A mixed-methods analysis of online NPS user discussion in Hungary

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Objectives   Our study's aim was to identify a method which can properly reveal the different layers of the NPS phenomenon appearing in the online discussion fora. Besides (i) evaluating the extent of potential peer-help harm reduction within NPS fora discussants, we also aimed (ii) to understand the main purposes of NPS use among the discussion participants, (iii) to chart their knowledge of and attitude toward the legality of the substances traded and used, and (iv) to explore the feelings and consumer decision making processes on the NPS market.

Methodology   A mixed-methods analysis and a sequential explanatory strategy were applied on the data set of Hungarian NPS discussion fora. The initial qualitative data collection, netnography and thematic analysis were carried out to reveal emerging topics. Followed by a subsequent quantitative data analysis using the self-service text analysis tool Zurvey exploring word frequencies, co-appearances, and recurring themes.

Significant results   The discussion's main topic was vendor reliability and fraud, with more negative than positive phrases attached. Discussants showed low levels of literacy, weak knowledge of substance legality, and inadequate resources to provide peer-help harm reduction. Drug use purpose was mainly to 'escape from reality', not positively toned recreation.

Conclusions   Efficient indicated prevention interventions and harm reduction measures are needed to target disadvantageous online NPS user groups having little or no resources for self-help.

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