the "Nebras" program and its contribution to curbing the spread of drugs among young people.

The researcher employed a survey method, targeting a simple random sample of 280 young men who frequent coffee shops in Jeddah Governorate. The study found that 50.8% of the respondents follow the Nebras program, and that the program contributed to a 54% increase in their knowledge regarding drug awareness; furthermore, 59.2% expressed satisfaction with the program as a source of awareness. Short message service (SMS) communications ranked highest among the program's outreach activities, while insufficient publicity and promotion were identified as the primary reasons for not following the program.

3.2 Foreign Studies

1. Hill et al. (2025) study: "Exploration of Cannabis Use with Excessive Social Media Use Among U.S. College Students"

This study aimed to examine the relationship between cannabis (marijuana) use and excessive social media use among American university students. Researchers conducted a secondary analysis of data from the 2022–2023 National College Health Assessment, involving 65,052 students aged 18 to 24.

The study found that 23.2% of students reported using cannabis within the previous 30 days and that users were more likely to engage in excessive social media use. The researchers concluded that these platforms serve as an effective channel for reaching students with awareness-raising messages regarding the risks of cannabis use.

2. Siddika, Ellithorpe, and Reilly (2025) study: "College Students' Engagement with Social Media Messaging from University Health Services"[5]

This study aimed to analyze the content of health-related messages published by university health service centers on Instagram and to measure student engagement with them. It employed a content analysis method grounded in the "Reasoned Action Approach," focusing on its key components: target behavior, expectations, social norms, and self-efficacy. The results revealed that 43.7% of the posts from these centers incorporated at least one component of the approach, and that student engagement was higher for messages linking healthy behavior to improved academic performance and those that bolstered self-efficacy. This study is considered closely aligned with the concept of university media addressed in the current research.

3. Cui et al. (2025) study: "How Are Pro- and Anti-Cannabis Messaging Exposures Related to US Young Adult Cannabis Use-Related Factors? [6].

This study aimed to examine the relationship between exposure to pro- and anti-cannabis messages across various communication channels and young people's perceptions and behaviors regarding cannabis use; it employed a survey method involving a sample of 4,031 young Americans.

The findings revealed that increased exposure to pro-cannabis messages and limited exposure to anti-cannabis messages were associated with higher social acceptance of use and lower perceived risk of harm, and that the digital environment and direct communication were among the most influential sources of such messages.

4. Study by Willoughby et al. (2024): "Exposure to Pro- and Anti-Cannabis Social Media Messages and Teens' and College Students' Intentions to Use Cannabis" [7].

This study sought to examine the impact of exposure to pro- and anti-cannabis messages on social media on the intentions of adolescents and university students to use the substance, utilizing two online surveys involving 350 adolescents and 966 university students in Washington State. The results showed that exposure to pro-cannabis messages was associated with an increased intention to use, whereas exposure to anti-cannabis messages was associated with a decrease in this intention—an effect mediated indirectly by negative beliefs regarding the consequences of use and by perceived norms among university students.

5. Fuller et al.'s study (Fuller et al., 2024): "Understanding and Preventing the Advertising and Sale of Illicit Drugs to Young People through Social Media: A Multidisciplinary Scoping Review" [8]

This study aimed to review the literature regarding the promotion and sale of illicit drugs to young people via social media platforms, as well as prevention strategies, employing a multidisciplinary systematic scoping review methodology.

It found that drug sales have shifted to popular applications that grant dealers broad access to children and adolescents; it also noted a scarcity of rigorous evaluations of prevention campaigns on these platforms and called for greater collaboration between computational and qualitative approaches in studying the phenomenon.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Section One

University Media

3.3 The Concept of University Media

3.3.1 Linguistic and Terminological Significance

University Media (Linguistic Definition): The term i'lām (media/informing) is the verbal noun derived from the quadriliteral verb a'lama (to inform/notify), stemming from the root ('-l-m). One says a'lamahu al-khabar or a'lamahu bihi, meaning to inform someone of the news or make them aware of it. Thus, linguistically, i'lām signifies the act of informing and conveying knowledge about something to others. As for the adjective jāmi'ī (university-related), it is a relational adjective derived from jāmi'ah (university)—which, in contemporary usage, refers to a higher education institution comprising multiple faculties. Consequently, the linguistic definition of "university media" is the act of informing or communicating that originates from, or is connected to, the university. [9]

University media, in terms of terminology, is defined as all forms of communication taking place within, originating from, or centering on higher education institutions—including the production, content, utilization, and impact of such communication—whether conducted by actors from within the university institution or from outside it.[10]

3.3.2 University Media in Arab Literature

The concept of university media in Arab literature has not received the same level of theoretical grounding as other forms of media. This has prompted some researchers to dedicate studies to establishing its theoretical foundations—such as the study by Amer Mohammed Al-Dhabiani, published in the *Al-Hikma Journal for Media and Communication Studies* at Dhamar University.[11]

Recent Iraqi studies approach university media as a communication system linking the university to its broad audience. For instance, a study conducted at Wasit University defined the university media audience as comprising faculty members, staff, and students alike. It proceeded from the premise that this medium shares a close bond with its audience, making the study of its tools and impacts a prerequisite for developing university media that is effective and influential within society. [11] [12]

The concept of university media has evolved in recent years due to digital transformation; it is no longer limited to printed newspapers, magazines, and bulletins but has expanded to include the official websites of universities and their faculties, as well as their social media accounts. The study itself demonstrated that, from the perspective of the Wasit University audience, the digital technologies employed in university media contributed to increased knowledge acquisition and the development of dialogue and experience-sharing skills; furthermore, the correlation between digital transformation in university media and cognitive impact on the audience was found to be 82.9%. [12]

The scope of issues addressed by this media has also broadened, becoming a subject of studies that measure its role regarding emerging topics—such as a recent study examining the extent to which Iraqi university students follow university media to obtain information on the use of artificial intelligence, as well as the primary channels they rely on for this purpose.

3.3.3 University Media in Foreign Literature

Foreign literature addresses this concept under various terms, such as "Higher Education Communication," "University Communication," "University PR," and

"Institutional Academic Communication." Under these labels, researchers analyze communication occurring within higher education institutions, communication originating from them, and communication revolving around them, while taking into account both internal and external stakeholders [13] a tripartite framework that underpins the conceptual definition adopted in this research.

Foreign literature reveals that university communication departments have expanded and diversified over the past two decades, employing a wide range of channels—from media relations, marketing, and public events to websites, blogs, and social media platforms—to reach broader audiences directly.[13] This literature also distinguishes between two types of objectives pursued by university communication: organizational goals, such as building the institution's reputation, enhancing its public presence, and legitimizing its funding; and societal goals, such as transferring scientific knowledge to the community, adhering to sound scientific practices, and fostering dialogue and engagement. A survey of 203 communication staff members across all 42 Swiss higher education institutions demonstrated that these two types of objectives are balanced in practice, with neither generally overshadowing the other. [10]

3.3.4 Operational Definition of University Media

In this research, university media refers to the array of communication channels and activities—such as newspapers, magazines, university bulletins, official websites, social media accounts, student-run radio stations and channels, seminars, and awareness campaigns—produced or overseen by Iraqi universities and their colleges. These media outlets are primarily directed at students and the general public, with the aim of disseminating knowledge about the dangers of drug addiction and fostering preventive attitudes and behaviors regarding it.

3.4 Functions of University Media

An examination of the functions of university media begins with the general functional framework of media established by Harold Lasswell. He identified three major functions of communication in society: surveillance of the environment, correlation of the parts of society in responding to that environment, and the transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next. [14] Charles Wright subsequently added a fourth function: entertainment. [15] However, given its institutional nature and dual audience, university media does not merely replicate these general functions. Instead, it reshapes them in light of the university's mission—which encompasses education, scientific research, and community service. Modern literature on higher education communication distinguishes between two categories of objectives that guide the work of such media: organizational objectives serving the institution itself, and societal objectives serving the public and the community at large. [13] In light of this distinction, the functions of university media can be detailed as follows:

3.4.1 The Informational and Knowledge-Dissemination Function

This function represents the university-level extension of the "environmental monitoring" function. It manifests in providing the internal audience—comprising students, faculty, and staff—and the external audience—including the community and media outlets—with news and information regarding the university, its activities, and its decisions. However, the most significant aspect of this function is the knowledge-dissemination dimension; academic literature identifies the transfer of scientific knowledge produced by the university to society—and its subsequent dissemination—as a primary societal objective of communication within higher education institutions. [13] A field study conducted at Wasit University revealed that the majority of the university's audience believes digital university media has enabled them to enhance their knowledge of modern technologies and that the digital technologies employed therein have contributed to increasing their knowledge acquisition. [16]

3.4.2 The Awareness-Raising and Health-Related Function

Stemming from the cognitive function is an awareness-raising role in which university media acts preventively by informing students of the health and social risks they face and fostering healthy behaviors among them. A study analyzing health-related messages published by university health service centers on Instagram revealed that nearly half of these messages (43.7%) were based on theoretical components of behavior change. Furthermore, student engagement was found to be higher for messages that linked healthy behavior to improved academic performance and boosted students' confidence in their ability to adopt the desired behavior. [5]

3.4.3. The Dialogic and Interactive Function

In the digital environment, university media is no longer a one-way channel; instead, it has become a space for dialogue between the university and its audience. Academic literature identifies the facilitation of participation and critical engagement—including dialogue with the audience through both physical settings and social media platforms—as a fundamental societal objective for higher education communication. This function was evident in the findings of the Wasit University study, where respondents indicated that digital technologies in university media contributed to fostering dialogue skills and the exchange of experiences among audience members. [13] This function holds particular significance regarding sensitive issues such as drug abuse, as dialogue allows students to express their concerns and questions rather than merely receiving didactic messages. [12]

3.4.4 The Organizational Function and Image Building

University media performs an institutional function linked to the university's own interests; this encompasses building a positive reputation, enhancing public visibility, legitimizing the institution's existence and funding, and warding off negative media coverage.A survey of 203 staff members in the communications departments of all Swiss higher education institutions revealed that they consider enhancing the institution's public visibility and reputation to be their most important tasks. This is followed by the dissemination of scientific knowledge to society and the engagement of citizens in dialogue, with no overall dominance of organizational goals over societal goals.

3.4.5 The Function of Linking the University with the Community

This function represents the university-level extension of Lasswell's concept of societal integration. It entails university media acting as a bridge connecting the institution to its social and cultural environment; it informs the community about the university's offerings while conveying societal issues and needs back to the university. Staff in university communication departments—as noted in the referenced Swiss survey—identified similar objectives, including presenting the university as a key player in the social and cultural life of its city, fostering student pride in the institution, and highlighting the social significance of research and education. [13]

3.5 Uses of University Media

The uses of university media are viewed from two complementary perspectives: that of the sender—meaning how the university employs its media channels to achieve its objectives—and that of the receiver—meaning how students and the broader public utilize this media, the motivations driving their exposure to it, and the gratifications they derive from it. The latter perspective is grounded in the "Uses and Gratifications" approach, which shifted the focus from the question "What do media do to the audience?" to "What do audiences do with media?" based on the premise that the audience is active, selecting media channels and content according to their own needs. [17]

3.5.1 University Utilization of University Media

The university employs its media presence across a wide spectrum of channels, having evolved gradually from print to digital media. The traditional presence of printed university newspapers, magazines, and bulletins has diminished in favor of official university and college websites and social media accounts, alongside public events such as seminars and open lectures. [13] Literature indicates that communication departments

within higher education institutions have expanded their channel scope over the past two decades to encompass media relations, marketing, public events, websites, blogs, and social media platforms, thereby enabling direct audience outreach without relying on traditional media outlets. [10]

The purposes of this usage are as varied as the functions of university media; universities employ it to announce activities and decisions, disseminate scholarly output, build their image and reputation, and communicate with students. A notable example within this context is the use of university health service centers of social media platforms to broadcast health-related messages to students; an analysis of such messages on Instagram revealed that nearly half (43.7%) were grounded in behavioral change theories, demonstrating a shift in university media from general announcements to planned, scientifically-based communication. [5]

3.5.2 Students' Use of University Media

From the perspective of the audience, students engage with university media driven by various motives that can be categorized into three main types: cognitive motives related to acquiring administrative, academic, and scientific information; interactive motives related to dialogue, participation, and the exchange of experiences; and affiliation-related motives concerning their connection to and pride in the university. A field study conducted on the audience at Wasit University demonstrated that digital university media provided clear cognitive gratifications; it enabled students to enhance their knowledge of modern technologies, contributed to their academic learning, and fostered skills in dialogue and the exchange of experiences. [16] Another recent study examined the extent to which Iraqi university students follow university media to obtain information regarding the application of artificial intelligence—as well as the primary channels they rely on for this purpose—indicating that student usage of this media extends to issues far beyond the university's administrative affairs. [18]

International studies confirm that social media platforms have become the primary environment where students are reached; an analysis of data from over 65,000 American university students revealed high rates of excessive platform usage and concluded that these platforms serve as an effective channel for delivering awareness-raising messages to students. [19] Another study demonstrated that student engagement with university-disseminated health messages increases when those messages link healthy behaviors to improved academic performance and boost students' confidence in their ability to adopt such behaviors. In other words, student engagement with this medium is determined by the extent to which it addresses their actual needs and priorities—a core tenet of the "Uses and Gratifications" approach. [5]

3.5.3 Awareness-raising and preventive uses of university media

The significance of these uses stems from the fact that the digital environment where students encounter university media is the same environment where they are exposed to messages promoting illicit drugs. A recent systematic review concluded that the sale of illegal drugs has shifted to popular applications that grant dealers broad access to young people, while also noting a scarcity of rigorous evaluations regarding prevention campaigns on these platforms. [8] Consequently, utilizing these very platforms for awareness-raising through university media becomes a necessity rather than a mere option. [20]

Studies provide evidence of the efficacy of this approach; a study involving 966 university students demonstrated that exposure to anti-substance-use messages on social media was associated with a reduction in the intention to use substances—an effect mediated by reinforcing negative beliefs about the consequences of use and altering students' perceptions of their peers' behavior. [7] Conversely, greater exposure to pro-use messages—and less exposure to anti-use messages—was associated with higher social acceptance of substance use and a diminished perception of its harmfulness among young people.

3.6 Dimensions of University Media

The dimensions of university media refer to the various facets constituting this form of media as a complex communication phenomenon—facets that must be considered collectively for a complete understanding. While three fundamental dimensions (institutional, mass-oriented, and functional) were outlined in the section on the concept, they are elaborated upon here, supplemented by insights from recent literature. This elaboration stems from the definition adopted by this study, which inherently encompasses four analytical dimensions regarding communication within higher education institutions: production, content, usage, and impact—regardless of whether the actors involved are internal or external to the institution. [10]

3.6.1 The Institutional Dimension

This dimension implies that university media is produced by an institution with a specific mission and set of objectives—operating through its media and public relations departments—and is subject to the institution's policies and priorities. This dimension is reflected in what the literature terms the "organizational goals" of higher education communication, such as building the institution's reputation, enhancing its public presence, and legitimizing its existence and funding. [13] This dimension requires university media to strike a balance between the institution's interest in projecting a positive image and its responsibility to address sensitive issues—such as student drug abuse—with honesty.

3.6.2 The Educational Dimension

University media derives this dimension from its place within the educational media system—a specialized field of media focused on education that emerged in the mid-20th century. Its primary mission is to utilize both general and specialized media channels to achieve educational objectives. Within this framework, university media represents an advanced level of educational media and its application in educational institutions, given that it originates from the university—an entity situated at the pinnacle of the educational hierarchy. [21] This implies that the mission of university media extends beyond mere information dissemination to encompass character development and the cultivation of values and attitudes, making it an effective tool for preventing deviant behaviors such as addiction.

3.6.3 The Knowledge and Scientific Dimension

Universities differ from other institutions in that they generate scientific knowledge; consequently, university media embodies a distinct knowledge-oriented dimension—namely, the dissemination of this knowledge to society. Academic literature identifies this as a primary societal objective of higher education communication, alongside a commitment to sound scientific practices.A study conducted by the University of Wasit confirmed the presence of this dimension within the Iraqi context, finding that—from the audience's perspective—digital technologies employed in university media contributed to enhancing their knowledge acquisition. This dimension lends university media a level of scientific credibility regarding drug abuse awareness that surpasses messages from other sources, as it can draw upon the expertise of faculty members in medicine, pharmacy, psychology, and sociology from within the university itself.

3.6.4 The Audience Dimension

University media addresses a dual audience: an internal one comprising faculty, staff, and students,

and an external one that includes the local community, media outlets, and decision-makers. Literature acknowledges this duality by defining the scope of higher education institutions' communication to encompass interactions occurring within, originating from, and revolving around the institution, while taking into account both internal and external stakeholders. Within this audience, students represent the largest and most exposed segment; simultaneously, they are the target group for messages raising awareness about the dangers of drugs. [10]

3.6.5 The Social Dimension

University media extends beyond the campus boundaries to play a role in the surrounding community, aligning with the university's mission of community service. Communication professionals at Swiss higher education institutions have incorporated into their objectives the goal of presenting the university as a key player in the social and cultural life of its city, while highlighting the social significance of research and education. [13] This dimension is particularly evident in issues affecting society as a whole—such as the problem of drug abuse—where the university can use its media channels to raise awareness among students' families and their wider communities.

3.6.6. The Technical and Digital Dimension

Digital transformation has added a new dimension to university media; it is no longer confined to print media but now operates through websites and social media platforms. A study by Wasit University demonstrated that digital transformation has provided university media with diverse sources of news and information, and that the relationship between this transformation and cognitive impacts on the audience reached 82.9%. Furthermore, university communication via electronic means and social media platforms has garnered significant attention in contemporary academic research. [10] This dimension holds particular importance for the subject of this research, as the digital environment is the very same space where messages promoting narcotics circulate. [12]

3.6.7. The Ethical Dimension

This dimension relates to the commitment of university media to truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, and respect for individual privacy. This commitment is particularly significant—indeed, doubly so—because it originates from an academic institution expected to adhere to the principles of sound scholarly practice.[13]

Specifically regarding the coverage of the drug phenomenon, this dimension entails avoiding the stigmatization of or public shaming directed at drug users, relying on verified scientific information rather than exaggerated scare tactics, and protecting the identities of students who may be mentioned in media content.

Section Two

The Phenomenon of Drug Addiction in Iraq

3.7 The Concepts of Narcotics and Addiction

3.7.1 Narcotics (Linguistic Definition):

The term mukhaddirat (narcotics) derives from the root kh-d-r. Linguistically, *al-khadar* denotes lethargy, sluggishness, and relaxation; Ibn Manzur noted that *khadar* resulting from drink or medication is a state of lethargy and weakness that affects the consumer .Thus, narcotic substances were given this name because of the lethargy and the suspension of sensation and perception they induce in the user**.**

3.7.2 Definition of Narcotics:

Definitions of narcotics vary depending on the perspective from which they are viewed. Scientifically, they are psychoactive substances that, when consumed, alter perception, mood, thought processes, or behavior. From a legal standpoint, the Iraqi Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Law No. (50) of 2017 adopted the approach common in contemporary legislation: defining narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances by listing them in schedules annexed to the law, such that a substance is not legally classified as a narcotic unless it appears in those schedules. [22]

3.7.3 Addiction:

In its International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11), the World Health Organization prefers the term "dependence" over "addiction." It defines this condition as a disorder of substance use regulation arising from repeated or continuous use, characterized by a strong internal drive to consume the substance. This drive manifests as impaired control over use, the prioritization of use over other life activities, and continued use despite resulting harm. It is frequently accompanied by physiological features such as tolerance—the need for increasing doses to achieve the same effect—and

withdrawal symptoms upon cessation. [23] This definition clarifies that addiction is not merely occasional use but a chronic medical condition with physical, psychological, and behavioral dimensions; consequently, preventing it before it develops is far easier than treating it once it has become entrenched.

3.7.4 Operational Definition:

For the purposes of this research, the phenomenon of drug addiction is defined as the prevalence of the use of narcotic substances and psychotropic substances—listed in the schedules of Iraqi Law No. 50 of 2017—among segments of Iraqi society, particularly university youth, to an extent that leads to dependency, along with the resulting health, psychological, social, and economic consequences.

3.8 The Reality of the Drug Phenomenon in Iraq

Prior to 2003, Iraq did not experience widespread drug prevalence; however, the phenomenon has undergone a significant shift in recent years. A 2024 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) concluded that Iraq has witnessed a sharp escalation in drug trafficking and consumption over the past five years, positioning the country at a crossroads for regional trafficking in methamphetamine ("Crystal") and Captagon. According to the report, Iraqi authorities seized a record total of approximately 24 million Captagon pills—weighing over 4.1 tons—in 2023 alone. Seizures tripled between 2022 and 2023, reaching a level thirty-four times higher than in 2019, while methamphetamine seizures increased roughly sixfold during the same period. The report also noted Iraq's transformation from a transit country into a consumer market and even an emerging production site, following the dismantling of a Captagon production facility in Al-Muthanna Governorate in 2023. [24]

Regarding security, official figures indicate the arrest of approximately 14,000 individuals—comprising both users and traffickers—during 2022, although no official statistics regarding the number of drug users have been published. [25]

3.9 Causes of the Spread of Drug Addiction in Iraq

This phenomenon does not stem from a single cause but rather from a complex of interrelated factors that can be categorized as follows:

1. **Geographical and Security Factors**: Iraq is situated between drug-producing and drug-consuming regions. According to the United Nations, three major trafficking corridors converge within the country: a northern corridor through the Kurdistan Region; a central corridor through Anbar—specifically via the Al-Qaim border crossing with Syria; and a southern corridor through Basra. Methamphetamine smuggling is concentrated in the south, while Captagon trafficking is concentrated in the central corridor. [26] Compounding this situation are the consequences of years of instability, which have resulted in weak control over border crossings and a lack of modern detection technologies at these points.
2. **Economic Factors:** Poverty and unemployment are among the primary drivers of this phenomenon. Human rights monitoring indicates that drug prevalence is higher in impoverished areas and cities suffering from high unemployment rates. Psychology experts identify unemployment, poverty, and a lack of prospects for young people as key factors underlying the rampant spread of both drug use and trafficking. [25] The high financial returns associated with the drug trade entice some unemployed individuals to engage in trafficking, thereby expanding distribution networks.
3. **Psychological factors**: Some individuals turn to drugs to escape pressures and crises or in search of a false sense of euphoria. According to an Iraqi specialist, feelings of aimlessness, a lack of meaning, depression, despair, and helplessness are among the primary factors driving the escalation of this phenomenon in Iraqi society. These conditions have been exacerbated by the successive wars and crises the society has endured.

4. **Family and social factors**: Family breakdown, weak parental supervision, and a lack of communication between parents and children create an environment conducive to young people slipping into drug use. Contributing factors also include the influence of bad company, weak religious and moral constraints, and rapid social and cultural shifts that have eroded traditional social controls.
5. **Legal and institutional factors**: These relate to weak deterrence and law enforcement, a scarcity of rehabilitation and treatment centers, and inadequate prevention programs. An analytical study of Iraqi online media revealed that a lack of deterrence or punishment was cited as a leading cause of the drug problem in media coverage, with proposed solutions focusing on the establishment of rehabilitation centers and treatment facilities. [27] Other assessments attribute the worsening situation to a lack of awareness and the absence of sufficient rehabilitation centers. [25]
6. **Digital and media factors**: The digital environment has introduced a new factor; a recent systematic review concluded that drug promotion and sales have shifted to popular social media applications, granting dealers easy, widespread access to young people and lowering traditional barriers to obtaining drugs. This factor is directly linked to the subject of the research, as it transforms the digital space where students encounter university media into an arena where awareness-raising discourse competes with promotional discourse.
7. **Factors specific to university students**: University students face a combination of factors that increase their vulnerability to risk. These include the transition to an environment offering greater independence from family supervision, academic and exam-related pressures, curiosity and a desire to experiment, peer influence, and common misconceptions that certain stimulant pills enhance concentration and academic performance. The international context highlights the extent of this risk within the university setting; a large-scale national survey revealed that approximately 23.2% of American university students had used cannabis in the month prior to the survey. [19]

3.10 Dimensions of the Drug Addiction Phenomenon in Iraq

The drug phenomenon in Iraq is no longer merely a limited health or criminal issue; it has evolved into a multidimensional phenomenon affecting the individual, the family, society, and the state simultaneously. A recent study confirms that the spread of drugs in Iraq has become one of the most significant threats to national security, with consequences extending beyond social and health aspects to threaten political, security, and economic stability. [28] The dimensions of this phenomenon are outlined below:

1. **The Security and Criminal Dimension:** This dimension represents the most prominent aspect of the phenomenon, as drug trafficking constitutes a form of transnational organized crime and poses a major challenge to national security agencies. Iraq's open geography and security challenges have rendered it vulnerable to the drug trade and smuggling, with traffickers exploiting security vacuums in certain areas and weak oversight. A 2024 United Nations report underscores this dimension, noting that Iraq has become a crossroads for the regional trafficking of methamphetamine and Captagon; in 2023 alone, approximately 24 million Captagon pills were seized, with a retail market value ranging between $84 million and $144 million.Security statistics reflect the heavy burden placed on law enforcement agencies; in 2024, more than 14,000 individuals were arrested on charges related to drug trafficking and possession, and the judiciary handed down death sentences to 144 international drug traffickers. [24]
3. **The Health Dimension:** This dimension is evident in the physical and mental harm addiction inflicts on users and the burden it places on the healthcare system. Studies indicate that the drug trade leads to increased disease and violence within

society, and that the costs associated with drug use include mounting healthcare burdens. [29] The severity of this dimension is compounded by a shift in consumption patterns in Iraq toward synthetic stimulants—such as crystal meth and Captagon. According to the International Classification of Diseases, chronic use of these substances is linked to dependence, characterized by tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and continued use despite the resulting harm [28] . This issue is further exacerbated by the scarcity of specialized rehabilitation and treatment centers in Iraq. [25]

4. **The Psychological Dimension:** This dimension relates to the impact of addiction on an individual's psychological makeup and the cyclical relationship between psychological disorders and substance abuse; feelings of aimlessness, a lack of meaning, depression, despair, and helplessness drive some individuals toward drugs, while drugs, in turn, exacerbate these conditions. [30] Recent Iraqi studies have focused on examining the psychological repercussions of the drug crisis, alongside its familial and societal consequences, [27] reflecting an awareness among Iraqi researchers of how the psychological dimension is intertwined with other dimensions.
5. **The Familial and Social Dimension:** The family is the primary, direct victim of addiction; the phenomenon destroys the social fabric, causes family disintegration, and fuels violence. [29] This manifests in escalating family disputes and divorce, child neglect, domestic violence, and juvenile delinquency, as well as rising crime rates driven by the need to obtain money for drugs. Furthermore, this impact extends to society as a whole by eroding values and social controls, and through the social stigma that haunts users and their families, hindering their reintegration following treatment. [31]
6. **The Economic Dimension:** The economic dimension manifests at two levels: at the household level, spending on drugs drains the family budget and drives the family into poverty; at the state level, the economic costs of drug abuse include healthcare burdens, increased expenditure on social welfare programs, and lost productivity—all of which necessitate a comprehensive response from governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector. [32] Added to this are the escalating security and judicial expenditures required to combat smuggling, as well as the illicit parallel economy generated by the drug trade.
7. **The Developmental Dimension:** This dimension is linked to the economic dimension but is broader in scope, as it concerns the future of the country's human resources. Drugs hinder human development, [2] and recent Iraqi studies have addressed their repercussions on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.[32] This dimension becomes particularly evident regarding university youth; the addiction of a university student represents not merely the loss of an individual, but the loss of an educational investment and a source of productive energy upon which society had relied.
8. **The Legal and Institutional Dimension:** This dimension concerns the legislative framework and the effectiveness of institutions in addressing the phenomenon. Law No. (50) of 2017 on Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances has served as the primary legal framework for confronting this issue in Iraq; however, studies indicate that a lack of vision, the absence of unified efforts, and fragmented policies hinder the response. These studies call for a comprehensive strategy that integrates legal, security, and health efforts, as well as for enhanced international and regional cooperation and the activation of security diplomacy. [28] Furthermore, Iraqi media coverage reveals that weak deterrents or penalties are cited as a leading cause of the phenomenon's spread.
9. **The Media and Awareness Dimension:** This dimension serves as the entry point for the current research into the phenomenon; media can act as a tool for prevention by raising awareness about the dangers of drugs, yet—in the digital environment—it can also serve as a channel for promoting them. [27] Recent Iraqi studies reveal that Iraqi newspapers have shown only moderate interest in

reporting on drug-related issues, with a heavy emphasis on the local level. [8] Coverage in online media has been dominated by security-focused news, particularly reports on the arrest of drug dealers. [2]

Conversely, a study on Iraqi university students demonstrated the positive role played by satellite channels in raising awareness about drug risks, with talk shows and documentary reports proving to be the most effective formats. [7] This highlights a gap in specialized, preventive awareness-raising coverage—a gap that university media could help bridge.[1]

Chapter Three

Practical Framework

Field Study and Results

3.11 Field Study Procedures

Methodology: The study employed a descriptive-analytical approach using a survey method to describe the contribution of University of Baghdad media to curbing drug addiction, as perceived by students.

Study Population and Sample: The population consisted of University of Baghdad students who follow the university's pages on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). A simple random sample of 400 respondents was selected, and a questionnaire was distributed to them electronically via Google Forms during February 2023.

Study Instrument: A questionnaire comprising four sections; the items were organized in this research according to the dimensions of university media and the dimensions of drug addiction identified in the theoretical framework:

Table 1. Four-dimension questionnaire

The Axis	Content:	Dimensions Measured
First	Demographic data (5 questions)	—
Second	University media usage (4 questions)	Technical and digital dimension; mass-audience dimension
Third	The role of university media in curbing addiction (6 questions)	Cognitive dimension; educational and institutional dimension; ethical dimension (quality)
fourth	Gratifications obtained (10 items using a five-point Likert scale), as shown in Table 7.	Dimensions of addiction: health, psychological, social and familial, and cognitive-awareness-related

Reliability: The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the fourth dimension was 0.834, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, which indicates the reliability of the instrument.

Statistical Analysis: SPSS software (Version 28) was used to perform analyses involving frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, standard deviations, the independent samples t-test, the chi-square test, and one-way ANOVA. The following categories were adopted for levels of agreement: (1.00–1.80) very low, (1.81–2.60) low, (2.61–3.40) moderate, (3.41–4.20) high, and (4.21–5.00) very high.

Sample Characteristics:

Table 2. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Categories and Percentages
Gender	Males 61% – Females 39%
Age	18–24 years 87.3% – 25–35 years 12.8%
Academic Level	Bachelor's 78% – Master's 22%
Marital Status	Single 85% – Married 15%
College Type	Humanities 72% – Sciences 28%

The sample is predominantly male and composed of undergraduate students in the 18–24 age group—the demographic most at risk of substance use—which lends particular significance to the findings.

3.12 Results in light of university media dimensions

1. Technical and digital dimension (channels of engagement):

Table 3. Technical and Digital Dimension

The means	Percentage
University pages on social networking sites	%58
University website	%26
University channel on YouTube	%16
University newsletters	%0

93% of students follow university media daily, confirming that the digital dimension has become the primary vehicle for university media, contrasting with the near-total absence of print media.

2.The Mass-Audience Dimension (Motivations for General Consumption): Leading the list of reasons were staying informed about university news and events (47%), followed by keeping up with activities and functions (28%), raising awareness of social and cultural phenomena (12%), benefiting from reports and articles (8%), and integrating into the university community (5%). Thus, informational and organizational motives significantly outweigh awareness-raising motives.

3. The Knowledge and Awareness Dimension (Exposure to the Topic of Drugs): All respondents (100%) reported encountering the topic of addiction while consuming university media; however, all of them (100%) spend less than one hour daily engaging with this subject. They identified the most effective awareness-raising formats as events and discussions between faculty and students (44%), followed by social media pages (30%), university newspaper articles (18%), and on-campus posters (8%).

4. The Educational and Institutional Dimension (Awareness-Raising Methods Employed):

Table 4. Educational and Institutional Dimension

Approach	Percentage
Organizing seminars and lectures.	%47
Publicizing psychological and social support services for students.	%31
Awareness materials regarding addiction.	%15
Collaborating with health institutions and local associations.	%7

Approach	Percentage
Videographics, infographics, virtual seminars, training courses, and opinion polls.	%0

This result reveals a fundamental paradox: while students primarily consume university media through digital channels, drug awareness methods remain traditional and in-person, completely lacking interactive digital formats.

5. Ethical and Qualitative Dimension (Quality Assessment): 50% of students rated the quality of university media regarding addiction prevention as "acceptable," 41% as "poor," and only 9% as "good"; no one described it as "excellent." In other words, 91% view it as falling below the "good" level.

3.13 Results in Light of the Dimensions of Drug Addiction

The items in the fourth section (Gratifications Realized) were categorized according to the dimensions of the phenomenon, and the mean for each dimension was calculated based on the means of its constituent items:

Table 5. Results in light of the dimensions of the phenomenon of drug addiction.

Dimension	Items and their mean scores	Average Distance	Level
Social and Family	Understanding and empathizing with individuals struggling with addiction (3.60); community engagement and social responsibility (3.45); improved social and family relationships (3.28).	3.44	High
Health	Making informed health-related decisions (3.52); engaging in healthy behaviors (3.28).	3.40	Medium
Psychological	Ability to resist the pressures and temptations of substance use (3.55); satisfaction with contributing to the reduction of addiction (3.22).	3.39	Medium
Cognitive and Awareness-Raising	Benefiting from the stories of recovering individuals (3.48); awareness of the risks of addiction (3.39); learning persuasion and critical thinking skills (3.12).	3.33	Medium
The Axis as a Whole	Items and their mean scores		Medium

This aligns with the motivations behind students' engagement with university media regarding the specific issue of drugs. Leading the list was the health-related motive—preserving their own health and that of the community (38%)—followed by the cognitive motive, which included expanding knowledge about the dangers of addiction and prevention methods (25%) and learning about awareness programs (18%). Next came the social motive, encompassing a sense of social responsibility (12%) and a desire to help raise community awareness (7%).

These results indicate that the overall contribution of university media to curbing addiction was moderate. It proved more effective in the social dimension (fostering empathy and responsibility) than in the cognitive dimension, which recorded the lowest

mean score—particularly regarding the acquisition of persuasion and critical thinking skills (3.12). This suggests that university media is more effective at stirring emotions than at building knowledge and preventive skills.

3.14 Hypothesis Testing

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Test	Results	Decision
First: The relationship between demographic variables and the gratifications obtained.	t-test	Gender: Not significant (0.169); Age: Significant (0.000), favoring the 25–35 age group (3.66 vs. 3.42); Marital status: Not significant (0.890).	Partially accepted (age only)
Second: The relationship between university media methods and the reasons for student engagement.	Chi-square	$\chi^2 = 39.0$, Significance = 0.000	Accepted
Third: The relationship between university media methods and the gratifications obtained.	One-way ANOVA	F = 1.007, Significance = 0.389	Rejected

4. Discussion

1. University media is a specialized form of institutional communication that combines an organizational function—related to the university's image and reputation—with societal functions involving the dissemination of knowledge, raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and serving the community. Addiction prevention lies at the core of these societal functions.
2. Drug addiction in Iraq is a complex phenomenon involving an interplay of geographical, security, economic, psychological, familial, legal, and digital factors; its impact extends to health, the family unit, the economy, development, and national security.
3. The digital environment serves as a shared arena where awareness-raising discourse competes with pro-drug messaging, making a university media presence there a necessity rather than an option.

4.1 Fieldwork Findings

1. Students rely primarily on the digital dimension of university media; 58% follow the university's social media pages, and 93% engage with them daily, while print media is almost entirely absent.
2. All students encounter content regarding drugs in university media, yet this exposure is limited in duration, and the motivation to stay informed (news-seeking) outweighs the motivation to gain awareness.

3. Traditional in-person methods—specifically seminars and lectures (47%)—dominate the awareness-raising approaches adopted by university media, while interactive digital formats are completely absent, despite the fact that students consume this media digitally.
4. 91% of students perceive the quality of university media regarding addiction prevention as falling below a "good" standard.
5. The contribution of university media to curbing addiction was moderate overall (mean score of 3.38). It was strongest in the social and familial dimensions and weakest in the cognitive dimension—specifically regarding the development of persuasion and critical thinking skills.
6. Student satisfaction levels are influenced only by age (favoring older students) and are unaffected by gender or marital status; furthermore, there are no significant differences in the effectiveness of the various awareness-raising methods employed.

5. Conclusion

The research concludes that while university media at the University of Baghdad possesses a broad, regular audience and effective digital reach, it fails to sufficiently leverage these assets to raise awareness about the dangers of drugs. It reaches students digitally but addresses them using traditional awareness-raising tools, focusing more on stimulating social awareness than on building knowledge and preventive skills. Consequently, its contribution to curbing the phenomenon exists but remains limited—though it could be enhanced through the strategic realignment of its tools and content.

5.1 Recommendations

1. Shift drug awareness campaigns to the digital platforms where students already engage with university media, utilizing short, interactive visual content such as videographics, infographics, and live broadcasts.
2. Strengthen the cognitive aspect of awareness messages by incorporating accurate scientific information and training students in skills such as resisting peer pressure and critical thinking, drawing upon the expertise of faculty members in medicine, pharmacy, psychology, and sociology.
3. Incorporate the stories of recovering individuals into awareness content, while ensuring the protection of their identities and avoiding stigmatization.
4. Expanding partnerships among university media outlets, the Ministry of Health, the General Directorate for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Affairs, and civil society organizations.
5. Taking age differences into account when designing messages and tailoring content to suit younger students.
6. Establishing a permanent health and awareness media unit within the media and public relations departments of Iraqi universities to plan campaigns and periodically measure their impact.
7. Incorporating the topic of drug prevention into general university curricula and linking it to university media activities.

5.2 Proposals

1. Conducting a content analysis of drug-related material published by university media in Iraqi universities to complement the findings of this research, which is based on an audience survey.
2. Conducting a comparative study—between public and private universities, or among universities in different governorates—regarding the use of university media for drug awareness.
3. Conducting an experimental study to measure the impact of a scientifically designed digital awareness campaign on students' knowledge and attitudes regarding drugs.

4. Studying the communicators within university media to understand their perspectives and the obstacles they face in this field.

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