Journal of Audiovisual Translation

Perceptions of Audio Introduction by the Blind and Partially Sighted Audiences in Iran

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Abstract

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) advocates for further access to multimedia content for individuals with special needs. Audio Description (AD) and Audio Introduction (AI) tools serve to facilitate the engagement of Blind and Partially Sighted (BPS) individuals with these contents, contributing to media accessibility. Given the emergence of AI as a phenomenon in Iran, this study delves into the perceptions and suggestions of BPS audiences regarding this supplementary tool. For this purpose, four AIs were selected. Subsequently, the data were collected through a semi-structured online focus group and interviews conducted on the "TeamTalk" platform. The gathered data were then transcribed and analysed using grounded theory. The results unveiled four interconnected categories, each with corresponding subcategories, essential for the production of AIs. The findings highlighted that AI is a beneficial tool, aiding in the comprehension, visualisation, and enhanced enjoyment of content among BPS individuals.

Key words: Media Accessibility, audio description, audio introduction, BPS Audiences, Perception, Iran.

Citation: Ghaffari, M. R., Khoshsaligheh, M., & Eriss, A. (2026). Perceptions of Audio Introduction by the Blind and Partially Sighted Audiences in Iran. Journal of Audiovisual Translation, 9(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v9i1.2026.329

Editor(s): E. Di Giovanni

Received: May 31, 2024

Accepted: April 25, 2025

Published: January 6, 2026

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Introduction

Media accessibility, as a thriving field of research and practice, overlaps with disciplines that advocate for further access to multimedia content for people with special needs, including feature films, theatre, and streaming series. Audio Description (AD), a focal point within media accessibility, seeks to translate crucial visual information into an auditory format for the benefit of the blind and the visually impaired audiences of such media, presenting it during silent gaps or where relevant sound is absent. In recent years, increased attention has been paid to this practice and human rights issues (Matamala, 2018; Vera, 2006; Matamala & Orero, 2016; Benecke, 2004). Similarly, Audio Introduction (AI) aims to complete AD by providing initial information to expedite and enhance comprehension of media content. AI was initially used in theatre and opera to introduce the products. This complementary tool, lasting between 5 to 15 minutes, provides visual and factual information to Blind and Partially Sighted (BPS) audiences when there are insufficient silent gaps in the main audiovisual (AV) product. This tool can be a separate or an integral part of the AD. AD has also been broadcast on websites and radio programs and can be provided live (Reviers, 2015; Fryer & Romero-Fresco, 2014). Despite the short history of AD, different studies have been conducted on its various aspects worldwide—mainly in the European context. There is limited empirical research on AI worldwide, and despite a few studies on AD in Iran, no research has been conducted on AI in the Iranian context. Therefore, the present research aims to fill this gap by conducting an exploratory study on AI as a new practical tool in AD in Iran. Furthermore, to evaluate its importance, it intends to look for Iranian BPS individuals' perceptions, needs, and suggestions toward AI.

1. Literature Review

1.1. AI Within AVT

In today's media-rich landscape, the importance of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) is evident (Abu-Rayyash & Shiyan, 2023). AVT advancements prioritise accessibility, empowering individuals across various demographics to engage with content (Gambier, 2023). This includes essential services such as subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and AD (Díaz Cintas, 2009; Shokoohmand & Khoshsaligheh, 2024).

AD is particularly crucial for BPS individuals, as it provides visual details that are not conveyed through sound. It encompasses actions, character descriptions, scene changes, and more (Cao et al. 2025; Homayouni & Khoshsaligheh, 2024; Matamala, 2018; Vera, 2006; Maszerowska et al., 2014; Matamala & Orero, 2016; Benecke, 2004; Wilken & Kruger, 2016). By placing this information in silent gaps or non-auditory moments, AD enhances social inclusion and enjoyment for BPS audiences (Chu et al., 2024; Glos & Franco, 2024).

However, AD poses challenges due to its reliance on auditory comprehension. Researchers like Braun (2008) stress the importance of timing descriptive elements to avoid overshadowing dialogue, lyrics, or sound effects. These constraints impact the quantity and content of descriptions, necessitating careful scriptwriting efforts. Given that time limitations make it impossible to describe every visual element in AD, essential information is often provided beforehand through a tool known as AI, which enhances accessibility (Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015).

AI is a complementary tool offering additional information and an external perspective on the context of AV products not mentioned in AD. It can be presented independently or alongside AD and may include sound bites. AI can be delivered by a single voice or a combination of voices and can be pre-recorded or delivered live (York, 2007).

In addition to enhancing accessibility, AI also plays a critical role in addressing intertextual references within AV content. Julia Kristeva's (1980) concept of "intertextuality" describes how texts incorporate quotes, borrowings, or allusions from other works. In the realm of AVT, understanding these intertextual references is essential for effective AD. Federici (2007) notes that postmodern aesthetics often involve intermediality—where literary genres mix with other art forms—making it imperative for audio describers to recognise, and explain these connections.

Szarkowska and Jankowska (2015) argue that just as literary translation employs footnotes and endnotes to clarify intertextual elements, AVT—including AD—can utilise AI to explain these references beforehand. For instance, Monet's "Bridge over a Pond of Water Lilies" in "Midnight in Paris" (2011) serves as a crucial intertextual element that can be elucidated through AI to enhance audience understanding.

1.2. Strategies for Effective AI

AI for AV products is tailored to the specific nature of the work, varying in length and content. Describers watch the entire film, taking note of essential elements such as characters, locations, and visual details. This ensures that significant visual aspects, like character movements and personality traits, are effectively conveyed. Descriptions encompass theatre sets, film locations, camerawork, and music while also providing background information such as running time and awards. To promote equal access, describers include details from DVD covers and box information while exercising caution when citing critics. A synopsis may also be included optionally. The elements are integrated coherently, with a focus on visual style early in the introduction and a logical progression of character descriptions. The duration of the AI is mentioned early on, along with information about the presence of AD. Additionally, recognising the scriptwriter and voice talent adds value to the introduction. It is important to note that AI may differ based on film classification across countries or regions (Fryer & Romero-Fresco, 2014). Di Giovanni and Morettini (2012) suggest that AI can include selected DVD text while avoiding plot spoilers.

For AI to be effective, it must be clear, simple, fluent, and accurate. This clarity helps audiences grasp important factual and visual information presented vividly to capture attention and highlight cinematic qualities (Fryer & Romero-Fresco, 2014). Fryer (2016) emphasises that AI acts as a glossary for explaining technical terms beforehand, enabling describers to reference names without prior explanation in dynamic AD scenarios.

The process of creating an AI lacks a fixed template; however, several factors are crucial. AD instructors recommend finalising the AI after completing the AD while focusing on structure, content, and style—particularly in the introduction. Practitioners should organise AI information logically, starting with greetings, introducing the speaker, and mentioning the length of the presentation. Using quotes for recorded ADs can enhance engagement. Balancing information is vital to prevent overwhelming audiences; live performance AIs should be limited to 10 minutes while recorded ADs should not exceed 15 minutes. Engaging text is necessary for effective processing and retention, with audiences favouring a plain and direct writing style that employs specific vocabulary (Reviers, 2015).

Remael and Reviers (2013) identify five key functions of AIs: a general function that establishes a framework for understanding the play; an information function that provides details from printed programs such as running time, cast, production credits, set design, costumes, and character descriptions; a foreshadowing function that offers additional descriptions of visual elements that may not be thoroughly covered during the performance; an expressive function that characterises the nature of the production—whether performances are realistic or stylised; and an instructive function that guides users on actions like adjusting their AD headset volume. Users can also access pre-recorded AIs on CDs or download them as audio or text files from websites.

Some scholars have conducted research in different countries regarding AIs (Romero-Fresco & Fryer, 2013; Di Giovanni, 2014; Jankowska, 2013). Romero-Fresco and Fryer (2013) carried out a study in London investigating AIs for *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008) and *Man on Wire* (Marsh, 2008). They were particularly curious about mentioning cinematic aspects of a movie in AI. Twenty participants aged 36–68 with different sight loss types volunteered for the AIs and indicated a positive response toward them. Di Giovanni (2014) replicated this study in Italy, where 20 blind participants aged 22–81 participated (13 female and 7 male). Unlike the UK experiment—which included two screenings at the University of Roehampton with some attendees participating from home—all Italian participants watched *Slumdog Millionaire* at the University of Macerata before completing a questionnaire about AD and AI translated into Italian. Jankowska (2013) replicated a similar study in Poland for Man on Wire at both the University of Warsaw and Jagiellonian University. The findings from these studies indicated highly positive feedback from participants.

1.3. The Status of Audio Description and Introductions in Iran

Despite the growing body of research on AVT and accessibility worldwide, significant gaps remain regarding AD and AI in Iran. Khoshsaligheh and Shafiei (2021) investigated the status of AD in Iran,

revealing that Sevina, a specific radio and non-governmental group, predominantly produces AD, while television lacks national content for BPS audiences. Their findings indicated that television, as a national mass medium, had no AD products available for BPS audiences, whereas Sevina offered a wider variety of products. Further analysis by Khoshsaligheh et al. (2022) of AD scripts from three Iranian feature films produced by Sevina[1] showed that while they are the first AD producer group in Iran, their products are nearly systematic according to ADLAB guidelines.

Additionally, there is a pressing need for research on AIs in Iran to explore their significance for BPS individuals. Understanding how AIs can enhance accessibility is essential, particularly given the limited global research on AIs and the specific lack of studies within Iran. Qualitative methods are needed to gather insights into Iranian BPS individuals' perceptions and suggestions regarding AIs to address these gaps effectively.

2. Method

This phenomenological study aims to explore and describe the impact of AI on BPS audiences' perceptions in the context of Iran. This research attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Iranian BPS audiences toward AI?

2. What are the suggestions and expectations of Iranian BPS audiences for producing AIs?

As an exploratory study, this research is based on a qualitative design to explore BPS individuals' perceptions, expectations, and recommendations. Statistically, few products have been audio-introduced in Iran, yet for the sake of the richness and diversity of the findings, the study intentionally includes a diverse range of multimedia products, namely, the film *Nafas* (Abyar, 2016), a music video *Cardigan* (Swift, 2020), an animation *Luca* (Casarosa, 2021), and an episode of a series *Nargil* (Ameriyan & Salehi, 2021). All these products were audio-described and audio-introduced by Mahale Nabinayan[2]. Based on a purposive sampling strategy, 12 participants (six men and six women) from BPS avid film audiences aged 18–44 from different provinces of Iran were selected and invited to contribute to this study. Furthermore, the type of blindness and the time of vision loss were determined to be varied among the participants. To clarify, four participants gradually lost sight (two with light detection and two without light detection), six were congenitally blind (one with light detection and five without light detection), and two were congenitally partially blind.

[1] Sevina is an Iranian NGO founded in 2019 that provides AD for films and other media to make them accessible for BPS individuals in Iran.

[2] Mahale Nabinayan (Gooshkon.ir) is a website that BPS individuals run on their own. This group established its website in 2011, updating its contents daily and for free.

Table 1

Profile of Participants in the Focus Group Interview

No.	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Vision Loss	City
1	34	Male	BA in Translation Studies	Editor Script-Translator Narrator	Totally Blind (Congenital)	Amsterdam
2	33	Male	High school Diploma in Applied Sciences	Editor	Totally Blind (Non-congenital)	Semirom
3	34	Female	MA in Business Administration	Editor	Totally Blind (Non-congenital)	Isfahan
4	25	Male	BA in History	Editor	Visually Impaired	Ardabil
5	35	Male	PhD in Persian Literature	Editor Narrator	Totally Blind (Light Detection)	Isfahan
6	33	Female	BA in Persian Literature	Audio-describers' Assistant	Totally Blind (Non-congenital)	Sari

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 2

Profile of Participants in the Online Interview

No.	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Vision Loss	City
1	31	Female	BA in Arts in Music	Teacher	Totally Blind (congenital)	Tehran
2	32	Male	BA in Persian Literature	Teacher	Totally Blind (Congenital)	Shiraz
3	22	Male	BA Student in English Literature	Student	Totally Blind (Congenital)	Shiraz
4	25	Female	High school Diploma	Homemaker	Totally Blind (Non-congenital)	Rafsanjan

No.	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation	Vision Loss	City
5	40	Female	BA in Persian Literature	Teacher	Totally Blind (Congenital)	Khomein
6	18	Female	High School Students in Humanities	Student	Visually Impaired	Rafsanjan

Source: Author's own elaboration.

For the participants' easy access to the necessary data, the pre-recorded materials were sent to the participants online using the WhatsApp and Telegram platforms. After two weeks, due to some limitations, remote participation was benefited, and a 90-minute online focus group and six approximately 20-minute online interviews were run on "TeamTalk", on which BPS individuals can communicate with each other in determined channels ("Mahale Nabinayan" channel, in this study). A semi-structured interview protocol with initial open-ended questions followed by probing questions was used. This exploratory design aimed to allow the participants to freely describe their experiences, ideas, and thoughts in words. The questions were prepared and determined based on a seminal literature review. Interviews and data collection continued until the moderator, one of the authors, was convinced that data saturation was reached.

The procedures of qualitative data analysis initially introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), known as grounded theory, were used to analyse the data. The participants' words were transcribed manually and translated into English, potential analytic categories were identified, the emerged categories were pulled together and compared, relations among categories were found, and finally, a map showing a theoretical model based on the relations was drawn. Later, the results of the analysis were reviewed, and through participants' quotes and consultations, the map was further clarified. The software program MAXQDA was used to assist with the grounded theory procedures for the qualitative analysis.

3. Results and Discussions

As we explore the intersection of AI and the perceptions of BPS audiences within Iran, this article aims to unveil the nuanced landscape of AI's impact on the perceptions of this audience demographic in this unique context. Furthermore, we delve into their expectations and suggestions concerning the production of AI, shedding light on the potential enhancements in media accessibility within this distinctive cultural backdrop.

Our results can be summarised into four key categories from the process of analysis. In fact, the four categories speak directly to the holistic questions as well as the blind spots about AI. We initiated the process of analysis through open coding, where, through the breakdown of the data into distinct parts, attached to the code, we actually highlighted the main concepts or themes identified within

the data. We continually compared the newly emerging data with the developed codes and categories to enhance our work further. The process involved is iterative; that is, the categories will emerge during the constant analysis. When this preliminary level of coding was completed, axial coding was started, wherein these various codes were linked into broader categories and the relationships among them were identified, as shown in Figure 1. Subsequently, we recorded reflections and insights from participants on developed codes and categories by memo writing, which also greatly helped us to conceptualise how all the elements interact in the landscape of AI. To do so, in the process of memo writing, we have identified codes by underlining them and subcategories by bolding them.

3.1. Effects of AI

The study indicates that AI positively influences BPS users' perceptions of AV products. Previous studies by Di Giovanni (2014), Jankowska (2013), and Romero-Fresco & Fryer (2013) support this finding. Participants' statements in interviews affirm AI's effectiveness in aiding BPS individuals' better comprehension of AV content, which is in line with Reviers's (2015) and Fryer and Romero-Fresco's (2014) views. AI enhances audiences' understanding of plot elements and fills visual gaps through auditory descriptions, aligning with Remael and Reviers' (2013) foreshadowing function. This suggests that transforming visual into auditory information provides audiences with a more enjoyable experience and better mental imagery, particularly in imaginative contexts such as animations.

> Graphical information turns into spoken information, and we need it to better understand the movie, especially in today's age when graphic images are very advanced and cannot be understood by listening to them. (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

> A certain amount of character descriptions, especially in products like animation, helps us to have an accurate idea of them; for example, I never thought that *Luca*'s uncle had an antenna on top of his head that was on. This was very interesting to me. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

Reviers (2015) stressed that practitioners must find the right balance in AI because it provides the users with sufficient information to create a framework for understanding the products. The participants shared this view, considering AI information as a framework for AV products, just like a trailer for sighted audiences. Accordingly, information about the content allows the audiences to know if the AV product is their type, which is obtained by the general function of AI (Remael & Reviers, 2013). In addition, as the sighted audiences watch the visual information in the product, BPS individuals hear it through AI narration.

> As sighted people watch the product, the narrator describes the images to us. AI gives us everything that the sighted person understands and sees. (participant No. 5 from the online interview)

> In my opinion, AI makes about 70% of the audiences aware of the product and lets them know its genre or whether the person likes it or not. (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

Despite the positive impacts of AI, if not designed carefully, they may have adverse effects. According to participants' statements, providing detailed and unnecessary information increases the product's duration, making it difficult for BPS audiences to keep up with the sighted audiences and rendering the product tedious. The AI writer's self-interpretations are among the factors that discourage users from engaging with this tool.

> Because the person who wants to see the movie is curious to know what is going on in the movie, if the AI is long, it will get boring and annoying, and if there are too many descriptions, the rest of the movie won't be as attractive. It also increases the time needed for the main movie. (participant No. 1 from the focus group interview)

> You may want to watch a movie simultaneously with a sighted person, and you don't want the sighted person to describe the movie to you in the middle of watching it. Here, you just listen to the movie's AD for yourself, or you can put on headphones. (participant No. 6 from the online interview)

3.2. Affecting Factors on AI

Participants stress the importance of producers understanding audiences' needs and opinions, as it enhances comprehension and enjoyment of AI-augmented products (Fryer & Romero-Fresco, 2014). Failure to address audiences' preferences may result in dissatisfaction and a lack of engagement. Practitioners should focus on providing relevant visual-based information, as suggested by BPS individuals in the study. Producers who overlook audiences' preferences risk delivering subpar experiences. For instance, Fryer and Romero-Fresco (2014) suggest characters' behavioural habits, but BPS individuals in the study argue that they can infer them during the product.

> Contrary to the fact that I like the appearance of the characters to be described, I do not like their behaviour habits and personality to be clarified. For example, in *Nafas*, the child who is an informer, I don't like to be told in advance; I like to find out myself. (participant No. 4 from the focus group interview)

According to participants' statements, the inclusion of irrelevant details in AI can render it devoid of essential information, resulting in a futile AI. Moreover, an imprudent selection of details may yield a brief AI that fails to meet audiences' needs, or conversely, an overly verbose AI that risks audiences' disengagement (Reviers, 2015). Audiences' preferences are pivotal in AI production, with individual tastes influencing attention to varying aspects. Participants highlighted how differing levels of visual impairment impact comprehension, visualisation, and interest in AV products. While some visually impaired individuals may find detailed descriptions unnecessary, others may benefit from abstract information. These nuances underscore the importance of catering to diverse audiences' expectations, as preferences vary even among those with similar conditions.

> I was born blind, and knowing this information doesn't make much difference to me. But knowing this information is interesting to me, but not like a person who has seen the world before, because I don't have any pictures in mind. The visualisation is there, but the image is not in my mind; for example, for me, the wavy ocean is just a sound, and if I want to be precise, I can only visualise the wave in my mind in the form of lines that go up and come down. (participant No. 2 from the focus group interview)

Furthermore, gender is another issue that makes the production of AI even more difficult. According to the participants' responses, most women wanted to know the details, but the men did not emphasise as much as the women; most men needed only crucial information. Therefore, the preferences of people of different genders and types of blindness cannot be considered the same.

> I can't give a definitive answer because I have seen many people who care about details, but maybe women care more about them. For example, hairstyles and the colour of clothes may be more important for women. (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

Some participants noted that the production company's objectives could influence the nature and presentation of AI content. For instance, while some AIs are informally produced by private entities like Mahale Nabinayan, they may adopt a formal tone when disseminated through national media outlets. The manner of delivery, whether integrated with AD or standalone, varies based on company intent. Additionally, companies may opt for diverse formats such as MP3 files or include supplementary visuals. Consequently, understanding audiences' expectations and preferences regarding AI content, delivery methods, and associated products becomes crucial in the ensuing discussion.

> I think it depends on the company that produces the film. For example, if it is Mahale Nabinayan, then informal language is good, but if it is radio, formal is better, in general, the genre of the film is also important. (participant No. 1 from the focus group interview)

3.3. AI Features

For audiences to receive a positive impact from AIs, producers must be careful in creating AIs' structure, content, and style in a way that matches the needs and expectations of users. For this purpose, the opinions and demands of the participants will be discussed below in three subcategories: structure, content, and style of the AI.

3.3.1. AI Structure

The structure of AI varies and may incorporate snippets of character voices, which some participants deemed unnecessary due to plot introductions but found beneficial for immersion and character recognition. Despite concerns about increased time, many agreed that it aids in easier character recall since BPS individuals recognise others by their voices, analogous to sighted individuals recognising others by their faces. Additionally, using voice actors' voices helps audiences recognise foreign actors.

> Maybe some audiences don't memorise the characters' names and only have the characters' voices in mind. (participant No. 3 from the online interview)

> Because in Iran, each voice actor is usually the voice of an actor, and when we know that a certain voice actor is in the film, we can easily identify the cast of the film. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

> I need to hear the voice so that I can recognise the character and the actor/actress, but the sighted audiences recognise them by their faces. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

AIs can be attached to the ADs or separate. Some participants preferred that AI be separate since the audiences are not bothered and have easy access to it, giving them the desired information well at the very beginning.

> It is better if the AI is attached to the product. Whether it's about internet problems or people's boredom, the audiences can't listen to more than one file. If they are attached, they are more accessible (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

Some believe that a person may not be interested in listening to AI, so why should they be forced to listen to it? They also stated that if the AI is separate, the AD will be long, and it will cause problems such as inequality of watching time for the same AV product between BPS and sighted viewers. In addition, they said that if someone is interested in listening to the AI, they can listen separately and understand the details they need from the product.

> It is much better to have a separate AI. Because if I want to know the details, I will go and listen to this file, but if it is attached to the product, we have to listen to it. (participant No. 6 from the focus group interview)

> It is better if it is separate because, for example, I want to watch a movie with my sister, but the time of my movie will be 95 minutes with AI, but hers will be 90 minutes. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

Participants emphasised the importance of short AI durations for BPS users, asserting that shorter AI facilitates immediate access to main products, reduces tedium, eliminates unnecessary details, and maintains product appeal. Most participants recommended AI durations of less than 5 minutes,

believing practitioners can convey critical information within this timeframe, enhancing audiences' utilisation and information absorption.

> It should be at most 5 minutes because if it's shorter, the practitioners can't add anything at that time, and they have to rush to express information, but if it's longer, it will be too detailed and boring. (participant No. 3 from the online interview)

Although some participants believed synopsis has nothing to do with them because its duty is not to convert visual information into audial, others considered it useful in better understanding the plot. Among the objections and agreements, some people thought it a persuasive one, provided that this section is short and concise, and as Di Giovanni and Morettini (2012) said, it should not reveal the plot, and based on one of the participants, it is better if an ellipsis finishes it.

> Unless it is a summary of a plot that does not tell the end of the story, it should be like the introduction of a book that doesn't reveal the story by putting an ellipsis at the end of the text. (participant No. 2 from the focus group interview)

AI can feature multiple narrators, akin to AD. In Iran, while there haven't been products with multiple narrators, *Nafas* AD employed two narrators: one for scene descriptions and the other for titles. Participants found the use of dual narrators intriguing, believing it could enhance audiences' engagement. This practice aligns with Audio Subtitle Translation (AST) in the AD, with the AI providing an instructive function that explains AST.

> But having another person narrate the titles of the movie so that it does not interfere with the description of the movie, for example, in *Nafas*, was a very good thing. And I became aware of this in the AI and enjoyed it very much. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

3.3.2. AI Content

AI's content is vital and should complement rather than replace AD, echoing Di Giovanni's (2014) perspective. Participants stress the importance of essential information to convince them of AI's role as a complementary AD tool, forming a framework for understanding. They emphasise the need to avoid overwhelming audiences with unnecessary details, as it would waste essential time and deter engagement. This underscores the significance of providing critical, succinct information in AI to enhance audiences' experience.

> Anything that increases the introduction time is boring, but some points are interesting and essential. However, the time should not be increased. (participant No. 3 from the online interview)

Product types and genres can help producers choose and identify essential information. In audiences' ideas, since the related images and scenes are often imaginary and unnatural for the animation genre, they wink at the producer to be described so that the audiences have a better understanding and visualisation of them. However, in products such as series, some of them are broadcast episode

by episode, and the practitioners only have the key to the episode information at hand, and they cannot provide the audiences with the information that will be released in the next episodes. Some of them are entirely broadcast at once, where the practitioners are faced with the choice of giving all the information in one AI, or each episode has its own AI; all participants accept the latter.

> It also depends on the genre; for example, to describe the animation, there should be a detailed introduction because the created characters can be better imagined with more detailed descriptions. However, red lipstick and black eyeshadow are not important to me in a film. (participant No. 4 from the online interview)

> It is not good if all the information for the next episodes is given in the AI of the first episode. …. It is better if new characters and information related to the same episode are given episode by episode. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

The level of detail in AIs varies depending on audiences' preferences and interests. Participants favoured concise AIs, expressing concern over excessive detail, leading to lengthy recordings. They desired information aligning with Fryer & Romero-Fresco (2014) but emphasised character appearance, locations, factual details like budget and genre, and noteworthy visual elements. Key interests included character descriptions, setting details, and information about special effects or notable credits regarding their type and time of blindness. Overall, participants sought succinct yet informative AIs to enhance their understanding of the plot.

> If the AI describes the actor or other things in great detail, it will become boring. The AIs should not go into unnecessary information; only the key information should be mentioned. (participant No. 3 from the focus group interview)

Participants strictly recommended prohibiting the description of characters' habits or similar details in the AIs, as such information can be conveyed through sound. Explaining these characteristics in the AI is unnecessary and diminishes curiosity about the character by making them too familiar from the start. Consequently, any information that reveals key plot elements should be excluded from the AIs to maintain audiences' engagement.

> Additional explanations, for example, if the characters' personality traits are described as very smart, nervous, or rude, this kind of information can be understood by listening and is unnecessary. Instead of this information, they can focus on more important things that help BPS users, such as describing their appearance, face, and other things. People's bad characteristics can be understood but not seen. The fact that a person is smart is understood clearly during the story. (participant No. 5 from the online interview)

Participants were wary of practitioners' interpretations influencing the details. They expressed concern that describers might impose their judgments on the audiences instead of allowing them to interpret the story, characters, or other elements independently. This aligns with Vercauteren's (2007) belief that audio describers' interpretations can unduly influence emotions. Participants felt that such interpretations reveal too much information, reduce enjoyment, and affect audiences' perceptions of the AV product, and therefore, should be strictly banned.

> When writing the AI, the AI writer should not judge the characters because it may affect my understanding and opinion. (participant No. 2 from the focus group interview)

Some participants felt that the names of the cast and crew were unnecessary, particularly if they were non-Iranian names or difficult to remember. However, others wanted to know the names of key individuals, such as the director, lead actors, writer, composer, and voice actors, because these people are integral to the production. Their work significantly contributes to the creation of the product's world. Additionally, the popularity of certain names can attract audiences to the product.

> Many people look for the works of a director or an actor/actress, and it motivates them more when they find out that these people are in a movie. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

> Names of important characters, directors, writers, and music composers. And if it is a foreign movie, the dub voice actors/actresses. (participant No. 6 from the online interview)

They agreed that the names of the actor/actress or role should be mentioned first, and then the character should be described. There was no particular opinion about the names of the other members, and they agreed with what happens in the current AIs, like using the director's name at the beginning of the synopsis or introducing the writer without any compliments.

> For example, first, the snippet of the character's voice is played, then the name of the actors/actresses and their role is mentioned, and then the descriptions of that character should be included in the AI. (participant No. 2 from the focus group interview)

Some participants wanted to hear the names of all the people involved in the production of an AV product; since mentioning all these names is not possible in the AI due to reasons such as increasing the time and details of it, this issue needs a solution that is beyond the scope of this research.

> For me, the names of the main actors/actresses and the people in the credits, and I like to know them as if I were a sighted person. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

3.3.3. AI Style

Reviers (2015) argued that AI should be engaging and memorable, favouring simple sentences, explicit conjunctions, and a plain, direct writing style. Participants agreed, emphasising the importance of apt, simple, accurate, and appropriate language. They believed that well-chosen words help audiences remember information and encourage them to watch the product. Conversely, poor word choice can lead to confusion, requiring multiple listens or even deterring audiences from using AI. Additionally, the narrator must articulate the words in a nice manner and tone to convey the information properly.

> No, but if I forget, yes, but if it sticks in my mind, no. It might slip your mind if it is too fast, and you will have to listen again. It depends on the speed and how to describe it. Just as

> memorisation is important for sighted people in creating images, but for a blind person, when you memorise the same image with words. The stronger this memorisation, the less need to repeat it. And the tone is effective in memorisation. So, choosing the right words and tone greatly impacts our memorisation. (participant No. 6 from the online interview)

A suitable AI should be attractive. Audiences believed that using snippets of the characters' voices, avoiding a single narrator for both AI and AD and including a short synopsis could enhance its appeal.

> It is interesting if two different people narrate the AD and AI, but it does not matter. (participant No. 3 from the online interview)

> I also agree with No. 1 that the voices of key roles should be in the AI. Of course, it's not like their absence bothers me, but their presence is attractive. (participant No. 2 from the focus group interview)

> But in general, having information such as winning an Oscar, this kind of information encourages me to watch the product. Maybe this is information that others and I don't know. (participant No. 5 from the online interview)

Participants generally agreed that AI should only convey important points concisely and precisely. They believed this information could vary in formality. Half felt that informal language maintains intimacy between the describer and audiences, matching the formality of most products and enhancing understanding.

> I think it would be better if the AI language were informal. They are not supposed to read books to us. The fact is that when it is informal, the sentences are shorter, which is very good and easier to remember. (participant No. 3 from the focus group interview)

One of the participants contended that informal language has feelings, and the describer's feelings can affect the audiences' perceptions, so it must be formal. Some others said that the AI language should be standard, neither formal nor informal, and others need the AL language to be genre-oriented.

> In my opinion, it is good that the language of the AI is formal because, in my opinion, it can have a greater impact on the quality of the work. The more we move towards more informal languages, the more emotions there are in these languages, naturally affecting the audiences' perception. (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

> I think the language of the AI should not be too formal or too informal. In my opinion, the language of the AI should be standard. (participant No. 3 from the online interview)

> I think it depends on the genre of the movie. For example, a drama or comedy movie can have an informal language, but for a historical movie whose language is also a criterion, it must be compatible with the language of the movie. (participant No. 1 from the focus group interview)

3.4. Needs for AI

Participants believed that AIs enhanced their understanding, visualisation, and enjoyment of various products and suggested that all visual and AV products should include AIs. They recommended AIs for documentaries and computer games due to their image-oriented nature and the need for key elements to be described. However, they opposed producing a single, comprehensive AI for an entire series, as it would reduce attractiveness. Instead, they advocated for episode-specific AIs with new and vital information, akin to footnotes, enhancing comprehension and enjoyment. This aligns with Szarkowska and Jankowska's (2015) view that AD can provide intertextual information through paratextual cues.

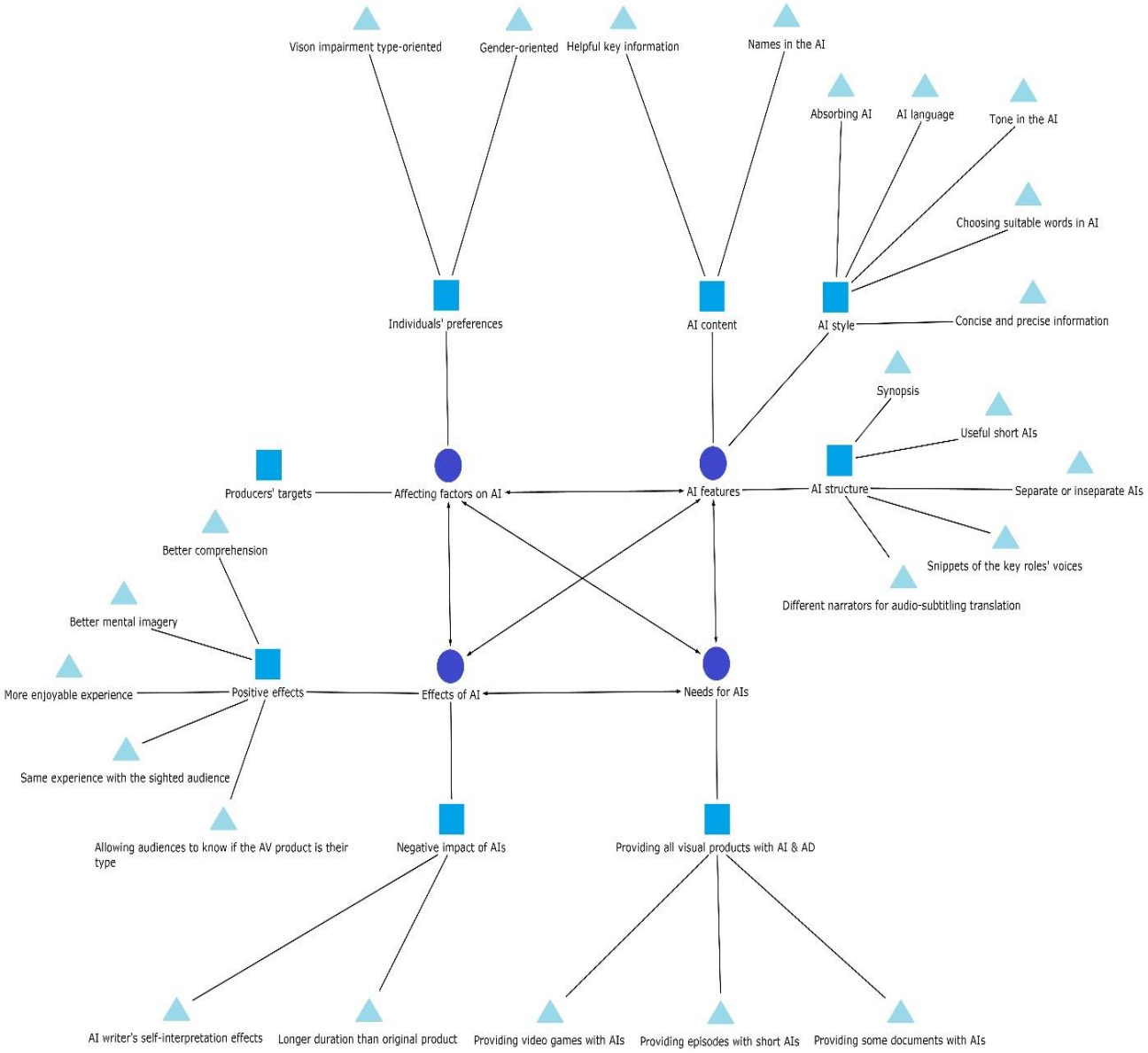
> [AI is useful for the] games, for example, in GTA, when we enter the code, I like to know what happens, and knowing this information is very important for us to be able to play better. (participant No. 1 from the online interview)

> One thing that I am very interested in and listen to a lot that I may not be able to understand many of its cases is documentary. There is a lot of complete information about everything in the documentary, and if it has an introduction, especially in industrial fields, new inventions, or even a specific place, this can help a lot. (participant No. 2 from the online interview)

> It would be excellent if an AI is produced for each episode of each series if there is new information, but the important thing is that this AI should be very short. Otherwise, it can have the opposite result. (participant No. 6 from the online interview)

Figure 1

The Map of the Extracted Theory



Source: Author's own work.

The results on perceptions about AI tools among BPS audiences in Iran indicate important lessons that could be drawn with respect to how such tools serve better access to media. These results have been compiled under four major categories, each explaining a very significant dimension of AI's impact and the expectations of BPS individuals. Figure 1. shows all the details mentioned above in different categories (circles), subcategories (squares), and codes (triangles).

This, referring back to our first question, makes it crystal clear that Iranian BPS audiences hold mainly positive attitudes toward AI. The respondents explained how AI lets them achieve a much greater understanding, visualisation, and enjoyment of AV content. The research showed the role of AI as an

asset that is supporting but complementary to classic AD by providing important contextual information which enriches the experience of BPS viewers. Participants were appreciative of AI's ability to provide crucial visual information and to increase media engagement, thus showing strong demand for its continued use and development.

On the second question, the participants urged improvement in many respects. They suggested that, as far as possible, AI contents should be tailor-made to their needs; likewise, other aspects, like better interfaces and support, would be taken as equally important to them, and how to let feedback improve these AI tools. In other words, BPS audiences expect that future AI productions will begin to start working on accessibility, relevance, and user engagement to improve their media experience.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study expanded the horizons of AD and its complementary tool, AI, comprised in AVT. This research revealed findings resulting from two research questions. The first question examined Iranian BPS users' perceptions regarding AI. The second question tried to seek the opinions and needs of Iranian BPS audiences and bring them to the ears of the producers. This study analysed Iranian BPS people's perceptions and reactions toward the AIs provided by Mahale Nabinayan through a focus group and six interviews and listed their ideas and opinions toward this tool, which can draw the attention of scholars and practitioners to their expectations and demands. As this tool is created for BPS individuals, their perceptions and insights are very important in the production process. In general, the participants had positive feedback toward the AI and considered it a helpful tool for better understanding, mental imagery, and enjoyment of the AV products. Furthermore, based on what they heard in different provided AIs, they shed light on some elements that needed to be removed, modified, or expanded so that AI practitioners were informed about what and how information must be contained. They also demanded that, in addition to the products equipped with the AIs, all AV products, especially documentaries and computer games, should be provided with this tool if needed.

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