



*Drugs abuse and addiction behavior in music as a threat to mass culture*  
*-Analytical study*

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**Abstract**

This paper focuses on music and exactly the American one in its presentation of drug abuse and addiction behavior, the study aimed to understand and clarify values, messages and thoughts sent by these songs to the audience, which are represented in linguistic and visual symbols. Based on this, the study tries to figure out how the American music encourages drugs abuse and addiction, and how it affects the receiver's mental image about drugs, tobacco, alcohol and its potential threat. By using Frankfurt School as an approach of explanation, discourse analysis as a method, scientific observation as a tool. The research used a purposive sample, composed of six songs in English from different styles of music (hip-hop, rap and Rock). The study found that the American music is glorifying drug addiction and make it socially acceptable for the audience, in order to show it as a lifestyle, which may pose a real threat to social and individual values.

**Keywords:** *Addiction; Drugs abuse; Mass culture; Music; Threat.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Media is one of the essential elements that takes place in individuals daily life, due to the diversity of its content from different media materials; among the media materials broadcast through traditional and new media we find music as an art form, which is considered in the same context a cultural product that is marketable, and then consumed across different countries in the world.

Foreign music in general and American in particular are widely resonated and highly popular with the masses, not only in Western countries but also in the Arab world.

This music is of all kinds (hip hop, rap, rock and roll ...) It sends messages to convince the recipients of music, by either statement or hint relying on symbols.

Thus, the ideas and values that the media discourse emits through music resonate in the mind of the recipient, since that part of his vision of picturing reality, events, issues and even behavior is determined by the cultural patterns, in which it is stereotyped. Music, like other cultural products, deals with many issues of its content, and then directs its audience to adopt a certain attitude towards the topics it addresses. Among the topics covered by music are abuse and addiction to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, which is a phenomenon that is rampant in different societies and cultures.

So, how does foreign music portray abuse and addiction?

From this main question arises the following sub-questions:

- What visual symbols do foreign musicians adopt in addressing the topic of abuse and addiction?
- What words and terms are used to describe the phenomenon of abuse and addiction?
- What values does foreign music try to convince the recipient while bringing the abuse and addiction?
- What goal does foreign music seek to promote while addressing the topic of abuse and addiction?

## **2. Purpose of study**

This study aims to:

- Understand the mechanisms by which foreign music addresses the phenomenon of abuse and addiction.
- Reveal the messages and values that foreign songs try to convince the public about the abuse and addiction of prohibited substances.
- Identify the manifestations of mass culture and consumer behavior, while these songs address the phenomenon of abuse and addiction.
- Reach the hidden and esoteric goals aimed at foreign music in the long-term.

## **3. Relevance of study**

The study deals with the topic of abuse and addiction as a behavioral disorder, which includes substances such as tobacco, alcohol, drugs and narcotic drugs, that are not medically necessary to take up. This is a behavior that threatens the stability of society, both at the individual and collective levels. Due to the effects of these behaviors, which in turn lead to the emergence of other pests such as theft, criminality, violence and even accidents in order to provide substances to those addicts.

In this sense, the study attempts to understand the mechanisms by which foreign songs embody abuse and addiction, how they affect the listeners and the viewers of what they

broadcast, and then to identify the causes of this deviant behavior and the possibility of reducing it and restricting the products that promote it.

#### **4. Study concepts**

##### **4.1. Music**

Music is the art that combines silence and sounds during a period of time, and previously music was combining all the arts and then dedicated to be the language of melodies only, namely making melodies and organizing the relationships between them and studying the rhythms and weights, to include the layers of sound and harmony between the melodies (Aldroubi. 2019)

The melody represents the spirit that gives the series of sounds an inner meaning and a capacity, the melody is built to achieve quality of internal tension, and the possibilities of the melody are infinite.

##### **4.2. Behavior**

Considered the founder of the study "John Watson" that behavior is an act can be regular or irregular acceptable or unacceptable, the community has the foundations through which evaluates a person's behavior through social norms, with a view to regulate the behavior of individuals and, through the power can diagnose a lot of psychological problems. (Almawsoaa alarabia alshamila. 2018)

##### **4.3. Abuse**

psychoactive substance abuse is a poorly adapted pattern of Use expressed by continued use despite knowledge of social, occupational, psychological or physical problems – persistent or recurrent – that are caused or exacerbated by use [or by] repeated use, in situations where it is physically dangerous. (World Health Organization)

##### **4.4. Addiction**

The American Psychological Association defines addiction as a complex condition, manifested through compulsive use of substances despite the bad consequences, and people who are addicted have an intense focus on the use of certain substances such as alcohol and drugs to the point that it can take their lives. (Parekh. 2017)

#### **5. Theoretical approach of the study**

##### **5.1. Frankfurt's approach**

###### **5.1.1. Background of Frankfurt's approach**

It is one of the critical schools, and derived many of its ideas from Marxism, which was pioneered by Marx Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, its view of the contents of the media that it offers inferior works or distorts the high-end works and the goal is to distract people from reaching the truth, as one of the practices of the capitalist system based on monopoly. (Mekkawi and Alsayad, 1998, 120-121)

###### **5.1.2. Most important ideas of Frankfurt School**

- Mass culture

As culture produces the same characteristics as the commodity produced accordingly to its value in the market, by the supply and demand that underpins the profit-oriented capitalist system, which led to the collapse of the public traditions that used to govern the individual, the mass culture offers the person temporary, momentary pleasure that makes him move away from his reality. (Alabdellah, 2006, 203)

- Alienation:

This concept means the dissociation of the individual from society and its inability to

adapt and conform, as the individual becomes living in a state of isolation from the society in which he lives. (Khalifa, 2003, 21)

- Reification:

It is one of the basic concepts that the Frankfurt School is interested in analyzing and interpreting and directing criticism, because the school is against the formation of human knowledge, which includes art, culture, literature because that makes it a commodity and thus loses its value, becoming just a material thing. (Bottmore, 2004, 177)

The instrumental mind:

Critics refer to the type of thinking that prevails in modern industrial society, also called the technical and formal mind, which "Marcuse" describes as one-dimensional thinking and can be clearly seen through the method of scientific and technical thinking, which is manifested in positivist philosophy and pragmatic practical philosophy. (Mekkawi, 1993, 27-28)

### **5.1.3. Frankfurt School view on music**

The view of the German philosopher Theodor Adorno on art in general and music in particular; that it is a mean of amusement and escape from everyday life because it goes beyond the sensual relationship, that brings Man together with the world he lives. He describes the music presented in capitalist society as commercial mass music, which is quite different from the serious music meant by classical music at the time. That's because Adorno is a pianist and studied music, and Adorno himself despises mass culture and its music, which he considers merely a manifestation of the cultural industry, based on consumption in capitalist society. (Al-Tantawi. 2019)

Adorno demonstrates his idea that stereotyping dominates modern music, which makes the mass song petrified and devoid of creativity and imagination. Thus, audiences react to songs on the basis that they are new songs when they are not, in addition to listening to these songs, only total perception and neglect of details are made.

## **6. Addiction as a behavioral disorder**

### **6.1. Causes of addiction**

The use of morphine and sleeping pills is common among doctors, pharmacists, nursing workers and pharmaceutical companies. In addition, societies view abuse differently; for example, alcohol and cigarettes are socially acceptable in some societies, while cannabis and hallucinogenic drugs are rejected at the same time, and the incidence of addiction in the families of addicts is higher, while the theory of learning interprets addiction as a human learning behavior. (Aldamerdash, 1990, 28-29)

In other words, mimicry and imitation play an important role; children and adolescents tend to imitate those they see as role models.

### **6.2. Manifestations of addiction**

Addiction can begin with the gradual use of a substance in some situations and then become more frequent, and can also arise through drugs that are prescribed medically, and the effect varies according to the drug taken, where there becomes a difficulty in stopping, and symptoms of addiction and its behaviors; feeling the need to use the drug at regular intervals. Thus, the need theft and criminality, where fate Abusers repeatedly fail in attempts to quit, followed by feeling withdrawal symptoms when trying to stop. (mayoclinic.org)

## **7. Music and mechanisms of influence**

### **7.1. Music functions**

The importance of music lies in the diverse functions that it performs in human life, which are difficult to limit to a particular field without another, or in an age group without another or even in a particular culture.

- Socially:

Music can be considered to communicate directly with individuals and affect them as well as the course of their lives, and so it can be estimated that it affects the entire society in the same way, since it represents a definition of current situations and what is socially agreed.

Music thus defines a kind of control, which can be realized by the fact that music can modify societal awareness and signal negative effects. (Zambas. 2012)

-From an individual creative point of view:

Music is one of the keys to creativity and improve mental abilities, it makes the individual more creative and innovative; because it fills the mind with art and imagination, which increases the ability to understand, listening to a song through a musical instrument reflects on thoughts and feelings, and in the same process the brain is used to transmit ideas without the use of the ability to speak, and so music makes the learning process. (TargetStudy. 2018)

-Emotionally:

Pleasant music can trigger the release of reward-related neurotransmitters such as dopamine, and listening to music is an easy way to adjust the mood or relieve stress, as people listen to music during their daily lives in order to alleviate and reduce unwanted emotions, music also has the ability to refine feelings and memories such as sadness, joy, which is the same as music that expresses ambition, as well as music that helps to change moods, such as the desire to achieve various goals, focus on a particular work or relieve boredom, or even get rid of stressful situations like separation, death ... etc. (Heshmat. 2019)

Music stimulates the imitation of emotions, not only on the individual level but on the collective level.

### **7.2. The influence of music on behaviors**

In a study at the University of Berkeley on the relationship of music to abuse and aggression, the results were that listening to rap music was positively associated and associated with alcohol use, drug use, and also hostile behaviors, indicating that all variables were controlled, as well as alcohol and illegal drugs were associated with listening to a musical genre represented by techno and reggae, as well as the controlled variables represented in the search for ecstasy: age, sex, race and ethnicity were associated with substance abuse and aggressive behaviors. (Meng-Jinn Chen & others. 2006)

In the article "HealthDay" which entitled as "hip-hop music is blamed for encouraging drug use", where there is a link between mental disorders and physical risks with severe consequences such as seizures, tachycardia and even death, researchers at the University of South Florida found in a survey of young black men who use the drug "molly", 82% of them said that hip-hop influenced their decision to try the drug. (HealthDay. 2018)

People tend to form groups with peers with those who share their cultural preferences, which can be manifested through musical taste and the preferences of the substances being consumed. (Hamilton & others. 2018)

This explains the large presence of drugs in popular music, which gives this behavior a kind of societal justification.

## **8. Methodology**

### **8.1. Method**

The most suitable method for this study is the discourse analysis, as it is based on research in linguistic and non-linguistic symbols, as well as the development of deep meanings.

Biger believes that discourse analysis is the approach that includes the whole structure of texts, the analysis of verbal and non-verbal context, and linguistic analysis to understand what is meant. (Almshakba, 2014, 251)

### **8.2. Study population**

The study community consists in the sum of foreign songs that deal with addiction, drugs and alcohol as a main or secondary topic, and due to the huge number of songs, where not all can be studied, the researcher resorted to the sampling until the study is achievable.

### **8.3. Study sample**

Therefore, the researcher chose a sample of a collection of American songs from different musical types that fall into the category "rap", "hip-hop", "rock", "pop", considering that the selected songs deal with abuse and addiction whether it concerns tobacco, alcohol, drugs or narcotic drugs, by focusing on visual symbols, i.e. those that appear in the physical form, as well as the meanings and represented messages.

The sample of the study is considered as a non-probability, which is defined as; "Non-probability sampling is based on selection by non-random means. This can be useful for certain studies, for example, for quick surveys or where it is difficult to get access to the whole population, but it provides only a weak basis for generalization". (Walliman, 2011, 96)

### **8.4. Study tool**

During the analysis of the sample of the study was relied on scientific observation as a tool for research, in order to find out the mechanism of portraying the behavior of abuse, addiction, and how it is shown to the listeners On this basis, we took the sample of famous American songs in English and specifically the American accent, that achieved great success and major sales as well as large number of views on social media sites, precisely YouTube.

## **9. Analytical study**

### **9.1. "Drug Addicts" by lil pump**

In the first section, there is a direct incitement to drug consumption, not only encouragement to use but also encouragement to addiction, where the high status of the individual and influence was linked to the volume of alcohol intake, in addition, the song combines a sense of happiness that increases as the volume of intake increases, and the next section in which a person addicted to alcohol, drugs and tobacco shown as an effective and typical person and live a life full of achievements and happiness, and no one can impose on him his opinion, so his social status surpasses non-addicted people, and even stranger that in the song explicit invitation to children and minors to try to eat narcotic substances of various kinds, here the listener is in an imaginary world that does not exist; as well as trying to drag him into the demand for bad and harmful habits such as addiction that can completely destroy an individual's life and does not make it as bright and shiny as the song tries to appear.

### **9.2. "Gangsta" by the singer Kat**

This song depicts the suffering of the individual and the difficult way of life imposed by society and the capitalist economy, and the resulting inability to create jobs to provide daily needs. Smoking and drug use will be used to overcome these problems, as a justification for

abuse and smoking, which in turn is a "pretext" to justify the bad behavior of abuse. Here again, we do not find criticism but indirect encouragement for individuals when they face difficult circumstances they resort to drugs, as a mean of forgetfulness and defensive mechanics of what's happening to them.

### **9.3. "Fancy" by the rapper Iggy Azalea**

Which has gained a billion views on YouTube, where the singer shows herself as a wealthy young woman with great popularity among her peers, here also the intake of alcohol is linked to the important social status, but also to achieve success, and to reach the highest degree of self-confidence and self-esteem, which according to this song must be accompanied by the consumption of alcoholic beverages of all kinds, aiming to establish a mental image for the recipient that the behavior of abuse and addiction is acceptable, and even almost it is an essential part of the individual's role model, which can be included in the category of manipulation of minds and contradiction with reality, as well as scientific and medical facts, when medicine confirms that the use of alcohol and narcotic substances is harmful to human health and can lead to death, these songs come to imagine the exact opposite.

### **9.4. "On the floor" by Jennifer Lopez and Pitbull**

Even in songs of a fun nature that carry the meanings of pleasure and joy, they in turn encourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and here the happy times were limited and linked to the consumption of alcohol, and make it the only appearance that indicates the inner happiness of the individual, it is based on indifference, as it indicates in its entirety a superficial and instant pleasure, and in this sense the objectification that addressed by the Frankfurt School, where the main values and high emotional meanings reached through self-reflection, we find that these songs try to express mere lying about material things and behaviors that express in essence confusion and unhealthy behavior.

### **9.5. "Shape of You" by Ed Sheeran**

When talking about the need for man to make friends within his social space, where the formation of social relations is one of the basic needs of man and this according to the "Pyramid of Maslow", we also find the association of fun times with friends linked to heavy alcohol intake, even positive meanings and values that are essential in the normal life of the human being, which is the belonging to the group of peers and the formation of friends linked to negative values, and messages are placed that stimulate bad behavior and addiction. What's more, it is creating a positive trend towards abuse behavior.

### **9.6. "Lithium" by the rock singer "Evanescence"**

She talks about the suffering of depression patient and his dependency, which reaches the extent of addiction to the drug diluted depressive symptoms called "lithium" since the song did not provide any solution, and only mentioned the difficulty of getting rid of drug addiction, which leads to the idea that drug acquires the life of patient and his emotional condition. Thus, discouraging the addict in trying to quit, and then spread the wrong message about the impossibility of being able to recover from drug addiction.

## **10. Critical review**

According to the critical theorists, at the head Adorno who sees that culture manifests itself in the commodity form; Adorno thinks that the culture industry has a profit motive, unlike what was previously, profit was a goal but not in a direct way, and because of the seriousness of these cultural products, they gain the audience's popularity, in this sense it can win the attention of consumers.

It is exactly what American Music works on, where it makes the individual live moments

of temporary instant pleasure, but at the same time its consequences are terrible, harmful, and false; when it tries to consolidate the idea of its significance that a person who uses prohibited substances makes him a unique, distinctive and successful person, this is a cover-up and ridicule the mind of the recipient.

What confirms the manipulation practiced by these songs is that they circumvent individuals and fill their minds with destructive values, and a way in which a lot of malice and circumvention of the law, when we know that the law prevents commercial advertising of cigarettes and drugs, then we find indirect publicity of these prohibited substances in video clips of the songs; economic enterprises and lobbies producing and dedicating their influence even above the psychological and physical health of individuals, as well as moral standards.

The manifestations of the objectification in these songs are total mockery of the human nature and the entity of the person and his existence, and even self-realization, they portray individuals as mere things, as if they are only interested in eating, drinking, sleeping, playing, abusing and having fun, where the emotional aspect and the element of thinking have been abolished, without regard to the possibility of inflicting psychological and physical harm on the individual. Addiction is a fact in some stages may lead the person to commit crimes or even suicide, while what the songs depict is completely different from the reality.

Thus, the follower of the content of American music finds that it creates false needs for the audience. The study shows that it sends convictions that the individual does not build strong personality unless he takes alcohol and drugs, but it is the best way to get rid of pains, pressures and life problems, which in turn contributes to the creation of addictive habits and continuation if they exist in advance, which means to weaken the ability of the person to resist the desire to take drugs.

Positive drugs photography increases over time, this is a serious trend as rappers who are considered to be a role model for the nation youth, especially in urban areas. (Preidt. 2008)

Creating these false needs is useless, other than making the public accept consumption no more or less, whether it is forbidden materials or the consumption of these songs and the demand to buy them, as they satisfy what is common in mass culture, or by helping tobacco, alcohol and drugs companies in marketing their product.

Hence, we find that the manipulation of minds in these songs is present strongly, where it tries to abolish the ability of rational thinking, and even the ability of the person to control himself and control his actions, because it depends on many methods of persuasion through selecting images carefully.

According to studies, adolescents who listen to this type of music are more likely to use cannabinoids after hearing the lyrics of a song related to the dependence of the chemical drug. (Murray. 2018)

Thus, we find that the danger in foreign songs that deal with the subject of abuse and addictive behavior is that it's contradictory of the function of awareness that the media is trying to do through awareness campaigns to reduce the use of cigarettes, drugs and alcohol. What makes the situation more difficult is that these songs work with the mechanism of repetition, which would entrench the negative values of the followers. Also, it promotes its destructive ideas accompanied by fun, entertainment and melodies with a deep echo and effect in conscience. In this way, the message becomes more easy to pass and less resistant.

Therefore, the extent of the damage is not limited to American society, but extends to other societies, including Arab and Muslim societies, considering the ease provided by the new media in transmitting and passing information and media products anywhere in the world, and



the language itself is not an obstacle in the transmission of messages, no matter how culturally diverse the receiving communities. American music uses English, which is the first and most popular global language in different countries of the world. In addition, providing translation for people who do not master English will ease the understanding. From a visual side, the image is a universal language, does not require to be translated to be understood, and this is precisely what puts us in the concept of one culture and man with one dimension, where the divides and boundaries between societies have collapsed, which means the domination of the customs and traditions of the imperialist countries at the expense of the customs and traditions of the less powerful countries. Even societies ruled by religion which forbids such addictive practices and behaviors, they in turn have fallen and have been immersed in media products, such as foreign songs that urge drug addiction, the proof that in the sample of study, it has been observed that the teachings and values of religions are being flouted, which strictly prohibit the use of these substances.

### 11 . Conclusion

Through our analysis of many American songs at the level of symbols and visual implications, as well as at the level of the linguistic aspects, that indicates values and messages carried in relation to the behavior of abuse and addiction, it has been noted that most of these songs call for the handling of prohibited harmful substances to health clearly and publicly, and promote their consumption. Thus, we found that they are similar to what is prevalent and widespread in the social and cultural environment of American society, which in turn suffers from the prevalence of abuse and addiction in different segments of society, where the substances intake of cigarettes and alcohol are various.

The recommendations suggested by the researcher are:

- To do more researches on the effect of music on audience behaviors.
- To establish a serious media literacy to promote awareness of media influence.
- To encourage interdisciplinary studies in order to get full perspectives about the relationship between addiction and media products.

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