



**BAONPS**  
BE AWARE ON NIGHT PLEASURE SAFETY



"Co-funded by the Justice  
Programme of the European Union"

*WORKSTREAM 2 –WEB RESEARCH*  
*CROSS-NATIONAL FINAL REPORT*

*September 2017*

This research has been conducted within the project B.A.O.N.P.S – Be Aware On Night Pleasure Safety – co-funded by the Justice Programme of the European Commission (JUST/2014/JDRU/AG/DRUG – Grant no. 4000007107).

*Research design and coordination*

Eclectica – Institute for Training and Research (Turin)

*Data collection and analysis*

Eclectica (IT), Apdes (PT), DrogArt (SE)

*Report*

S. Rolando, F. Beccaria (Eclectica), Š. Dovžan (DrogArt), Rêgo X., Pereira J., Pires C., Moura H (Apdes)

*This publication has been produced with financial support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the view only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein*

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## 1. AIMS AND RATIONALE

The present research, made of different studies, is part of a larger project, BAONPS (Be Aware On Night Pleasure Safety), the main aim of which was to increase knowledge about NPS (New Psychoactive Substances) among professionals and institutions, by implementing and improving drug checking, especially in recreational contexts.

NPS is an umbrella concept that indicates new substances as well as substances discovered from decades but recently spread or consumed in renewed ways, or substances used for different purposes from those for which they have been created. In 2015 the UNODC Early Warning Advisory on NPS reported more than 600 substances (UNODC 2015), to which we refer into the present study. However, the spread and the legal status of NPS can differ from country to country, and from time to time, as a legal substance becomes illegal when detected by the authorities and recorded. Indeed traditional and new drugs markets are gradually overlapping (Soussan and Kjellgren 2016).

The research project was designed to integrate the knowledge about substances and technical procedures necessary for prevention and harm reduction interventions with knowledge about consumption patterns, both inside and outside recreational contexts, by analysing drug users' points of view, perceptions and attitudes. Indeed studies on NPS users are scarce and consist mainly in prevalence-of-use rates, while motivations for consumption are little known. Above all, there is a lack of understanding about different consumers' profiles (Soussan and Kjellgren 2016).

Furthermore, the research aimed at providing insights about cultural meanings related to NPS use by comparing data collected in three different European countries, i.e. Italy, Portugal and Slovenia. Indeed, cultural differences can represent specific protective/risk factors which should be taken into consideration when planning interventions.

To reach the mentioned aims, a mixed-method research design was adopted, including a survey addressed to partygoers, mainly contacted in nightlife contexts, and a web-based study.

This kind of knowledge is necessary to increase the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at preventing and reducing the risks of drug use. The study was also expected to provide insights to set up effective web-based prevention actions.

The present report summarises the main results of the web-based studies.

It has been argued that the emergence of the Internet and, more recently, of the Darknet has increased the access to old and new substances of all categories (Hout and Bingham 2013; UNODC 2013). These increasing in availability and types of drugs may affect peoples' motivations for drug use and result in new and diverse patterns of use, new combinations of drugs or routes of administration.

The web has been chosen as an ideal research setting for at least other three reasons:

- First, it represents a research setting where to gather users' spontaneous contributions, which means, observe their perceptions, experiences and opinions about NPS in a sort of natural context and "free zone", where users feel not observed by the researchers nor judged.
- Second, it provides an opportunity to explore users' perceptions and conversations outside of institutional and / or medicalized contexts, in which, more typically, researchers come into contact with drug users.
- Third, it allows to better understand if and how the web could be effectively used as an intervention environment for professionals involved in drug prevention.

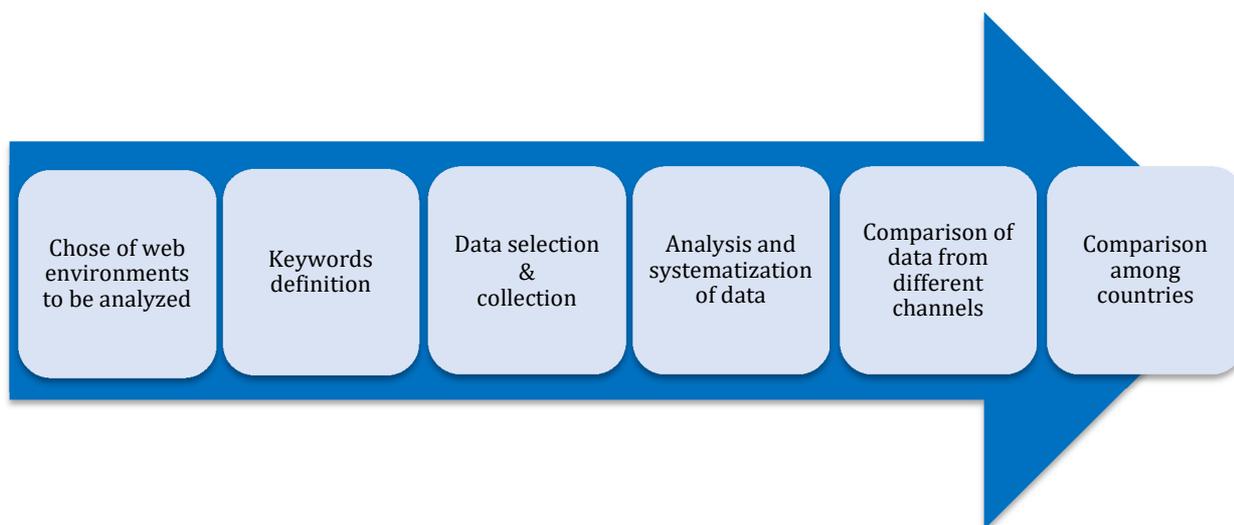
The web-based research can be compared to an ethnographic analysis; it does not return a representative sample, but it draws some lines of interpretation about the social discourses about

drugs, which must be contextualized and specified according to the users' profile and the communicative framework in which they were performed.

## 2. METHODS

Figure 1 represents the road map that guided the research activities.

*Fig. 1 Road map of the web study*



### 2.1 Keywords definition

To compile a good list of keywords to be used for searches in the different online environments, a double strategy was adopted:

- Top down. First we gathered suggestions from experts, by asking the project partners involved in outreach interventions or drug-checking.
- Bottom up. While the exploration of the online environments was proceeding, the initial taxonomy of keywords had been enriched and improved with names and idioms.

For dealing with this exploratory phase of keywords refinement, we used Google Trends to explore how many times the keywords were used in the Google search engine – as a predictor of their effective diffusion in the daily life – and with which other terms/names were combined into the web searches. This can serve:

- To validate the research keywords and to find unexpected associations among terms;
- To compare variations among geographical areas.

Therefore, the lists of keywords has been made with reference to the substances included in the Global SMART Programme (UNODC, 2013), by asking technicians and social operators of the country project group to add slang terms. Besides, terms associated to the same substance, have been checked through internet searches made on Google Trends. This way, each country has obtained its own keywords list, as shown in the following tables.

Tab. 1 Country keywords lists

<i>Italy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cannabinoidi sintetici (spice, K2...)</li> <li>- Eva, love drug</li> <li>- Flakka</li> <li>- G, ecstasy liquida, droga dello stupro, liquid E, GBL, (GHB)</li> <li>- K, keta, caterina, kech, green k, special k, super k, vitamin k, ket (Ketamina)</li> <li>- Krokodil, droga del cannibale, droga degli zombie</li> <li>- METOX, MXE (Metoxetamina)</li> <li>- MMCAT, 4-MMC, meow, doves, bubbles (Mephedrone)</li> <li>- NBOME (25-NBOME), cartoni</li> <li>- Nexus Afro, Special cake (2CB)</li> <li>- Paste, kikke, chicche (pastiche)</li> <li>- Piperazine, benzylpiperazine, BZP, A2, MCPP</li> <li>- Plant-based substances: Kratom, Salvia divinorum, Sally D, Lady Salvia, Magic Mint Calea Zacatechichi, Turnera Diffusa, Cola nitida, DMT (Ayahuasca)</li> <li>- Quat, qat, qaadka, chat, jaad (Khat)</li> <li>- Shabu, diamantini colorati (anfetamine fumate)</li> <li>- Superpill (ecstasy + viagra)</li> <li>- synthetic cannabinoids</li> <li>- synthetic cathinones</li> <li>- El Padrino, Ex, Euphoria, Ecsphoria, Diablo, Funky, Cocolino, penthedrone, MDPV, 6-APB, bk-MDMA, 3,4-DMMC</li> <li>- Trittico (ketamina + mdma + speed)</li> <li>- Yaba</li> </ul>
<i>Slovenia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2C-B, 2C-E, 2C-I, nexus</li> <li>- 3-MeO-PCP, 4-MeO-PCP, 5-MeO-PCP, 5-MeO-DMT, 5-MeO-DIPT, 5-MeO-MIPT</li> <li>- 3-MMC, sladoled, led</li> <li>- 4-MEC</li> <li>- 4-FA</li> <li>- 5-APB, 6-APB</li> <li>- alpha-PVP, flakka</li> <li>- ayahuasca</li> <li>- butylone</li> <li>- datura</li> <li>- DOC, DOI</li> <li>- DTM</li> <li>- GHB, GBL, G, vodica, kaplce, tekoči ecstasy</li> <li>- ketamine, keta</li> <li>- khat</li> <li>- kratom</li> <li>- krokodil</li> <li>- LSA, Morning Glory</li> <li>- MDPV</li> <li>- mephedrone, 4-MMC, meph</li> <li>- methoxethamine</li> <li>- methylone, bk-MDMA</li> <li>- NBOMe</li> <li>- PCP</li> <li>- penthedrone, penta</li> <li>- phenethylamine</li> <li>- PMMA</li> <li>- salvia divinorum</li> <li>- spice</li> <li>- synthetic cannabinoids</li> <li>- synthetic cathinones</li> <li>- tryptamine</li> </ul>
<i>Portugal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 25i</li> <li>- 25i-NBOMe</li> </ul>

- 2CB
- Blow
- Canabinóides Sintéticos
- Catinonas
- Cryptomarket/Criptomoeda
- Designer drugs
- DMT, Dimetiltriptamina, jurema-preta, ayahuasca
- Drogas legais (legal drugs), Drogas legais sintéticas, bloom
- Drogas/Drugs darkweb
- Drogas/Drugs Deepweb
- Fertilizers
- ketamina
- Legal highs
- New psychoactive substances
- New synthetic drugs
- Novas drogas (new drugs)
- NPS drug
- Salvia divinorum
- Silkroad
- Smartdrugs
- smartshops
- Spice

## 2.1 Choose of web environments as research settings

Three different online environments were initially taken into consideration as possible research settings: social networks, web forums, and the deep web. However, a pilot exploration confirmed that within the social networks drugs are discussed in a superficial way. Indeed, messages are characterized by public exposure and connection with the physical, real identities, so the users' communication is affected by the will to save our reputation. For this reason, we have chosen the two other settings.

### 2.1.1 Forums on the clear net

In online forums messages are characterized by anonymity but also public visibility. Anonymity allows participants to be more authentic and bring out even "uncomfortable" issues about the drugs; the experienced and biographies that emerge are authentic, without being influenced by repercussions in real life (Turkle, 1998).

Forums are often related to the specific national culture and its subcultures, in many cases they are linked to specific communities: for this reason, it is important to individuate the right forum channels for each country in which the investigation will proceed.

There are some search engines that can help in the identification and screening of the principal forums in which drugs related posts are present. Each research team has used Boardreader (<http://boardreader.com/>) in order to individuate forums with more drug-related discourses, which allows to select contents on the base of language.

This tool has been used together with the projects partners' knowledge, as in some countries Boardreader was not able to find specific forums addressed to drug users known by the project partners.

Furthermore, it has been decided to gather data both from one generalist forum – that is, not specifically focused on drugs – and from one specific forum, i.e., a forum mostly frequented by drug users. The aim was to catch differences between mainstream and ‘specialist’ images about drugs and NPS.

Characteristics of the forums selected for each country are following described.

### *Italy*

The search through Boardreader did not provide very numerous results and, for most of individuated key-words, there were no results at all. Therefore, the selection of generalist forums was not difficult, as there are only two forums occurring for almost all successful searches, following described.

**Yahoo Answer.** This is an online community in which participants pose questions and receive answers on a wide range of topics, both serious and trivial. Within the community guidelines talking about drugs is not explicitly prohibited, however users are invited to “not posting anything that violates the laws”. The website is forbidden to children under 13 years. In this forum all the posts are questions and usually replies are rather short answers. Sometimes repliers simply answer by posting the information they found on the internet, quoting their sources, as requested by the rules of the community.

**FobiaSociale.com** (social phobia). This forum is intended for people with social phobia, defined on the website as an “anxiety disorder characterized by a persistent and exaggerated fear in social relations”. It could be argued that this forum does not represent the “normal” population, however it is interesting to understand to in what kind of social sub-groups NPSs are discussed. In this case it seems that, at least in the Italian web, NPSs discourses are particularly frequent among people who declare to have problem in social relationships. On this forum posts are either questions or personal opinions and reflections, and both posts and replies can be short but frequently they are also long.

Other identified forums, but with a few references related only to one or two substances, are Finanzaonline (forum base on finance theme), Groups.google.com (google forum), and Gaming.ngi.it (forum for Net-gamers). Furthermore, no specific forum came out, maybe because they are not indexed expressly to not be found so easily. Therefore, one more forum specifically addressed to drug users has been individuated following the suggestions of the operators working on the field of harm reduction.

The chosen specialist web forum is **Psiconauti.net**, which counts 621 members and is described as the Italian psyconauts’ community. Indeed this is the forum where Italian drug users following the international forum <http://www.psychonautes.com/> has moved since 2015. It is sponsored by an online smart shop, however, in the disclaimer, it is specified that “the project has not to be used for looking for/getting/offering substances, nor for talking about prices, neither about legal nor illegal substances”. The main declared purpose is to spread information and harm reduction about psychedelics and other drugs. It is also recommended to not indict ourselves and to protect the forum. The data search has been performed through the website search engine using all the keywords individuated.

### *Slovenia*

Boardreader turned out to be not suitable for the choice of Slovenian forums, since none of the words in Slovenian had any results. Instead of this search tool, it was therefore chosen the Google search.

We set the advanced search setting to only look for hits in Slovenian language and then looked up our keywords by typing the keyword and “forum” e.g. “ketamine forum”. We looked at the first results and wrote the names of the forums where a certain word appeared. We then selected the most frequent forums, which were Slo-Tech and Med.Over.Net forums. Since at the time of the research, Slo-Tech forum did not have a good search engine (it did not show specific posts with the searched keyword, it was also not possible to select a time range etc.), we decided to analyze Med.Over.Net forum.

**Med.Over.Net** website was created in 2000 as a response to the fact that health topics were not covered well on the internet. It developed rapidly and started cooperating with different organizations from the fields of health and social welfare (there are currently more than 200 experts involved in the creation of the content). It consists of various articles and 213 active forums on different topics, mostly health related. The forums are mainly moderated (143) by an expert from the field who also offers answers to the users’ questions. The portal is monthly visited by 425.084 different users, which makes it the 6th most popular portal in Slovenia. The profile of the visitors is mostly the active population aged 25-45.

There were a couple of other forums found (e.g. cosmopolitan.si, zadovoljna.si, mojbutik.si, rtvslo.si, joker.si, piro forum, Društvo Svit forum) but with references only to one or two substances, so they were not included in the analysis.

In Slovenia, the most popular forum on drugs is DrogArt forum ([www.drogart.org/forum](http://www.drogart.org/forum)). It is a user based forum with 9.032 registered members that have so far written 1.689.787 posts. The number of page views of the forum on a yearly basis is approximately 100.000. The forum is well known among users and therefore offers a good insight into the drug users’ and nightlife scene. The topics on the forum are however not all drug related – there are also threads about music, events, nightlife, current events in the world, social forum, sport, culture, art, movies, sex, love, relationships, recreation, health, technology, computer science etc. The conversation evolves mostly among users and other forum members, but there are also some professional responses from DrogArt staff. Although the forum is user based, there are some rules regarding the content of the discussions, e.g. it is forbidden to incite others to drug use, to offer or sell legal and illegal drugs and to ask where and how to get psychoactive substance (legal and illegal). Apart from the general rules, each sub-forum is dedicated to a specific topic and has rules of its own. For instance, there is a specific topic called “first-hand and third-hand experiences” intended for trip reports or other long-term experiences. Another specific topics is opened for “dark side of drugs” where users are supposed to write if they have health or psychosocial problems because of drugs or if they need advice. Groups of drugs also have separated topics (e.g. “psychedelics”, “stimulant drugs”, etc.) and the forum is moderated.

### *Portugal*

On the base of the professionals’ knowledge, as generalist forum the Portuguese section of the website **Reddit.com** was chosen. Reddit is a website made up of “subreddits”, which are similar to channels or communities with its own set of users and with its own set of rules. What identifies the user is a chosen username that may or may not identify the person’s real identity. In the majority of the cases it does not, being anonymous. Anyone can post questions, videos, links and it has a voting system (up or down) that sets the visibility of the post/comment in a way that contents with more points are viewed first.

According to what is declared on the website, the community [www.reddit.com/r/portugal](http://www.reddit.com/r/portugal) is, “A place to discuss articles related to the country Portugal or Portuguese people in the world only. They can be in Portuguese or English”. It has 14,286 registered accounts, not all active. Even though the main topic of the website is not drugs, its scope is broad enough to include some drug related posts.

In Portugal forums specifically focused on drugs and dedicated to drug users do not exist. The search through Boardreader allows skimming contents for language but not for geographical location.

Selecting the Portuguese language, we got more than one page lists of results, but none from Portugal. Other search engines and information sources were used, also considering the operators' field experience. The final impression was that, differently than other countries, Portuguese users do not discuss drugs on web forums and that the use of websites on psychoactive substances has no social expression.

For this reason – instead of analyzing a drug users' specific forum - the project research group has decided to organize 2 focus groups to explore attitudes and practices regarding mainly the means to access information about drugs and NPS, exchange experiences and reach the supply.

### 2.1.2. Forums on the dark net

The dark net provides a total anonymity and a limited visibility of the messages to the wider web audience. It is a totally parallel world where contents are not affected by social pressures, desirability or legal norms.

Martin (2014) defines crypto markets (or market places) as "online forums made available on a hidden site (usually .onion) where goods and services are exchanged between two parties using digital encryption, either Bit coins or Monero, and TOR browser, in order to clear their identity not to be tracked" (p. 356). Therefore, electronic money, TOR browser and cryptography are the main barriers to enter into a crypto market.

Once installed the Tor browser, users can access to specific areas of the Deep web dedicated to the topic and the trade of NPS by using repositories of hidden resources, such as Hidden Wiki. Hidden Wiki is the main access to the Dark Web, which all new users pass through, therefore the exploration started from this portal. The study can be defined as an exploratory "coring", using as criteria the visibility and accessibility of data and focused on a particularly complete forum in terms of types of available information.

To choose a market place forum in the dark-net, we entered through Hidden Wiki, and explored the links under the tag "drugs". Only forums related to market places were founded on July 2016.

Then, we have chosen **The AlphaBay Market Forum** for three main reasons.

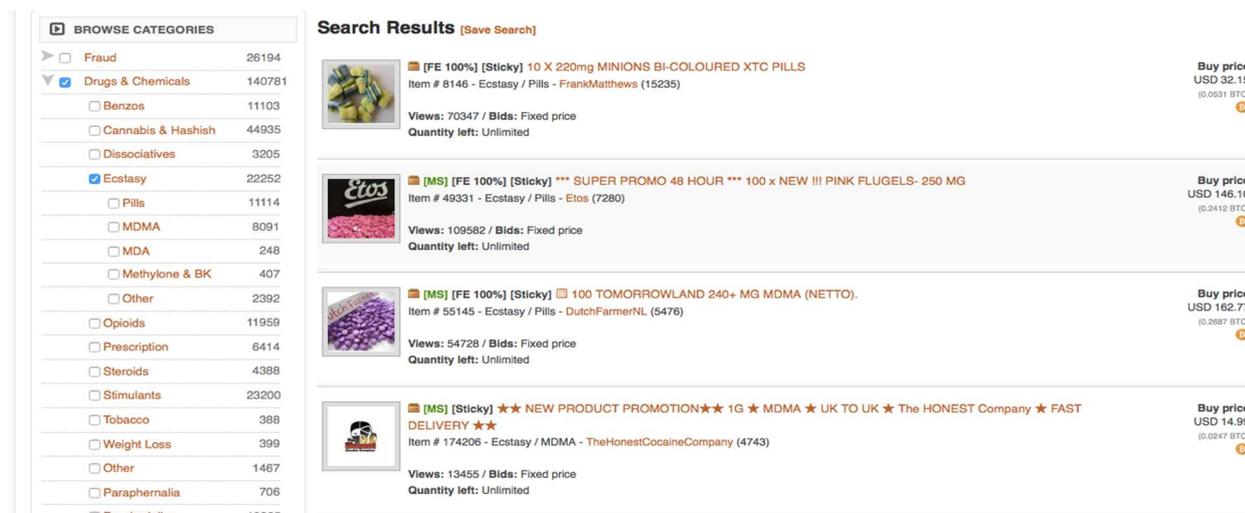
1. Among the forums found during the search, on that date<sup>1</sup> it was one of the most accessible. This assessment has been confirmed by the online magazine (<https://www.deepdotweb.com>), which reviewed AlphaBay Market as one of the Market Places with greater accessibility over time.
2. Among the Market Places that included a forum, with its 5,119 threads, it was one of the most active.
3. Lastly, it provided a lot of information about users, e.g. number of posts and answers and date of registration.

The AlphaBay Market Forum was made up of around 100,000 users. The market section was very similar to that of the most famous e-commerce services on the clearnet, like Amazon or eBay (see fig. 2).

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<sup>1</sup> AlphaBay was closed by the FBI on July the 5<sup>th</sup> 2017

Fig. 2 – How AlphaBay Market appears (July 2016)



To verify that the choice was correct, a brief exploration was made also into “Darknet avengers”, “Hansa” and “The HUB”, other famous forum on the Deep Web that are not categorized on HiddenWiki. Once again, it has been noted that AlphaBay Market was the most active in terms of conversations between users.

\* \* \*

To resume, the final choice of forums resulted as specified in table 2.

Table 2. Analysed forums

	Generalist	Specific	Marketplace
Italy	YahooAnswer + Fobiasociale	Psychonautes	Alphabay Market (cross national)
Slovenia	Med.Over.Net	DrogArt	
Portugal	Reddit	-	

## 2.2 Data collection and data sets

### 2.2.1. Web forums

To collect the data to be analysed, the keywords included in the original lists, have been used in the internal search engine of each selected forum. When a keyword was retrieved, the first 10 more recent results (threads) were selected and pasted on a new text file (so called “primary document” to be analysed). Comments older than 5 years have not been included, as well as off topics results.

Some adjustments have been introduced in some cases to get a meaningful and manageable data set. Particularly, after a first read of all the primary docs so obtained, in the case of specialist forums,

where comments and threads were usually very long, we have decided to reduce the number of threads to be analysed in depth.

Other slight adjustments have been made in each country to adapt the analysis to the contents of the specific forums, as following described.

In the case of the Italian generalist forums, in most cases NPSs are just quoted by someone within the conversation, being not the main topic of the discussion (thread). In these cases, the first post (the start of the thread) has been selected, then the post where NPSs are quoted and all the possible further comments related to it. On the contrary, on the specialist forum, threads included many pages and talks about different substances (NPSs and other drugs) and topics. Therefore, the ten most quoted substances have been chosen and the five more recent threads selected for the content analysis. Besides, ten posts about new forum members' self-representations have been added.

*Tab.3 Italian web forums data set (YahooAnswer, FobiaSociale.com, Psiconauti.net)*

Keywords	No. of retrieved threads	No. of selected threads (primary docs)
<b>Psiconauti.net</b>		
Salvia divinorum, Ayahuasca, Dimitri	185	5
Tryptamines (+4MEO-PCP, 5MEO-AMT, 4-AC0-DMT)*	169	5
Kratom	86	5
Ketamina, special k, green k	81	5
NBOME, cartoni	72	5
MXE, MXP, methoxetamine	39	5
Cannabinoidi sintetici, spice (HU-210, JWH-018, JWH-250, AB-001)	28	6
Kanna	23	5
Calea zacatechichi	15	5
Cathinoni (Mephedrone, bubbles, meow, Methylone)	8	5
GHB, GBL	8	0
2CB	7	0
Khat	5	0
Flakka	3	0
Love drug	2	0
Piperazine, MCPP	2	0
Droga del cannibale	1	0
Turnera aphrodisiaca	1	0
Forum members' self-representation	10 post	
Total		51
<b>Yahoo Answers</b>		
Ketamina	894	10
Droga dello stupro/ghb	637/112	10
Kratom	30	10
Salvia Divinorum	277	10
KHAT	39	7
Krokodil	61	10

Shabu	30	5
Speed	194	10
2CB1	40	1
Mephedrone	6	5
Spice (droga)	36	5
Superpill (ecstasy AND viagra)	9	1
Pasticche	10.453	10
<b>FobiaSociale.com</b>		
Ketamina	16	10
Kratom	2	2
Salvia Divinorum	5	4
KHAT	1	1
Krokodil	1	1
Speed	114	3
Pasticche	108	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>122</b>

In Slovenia, since all the keywords generated results, we estimated that the quantity of data would exceed the scope of this research, and decided to reduce the number of keywords to 10. We selected the 10 keywords that had the most results and formed the final list, then we proceeded to the selection of threads. Since some of the threads on DrogArt forum were very long and therefore provided too much data for the purpose of this research, we decided to reduce the number of selected threads to 5. We still first reviewed the topics according to the time criterion, but we also considered the content, selecting those that were more relevant (e.g. with the keyword “alpha-PVP” the second most recent thread was one where a user asks about the traceability of THC in blood/urine and the keyword only appears in the text once without providing any relevant information, so the topic wasn’t included in the analysis). In the analyzed discussions, there were also responses from DrogArt professionals (18), but the content of these posts was not considered in the analysis.

In order to synchronize the selection of data on both forums, we decided to use the same list of keywords that we chose on DrogArt forum also for Med.Over.Net forum. However, since some of the keywords had no results on Med.Over.Net we replaced them with the ones that had the most hits on Med.Over.Net, thus creating the following final list.

*Table 4. Slovenian web forums data set (DrogArt, Med.Over.Net)*

Keywords	No. of retrieved threads	No. of selected threads (primary docs)
<b>DrogArt</b>		
3-MMC, sladoled	128	5
mephedrone, 4-MMC	68	5
methylone, bk-MDMA	51	5
NBOMe	41	5
2C-B, nexus	40	0 <sup>2</sup>
GHB, GBL	37	5
methoxethamine, mxe	34	5

<sup>2</sup> According to the selection criterion (most popular keywords), we should have selected 2C-B for analysis but the review of the threads revealed that with 2C-B and nexus, there wasn't a lot of useful data. The substance were mostly only mentioned, but not discussed. Therefore, we decided to select »ketamine«, which was the next keyword in line.

alpha-PVP, flakka, a-PVP	24	5
MDPV	23	5
4-FA	22	5
ketamine	22	5
PMMA	13	0
4-MEC	10	0
JWH-018	8	0
pentedrone	7	0
ayahuasca	7	0
buthylone	6	0
spice	5	0
5-MeO-MIPT	5	0
droga krokodil	5	0
5-APB	4	0
datura	4	0
lsa	3	0
phenethylamine	3	0
6-APB	3	0
khat	2	0
2C-E	2	0
2C-I	1	0
		total: 50
<b>Med.Over.Net</b>		
droga krokodil	11	10
GHB/GBL	11	10
flakka	4	4
mephedrone	3	3
3-MMC	3	3
ketamine	3	3
kratom	3	3
5-MeO-MIPT	2	2
salvia divinorum	2	1
bk-MDMA	1	1
2C-B	1	0
buthylone	1	0
6-APB	1	0
khat	1	0
datura	1	0
LSA	1	0
ayahuasca	1	0
		Tot. 40

In Portugal the results were so scarce that also the general keyword “drug” was added. The final data set is shown in table 4.

Table 5. Portuguese generalist forum data set (Reddit)

Keyword	No. of retrieved threads (17/08/2015)	No. of selected threads
<b>Reddit</b>		
Drogas legais	2	1
Legal highs	0	0
Designer drugs	0	0
25i-NBOMe	0	0
2CB	0	0
DMT	1	0
smartshops	0	0
Anfetamina	1	0
Metanfetamina	0	0
MDMA	2	0
Ecstasy	1	0
Droga	53	5
ketamina	0	0
Salva divinorum	0	0
Drogas legais sintéticas	0	0
Droga designer	0	0
Dimetiltryptamina,	0	0
jurema-preta	0	0
Ayahuasca	0	0
MD droga	0	0

### 2.2.2. Focus groups

For the explained reasons, in Portugal two focus groups have been built up through a snowball sampling (or a chain referral sampling), where participants are selected “through referrals made among people who share or know others who possess some characteristic that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981:141). Procedures typically include asking an individual, previously identified through a nominative procedure, to appoint other individuals that meet the research criteria established: psychoactive substances use; and the use of the web to research, discuss or search for (gather information, exchange experiences, buy PS, etc.) psychoactive substances.

Focus groups have involved a total of 15 participants (FG No.1=7; F No.=8), 13 men and 2 women, aged between 22 and 46 years old (average age 31.5). Formal education level of the participants is generally high and heterogeneous: 9 of the participants hold a university degree (engineering, architecture, economics, social area, design, music...) and 6 have between 9 to 12 years of formal education. Except for one student and one unemployed person, all participants work either for a company or as free lancers, having attained different degrees of socio-economical stability. The general profile of the participants fits the “socially integrated” (Pavarin, 2015) or “non-problematic” drug user (Cruz, 2015) definition as defined by the scientific literature.

Finally, the majority shows high levels of PS and NPS literacy and a wide range of drug use patterns can be observed:

Before, I don't know, I used to give more opportunities to synthetic drugs. For instance, 2CB has been a great experience, or pills. But, with time, I moved forward. Nowadays, I prefer natural drugs, although I do not abdicate MDMA if I am going out at night or to a party (participant 3; FG 1).

The majority of drugs that I have used might be considered NPS (participant 2; FG 1).

My top 5 of drugs is DMT, 2CT7, LSD, 2CB and Ketamine (participant 24; FG 2).

Psychoactive substances used are diverse and include Cannabis, Synthetic Cannabinoids (such as poutpourri), MXC, Psilocybin, DMT, LSD, MDMA, Speed, GHB, DOB, 2CB, NBOMe, 2C-T-7, MDPV (Bath Salts), Cocaine, Crack Cocaine, Heroin, Ecstasy, Salvia, Methylone, Ketamine, Mefedrone, Amphetamines, Oxytocin, and Kratom; in a general manner, the term 'research chemicals' has been used for NPS of which there is little or nearly no information.

### 2.2.3. Market-place forum

On the dark net, the data sample to be analysed more in depth has been chosen in a reasoned way, a bit different from the clearnet forums, as the internal search for keywords did not provide many results.

We started from the same categorization proposed by Alphabay. Then, the 10 most visited and commented threads were selected for each category of drugs that included also NPS, on the assumption that they had the highest number of information. In the case of items that did not have 10 threads (MXE, Knock Off, NBOME), we proceeded by collecting all the available data. In this way, we obtained a sample consisting of 113 conversations or threads, which have become as many primary documents for the analysis, or "primary docs". Even during the analysis phase, we have chosen to follow the categorization made by the Crypto Market.

It has to be noticed that on the Dark net forums conversations are in English, a language that maybe not all users know well, therefore many pieces of talks are sentences not fully clear and meaningful.

*Table 6. Market-place forum data-set (AlphaBay Market)*

<i>Drug categories</i>	<i>No. of selected primary docs</i>
<i>Cannabis Hashish</i>	
(Syntetic)	12
<i>Dissociatives</i>	
Ketamine	10
MXE	5
Other Dissociatives	10
Drug safety	10
<i>Ecstasy</i>	
Knock off	3

Opioid	
Other Opioid	10
Fent and RCs	10
Pills	10
<i>Psychedelic</i>	
DMT	11
NBOMe	7
Other Psychedelics	3
Steroids/Weight Loss	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>

## 2.2 The analysis process

The coding process has been performed using Atlas.ti 7. The use of a specific software for qualitative analysis is highly recommended. Besides guaranteeing the traceability of data, it allows to easily come back to the original data during the whole process of interpretation, to check the wider context of the single quotations.

Quotations – in other words portions of text labelled under a code – are understood here as semantic units of varying length, which can include multiple users’ voices, but mostly correspond to one post or one reply.

A template model analysis (King, 1998) has been applied, adopting a coding template referring to topics expected to be relevant to the research, which will be named family-codes (attitude towards NPS, effects, use values, representations of consumers). However, this template has been open throughout the analysis to the addition of new codes based on actual data, using also very open family-codes, such as “questions” (with reference to initial question/post that has originated the discussion in which NPS are cited) and “discourse”, that include a list of topics and issues related to NPS (sometimes more generally to drugs, if NPSs are also quoted in the discourse).

These topics, as well as other free-codes (not part of families), have been added from time to time, according to what was emerging from the data. At the end of the analysis, the list of codes has been cleaned, by aggregating similar items and deleting a few codes that included only one or two quotations (with a few exceptions).

To the following general coding template, some new codes and free codes have been added to adapt it to the different environments, in order to catch the most relevant topics and issues in each kind of forum – generalist, specialist and related to a cryptomarket.

Table 6. Template model used for coding

Family code	Explanation	Initial list of codes (open)
Questions (QUEST)	Questions/issues/topics arisen in the first post that originated the thread	QUEST_info about drugs QUEST_effects QUEST_where to buy QUEST_consequences QUEST_legality QUEST_how to use ...
NPS representations (NPS_REPR)	All statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards NPSs	REPR_neg REPR_pos ...
Effects of NPSs (NPS_EFF)	Discourses about effects of NPS consumption (positive and negative)	EFF_death EFF_addiction EFF_brain damage EFF_social damage EFF_antidepressant EFF_anxiolytic EFF_socializing ....
NPSs consumers representations (C_REPR)	All statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards who consume NPSs	C_REPR_insults C_REPR_harm to others C_REPR_hopeless C_REPR_weak person C_REPR_young people ...
Self-representations (S_REPR)	Self-representations as consumers	S_REPR_controlled consumer S_REPR_ex-consumers ...
Vendors' self-representations (V_REPR)	Self-presentations of vendors (only for the Dark-net)	V_REPR_expert consumer V_REPR_honest ...
Responses (RESP)	Statements expressing responses to the situation of NPS  (only for Slovenia)	

The coding process, as well as the analysis, have been performed by native speaker researchers in each country. Then a national country report was provided to the workstream leader, who in turn draft the cross-national report and submitted it to partners for comments and amendments.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Generalist forums

#### 3.1.1. Italy

- In what kind of conversations forum users talk about NPSs?

Only in a minority of cases the web forum conversations are exactly on NPSs. More frequently, NPSs are cited when discussing more generally drugs or other general topics. Most of threads where NPSs are discussed start with a very general request of information about drugs, like the following:

CHE CARATTERISTICHE HANNO LA DROGA, L'EROINA, L'ALCOL.....?

esiste l'eroina , alcol, anfetamina, cannabis, cocaina, cobret, ecstasy, GHB, hashish, marijuana, ice, ketamina, LSD, mescalina, metadone, morfina, oppio, poppers, psicofarmaci, speed, subutex e buprenorfina ma quali caratteristiche hanno??? pleas aiuto!!! (P 45YA)<sup>3</sup>

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS HAVE DRUGS, HEROIN, ALCOHOL .....?

There are heroin, alcohol, amphetamine, cannabis, cocaine, cobret, ecstasy, GHB, hashish, marijuana, ice, ketamine, LSD, mescaline, methadone, morphine, opium, poppers, drugs, speed, Subutex, and buprenorphine, but what characteristics they have??? Please help!!! (P 45YA)<sup>1</sup>

Often authors of this kind of post specify that they are not willing to consume drugs, but they need information, for instance, because of a school research:

P.S. e una ricerca, non mi drogo, e non mi voglio drogare O.o (P 45YA)

P.S. this is a research, I do not take drugs and I'm not willing to do it (P 45YA)

Otherwise, they probably would risk to see their posts deleted by the forum moderators. Among these general requests of information, there are questions about what drugs are most dangerous. With respect to this topic, there are many references to the drug classification proposed by the Lancet in 2013:

CHI HA SCRITTO 'STO GRAFICO SULLA TOSSICITÀ DELLE DROGHE?

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/co...>  
E cosa c'è di vero?  
E un grafico più veritiero..? (P 106YA)

WHO WROTE THIS GRAPH ABOUT TOXICITY OF DRUGS?

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/co ...](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/co...)  
And what's true?  
And a more realistic graph ..? (P 106YA)

However, some forum members pose more specific questions, such as what are drugs effects and consequences and where it is possible to buy drugs, mostly NPSs (GHB, Kratom, Mephedrone, Spice), and how much they cost.

Most of questions or initial posts are therefore not personal, and this is not surprising considering both that talking about illegal behaviours is not allowed within these forums and that most of forum members show a negative attitude towards drugs and condemn consumers (see further). Nevertheless, there are also some personal requests of advise concerning personal drug consumption and, even more, about someone else's consumption, most frequently a boyfriend or a girlfriend:

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<sup>3</sup> In brackets at the end of all quotations is indicated the code identifying the primary doc from which the single quote has been extracted and the forum (YA=YahooAnswer; FS=FobiaSociale.com)

#### IL RAGAZZO CHE AMO DA MORIRE SI DROGA?

Ha preso l md, un altra sera speed, un altra ancora cocaina, poi ancora acidi..... Piango ogni giorno perché tenere tanto ad una persona e vederla fare così mi fa soffrire ho paura per lui.... Ed anche per me perché so che in futuro potrei soffrire tanto (P 117YA)

#### THE BOY WHO I LOVE TO DIE TAKES DRUGS?

He has taken the md, another night a speed, another one cocaine, then again acids..... I cry every day because to care so much about a person and to see him doing so, makes me suffer and I'm afraid for him .... and for me too, because I know that I could suffer so much in the future (P 117YA)

It is worth noting that some of the authors of this kind of posts are identified by the other forum members as "trolls", who, in the internet slang "is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (...) with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion, often for their own amusement". It is clear then that drugs are considered an irritating and provocative topic. Indeed, these messages are those that rise more replies, like the following that got 32 comments, much more than those usually found in YahooAnswers.com.

#### LA MIA RAGAZZA HA PROBLEMI DI DROGA...SONO A PEZZI

Ha solo 17 anni! Dopo due mesi che stiamo insieme ho capito di amarla e so che per lei è lo stesso. All'inizio mi dice che ha cominciato a fumare e a prendere qualche pasticca. A me dispiace tantissimo sapere che si rovina in questo modo, mi sono proposto di aiutarla, le ho buttato le pasticche e per una decina di giorni è riuscita anche a smettere ma ha ripreso. Mi ha anche detto che ogni volta che ci siamo visti ha sempre preso qualcosa prima. La "bombardavo" pur di farla smettere, ho fatto di tutto e le dicevo anche di non passare mai a sostanze più pesanti. Poi stamattina l'inferno: ieri sera ha preso dell'eroina. Mi viene da piangere, non posso neanche immaginare a quello che gli succederà e so che il mio aiuto non servirà neanche più. L'eroina la renderà dipendente, la rovinerà, la distruggerà. (P143YA)

#### MY GIRL HAS DRUGS PROBLEMS...I'M BEAT

She's only 17 years old! After two months we're engaged I realized that I love her and I know that it's the same for her. At first she tells me she has started smoking and taking some pills. I'm so sorry to know that she ruins herself in this way, I set out to help her, I threw her pills away and for ten days she even has been able to stop, but now she has started again. She also told me that every time we met she always had taken something before. I bombarded her just to make her stop, I did everything and I also told her to never move to heavier substances. Then, this morning the hell: last night she took heroin. I feel like crying, I can't even imagine what will happen to her and I know that my help will not help even more. Heroin will make her addicted, it will ruin her, it will destroy her. (P143YA)

On the forum FobiaSocial.com some talks about drugs have been arisen by questions about how the forum members deal with social phobia. Among these, there is a post by a banned author, who exhort users to search for professional support instead of taking drugs. The author has been banned by the forum, probably because moderators have identified him as a professional in search of clients.

#### NO ALLE TOSSICODIPENDENZE!

Molti sociofobici, per compensare il loro disagio ricorrono all'uso di sostanze stupefacenti! Oggi ci sono molti modi per affrontare il problema. Non fare uso di droghe, alcol ecc.. Vai piuttosto da un buon specialista. Lui sarà in grado di rimediare al tuo problema (P 4FS)

#### NO TO ADDICTIONS!

Many social-phobic people, resort to taking drugs in order to compensate for their discomfort! Today there are many ways to tackle the problem. Do not use drugs, alcohol etc .. rather, go to a good specialist. He will be able to remedy your problem. (P 4FS)

Following, codes and number of quotations are listed with a brief explanation.

<b>Family Code: "Question" = questions/issues/topics arisen in the first post that originated the thread</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>No. quot.</b>
<b>Requests of information on drugs/NPSs</b>		
QUEST_your opinion about drugs/drug users	Questions about what forum users think about drugs in general, traditional drugs and NPS (3 cases)	16
QUEST_effects	Questions about effects of consuming drugs, traditional and NPS (5)	15
QUEST_info about drugs	Very general request of information about drugs or NPS (6)	13
QUEST_where to buy drugs	Questions about where you can buy some kinds of drugs (mostly NPS)	10
QUEST_drugs classification	Questions or opinion about differences between different kinds of drugs, many referring to the "Lancet classification"	9
QUEST_have you ever try drugs?	Questions about drugs in general, traditional drugs and NPS (1 case)	5
QUEST_legality	Questions about legality of some specific substances mostly NPS	5
QUEST_consequences of drug use	Questions and comments about consequences of drug use. 1/5 concern directly NPSs.	5
QUEST_spiritual exeriences	Questions/opinions about the relationship between drug consumptions and spiritual experiences	5
QUEST_analysis	Traceability of drugs through blood tests	4
QUEST_prices	Questions about prices of drugs/NPS	4
QUEST_prescribed drugs	Questions about use of prescribed drugs or interactions between prescribed and illegal drugs	3
QUEST_news	Comment about a newspaper article	3
QUEST_why	Questions about why people do consume drugs/NPS	2
<b>Request of advice about drugs</b>		
QUEST_advice (others)	Advice request about how to deal with a consumer, generally a boyfriend/girlfriend ( <i>some authors are "trolls"</i> )	9
QUEST_advice (personal consumption)	Advice request about how to use drugs/how to handle consequences ( <i>some authors are "trolls"</i> )	4
<b>Other</b>		
QUEST_other	Other topics not before mentioned nor directly dealing with drugs	18
QUEST_social phobia	Questions about how other forum users deal with social phobia	4

- [How are NPSs represented? Attitudes, use values and supposed effects](#)

Attitudes towards drug consumption is in general rather negative on both forums analysed, and a recurrent discourse is that all the drugs have negative effects, from permanent damages (deaths, dependence, brain damage, harms to others...) to temporary effects (hangovers). This position is sometimes supported with the arguments that drugs cause not only physical dependence but also psychological addiction, and that light drugs can be a gateway to other drugs:

In più hai mai pensato che dalle pasticche potrebbe passare ad altro di più pesante? (P 92YA)

Furthermore, have you ever thought that he could move from pills to something heavier? (P 92YA)

Obviously not everyone agree with this vision and many forum members share that there are different kinds of drugs. In this sense, the most spread opinion about traditional drugs is that cannabis is the best, harmless or even beneficial drug, and heroin in the worse, most dangerous and mortal substance. This discourse is due to the fact that heroin is expected to cause addiction from which is very difficult – if not impossible – to come back. According to some, death is therefore an almost obvious consequence for those who consume opiates, including speedball, which is also associated with the risk of overdose.

However, forum members draw also other distinctions. A recurrent feature is that chemical or synthetic drugs are more harmful than natural ones, that is herbs and plants cultivated in the past in different cultures for therapeutic purposes. Problems would be linked to the chemical distillation, which alters the concentration (P 63). The following excerpt is from a talk to comment the classification of drugs published on The Lancet.

Di sicuro le droghe sintetiche, malgrado il loro costo inferiore, sono largamente più dannose di quelle naturali, o derivate da sostanze naturali, come la cocaina. Bisogna anche evidenziare, tuttavia, che le droghe quali la cocaina o l'eroina, sono pericolose a causa degli additivi, e non per la materia prima in sé, che di solito è utilizzata in modo del tutto naturale dagli indigeni che la coltivano, magari come corroborante o anestetico (P 106YA)

In spite of their lower cost, synthetic drugs are for sure largely more harmful than natural ones, or than naturally-derived substances, such as cocaine. Yet, it must be also highlighted, that drugs such as cocaine or heroin, are dangerous because of additives, and not for the raw material itself, which is usually used in a natural way by the natives who cultivate it, maybe as tonic or anaesthetic (P 106YA)

If this vision sounds sometimes ideological, somebody points out that the risks of NPSs is related to the fact that consequences are not yet studied and known. In this sense, also synthetic cannabinoids – sold in some smart shops as odorisers – are considered risky and very different from natural cannabinoids:

#### KETAMA GOLD E SPICE?? 10PUNTI?

ho sentito dire k questi due profumatori per ambienti k sono venduti negli smartshop sono molto simili alle droghe leggere, e vengono usate come se fossero tali, ma è vero? non dovrebbero fare male dato k sono prodotti chimici?

2 answers

**Migliore risposta<sup>4</sup>:** onestamente dubito che quei due prodotti in particolare siano ancora venduti(ma saranno di sicuro stati sostituiti da una quantità almeno doppia di prodotti simili), comunque sì è tutto vero.

questi prodotti contengono al loro interno delle molecole chimiche simili ai cannabinoidi normalmente presenti sulla cannabis. fumare questi prodotti dà un effetto abbastanza simile a quello della cannabis(appunto perchè sono molecole chimiche simili appartenenti alla stessa famiglia).

non è che siccome sono prodotti sintetici(non ha senso dire prodotti chimici perché qualsiasi cosa è un prodotto chimico, anche la naturalissima cannabis) sono pericolosi. piuttosto sono pericolosi perchè non si è a conoscenza delle quantità contenute nelle buste, non è possibile dosare a dovere la sostanza, sono molecole chimiche relativamente recenti e quindi non molto studiate(il che non garantisce nulla sui rischi a lungo e a breve termine, nè sulla dipendenza).

#### Ketama GOLD AND SPICE ?? 10 POINTS

I heard that these two air fresheners are sold in smart shops are very similar to soft drugs, and are used as if they were those, is it true? Should they not hurt since are chemicals?

2 answers

Best answer<sup>3</sup>: honestly I doubt that those two particular products are sold yet (however they surely have been replaced by an at least double amount of similar products), but yes it's all true.

These products contain in their inside chemical molecules similar to cannabinoids usually present on cannabis. Smoking these products gives a effect quite similar to that of cannabis (just because they are similar chemical molecules, belonging to the same family).

It's not that because they are synthetic products (to say "chemicals" does not make sense because everything is a chemical product, even the most natural cannabis) are dangerous. Rather they are dangerous because you don't know the amounts contained in the envelopes, you cannot dosed the substance properly, (and) they are relatively recent chemical molecules and therefore not very studied (which does not guarantee anything about the long and short-term risks, nor about dependence).

Actually it would be better to buy the active ingredients directly by laboratories (to be sure of the purity and non-

<sup>4</sup> On YahooAnswers the author of the initial post has the possibility to assign the title of "best answer" to the reply he prefers.

effettivamente sarebbe meglio comprare i principi attivi direttamente dai laboratori(per essere sicuri della purezza e della non contaminazione) che li sintetizzano e sperimentare con bilance di precisione(per essere sicuri sulle quantità)...ovviamente se a qualcuno interessa fare da cavia umana!(ripeto, sono prodotti poco o per nulla studiati, quindi pericolosi)

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Ciao.. Io conosco una cosa molto simile che vendono in uno smart shop dalle mie parti..sinceramente l'ho provato ed è una schifezza disumana! ti fa girare la testa e ridere magari.. ma sicuramente essendo un mix chimico non va bene.. e soprattutto non ha un buon sapore e costa anche tanto.. a parere mio..schifezza! (P 137)

contamination) that synthesize and experiment them with precision scales (to be sure about the quantity) ... obviously if someone interested to be a human guinea pig! (I repeat, they are little or not at all studied products, therefore dangerous)

-----

Hello .. I know a very similar thing sold by a smart shop in my neighbourhood... honestly I tried it and it's an inhuman crap! It makes your head turn and maybe makes you laugh... however, being a chemical mix, it is surely not good .. and above all it does not taste good and it costs too much .. in my opinion...(it's a) crap! (P 137)

Among NPSs, unspecified pills are subject of particular criticism, as they seem to be more innocuous than injecting drugs, easier to take, but they are equally highly harmful and can even lead to death, because you can dose them nor knowing exactly what is inside:

Poi col tempo gli spacciatori di morte hanno iniziato a sintetizzare droghe più "appetibili", perché in fondo una pasticca ci sembra più "pulita" di un qualcosa che devi sciogliere ed iniettarti. (P 97YA)

Then over time the death (drug) dealers have started to synthesize most "attractive" drugs, because basically a pill seems more "clean" than something that you have to dissolve and inject. (P 97YA)

Penso che tu sia molto maturo per la tua età, e che lei sia ancora molto piccola di testa. Purtroppo puoi farci veramente poco, di certo non puoi impedirle di andare in discoteca e di divertirsi. Ma sul fatto che beve e che si ubriaca, e che usa pasticche, fai bene a essere preoccupato. Le due cose messe insieme possono essere letali, quindi è un comportamento molto pericoloso. (P 92YA)

I think you're very mature for your age, and that she has still a very immature mind. Unfortunately, you can do very little about it, certainly you can not prevent her from going to the disco and have fun. But you are right to be concerned about her drinking and getting drunk, and taking pills. The two things put together can be lethal, therefore it's a very dangerous behaviour. (P 92YA)

Besides addiction and death, pills consumption is also related to permanent brain damage, even by those who declare to have experienced them, like in the following excerpt written by an ex-poly-consumer. According to a common feature, pills are told to "burn your brain":

- i trip son droga pesante niente astinenza fisica ma ti bruciano il cervello e te lo scollano dalla testa , tanti ci son rimasti sotto.  
- le paste ugualmente bruciano il cervello e anche se tanti le considerano droga leggera invece si rischia di non tornare + quelli di prima ! (P 34FS)

- Trips are hard drug [they give] no physical withdrawal, but they burn your brain and they unstick it from the head, a lot of people have been left below [have got their brain permanently damaged].  
- Pills also burn the brain and although many people consider them soft drugs, on the contrary there's the risk of not coming back to be the same as before! (P 34FS)

Krokodil is the another drug associated to very severe effects, such as cannibalism and self-destruction, to the point that many forum members wonder how is it possible that somebody decide to take this drug. Effects of GHB are described in less alarmist tone, but negative as well, because the risk is doing something that otherwise you would not do, ending up in at risk situation such us having unprotected sex.

Mixes of drugs are even more dangerous, also because purity is considered to be an issue. Indeed, there is no trust in the Italian drug market:

Per quanto riguarda questa storia, l'Italia fa schifo, siamo il cesso di tutta Europa, leggevo che le peggiori sostanze, le più impure, girano sul nostro territorio; il ragazzo è stato sfortunato ma anche incosciente, i minestrini sono pericolosi. (P 17FS)

About this aspect, Italy sucks, we are the loo of all Europe, I read that the worst substances, the most impure, are [sold] on our territory; the boy was unlucky but also unconscious, soups [mixes] are dangerous. (P 17FS)

Forum attenders do not focus only on physical damages, but also about the risk of ruining personal social relationships, doing harms to others (partners, friends, relatives) besides to themselves.

Se ora ti ama, conta quello ed andare in discoteca non è un reato ma cerca di farla smettere di assumere certa roba che potrebbe rovinarla (non solo come persona ma anche come vostra relazione) (P 92YA)

If she loves you by now, this is what matters, and going to disco is not a crime, but try to get her to stop taking some stuff that could ruin her (not only her as person but also as your relationship) (P 92YA)

However, for someone drugs are on the contrary a way to feel better with others, socialize more easily, and overcome shyness and feel more empathetic and able to create social bonds. The following excerpt is about supposed effects of M-cat, reported on a newspaper and posted by a member of YahooAnswers.

Chi la assume sente che le sue capacità relazionali aumentano: la parlantina è più sciolta, c'è maggiore empatia con le altre persone, si diventa più gioiosi ed eccitati. (P 58YA)

Who takes it feels that his social skills increase: the gab is looser, there's greater empathy with other people, you become more joyful and excited. (P 58YA)

Indeed, also positive effects are discussed on the analysed forums, among which the most quoted is the antidepressant effect, mostly associated to ketamine.

La ketamina, un anestetico dissociativo con proprietà allucinogene che agisce primariamente nei sistemi di trasmissioni del glutammato, può effettivamente alleviare la depressione, persino riducendo la frequenza di pensieri suicidi nei pazienti depressi. (P 10FS)

Ketamine, a dissociative anaesthetic with hallucinogenic properties that acts primarily in glutamate transmission systems, can actually relieve depression, even reducing the frequency of suicidal thoughts in depressed patients. (P 10FS)

Such an effect goes hand in hand with the anxiolytic properties attributed to certain substances, such as kratom.

Quello che provo sotto kratom è una sensazione di profondo benessere, ottimismo e rilassatezza. La depressione e l'ansia vengono spazzate via e ho la sensazione di riuscire a fare, parlare e comunicare con chicchessia con buona disposizione d'animo, come se una sorta di velo grigio dai miei occhi venisse via. (P 13FS)

What I feel under [the effect of] kratom is a feeling of profound well-being, optimism and relaxation. Depression and anxiety are swept away and I have the feeling that I can do, speak and communicate with anyone with a good frame of mind, as if a kind of gray veil from my eyes was removed. (P 13FS)

Differences and similarities between drugs and prescribed psychotropic drugs represent a recurrent topic, mostly on FobiaSociale.com. Three main opinions emerge about, with no significant prevalence: one is that drugs are even better than prescribed drugs, even if – as someone points out – long terms effects are not known. Another position is that prescribed drugs are as addictive as (illegal) drugs (e.g. one person admit to be addicted to Lexotan). The third opinion on the contrary is expressed by whom suggest to other members to not use illegal drugs or NPS but rather prescribed drugs.

Somebody refers as effect the possibility to increase fun and leisure when hanging out, without making reference to the need to set aside anxiety, however some doubts are also expressed about

effectiveness of drugs in this sense. Some users recognised that positive effects are only temporary and therefore illusory:

La droga è piacere o soluzione del proprio malessere x un periodo + 0 - lungo xciò momentaneo e quando finisce l'effetto ci si ritrova punto a capo se non peggio. (P 34FS)

The drug is a pleasure or solution of your discomfort for a more or less long period, therefore temporary, and when the effect ends, you find yourself at the head, if not worse. (P 34FS)

Finally, there are the beneficial effects that are related to an experimental use value of psychotropic substances, which would allow consumers to expand their perceptions and understanding, to go beyond the limits of the rational experience and to approach the spiritual dimension. This discourse is mostly related to the use of hallucinogens, substances considered “able to improve creativity and intelligence” (P 106YA). The following excerpt is from a discourse about ketamine, and the focus is on its role in the comprehension of our brain function.

Per quanto mi riguarda invece, è più una questione di voler fare un'esperienza diversa del proprio pensiero e della realtà; perché non è vero che si perde del tutto il controllo su se stessi; ciò che accade anche con la droga, se considerata non solo come mezzo per fuggire o come sbalzo ricreativo, è che tutto quel parlare di che cosa sia l'IO, della sua base organica e di quale sia il suo rapporto, quali siano i suoi mezzi conoscitivi e interpretativi del mondo nel teorico, prende concretamente forma nell'esperienza diretta dello stravolgersi della percezione di me indotta da droghe di un certo tipo o da pratiche tipo l'OBE<sup>5</sup> e cose simili che non conosco in verità; non è straordinario pensare che si può, alterando qualche valore della nostra chimica, avere prova tangibile dell'illusorietà del mondo sensibile? Potendo agire su certe parti che alterano i dati sensoriali e vedere quindi seppur sempre in maniera limitata cosa accade oltre i limiti del nostro cervello, perché non provare a farlo? Si tratta di ricerca, non sbalzo. (P 3FS)

As far as I'm concerned, on the contrary, the point is rather wanting to do a different experience of his own thoughts and reality. Because it is not true that you lose the control over yourself at all. What happens - even with drug if considered not only as a means of escape or as a recreational buzz - is that all that talk about what is the 'I', about its organic basis and what is his relationship, what are his cognitive and interpretative means of the world in theory, [all this talk] takes concrete form in the direct experience of the direct perception of the distorted perception of me induced by a certain type drugs, or the OBE<sup>3</sup> and similar things which I actually do not know. It is not extraordinary thinking that you can have tangible proof of the illusion of the material world, by altering some value of our chemistry? Being able to act on certain parts that alter the sensory data and therefore to see what happens beyond the limits of our brain, though always in a limited way, why not to try it? This is research, not high. (P 3FS)

<b>Family Code: NPS representations</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>No. quot.</b>
<b>Attitudes towards NPSs<sup>6</sup></b>		
REPR_neg	Negative representations about specific substance (ketamine, krokodil, pills)	15
	Negative representations about synthetic/chemical drugs	13
REPR_pos	Positive statements about specific substances (ketamine, kratom and salvia divinorum)	7
<b>Discourses about effects</b>		
<b>negative</b>		
EFF_death	Images of drugs leading to death (ketamine, krokodil, pills, shabu)	13
EFF_addiction	Images of drugs that cause addiction and dependence (kratom, krokodil, space, pills)	9
EFF_brain damage	Images of drugs that burn your brain causing permanent damage (khat, krokodil, pills)	7

<sup>5</sup> Out of body experiences

<sup>6</sup> Only statements directly referring to NPSs have been included, not all general opinions about drugs

EFF_social damage	References to damaged relationships with partners, friends or relatives (pills)	4
EFF_amnesia	References about (risky) temporary amnesia due to drugs, like having unprotected sexual intercourses (ghb, pills)	3
EFF_cannibalism	Reference to the effects of krokodil	3
EFF_hangovers	References to gastrointestinal disorders and other general negative hangovers (khat, spice)	3
EFF_other_neg	References to allucinations, convulsion, bad trip related to drugs (ghb, khat, sniffing drugs, shabu, space)	3
<b>positive</b>		
EFF_antidepressant	References to antidepressant effects of some drugs (ketamine, khat, kratom)	11
EFF_experimental	References to an expansion of perception and understanding (ketamine, salvia divinorum)	9
EFF_socializing	Reference to increased relational competences/to create social bonds (m-cat, kratom, ketamine, pills)	5
EFF_anxiolythic	References to anxiolytic/relaxing effects of some drugs (ketamine, kratom)	3
EFF_fun	References to the ability of drugs to increase fun (khat, pills, speed)	3
EFF_other_pos	References to generic positive effects (hallucinogens)	

- How are (NPSs) consumers represented?

It has to be noticed that no positive representations of NPS consumers emerged from data. Moreover, most of stances are judgemental in many ways. In some cases epithets used to indicate NPS consumers are really insulting, such as: junkies, pieces of shit, idiots, dregs of society. These kind of insults are particularly frequent when talking about drugs which are considered to have severe impact, such as krokodil, to the point that some members do not express any pity, even when commenting deaths, because of the idea that consumers asked for it, he is responsible of his own destiny. This is a typical conversation, where the voices that oppose this view – pointing out that drug consumptions is often related to poverty and social deprivation, and that drug users are not responsible for their problems - are a minority.

È ARRIVATA ANCHE IN ITALIA LA DROGA KROKODIL. COSA NE PENSATE?

ci sono delle immagini su yuotube da spavento. corrode la pelle.

**Migliore risposta:** Penso che alla stupidità delle persone non ci sia realmente un limite. E che non mi vengano a parlare di disinformazione, proprio no. Questo "alibi" andava in voga negli anni '70, forse.

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Ecchisenefrega...si squamino pure fino al midollo...feccia della società.

(...)

-----

Penso che limitare la questione alla "stupidità" delle persone sia davvero "stupido". La droga arriva dove c'è vuoto sofferenza. Questa cosa vale tanto per un ricco americano che per un ragazzino della periferia russa, e nessuno dovrebbe giudicare qualcun'altro per questo. Il Krokodil costa pochissimo, per questo tutti la usano. Se sei un eroinomane, vivi per strada, ti sei venduto anche tua madre, e non hai 10 dollari

ALSO IN ITALY HAS ARRIVED THE KROKODIL DRUG. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

there are frightening images on Yuotube. It corrodes the skin.

**Best answer:** I think the people's stupidity has not a limit really. And not talk to me about misinformation, not really. This "alibi" was in vogue in the '70s, maybe.

-----

Who cares ... they can desuamate to the core... dregs of society.

(...)

-----

I think that limiting the issue to the "stupidity" of people is really "stupid." The drug comes where there is a lack, suffering. This is true both for a rich American adult and for a boy from Russian suburbs, and no one should judge someone else for that. The Krokodil is cheap, so everybody use it. If you're a heroin addict, living on the street, who has also sold his mother, and you have not even \$ 10 for a dose, you

per una dose, non ci penserai due volte e comprerai il Krokodil a 1 dollaro. Accusare di stupidità gente che sta morendo e non ha strumenti per uscirne è una cosa vile, ignobile e da ignoranti.

---

Meno male così ci togliamo un po' di spazzatura di torno (P 83YA)

will not think twice and will buy the Krokodil for \$ 1. Accusing of stupidity people who are dying and have no means to get out of it, is a vile, despicable and ignorant thing.

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Thank goodness so we get rid of some garbage (P 83YA)

The hate towards consumers is so evident that a forum member poses the following question, pointing out that different type of consumers - for consumed drugs or consumption frequencies – are treated in the same way. This is true, and this is maybe due to the fact that in most cases the consumers represent themselves as poli-consumers.

POTESTE ELIMINARE TUTTI I DROGATI SULLA FACCIA DELLA TERRA, LO FARESTE?

Vedo che yahoo trabocca di gente che odia i 'drogati', e per drogati intendo dal cannato, all'acid-head, a quello che si fa di speedball e a quello che si fa di meth, da quello che si fa 2 volte l'anno a quello che si deve fare la striscia la mattina se no non tira avanti (ahaha). Perché li odiate tanto? Siate pure aggressivi quanto volete, ché mi diverto di più! (P 127YA)

IF YOU COULD ELIMINATE ALL THE ADDICTS FROM THE FACE OF THE HEARTH, WOULD YOU DO IT?

I see that yahoo is full of people who hate the 'junkies', and by "junkies" they refer to cannabis-smokers, to acid-heads, to those who take speedball and those who take meth, to whom takes drugs two times per year and to whom needs a strip of cocaine all the mornings otherwise he cannot not go forward (ahaha). Why do you hate them so much? Be as aggressive as you want, because I enjoy it more! (P 127YA)

Along the same line, another member asks why people should have problems to hang out with a drugs consumer and what harm does he make except than himself. The following answer well explains a position that frequently occurs in the data: consumers are accused mainly of doing harm to other people, for instance by causing car accidents, especially of causing suffering and concern to relatives and partners.

So cosa significhi stare vicino a chi si droga.....ho passato anni e anni dietro a mia cugina, ero una delle poche persone di famiglia a starle emotivamente vicino oltre nostra nonna....ti posso dire che il male lo fate a voi ma molto e non immagini quanto a chi vi vuole bene (...) Adesso è grande, ha smesso da molti anni, ma non è la cuginetta che avrei voluto vedere (...) preferisco non vederla, mi fa ancora male, anche se ho una famiglia mia dove tutto procede bene.....come vedi il male lo fate, non solo a voi, ma a chi vi sta vicino e vi vuole bene.....pensaci..... (P 128YA)

I know what being close to those who take drugs means..... I have spent years and years after my cousin, besides our grandmother, I was one of the few members of the family to be close to her emotionally.... I can tell you that you hurt yourselves but also who loves you, a lot and you can't imagine how much(...) Now she is an adult, she has been quitted [taking drugs] since many years, but she's not the cousin I wanted to see (...) I prefer not to see her, it still hurts makes, although I have my own family where everything goes well ..... see how damage you do, not only to you but to those around you and loves you ..... think about it (P 128YA)

Consumers are accused to prefer drugs to relatives, willing to continue to do it and therefore not deserving others' help. According to some people, who want to help consumers to quit may find himself involved in the use of drugs. To let consumers alone on their way is a quite frequent suggestion, according to which in this way consumers can understand they have a problem:

Non lo dico per allarmarti, ma devi stare molto attento, perchè non sai in che giro sta lei. è brutto a dirsi, ma di solito l'unico modo per queste persone in questo stato di capire cosa stanno facendo alla loro vita e a loro stessi, è lasciarle. Solo lì capiranno che per colpa della

I do not mean to alarm you, but you have to be very careful, because you do not know what is around her. It's bad enough, but usually the only way for people in this state to understand what they are doing to their lives and to themselves, is abandoning them. Only in this way they will understand that because of

droga le persone care attorno a loro sono costrette ad allontanarsi. (P 92YA)

the drug the loved ones around them are forced to move away. (P 92YA)

Even forum users who do not condemn drug users, think that they are weak persons, unlikely to be able to get out of drug consumption. In the following case the advice is about a girl taking (generic) pills and more recently having tried heroine, but similar stances are retrievable also about more proper NPS:

Sono pochissime, anzi rarissime le persone che si salvano da quella \*\*\*\*\*. Un mio parente è stato un di quei miracoli. E' davvero difficile uscirne una volta dentro a quel tunnel infernale... tu ci hai provato, provaci ancora. Ma se vedi che lei nemmeno si sforza per uscirne allora non ti star a rovinare la vita. Cambia aria, meriti di amare qualcuno che ti ami più della droga, qualcuno che trova in te la sua droga.. che non gli serva altro che il tuo amore. (P 143YA)

People who are saved from that \*\*\*\*\* are very few, rather very rare. A relative of mine was such a miracle. It's really hard to get out of that infernal tunnel once you are inside... you've tried it, try it again. But if you see that she does not even make an effort to get out of it, then do not ruin your life. Change scenery, you deserve to love someone who loves you more than drug, someone who finds his drug in you.. who needs nothing but your love. (P 143YA)

In such a hostile context, not surprisingly, only a few web users openly declare that they are consumers – or better poly-consumers - while, as we have said, those looking for information on drugs prefer to ask general and impersonal questions. Even among these few, the majority present themselves as occasional and controlled consumers, who anyways know that drugs are dangerous:

Prima di ciò, io assumevo quotidianamente alcol e fumavo molto hashish... In più ogni weekend o giù di lì vado alle feste e lì mi capita di assumere anche grandi quantità di mdma speed (che sarebbe o almeno dovrebbe essere anfetamina o qualcosa di simile) a volte cocaina chetamina ed oppio. Sicuramente non voglio abusare di queste sostanze ora, ma neppure voglio privarmi del divertimento. Ho sempre usato la droga in maniera cosciente - per quanto sia possibile... Nel senso, mai capate storte, non voglio di certo rimanerci sotto. (P 114YA)

Before that, I took alcohol and smoke lot of hashish daily... Plus, every weekend or so I attend parties, and over there it happen to me to take also large amounts of MDMA speed (which would, or at least should be amphetamine or something like that) sometimes ketamine cocaine and opium. Definitely I do not want to abuse of these substances now, but do not even want to deprive me of fun. I always used drugs consciously – insofar as possible ... I mean, never weird stuff, I will certainly don't want to remain under it [have permanent damage]. (P 114YA)

However some of these (2) acknowledge that they are occasional consumers not by virtue but by necessity, because of difficulties related to availability, that is not knowing where to buy them:

Io credo che se conoscessi qualcuno che ne fa uso [di droghe] e sapessi come comprarle a quest'ora sarei un tossicodipendente. In realtà visto che le due condizioni si sono verificate solo per la cannabis, ho provato solo quella, e neanche mi piace particolarmente, soprattutto riduce ulteriormente le mie già inesistenti doti sociali. (P 8FS)

I think that if I knew someone who uses it and knew how to buy them I'd be a drug addict. Actually, since the two conditions exist for cannabis only, I tried just that, and I do not even like it particularly, most of all it further reduces my already non-existent social skills. (P 8FS)

Others admit they have consumed in the past but today declare themselves abstinent and recommend to not use drugs to those seeking information about:

Marijuana, cocaina, crack, mdma, funghi, afetamine ed alcuni tipi di pastiche a Londra. C'è poco da Andar fiero, ma sono contento di esserne uscito. (P 53YA)

Marijuana, cocaine, crack, MDMA, mushrooms, amphetamines and certain types of pills in London. There is little to be proud of, but I'm glad to be out. (P 53YA)

Those who have no reticence to admit their consumptions have been found mostly on FobiaSociale.com. They refer to use of kratom and ketamine and they focus on positive properties of

consumption, that is either to make you experience other possibilities of the human brain or to relax and improve the sociability, as it has explained in the previous paragraph.

Family Codes: C_REPR = “NPSs consumers representations” <sup>7</sup> and S_REPRE=self-representations as consumers		
Code	Explanation	No. quot.
<b>Blaming judgments</b>		
C_REPR_insults	Judgmental and offensive statements	17
C_REPR_harms to others	Consumers are seen as people who care about drugs more than about people around them, who they hurt	8
C_REPR_hopeless_responsible	Consumers are considered responsible for their addiction, people who do not want to stop using drugs	5
C_REPR_contagious	Consumers are seen as able to make other people become addicts	4
C_REPR_other neg	Consumers as people who want to appear cool and damage their brain	1
<b>Non-blaming judgments</b>		
C_REPR_hopeless	Consumers are seen as unlikely to be able to get out of drug consumption	8
C_REPR_weak person	The consumer is represented as a weak person, with a weak character	5
C_REPR_young people	Consumers are viewed as immature kids/very young people	3
C_REPR_other	People alone, people who hurt only themselves, who are bored	3
<b>Self-representations</b>		
S_REPR_Controlled/occasional consumer	Occasional consumers, who do not consider themselves addicted and control their consumptions (substances and frequency)	6
S_REPR_Ex-consumer	Reformed consumers who used to take NPSs and other drugs, but that at the present time declare to have quit	6
S_REPR_Other	Who directly declares to be a consumer with no regret nor reticence, but rather a positive meaning	4

### 3.1.2. Slovenia

- [In what kind of conversations forum users talk about NPSs?](#)

In approximately half of the threads, NPS are mentioned in the originating post of the thread and/or is the main topic of conversation, while, in the other half, they are just mentioned in conversations about other topics. Usually, people start the conversations either by asking or giving information about drugs, by asking for advice/opinion or with other topics, not related to drugs. Most posts start by people **asking for information** about drugs, for example whether a certain substance is a drug or which drug it is.

Piše spodaj ena mamica, da je hčerka zaužila “drogo za posilstvo”. Kakšna droga pa je to. Prvič slišim to. (P6M)

A mother writes that her daughter ingested “rape drug”. What kind of drug is that. This is the first time I hear of it. (P6M)

They also ask about the availability of drugs in Slovenia, the legal status of GHB and the traceability of drugs in blood and urine tests, one user is interested specifically in new drugs.

zdravo, mene pa zanima, če testi, ki so v redni uporabi zaznajo novodobnoe droge kot so flubromazepam, flubromazolam, clonitrazolam, clonitroprazepam, 4-ho-met, al-lad, 5-mapb, 6-apb, butyrfentanyl, u47700,

hi, I would like to know if tests, which are in regular use, detect new drugs like flubromazepam, flubromazolam, clonitrazolam, clonitroprazepam, 4-ho-met, al-lad, 5-mapb, 6-apb, butyrfentanyl, u47700,

<sup>7</sup> The aim was to select only data about consumers of NPSs but sometimes the discourse included both NPSs and traditional drugs and it was impossible making a distinction.

4-meo-butyrfentanyl, furanyl-fentanyl, eth-lad, 5-meo-mipt, 4-aco-dmt, dpt, a-pvp, 3-fluorophenmetrazin, metizolam, ....

4-meo-butyrfentanyl, furanyl-fentanyl, eth-lad, 5-meo-mipt, 4-aco-dmt, dpt, a-pvp, 3-fluorophenmetrazin, metizolam, ....

zamima me predvsem za hitre urinske teste

I am interested especially in fast urine tests

Other questions include one user asking if anyone has ever tried injecting heroin without becoming addicted, someone asking if GHB arouses women, a recovering addict asking when he can lower his dose of buprenorphine, and a woman asking why people even take drugs.

Sometimes, people start the thread with a **story** – there is no question, just a description of a situation, expression of opinion or links to a website with a news article or effects of a drug (crocodile, GHB). The situation can be either something that has happened to them (e.g. someone saw a junkie cutting his leg and found it really disturbing), something they read or saw (e.g. article about crocodile) or in one case, a personal experience with a drug (salvia divinorum).

On the other hand, some people on the forum begin the thread by **asking for advice or opinion** from other forum members or professionals. Two members ask about the danger of drugs, one related to NPS:

Pozdravljeni,  
v tretjem in četrtem tednu nosečnosti sem 2x zaužila nekaj črtic(enkrat 3 in drugič 5 črtic) prepovedane droge 3MMC (več o drogi na povezavi <http://www.drogart.org/>)  
Takrat še nisem vedela da sem noseča, ker sem s partnerjem zanosila nenačrtovano. Zanima me ali ima lahko omenjeno dejanje kakršnekoli posledice na plod in pa kasneje na otroka. Po tem nisem zaužila nobene droge več. Ker nisem zasledila podobnega primera, vas lepo prosim za odgovor. Pred tem sem omenjeno drogo zaužila 1x na mesec, pa še to v zelo majhnih količinah. Zdaj sem v 10 tednu, kmalu sem naročena na biopsijo horionskih resic. Otroka bi vsekakor obdržala.

Lepo vas prosim za mnenje. (P1M)

Hi,  
in the third and fourth week of pregnancy I twice took a few lines (ones 3 and the other time 5 lines) of the illicit drug 3MMC (more about the drug on the link <http://www.drogart.org/>). At that time I didn't know that I was pregnant yet, because the pregnancy was unplanned. I would like to know if the described act can have any kind of consequences for the fetus and later for the baby. After that I haven't ingested any other drug. Since I haven't found any similar cases, I kindly ask for an answer. Before that I took the mentioned drug 1x a month, in very small quantities. Now I am in my 10th week, soon I have an appointment for a chorionic villus sampling. I would definitely keep the baby.

I kindly ask for your opinion. (P1M)

The question was answered by a professional, a doctor.

The issue for which people seek opinions can be very general, e.g. someone wants to know what others think of drunk women, or it can be specific. The example for the latter is the question of a woman who comments the recent media-covered events of the disappearance of young boys, who went missing over the course of a couple of months after they were partying and their bodies were later found in rivers (they drowned). There was a lot of speculation at that time about whether they were using drugs (or were drugged by someone). In the forum discussions, there are references to these cases, especially in relation to 5-MeO-MIPT and flakka. The thread about 5-MeO-MIPT starts with a related question:

Občutek mi pravi, da bodo tudi pri Klemnu našli to drogo kot pri Domnu, saj sta si primera zelo podobna. Kaj vi mislite? (P2M)

My gut tells me that they will find the same drug with Klemen as they did with Domen, because the cases are very similar. What do you think? (P2M)

Forum members turn to others also for advice on what to do, either with somebody they know that uses drugs (son) or for themselves (how to handle their addiction/substitution).

Some of the threads are **not drug related** and include topics like the case of the missing boys, comments on how some people can leave their sick partners, someone asking if anyone has experience with clinical death after failed suicide attempt and so on. In these cases, the topic of drugs is usually introduced later in the conversation and is not apparent from the first post.

Family code: "QUESTIONS" = Questions/issues/topics in the first post that originated the thread		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT. <sup>8</sup>
<b>INFORMATION ON DRUGS</b>		
QUEST_story	Sharing a story, experience, links and comments of online articles (NPS 7)	9
QUEST_identification	Questions if a certain compound is a drug or which drug it is (NPS 4)	4
QUEST_availability	Questions about the availability of drugs (NPS 1)	2
QUEST_legality	Questions about the legality of specific substances (GHB)	2
QUEST_analysis	Questions about traceability of drugs through tests (NPS 1)	2
QUEST_effects	Questions about the effects of a drug (NPS)	1
QUEST_dose	Question about dosing (Buprenorphine)	1
QUEST_why	Questions about why people consume drugs	1
QUEST_personal experience with drugs	Question about personal experiences with drugs	1
<b>ADVICE OR OPINION</b>		
QUEST_danger	Asking for an opinion about the danger of a drug (NPS 1)	2
QUEST_advice (personal)	Advice request regarding substitution/how to manage drug use	2
QUEST_drunk women	Asking for an opinion about drunk women	1
QUEST_boys who drowned	Asking for an opinion about the NPS related with the cases of the boys who drowned	1
QUEST_advice (others)	Advice request about how to deal with a consumer (son)	1
<b>OTHER</b>		
QUEST_other	Other topics not directly dealing with drugs	7

- **How are NPSs represented?**

Attitudes towards NPS are mostly **negative**, especially in connection with flakka, GHB and crocodile. The latter is seen by some users as a new weapon to eliminate the poor or the junkies.

Putin je to drogo namerno vrigel med narkomane, da se jih čim več znebi. (P4)      Putin intentionally threw this drug to the junkies in order to get rid of as many of them as possible. (P4)

GHB is mostly associated with drink spiking and rape and there is a lot of discussion among forum users about whether a rape drug even exists, what the effects are and also if spiking is happening in Slovenia. Some doubt it, but others are very sure that it does happen.

res je!!!      it is true!!!  
 Verjemite, da ta droga res obstaja. Tako v tujini kot pri nas. (P6M)      Believe me that this drug really exists. Abroad, as well as here. (P6M)

A user posts links to news articles about cases of spiking and dangers of GHB as proof that spiking really does occur. Users also offer examples of stories that they have heard about women being drugged and not remembering anything. One user writes about the "typical scenario".

Običajen scenarij je sledeč: "Pila sem alkoholno      The usual scenario is the following: "I drank alcohol

<sup>8</sup> The number represents the number of quotations marked with a certain code. It does not show the number of different authors (forum members).

pijačo, potem sem pa kar naenkrat bila kar nekje na drugem koncu mesta, sama." Običajno se kasneje še ugotovijo znaki spolne zlorabe. (P6M)

and then suddenly I was somewhere on the other side of the city, alone". Usually there are signs of sexual abuse discovered later. (P6M)

Two of the users also share their own experience of how they were probably drugged. In the following discussion users speculate if it is possible that it was GHB. In connection to GHB, people warn each other that they should be careful. The warning is general and the actual compound isn't even relevant - people don't always know that the rape drug is called GHB; they refer to it as "that drug".

Apart from GHB, users warn others also about crocodile, flakka, bath salts and other cheap NPS and snorting. The tone of the messages is often dramatic and to make it more serious, users post links to horrible pictures of the effects of crocodile or write explicit warnings, e.g. "Be afraid of flakka drug" (P5) or "Warn your children" (P5). Crocodile is considered to be especially dangerous due to its ingredients, long preparation time and short lasting effects. Users write that crocodile isn't even a drug, but "death" (P4) or "a mixture of the most dangerous chemicals" (P4) so dangerous, that even a junkie that "has at least a few of brain cells left in his head wouldn't even smell it" (P4).

One user also considers salvia divinorum to be dangerous and labels the use as "playing with life" (P10).

There are different perceptions about the dangerousness of various drugs. Crocodile seems to be very high (if not on the top) on the list, but also some other, traditional drugs, e.g. heroin, methamphetamine, crack... It is important to note that by two users, alcohol is also seen as very problematic, despite its cultural and social acceptance, and so is the abuse of medications. Cannabis is perceived by one user to be the least dangerous drug that can also be protective – in his opinion, if people are allowed to smoke pot, they don't use other, more dangerous substances.

(...) Z temi testiranji ste mu odvzeli možnost kajenja marihuane, ki ga verjetno pomirja; zato išče druge možnosti ki so VSE po vrsti nevarnejše in škodljivejše. Ponavadi to prinese več kao neizsledljivih legalnih drog, da so testi negativni:

1. alkohola, nikotina, energijskih napitkov, raznih enrgijskih pripravkov, 5htp...
2. starih tradicionalnih halucinogenov, ki so lahko smrtno nevarni v prevelikih odmerkih (datura angelska trobenta ali nočna kurbica, slak morning glory, muškadni orešček, mušnice, ostale nore gobe, volčja češnja, absinth, pejotli, meskalin, DMT...)
3. novih dizajnerskih drog (mefedron->soli za kopanje; nadomestkov konoplje ko so spice, k2 (Jwh-18); ketamina, razne tablete legalno dosegljive na internetu, legalna koka, legalni opij...) obseg teh novih dizajniranih drog je ogromen in jih najdemo v prosti prodaji na internetu, bio trgovinah, fitnesi trgovinah, lekarnah....
4. zlorabe zdravil za psihične bolezni (tramali, adderal ritalin, litij, iboprufen, apaurin ...) te dobiš kar zastonj če terapevtu našteješ prave simptome vendar niso preveč popularna zaradi grozljivih stranskih učinkov. (P9M)

(...) With these tests you took away his option to smoke marihuana, which probably soothes him; therefore he is looking for other options which are ALL more dangerous and harmful. Usually this brings more supposedly untraceable legal drugs, so that the tests are negative:

1. alcohol, nicotine, energy drinks, different energy concoctions, 5htp...
2. old traditional hallucinogens, that can be deadly in high doses (datura, morning glory, nutmeg, fly agaric, other magic mushrooms, deadly nightshade, absinth, peyote, mescaline, DMT...)
3. new designer drugs (mephedrone -> bath salts; cannabis supplements like spice, k2 (Jwh-18): ketamine, different pills legally available on the internet, legal coke, legal opium...) the scope of these new designer drugs is enormous and they are found in free sale on the internet, bio stores, fitness stores, pharmacies...
4. abuse of medicine for mental diseases (tramal, adderal, ritalin, lithium, iboprufen, apaurin...) you get these for free in you tell the therapist the right symptoms but they are not so popular due to the horrible side effects. (P9M)

Since some of the new drugs are represented as very dangerous (crocodile, flakka), forum members are afraid of them and of the consequences they might bring to their surroundings. They are also afraid because they don't know the truth about what is going on (related to the lack of information). One of the forum members even says that she would stop partying because of the fear of being drugged and raped.

Sama bi zaradi takih možnosti raje prenehala sploh hodit ven, torej žurat, prav zaradi nezaupanja in strahu pred takimi okoliščinami, a mladim nima smisla nekaj preprečevati, postane to še bolj zanimivo! (P6M)

Because of these possibilities, I would stop even going out, that is partying, because of distrust and fear of these circumstances, but it's no use prohibiting young people something, it becomes more interesting! (P6M)

In addition to fear, another emotion is evident and that is disgust (as a reaction to rotten flesh).

Other negative representations mostly refer to crocodile – users write how it is a cheap substitute for heroin, mixed with various additives, they use negative words (e.g. horrible, sad) and associate crocodile with zombies. Crocodile is even used as a metaphor for something really horrible. In a discussion about how people can leave their sick partners, a forum member writes that people can “do to each other’s souls what for examples crocodile does to a body” (P4). NPS are also seen as cheap and dirty drugs.

There are **a few positive attitudes** towards NPS, mostly associated with salvia divinorum (that is presented as safe, natural and with interesting effects) and kratom (that can help with detoxication). It is also pointed out that there is nothing wrong with any substance itself – the users choose to use it. Drugs can teach you new ways of perception and reacting to the world around you. As a response to a mother asking about how to stop her son from experimenting, one forum member writes about how prohibition is not the answer, how her son probably likes using drugs that are not all bad and how the negative attitude towards drugs is a consequence of ignorance about the world of drugs.

(...) Verjetno le išče nove načine širjenja zavesti, nova doživetja... Droge niso samo zlo. Lahko te naučijo drugače gledati na svet, drugače reagirati na zunanje dražljaje, spoznavati sebe v drugačni luči. Vsa doživetja ki jih doživimo pod vplivom drog nam ostanejo kot spomini, ki jih kasneje lahko obujemo. (...) Vi droge zavračate samo zato, ker se jih bojite zaradi napačnih predstav o njih. Zgodbe iz javnih medijev ter policijskih poročil niso tako enoznačne kot jih mediji ter država prikazuje (...). (P9M)

(...) He is probably just looking for new ways of expanding his consciousness, new experiences... Drugs aren't just evil. They can teach you to look at the world differently, react differently to external stimuli, get to know yourself in a different light. All the experiences that we have under the influence of drugs stay with use as memories that we can later revive. (...) You reject drugs only because you are afraid of them due to your incorrect perception of them. Stories from public media and police reports are not as unambiguous as the media and the state present them (...). (P9M)

Sometimes, the attitude towards NPS is **neutral** – the conversation is just about the facts, with no direct expression of either negative or positive attitude (which, in a way, can be considered positive, because it creates an online environment where people can feel safe enough to ask for information).

The **availability of NPS** is discussed a lot – there are mixed opinions about whether certain drugs are present in Slovenia (crocodile, GHB, flakka). Generally, according to the forum members, NPS are easily available and are also popular among students, one user reports that crocodile was even used by primary school pupils. The only obstacle is that it can take long to get the drug when you order it online (salvia divinorum). Legality doesn't seem to be an important factor in the popularity of drugs and according to one user, demand creates supply.

A doctor mentions in his professional response that there is **not a lot of data** available about 3-MMC, which is consistent with the general situation of NPS. There is lack of information but not a lack of NPS themselves.

In the analyzed discussions, there are **more negative effects** associated with NPS than positive. Crocodile and flakka are thought to turn people into zombies. A specific effect is linked to flakka – the feeling of heat or even burning. That is believed to cause people to take off their clothes and look for water to cool down. Crocodile, on the other hand, is often linked to the rotting of tissue. Amnesia is mentioned as an effect of GHB and addiction as a possible consequence of flakka and kratom.

Death is related with crocodile and bath salts. The latter are also believed to burn your brain and cause life-long damage after one time use:

nepopravljiva škoda

03 Apr 2016 10:59

Ljudje se sploh ne zavedajo kakšne hude posledice imajo te poceni droge, bath salts, spice (sintetična trava), flakka, itd... ki krožijo tudi med študenti, opozorite svoje otroke.

Dobesedno ti skurijo možgane, škoda je lahko življenska že po 1x uporabi, nikoli več nisi enak.

Nespečnost, paranoja, nezmožnost učenja, samomorilski občutki, nezmožnost učenja, razdraženost včasih tudi smrt.

Lahko tudi pregoriš zaradi povišane temperature ti lahko odpove srce in drugi organi. (P5M)

irreparable damage

03 Apr 2016 10:59

People are not aware of the terrible consequences of these cheap drugs, bath salts, spice (synthetic weed), flakka, etc.... that are present also among students, warn your children.

They literally burn your brain, the damage can be life-long even after one use, you are never the same again.

Insomnia, paranoia, incapability to learn, suicidal feelings, incapability to learn, agitation, sometimes even death. You can overheat because of the high temperature your heart can fail and other organs.

(P5M)

Depression is also mentioned, both as an after-effect of some drugs and as a dangerous predisposition that is amplified by a drug and can be a very difficult experience combined with hallucinations:

Skratka, če si čustveno nestabilen, depresiven ..itd to pomnoži 10.000 x in dodaj še dejstvo, da se čas ustavi in tema se preliva v barve in za povrh vidiš še druga bitja iz druge realnosti ;) (P2M)

In short, if you are emotionally unstable, depressed ... etc. multiply it by 10.000 and add the fact that time stops and darkness shades into colors in on top of it you see other creatures from another reality ;) (P2M)

Other negative effects of NPS include paranoia, incapacity to learn, suicidal feelings, agitation, fear, violence, loss of the feeling of reality, high blood pressure, insomnia, organ failure, sedation, loss of reason, hallucinations and changed perceptions etc.

On the other hand, users report **positive effects** of NPS. The beauty of out of body/out of Earth experiences is described in a post where a user shares his experience with salvia divinorum:

Ko sem povlekel čez pipo sem zadržal v sebi kolikor časa sem lahko, ko sem izdihnil čez 1-2 sekunde je usekalo in sem se ulegel na tla. Potem pa telesa nisem več čutil, kot ga ne bi imel, kot bi lebdel neznam ti povedat ampak bilo je čudovito. Spustilo je po kakih 2 minutah in bil sem čisto normalen in čez 5 minut naprej. =) (P10M)

When I drew through the pipe I held it inside as long as I could, when I exhaled after 1-2 seconds it hit and I lay on the floor. Then I didn't feel my body anymore, as if I didn't have it, as if I was floating I can't tell you but it was wonderful. It let go after 2 minutes and I was totally normal and after 5 minutes I continued. ☺ (P10M)

The experience is even labelled as "divine". Ketamine is also related with the same effect and it is believed it can help reach meditative-like states or even astral travel (e.g. the ability of a person's spirit to travel to distant places).

The healing potential of drugs is mentioned in relation to kratom, GHB and drugs in general – here, the beneficial effects are not only physical but also psychological (e.g. they help you see yourself differently) and social (e.g. improved relationships). Especially psychedelics also open the door to other worlds and experiences that we can later remember and make use of even when sober.

Other positive effects mentioned are ego dissolution, better understanding of reality and yourself (both seen as the purpose of the use of 5-MeO-MIPT), the feeling of floating, energy, laughter, feeling of love and happiness, intense stimulating effect, interpersonal connection, beautiful visions etc.

Family code: "NPS REPRESENTATIONS" = Statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards NPS		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT.
<b>ATTITUDES TOWARDS NPS</b>		
<b>NEGATIVE</b>		
REPR_spiking	Connection of GHB with spiking and rape	17
REPR_warning/danger	Statements with a warning message or tone; perception that NPS are dangerous	16
REPR_other neg	Other negative representations of NPS	14
RESP_fear	Statements expressing fear	6
REPR_weapon	NPS are seen as a weapon to get rid of the poor/the addicts	3
RESP_disgust	Statements expressing disgust	3
<b>POSITIVE</b>		
REPR_positive	Positive representations of NPS	7
<b>OTHER</b>		
REPR_availability	Discussion about the availability of NPS	26
REPR_not much data	Lack of data about 3-MMC	1
<b>DISCOURSES ABOUT EFFECTS</b>		
<b>NEGATIVE</b>		
EFF_links to horrible pictures/videos	Links to websites containing pictures and videos of negative effects of a certain drug	10
EFF_other neg	References to other negative effects of drugs	10
EFF_eats your tissue	References to tissue rotting	6
EFF_heat	References to the rise of body temperature and feeling of heat	5
EFF_amnesia	References to (temporary) amnesia due to drugs	4
EFF_addiction	References to drugs causing addiction	3
EFF_zombies	References to the "zombie" effect of certain substances	3
<b>POSITIVE</b>		
EFF_other pos	References to other positive effects of drugs	11
EFF_out of body/out of Earth experience	References to the dissociative "out of body" or "out of Earth experience"	7
EFF_healing	References to the healing potential of some substances	3

- Representations of (NPS) consumers

In the discussions it was difficult to distinguish between forum members' opinions of NPS users and drug users in general, so the results are combined. The attitudes towards drug use are expressed through individual comments and also a few longer conversations about the issue.

The use of drugs is mostly judged and not approved of. Therefore, people who use drugs are perceived as **immature** and the attitude is expressed through statements that seem to have a judgmental, "parenting" tone – forum members try to evoke reconsideration or guilt in those who use drugs, or even tell them to "grow up".

Zdaj bo pa počasi prišel čas za odraščanje, a ne? In ne, nisi probal, zato ker je tip težil, probal si zato, ker si to želel. A če bi tip težil, da si daj over dose, bi si a ne? :) In če bi danes bil zaradi tistega dne odvisnik, bi bil celo življenje kriv tip, ki je težil.

Grow up, "man" ! (P4M)

Now eventually the time will come to grow up, right? And no, you didn't try it because that guy was pressuring you; you tried because you wanted to. If the guy told you to give yourself an overdose, you would do it, right? ☺ And if because of that day you were and addict now, it would be that guy's fault for the rest of your life.

Grow up, "man"! (P4M)

Patronizing is also used when telling the users how they should have acted: “My darling, if you had any self-respect before (you mentioned that you now lost it), you should have...” (P6M). Forum members can be quite offensive and use insults, for example when they refer to drug users as stupid or losers. Sometimes, they don’t approve of drug use, but still offer nice wishes to drug users.

Nočem te žaliti, ampak res mi ni jasno, kako je lahko nekdo tako zabit, da zaradi visokega pritiska vzame najhujšo, najbolj osovraženo in uničujočo substanco na svetu? A nisi niti pomislila na posledice? To se mi zdi naravnost bizarno.

Sicer pa upam, da se boš rešila odvisnosti in zaživela novo, bolj polno življenje. Pa vso srečo! (P4M)

I don’t want to offend you, but I really don’t understand how someone can be so stupid that they take the worst, the most hated and devastating substance in the world because of high blood pressure? Didn’t you even think about the consequences? I find this really bizarre.

Otherwise I hope that you save yourself from addiction and live a new, fuller life. Good luck! (P4M)

There are cases where forum members directly deny feeling any pity (they feel more for the people who suffer because of them), because they do not see why they should feel for a junkie who is incapable and also uninterested in living. Indeed, consumers are sometimes seen as responsible for their own life and so the consequences are their fault. Not only drug users – also the boys who went missing are partly to blame for what happened to them.

Mogoče je čas da malo nehate kritizirati policijo in vse ostalo. Tudi tisti trije "pridni" študentje niso bili tako pametni, če so vsi trije zapustili prijatelje in sami tavali okrog. Sam ko grem žurat ostanem zraven prijateljev vedno. Pa tudi gledam kako pijaco mi da natakar pa pazim kdo je okrog mene da mi nisce neda nič v pijaco. (P5M)

Maybe it is time for you to stop criticizing the police and everything else. Also those three “good” students weren’t so smart if all three left their friends and wondered around alone. I always stay with my friends when I party. And I also watch which drink the waiter gives me and I look out for people around me so that no one puts anything in my drink. (P5M)

Even when girls share their experience with being drugged (presumably with GHB), they are confronted with a lot of judgmental comments about their drinking (note that drinking alcohol is disapproved of just as strongly as illicit drug use). A girl talks about how she went partying, drank 5 beers and then had a blackout – she still doesn’t remember anything and wonders if she was drugged. The first response she gets is the following.

Sicer ne vem, kaj hočeš povedati, ampak jaz bi se nad svojim življenjem malo zamislila, če bi bila na tvojem mestu. Zakaj piješ toliko? A si odvisna? Res ne razumem, a ni boljše ostati trezen in se imeti pod nadzorom in potem si ne rabiš postavljati vprašanj, kaj se je dogajalo z mano.

Lep pozdrav in vzami se v roke! (P6M)

I don’t really know what you want to say, but I would ponder on my life a little, if I were you. Why do you drink so much? Are you addicted? I really don’t understand, isn’t it better to remain sober, control yourself and then you don’t have to ask yourself what was going on with me.

Regards and get a grip on yourself! (P6M)

However, these kinds of comments are sometimes followed by other users defending the girls. Other negative judgments include the perception that a lot of people use drugs and lie about it even to their partners and an example of an addict that is oblivious to common decency – he cuts the rotten tissue on his leg in the open public where anyone can see him, which disgusts people and presents a threat to kids who might sit on the same bench. Drug use is condemned also because users hurt not only themselves, but others as well. One forum member sees the circumstances that are often present with drug use (e.g. difficult life, problems) only as a bad excuse for drug use.

It is obvious that the general notion of drug use is negative, but there are some **less judgmental or even positive views** present as well, especially from people who use drugs (or have used them) themselves. Some people recognize that there are many reasons for drug use and several of them are mentioned, e.g. using drugs to reach the good feelings that the high brings and have fun, experimenting, forgetting the pain, medical reasons, enhancing their abilities etc. A forum member

believes that there must be a really strong addiction behind a person's decision to use crocodile. And with relation to crocodile, people's freedom of choice is mentioned: somebody expresses that everyone has the right to die however they want. Some members express pity towards drug users.

Addiction can also be seen as sickness. There was a response to people's frowning upon a drug user's behaviour explaining that when someone is sick, their mindset is different and they don't perceive social norms the same way as others. Otherwise unacceptable behaviors seem normal to them and they don't think about what is appropriate for the public.

There is a distinction between common consumers and **"true drug users"** who are believed to be more informed and competent so they know what is OK to take and what is not.

Koliko pravih drogerašev obstaja, pa droge niso vzeli... pač ne poroča se, da bi ker težki drogeraš umrl zaradi te droge... tako da ne vjamem v to sranje, da v resnici niso bili pridni in so drogo vzeli sami.

Tisti "pravi" točno vedo, kaj je OK in kaj ne in od koga vzamejo. Za razliko od "pridnih" niso naivni. (P5M)

How many true drug users exist and they didn't take the drug... it's just not reported that some heavy user died because of this drug... so I don't believe in this shit, that they<sup>9</sup> really weren't good and took the drug themselves.

Those "real ones" know exactly what is OK and what is not and who they take it from. Apart from the "good ones" they are not naïve. (P5M)

Some people are critical of the double standards when it comes to legal drugs, which can be as dangerous as illegal ones. Therefore, one user is also critical about the stigmatization of heroin users in comparison to cocaine users.

Among the positive representations there is a notion that many drug users are very attractive, open and smart and that "people who don't go out at night have no idea what the world looks like at 3 am. In spite of that, they have a very negative attitude towards partying and drugs. Yes, everyone is getting high, but that doesn't mean that everyone is bad" (P9M). From this point of view, the negative attitude towards drugs is a result of ignorance.

Another aspect of consumers' representations are people's opinions about what should be done regarding drug users. The views in discussions include that we should stop pardoning/making allowances for drug users and that their treatment should be self-funding. One person writes that he would simply kidnap and forcibly treat users who have gotten so deeply in trouble that nobody cares about them.

- **Self-representations**

In the forum discussions, there are not many members who reveal their drug use. Those that do, mostly use traditional drugs, fewer write about the use of NPS. With traditional drugs, the majority of members report only occasional use and some share their story of addiction (and the process of detoxication or substitution), some express that they would never allow themselves to get addicted or say that they have stopped experimenting because they were afraid of becoming addicted. People who mention using NPS are either also traditional drug users, they have either tried but not regularly used NPS or the frequency isn't apparent from their posts.

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<sup>9</sup> "They" = boys who went missing (A/N)

Only a few users write about their use of drugs with a positive attitude – either that they enjoyed using it (salvia) or that it helped with detoxication (kratom). Some members explicitly state that they haven't and/or will never use certain/all drugs.

One user starts talking about her drug use but then feels that a forum isn't the right platform for that: "(...) I can't explain this on a forum." (P4M)

<b>Family code: “(NPS) consumers’ representations” and “Self-representations”: Statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards (NPS) users and self-representations as consumers</b>		
<b>CODE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>	<b>NO. QUOT.</b>
<b>BLAMING JUDGEMENTS</b>		
C_REPR_other neg	Other negative views of drug users	10
C_REPR_immature	Consumers are seen as immature; patronizing or parental attitude	6
C_REPR_judgement	Judgmental attitudes and discourses	6
C_REPR_responsible for themselves	Consumers are considered responsible for consequences of their actions	6
C_REPR_stupid, loser	Consumers are seen as stupid or losers	5
C_REPR_no pity	Statements denying pity towards consumers	2
<b>NON-BLAMING VIEWS</b>		
C_REPR_good feeling	Statements mentioning that people use drugs to feel the positive effects	6
C_REPR_other attitudes	Statements expressing pity, view that everyone has a freedom of choice and that drug users have a different mindset	5
C_REPR_other reasons	Opinions why people use drugs	4
C_REPR_forgetting the pain	Some consumers use drugs to forget the pain	3
C_REPR_experimenting	Some consumers want to try drugs out of curiosity	3
C_REPR_competent	View that true drug users know which drugs are ok to take	2
<b>POSITIVE VIEWS</b>		
C_REPR_positive	Positive views of drug consumers	2
<b>OTHER</b>		
C_REPR_what to do	Statements expressing people's opinion on what to do about drug users	3
<b>SELF-REPRESENTATIONS</b>		
S_REPR_experimeted/recreational	People who have only experimented with drugs/used recreationally (now or in the past)	8
S_REPR_not consumer	People who say that they don't use drugs	8
S_REPR_was addicted	People who were addicted	5

- Responses to NPSs

In addition to the representation of NPS and its consumers, it was interesting to see how people respond to the NPS (drug) situation – how they perceive it and what they think can be done about it. There are no direct references to these questions since they were never explicitly asked in the conversations, but some data related to the topic can be found.

Interestingly, there were a lot of **harm reduction tips**, advice and personal rules exchanged among users. Many are connected with drink spiking – people mention the importance of watching the bartender give you the drink or have him open it in front of your eyes, not leaving the drink out of your sight, always staying with friends when partying, not drinking alcohol without eating anything

etc. One of the harm reduction strategies is criticized – a user thinks that it is impossible to stay with your friends at all times when you are out partying.

As already mentioned, smoking cannabis is also considered by one user to be a harm reduction measure, because that way people don't use other, more dangerous drugs:

(...) Po mojem je bolje otroku pustiti nekoliko več svobode, kot pa reskirati (in ga siliti) v prekomerno uporabo katere izmed drog iz teh štirih skupin. Predstavljajte si kako se počuti medtem ko se ga vrstniki malo "zadanejo" ali "kakega skadijo". On mora njihovo zavrniti in posegati po nekih čudnih alternativnih, neprijetnih in celo nevarnih spojinah. Kaj si bolj želite negativnih testov ali srečnega sina? (P9M)

(...) In my opinion, it is better to give the kid a little more freedom than risk (and force him into) excessive use of any of the drugs from these four groups. Imagine how he feels when his peers get a little "high" or "smoke one". He has to decline theirs and reach for some weird alternative, unpleasant and even dangerous compounds. What do you want more, negative tests or a happy son? (P9M)

With kratom and also drugs in general, users are advised to not over-do it, because drugs can cause addiction. Psychedelics have a different purpose than other drugs - a user writes that salvia can't become a recreational drug like alcohol and cannabis.

One user has a lot of advice for a girl who is asking for help with her addiction management (P9M): substituting speed with coffee, reduction of quantity of speed and alcohol, changing bars and music scenes, trying other drugs, avoiding routine, not overdoing any drug, holding back a little during weekends and relaxing at festivals in "safer" environments, volunteering to be a designated driver, having a nice ending to parties to avoid depression etc.

With salvia divinorum, another HR strategy is mentioned – the presence of a sober person, especially for the first time use and if you use a lot. With moderate consumption the presence of a sitter doesn't seem to be needed.

Furthermore, the lack of (correct) information was expressed in different contexts. One is that the media doesn't correctly or adequately present the situation – which goes for media reporting in general, covering criminal activities, drug situation, drink spiking and the cases of the missing boys. When it comes to the cases of missing boys, some forum members warn about the danger of misinformation, unconfirmed facts and conspiracy theories that have emerged about that topic. One user is sorry that when it comes to drugs, our nation is very ignorant and dense, believing that it is better to not know anything so that you can pretend that it does not exist.

Some criticism is also directed at harm reduction organizations (DrogArt, Stigma) and public health organizations because, according to some users, they don't warn enough about krokodil and flakka – some users are surprised why there aren't any measures taken to protect people.

Zakaj zavod za zdravstvo in ostale inštitucije ne ukrepajo in skušajo zaščititi narkomanov? Pred leti so opozarjali na bistveno manj nevarne zadeve ... čudi me, da ni ukrepov, da ni informacij, da si mladi ljudje morda kupijo zadevo za zabavo, pa ne vedo, kaj so dobili ??? (P4M)

Why don't the institute for health and other institutions do something and try to protect junkies? Years ago they warned about a lot less dangerous things... I'm surprised that there are no measures, no information, that young people maybe buy stuff for the party but they don't know what they got??? (P4M)

It is also expressed that there is not enough information available about NPS in Slovenian language. There is also a specific call for action aimed at associations, media, to write about NPS and warn people.

Dajte mediji, društva, organizacije, povsod o tem Media, associations, organizations, speak everywhere

govorit, pisat, o posledicah-do majhnih in tistih večjih in vseh vmes. Dajte prevest v slovenščino tako pomemben tekst, na veliko propagirat. AKCIJA!!!! (P5M)

about this, write, about consequences – from small to those bigger and all in between. Translate to Slovene such important text, promote it. ACTION!!!! (P5M)

On the other hand, there is one different response suggested: in the already mentioned case of a parent asking how to stop their son from using drugs, a member invites the parents to **get to know this world** and suggests that they also try a drug.

Family code: “RESPONSES”: Statements expressing the response to the situation of NPS		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT.
RESP_harm reduction	References to harm reduction strategies	13
RESP_not enough information	Statements expressing the lack of information (not related only to NPS)	11
RESP_call for action	Call for action	2
RESP_get to know this world	Suggestion to start using drugs (not related only to NPS)	1

### 3.1.3. Portugal

- In what kind of conversations forum users talk about NPSs?

Only in a few cases the web forum conversations are exactly on NPSs. Of the selected results, what originated the conversation was the sharing of news piece regarding NPS (in 2 cases, both with none to little engagement). In the majority (5 cases) what started the conversation on NPS were questions about legal matters, like which drugs are legal to use or what amounts you can carry with yourself without it being considered a trafficking crime. Finally, in one case the general question “What was your best/worst experience with drugs” lead to users describing experimentation with 25i-NBome and DMT.

Family Code: “Question” = questions/issues/topics arisen in the first post that originated the thread		
Code	Explanation	No. quot.
QUEST_best and worst experience with drugs?	Questions about drugs in general	1
QUEST_legality	Questions about legality of some substances	4
QUEST_news	Newspaper article	2

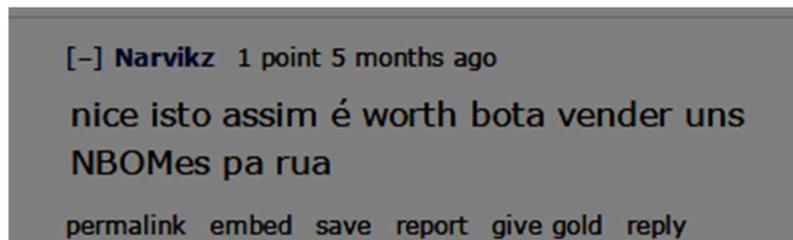
- How are NPSs represented? Attitudes, use values and supposed effects

In a total of 53 results we found 7 making reference to NPS. Of those, the majority focus on legal issues, suggesting that users search NPS as an alternative to the “traditional” substances being illegal.

Only in two occasions appear descriptions of experiences with NPS. One is relating the use of 25i-NBome as a one time, positive experience (see below) and the other refers to DMT as a negative experience, saying it caused anxiety and it was difficult to deal with the situation, without further details.

Of the selected results one is titled “Alguma droga para uso recreativo legal” (Any legal drug for recreational use) and is questioning if Mephedrone is legal in Portugal, and if is there any “substance that can be used recreationally that is legal in Portugal”. There are only 4 comments, first one says “Alcohol, coffee, nicotine, ben-u-ron, jenkem” and two replies to that, one adding “solvents” to the

list and another joking about adding kid's candies as well. The other just says that "Mephedrone is illegal in Portugal for about 4 years now". The second post making references to NPS is the share of a news piece (without any comment from the user that posted it) titled "Jovens Europeus são cobaias de novas drogas" (European youth are guinea-pigs for new drugs). There is no engagement from the community as no comments are made on this post. From the same user, with two months difference, we've found also a post sharing one more journalistic investigation titled "Tráfico de drogas sintéticas punido só com multa" (Dealing synthetic drugs punished only with penalty), and one user comments: (Nice, this is worth, let's go out to the streets and sell some NBOMes!)



In the same post there are some more comments about drug market regulation and legislation, but these comments do not mention NPS.

There is a post titled "Leis das drogas em Portugal" (drug laws in Portugal) asking about the "Portuguese legislation on research chemicals". It contains 5 comments, all about the applicable legislation and very objective (no representations emerge from the discussion).

We've found references to NPS on another post with high engagement from the community (53 comments). It is titled "Redditors de Portugal, qual foi a vossa melhor/pior experiência com drogas?" (Portuguese Redditors, what was your best/worst experience with drugs?). User pullpush (we've noticed that, in drug related matters, it is common to see that some of the same users usually are posting and commenting) recalls his experience with 25i-NBOMe as being one of the best he'd ever had. He says that he took 700ug in the nature with a friend, and describes feelings of serenity and energy at the same time.

[-] **pullpush** 5 points 4 months ago\*

25i-NBOMe - Era cerca de meia-noite e estava no monte a passear com um amigo, cada um havíamos sniffado 700ug da droga e estávamos a falar sobre assuntos aleatórios, a apreciar a natureza sob a luz da lua e das estrelas, sentia-me com muita energia mas ao mesmo tempo muito sereno. Pus-me a olhar para as estrelas e de repente senti que o tempo começou a ter algumas quebras, era como se eu estivesse em modo debug no universo e conseguisse ver a realidade para além dos filtros normais, a observar a realidade por aquilo que ela é, como se estivesse separado dela; assim como uma pessoa vê o código assembly de um programa a ser executado no Olly Debugger. Às vezes voltava à realidade, outras vezes voltava ao modo debug... ia e vinha, em ondas.

Até que de repente aconteceu algo que eu não estava nada à espera e foi tão intenso que só de pensar agora estou a ficar com arrepios: Comecei a absorver toda a natureza à volta e as fronteiras da minha consciência ficaram extremamente maleáveis e começaram aos poucos a fundir-se com o resto das coisas à minha volta: árvores, pedras, terra... e cada vez mais e mais rápido, céu, espaço, estrelas... até que fundi-me com todo o universo, em todas as dimensões espaciais e na dimensão temporal. Tornei-me infinito, deixei de existir como um eu e passei a ser um todo. Foi aí que eu reconheci a verdadeira natureza do ego e da consciência, que o ego é uma ilusão e que a consciência é uma propriedade inerente a todo o universo e não está apenas confinada às nossas cabeças.

edit: corrigir erros

permalink embed save report give gold reply

[-] **emptywallspt** 4 points 4 months ago

E efeitos nefastos para a saúde, sentiste algo ? Não te apeteceu experimentar mais ?

permalink embed save parent report give gold reply

[-] **pullpush** 3 points 4 months ago\*

Tive várias experiências mas nunca foi por vício, foi sempre por determinação própria. Drogas psicadélicas têm um potencial para dependência quase nulo, muito menor que o cannabis.

Quanto aos efeitos nocivos, não senti nada, nem ressaca.

permalink embed save parent report give gold reply

[-] **emptywallspt** 3 points 4 months ago

hmm nice. Sim gostava de poder sentir a experiência uma vez na vida. Já ouvi relatos muito semelhantes ao teu, é realmente curioso.

*“ We were looking at the stars and, suddenly, I started to feel some breaks in time, it was if I entered a debug mode in the universe and could see reality beyond normal filters, seeing reality as it is, as if I was separated from it; the same way we watch a program’s assembly code being executed on Olly Debugger. At times I came back to reality, then I was just gone again... It was coming and going, as waves,*

*Suddenly something unexpected happened and it was so intense that just thinking about it makes me goose bumps: I started to absorb all the nature around me and the frontiers of my conscience were dissolved, melting with everything around me: trees, rocks, ground... And faster: stars, universe, space... Then I became dissolved within the universe, in the temporal and spatial dimension. I became infinite, ceased existing as one and become the wholeness. That was when I realized the true nature of ego and consciousness, ego is an illusion and consciousness is inherent to all the universe and not just our heads.”*

On the comments this user is asked if he bought the substance knowing what it was, or if he thought he was buying LSD. Pullpush replies that he knew what he was buying and that he had already tried 25i-NBOMe, 25e-NBOMe, 2C-E, 2C-B, 2C-E, salvia and mushrooms, and it’s the end of the conversation on this.

On another comment on the same post, the same user (*pullpush*) describes his experience with DMT as being the worst he’d ever had, but doesn’t elaborate on this.

Family Code: NPS representations		
Code	Explanation	No. of quotes
Discourses about effects: negative		
EFF_anxiety	Images of drugs leading to anxiety (DMT)	1
EFF_other_neg	References to other effects perceived as unpleasant (magic mushrooms)	1
Discourses about effects: positive		
EFF_experimental	References to an expansion of perception and understanding (25i-NBome, DMT)	2

EFF_other_pos	References to generic effects perceived as positive (hallucinations, increased awareness and connection) (25iNBome, DMT)	2
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- How are (NPSs) consumers represented?

No representations about NPS users emerge in the discussions, positive or negative. Usually the conversations are kept in less subjective way, for instance asking about legality of some substance or quantities you can have with yourself without it being considered a crime, or even asking about general experiences with drugs. No positive or negative features are attributed to NPS consumers.

### 3.2 Specialist forums

#### 3.2.1. Italy

- In what kind of conversations forum users talk about NPSs?

In line with the community rules, most of threads are opened with the aim of sharing information and experiences. Many pages of the website are therefore dedicated to share recipes to prepare plants-based drugs, correct assumption doses and chemical formulas. It has to be noticed that some discourses entail rather in-depth knowledge about chemistry and physiology and that often also scientific evidences are quoted.

Quindi se mettiamo il dosaggio giusto facendo diviso 2 o diviso 3 un po' di dmt rimarrà sola soletta senza salificare con l'acido. La soluzione è semplicemente mettere acido in eccesso, facendo diviso 1,5 invece che 2 nel caso del fumarico e 2 (circa) invece che 3 nel citrico. [...]

Acido fumarico per 1000 mg di DMT  $116.07 * 5.31 / 1,5$   
 $= 409,86$  mg

Acido citrico per 1000 mg di DMT  $192.124 * 5.31 / 2$   
 $= 508.05$  mg

Questo calcolo vale precisamente SOLO per la dmt in quanto nel dividendo (1,5 e 2 a seconda dell'acido) derivano da considerazioni in merito alla pka della dmt e quel 5,31 sono le millimoli di dmt di un grammo. (P40 PN)

Therefore, if we put the right dose by dividing in 2 or 3 parts, some DMT will be alone without salt. The solution is put more acid, dividing into 1,5 parts instead of 2 in the case of fumaric and about 2 instead of 3 in the case of citric [...]

Fumaric acid \* 1000 mg of DMT  $116.07 * 5.31 / 1,5$   
 $= 409,86$  mg

Citric acid \* 1000 mg of DMT  $192.124 * 5.31 / 2 = 508.05$  mg

This calculation is valid only for DMT since in the dividend (1.5 and 2 according to the acid) come from consideration about the pka of DMT and 5.31 are the millimoli of 1 gr of DMT. (P40 PN)

Many members share with others their experiences with NPSs (and other drugs) with very long and detailed reports, which are generally appreciated by readers who often thank the authors. Reports represents slices of life, where members not only tell about the effects of the substances, but they also describe – as they call them – sets and settings, therefore adding personal information that can be useful to understand the meaning of the experience. Many of them talk apparently without any reticence about their personal fears, difficulties or weaknesses, that is, they do not take this as an opportunity to show off. Indeed negative experiences are as much as positive ones, also because telling about bad trips can help other drug users to prevent them. Positive experiences are described mostly in terms of states of deep wellbeing and flashes of inspiration, while bad trips are related to bad physical (nausea, vomit, difficulties to move...) and psychological sensations (fear of dying, sense of detachment from reality...). Some bad experiences are related not to the substances effects

but to organised rites and “schools of consumptions”. This is the typical case of organizations related to Ayahuasca, that arise some critics and suspicions related to idea that their main aim is to get money from inexperienced people. For this reason, while some members think that you need a guide, others think that self-administration is the best way to assume the plant.

Dopo tutte queste esperienze direi che il meglio è arrivare a cucinarsela da soli. In questo modo ognuno potrà sacralizzarla o meno alla sua maniera, scegliendo l'ambiente e la musica con cui fare il viaggio per ottenere i risultati migliori su misura per lui/lei. Sono le piante a fare da maestre e non servono "guru" umani. Le piante parlano sempre in modo chiaro. Certo che per casi particolari di blocchi, traumi, violenze subite, magari si ha bisogno di un aiuto esterno e a questo punto dei bravi facilitatori possono fare la differenza. Dipende sempre se si è abbastanza forti da lottare o serve aiuto e bisogna sempre valutare a chi si chiede. (P1 PN)

After all these experiences, I would say that it is better to learn how to cook it alone. This way, everyone can consecrate it or not in his own manner, choosing the context and the music for the trip so to obtain the best results for him/her. Plants are the teachers, human gurus are not needed. Plants always talk clearly. Of course in specific cases like traumas or violence, maybe an external use is necessary and good facilitators can make the difference. It depends if you are strong enough for fighting or you need help and you must always evaluate who you are asking. (P1 PN)

Instead of searching for external experts, some forum members prefer to ask suggestions and information to their peers. Many threads originate from questions about what substances to take in order to get specific effects, or, on the contrary, what effects has a specific substance. Questions are not just about ‘recreational’ effects, but also – in about half of cases – about how to solve health problems with the use of drugs. Mentioned problems are both physical and psychological, the most quoted is depression. Sometimes is highlighted that other traditional treatment ways have been already tried but with no good results.

Ho diversi problemi di salute (infiammazione cronica, dolori cronici, depressione) che vorrei provare ad affrontare con le sostanze psicoattive naturali. Mi sarebbe piaciuto farlo sotto la guida dei professionisti - ho scritto ad alcuni scienziati - ma purtroppo, non e' così facile essere accettata in una ricerca ufficiale. Quindi mi tocca con massima probabilità procurarmi le sostanze da sola e provare da sola - che non è certo ideale. (P4 PN)

I have several health problems (chronic inflammation, chronic pains, depression) that I would like to try to face with natural psychoactive substances. I would had like do it with a professional guide – I have written to some scientists – but unfortunately, it is not so simple to be accepted in an official research. Therefore, it is most likely that I have to get these substances and try them alone, which is not the best. (P4 PN)

The main attitude is to get informed by sharing and compare experiences, rather than simply ask to get answers, as a forum member tell to another user who insist to get a specific answer:

E' un forum di gente che si scambia esperienze, non uno sportello consulenze gratuite. Se nessuno ti ha risposto è perchè nessuno sa risponderti. (P 38 PN)

This is a community of people who share experiences, not a free counselling service. If nobody answered to you, it is because nobody can answer. (P 38 PN)

Another kind of question is addressed to identify a substance already taken on the base of experienced effects, both positive and negative, in order to find it again or avoid it. This is the case of blotters of alleged LSD or NBOME. Questions about where to buy a substance, which are not allowed according to the forum rules, seem to be a few, while some members are interested to know the legal status of a substance, since the situation, as a member stated, “is a mess”. The following piece of conversation

between two forum members is about 4-ACO-DMT and it is told that the Italian law is not clear, therefore to address the topic is not just useful but also a type of harm reduction.

E' tutto un gran casino, l'ultimo aggiornamento delle tabelle con l'inserimento di nuove sostanze sembra risalire al 10 febbraio 2015 dove ad esempio troviamo il 25I-NBOMe. Dopo di questo il più recente è del 25 giugno 2013 [...] che dice che "In Italia la molecola 4-AcO-DMT non risulta inclusa nelle Tabelle del D.P.R. 309/90 e s.m.i.". [...]

Credo anch'io che approfondire lo status legale degli rc più comuni nella sezione legge sarebbe molto utile. Alla fine per me anche questo si può considerare "riduzione del danno" Però sono sempre perplesso... Se avessimo una legge tipo l'analogue act inglese sarebbe tutto più facile (P52 PN)

Everything is a big mess, the last updated tables with new substances seems to be that of February the 10th 2015 where for instance we find 25I-NBOMe. Before this the most recent is from June the 25th 2013 [...] which says that "In Italy the molecule 4-AcO-DMT is not included in the tables of DPR 309/90 and following changes and additions" [...]

I think as well that deepening the legal status of most spread RCs in the law section would be very useful. This is harm reduction too, after all. However I'm always puzzled... If we had a law similar to the English Act everything would be easier (P52 PN)

<b>Family Code: "Question" = questions/issues/topics arisen in the first post that originated the thread</b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>No. quot.</b>
<b>Requests of information on drugs/NPSs</b>		
QUEST_share recipes	Questions/reports about recipes (for plants-based substances), chemical formulas and doses	14
QUEST_share experiences	Narrations about positive experiences and bad trips	11
QUEST_what to choose	Request of suggestions about substances useful to solve health problems (6) (depression, derealisation) or to get specific effects (relax, euphoria...)(5)	11
QUEST_effects	Questions about effects of specific substances (synthetic cannabis, antidepressant, Nbome, 4AcO-DMT, 4 HO-MET)	6
QUEST_what is...	Questions addressed to identify taken substances on the base of experienced effects	3
QUEST_legality	Questions about legality of some specific substances (kratom, 4AcO-DMT)	2
QUEST_where to buy	Questions about where to buy specific substances	2
QUEST_why do you consume	Questions addressed to know why other members use drugs	2
QUEST_comments	Comments to new scientific research or drug related laws	2
QUEST_other	Other topics not before mentioned (addiction, cultivation, synthetic vs natural drugs)	3

- **How are NPSs represented? Attitudes, use values and supposed effects**

Representations of NPSs and drugs are generally more positive compared to those found in generic forums. This is obviously not surprising, as the community members are supposed to be drug consumers. However, representations are not all positive, first because different opinions are related to different drugs, second because drug consumption entails negative as well as positive effects.

Looking at the first aspect, in the collected data there were some recurrent discourses related to differences among drugs categories. The most frequent discourse - already found in the generalist forums - is about the differences between **natural and synthetic substances**. In Psychonauts, as well as in YahooAnswers, the opinion that the first would be better than the latter is spread, indeed negative representations about specific substances only refer to synthetic substances.

Herbal blends, la maggior parte contengono cannabinoidi sintetici: lo sterco di satana  
Nel 2009 un paio di bustine di "Spice" me le sono fumate, che contenevano jwh-018, un'altra cosa simile che si chiamava "yucatan fire" (non mi ricordo con quale jwh) e a seguire ho provato pure il jwh-250 in polvere [...] finchè un giorno mi sono deciso a buttare quel che restava della bustina da 250mg nel cesso. La fusione era simile a quella della cannabis ma molto più nervosa e piena di side effects merdosissimi che crescevano assieme al dosaggio. Io ci ho anche avuto un'esperienza dove credevo che mi sarebbe letteralmente esploso il cuore, una tizia che conosco dopo aver fumato una mezza bustina di "profumatore per ambienti" l'hanno pure ricoverata per un paio di giorni. La cosa peggiore delle herbal blends è che non hai idea del quantitativo di principio attivo che può avere ogni bustina (P16 PN)

Herbal blends, most of them have synthetic cannabinoids inside: the Evil's shit. In 2009 I smoked a pair of Spice packets, which contained JWH-018, another similar thing called "Yucatan fire" and after that I've tried even the JWH-250 powder [...] until one day I've decided to throw away the rest of it in the bog. The effect was similar to that with cannabis, but much more nervous and full of crap side effects that increase with increasing doses. Once I also thought that my heart would have exploded. A person I know after having smoked half a blister of herbal blends has been even the hospitalised for two days. The worst thing of herbal blends is that you do not know how much active principle is inside one blister (P16 PN)

Still, in the consumers' forum the topic is discussed in more detailed and complex way. This clearly emerges from a thread opened by the forum moderators, addressed exactly to better understand what reasons underlie this believe. The question raises many reactions that criticize people who make this distinction and refer to them as ignorant and uninformed persons. Their attitude is pragmatic: the best molecule is the one that better function in relation to the consumer's purposes.

Quindi non può esistere il naturale vs il non naturale. Tutto è naturale per forza di cose. Almeno che qualcuno riesca a creare qualcosa dal nulla. Poi fare una tisana è un metodo naturale e fare una reazione no? [...] Trovo che chi elogia i naturali denigrando i sintetici, non sappia realmente cosa sta dicendo.

Therefore natural vs unnatural does not exist. Everything is inevitably natural, unless someone can create something from nothing. Why making a tisane is a natural method while a chemical reaction is not? [...] I think that who praise 'naturals' and denigrate synthetics do not really know what he is saying.

Nonetheless, the opinion that natural substances are better comes out from the forum comments several times, and in the mentioned thread we can find various explanations, which include objective aspects and personal believes. Among the latter the belief that plants and herbs are sacred substances, able to give knowledge and precious gifts to consumers who respect them. Ayahuasca is a typical example.

Drogarsi con piante o animali significa assumere un miscuglio più o meno vario di sostanze. Assumendo una sostanza sintetizzata invece si assume solo una sostanza precisa praticamente. Questa è la differenza.

Stessa molecola, diversa origine; non ho altro da aggiungere a tutti quelli che hanno detto che è la stessa cosa. Molecola base o molecola derivata; sono due molecole diverse. Ognuno avrà le sue ben motivate preferenze e da qui in poi è il magico regno dei pareri puramente soggettivi. [...] Le piante sono in genere più imprevedibili, e possono dare magari qualcosa di più per il semplice fatto che quanto meno qualcosa è lineare e quanto più il tuo cervello ci ragionerà su. Ovviamente tutto questo correlato alla molecola corrispondente (esempio dmt+maoi oppure aya).

[...] un prodotto di laboratorio non può assolutamente superare milioni di anni di evoluzione di funghi e piante e animali..

Per scopi ludici generalmente preferisco i sintetici, per scopi psiconautici i naturali, proprio per la loro imprevedibilità...ciò non toglie che ogni molecola ha il suo perché che sia di sintesi o naturale... (P2 PN)

To take plants or animals as drugs means to take a more or less various mix of substances. Differently, taking one synthetic substance, you take basically only one specific substance. This is the difference.

The same molecule, different origin. I do not have anything else to say to ones who told that it is the same thing. Basic molecule or derived molecule, are two different molecules. Everyone has his own motivated preferences and beyond this there is the magic reign of purely subjective opinions. [...] Plants are usually more unpredictable and can give you maybe something more simply because the less something is linear the more the brain will reason about it. Obviously this is correlated to the correspondent molecule (e.g. DMT+MAOI or Aya).

[...] a laboratory product absolutely cannot overcome billions years of evolution of mushrooms and plants and animals...

For ludic purposes usually I prefer synthetic (substances), to "travel in the psyche" naturals (substances)... This does not mean that every molecule, either synthetic or natural - has his motives (P2 PN)

Effects of natural substances are often described in terms of improved knowledge and personal development due to the inner properties of these "magic" substances, with an own knowledge, able to increase the consumer's understanding of the sense of life and his ability of perception and introspection. They are represented like a means to get closer to the transcendent and to perceive the divine origin of the human being, for instance by experimenting states of grace and inspiration. The same properties are attributed to psychedelics, compared to other drug categories (e.g. opioids and stimulants) perceived as worse substances.

Certe sostanze sono un dono. Alcune della natura e altre dell'intelligenza umana. Possono guarirci se le ascoltiamo e le accettiamo. Ci aprono all'infinito e ad infinite possibilità.

Personalmente sono stati l'1P-LSD e l'AL-LAD a farmi capire ciò. Anche l'Ayahuasca (essa ha una memoria antica) a cercato di farmi capire che l'amore era l'unica via, ma il suo approccio è diverso, bisogna fidarsi ed ascoltarla e io ero timoroso e soprattutto sentivo il bisogno di un ragionamento sempre vero e logico per arrivare alle conclusioni (P24 PN)

Specifichiamo che si parla di psichedelici. Non vorrei mai che uno che passa leggendo pensi che una stagnola di eroina o una riga di coca lo facciano crescere interiormente... (P2 PN)

Certain substances are a gift. Some from nature and others from the human intelligence. They can cure us if we listen to them and accept them. They open us to the infinity and infinitive possibilities.

It was 1P-LSD and AL-LAD that make me understand this. Ayahuasca also (it has an ancient memory) tried to make me know that love was the only way, but its approach is different, you have to trust it and listen to and I was afraid and most of all I felt the need of a "true" logic thinking to come to "right" conclusions (P24 PN)

Let's specify that we are talking about psychedelics. I would not want that somebody reading this thinks that a dose of heroin or cocaine make him grow-up from within (P2 PN)

It is clear from the data that the drug consumers' purposes go far beyond the recreational effects, and the shift towards more spiritual or at least experimental aims can be seen as a development in a drug user's career.

Ho fatto uso e continuerei a farne di sostanze onirogene per sperimentarne la validità, di Lsd e Mescalina perché sono come porte verso l'infinito, proverò in un futuro non troppo remoto Dmt e Funghetti. Non considero più la droga un mezzo per sballarsi o divertirsi o semplicemente rilassarsi (P17 PN)

voglio e sento il bisogno di conoscere questa verità, queste piante che appartengono come me a questo mondo. E non lo farò per divertirmi, ma con la consapevolezza di stare esplorando qualcosa di a me sconosciuto e quindi col massimo rispetto. (P 1PN)

I have used dreamlike substances and would continue to in order to experiment their validity; (I have used) LSD and mescaline because they are doors through the infinite, and I will try in a not far future DMT and mushrooms. I do not consider drugs a means to get high or to have fun or simply to relax (P17 PN)

I want and feel the need to know this truth, these plants that belong to this world like me. And I will not do it for fun, but with the awareness of being exploring something that I ignore and therefore respectfully (P1 PN)

Some NPSs are indeed considered medicines effective for many psychological and physical problems: antidepressant and anxiolytic are the most quoted therapeutic properties. Natural NPSs and drugs are also considered better than prescribed medicines, which are often criticised by the forum members as they are considered even more addictive and harmful.

Bere l'Aya è un pò come risintonizzare una vecchia radio con frequenze ormai obsolete. La cosa bella è che, essendo una medicina, questa armonizzazione delle frequenze è permanente.(P1 PN)

Il Kratom è un antidepressivo eccezionale, oltre all'iperico che già conosci e potresti provare a combinare con la passiflora [...] oppure potresti parlare prima con il tuo medico e provare con i MAOi, presenti in tantissime piante in natura, insomma le alternative ci sono se le cerchi e visto che sei già sulla strada giusta non ci sarebbe neanche bisogno di dirlo ma ci sono mille motivi per buttare via le benzo, e anche il tuo medico li conosce o dovrebbe farlo...(P29 PN)

Drinking Aya is almost like retuning an old radio with obsolete frequencies. The good thing is that, being a medicine, this frequencies harmonization is permanent (P1 PN)

Kratom is an great antidepressant, in addition to hypericum that you already know and you could try to mix with passionflower [...] otherwise you could talk with your medical doctor before and try with MAOi, which are naturally present in many plants. In short, there are alternatives if you look for them and since you are already on the right way maybe it is not the case to say this, but there are thousands reasons to throw away benzodiazepines (P29 PN)

Due to the therapeutic properties and many perceived benefits of specific NPSs (mainly plants and psychedelics), consumers are even disposal to accept annoying side effects and hangovers, or to take the risk of scary bad trips, which are anything but rare according to our data. However, even bad experiences can be instructive and useful as they give you something to reflect on.

Se tu lo 'leggessi' con gli occhi di qualcun'altro noteresti che è un 'bad trip' pieno zeppo di pensieri profondi... e qui si ricade nel discorso badtrip/goodtrip, quale dei due è più 'utile'? Tu stesso hai detto che i pochi viaggi fatti ti hanno dato molto su cui riflettere...peccato che tu abbia bruciato le annotazioni, i deliri sono sempre interessanti (P45 PN)

Sono un ex "bad tripper" che ha deciso di mettere in pratica ogni insegnamento tratto dalle esperienze psichedeliche, praticamente una più traumatica ma rivelatrice dell'altra. [...] perché credo che a questo servano i viaggi più profondi: a capire chi siamo e quindi ricostruirci il mondo che ci circonda P55 PN

If you read this [experience] with someone else's eyes you will notice that it is a "bad trip" full of deep thoughts... and here we come again to the discourse about bad trip vs good trip, which one is more useful? You have told yourself that the few done travels gave you much to reflect on... it's a pity that you have burned your notes, as ravings are always interesting (P45 PN)

I'm an ex "bad-tripper" who decided to put in practice every lesson that I've learnt from psychedelic experiences, basically one more traumatic but also more revealing of the other [...] Because I think that deeper travels serve to this: to understand who are we and therefore to re-construct the world around us (P55 PN)

The relationship between possible long-term effects and NPSs results more complex and rather puzzling in the data, as some problems are not clearly reported as consequences of drug consumptions. Therefore, the boundaries between therapeutic properties and adverse health effects remain blurred. This is the case for instance of disorders related to the depressive states, the most cited being derealisation and depersonalisation. The first term is defined as an alteration in the perception, of the external world so that it seems unreal, while the latter means feeling disconnected or detached from one's body and thoughts. These problems can last even for years and cause distress and problem functioning. The following excerpt is an example of this unclear relationship, as the subject - in spite of suffering from these disorders – misses the dissociative effects of ketamine and continues to use drugs.

É da quasi un anno e mezzo che non uso psichedelici, ma ultimamente sto sentendo il richiamo di questa classe di sostanze...in particolare della ketamina. Ho sofferto molto di depersonalizzazione e a volte ho episodi di derealizzazione e depersonalizzazione che a volte mi creano un po' di preoccupazione, oltre a ovviamente il senso di "stranezza"...ma l'effetto della ketamina, mi piaceva, mi piaceva la dissociazione e la rapida espansione di coscienza che a mio parere crea questa sostanza, nonostante sia sicuro dell'esperienza vorrei chiedere un parere esterno, che ne dite? (Ultimamente sto usando stimolanti, depressivi e empatogeni...ma la psichedelia un po' mi manca) (P45 PN)

It's almost one and a half year that I do not use psychedelics, but recently I'm feeling the call of this kind of substances... particularly of ketamine. I have suffered a lot for depersonalisation and sometimes I have episodes of derealisation and depersonalisation that sometimes make me worried, obviously in addition to the sense of strangeness but I liked the effect of ketamine, I liked the dissociation and the fast expansion of consciousness that this substance give, in my opinion. Even though I'm sure about this experience, I would like to ask an external opinion, what do you think about? Recently I'm using stimulants, depressives and empathogens... but I miss psychedelics (P45 PN)

Compared to the generalist forums, in Psychonauts more serious effects like death and brain damage are not cited unless in order to ridicule certain false beliefs and to emphasize that legal drugs (especially alcohol) are the most dangerous and that they reap more victims. Even addiction is rarely quoted and discussed as possible consequence of NPS consumption, as emerged from the following table.

<b>Family Code: NPS representations<sup>10</sup></b>		
<b>Code</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>No. quot.</b>
<b>Attitudes towards NPSs<sup>11</sup></b>		
REPR_natural vs synthetic	Mostly negative statements about synthetic drugs compared to natural ones	34
REPR_legal vs illegal	Mostly critical opinion about the 'specious' distinction between legal and illegal substances	18
REPR_neg	Negative representations about specific substance (synthetic cannabinoids, spice, herbal blends, RCs)	8
REPR_psychedelics vs others	Mostly positive statements about psychedelic substances compared to other substances (e.g. stimulants)	8
<b>Discourses about effects</b>		
<b>positive</b>		
EFF_medicine	Reference to therapeutic properties, mostly antidepressant and anxiolytic (ayahuasca, iboga, kratom, kanna, hypericum but also psychedelics in general, methylene, ketamine, MXE)	20
EFF_personal development	References to personal development (increase of awareness and ability of empathy and introspection) through the use of substances, mostly psychedelics, but also ketamine	16
EFF_learning	References to acquired knowledge through consumption, mostly referred to plants and psychedelics (1P-LSD, AL-LAD, ayahuasca...)	15
EFF_recreational	References to the ability of drugs to increase fun (synthetics, stimulants, psychedelics, NBOMe)	5
EFF_ecstasy	References to so called states of grace (kratom, ayahuasca)	3
EFF_other_positive	References to substance that help you to overcome shyness and relax	3
EFF_energizer	References to energizing properties (kratom)	2
EFF_sensations	References to the desire to feel strong sensations (psychedelics, drugs in general)	2
<b>negative</b>		
EFF_bad trip	Reference to anxiety, fear, negatively perceived detachment from reality, loss of control, paranoia, panic attacks (NBOMe, synthetic cannabinoids, Ayahuasca, ketamine...)	15
EFF_side effects	References to nausea, sweat, trembling, movement difficulties, tachycardia (herbal blends, spice, ketamine, kratom, O-PCE, NBOMe, AMT...)	11
EFF_hangovers	References to fatigue, inability to work, headache (kratom, O-PCE...)	6
EFF_long-term	References to derealisation, depersonalisation, panic attacks, heart problems (dissociatives, ibogaina...)	6

<sup>10</sup> Most of collected data directly refer to specific NPSs, however some discourses refer to broader drug categories.

<sup>11</sup> Codes represent the most frequent topics from which general attitudes towards NPSs can be deduced.

EFF_addiction	References to addiction and dependence (RCs, THC, kratom, stimulants)	4
EFF_tolerance	Reference to the need to take more substance to feel the same effects (kratom)	2

- [How are NPSs consumers represented?](#)

Representations of NPSs consumers are obviously more positive in this specific forum compared to those found in the generalist forums. Furthermore, in this case it was useless to distinguish between self-representations and representations of other consumers, since even when talking about consumers in general terms, the forum members usually refer to them as “us”. The only few exceptions are quotations referring to people who take drugs just in order to have fun and not learning or reasoning about these experiences. Sometimes, this consumption way is referred to personal experiences too, as a phase of immaturity.

Indeed most of the forum members, perceived themselves as “researchers” or explorers of psyche - as the forum name says - committed to the study of new substances and their effects. The boundaries between the two consumption ways is well summarised in the following excerpt, which is a slogan chosen by a forum member.

Il tossico abusa, lo psiconauta apprende. (P7 PN)

The junkie abuses, the psyconaut learns (P7 PN)

Many consumers depict themselves as curious and passionate people, committed to the aim of learning and disposal to dedicate much time to study and experiment, for instance doing complicated and long processes necessary to prepare specific substances, e.g. plant and mix of chemical substances. Some of them show competences acquired in their formative or working careers, as among members there are even professional researchers.

ho quasi 30 anni, faccio il ricercatore, sono laureato in fisica e appassionato di scienza, meteorologia in particolare, disegno, psicologia, gatti e ovviamente psiconautica! (P55 PN)

I’m almost 30 years old, I’m a researcher, I’m a physician and fond of science, particularly meteorology, design, psychology, cats and obviously psychonavigation! (P55 PN)

Studio questo mondo da sette anni [...] ma prendo psichedelici da tre, le piante e dunque la botanica sono sicuramente ciò che ha catturato di più la mia passione, anche se ogni tanto mi piace sconfinare [...] nella chimica, nell'astronomia, e perchè no, anche nell'arte, nell'antropologia e nella filosofia, anzi se fosse umanamente possibile e se le mie spalle fossero abbastanza forti de reggere il peso, mi piacerebbe sapere praticamente tutto (P28 PN)

I’m studying this world since 7 years [...] but I’m taking psychedelics from 3. Plants and botanic are surely what has mostly captured my passion, even though sometimes I like digress in chemistry, astronomy, and why not, in art too, in anthropology and philosophy, indeed, if it was humanly possible and of my shoulders would be large enough to stand this weight, I would basically like to know everything (P28 PN)

A particular field of study is that related to the therapeutic properties of specific substances. Some psyconauts considered themselves as frontier researchers able to discover new medicines able to treat health problems. One way is for instance microdosing, that is, assuming low quantities of psychoactive substances in order to test their effects.

Noi psiconauti grazie anche ad ERRORI, abbiamo saputo portare la Ketamina da campo anestetico a nuovi scenari. E il microdosing? Uguale. La psiconautica di frontiera non è che l'ombra delle future cure, credo che questo sia chiaro.

Tanto per fare altri esempi: scopolamina per la cura della depressione a breve termine, Ossido di diazoto per la cura della depressione, MXE, Ketamina e Litio, DXM, Banister Caapi nella cura del Parkinson e altri malattie neurodegenerative

Psilocina, Analoghi dell'acido lisergico, e se cercate su pubchem, e sul sito del MAPS la lista continua (P27 PN)

Even thanks to errors we psychonauts have been able to bring the ketamine from the anaesthetic field to new scenarios. And what about microdosing? It's the same. The frontier psych-navigation is just like a shadow of new treatments, I think that this is clear. Just to do other examples: scopolamine for treating the short-term depression, nitrogen oxide for depression treatment, MXE, ketamine and lithium, DXM, Banister Caapi in the Parkinson treatment and other neurodegenerative diseases, psilocin, substances similar to lysergic acid, and if you search on pubchem and on MAPS website the list continues (P27 PN)

If personal experience is considered a privileged way to learn, several times is risen the issue that also scientific research is necessary and that subjective impressions have a limited validity.

A me dispiace, ma in caso di cura bisognerebbe sempre informarsi, e studiare sia libri medici che esperienze. (P27 PN)

Sorry but in case of treatment you should always get informed and study both medical books and experiences (P27 PN).

Dire che sicuramente il methylone fa meno male dell'MDMA mi pare incauto. Se puoi darci delle fonti o postare qualche ricerca per documentare ciò che esponi sarebbe bello. [...] Non sto dicendo che sicuramente l'MDMA è meno tossica, ma che farsi delle idee precise su una sostanza basandosi sull'esperienza personale o sul "mi hanno detto che..." può essere rischioso. Per capire bene ci vogliono degli studi che siano fatti in condizioni standardizzate il più possibile (P38 PN)

Saying that methylone is less harmful than MDMA for sure sounds incautious to me. It would be great if you could give us sources or posting some research to document what you are saying. [...] I'm not telling that MDMA is surely less toxic, but rather that getting precise ideas about a substance either on the base of personal experience or on "they told me..." can be risky. To well understand you need studies done in as much standardised conditions as possible (P38 PN)

If many drug users are engaged in this kind of research, it is also because they personally have some health problems – the most quoted are depression and anxiety – that they want to overcome with drugs. It is worth noticing that some of them have already tried with prescribed drugs and official therapy, but without effective results.

Ho quasi 25 anni. Da 4 anni combatto con la depressione tramite psicanalisi e farmacoterapia. Ad oggi ho ottenuto 0 risultati e provato 3 SSRI, olanzapina (antipsicotico), valproato (stabilizzante).

Ci sono ancora altre opzioni da provare ma le pulsioni suicidarie non mi fanno credere di avere ancora molto tempo.

Ho una laurea che ha a che fare con la medicina e il farmaceutico, motivo per cui ho scoperto e approfondito gli studi degli ultimi 10 anni sul meccanismo d'azione della Ketamina e le sostanze ketamino-simili sulla depressione e l'ansia mediante i recettori NMDA, AMPA e la stimolazione neurogenetica.

La terapia che intendo eseguire consiste in somministrazioni intranasali di 50mg di Ketamina. (P41 PN)

I'm almost 25 years old. From 4 years I've been fighting depression with psychoanalysis and pharmacotherapy. So far I've got no results and tried 3 SSRI, olanzapine (antipsychotic), valproate (stabilizer). There are still other options to try, but suicidal impulses make me think that I have not much time yet. I have a degree related to medicine and pharmaceutical, for this reason I have discovered and deepened studies about the effects of ketamine and other similar substances on depression and anxiety through NMDA receptors, AMPA and neurogenetics stimulation. Therapy that I will do is 50mg of ketamine by intranasal administration (P41 PN).

As previously mentioned, what remains unclear is how much the forum members are aware that some mental disorders or psychological suffering, which they try to overcome through drug consume, could depend just from it. In the following excerpt a drug consumer who exceeded in psychedelics consumption and now suffers of derealisation and hallucinations, declares to be pleased to have used psychedelics in the past, as this experience would help him in facing his actual health problems.

mi ritengo fortunato ad aver avuto esperienze psichedeliche in passato perchè proprio grazie a quelle riesco a gestirmi e calmarmi quando sto male...ma forse sono proprio io che sono forte... una persona qualunque specie le prime volte sarebbe andata nell panico piu totale e si sarebbe recata in pronto soccorso e per affrontare questi problemi farebbe terapie e prenderebbe farmaci io ne sto uscendo piano piano totalmente da solo... pero voglio tornare a fumare non per risolvere i miei problemi ma per riprovare quelle sensazioni che amavo e tornare a ridere qualche volta. [...] per gli psichedelici stesso discorso mi domando se mai potrò tornare a farne uso naturalmente non abusandone, cosa che non ho mai fatto, giusto qualche rarissima volta, anche se non mi interessa più di tanto perchè quelle poche esperienze che ho fatto mi hanno mostrato molte verità e donato molte chiavi di cui avevo bisogno (P27 PN)

I think I'm lucky to have had psychedelic experiences in the past, since just because of those I can manage and keep calm when I feel sick... maybe I am a strong person... another person especially the first times would have been panicked and went to emergency service and to manage these problems would do treatment and take prescription drugs, while I'm slowly recovering alone... but I want to smoke again not to solve my problems but in order to feel again those sensations that I loved and laugh [...] The same discourse for psychedelics, I wonder if I will ever can to use them - obviously without abuse, which I never did, just rarely - however I'm not so much interested because those few experiences have shown me lot of truths and given me many clues that I needed. (P27 PN)

Other psyconauts are engaged in another kind of research, related to personal development and spirituality. In this sense, they represent themselves as aware people in a religious sense, engaged in a process of introspection and personal development. They also perceived themselves as frontier researchers in the field of the mysteries related to the human life and its sense, beyond what appear as real. In this case, the logic thinking on which the science is based is not sufficient, while introspection and intuition are the privileged learning methods, and drugs - especially sacred plants - constitute a means, like dreams and meditation.

Mi sono iscritto al forum perché molto interessato alla materia a cui mi sono avvicinato da poco, anche se in un certo senso ha sempre fatto parte di me, ho avuto esperienze da psiconauta (in gioventù) senza l'ausilio di nulla solo con quella che chiamano meditazione [...] oggi sono invece alla ricerca di qualcosa che buchi il velo perché secondo me di là c'è altro

I have become a member of this forum because I'm really interested into the matter to which I have come close recently, even though in a certain way it has been always part of me. I had psych-navigation experiences (during my youth) without any substances only through what is called meditation [...]. Now I'm looking for something that removes the veil because in my opinion there is something else.

Ho sempre nutrito interesse per l'introspezione, fosse essa psichedelica o meditativa, e per le letture di genere (da Baudelaire ad Huxley) ma aver potuto, pur modestamente, sperimentare tutto questo è stato davvero... illuminante. (P55 PN)

I've always been interested in introspection, being it psychedelic or meditative, and for reading in general (from Baudelaire to Huxley) but to have been able - though modestly - to experiment all this has been really... enlightening! (P55 PN)

It is worth noticing that also this kind of drug consumers are engaged in a process which is anything but uncommitted. Drugs are perceived as a means but personal efforts and development are necessary.

Sono dell'idea che sogno e stato di veglia non siano poi così lontani quando si è "presenti a se stessi", è una delle prime cose che ho imparato sulla mia pelle, quelli che reputo veri viaggi astrali si possono ottenere solo nel momento in cui si ha abbastanza dimestichezza con i propri processi interni, il proprio io interiore, se stessi [...] bisogna sudarsela, non basta mangiare verdurine, respirare strano, imbottirsi di calea o disegnarsi un occhio in più sulla fronte, serve essere pazienti e costanti senza diventare scemi, cosa non facile, ma possibile.(P10 PN)

In my opinion dream and wakefulness are not so different when you are "present to yourself", this one of the first things that I have learnt on my skin. What I call real astral trips can be done only when you have enough familiarity with your internal processes, your interior ego, yourself... It must be earned: eating vegetables, breathing in a strange way, stuffing with di Calea or drawing an eye on your head is not enough. Being patient and ... without becoming silly, what is not easy, but possible. (P10 PN)

Family Codes: C_REPR=consumers' representations and self-representations as consumers		
Code	Explanation	No. quot.
C_REPR_researcher	Self-representations and consumers representations of NPS consumers as researchers eager to learn and experimenting new drugs effects	15
C_REPR_sick	Self-representation as persons with some problems (mostly depression and anxiety) they try to overcome with drugs	10
C_REPR_aware	Self-representations as aware people engaged in a process of self-improvement through drug consumption	10
C_REPR_curious	Self-presentation as curious people	5
C_REPR_negative	Presentations of consumers (or self-representation related to the past) who take drug without being aware, just in search of fun	4
C_REPR_addict	Self-representation as addicts to substances (policonsumption, cannabinoids)	3

### 3.2.2. Slovenia

- In what kind of conversations forum users talk about NPSs?

Since DrogArt is a users-based forum, there is no surprise that there was more data found than on a generalist forum. In almost all of the selected threads, one or more NPS were the main topic of the conversation. The types of posts that start threads where NPS are mentioned can be divided in 4 different groups: sharing experience, asking for information on drugs, asking for help and other.

a) The majority of conversations start with a user **sharing their experience** with drug use, either positive or negative. The narrations usually include information about dosing, setting, effects of the drug and impressions about the experience/opinion about the drug (one aspect or more). They don't always cover all the parts of a so called trip report. The descriptions differ in time span and number of events/substances described – some users talk about one experience of drug consumption and some describe multiple events/substances or even tell a story of their addiction/most problematic period. One of the users described in detail his "era of mephedrone" by writing almost 13.000 characters about it.

Originalni načrt je bil sicer čisto drugačen - 150ug al-lada in okoli 90mg 6-apdb, ampak je pač šlo vse skupaj v drugo smer. Začelo se je s 150ug al-lada in par mg (točne št nima smisla pisat, ker te mg tehtnice itak niso tako občutljive) 5-meo-mipta. Učinki so se pojavili hitro, večinoma so bili vidni učinki v edinstvenem stilu (rahlo sicer podobni al-ladu, ampak ne čisto), slušnih učinkov nisem opazil, umski so bili klasični psihadelični, kakšnih neprijetnih telesni učinkov nisem opazil. Ena zanimiva lastnost je bila, da sem v glavi lahko razmišljal dokaj normalno, ampak izraziti to z besedami (govor/pisanje), pa ni šlo najbolje. Po parih urah so učinki začeli popuščati in sem pojedel še 300ug lsz + še par mg 5-meo-mipt. Učinki so se hitro vrnili, bili so rahlo močnejši, drugače pa ni bilo prevelike razlike. Še kakšno uro kasneje sem vzel še 300ug al-lada in okoli 90mg 6-apdb. Učinki so postali še močnejši, čutilo se je dosti evforije. Dojemanje časa je bilo spremenjeno. Nekaj trenutkov (po mojem občutku, nimam pojma koliko je trajalo v resnici) je bilo tudi zlitja vsega v eno. Kasneje so učinki začeli popuščati, jaz pa sem zaspal. Edina posledica je bila, da sem naslednji dan spal kot crknjen. Fizično/umsko ni bilo nobenih trenutkov, ko bi se počutil slabo/v nevarnosti. (P8D)

Original plan was different - 150ug al-lada and around 90mg 6-apdb, but it all went in a different direction. Started with 150ug al-lada and few mg (no sense in writing exact number as those scales are not so sensitive) of 5-meo mipt. The effects started quick, mostly visual effects in unique style (a bit similar to effects of al-lad, but not the same), hearing effects were not noticed, mind effects were classical psychedelic, also I did not notice unpleasant physical effects. One interesting effect was that I could think normally inside my head, but express this thoughts through words was very difficult. After few hours effects started to worn off and i took 300ug lsz + and few mg 5-meo-mipt. Effect come back quickly and a bit stronger, but all in all there wasn't a big difference from before. After ran hour I took 300ug al-lad and around 90mg 6-apdb. Effects become much stronger, I feel a lot of euphoria. Perception of time changed. Few moments (by my opinion – I don't know how much time really passed) were like everything is becoming on. After the effects start to wear off and I fall asleep. Only side effect was next day when I slept like dead person. There was no physical/mental problems when I would feel bad or in danger. (P8D)

Users find the shared experiences of others very useful and are thankful for them. Users who share their stories often do so in detail and write explicitly about their actions, problems and intentions to use in the future. The atmosphere of the forum is very open and users have no problems with describing their situation, even if it means sharing information about their health issues, negative life events etc. It seems that the forum is considered a safe place.

b) In addition to sharing experience, users also ask others for information about drugs. Some specifically ask for others' experience or opinion. Topics can be specifically dedicated to assessing different drugs and usually offer a lot of information.

Glede na to, da opažam, da se je etilfenidat razširil predvsem po ljubljani kot nadomestek 3mmcju ipd. me zanima če lahko tisti, ki ste ga uporabili poveste kaj več o samih izkušnjah. Bi prišlo zelo prav. (P6D)

Since I am noticing that ethylphenidate has spread especially in Ljubljana as a substitute to 3-MMC etc. I wonder if those who have tried it can tell some more about your experiences. It would really be useful. (P6D)

Forum members ask others about the availability of specific drugs (e.g. 2-FMA, 2-FA, 5-MAPB, 6-APB, Etilfenidat, Etil-katinon) or they ask a more general question such as "So, I would like to know what is appearing in clubs/parties/free time around you."

Two forum members would like to know about the traceability of drugs in the body, two request more information about a specific substance (4-FA, pentedrone) and two ask about the risks of drugs.

Mene pa zanima, če je možna fizična odvisnost od katinonov, ter koliko časa traja? Zanimajo me predvsem osebne izkušnje, ne teorije. (P1D)

I would like to know, if there is a possibility of physical addiction from cathinones and how long does it last? I am interested in personal experiences, not theories. (P1D)

Other questions include dosing, asking for drug suggestion and asking which drugs users would like to take.

c) Users see the DrogArt forum also as a platform where they can safely **ask for help** – either because of a health issue, a legal dilemma or to get advice on where to turn for help after recognizing trouble with controlling drug use.

Ta post objavljam z razlogom anonimno. Zgodilo se mi je naslednje. Naročil sem nekaj gramov katinonov (3MMC) iz preverjene strani in jih nisem prejel. Imam resen občutek, da so preverili pošto in da mi je bila zadeva zasežena.

Kaj lahko storim v tem primeru? Ne vem, če je ta forum pravi kraj za to vprašanje.

Doslej nimam še niti enega kaznivega dejanja. Nikoli več ne mislim prek neta naročiti ničesar prepovedanega.

Je možno, da sodniku preprosto rečem, da ne vem, zakaj in kdo mi je to poslal?

Ali je bolje biti iskren in se opravičiti na sodišču, ter povedati, da sem kupil leza lastno uporabo in upati na najboljše? (P1D)

I am publish this post anonymously for a reason. The following happened to me. I ordered a few grams of cathinones (3MMC) from a verified website and never got them. I have a serious feeling that my package was checked and seized.

What can I do in that case? I don't know if this forum is the right place for this question.

Till now I don't have any police record. I will never ever again order something illegal on the internet.

Is it possible to tell the court judge, that I don't know who and why sent me this package? Or is it better to be honest and apologize and tell that I bought this just for my personal use and hope for the best? (P1D)

Users turn to each other with the request to help identify a certain substance that they (or their friend) have taken based on the experienced effect. The latter sometimes weren't like expected, so users started doubting if the drug was really what they thought. In other cases, users didn't even know what they were taking in the first place – this behavior was also criticized by other users.

d) Other threads start with a post by a DrogArt operators, mostly warning or informing users about a substance or asking for information from “the scene”, or include comments on news articles, drug checking and drug synthesis. One thread focuses on new RCs and RCs in development where users discuss in depth the chemical structures of RCs, the possible future developments, predictions of what will be available etc. and obviously show a great deal of knowledge about chemistry. There is also one topic dedicated to results of colorimetric tests, which can serve as a rich database of reactions that are also photographically documented.

When looking at the whole discussions (not only starting posts), other topics emerge, e.g. drug forms, names, pharmacology, drug synthesis, prices.

Family code: “QUESTIONS” = Questions/issues/topics in the first post that originated the thread		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT. <sup>12</sup>
<b>SHARING EXPERIENCES</b>		
QUEST_sharing experience	Narrations about positive/negative experiences of drug use, trip reports, opinions about drugs based on experiences (NPS 14)	15
<b>INFORMATION ABOUT DRUGS</b>		
QUEST_asking about experiences	Questions about others' experiences and opinions about certain drugs (NPS 7)	8
QUEST_avaliability	Questions about the availability of drugs (NPS 3)	5
QUEST_analysis	Questions about the traceability of drugs in the body (NPS 1)	2
QUEST_risks	Questions about the risks of specific drugs (NPS 1)	2
QUEST_info about drugs	Requests for more information on specific drugs (NPS 2)	2

<sup>12</sup> The number represents the number of quotations marked with a certain code. It does not show the number of different authors (forum members).

QUEST_other questions	Other questions, including dosing, asking for drug suggestion and asking which drugs users would like to take (NPS 3)	3
<b>ASKING FOR HELP</b>		
QUEST_help	Questions about how to handle a problem with drug use or legal problem (NPS 2)	5
QUEST_what is...	Questions addressed to identify taken substance based on the described effects (NPS 2)	4
<b>OTHER</b>		
QUEST_post by DrogArt	Posts written by a DrogArt employee with the purpose of informing/warning users or ask them something (NPS 6)	6
QUEST_other	Other topics not before mentioned (drug synthesis, news article, drug checking, warning) (NPS 5)	5

- **How NPS are represented and supposed effects**

Even though it is usually not explicitly stated, the attitude towards drugs is generally positive, as the forum atmosphere is open and drug use is almost an a-priori fact. While this is quite obvious, more interesting is that also negative representations are present, and to a certain extent they seem to be even the majority, just because positive representations are somehow taken for granted.

For instance, some NPS are considered to be **dangerous**. The representation is usually connected with a specific substance or group of substances (e.g. cathinones), not all new psychoactive substances, but there is also a notion that RC's are dangerous because they are not researched so you do not know the damage it can cause. Sometimes, users directly write that a certain substance is dangerous.

Tako da fantje in punce - 3MMC ima dve plati, tako da res pazljivo s tem, doslej nisem verjel raznim horror zgodbicam z neta, zdaj pa vem da so resnične. (P1D)

Boys and girls – there are two sides to 3MMC, so be really careful with it, till now I didn't believe different horror stories from internet but now I know they are real. (P1D)

sicer sem zelo proti prepovedovanju drog in določanju kaj uporabniki smejo zaužiti in kaj ne, ampak za mephedron sem bil vesel ko se ga ni dalo več dobiti. po več kot 2h letih od zadnje uporabe še vedno nisem pozabil občutka ko grenko pekoče snežinke polzijo po grlu in se v trenutku začne močan rush in globoko dihanje. če bi se mef dal dobiti tako lahko kot spid in iksi danes najbrž ne bi bil več "normalen". (P5D)

I am very against drugs prohibition and regulation about which substances users can or cannot use, but for mephedrone I was happy when it was not available anymore. After 2 years from last use I still remember the feeling of bitter chili snowflakes going down my throat, when the rush kicks in and deep breathing starts. If mephedrone was so accessible as speed or ecstasy, probably I wouldn't be "normal" today. (P5D)

Some examples of perceived dangerous drugs are 3-MMC, mephedrone, GHB, methylone, NBOME, MDPV, ketamine, MXE, fentanyl analogues, Diphenidine, a-PVP... Users see a substance as dangerous mostly because of risks connected to its use (addiction, hangovers, psychological problems, other long term consequences, difficult withdrawal symptoms), the fact that a drug is very compulsive and uncontrollable, is difficult to dose correctly or has undesirable effects. The danger is not always connected only with the substance, but also the combination of substance and other factors such as route of administration (e.g. injecting 3-MMC), dosing (e.g. GHB), users' mentality etc.

Especially with mephedrone, there is an ambivalent attitude – it can be perceived as very dangerous and at the same time one of the best drugs, even by the same users:

js iščem to že fuul časa, tko da mislm da se bom en dan kr na štop odpravla gor kr jbg tud če me je takrat čis čis spral pa sploh nvem kaj bi blo z mano če to ne bi šlo off the

I am looking for it for a long time, so I think one day I will hitchhike up there, because fuck it even though I was totally fucked up and I don't know what would

market... hočm usaj enkrat spet dožvet tist filing (P5D) happened if this wouldn't go off the marker... I want to feel the rush once again (P5D)

Negative representations refer mostly to users' opinions about a drug they have tried or their general opinion. The found expressions stretch from "boring" or "lousy" to "the worst drug". The reasons why a drug is perceived as negative can be the (side) effects, compulsiveness, emptiness (offers no insights), unpredictability, lack of wanted effects etc. Some users express they are disappointed or regret taking a certain substance. One nuance of negative perceptions are drugs that are labelled as "filthy" or "crappy/shit drugs", for example 3-MMC, 4-FA, 2C-D, 2C-I, 4-MeO-PCP, MDPV, 5-MeO-DALT.

men osebno je "sladoled" kot droga ena svinjarija agresivna strupena. Kot vecina sranja ki ga zdejejo malinovci. (P1D) To me personally "ice cream" as a drug is aggressive toxic filth. Like most of the shit which is used by pubescents. (P1D)

Another frequently expressed representation of NPS is that a user does not really know what he/she is taking. Forum members see this from two points of view.

1) When you buy a NPS, you can never be sure that it's really what you think it is; users have experienced this problem themselves, and this can happen even with substances sold as traditional drugs, which are actually RCs. With regards to this issue, the need for a drug checking service is often claimed.

Drgač pa glede na to kok so ljudje (preprodajalci) pokvarjeni, se zna zgodit, da neveš točno kaj konzumiras in ubistvu jemles nekeje k je fizično addictive... (P1D) Otherwise, according to how people (dealers) are corrupt, it can happen, that you don't know exactly what are you consuming and in fact you are using something that is physical addictive... (P1D)

točen tak, pr nam prodajajo use sorte, maš 5 različnih "MDMAjev" po ceni ki je primerna za kokain, v resnici so pa neki rcji, pa še to ne kaki kvalitetni ampak nek šrot ko te sam zvija mal pa oči skup vleče, da bi biu pa kak lep efekt od MDMAja lahk pa kr pozabiš. (P2D) Exactly, they sell us everything, you have 5 different "MDMAs" at a price that is appropriate for cocaine but in reality they are some RCs and not even of any quality but some junk which just give you cramps and pulls your eyes together and you can just forget about any nice MDMA effects. (P2D)

2) Naming NPS with made-up street names is problematic and dangerous. The topic of street names emerged in a discussion about an unknown drug called "flamingo" that started appearing among users in 2014 but nobody really knew what it actually was. The thread was opened by a DrogArt professional who addressed forum members with the question if anyone knows what "flamingo" is. She also said that she doesn't like the fact that people name drugs like that since people can't look them up on the internet to get informed about them. As is apparent from the responses, many users agree with that and believe that naming drugs with such weird made-up names is dangerous and stupid.

Pač dokler ime še nekako daje vsaj nekakšno predstavo za kakšno substanco gre je ok... ko pa pridejo imena kot so hanibal in flamingo... kapo dol idiotom (P2D) As long as the name gives you an idea about which substance it is, ok... but when names like hanibal and flamingo come... hats off to the idiots (P2D)

Here, "the responsibility is two-sided. Not only dealers are to blame but especially users who are too lazy to learn how to read and pronounce the names of substances that they put in their bodies... and then they settle with being sold a drug called "flamingo"; in fact, they prefer it this way because they don't twist their tongues" (P2D).

Most statements directly addressing the **comparison between traditional drugs and NPS** are in favour of the first, and there is a sense of nostalgia for them, not just because of drugs but also the music and the whole scene.

Droge v dobrih starih časih so bile boljše, itak, pa muzka tudi. ;) (P1D)

Drugs in good old days were better, for sure, and the music too. ;) (P1D)

In the case of one user, only traditional drugs are “real drugs”. He doesn’t understand why anyone would use the new ones.

Še vedno me čudi, zakaj ljudje kupujejo in namenoma jemljejo te raznorazne bedarije? Ok, tudi sam sem, kot sem že napisal, probal ta flamingo, ker sem ga slučajno dobil večje količine od nekoga (ne da se mi razlagat kako in zakaj), sigurno pa ga nisem namenoma iskal in kupoval. Štekom, da ljudje jemljejo take stvari, v pomanjkanju denarja, ali pa v pomanjkanju "pravilnih" drog, ampak če je cena teh novih RCjev enaka ali celo višja kot cena običajnih drog, poleg tega, pa je le teh v izobilju, zakaj bi se nekdo namesto preizkušenih zadev, namenoma loteval nepoznanih in dragih substanc?

Jaz sem enkrat probal (v zelo majhni količini) in ne nameravam nikoli več. Pa ne zato, ker bi bil tako slaba droga, ampak, ker se ne želim zastruplat z neko testno snovjo, o kateri ni bila narejena niti ena raziskava. (P2D)

I am still wondering, why people are buying and intentionally using all kinds of bullshits? Ok, like I wrote, I also tried this flamingo, because I incidentally got it in bigger quantities from someone (I don't feel like explaining how and why), but for sure I wasn't looking for it or buying it intentionally. I understand that people take this stuff if they lack money or other “real” drugs, but if the price of the new RCs is the same or even higher than ordinary drugs, beside this there is plenty of them, why would someone instead of tested drugs, intentionally use unknown and expensive substances?

Once I tried (in very low quantity) and I will never do it again. But not because the drug is bad, but because I don't want to poison myself with some test substance, without any research about it. (P2D)

However, there are opposite user opinions as well – for example that drugs were always good, perhaps even better now since the laboratories are better. Also, a user shares his experience with 3-MMC for which he says that it is better than MDMA, cocaine and all similar things.

It is interesting that even in the diverse and broad group of new psychoactive substances, in one user’s opinion there is a difference in perception of “old” and “new” NPS, where again, the old ones are believed to be better.

Jst iskreno mislim, da so ta boljše molekule že pobenane in da je vse tole samo še mešanje dr\*\*. Stvari kot so ble AMT, MDPV, MXE, NBOME, metilon so dejansko delale distinktivno in učinkovito, kar pa berem reporte od vseh teh novih stvari je večinoma bolj žalostno. Vse to je zdj že 3je razredno... (P6D)

I honestly think, that the best molecules are banned already and this now is just mixing shit. Stuff like AMT, MDPV, MXE, NBOME, methylone were working distinctively and efficiently, from reports of all those new stuff I am reading now, most of it looks sad. Everything now is 3rd class... (P6D)

Among the **positive representations** there were a lot of substances that users rated as good, likable, pleasant, with good effects and price, safe (at least compared to others) etc. As well as with the “dangerous” representations, the representations are mostly about specific substances or groups of NPS (e.g. RC stimulants) rather than about NPS as a whole. In fact, a clear distinction is drawn and users often write about which NPS they liked and which they did not in the same post.

2c-x eni zlo dobri, eni sranje....2c-e/p/b/c/t-7 so legendarni, d, i sta pa sranje (P4D)

2c-x some are very good, some are crap...2c-e/p/b/c/t-7 are legendary, d and I are crap (P4D)

Drgac pa use te zgodbe k so tle opisane in prigode... Zgledajo men tragi-komicno, za nekatere absurdne, za druge verjetn normalne al pa mal sick bi pa skor lahko reku da je bil to edn bolsih obdobji v moje lajfu, ceprou smo take pocel smo se mel fajn...in bi verjetno

All those stories and adventures described here...look to me tragicomic, for some absurd, for others probably normal or a bit sick, but I could say this was one of the best periods in my life, even though we did this things we had great time...and I would do it again from

se 1x use od januarja 2009 naprej - ponovil bols je blo mogoce sam takrat k smo zacel s partiji kot mulci...tist hype je biu mogoce mal bols (P5D)

January 2009 onwards maybe better was only when we started with parties as kids...that hype was maybe a bit better (P5D)

Among the reasons why users like certain drugs is that the substance doesn't have (specific) side effects or consequences in the short and/or long term, for example no craving, no insomnia, bad trips, doesn't "make you stupid", there is no tolerance and so on. Therefore, the absence of undesirable effect actually becomes the positive aspect of a drug.

mdai - ta je neupravičeno na slabem glasu. ni noben nadomestek mdmaja, ampak deluje kot nekaj kar te na hitro spravi v dobro voljo brez posebnih stranskih učinkov (P10D)

Mdai – has an unjustified bad reputation. It is not a substitute for mdma, but works like something that gets you quickly in a good mood without any special side effects. (P10D)

As we could see, representations of NPS are tightly connected with the effects of NPS.

Among the positive effects, there are **pleasant feelings**, which are different in quality and intensity: bliss and carefreeness (mephedrone), confidence, laughter (25B-NBOMe), feeling like the king of the world (3-MeO-PCP), euphoria (methyline), general "feel-good" sense (a-PVT), rush, etc.

Blo je v gozdu, avto, muzika, družba, lajf se je začel po 10min odvijat ekstremno nepopisno čudovito in nepozabno. Mel sem rad vse, vse hoto povedat, objemal drevo, čiki so pasal, vse je blo fajn, dobesedno. Kot si sam rekel, da ti na tem ni nič težko naret in prav iz tega se razvijejo scene kot si jih delil z nami (P5D)

It was in the woods, car, music, after 10 min life start to evolve extremely indescribable wonderfully and unforgettably. I loved everyone, said everything, hugged the tree, cigarettes pleased me, everything was great, literally. Like you said it, on this nothing is hard to do and right from these scenes that you shared with use develop. (P5D)

Users report having pleasant hallucinations and other sensations especially when taking psychedelics. They write about the beautiful visual effects, enhanced perceptions (of music, the surroundings...), modified perception of time, dissolution of everything into one and so on.

AMT: trenutno top substanca lih prav trippy, doug traja edin, moreš gleat da nimaš drug dan nobenih obveznosti pa čim bolj zgodi ga vzet, ni lepšga ko jutro na amtju uaaa eh...simply the best (P10D)

AMT: momentarily a top substance just trippy enough, only it lasts long so you have to be without any obligations next day and you should take it as early as possible, there is nothing more beautiful as a morning on amt uaaa eh..., simply the best (P10D)

Drugs can also influence one's **sex life** – users report having stronger orgasms, having an enhanced sex drive, lower inhibitions etc.

Je pa zanimiv vpliv na spolnost; vsi iz družbe smo postali mnogo bolj dovzetni za razne eksperimente na tem področju, nekaterim straight tipom ni bilo več jasno, če to res so (seveda ob pre mnogih sugestijah gay-ev , pa še kaj bi se našlo. (P4D)

The influence on sexuality is interesting; everyone from our company became more receptive for different experiments in this area, some straight guys weren't so sure if they still are straight (of course with many proposals of gays), and there is more to that (P4D)

Apart from recreational use, consumers use drugs for other purposes – in the analyzed discussions, some of the evident purposes are for work or study (stimulants), drugs as medicine for different problems (insomnia, anxiety, bad trips etc.) and spiritual purposes/personal development (especially psychedelics).

nizke oralne doze delujejo podobno ritalinu za učenje (P10D)

Low oral doses works similar as Ritalin for studying (P10D)

etizolam - najboljši benzo kar se tiče price/performance trenutno na trgu, prime zelo hitro (idealno za pomoč pri bad tripih), ne traja dolgo, še kar evforičen (P10D)

Etizolam – best benzo regarding price/performance ratio on the market, kicks in very fast (ideally for help with bad trips), not long-lasting, quite euphoric (P10D)

A positive connotation is also given to the effect of increased communicativeness, rush and certain changes to the cognitive processes like remembering things from your childhood, having a better focus and concentration, having the feeling that you understand the world better etc.

**Negative effects** of NPS found in the posts were mostly connected with unwanted side effects, hangovers and long-term consequences (e.g. bladder damage caused by mephedrone). Side effect can be either physical or psychological, both ranging from mild (e.g. headache, confusion) to severe (e.g. epileptic seizures, psychosis). Psychological side effects in this case include not only bad trips as a result of the use of psychedelics, but also other psychological discomforts and consequences like memory loss, anxiety etc.

Peče hujše, kot če bi snifal bonbon zato bi bil tudi vesel, če mi nekdo pove, če se ta zadeva dejansko snifa, ker peče nenormalno (P2D)

Burns more than sniffing ecstasy so I would be happy, if someone told me if this stuff is actually for sniffing, because it burns abnormally. (P2D)

Samo na eni drogi sem lulal v prazne plastenke sredi noči v svoji sobi ker zaradi paranoje nisem upal nikamor. Psihoza pri mdpvju je tako pogosta da bi jo lahko napisal med efekte. (P9D)

Only on one drug I peed in empty plastic bottles in the middle of the night in my room, because did not dare to go anywhere due to paranoia. Psychosis at mdpv is so common, that it could be listed as an effect. (P9D)

ne se igrat s psy shit.. pokažejo ti lahko tak svet kot si ga niti v sanjah nočeš predstavlat+ pozanimite se o hppdju - to je bolezen ki jo sproži uporaba psyhadelikov, jaz sem jo preživel in sicer je trajala okoli 6 mesecev (vsakodnevno)... ne bom vam zdej pisal preveč podrobno, k preveč podoživljam scene... hef fan (p8d)

Don't play with psy shit...they can show you the world that you don't want to imagine even in your dreams + inform yourself about HPPD – it is a disease that can be triggered by psychedelic use, I survived it and it lasted for around 6 months (daily)...I will not describe you in details because I relive the scenes again...have fun (P8D)

The next set of negative effects are associated with addiction, tolerance and compulsive drug use (binges). Users also mention social consequences, e.g. job loss and behavior that they wouldn't normally engage in. These actions can be so bizarre that one user labelled them as "sick". Other negative effects/risks include death, toxicity and abscess (with IV use).

... Bli so trenutki k je biu kdo ze kr dobesedn nakonc, k sm dejansk mislu da bo koga pobral, predvsem sm se bal za moja punco takrat kr je mela dostkrat probleme...ubistvi smo jih imel tko usi, tut js sm mislu da bom sou u kurac sploh na Eco festi 2009 ko sm se prvic u lajfu ustrazu za svoj lajf, ko 2 dni nism jedu, in zvleku N mepha, in ko je zmankal vleku se ixk kr ene z mddp al kua je tist shit k te sam ubije lahko... (P5D)

...there were moments when some were literally at the end, when I actually thought that someone will die, most of all I was afraid about my girlfriend who had many problems...in fact we all had them, also I thought that I will drop dead at Eco festival 2009 when I was afraid for the first time for my life, when for 2 days I wasn't eating and did N grams of mephedrone and when meph was gone I snorted ecstasy with mddp or whatever that shit was that can just kill you...(P5D)

Sometimes, it is difficult to say that an effect is positive or negative, since it can be experienced differently depending on the person, setting, dose etc. – which is nicely illustrated by a user's comment:

Daljše trajanje je pa itak dvorezen meč, če vzameš preveč, si v riti, če lepo zadaneš dozo, je pa super + ceneje. (P10D)

There are 2 sides to long-lasting effects, if you take too much you are fucked, if you hit the perfect dose it's super + cheaper. (P10D)

Certain desired effects, like stimulation, have a thin line between being positive and turning into an unwanted side effect. Most of the time, references to stimulant effect were positive, however, it could also be excessive and thus perceived as negative. The same dynamics applies to some other effects, e.g. hallucinations, where an experience can be pleasant but also somewhat scary.

Če vzameš več v enem večeru (~1g in ko greš po tem spat (ko že popusti..)) imaš lahko privide, halucinacije, v gozdu v temi, ko smo to enkrat užival (avtu, muzika, weed, standard) so ble zvezde rdeče, zdelo se mi je, da nekdo hodi ob gozdu, videl sem ljudi, nisem upal preverit, če je res kdo, včasih tut rahla paranoja zaradi prividov.

Najbolj zanimivo je, ko greš spat in lahko gledaš risanko, vidiš z zaprtimi očmi, še stvari od prej se ti odvijajo pred očmi, zelo hitri prebliski vsega.. Predvsem pa to kar hočeš, da vidiš to vidiš in tako posledično spopotoma oblikuješ sliko, slike, in nastane film. (P5D)

If you take more in one night (~1g and after when you go to sleep, after effect wears off) you can have hallucinations, in the woods in the darkness when we use it once (in a car, music, weed, standard) the stars were red, I thought that someone is walking along woods, I saw people, I didn't have courage to check if there is really someone, sometimes also mild paranoia because of hallucinations.

The most interesting part is when you go to sleep and you can watch a cartoon with your eyes closed, things from before roll in front of your eyes like quick flashes.. Especially what you want to see you see it and like that you can form a movie. (P5D)

Often, people talk about the effects of drugs by comparing them to effects of other drugs (e.g. *“To me personally, mephedrone is like a starting effect of MDMA. Or like a lower quality speed.”* P5D). Since it seems that everyone on the forum know the effects of more common drugs, there is no need to describe them and the name of a certain substance can now become a name for a group of effects of a different drug, e.g. *“MDMA-like”*. Drugs are also assessed by being compared to one another based on other criteria, e.g. price/performance ratio.

As well as with individual drugs, people express their preferences, write about the effects and share their experience with combinations of drugs. As such, a combination becomes a separate unit with specific characteristics.

<b>Family code: “NPS REPRESENTATIONS” = Statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards NPS</b>		
<b>CODE</b>	<b>EXPLANATION</b>	<b>NO. QUOT.</b>
<b>ATTITUDES TOWARDS NPS</b>		
REPR_negative	Negative representations of NPS	54
REPR_dangerous	Perceptions that NPS are dangerous	48
REPR_positive	Positive representations of NPS	42
REPR_you don't know what you take	Statements linking NPS (and other drugs) to insecurity about what a user is really consuming	25
REPR_traditional NPS vs. NPS	Statements comparing traditional drugs and NPS	11
<b>DISCOURSES ABOUT EFFECTS AND PURPOSES OF USE<sup>13</sup></b>		
<b>POSITIVE</b>		
EFF_no consequences	References to the lack of negative effects or consequences (4-FA, A-PVT, GHB, mephedrone...)	34
EFF_pleasant feelings	References to positive feelings like blessedness, euphoria, carefreeness etc. (3-MMC, a-PVT, mephedrone, 3-MeO-PCP, GHB, 5-MAPB, 25b-NBOME, MDAI, NEB ...)	32

<sup>13</sup> Including also risks/consequences connected with NPS use and the different purposes why NPS are used (on the basis of their effects).

EFF_positive hallucinations and other sensations	References to positive hallucinations and other sensations (dissolution, all becomes one, enhanced perceptions...), especially with psychedelics and dissociatives	20
EFF_stimulative	References to energizing, stimulative properties (a-PVP, GHB, 3-MMC, 6-APB, pentedrone...)	20
EFF_work or study	References to drugs that help you work or study (4-FA, A-PVT, MDPV, ethylphenidate, 2-FMA, 4F-MPH)	10
EFF_communicative	References to increased desire to communicate, socialize (mephedrone, methylone, 4-FA, 2-FA, MDPV...)	10
EFF_sex	References to effects related with sex (3-MMC, GHB, mephedrone, 5-MeO-MIPT...)	9
EFF_medication	References to drugs, used as medicine (GBL, etizolam, MXE...)	8
EFF_recreational	References to drugs good for recreational purposes (4-FA, 2-FA) a-PVP, 5-MeO-MIPT, 3-MeO-PCP...)	7
EFF_spiritual	References to personal development through the use of substances and to drugs used for spiritual purposes (psychedelics, mx, 1P-LSD+4-FA)	6
EFF_cognitive	References to changes in the cognitive processes like remembering things from your childhood, understanding the world etc. (MXE, methylone, GBL, diphenidine)	6
<b>NEGATIVE</b>		
EFF_side effects	References to physical undesired effects, e.g. tachycardia, movement difficulties, body load, headache, cramps, pain, overstimulation, nausea (GHB, 2c-e, LSZ, A-PVP, 25b-NBOME, pentedrone, MPDV...)	53
EFF_psychological side effects	References to psychological undesired effects, e.g. anxiety, delirium, dissociation, paranoia (NBOMe, ketamine, a-PVP, MPDV...)	37
EFF_long-term	References to long-term negative effects (more than a week), e.g. psychosis, depression, pain, bladder damage, damage to the nose, HPPD (mephedrone, ketamine, MPDV, 3-MMC, 3-FPM...)	30
EFF_hangovers	References to negative consequences after use, e.g. fatigue, anxiety, depression, nausea, being "spun" <sup>14</sup> (3-MMC, 4-FA, MDPV, GBL, MXE...)	19
EFF_binge/compulsive	References to strong cravings/irresistible urge to keep taking the drug (3-MMC, mephedrone, GHB, a-PVP, MDPV, ethylphenidate...)	18
EFF_addiction	References to addiction and dependence (etizolam, GHB, mephedrone)	13
EFF_tolerance	References to the need to take more substance to feel the same effects (nifoxipam, 25b-NBOMe, mephedrone, 3-MMC, GHB, GBL)	10
EFF_social and other consequences	References to job loss, rape, fights, hurting others (3-MMC, mephedrone, GBL)	10
EFF_death	References to the risk of death (3-MMC, mephedrone, mixing drugs, MDPV, fentanyl analogs, diphenidine)	9
EFF_sick scenes	References to behavior that one wouldn't normally engage in, e.g. reckless driving, sexual profligacy (especially with mephedrone)	8
EFF_other negative	References to toxicity and abscess	4

- Representations of NPS consumers

(Self)representations of consumers are not as clear on DrogArt forum in comparison with the generalist one. It seems taken for granted that forum members are drug users, therefore the general

<sup>14</sup> »Spranost« is a Slovenian slang expression with various meanings and is therefore not easily translated – it can be understood a side effect of a drug (e.g. while under the effect of a drug), a negative after effect (e.g. hangover) or a long-term state that occurs with frequent/long drug use. It refers to the feelings of being »washed out«, »drained«, »spun«, »trashed« and similar.

atmosphere around drug use is quite positive, open and accepting – people generally don't condemn the use of drugs in itself, however they do draw certain lines and see certain ways of consumption or risky behaviour as not OK. Statements that were taken into consideration refer to current or past situations and to forum members themselves or others. In many cases it is not clear whether an opinion is about NPS consumers or drug users in general – if the statement in question was written in the context of NPS use (e.g. discussion about an NPS), it was included in the analysis.

Mostly, forum members use their nicknames, under which they become known in the forum community. This in turn leads to lesser anonymity since some of them are very active, reveal personal information and also sometimes even get to know each other in real life. However, it is not necessary to register in order to post in some parts of the forum. In the analysed discussions, 12 users used a so called “guest” profile. One person explicitly expressed his intention to write a post anonymously, because he was writing about ordering illegal drugs online.

Sometimes users recognize that some of their consumption styles - binges lasting several days, large quantities of drugs used, mixing drugs, frequent drug use, injecting etc. - are risky and conclude that they need help/discourage others from doing the same, whereas for others, taking risks is part of their preferred life style since they believe that “life on the edge is the only one worth living” (P2D). Representations are sometimes quite expressive, e.g. “HC polydrug user”, “reckless polytoxicomaniac”. Apart from the representations as (ex) risky users, addiction (current and in the past) is also mentioned – in one case, a user is expressing his doubts about being addicted.

Namreč v zadnjem času sem kar pogosto začel uporabljat 3MMC, in sicer 2 do 3krat na teden. In takrat ko uporabljam, so to res velike doze in dolgo trajajoči binge-i (okoli 15 urni).

Je pa stvar v tem, da še nikoli nisem jemal 2 dni zapored, torej, ko neham, si vedno vzamem vsaj 24 ur pauze. Je možno, da je vseeno prišlo do odvisnosti?

Stvar je namreč v tem, da se danes in pravzaprav zadnje čase kar naprej (kadar nisem pod vplivom 3MMC-a, kadar sem, to takoj mine) izredno živčen, slabo mi je, nimam apetita, sem razdražljiv, skoraj samomorilski, vse se mi zdi odveč. (P1D)

Recently I started to use 3mmc quite often, 2-3 times per week. When I use it I take high dosages and have long lasting binges (around 15h).

But the thing is that I never used 2 days in a row, so, when I stop I always have at least 24h pause. Is it possible that I still got addicted? The thing is that today and actually quite often lately (when I am not under the influence of 3mmc, when I am, it passes) I am extremely nervous, nauseous, without appetite, irritable, almost suicidal, everything seems unneeded. (P1D)

One of the users who recognized their past addiction with mephedrone believes that he could now use it recreationally (once in a while) without getting addicted to it again. He sees a difference between his addiction (however strong) and “IV junkies who had better not try it again after getting clean” (P5D).

Although this forum is very open and the attitude towards drug use is predominately positive, some users perceive certain behaviours as immature, irresponsible or **stupid**. Among these actions are injecting 3-MMC, taking NPS without knowing what it is only because it gives a good “high”, taking NPS in general, using an unknown substance found on the floor, excessive use and mixing etc. The motto of living on the edge is therefore contradicted.

tja, zdej ce je zate hoja po robu da se ga nabutas s slabo preverjenimi RC ji in umres zarad zastrupitve?! kot vau dva dni nisem vedu kdo in kje sem, pol so mi pa ledvica odpovedala, heh mislem, men je to neumnost in patetika. (P2D)

If walking on the edge for you is getting high with poorly known RCs and dying from poisoning?! Like wow two days I didn't know who and where am I and then my kidneys failed, heh I mean, for me this is pathetic and stupid. (P2D)

Users are critical not only about others, but also about themselves, since sometimes they see their own current or past behaviour as stupid/irresponsible. One user thinks that more or less all junkies (including him) are spoiled children. A user who published a long report about his addiction with mephedrone wrote that he is aware of how irresponsible that was and that he would never do something like that again.

In retrospective, some users, like the one mentioned above, recognize their past behaviour (use of specific drug, drug use in general, heavy drug use etc.) as something they would not repeat. Their perspectives and attitudes have changed (e.g. one user became a father and confirmed the stereotype that you change when you have children), hangovers have become worse and they have now stopped using or have become less frequent users. One forum member stated that she never understood why people used GHB and that in the past perhaps she would have tried it (at a party), but not now. Mostly, users who would not engage in their past behaviour believe that they would not do so (e.g. use so much) even if their drug of choice was widely available.

Zanimiu k tole pisem in razmislam za nazaj, se spomnem usake scene, imam mocno pospesen utrip in ni mi jasno kko sm/smo lahko to pocel... Danes ne zdrzim niti en party, kaj sele after, kaj sele ceu vikend... Ni sans, niti nebi probavu sploh. (P5D)

Interesting when I am writing this and thinking back remembering every scene, I have a faster heart rate and I don't get it how I/we could do that... Today I can't bear not even one party, what about after or whole weekends. No way would I even try. (P5D)

Not everyone shares this opinion, though. One user wrote that despite the fact that she doesn't know what would have happened to her if mephedrone hadn't disappeared from the market, she wants to experience that feeling again. Another user seems to be a bit incongruent about his past behavior (addiction to mephedrone) – on one hand he describes it as irresponsible, very harmful and something he would not do again but in a different post where he refers to that same addiction he says that it was one of the best times of his life and that he would probably do it all again.

The forum members are clearly attracted by NPS and they intentionally **experiment** with different altered states of consciousness. It is common that they have tried a large number of different drugs (not only NPS). There is even a topic on the forum called "RC's I have known and loved" which is dedicated to short descriptions and opinions of a variety of different NPS. However, there aren't any explicit (self) representations, where users would depict themselves as experimenters, but it is evident from the context (e.g. the thread mentioned above). This kind of experimental/research use of NPS is especially typical for one of the forum members who has written a number of posts sharing experience with different drugs and also what he intends to use in the future. He says that he has other things to try, but has trouble with "time, tolerance with psychedelics, choice... (P10D)". Apart from obvious interest in trying a lot of drugs, he also shows a great deal of knowledge about chemistry and drug synthesis. He likes to try different combinations of drugs and has specific goals, e.g. he would like to make a sterile dissolution of a combination of MXE and 2C-C "firstly to prove to myself that I can do it and secondly because I am curious" (P7D). Even though there are no direct self-representations as researchers or chemistry enthusiasts, there are other users beside the one mentioned above, who display knowledge and passion about drug synthesis.

Drug use can also be recreational and some users depict themselves as moderate/recreational users, meaning that they use drugs occasionally (e.g. at weekends) in their spare time and mostly for fun. This way of consumption is portrayed as more responsible.

Droge so mi sam za rekreativno uporabo v prostem času (P3D)

I only have drugs for recreational use in my spare time (P3D)

According to some forum members, drug use is **subjective** – what is important is not so much the drug use itself, but how a person uses substances and if they have things sorted out in their head.

Other representations include users that use drugs for a **specific purpose** like personal development/spirituality, to be able to perform/focus better or medicate themselves (e.g. in an opioid crisis a user uses GBL to sleep). The representations are not elaborate, they only show the above mentioned purposes of NPS use.

The level of knowledge about drugs among forum members is quite high, with some exceptions, but mostly, users are informed about the substances, they educate themselves mostly by reading about them on the internet. In some of the discussions, if certain facts that someone wrote are doubted, forum members request credible sources where the information came from.

Family code: “CONSUMERS’ REPRESENTATIONS” = Statements and discourses expressing an attitude towards (NPS) users and self-representations as consumers		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT.
C_REPR_stupid	(Self)representations as people who have done/are doing something stupid/irresponsible	15
C_REPR_would not do it again	(Self)representations as consumers who wouldn’t repeat their drug related behaviour from the past	12
C_REPR_experimenter	(Self)representations as experimenters who like to try different drugs	12
C_REPR_recreational	(Self)representations as moderate users who consume drugs recreationally	7
C_REPR_riskier	(Self)representations as (ex)riskier users	7
C_REPR_addicted	(Self)representations as (ex)addicts	7
C_REPR_subjective	Notion that drug use is subjective/how it is perceived depends on various factors (reasons, type of drug use)	6
C_REPR_other	(Self)representations as people who use drugs for purposes like personal development/spirituality, work/study or as medication	5

- Responses

Among the sharing of information and experience with drug use, forum members also give each other advice on what to do and share their harm reduction strategies.

The latter are mentioned very frequently, which shows a certain level of awareness among users and might also be related with the fact that this is the forum created by a harm reduction NGO. Since the forum is very popular among drug users, **useful information on how to reduce drug related harm** can reach a great number of people and have a bigger impact since they are conveyed by peers and not (only) professionals, so it is important to share these strategies among the users’ scene.

Harm reduction guidelines in the forum discussions are either explicit (in the form of facts or advice) or are evident from the context (e.g. trip report).

ti pa mogoče raje ne vleči najprej pa potem spraševati za kakšno zadevo gre - najprej TEORIJA pol PRAKSA (P2D)

You shouldn’t first snort and then ask about the substance you are dealing with – first THEORY then PRACTICE (P2D)

Glede na to, da je blo za obe prvič, se nama je zdelo najbolj pametno da začneva s polovičko. (P13D)

Since it was the first time for both of us, we thought the smartest thing to do is to start with half. (P13D)

These are some of the mentioned harm reduction strategies according to users:

- use the drug checking service; people express intention to bring samples to DrogArt for testing, encourage others to do it and share drug checking results

- using opiates to cut amphetamine peaks
- it is unsafe to mix drugs
- users should demand the use of serious, chemical names for drugs and not street names
- don't use the same source
- physical activity and positive affirmations helps reduce psychosis
- to regenerate better: eat good food (fruits), take vitamins, be physically active and also rest well
- people who are psychologically more vulnerable or have a family history of mental illness shouldn't use too much drugs
- using sterile equipment
- don't inject strong stimulants
- it's better to use less (smaller quantities)
- buy over the internet, because the quality is better
- get informed before use; users also ask about risks/effects
- don't snort 4-FA
- use GHB, not GBL
- don't use cheap, low quality GBL
- don't mix GHB and alcohol
- careful with dosing GHB, mix it with juice, use only in the evenings
- use in a safe setting
- effects are subjective, so different users will experience them differently
- don't play with psychedelics
- start with small doses (gradually find your dose) and be careful with dosing (use a milligram scale or dissolve it in water and use a dropper), do an allergy test
- use a salt solution to wash your nose after snorting
- be careful that you don't break and loose your social network because of drug use

To je preveč, 100mg mxeja je za hardcore ljubitelje disociacije, ne za nekoga, ki sploh še ni zihra, če mu je vseč tak občutek. Grem staviti, da bi nižja doza bila prijetna mnogim večim ljudem. Tbh, ni mi jasno zakaj takoj rinit v visoke doze (dražje, več stranskih učinkov, nabijaš toleranco za bv, ...), poskusi najprej z majhno, da vidiš, kako se odzivaš na to. Itak si kupil 1g (po manj se ni/se ne prodaja afaik) in lahko komot probaš najprej nizke, če ti je vseč, pa malo višje. Mislim, a alkohola za prvič tudi spiješ celo vodko? Lsdja vzameš 1mg? .. (P10D)

This is too much, 100mg of mxe is for hard-core lovers of dissociation and not for someone who is not sure about liking this feeling. I bet that a lower dose would please much more people. To be honest I don't know why start with higher doses (more expensive, building tolerance for no reason), try first with a small one to see how you react. Anyway you bought 1g (as far as I know you can't buy less) and you can easily try first with low doses and if you like it you go higher. I mean, with alcohol do you also start with a whole vodka? And take 1mg of lsd?.. (P10D)

One of the users, shares a lot of harm reduction strategies among his peers. For example, alongside his trip report about A-PVT he wrote a whole section about harm reduction:

Have fun and stay safe!

Kako lahko zmanjšam tveganja pri tej substanci:

1. alergijski test
2. čim več informacij o substanci
3. testiranje z reagenti ali v laboratoriju
4. voda, hrana, počitek
5. v kolikor imamo doma več kot za par odmerkov, se pred uporabo določimo količino, ki jo imamo namen zaužiti (zna bit za nekatere kompulzivna)
6. uporaba tehtnice
7. Med uporabami počakamo min. 1 teden,

Have fun and stay safe!

How to reduce risks using this substance:

1. Allergy test
2. As much information about the substance as possible
3. Testing with color reagents or in the lab
4. Water, food, rest
5. In case we have more substance than for a few dosages, we determine the amount for consuming in advance
6. Use of a scale

priporočljivo 2 tedna, optimalno 3 mesece  
8. Ne mešam z ostalimi stimulansi (P3D)

7. Between each use we wait for at least 1 week, recommended for 2 weeks, optimal for 3 months
8. We don't mix with other stimulants (P3D)

The same user also wrote he will soon open a new thread on the topic of how to use RC's with less risk and the idea was welcomed.

In addition to harm reduction messages, certain behaviours or the use of certain drugs is explicitly **discouraged**. Examples include: injecting 3-MMC, bingeing on a-PVP, use of GHB, use of unknown substances, use of MDPV, vaporizing ethylphenidate and snorting diphenidine. Users mostly advise each other not to consume MDPV, because it is considered to be especially dangerous.

Naj dodam še da je skupno število žrtev zaradi MDPV-ja že krepko čez 100. Tako, da my advice to you is STAY AWAY!!! (P9D)

Let me add that number of victims because of MDPV exceed 100. So my advice to you is STAY AWAY!!! (P9D)

Warnings among users may be taken seriously:

Po dolgem času sem se logiral in nabašem na tole. Hvala za opozorilo - ne bom šutilar sladoleda (P1D)

After a long time I logged in and found this. Thank you for the warning – I will not shoot up ice-cream (P1D)

However, one user said that when someone writes a warning/a negative effect or risk on DrogArt forum, it can have the opposite effect and serve as an advertisement for a drug (he drew on his own experience).

In a few cases users are suggested to find professional help for their problems or to get information. Referrals are general (e.g. "you need professional help") or directed to DrogArt.

pomoje dirkas proti enmu finmu zivcnemu zlomu. nujno govori z nekom ki ti je blizu in poklici na DA, ce oni slucajno nebi mogli pomagat te bodo pa napotil v pravo smer. (P1D)

In my opinion you are running toward a nervous breakdown. Absolutely speak with someone who is close to you and call DrogArt, if they will not be able to help you they will steer you in the right direction. (P1D)

Among other things, users sometimes advise others to temporarily stop using drugs in order to recover and prevent further complications, to get tested at the infectious disease clinic and to rethink their actions.

Family code: "RESPONSES" = Advice and harm reduction strategies		
CODE	EXPLANATION	NO. QUOT.
RESP_harm reduction	References to harm reduction strategies	93
RESP_don't	Advice on what not to do (e.g. certain behaviors, certain drugs)	18
RESP_other	Other advice (think about your life and make a different decision, go test yourself for infections)	7
RESP_get professional help	Advice to get professional help for the mentioned problems	6

### 3.3 Focus groups

- Means to access information about psychoactive substances

As stated by the majority of the participants, information regarding psychoactive substances (PS) and/or NPS is searched for and obtained mainly through web channels: sites, forums and Facebook pages, most of them are secret. 11 participants indicated that they do prefer the web and 4 indicated that they prioritize face-to-face experiences and information exchange. Other ways of gathering information, less usual but mentioned, were scientific papers, literature (for instance, Thikal), documentaries and the Check In' flyers (Portuguese outreach team intervening in party settings).

Nonetheless, all use both means to access information, the web and the direct social networks, although some underlined that the forums are used to “read” the information and not “to participate”.

Similarly to others here, I use mainly the Internet, not only to gather information and experiences [on SP], but as well out of curiosity. I use also forums because I want to add to the linear information [gathered] some of people experiences. For instance, within Reddit, we can have access to those experiences, which substances, how did they felt, the risks that they know and that they might have felt. (participant 5; FG 2).

For me, the most import and the main tool is the exchange of experiences, not with a book, not in the Internet, but real and direct exchange with others (participant 3; FG 2).

In general, sites, forums, and the deep web have slightly different uses and they are accessed depending on the goal of the user.

Yes, I access forums, but for enquiry purposes only. I believe that forums information is not as reliable as it is in the sites. I use the forums, I cross that information with other types; and then I work out my own decision (participant 1; FG 1).

The most frequently cited sites were Erowid, followed by psychonaut.com, ecstasy.org, Switzerland dancesafe, ecstasydata.org, and Wikipedia. The most used forums, at the moment or in the past, include Bluelight, Drugs.com, Reddit, drugs-forum.com, RC sources of Reddit, secret Facebook Erowid page, Silk Road, pillreports.net, Urban 75 drugs forum, Legalthighsforuns.com, UK Research Chemichals, chemsrus.com, Men's Health, Shroomery, Mycotopia, Isratrance, and dmt-nexus.me (Ayahuasca). Portuguese forums, mostly related with cannabis, are as well appointed – Tripomaria, cannabis.portugueseforum.net, hortadacouve.blogspot.pt and Penso, Logo sou I Laboratório de Investigação da Consciência, this last one a Portuguese Facebook page. However, as we said before, the use of national forums is very low and these sites are usually used to search for information or to search for cannabis use paraphernalia. AlphaBay and Darknet Avengers (DNM Avengers) are mentioned as Deep Web locations. Participants also indicate that many forums of trance and techno music, both Portuguese and foreign, hold discussions on PS.

Bluelight is more liberal and the people there are more sophisticated; Reddit has all type of people, but usually new stuff shows up first there; because of some groups like RCSources. They have everything that is new and also the dealers. It's public; everybody can have access. I always go there for fresh news. If I cannot understand what are the pharmacological properties of the stuff that they are talking about, I go to Erowid. It has everything. It is very good, with lots of information. If this is not enough I go to the Facebook groups, there are some secrets ones, and I ask what do they think about it (participant 4; FG 2).

- Means to access information about psychoactive substances

The majority of the participants use the web to learn about levels of quality, levels of danger and/or risks associated with a specific substance, adequate dozes, effects and health impact, interactions between SP, personal experiences and, less frequently, prices. However, although widely used by the majority, participants do not have similar purposes when searching.

Those that produce substances “at home”, search mainly about cannabis and mushroom production issues.

I search about cannabis, oils, mushrooms... how to produce them; also about alcoholic beverages. I did once aqua vitae and absinthe, you can get hallucinations from that. You need to know, you need to study the ways to do it, how to make the process cheaper, for instance (participant 2; FG 2).

Those more interested in research chemicals describe the web as the only means to access information on NPS, about which there is little to none.

I look for trip reports, although I know that everybody is different. I search to know about interactions and about the right doze, to be sure that I do not take too much or too less; to have a nice experience (participant 1; FG 1).

A like very much to learn about pharmacological properties. I find very interesting to know about the interactions; that the first thing that I look for: what is going to be affected (participant 2; FG 1).

In short, the web seems to gain more value for the users the greater the level of technical sophistication of the issues, procedures, or of the drugs themselves.

- **Research tools, type of psychoactive substances and social meanings**

Age and/or generation and/or level of formal education do not point, in the case of FG participants, to any preference pattern concerning web versus face-to-face means of accessing information. Tendencies concerning the different means used to communicate about illegal drugs seem to be related to the social meanings and beliefs ascribed to the subject, being frequently associated as well with a certain type of PS.

The first main difference established regards the type of PS and its association with esotericism:

Drugs are very different. Everything that grows on earth has vibration (or vibes) quality. Everything that is produced in a lab has a lower vibration quality (participant 1; FG1)

An identical division is set regarding PS and the web:

There are many sites and forums. Long time ago, the difference was between legal and illegal. Nowadays, the difference is between natural drugs and chemical drugs (participant 6; FG1).

Participants that have cannabis and its derivatives as their substances of choice, although occasionally using others (such as mushrooms), tend to privilege face-to-face experience exchange. Furthermore, PSs are used not only for recreational purposes, but also for medicinal and/or spiritual ends. These users also tend to produce weed and mushrooms for themselves (2 out of 3 “producers” participants) and, because of this, having the house searched by the police represents a bigger threat.

When one has domestic production it is not convenient to, for instance, order stuff through the Internet; I only do it when I have the house “clean” and the method is always the dark web with bitcoins (participant 7; FG2).

The ones that prefer face-to-face social interaction show more clear and intense signs of distrust of web research tools. They believe police forces are observing in web forums and believe in the association between social control state structures and social media, for instance Facebook, and the resulting fear of being identified are highlighted as reasons to choose direct social interaction instead of web mediated interaction.

Regarding cannabis, there is a “cannabis cup” in Portugal. It is done already for two years and nobody knows about it. It is to avoid further security problems (participant 7; FG1).

Distrust in web and deep web is typically accompanied by distrust on State structures and societal mechanisms such as capitalism, the financial sectors, corporations, and means of production, democratic institutions and/or police forces. This is a curious data since dark web is usually used by libertarian people that consider these platforms advocacy spaces to claim for their freedom and right to their body and, consequently, to use drugs. We believe that it could be related with the age, relationship with information and communication technology or by the nationality of the Focus

Groups participants. Sceptical attitudes regarding the web as a communication mean are bounded together with views and social meanings ascribed to lifestyles and world transformation.

When I started [with drugs], 25 years ago, there was no Internet, no mobile phones. People used to go to parties compromising the week before, and we would meet in the party without failing. Nowadays, everything fails. In the old days, people cared for more direct things (participant 7; FG1).

Finally, those especially sceptical tend to, simultaneously, vindicate the need to be closer to nature, to use “natural” products - including food and PS – and to place drug use in a historical perspective, as a meaningful ritual.

Salvia was initially used 1000 years ago by some tribes. I was told about the context in which salvia was used (...) it was a path to maturity of youngsters (...). Trance people, nowadays, use salvia; they get stoned for 1 minute. I can understand why mankind got crazy. The contexts [of drug use] have been misrepresented. We do not go after the original context and meaning of those uses (participant 7; FG1).

Other participants stated that they mainly use web tools (sites, forums, deep web) arguing that it facilitates proximity and experiences exchange,

A long time ago, it used to be contacts in the street, then the friends. Nowadays, I am... completely converted to the dark web (participant 7; FG2).

The nice thing about forums is that, contrary to the sites, you can talk with people that are at least apparently more similar to you. If you are an anxious person you talk with anxious people and get to know the effects, if they are good or bad... (participant 2; FG 1).

These participants do not seem to recognize the boundaries between PSs set by the ones that claimed the virtues of “what is natural”. Instead, the pharmacological properties of PS and its effects are valued. It is to be underlined that participants involved in the debate tended to show high levels of literacy concerning both “natural” and “lab” PSs. The meanings ascribed to drugs and drug use gave rise, in both focus groups, to controversy, as can be seen in the following dialogue (FG 1).

Participant 2: I might prefer GHB. It is among the best I have experienced.

Participant 6: So, more chemical...

Participant 2: Chemical? Yes...

Participant 3: Well, it is synthetic; but all are chemical; the natural ones are still chemical!

Participant 6: But there are the ones that grow in nature, and the ones that are made in a toilet, in a lab!

Participant 2: To be honest, for me, that is irrelevant... natural or chemical.

Participant 6: People bounded with earth understand better.

Participant 7: Well... but each person has its own path; we have to respect.

#### • Trust and distrust about supply

There is a diversity of channels to assure PS supply: well-known dealers and the web (surface and deep web) are clearly preferred. Social supply has as well expression – friends exchange or simply share the PS they have. However, since a certain degree of “planning ahead” is needed, especially concerning the web, most participants admit that occasionally they might buy either in “the streets” or in party events. These two alternatives - street and party settings - are always described as “last choices” due to quality issues.

The concerns and distrust expressed about web information search, especially in forums, is deepened when it comes to PS online supply - only a few dare to buy PS through web channels (5 participants). Participants that prefer cannabis and mushrooms choice do not buy those PSs online, although they do order online production related paraphernalia. This circumstance is related with the social meanings and beliefs identified earlier and that can be apparently extended and enlarged when online supply is in play, but also with the PS themselves. As it is stated:

Depends on the drug. Nobody buys hashish or weed online! (participant 6; FG 1)

Fear and other types of obstacles are highlighted by these participants. Concerns develop around security issues, quality issues and technical issues (for instance, related with the use of bitcoins), most of the times intermingled.

I fear to buy online because, first, it is expensive and, second, I do not know about its level of quality. They say quality is above average, but I don't know. The fact that is expensive is not a problem if I could be sure about the good quality. I have been on Silk Road, but I have feared to order (participant 5; FG 1).

The two main categories useful to capturing different attitudes and practices within the two groups of participants are, once more, web mediated interaction versus direct social interaction. Those who buy on the web - nearly the same that do not especially value "natural" substances - tend to show greater pragmatism concerning online supply. Thus, it is stated that there is a diversity of means to ensure security, not much different from other sites or forums, such as ebay, and to guarantee quality, namely the use of reports and reviews. Furthermore, it is described the use of Energy Control services in order to prove high quality stands. To order PS the deep web is preferred, although the surface is also used:

Procedures are very simple. There are market places in the same way you have ebay. The big benefit of deep web is that communications, including your address are encrypted. Even if the market place is taken [by authorities] your personal data is protected. Anyway, we are in Portugal. If I order 1 or 2 grams of cocaine, I am ok; I won't get arrested for that. I have no fear whatsoever. What's the problem? (participant 6; FG2).

The option for online supply is mainly based in the believe these drugs have higher quality.

I prefer to buy online instead of using a face-to-face dealer, depending on the site. In terms of lab process, these markets are better controlled, more reliable; the probability of having a fake product is lower. You have to know the site, of course (participant 2; FG 1).

Synthetic drugs or research chemicals, the ones that have now appeared, I believe that the web is more reliable. I trust it more. It is difficult to find a friend that really knows how to do it (participant 4; FG 2).

On the other hand, direct social interaction is valued and preferred by some participants as an intrinsic asset. In these situations, the dyad user-dealer has been built up, sometimes, over years of commercial transaction.

I usually buy to people that I know well, whom I really trust in. It is very rare that I buy from an unknown dealer (participant 1; FG 1).

I usually buy the MDMA from one person and the cocaine from another person. I trust them very much. I trust them so much that in two different occasions I asked to return the product because I was not satisfied with the quantity, in one case, and with the quality in another. (...) I never bought in the street. Those people from whom I buy are just normal people, they are married, they have children; and they work. We became friends (participant 5; FG 1).

#### • Portuguese psychoactive substances users' use of web

Most of participants did not present reasons to explain the apparently low level of web use among Portuguese PS users and they did not spontaneously further develop the subject. Nonetheless, 3 hypotheses were advanced, none of them with much signs of conviction:

- 1) the fact that when people search on the web most sites that are found are not domestic;
- 2) the fact that the Portuguese might be more "community orientated", preferring "gregarious" forms of drug use;
- 3) the age/generation gap, meaning that the oldest prefer face-to-face interaction and the youngest prefer web mediated channels.

This last hypothesis might be relevant, but does not fit with the main focus group's results.

- Final notes

Qualitative approach is especially valuable when it comes to studying novel patterns of drug use in worlds of difficult access. Its' assets are recognized in explanatory and descriptive research designs. Although comprehensive, results do not allow generalizing to the Portuguese population of PS users. Instead, its value must be framed in exploratory terms. In that sense, the focus group results presented here tend to point to the relevance of aspects such as type of PS used, beliefs and lifestyles and value ascribed to PS related practices. Moreover, high levels of literacy on PS and NPS were observed. Basic needs for trust have been clearly expressed either for face-to-face interactions or web-mediated interactions. As one participant has stated *at the first time you buy, you must trust; it doesn't matter if is the guy that has sold to you or the site you have chosen.*

Finally, the present report demonstrates that among Portuguese drug users we can identify: 1) the preference to use international forums to get information and discuss topics; 2) the relevance of traditional illegal drug markets that coexist with web and deep web markets; and 3) the online market search by users interested in specific experiences provided by diverse substances (some of them NPS), drugs quality, peer-led discussions about the drugs pharmacology and effects and not only for recreational purposes.

### 3.4 Market place forums

- The trust on the Crypto Markets

Since the TOR system hides the identity of users, the economic transactions that take place on the Crypto Markets are characterized by a high level of uncertainty. It is therefore questionable what the mechanisms that generate the users' trust are. The main guarantee can be found in the selection that the Crypto Market implements with respect to vendors.

As shown in the attached screen shot (picture 3) sellers are forced to comply with the internal norms, otherwise they will be excluded from the Crypto Market. The rules includes for instance the prohibition of cash out before the goods have been delivered, indeed usually it is the administrator of the Market that holds the amounts until the transaction is completed. In addition, if a seller receives a high number of claims of scams, he will be banned from the Market. In order to guarantee the compliance with these rules, to enter into commercial space the seller must pay a fee of \$ 200, which may be withheld by the administrator if he violates the norms.

Picture 3 – Norms to become a vendor on AlphaBay Market (september 2016)

## Vendor Account

Here you can activate your vendor account. Take time to read the vendor rules below, check the box, and click the button. After that, you will be able to create listings and start selling here. Be careful to acknowledge the rules, as breaching them may result in account suspension.

#1: FE (Finalize Early) is **not permitted** unless you get explicit permission later. You will get banned without refund if you ask for FE without permission.

#2: Digital orders auto-finalize after 48 hours, and physical orders auto-finalize after 14 days.

#3: If you get too many scam reports, we may revoke your vendor account at any time.

#4: There is a **USD \$200** vendor bond (0.3293 BTC at the current rate), refundable upon closure of account if in good standing.

#5: All sellers must have a PGP key in their profile before starting to sell.

#6: Prostitution, child porn, and murder services are not permitted. Personal information about Russian citizens is also prohibited.

#7: Any dox threat will result in an immediate ban.

#8: Two-factor authentication (2FA) is **mandatory** for all vendors and will be automatically activated when you become a vendor.

I have read and accept the rules mentioned above.

**Become A Vendor**

Buyers can read a brief description about each vendor's business, but above all, they can rely on the vendors' rankings, as happens also in the most popular markets on the Clear web. This means that potential buyers can see, for each seller, the total number of positive, neutral or negative reviews left by other buyers.

Picture 4 – Example of Vendor's profile su AlphaBay Market (settembre 2016)

**FrankMatthews | User Profile**

About Feedback: Feedbacks left by users are categorized in 1 month, 6 months, and 12 months categories. All feedback received over a year ago is not counted towards any stats. The feedback percentage is calculated by dividing the positive feedback by the total feedback, not counting neutral feedback.



**FrankMatthews** (15724) Vendor Level 9 Trust Level 10

Positive feedback (last 12 months): 95%  
[How is the feedback score calculated?]

Member since: March 18, 2015  
Contracts: 0 in progress, 0 complete

[View Store](#)

[Send Message](#)

[Favorite](#)

[Un-blacklist](#)

[FE Allowed](#)

Seller Feedback Ratings (last 12 months)				Buyer Statistics (since join date)	
	1 month	6 months	12 months		Since join
Positive	277	2658	3248	Total disputes / orders	0 / 0
Neutral	4	61	45	Total spendings	---
Negative	13	147	95	Feedback left	0 (100.0% positive)
				Last online	Sep 14, 2016
				Stealth	★★★★★
				Quality	★★★★★
				Value for price	★★★★★

Detailed seller ratings:

- + FE
- + No comment
- + No comment
- + Fast shipping, good stealth. Haven't tried it yet.
- + .trusted vendor

[About](#) | [Positive Feedback](#) | [Neutral Feedback](#) | [Negative Feedback](#) | [Feedback Left](#) | [PGP](#)

Total positive feedback: 6183 94% of all feedback

Feedback	Buyer / Price	Date / Time

Despite the uncertainty on the intrinsic characteristics of the Crypto Market, therefore, buyers can access to a wealth of information about the seller, which they would not have if they were carrying a face-to-face purchase with a stranger. Another major finding coming from the conversations analysis taken is that the confidence is built around the system created by the Crypto market, rather than among the individual members. This aspect can be noticed in the first lines of an analysed thread:

Firstly trust nobody on any market. You would have to be completely stupid to trust total strangers that are selling you drugs.

Secondly only use your real name and address if you want to go to jail.

Thirdly pay whoever you use for their risk and dont be disrespectful by calling them a wino, try to respect people and they will often respect you.

Lastly if your name is bb1111 then dont use a drop, use your real name and trust everyone you meet on these markets [38;13]

In summary, the confidence in trade is given by the comprehensive information system made available by the Crypto Market.

- [The vendors' self-representations and the marketing strategies on the Dark web](#)

Like most of the "markets" on the web, even Crypto Markets suffer because of the "network effects." The network theory and the so-called Metcalfe's Law explain that a network increases exponentially with the square of its nodes, that is, a network becomes more useful the more are the people who use it [Paccagnella, 2103].

This principle applies on two levels: at the level of the Crypto Market and at the level of the individual seller. At the first level, AlphaBay Market would be useless if he had not a high number of users such as to ensure a sufficient number of possible clients to the vendors. The same applies to the consumer, who will find the service useless if he/she will not have a number of vendors to satisfy his/her request. Therefore, the more sellers and buyers come into a market, the more this market will become useful because it will be possible to bring together demand and supply.

Therefore, over the time is likely that strong Crypto Markets will become stronger and stronger, and the weak Crypto Markets will become weaker and weaker. This phenomenon occurs because consumers tend to prefer services that are most spread [Shapiro and Varian, 2009]. The same thing happens within a single Crypto Market, since consumers tend to buy from those vendors who have more positive reviews. Therefore, vendors with more positive reviews will tend to get more clients than those who have less reviews.

For this reason, Crypto Markets tend to privilege the vendors who operate in the market for the longest time and this is an obstacle for both new platforms and new vendors.

To sum up, for vendors who want to start a business on a Crypto Market, the main barriers are:

- Installation of TOR
- Conversion of traditional currency in Bit Coins
- Registration and submission to the Crypto Market norms

To gain the consumers' confidence, which is achieved through a collection of positive reviews.

To increase their customers, vendors insert themselves into the forum trying to provide a good representation of themselves and of their business: punctuality and price are the aspects on which they focus more.

"I have BULK STOCK of Cannabinoids, , Benzos-Powders, Psychedelics, Opioids and Stimulants..!All products are of excellent quality and at very reasonable prices..Super discounts for bulk order\$\$Please, PM for custom lists! [3:4 ]

My products are of very high quality. To check the quality of my products and service, you can start with order of little quantity, clear.[3:7]

Hello AlphaBay friends.We are Boehringer Ingelheim Indian Company. Our company is the Research Chemical supplier Currently offering:

FUB-JWH 018

1kg 900 USD

5kg 3500 USD

10kg 6500 USD

4-MMC

1kg 1500 USD

5kg 6375 USD

10kg 12150 USD

25-NBome

1kg 4500 USD

2C-I

500g 2350 USD

1kg 4000 USD

We take the on order (MDMA, Ephedrine, Sildenafil citrate, Vardenafilum, Tadalafil)

Our shipping is fast, safe, confidential and prompt and we do ship round the world.

packaging is discrete and personal for security reasons.

Normal shipping - 10-15 days (free)

Fast shipping - 5-7 days ( +50\$ )

sales manager email:boehringerIngelheimIndia@mail2tor.com [8.2]

Those who are new on the Crypto Market, must persuade consumers to make a purchase despite the total absence of information. Therefore, sometimes they offer a free trial or discounts in exchange for reviews. With this strategy, sellers try to overcome the barrier due to the limited information available on their profile.

We are offering 10 x 0.5 gram samples in turn for an honest and in depth review on the product and service.

Message us for more details. We are accepting credible applicants with a good active account.

If you have reddit that would be good too, ALSO the best review wins a big free bag of K, or anything else from our shop that is of the same value"[14;41].

To promote themselves, vendors also promise punctuality and price. Some of them claim to be experienced and cite the marketplaces where they operated previously, such as Agora. Furthermore, some vendors present themselves as experienced drug consumers able to solve doubts and give suggestions, but also responsible and safe consumption promoters.

Drugs are no toys, they are serious and can make, break, or take your life. If you have any worries or concerns, please consult with me about contraindications. I am very well versed in this realm of things. (vendor)

I am an authority on Nbome, I have been collecting data and listening to experiences for many years, as I am a reputable Vendor of Nbome. I have personally ingested as much as 30mg of 25C Nbome, and loved it (6 times the alleged lethal dose). (vendor)

- **Topics of conversation**

As the following tables show, the topics of conversation on a Market place forum concern mainly the action level, that is are focused on the purchase. In addition to questions on how to buy goods safely, opinions about the vendors' reliability or unreliability prevail, while discourses about substances – and especially on personal consumption experiences – are in the minority and often represent parentheses within broader conversations.

Many conversations are actually disputes arisen from some buyers' complains about the long delivery times – which entails the risk of going through withdrawal– about the poor quality of the substance, or because the received quantity is lower than expected.

Furthermore, sometimes the substance is not that expected and buyers think to run serious risks, even to die for overdose, as told in the following excerpt, written by a buyer who is not able to find the vendor again on the forum.

I am what I would consider 'highly experienced' in opiate use & this was not a straight opiate. It tasted a little like cocaine and ketamine mixed together. Gave no euphoric feelings or opioid effects. It simply tried to kill me.

Even the two main guarantees for buyers, escrow and reviews, seem to be possibly bypassed. Indeed, according to the data analysed, some vendors are able to finalize the financial transaction before the delivery is concluded and to add false reviews. Anyway, free sample of drugs are offered in change of good reviews – and *vice versa* - so that the reliability of the latter is not very high. Not only good reviews can be false but even the negative ones, because of the competition among vendors who can use this strategy to discredit other vendors.

I asked for a custom listing of 25 because he only sells 50 pill orders which was fine. But after i made the order it turned out to be FE and he wrote a fake positive review on my order and then he finalized it. It looks like most of his feedback if fake, especially the MDMA pill listings.

You left me a negative feedback trying to ruin my reputation and advertise for yourself. I do not want you to "feel the heat of competition". You will never be able to compete with the quality product and service I offer, period. (vendor)

Even when the transaction will occur as agreed, buyers are concerned to run into legal problems during the delivery. For this reason, the forum members share experiences and suggestions. Such as to indicate for delivery false names and addresses (e.g. of student's homes or homeless shelters). Someone warns users about the possibility that some vendors may blackmail buyers: anonymity thus serves not only to protect themselves from law enforcement, but also from vendors.

I use homeless shelters and student houses. Anywhere that has a lot of people coming and going is good, you can use any name you want and the postman wont think anything of it. Its cheaper to give a homeless person of a student a few quid than getting false ID and renting somewhere. Never use your real name and address, its not just LE you have to worry about. Some vendors try to blackmail buyers so only pick vendors that other buyers will vouch for. [D38, Q11]

Quarrels can occur even between buyers. For instance an argument can arise because one buyer has warned another one about the dangers of taking a certain amount of drugs – Fent, in the following excerpt, but this advice has been taken badly, thereby showing a low level of trust even mong buyers. The following quotation is the last replay of who has been blamed for his suggestion.

I mean fuck...dude, take a step back and realize I wasn't trying to shake my finger at you. Just trying to fucking help, even if it wasn't \*IN THIS CASE\* needed. It's called a community and we should look out for each other. Not get our panties in a wad because of that...just saying dude. You seem paranoid, and upset. Forgive me for trying to be a decent guy and dealing with you.

Code	Explanation	No. quotations	%
QUEST_info about security	Information about the precautions to be taken in order to make a secure purchase, without getting caught by the police	172	35,4
QUEST_info about vendors positive	Positive information on vendors	72	14,8
QUEST_info about vendors negative	Negative information on vendors	62	12,8
QUEST_where to buy	Conversations in which consumers ask where to buy the substance	46	9,5
QUEST_how to prepare	Conversations about how to produce any substances	41	8,4

QUEST_info about vendors neutre	Neutral information on vendors	32	6,6
QUEST_worrying	References to the fear of being caught by parents, policemen...	25	5,1
QUEST_how to use	Conversations about how to consume any substances	17	3,5
QUEST_info about drugs	General information about substances	11	2,3
QUEST_info about price	Information about prices	8	1,6

- Substances representations

In general, substances are represented positively or negatively depending on their effects. In the considered sample, the negative representations are attributable to an unpleasant experience with the substance, to the adverse effects it has on the physical – as in the case of krokodil – or to the reprehensible aims for which the substance is used (e.g. Scopolamine).

The substances which are positively represented (especially painkillers, LSD, ketamine), are those with pain-relieving effects, such as fentanyl (opioid analgesic), or with antidepressant effects, as in the case of ketamine or LSD.

#### *Negatively represented substances*

##### *- Krokodil*

On the Market Place forum krokodil is harshly criticized for its poor quality, for its physical effects (abrasions, skin infections) and for its strong addictive power, considered to be worse than that of heroine. Krokodil is perceived as the drug of desperate people: *"it's for those who don't have anything to lose in their lives"* [44:11] Following the discussion: *"Certainly anyone with a few dollars here or there will find better options"* [44:18]. In addition, the krokodil also seems to cause unpleasant hallucinations, i.e. bad trips.

Krokodil though is no laughing matter you would have to put it in the same league as inhaling solvents or Oxi from South America. [42:5]

I don't think there is a safe non-street version. It is just injecting an opiate with really really dirty extract chemicals. [42:6]

Just leave it mate, it's for those who don't have anything to lose in their lives. I bet you can find some better drugs that won't make you fall apart. [42:10]

forget krokodil, too dangerous.. your body does not eliminate it at all.. it's worth addictive from normal heroin... if you want test opioids, try real heroin or real opium.. forget krokodil.."[42:11]

A friend tried a mix similar in front of me when i smoked a blunt and all she got was a skin infection from injecting under the skin [42:12]

Everything I've heard about it is truly bad, from bad trips to skin diseases and malformations. Not on my list of relatively safe drugs to use. Certainly anyone with a few dollars here or there will find better options and safer ways to get the desired high.[42:16]

##### *- NBOMe*

NBOMe it's a psychedelic substance belonging to the phenethylamine group. It is negatively represented, with despicable terms as "fucking Nbome", because of its lethality. One highlighted aspect is that the dose required for the recreational use is very close to the dose that can lead to death "The lethal 50 dose is extremely close to the recreational dose and people can or on it easily." The

use of NBOME is not recommended in the forum also because there is little information on its long-term effects. As highlighted by a forum member, studies on this matter and more generally on "research chemicals", are lacking, especially compared with other traditional drugs such as heroin or cocaine. Furthermore, even NBOME is considered a "bad hallucinogen", that is source of scary trips. These aspects are evident from the following excerpts.

Don't buy fucking nbome open your eyes get some real psychedelics [78:1]

This shit is just stupid. Now i'm not gonna try to lie I was a dumb ass and tried it myself before i read up on it very much. This shit will kill people. The lethal 50 dose is extremely close to the recreational dose and people can OD on it easily. I had a terrible experience with this shit and it ruined all psychedelics for me. I tried to use DMT after using Nbome and I just had terrible vivid flashbacks to tripping on Nbome and got scared shitless. Spend a few more dollars and get some lsd.[78:2]

SD is a great thing but NBOME is not. And to compare NBOME to coke mdma and heroin doesn't make sense at all. There is decades of reputable studies on the effects of Heroin, Coke, Mdma, LSD, and so forth. Decades of studies that tell a user what said substance is actually doing to them in the long run. There are no studies that show the long term effects of NBOME use on your body like there is for coke and heroin. There isn't any of this for NBOME that's what makes it a research chemical and the other drugs just drugs and not "research chemicals" Rc's are all new with little known about their effects. That's what makes them rc's. I would never recommend anyone to use any sort of RC's let alone psychedelic ones like NBOME. At least if they OD on heroin they'll just fucking die versus NBOME you may not live but you may live and be fucked up in the head and wish you had died [78:7]

However, also positive representations of NBOME are present, on which it is worth dwelling. Indeed, the analysis shows that they mostly belong to users who have a vendor profile, who intervene in the discussions in order to try to disprove the negative representations. In particular, the vendors claim that cases of death reported in the media are not real but stories invented to make illegal the substance.

Propaganda, I took 30mg of 25C nbome, 6 times the alleged lethal dose, and Had the most profound experience of my life. Stupid people kill themselves, The first death a girl in VA. Snorted the equivalent of 250 to 500 hits, Nbome does have a LD 50, so don't take that much, MOST DRUGS HAVE A LD50. There are very few exceptions.

The second Nbome death report came from a batch of 2C-I that a bathtub chemist in South Dakota tried to turn into Nbome, and sold as Nbome. IDK what he concocted, but it killed everyone that took it.

That being said, if you OD on Coke or Heroin, it is still a Ok drug to take, LOL RIGHT?!

One of my customers took 36 hits when he got pulled over by the police for speeding.

His experience was pretty cool, all material objects became animated and he was having conversations with everything around him. The objects in his environment gave him spiritual advice and jokes, LOL

In the 1960;s they used LSD Death stories to make LSD illegal. Which finally worked. After LSD was made illegal, the LSD death stories went away, but the LSD did not.

If someone takes a lethal dose of some other substance and has Nbome in his or her system also, the Nbome is blamed for the death. [78,4]

Vendors introduce themselves into the conversations as experts about NBOME thanks to their personal experiences and to the collection of consumers' feedbacks. They try to delegitimize the negative representations also by requesting data about the lethality of the substance or even a bibliography. Furthermore, a vendor emphasizes how, to make a "good trip", you must have some experience and tools, that is, you need to be educated.

How about articulating a bibliographic argument. What I hear is opinion, and I am an authority on Nbome, I have been collecting data and listening to experiences for many years, as I am a reputable Vendor of Nbome. I have personally ingested as much as 30mg of 25C Nbome, and loved it ( 6 times the alleged lethal dose). I gave an entire Buddhist Monastery Free Nbome, and they loved it. A Neuro scientist I know said the Nbome and LSD were made for one another. It is difficult for people to articulate what they see in their visions if they don't have the tools. You know tripping is not a panacea, and requires education also. You must be frustrated. Any troll can use a dictionary.[78,10]

### - *Scopolamine*

Scopolamine, an hallucinogenic alkaloid drug, is negatively represented because of fatal effects it has in case of overdose or if it is badly cut. In addition, under its effect, "you lose your free will and act motivated by any suggestion" [41: 5]. According to the forum members, the substance is also used for purposes of theft, rape or even murder, because it is tasteless and odorless and makes the victim unable to react. One user tells that once he made two girls ingest 4 mg of this substance and after that he had to give amphetamines to one of them in order to revive her.

scopolamine is some dangerous shit. The user is fully concious and aware but loses all free will and acts upon any suggestion.[39.3]

there's no real safe way to block this unless you are already high on a substance that uses those same receptors. scopolamine can be fatal depending on if it's cut or if the dosage is too high. this is evil shit, stay far away unless you have a good delivery method to the victim, most of the time i hear about this shit it involves strippers and girls rubbing some of it close to the nose/mouth for inhalation [39.2]

They took drinks with their hands and made the movements like drinking shots, that were not real.trying to pick up things from the ground that are not there talking with people that are not there...Also, it spans tensions their muscles, which makes it hard for them to talk and move.the 2nd girl was only lying like a dead person.i couldnt even move her finger or arms, she was cold and white.i have almost killed her, if i did not give reanimation and amphetamine IV shot to get up her heart rate, i needed to dump her body This works completely different as i imagined.i thought, they would just work with me when saying things.but, it works like: the people just can not react or do anything when you do something to them.But they are aware of what happens, because when i tried some sexual activities, they tried to hit me (which was not possible because of that they were almost unable to move their hands) but they tried it.Also, im pretty sure, they still remember alot about what hapenned during their drug had effect.and this was a 12 mg dose only.4 mg per drink over 3 doses spread over 3 hours the first girl is ok 2nd girl, left all her stuff , like phone and such, and she is still missing.the effects looked more like a very potent tripping drug [39.15]

On a site note: 99.9% of poeple buying this drug use it for rape, or to kill. Short explanation why. Lethal dose is around 20. it has no taste and no smell. it leaves the blood circuit really fast. 12-25h[39,7]

### *Positevely represented substances*

#### - *Painkillers*

Substances with painkillers powers are often positively represented. Somebody enthusiastically talks about the powerful analgesics and anaesthetics, such as Fentanyl, used mainly in operating rooms and in the treatment of chronic pain. Somebody else stresses that heroin and opium are equally effective substances, but less expensive and asks: "Isnt it sad that its cheaper to self medicate with illegal drugs than it is to go through legal channels and use doctors and pharmacies?" [65.7]. Are quoted even drugs that have been removed from the market and become illegal for some time because of their dangerousness, as the Butyrfentanyl, which someone inhales through the electronic cigarettes.

Fentanyl:ladies and gentlemen, we all know how powerful real fent hcl is! It improves the quality of my life, I have some medical issues that occurred both in the military and afterwards, and fent makes my day soooooo much better. The best thing about it is that I can alleviate all this pain without the "high" that a lot of other strong opiates can cause. I don't worry about driving, or watching the kids, working on the car, or doing anything really. Fent is amazing if you have it and don't run out. I'm sorry that so many people got screwed by MDMA, I look forward to making up for his rotten attitude. [53, 30]

I noticed that I didnt need any pain meds with the heroin of with the opium and the opium gave me a fantastic high which in my opinion is better than the high from Oxys. Some of the heroin I bought in around the same time gave equally good pain killing qualities but both were working out at a fraction of the price I was paying pharmacies each month. Isnt it sad that its cheaper to self medicate with illegal drugs than it is to go through legal channels and use doctors and pharmacies? Now that Ive healed up a lot compared to then Im only using

heroin and opium on an occasional basis again. I use it more now for the high than for pain relief but when I am using I feel absolutely no pain which as I'm sure you can imagine is very welcomed. If you suffer from pain then try opium, humans have used it for thousands of years for pain relief and the Blossom sells real opium, not that red imitation rubbish that some vendors sell. He reliable and honest and hes really east to talk to. Give him a try yourself, I'm sure you wont be disappointed.[61,5]

Honestly, I would look into some Butyr Fentanyl. I find it more euphoric and better for pain than fent HCL. I have chronic pain from multiple lung surgeries. Fentanyl HCl is definitely stronger than its analogs, I would balance your pain meds using fent/fent analogs as little as possible. I used to get 120x 4mg dilaudid every two weeks, fentanyl patches and Oxycontin. Now I take methadone (until I can switch back to Oxy, fucking insurance/pain clinic issue...Now most people don't agree with me on this but I find Butyr Fentanyl a great pain break through. I IV but with fentanyl derivatives I'm fond of smoking off foil or through my E-cigarette. Vaping ButyrFentanyl is great for pain breakthrough...[56,13]

#### - *Ketamine*

Among AlphaBay Market users, the perception that the use of ketamine helps to fight depression is widespread. Ketamine is considered a safe substance because it has been studied and there are even scientific evidences that provide indications about doses and consumption ways. Someone, however, points out how difficult it is to find the pure ketamine, while several other "junks" are sold as such. In the case of depression accompanied by anxiety, instead, it is suggested the use of benzodiazepines.

There is a lot of crap sold as ketamine. I am using it for depression treatment once a week. If you can get genuine Ketamine its wonderfully effective. But genuine Ketamine ids not easy to get hold off. [14;20]

Ketamine. High enough dose to k-hole. I've found it a relief for really deep, melancholic episodes of depression. [41,4]

Ketamine has clinical evidence for its efficacy in unipolar depression. I would use it in the way it's tested in studies (replicate the dosing and possibly the route of administration). [41,24]

Mushrooms, ketamine are long term "fixes" for some people. Benzos (valium, xanax etc) if your depression is causing you anxiety. [41,9]

#### - *LSD*

LSD is generally positevely represented as well, since it would have a therapeutic effect against depression. The AlphaBay Market forum members in some cases report their experience in which they have been able to fight depression, in other cases they refer to others' experiences told on the web or to studies.

I was taking sertalin about half year all my anxiety is gone for now. Like newborn kid, can talk make a joke and are interested some things what before i even dont thinked. Before that every day was thinking why the fuck i waked up. [47,7]

LSD! It's really helps you depression and its fairly cheap. [43,16]

Research shows that LSD has a very good potential for treating depression (google it), there are many stories on forums about people whose depression has vanished after a good LSD trip

. Here are a few of those reports:

[URL][https://www.reddit.com/r/Drugs/comments/3to87r/i\\_tried\\_to\\_treat\\_major\\_depression\\_with\\_lsd\\_the/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Drugs/comments/3to87r/i_tried_to_treat_major_depression_with_lsd_the/)[/URL]

[URL][https://www.reddit.com/r/LSD/comments/384dln/lsd\\_significantly\\_helped\\_my\\_depression/](https://www.reddit.com/r/LSD/comments/384dln/lsd_significantly_helped_my_depression/)[/URL]

[URL][https://www.reddit.com/r/Drugs/comments/3om3tc/lsd\\_and\\_mdma\\_cured\\_yes\\_cured\\_my\\_suicidal/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Drugs/comments/3om3tc/lsd_and_mdma_cured_yes_cured_my_suicidal/)[/URL]

[URL][https://www.reddit.com/r/Psychonaut/comments/2bto6t/lsd\\_trip\\_report\\_and\\_how\\_it\\_cured\\_my\\_depression/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Psychonaut/comments/2bto6t/lsd_trip_report_and_how_it_cured_my_depression/)[/URL] [41,26]

LSD has totally killed my depression, improved my mood and made me suddenly very productive! I recommend you give it a shot. [41,28]

<b>Substances representations</b>			
<b>Code</b>	<b>Code explanation</b>	<b>No. quotations</b>	<b>Substances</b>
REPR_NPS_pos	Threads where the substances are positively described	56	LSD, Ketamine, Fentanyl, MXE, Opioids, Cannabinoids
REPR_NPS_neg	Threads where the substances are negatively described	87	Krokodil, NBOMe, RCs, Fentanyl, Scopolamine, Steroids, DMT
<b>Positively perceived effects</b>			
EFF_analgesic	References to the analgesic effect	33	Fent and RCs, Opioids
EFF_antidepressant	References to positive antidepressant effects	27	Ketamine, LSD
EFF_trip mind	References to pleasant hallucinogenic effects	25	Ketamine
EFF_recreational	References to a recreational use of substances	7	Ketamine, Pills
<b>Negatively perceived effects</b>			
EFF_death	References to the lethality of substances	30	Fent and RCs, NBOMe, Scopolamine
EFF_body	References to physical damages caused by substances	19	Krokodyl, heroin
EFF_addiction	References to addiction caused by substances	13	Fent and RCs,
EFF_lost of control	References to lost of control	10	DMT, Fent and RCs,
EFF_bad trip	References to unpleasant hallucinogenic effects	7	DMT, NBOMe, Scopolamine

## 4. SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

- Results discussion

When referring to New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), in the present work, we have started from the list provided by the UNODC Early Warning Advisory, which includes more than 600 substances (UNODC 2015). However, on the base of data, we have used the term as an umbrella concept to indicate not only new substances, but also substances known from years, but recently spread, consumed in renewed ways or still perceived as NPS among partygoers. Which can entail many differences among countries, as the spread and the legal status of NPS can differ. In this sense, there are countries where the NPS phenomenon is particularly challenging in terms of public health (for example UK or Greece), and other countries where the use of NPS is vestigial (for example, Portugal). There is also another profile of NPS users, which was identified thanks to the drug checking services, namely the non-intentional use of NPS. This means that there are a significant number of drug users who buy and use a more traditional drug that are actually adulterated or totally substituted by a NPS (Martins et al. 2017). Furthermore, following the users' reasoning, we have sometime included in our analysis opinion about traditional drugs and prescription drugs. Indeed, especially with regards to generalist forums, specific NPS names were rarely quoted by members. This fact is consistent with other researches that show that NPS are not widespread among the general public (Young people and drugs, 2014) and that more traditional drugs are the first choice substances, while usually users intentionally use NPS only when their preferred drugs are not available or for experimentalism (Pires et al. 2016).

According to Soussan and Kjellgren (2016) studies on NPS users are scarce and consist mainly in prevalence-of-use rates, while motivations for consumption are little known. Above all, there is a lack of understanding about consumption motives and consumers' profiles (ibidem). To fill this gap of knowledge we decided to explore the internet, where different types of web forums are present and users can reely discuss about their consumptions within different level of anonimity. By analysing them, we also meant to contribute to the debate about if and to what extent they represent new forms of harm reductions (Buxton & Bingham 2015; Bancroft & Reid 2016; Móró & Rácz 2013; Drapalova & Belackova, 2016; Vale Pires et al. 2015; Vale Pires et al., 2016; EMCDDA, 2016) and 'constructive activism' (Maddox et al. 2016).

Applying an abductive approach (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014), a content analysis based on a template model (King, 1998) has been performed on 4 generalist forums (IT, SE, PT), 2 forums addressed to people who use drugs (IT, SE), and 1 marketplace forum on the dark net (transnational). These local researches allowed us to understand that the use of online platforms varies according to the country: In Slovenia and Italy there is a reasonable use of national websites to search for information on drugs and participate in peer-led discussions, while in Portugal (they use online platforms they prefer the international ones. We don't have concrete explanations about these differences that could be cultural, generational, or related with the local drug use profiles. For instance, cannabis users prefer face-to-face discussions and transactions.

**Generalist forums** – that is, forums dedicated to a generalist public - are places where relatively a few people look for information about drugs (effects, risks, how to use, how to buy, legality...). There are even less discourses specifically focused on NPSs, while more often NPSs are only cited among other drugs.

Some posts in the Italian data are not aimed at asking information but they are rather false stories told by false profiles (in the internet slang named *trolls*) in order to provoke numerous and emotionally strong reactions, which they actually do. This shows as in Italy drug consumption is still considered

an irritating and provocative topic in a mainstream context, which is not surprising as the cultural background is pervaded by moral reproof, conditioned by an historical tradition where the catholic perspective have dominated for decades (Beccaria et al 2015). This is not the case Portugal, where the absence of such features could be a consequence of successful drug decriminalization policies.

Negative representations of NPSs are prevalent in this kind of setting. They concern mainly risks and consequences, the main quoted being death, brain damage, addiction. Most cited NPS are not the most consumed, but those that were given a lot of attention on the media (e.g. krokodil and GHB), confirming how mass media are powerful in conveying images of drugs and drug users that influence the collective imagination of non users (Beccaria et al 2015). Accordingly, on generalist forums and especially in Italy, representation of NPSs consumers are mostly negative, and they often are blamed for their behaviour and seen as responsible for its consequences and accused to be cause of suffering for other people too (relatives, partners...). Moral judgment is often evident from the comments left by non-users, confirming the prevalence of an individualisation approach to addictions, conveyed also by internet tabloids, which frame it as a problematic behavioural pattern related to individual shortcomings (Hellman 2010). Consequently, self-representations of consumers are rare, especially those related to a recreational, “safe” use of drugs, while the pharmaceutical (antidepressant/anxiolytic) is more frequently cited in Italy.

The tone of the messages is often dramatic and to make it more serious, users post links to horrible pictures of the drug effects. Negative NPS representations, especially in Italy, reflect a wider negative attitude towards synthetic drugs compared to natural drugs, which are considered safer and better in terms of effects, while this distinction is rarely mentioned on the Slovenian forum. In both countries however concern about purity of substance emerges, as well as the lack of information. On the Slovenian forum, focused on health issues, harm reduction messages are also shared, mostly related to drink spiking.

Forums specifically addressed to people who use drugs, which we have called **specialist forums**, are places where people exchange information about many kinds of drugs, including also NPS. Encouraging drug consumption and seeking sellers is generally forbidden, therefore the main purpose of conversations is sharing experiences and knowledge. Arisen questions usually get prompt and proper answers.

Most forum members show competence and many of them have good chemical competences and to support their opinions also quote scientific evidences. Different profiles of consumers are identifiable, based on drug categories or purposes of use, rather than on single substances and NPS. Many suggestions provided by the forum members are harm reduction strategies (e.g. not mix substances, start with low doses, test your substance before use, use in a safe setting), indicating that many users are well-informed and confirming that that web forums are important platforms for awareness raising among peers (Soussan and Kjellgren 2014; Móró and RÁCz 2013). Moreover, it is frequently mentioned that with NPS a user does not really know what he/she is taking, therefore drug checking is advised.

Members describe both positive and negative drug effects. Compared to unspecific forums, positive effects are far more detailed and argued, but also long-term and serious consequences are mentioned.

Some differences between the Italian and the Slovenian data relate to the fact that the two forums are targeted to different users. While Psiconauti is mostly frequented by hallucinogens users, the DrogArt forum is attended by a wider range of drug users. For this reasons, the two data-sets are useful to reasoning on different consumers’ profile and attitudes towards NPS.

The latter, being the forum of DrogArt, is likely to be visited by many partygoers who know the association for its harm reduction interventions in nightlife events. The search of NPS by keywords

has resulted in a predominance of stimulant substances, especially from the cathinon group, which showed to be most popular among NPS also in other studies (e.g. Sande, 2016). Users often perceive NPS as dangerous - mostly because of risks connected to use, among which range from short-term aftereffects to other long term consequences, such as psychological problems (depression, paranoia) and addiction and related craving and withdrawal symptoms. With reference to addiction, it is worth notice that according to some people, certain substances are very compulsive. Some of the perceived dangerous NPS are 3-MMC, mephedrone, GHB, methylene, NBOME, MDPV etc. The fact that NPS are often perceived as risky is consistent also with a previous study on NPS (Sande, 2016).

On Psiconauti forum, NPS are not discussed to that extent. Representations of NPS are prevalently negative and many members draw clear boundaries (Lamont & Molnár 2002) between synthetic drugs and natural drugs, the latter being considered better with regard both of wanted and unwanted effects and perceived risks. Furthermore, psychedelics users represent themselves as researchers (psychonauts), engaged either in finding new medicines or in better understanding the human potentialities, thereby improving themselves as persons. This type of consumers takes distance from immature/unaware people who use drugs only for fun. While among partygoers the recreational purpose is taken for granted, in this different environment, the mere recreational drug use is sometimes quoted as a past experience, a first immature approach to drugs that has given way to a more conscious and committed consumption. For this reason, psychonauts could be looked at as the most experienced drug users.

Indeed, similar boundaries are draft also about psychedelics (ayahuasca, LSD...) compared to others kinds of drugs, e.g. stimulants, which would not possess the qualities required by a psychonaut. Among drug categories, hallucinogen plants (ayahuasca, kratom, kanna) and mushrooms are considered even sacred and associated to spiritual growth and means of contact with divine (Soussan and Kjellgren 2016; Móró and Rác 2013).

Another important categorization concern the prescription drugs, considered as dangerous as illegal drugs in terms of side effects and addictive risk, which is perceived as a strong contradiction among users. On the contrary, when talking about their favourite substances, unwanted consequences do not find much room. Talking about short-term consequences, the boundaries between positive and negative effects, according to most experienced users, are blurred, as they maintain that the user can learn a lot even by “bad trip”. With regards to long-term consequences, serious consequences as addiction, brain damage and death are not mentioned. However, different forms of psychological suffering are discussed – depression, depersonalisation, derealisation – that could be enhanced by certain kinds of drugs – e.g. dissociatives - which are actually taken as medicines. It is worth noticing that this possible vicious circle effect is apparently not considered by users.

This sort of hierarchy between drug categories – natural vs synthetic, hallucinogens vs stimulants – seems not so important among partygoers who attend DrogArt forum, some of who reported having using a large number of often quite rare substances. Here, substances are mainly assessed individually or by type of substance (e.g. synthetic cathinones), where the effects are the main criterions, along with risks and consequences, price, availability etc. This was also the case in the study conducted by Sande et al. (2016).

Differences between the two forum environments and their members in terms of drug users' profiles make difficult to provide country-specific cultural differences. From our data Italian drug-users would appear as more traditional-substances-oriented, while the Slovenians more experimental users, more engaged with NPS. However, it is somehow obvious that **each web environment has its own target and that detected differences relate mainly to different drug users profiles, which also relate to different music scenes and nightlife contexts.**

The absence of national forum dedicated to discussions on drugs in Portugal, seem to reinforce this hypothesis, suggesting that – as long as people can manage the English language – international forums such as Psychonauts.com or Erowid are preferred. Furthermore, according to the focus group participants, people who have cannabis as their substance of choice, although occasionally using other drugs (such as mushrooms), tend to privilege face-to-face exchanges than internet.

The analysis of a **Marketplace forum** (AlphaBay) confirmed that drug users tend to draw boundaries between different types of drugs, associating them to different type of motives and risks (Soussan and Kjellgren 2016; Móró and Rácz 2013). Particularly, “mind expanding” drug subcultures generally depict the use of depressants and stimulants as hedonistic, egoistic and harmful drug use (Móró & Rácz 2013).

However, forums on the Darknet appear quite different from those on the Clearnet. Indeed, talks on the marketplace forum are mostly on the action level, that is, they mainly focus on the purchase, particularly on how to buy safely without running into legal troubles and on the reliability of sellers.

Despite the anonymity is full, among the Darknet users there is no trust, and despite the ranking system and regulations (in particular, escrow), complains and quarrels – both between sellers and vendors and within each category - cover a relevant part of conversations.

The first type of disputes focus on several kinds of inconveniences, among which late/missed delivery, reduced quantity, bad quality..., while quarrels among vendors arise usually from the attempt to discredit other competitors in what seems to be a wild competition. As the level of trust is generally low, even clients can argue because advices are not always taken in positive way.

In this kind of context, there is not much room for exchanging experiences and opinions about drug consumption, nor to talk about values and philosophy of drug consumption (Maddox et al. 2016; Barratt 2011). Indeed, the marketplace forum members suggest to the new comers in search of information about the drug effects or administration routes to visit the surface web forums dedicated to drug consumers, which do actually take all these functions (Soussan & Kjellgren 2014; Móró & Rácz 2013).

For all these reasons, and primarily when compared to forums on the Clearnet, not linked to commercial purposes, we partly question the thesis according to which market places forums are a new form of harm-reduction (Buxton & Bingham 2015; Bancroft & Reid 2016) and users-based community (Vale Pires et al. 2016).

Indeed, when a forum is related to a marketplace, exchanges and interactions among members are completely affected by the aim of purchase and by the presence of the vendors. Furthermore, it has to be noticed that marketplace forums are frequented by users of different kinds of drugs, which does not favour the sense of community. Representations of substances recall both those of generalist forums on the Clearnet, influenced by internet tabloids, and those of specific forums, indicating the **presence of differently experienced users**.

- [Final remarks about the impact of results on prevention and harm-reduction strategies](#)

Based on the data and according to Eurobarometer (Young people and drugs, 2014), internet seems to be the main source of information for people who use drugs and NPS. Considering this fact, internet can be successfully used by different organizations as a platform for informing and raising awareness among drug users and the general public. Professional online interventions in these spaces can reach also those who are otherwise unlikely to engage in classical help services. To this purpose, the forums

on the clear net seem to be more suitable, not only because of accessibility, but also because on the dark net there is not enough trust among users to get attention, even though some successful experiences have been reported (Vale Pires et al. 2016)

Indeed, while the Clearnet forums can be considered places where people who use drugs and NPS are engaged in spontaneous harm reductions strategies, based on a peer-to-peer approach, in our opinion the marketplace forums cannot provide the same opportunity, as the main focus is on purchase.

However, prevention interventions should not consider drug users as a whole target, but should differentiate aims and messages according to different kind of drug users, as drug users tend to draw boundaries between different types of drugs, associating them to different type of motives and risks (Soussan and Kjellgren 2016; Móró and Rácz 2013). From this point of view **differences between drug categories (hallucinogens, stimulants, dissociatives...) seem more meaningful than the distinction between traditional drugs vs NPS**. Furthermore, according to our data, polydrug use seems to refer mainly to different drugs within the some category.

If generalist forums can be considered an expression of the mainstream thinking about drugs, some interventions could be addressed to dispel false myths to the extent that they foment the stigma around those who use drugs and the conflict with non-consumers.

Specialist web forums such as Psiconauti are obviously not representative of the whole drug users' population. According to our data, members of this type of forum can be considered a sort of *elite*, rather informed and conscious about drug effects and possible risks. It is clear from the data that the drug consumers' purposes go far beyond the recreational effects, and the shift towards more spiritual or "committed" aims can be seen as a development in a drug user's career. In this kind of environment the drug use for mere recreational purpose is contested, which means that "recreational" or occasional users – who are probably less informed – are also less accessible on this kind of web environments. From this point of view, the DrogArt forum provides a successful example of how a harm reduction organization can create a website where also more occasional users are actively involved. Another way to reach them could be through more general social media, such as Facebook or Instagram.

With respect to the web, another target seems to be made of only cannabis consumers, less interested on the internet and to privilege face-to-face exchanges, confirming previous research (Soussan & Kjellgren 2014; 2016; Winstock & Barratt, 2013)

Finally, there are some crucial topics resulting from the data that policy makers and people working in intervention field should not ignore.

First, the fact that many forum members present themselves as suffering people indicates, on the one hand, that many drug users, through substances use (e.g. of ketamine) look for a solution for their problems – mainly psychological stress and mental suffering - which they did not find in traditional therapy and prescription drugs. On the other hand, it could also mean that many people have health problems - mostly depression, derealisation, and depersonalisation - related to their drug consumption, but they are not fully conscious about this possible relationship. The problematic "loop" of self-medication was recognised also among the users in DrogArt counselling service in relation to 3-MMC and depression (Sande et al., 2016). Research and intervention should therefore try to clarify this issue.

Second, some drugs/NPS users and especially those who prefer psychedelics (e.g. ayahuasca) do it as an answer for their spiritual needs and maintain that certain substances improve their introspective and empathic skills, thereby contributing to their personal development. Some of them, with a more lay approach, consider themselves free researchers, who are engaged in a research field that academy is not apparently interested in, that is altered states of consciousness.

Third, the discussions on the forums gives us insight into users' patterns of use, which can be quite risky (e.g. mixing different drugs, binge use) – therefore, intervention should address those patterns and provide efficient harm reduction messages than can be distributed also on online platforms.

Since online forums have proven to be places where people openly write about their problems and even directly ask for help, it is useful if they are monitored by professionals, who can respond if needed by providing credible information or referring the user to a suitable help service. In addition, monitoring these online communities enable professionals to follow what is going on in the user scene and adjust their interventions accordingly.

However information and prevention strategies should be tailored on the base of specific drugs or main drug categories (psychedelics, opioids, dissociatives, stimulants) which correspond to different consumption purposes and profile, while campaign and interventions specifically addressed to NPS consumers would not be very meaningful.

Indeed, it is worth noticing that, usually NPS are not first choice drugs and users still prefer traditional drugs, considering NPS substitutes when these are not available. Indeed, NPS do not have a good reputation among people who use drugs. In some cases, traced on the dark net forum, users have tried NPS just because they have been cheated by the vendors who were supposed to sell them traditional drugs. Synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones are particularly criticised for their side effects, confirming previous literature (Winstock & Barratt 2013). Furthermore, discourses about legality do not have much room on the market place forum, that is, worries about the purchase and delivery extend to NPS also.

Differences found in the most quoted and discussed psychoactive substances in the three countries seems to be related mostly with their availability in the offline market and different nightlife or drug-category subcultures rather than to country-specific cultural differences. In this sense, in Portugal the use of NPS was more spread when smartshops were open. Indeed people who use drugs seem to be still highly connected with the traditional illicit market, known dealers and substances (mainly cannabis, cocaine, MDMA and speed), while the online market seems to be used mainly by psychonauts or users interested in specific experiences (see also Van Buskirk et al 2016; 2017). This is related with the fact that users do not have to be creative to find substitutes to their preferred drugs, since they are available in the offline market, and also as legal options considering the Portuguese Decriminalisation Model.

In the analysed discussions on DrogArt forum, references were also made to the dynamics of the drug market. Even though this topic was not in the focus of the present research, the relationship between the users' representations about drugs and NPS and the legal regulation, prices, and availability, would deserve further investigations.

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