

Project Corazza (UK)

Dr. Ornella Corazza, University of Hertfordshire Higher Education Corporate.

Digital pathways to Doping: an innovative netnographic approach on the use of untested supplements and the underlying “cheating culture

Athletes are always looking for novel means to become faster, higher and stronger. Globalisation and the rapid technological development have brought a new set of values, behaviours and means for sharing advice on products, specialist diets and other techniques to enhance the sporting performance. Such a phenomenon has been linked with a dramatic increase of websites selling supplements containing undisclosed biologically-active ingredients. Often advertised with captivating marketing strategies as “natural” enhancers, a wide range of products have been used by athletes driven by the false perception that natural equals healthy and remain unaware that some ingredients (listed or otherwise) could provoke a positive test result in doping toxicology. This poses unprecedented challenges to the anti-doping community and its values. Over the past decade, we developed ground breaking netnographic methods (e.g internet and media news monitoring, fora analysis) which enabled us to identify over 800 novel psychoactive substances (NPS) and related evasion trends (Corazza et al 2013; Marinnan et al 2017). We strongly believe that such innovative approaches could be beneficially applied to the social science of doping. In line with this, our project is a timely contribution to generate original netnographic data on perceived risks, motivations, “cheating behaviours” and other less explored patterns of consumption of untested supplements sold online, which, in combination with evidence emerged from ongoing toxicological analysis and a collection of case studies, will inform anti-doping prevention in unprecedented ways. Results from our investigation will be disseminated via a podcast series “Winners or Cheaters?”, which will include 20 interviews with athletes and professionals working with them (e.g. counsellors, coaches, WADA representatives, researchers) across four countries (UK, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands). We will bring both personal narratives and expert opinions on supplement use within a broader societal discussion, while transcending the sphere of scientific research. All podcasts will be designed in a user-friendly format and promoted via a dedicated project website as well as other digital media platforms (e.g. iTunes, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) to reach a wider audience. In a globalised and fast-moving society, podcasts are becoming increasingly popular tools for education due to their accessibility, portability, and scheduling flexibility. The literature demonstrates that the audio format is both feasible and accepted by learners: users can choose not only the content, which will be accessible to the audience at their own time, while training or carrying out other daily activities.