# Workstream 3

# Online survey among NPS users

# *Methodological guidelines*

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# INTRODUCTION

The study of NPS (new psychoactive substance) users (or drug users in general) raises a number of methodological and ethical problems. To name only a few, what should be mentioned is the distrust of drug users towards the researchers from public research institutes, the problem of determining the population of drug users that makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to prepare representative study, and finally the problems associated with the study of illegal behaviour giving rise to ethical questions about the respondents' anonymity and the use of the gathered information.

Nevertheless the social and political importance of the drug problem causes that many studies on this subject are carried out and the scientists for many years have been developing a number of research methods aimed at collecting reliable information. Most research assumes a relatively safe research strategy involving the study of drug users residing in rehabilitation centres or benefiting from the assistance of other institutions. From the beginning, however, it was clear that such sampling method bypasses drug users who do not use the service of support institutions. What is more, such methodology leads to focusing on the well-known and relatively well-recognized phenomena. The emergence of the NPS resulted in the increased need to develop new methods that will be able to record quickly changing trends.

In the literature (Miller, Sonderlund 2011) there are examples of different studies experimenting with different methodologies, i.e.: questionnaires attached to the containers in which needles were dispensed through community-based pharmacies ('fitpacks') (Lenton, et al 2000); 'snowballing' (Heckarthon 1997); 'street intercept' (Fitzgerald, et al. 1999); and the recruitment of eligible subjects through drug-related ambulance call-outs has also been successful (Dietze, et al. 2000). As soon as Internet became part of everyday life, the possibility to use the Internet for research looked

particularly promising from the very beginning[1]. Since the early studies of drug users conducted in the second half of the nineties[2], a lot of experience has been gathered but it should be kept in mind that we are still dealing with a relatively new methodology, in which many issues are not clearly resolved. While there is a series of studies regarding on-line surveys (Sue, Ritter 2011, Couper 2008, Bhaskaran, LeClaire 2008) and on the Internet[3], there is no study analysing the online survey of NPS in particular[4].

The prepared guidelines aim to: 1) present online survey methodology in the context of other research surveys and discuss its advantages and disadvantages; 2) present step by step the key elements of online research methodology using the experience of conducting an online survey under the Internet Tools for Research in Europe on New Drugs (I-TREND) programme[5].

## 1. WHAT IS AN ONLINE SURVEY?

Online survey research forms part of a larger family of survey research having different varieties[6]. Among various types of research survey, we should distinguish[7]: 1) a survey carried out directly (face-to-face) with the respondent; 2) a questionnaire sent by traditional mail[8]; 3) an interview carried out by telephone (CATI – Computer Assisted Telephone Interview); 4) a computer-mediated survey using the Internet[9], of which the online survey is a variation.

Each of these varieties has its advantages and disadvantages, which I will not discuss here in detail. When planning a study, however, everyone should consider which method to choose. Computer mediated survey is not a method suitable for every study. That is why it is worth to exactly know the advantages and disadvantages of such research.

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[1] I have omitted the origin of using the Internet for social research (cf. Couper 2008)

[2] The works of Coomber (1997) are worth special attention here.

[3] For example Coursera offers course https://www.coursera.org/course/questionnairedesign (Available June 2015) or WebSurveyMethodology from the Centre for Social Informatics at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana http://www.websm.org/ https://www.coursera.org/course/questionnairedesign (Available June 2015)

[4] However, a number of valuable articles on this matter have been published – they will be systematically mentioned in this study.

[5] Details of the study and specific methodology of each country and result see: Piotr Sałustowicz Artur Malczewski "Online survey for people who use new psychoactive substance. International survey report".

[6] It is good to be aware of this fact, especially if online surveys are the first survey research, with which we are dealing. The literature on survey research is vast – from very general works (Fink 2012, Rea, Parker 2005) to ones devoted to single aspects of such research. A researcher preparing online survey can benefit greatly by reading these publications. In particular, this concerns constructing questions, their diversification and the structure of the entire questionnaire.

[7] The presented division is very general and each of these survey research varieties has its variations.

[8] A traditional method today rarely used.

[9] In the further part of the Guidelines I will be using the term "computer-mediated survey". However, it should be kept in mind that nowadays both the researcher and the respondent may use not only a computer, but also a tablet or a smartphone to carry out a study.

**Advantages of a computer-mediated survey** [Mącik, 2005, p. 108]:

1. A shorter duration of the entire research project – with well-planned research and motivated respondents we can get the results on the same day we begun the study. And using the appropriate software, a report will be generated immediately.

2. Lower cost of research – computer-mediated survey eliminates the cost of printing questionnaires, postage, training interviewers, and manual data entry.

3. Higher quality of collected data thanks to:
   a) reduction of response error – the respondent will not be able to omit a question, since there is a possibility of applying mechanisms forcing the respondent to fill out the entire questionnaire,
   b) reduction of human error, e.g. arising when entering data,
   c) reduction of the interviewing effects involving, for example, suggesting replies to the respondent or triggering the respondent's sense of shame associated with giving an answer which is breaking social norms.

4. A high percentage of questionnaire return (although, as we shall see, it is not a rule).

5. The ability to expand the questionnaire with animated graphics, video and audio elements that, firstly, will enable the extension of research topics, secondly, will make the process of completing the survey more attractive, thus increasing the satisfaction of the respondent and his/her willingness to fill in the entire questionnaire.

6. Convenience for the respondent – he/she has the opportunity to fill in the questionnaire at any time.

7. The ability to reach specific target groups, people difficult to access.

8. Almost unlimited range – it can be carried out from one place in many countries.

9. Customisable questionnaire – adaptable to different categories of respondents.

**Disadvantages of computer-mediated survey** [Mącik, 2005, p. 109]:

1. The results are often not representative – in the case of surveys placed on websites we are dealing with auto-selection, a situation in which the respondents are people who want to participate in the study.

2. The researcher has no control of who really fills in the questionnaire – it is possible, for example, that the same people participate in the study more than once.

3. Internet users' population not being representative of the general population, even in the countries most penetrated by the Internet – as a rule, Internet users are younger, better educated and more affluent than those not using the Internet.

4. Shorter attention span while participating in an online survey – respondent's fatigue after approx. 25–30 questions. Studies have shown that the longer the survey, the more people do not fill it to the end.

5. Decrease in the percentage of fillings over time in long-term studies.

6. Inability to interpret the respondent's behaviour during testing due to the lack of direct contact with the interviewer (it is worth noting that this is a flaw typical for all non-personal forms of surveys).

Among the above-mentioned problems, particular attention should be paid to the representativeness of data[10]. Generally there are three types of errors with which we have to deal:

**1. Coverage Error** – lies in an inadequate attempts to match a sample to the population[11]. The causes of this error may be very different but most often they stem from the fact that the investigator does not have a reliable database of respondents from which he/she could draw a sample. The problem may be that the database is incomplete (some data is outdated, information about a part of the population is missing, etc.). Usually, however, the investigator has no database or information about the structure of the population. Then the subjects select themselves for the study and we are dealing with an unrepresentative sample. Even large sample size does not change it! This means that the results cannot be generalized to the entire population and are for information purposes only – they describe trends, make it possible to capture new phenomena.

**2. Sampling Error** – lies in the fact that respondents from the sample are not representative of the target population (Selm, Jankowski 2006). For example, a study of shampoos covering bald men. The causes of this error may be different. Errors, like the above example are rare, the researcher often does not know what his target population is exactly. We encounter such problems in particular when researching new phenomena (e.g. NPS).

**3. Non Response and Non Response Bias** – all varieties of survey research are faced with the problem of low response rate – that is, refusals to participate in the study or interruptions to answering the questions during the study. Studies show that the response rate in online survey is generally lower than in the case of other varieties of survey research (Shih, Fan 2008). We may think, that if someone refuses to answer our questions we can ask somebody else. That is not that simple. The problem is that we cannot assume that the people refusing to take part in the survey are random (because if they have not responded, we do not know what their characteristics are) and we cannot replace them with another person drawn out from the population (Sax, Gilmartin, Bryant 2003). Studies show that the impact of non-response in surveys conducted via Internet is significant (Grandcolasa, Rettiea, Marusenko 2012).

The above shortcomings and errors of computer mediated survey significantly limit the range of possible applications of this method. In the following part of the guidelines I will present the possible ways of reducing particular defects and preventing errors.

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[10] This is a problem typical of all varieties of survey research. However, in the case of research carried out using computers, in a situation where the relation between the researcher and the respondent is computer-mediated, these problems increase.

[11] Coverage error is a common objection related to online survey (Couper 2000).

**Various types of computer mediated survey**

At the end of the general discussion of the computer mediated survey, a distinction should be made between different forms of such research. In general, the division line runs between those surveys that are executed on a respondent's machine (client-side) and those that are executed on the survey organization's Web server (server–side) (Couper 2008:2). In the first case, the respondents downloads the questionnaire on their computer, fills it in and sends it back. In order to apply this method in research, it is necessary to have a database of respondents' email addresses. In the second case, the respondents use a tool placed on the Internet. In this case, it is not necessary to have a respondents' database, it is possible  to recruit them in another way. Online surveys belong to the latter type of research.

The diversification of this methodology does not end here. Miller, Sonderlund based on a meta-analysis of  5534 publications on the Internet-assisted research on illicit drug  users distinguished eight varieties of methods and described their strengths and weaknesses.

*Table 1. Forms of Internet computer-mediated research*

| Sampling method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| E-mail (text) | - Very easy<br>- Very inexpensive<br>- Very fast<br>- Little or no formal training | - Poor data automation<br>- No interactive controls<br>- No logic testing |
| Bulletin boards | - Moderately easy, fast and inexpensive<br>- Can see what others have written Very good for collecting responses over time | - Requires more skill<br>- Becoming obsolete |
| Web HTML | - Familiar<br>- Automated accumulation of data<br>- Highly flexible | - Requires additional programming skill to capture the data<br>- Extra time and costs for setup<br>- No true interactive controls |
| Web fixed-form interactive authoring tools | - Highly sophisticated<br>- Sophisticated controls<br>- Automated data accumulation | - Limits the design flexibility<br>- Researcher cannot usually control the whole research process<br>- High cost<br>- Longer set-up time |
| Web customized interactive programming | - Most powerful and flexible<br>- Modern technical controls<br>- Highest level of flexibility | - Most expensive<br>- Longest set-up time<br>- Requires substantial expertise<br>- Researcher has least control of the research process<br>- Customizations yield complex data structures |

| Sampling method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| Downloadable surveys | - Shifts the computing tasks from the online server to the respondent's PC Much smaller files<br>- Respondent can complete survey offline | - More costly and time-intensive<br>- Requires a greater level of respondent sophistication<br>- Time requirement may discourage some respondents |
| Web-moderated interviewing | - Qualitative, real-time<br>- Logic and control mechanisms are supplied by moderator<br>- Low-level technical skills required | - 'Tyranny of the fastest typist'<br>- Moderation fees<br>- Pre-recruitment may prove time-intensive |
| Social networking sites | - Low-level technical skills required<br>- Very popular—current technology Sample can be specified (e.g. university in London)<br>- Able to document total sample of people who saw advertisement and who followed link | - Expensive to advertise<br>- Need to advertise on multiple platforms |

Source: (Miller, Sonderlund 2010:1561)

In the further part of the Guidelines I will focus on online surveys that are executed on the survey organization's Web server.

# 2. METHODOLOGY OF THE ONLINE SURVEY – STEP BY STEP

Below we are going to present, based on the available literature, the key steps involved in planning, preparation and implementation of an online survey. The experience gathered in the process of preparation and implementation of surveys as part of the I-TREND project will be used in the presentation (part of the text in boxes). The questionnaire used in the study is attached as Annex 1 to the Guidelines.

## 2.1 Planning a survey

### Determining the objectives of a survey

The planning phase of the study is often underestimated and researchers, interested in the results, immediately proceed to creating a survey. This is a mistake. A well prepared study, with clearly defined goals, target population, sampling method, and promotion are a key to success.

If we know what and whom we want to examine, the subsequent steps of research – from laying the questions to writing the report – will proceed much more smoothly.

> The I-TREND research planning process took a lot of time – more than originally scheduled. The first task was to develop a common definition of NPS, which was not a easy task, because in the literature we find many different definitions of NPS. Also, the definitions of NPS in each country participating in the study were quite different. There were two possible solutions to this problem: the adoption of a broad or a narrow definition of NPS. Ultimately, both approaches are reflected in the questionnaire. Question 1 of the questionnaire is very general in nature and verifies whether the respondent is an NPS user, without precisely determining what kind NPS it is. In questions 5 and 6, on the other hand, the respondents are asked about specific NPS.
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> The second aim was to clarify who the NPS users are or determine what the target population is: whether the study is to cover the whole population of NPS users or just of those who buy NPS in online shops? Should it also include the party population, cannabis users, etc.? In the end, the decision was to adopt the broad approach based on the assumption that the study should be used to obtain information about the most diversified population possible.

***Describe the relevant information you would like to have***

The objectives of the study should be translated into a more detailed list of issues to be brought up in the questionnaire and of information to be collected. Such a list would  be helpful in preparing the questionnaire plan and coming up with specific questions.

When preparing such a list, it is worth posing a question: will the respondents be able to give us the information we are interested in? Asking a respondent a question that he/she will not be able to answer may discourage him/her from completing the survey.

## 2.2 Developing Questions that Get Responses

Having clearly defined the objectives of the study, the target population and the list of requested information, we can begin creating the survey. The form of the questions asked in the survey differs from the questions that we know from everyday language. What immediately catches the eye when we look at a survey is that most frequently the respondent receives a set of answers along with the question[12]. Over the years, the researchers  have developed various ways of formulating questions and it was quite quickly noted that the form of the question largely determines the nature of the information that we gain, so it is important to carefully consider the way in which we formulate the question (Schuman, Presser 1996).

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[12] The list of differences is not exhaustive (cf. Fowler 1995).

We can distinguish the following forms of questions used in questionnaires:

➢ Dichotomous questions

Dichotomous questions are the simplest form of questions in which the respondent must simply indicate "yes" or "no" (true / false or male / female). When formulating such questions, attention should be paid to the fact that it is possible to give a "yes" or "no" answer.

In the I-TREND survey we have used this form, for example, in question 14: "Because of unpleasant feelings from this substance, did you ever look for medical attention?"

➢ Multiple-choice questions

Multiple-choice questions are the most commonly used form of survey in surveys – they consist of a question and three to around a dozen possible answers. Most of the questions from the I-TREND survey questionnaire are multiple-choice questions. When formulating a list of possible answers, it should be kept in mind that they be separable. Moreover, the number of responses should not be too high – the respondent could easily get lost among the possible answers. But this is not a rule without exceptions.

The I-TREND questionnaire question 5: "Did you use any of the following new psychoactive substances in the last 12 months?" contained a list, depending on the country, of between 25 and 35 items of different NPS names. A list this long is permissible but should not be overused.

➢ Rating scale questions

Rating scale questions also allow the respondent to select one of many answers, in this case, however, the answers form a scale, which means they are ordered in a certain way.

For example, in question 28, where the respondents were asked to assess to what extent they agreed with the given opinions (e.g.: "New Psychoactive Substance are less harmful than illicit substances"), the answers were arranged in the following scale: 1. Yes, it's true for most of them; 2. Yes, it's true for a few of them; 3. No, it's not true; 4. I don't know.

Replies in the form of a scale should be used particularly in a situation where we plan to carry out a more complex statistical analyses on the collected material. Formulating scales to questions involves a number of complex issues (DeVellis 2011), and two rules worth remembering: 1) the categories of the scale must be separate; 2) the values should be unambiguous.

➢ Rank order scaling questions

Rank order scaling question is not a question in the strict sense of the word but rather a task consisting in putting a given set in order (for example, an NPS group) according to specific characteristics (for example, the subjective experience of the impact on the sense of sight). The respondent may simply assign specified numerical values to particular categories.

➢ Open-ended questions

The open-ended questions are the ones the most similar to everyday questions – these are the questions that have no pre-determined answers and that the respondent may respond in any way. This form of questions has its undoubted advantages: no specific language (concrete answers) are imposed on the respondent and he/she is allowed to freely comment on the topic. This type of question allows you to acquire new information, unforeseen by the investigator. Unfortunately, the open-ended questions have two major drawbacks: firstly, only some respondents provide an answer (James, Bolstein 1990); secondly, answers collected in this way create a number of problems during the analysis.

➢ Demographic questions

It is hard to imagine any survey without demographic questions – social and demographic variables are crucial for sampling, determining the profile of the respondents and for the analysis. It is natural that researchers want to find out as much as possible about the social groups represented by the respondents. When asking demographic questions, however, it should be kept in mind that they may discourage respondents from participating in the survey by making them feel that it will be possible to identify them based on these responses. In addition, there is a problem of placing demographic questions in the questionnaire. Studies show that placing them at the beginning increases the chances respondents complete them, and does not discourage them from continuing to fill in the questionnaire (Tecław, Price, Osatuke 2012).

When formulating questions for a survey, the following thing should be kept in mind:

▸ Questions should carry instructions accurately determining how to respond the question: first of all, it should be determined how many answers are acceptable.

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**9. Last time when using the substance which you selected, what were the circumstances? (*several answers are possible*)**

a. Alone at home
b. With friends at your or their home
c. Alone in a club, pub or at a party
d. With friends in a club, pub or at a party
e. Alone outside/in the countryside
f. With friends outside/in the countryside
g. At school/work
h. Other circumstances

Instruction should follow the question

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▸ When formulating questions, the researcher should diversify their form. The survey should not consist of questions asked in the same way, it might lead to some respondents answering questions without thinking. The overall appearance of the survey is equally important (Vicente, Reis 2010).

▸ The order of questions should not be coincidental, then the survey might look chaotic. Particular groups of questions should be arranged in a logical order. One should also be aware that the order of posing questions has an impact on the method[13].

▸ A questionnaire should not be too long. The researchers always want to get as much information as possible, which leads them to adding more questions. But it works to the disadvantage of the research itself – because the longer the questionnaire, the lower the response rate (Cook, Heath Thompson, 2000). It is impossible to indicate the ideal length of a survey. A lot depends on the topic of research, the target population, and many other factors. This issue should be carefully examined during the pilot study.

▸ The finished questionnaire should be subjected to a test. The errors made when formulating a survey may cost a lot. When we send the survey to respondents or put it up on a website, no corrections can be made – unless we agree to start the entire testing process from the beginning. That is why it is worth checking the prepared questionnaire.

As a part of the I-TREND study a pilot survey was conducted consisting in sending the questionnaires to a selected group of respondents, who were asked to complete it and comment on each question and the survey in general. In addition, a face-to-face survey was carried out with the respondent noting his/her reactions to particular questions. The collected material allowed to improve many elements and avoid mistakes.

## 2.3 Preparing to Launch an Online Survey

*Picking a sample group to take a survey*

Online surveys are often criticized because of the high level of sampling error (Elford et al. 2004, Dillman 2000). Fortunately, researchers who decide to conduct an online survey are not a lost cause. Studies have shown that online sampling groups are more representative than the sampling groups of drug users recruited in institutions (Nicholson, White, Duncan 1999).

Generally, sampling is divided into probability and nonprobability sampling. In the first case, we randomly select samples from specific population. Such studies are representative, which means that it is reasonable to generalize the results from a sample to the entire population. Of course, the prerequisite of probability sampling is to have knowledge about the population and its socio-demographic structure and a database, from which to draw samples according to a specific procedure.

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[13] Studies on this phenomenon have a long tradition. In a classic study found that Americans were more likely to agree to accept a communist journalist, if they were asked earlier about whether the communist country should accept an American journalist (Hyman and Sheatsley 1950). In relation to contemporary research on the ordering effect in online survey (Fan, Yan 2010).

The issue of sampling is quite complicated (Kalton 1983). In brief, it can be described as follows: starting the sampling one should answer the question of how large the sample is going to be. The sample size is related to the probability of committing a sampling error: the higher the size, the smaller the probability of error. So the sample should be as large as possible[14]. Increasing the sample size, however, equals higher costs. Having had specified the sample size, we can draw the sample from the database.

In practice, most online surveys are based on nonprobability sampling, which is often due to the lack of knowledge about the population and its structure or the lack of appropriate respondents' databases.

That happened in the case of I-TREND – we did not know what the population of the NPS users was nor had any database available from which to draw the respondents. In such a situation a survey can be carried out but it must be kept in mind that the results obtained in this way are not representative[15]. When preparing the study, we assumed that it will be based on convenience sampling (sometimes called: purposive or judgmental sampling).

"In this type of sampling, the selected individuals are considered to be the most representative of the population as a whole" (Levy, Lemeshow 2008: 21). In other words, the aim was to reach as many NPS users, which is why it was crucial to define them accurately, as mentioned above, as well as specify the questionnaire distribution channels and ways to increase the response rate.

### *Distribution channels*

Distribution channels depend only on the available resources, ingenuity and time. As part of the I-TREND study we have developed a list of distribution channels depending on the individual target groups.

*Table 2 – promotion strategy in I-TREND program*

| Target Group | Communication Platform | Distribution channels |
|---|---|---|
| 1. General population (15-64 y.o.) | General Media | ☐ A press release<br>☐ A paper about NPS and ITREND<br>☐ Announcement via related sites (drug testing site and prevention site).<br>☐ Facebook |
| | Institutional Communication Channels | ☐ Announce about the survey in its newsletter<br>☐ Press release posted on the DOA webpage<br>☐ Short description of the web page and program send to various institutions for their newsletters and webpages |

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[14] Fast calculation of the sample size with a given error can be made on many websites, for example: http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm#cineeded

[15] Precisely speaking, we have no reason to determine on the basis of the theory of probability whether and to what extent sampling nonprobability is representative.

| Target Group | Communication Platform | Distribution channels |
|---|---|---|
| 1b.<br>General population young adults (15-24 y.o.) | New Media Communication Channels | ☐ Facebook<br>☐ Twitter<br>☐ Setting up Facebook page for I-TREND survey, and / or using the current FB page established for NPS testing in party settings<br>☐ Mailing lists |
| | School Settings | ☐ University population (addictology students, other?)<br>☐ Student magazines<br>☐ Mail list / Facebook pages of high schools |
| 2.Psychonauts | Online Discussion Boards | ☐ Short presentation of the project and a link toward the Q. on selected forum<br>☐ Promoting banner |
| 3.Population at risks of substance use disorders | Health Prevention Web Sites And Associations In Drug Field | ☐ Associative or institutional website will be directly contacted by mail or/and by phone to invite them to insert a short text of presentation on ITREND survey and a link toward the Q.<br>☐ Announcement on one or two nightlife sites |
| 4.Population in treatment for addictive disorders | Addiction Treatment Centers And Hospital Consultations | ☐ The national association of addictologists will be invited by mail to propose the Questionnaire to their patients and to their colleagues.<br>☐ Announcement on the National Addictions Conference<br>☐ Information will be sent to institutions responsible for population in treatment. |
| 5.Problem drug users | Harm Reduction Centers | ☐ The low threshold treatment agencies will be sent an invitation to diffuse the Questionnaire among their users.<br>☐ Mailing to the national list of addictology services<br>☐ Facebook |
| 6.Party population | Party Webpages | ☐ Contacting the administrators of major dance webpages (commercial &underground scene) with promotional text, most likely will be charged<br>☐ a banner |
| 7. Cannabis users | Growshops and Cannabis Community Webpages | ☐ contacting page administrators |

Finally, not all channels were used, and the effectiveness of each channel turned out to be different. We found, for example, that the distribution of the survey through institutions did not generate large effects. Also, the idea of a banner placed on websites did not turn out to be really accurate. Whereas two strategies proved to be the most effective. The first strategy was based on placing a link on NPS users forms. A link bearing brief information about the objectives of the study, including the guarantee of anonymity, regularly placed on the forums. An important element of this strategy was the monitoring of the NPS users' reactions to the information about the study conducted by the researchers. We constantly explained various issues raised by potential

respondents. This action had two functions: first, to provide additional information about the study to the interested NPS users. Second, it showed that real people are behind this test, to whom you can talk, which in some way personalized the study itself. The second strategy was advertising on Facebook – the portal makes it possible to purchase an advertisement well targeted based on keywords – information about the study was displayed on profiles where content related to NPS appeared (Baltar, Brunet 2012). Advertising on Facebook proved to be effective, especially in Poland, which translated to the final response rate.

The experience gathered from the I-TREND survey shows that there is no universal way of promoting an online survey – what works in one country may not be the best in others. In addition to the methods in Table 2, other ways of increasing the response rate, mentioned in the literature, should be acknowledged:

- ✓ ▶Recruiting survey respondents via e-mail is a very effective method because the researcher has control over who completed the survey and who did not. After some time, it is possible to send an e-mail reminder and a thank you for participating in the study. It is important that personalize e-mail invitations because, as studies show, (Heerwegh, Loosveldt 2006) it significantly increases the response rate.
- ✓ ▶Issuing an online survey as a pop-up is a frequently used method in market research and we might consider using it in social studies. It should, however, be taken into account that modern web browsers allow you to block pop-up surveys.
- ✓ ▶Communication on the Internet is fast, there is no place for long explanations, so it is recommended that the invitations to participate in the study be brief and friendly (Wright, Schwager 2008)
- ✓ ▶It is worth considering using different compelling incentives, such as, financial or material rewards. Studies show that they increase the response rate, although critics point out that it may lead to respondents giving false responses (Cobanoglu, Cobanoglu 2003; Göritz 2006).
- ✓ ▶A graphically attractive survey with multimedia elements attracts the attention of the respondents and inspires them to fill it in (Couper, Conrad, Tourangeau 2007).
- ✓ ▶And finally, an issue to keep in mind in every online test – the anonymity. The respondents need to be ensured that the survey is completely anonymous. This is particularly important in the case of research on NPS.

## 2.4 Surveying Survey Administration

When the questionnaire is ready, it can be put up on the server. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to have specialized software and hardware[16]. Purchase of the entire software only for one or even several studies is pointless. Fortunately, on the Internet we can find a number of sites offering free and paid services from the scope of implementing online research. The reader will find the list of websites of such companies in Annex 2.

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[16] In the I-Trend study three teams used the existing infrastructure OFDT and the partners from the Czech Republic used theirs.

## 2.5 Preparing data for analysis

The process of data preparation is called: cleaning and means detecting, correcting, and removing data from online survey results that's either inaccurate, corrupt, incomplete, or irrelevant.

The data should fulfill following criteria (Bhaskaran, LeClaire, 2010:234-5):

✓ Accuracy: Data represents a clean match between the target population and the sample.
✓ Completeness: Data answers the objectives of the survey..
✓ Consistency: Each analyzer sees a consistent view of the data, including visible changes made by the user's own transactions and transactions of other users.
✓ Density: Density refers to data without missing values.
✓ Integrity: Data that maintains information exactly as it was input to a system, free from alteration or unauthorized disclosure, or if it has been modified, that modification was carried out in a secure and auditable fashion.
✓ Uniqueness: Data without any duplicates.
✓ Validity: The survey measures what it intends to measure.

From this point of view data need screening, which means checking according to the following points (Bhaskaran, LeClaire, 2010:237-6):

✓ Too little data: Look for any questions that have noticeably fewer answers than the other questions in the survey.
✓ Too much data: Look for duplicate surveys. If one person takes your survey more than one time, it skews the sample.
✓ Inconsistent results: People who offer results that are so far out of line with the general population can skew your survey. So, look for those inconsistencies and be prepared to cull them from your data.
✓ Unlikely responses: If the answers to some of your questions seem like they came out of left field, they probably did.

Cleaning data is sensitive process, if you clean too much, you may lost some important information, if you clean not enough you may stay with fuzzy data. So the rule of thumb is to keep raw data to be able always to compare the results with data source.

And now the data are ready for analysis.

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# Annex 1. Questionnaire

This is a presentation page from which you can have access to the questionnaire of the I-TREND SURVEY.

The focus of the I-TREND project survey is New/ Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS), or 'New Synthetic Drugs'. These substances are often and popularly referred to as 'legal highs' or 'designer drugs'.

They are also commonly sold as "research chemicals" (RC) or under a diverse range of fanciful marketing names (e.g. NRG-3, Benzofury, Funky, Cocolino etc.). In order to circumvent the law, retailers sell New Psychoactive Substance under a disguise of misleading purposes such as "bath salts", "incense", or "goods not intended for human consumption (collector goods)".

New Psychoactive Substance imitate the effects of existing illegal drugs such as cocaine, (meth)amphetamines, ecstasy, cannabis, ketamine or even opium. Most New Psychoactive Substance can be purchased online, but they can also be sold in head shops and smart shops or on the street within traditional drug markets. They come in different forms such as powder, pills, capsules, herb and resin.

## Why a questionnaire?

These substances have a short history of consumption and consequently, very little is known effects, potency, consequences on health. There is a need of a better understanding on how these substances are perceived and used. This questionnaire was developed in order to answer these questions.

**It is intended for people who have used at least one of these substances**. If you have concerns about these substances, we would appreciate if you could share your experience.

It takes 20 minutes to fulfil in and it's completely anonymous, no personal information is requested. If no other is stated there is only one answer possible.

Thank you very much for participating. Enter the questionnaire

## 1. Have you ever used a psychoactive substance that was (*several answers are possible*) *(Random OFF)*

- ☐ referred to as 'legal highs' or 'designer drugs'
- ☐ sold as a "research chemical" (RC)
- ☐ sold under a fanciful marketing name (e.g. NRG-3, Benzofury, Funky, Cocolino etc.)
- ☐ sold as a "bath salt", "incense", or "good not intended for human consumption (collector goods)"
- ☐ meant to be imitating the effects of existing illegal drugs, but definitely not being one of them
- ☐ sold online
- ☐ sold in a head shop or a smart shop
- ☐ was apparently new on the market
- ☐ having bought the new psychoactive substance in a tobacco shop (where Spice and Euphoria used to be retailed)

## 2. You are *(Random OFF)*

- ☐ A man
- ☐ A women

### 3. What is your year of birth?
Drop list (year 1920-2000) If respondent is younger than XXX the Q will end

**Czech partners will have more sociodemographic questions.**

## A – USE

### 4. In your life, which of these substances have you already used?
Random off

| | |
|---|---|
| 4.1 Alcohol | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.2 Tobacco (including hookah / shisha) | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.3 Marijuana/hashish | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.4 Ecstasy pills or MDMA  powder | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.5 Cocaine | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.6 Amphetamine (speed) or Methamphetamine (Ice) | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.7 LSD or psilocybin mushrooms / magic mushrooms | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.8 Heroin or Buprenorphine (Subutex, Suboxone,), Opium | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.9 Solvents or glues or paints or other volatile substances, Poppers | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.10 Ketamine | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.11 Herbal extracts (Salvia, Kratom) | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.12 New Psychoactive substances, synthetic cannabinoids included (Spice, etc.) | ☐ yes ☐ No |
| 4.13 Other        : | ☐ Specify _____ |

If they tick yes for a substance, the corresponding line will appear in the table for the next question.

| | a) When did you try this product for the FIRST TIME in your life | b) Did you use it during the last 12 months | c) Did you use it during the last 30 days |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4.1a Alcohol | ___ years old | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.2a Cannabis | ___ years old | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.3a Heroin or Buprenorphine (Subutex, Suboxone), Opium and poppy liquids | ___ years old | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |

| | *a) When did you try this product for the FIRST TIME in your life* | *b) Did you use it during the last 12 months* | *c) Did you use it during the last 30 days* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. 4a Hallucinogenic (LSD, mushroom, kétamine | ___ *years old* | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.5a Cocaine | ___ *years old* | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.6a New Psychoactive substances synthetic cannabinoids included (Spice, etc.) | ___ *years old* | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.7a MDMA ; ecstasy, amphétamine, méthamphétamine | ___ *years old* | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |
| 4.8a Solvents or glues or paints or other volatile substances, Poppers | | ☐yes<br>☐ no | ☐yes<br>☐ no |

## 5. Did you use any of the following new psychoactive substances in the last 12 months? (several answers are possible, but no more than 10, if you use more then 10, select the 10 which you use most often)? (RandomOFF)

### Excel list of substances (updated frequently) displays here multiple choice

☐ if the substance(s) is (are) not in the list please write its (their) name(s) below

✎ ………………………………….…

☐ A substance I did not know the name
☐ I didn`t know the name of neither of the substances I used
☐ None (**go to part C**)

*5.1 During the last twelve months, on how many days have you taken New Psychoactive Substance(s) (such as those referred above)?* (Random OFF)

    a.    1 to 3 days b.    4 to 9 days
    c.    10 to 19 days
    d.    20 days or more

*5.2 During the last 30 days, on how many days have you taken?* (Random OFF)

    a.    I didn't use a New Psychoactive Substance this last month
    b.    1 to 3 days
    c.    4 to 9 days
    d.    10 to 19 days
    e.    20 days or more

## Now we are going to talk about the last new psychoactive substance you used

## 6. What was the new psychoactive substance you used last time?

*6.1 Write the specific chemical compound the substance was supposed to contain, or select the option "I did not have any information"* („excluding possible adulterants to ecstasy pills") <u>(Random OFF)</u>

    a) ✍ …………………………………………

    b) I did not have any information

<u>If they know, they go directly to 7 and skip 6.2 and 6.3. If they don´t know, they go to 6.2</u>

*6.2 Do you know which group of substances it belonged to? (Select the name of the group the substance was supposed to be part of, or select the option "I did not have any information")* <u>Randomized ranking</u>

    c) Phenethylamines

    d) Indolalkylamines (f.e. tryptamines), e) Piperazine derivates

    f) Cathinones

    g) Cannabinoids

    h) Narcotic analgesics

    i) Other

    j) I did not have any information

<u>If they know, they go directly to 7 otherwise go to 6.3</u>

*6.3 What were the effects of these substances?* <u>Randomized ranking. (multiple choice)</u>

    a) No effect at all

    b) Stimulatory (enhanced activity)

    c) euphoric (good mood)

    d) halucinogenic

    e) calming

    f) similar to another known drug: ✍ _____

    g) other: ✍ _____

## 7. Under which name did you obtain this substance?

    ✍ …………………………………………

    Any other name? ✍ ……………………

    Any other name? ✍ ………………………….

## 8. How many times have you used (*list the name he/she provided*)? <u>(OPTIONAL)</u>

*8.1 During the last twelve months, on how many days have you taken (list the name he/she provided)?* (Random OFF) *(OPTIONAL)*

    e. None <u>(if ticked, ignore the following question)</u>

    f. 1 to 3 days

    g. 4 to 9 days

    h. 10 to 19 days

    i. 20 days or more

*8.2 During the last 30 days, on how many days have you taken (**list the name he/she provided**)?* (Random OFF) *(OPTIONAL)*

        f. I didn't use a New Psychoactive Substance this last month
        g. 1 to 3 days
        h. 4 to 9 days
        i. 10 to 19 days
        j. 20 days or more

**9. Last time when using the substance which you selected, what were circumstances? (*several answers are possible*)** Randomized ranking.

        a. Alone at home
        b. With friends at your or their home
        c. Alone in a club, pub or at a party
        d. With friends in a club, pub or at a party
        e. Alone outside/in the countryside
        f. With friends outside/in the countryside
        g. At school/work
        h. Other circumstances

**10. Last time when using the substance which you selected, what were the typical ways of administration for you? (*several answers are possible*)** *(Random OFF)*

| | Smoking | ☐ |
|---|---|---|
| Inhalation or insufflation | Waterpipe | ☐ |
| | Bong | ☐ |
| | Vaporizer | ☐ |
| | Chasing the dragon | ☐ |
| Sublingual | | ☐ |
| Ingestion | | ☐ |
| Snorting | | ☐ |
| Rectal | | ☐ |
| Injection | | ☐ |

**11. What are the most important intended effects that you seek when you used the substance which you selected? (*several answers are possible*)**
Randomized ranking. One answer minimum

        a. To bond with others, to socialize
        b. To get high
        c. To provides me with energy (sexual performances not included)
        d. To improve sexual intercourse
        e. To increase the positive effects of another drug
        f. To reduce the negative effects of another drug
        g. To modify perception
        h. To soothe pain
        i. To allay or alleviate anxiety
        j. To fight sleeplessness
        k. To fight tiredness
        l. To relax
        m. to stimulate the brain activity for learning or work

        n. Others (which ones) ✎…………………………

## 12. Did you feel anything unpleasant after you used the substance last time? *(Random OFF)* (OPTIONAL)

    a. Yes
    b. No

## 13. What were the unpleasant feelings after you used the substance? (*several answers are possible*) *(RandomOFF)* (OPTIONAL)

    a. the substance had no effect at all

    **Mainly mental effects:**
    b. unpleasant, intensive hallucinations, delusions
    c. strong craving to use more
    d. depression, dejection
    e. strong paranoia, fear, anxiety
    f. aggression
    g. extreme agitation and excitement, sleeplessness
    h. fatigue, exhaustion, sleepiness

    **Mainly physical effects:**
    i. muscle ache,, cramps, jaw clenching
    j. tremors
    k. seizures
    l. could not control my muscle, I have problems with moving
    m. headache
    n. nausea, vomiting
    o. strongly increased heart rate, palpitation, chest pain
    p. breathing difficulty, dyspnea
    q. sweating
    r. overheating
    s. dehydration and/or diarrhea
    t. problems of sight
    u. itches, skin changes , changed colour, spots, blisters, rash etc.
    v. other

## 14. Because of unpleasant feelings from this substance, did you ever look for medical attention? *(Random OFF)* (OPTIONAL)

    a. Yes
    b. No

**15. About the New Psychoactive Substance you, used last time (*list the name* he*/she*provided) do you consider having enough information on the following aspects?** *(Random OFF)*

|  | yes | rather yes | rather no | No |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **15.1 On their legality or illegality** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **15.2 On their effects** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **15.3 On their risks to health** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **15.4 On the doses to take to get the required effect** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **15.5 On the safe dose to take** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **15.6 On the routes of administration** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**16. What are the most important reasons that make you use the substance you used last time (*list the name* he*/she provided*)? Please specify their importance for you** *(Random OFF)*

|  | Not important | Rather important | Very important | Adding remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **16.1 The use was not forbidden** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.2 It was easy to get for me** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.3 It is difficult to detect during tests (urinary and saliva tests)** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.4 I had the opportunity (through friends, etc.)** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.5 Just for my personal curiosity** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.6 I like the effects (used it before)** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.7 .It is less harmful** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.8 It is of better quality (much pure, less cutting agent)** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.9 Is not so much addictive** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |
| **16.10 The effects are strong** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | |

## B – Mode of purchase

17. **Thinking about the substance which you selected, how did you get it the last time?** *(Random OFF)*

   a.  been given it by someone for free
   b.  bought from a friend who is not a dealer
   c.  bought it from a dealer
   d.  bought it from a shop online
   e.  bought it from a classified ad online
   f.  bought it from a shop (not online)
   g.  I made it myself
   h.  other _____

### WE ARE NOW GOING TO TALK ABOUT PURCHASING NPS ON THE INTERNET

18. **During the last 12 months, how many times have you ordered any new psychoactive substance from an online shop?** *(Random OFF)*

   a.  None (go to q26)
   b.  One time
   c.  2-5 times
   d.  to 10 times
   e.  11 to 20 times
   f.  More than 20 times

19. **During the last online order, how much have you spent? (OPTIONAL)**

   ✎ _____ €

20. **During the last online order, how many different New Psychoactive Substance have you bought?** *(Random OFF)*

   a.  1
   b.  2 to 5
   c.  More then 5

21. **How much did you get for your money during your last online order (please fill in only one row for each form you purchased)?** *(Random OFF)* **(OPTIONAL)**

| Substance quantity | Substance form |
|---|---|
|  |  |

| | |
|---|---|
| 21.1 ✎ ..................... | ❑ g (only for powder) |
| 21.2 ✎ ..................... | ❑ pcs (capsule) |
| 21.3 ✎ ..................... | ❑ pcs (pill / tablet) |
| 21.4 ✎ ..................... | ❑ ml (only for liquid) |
| 21.5 ✎ ..................... | ❑ pcs (parts of blotter) |

**22. During the last 12 months, on which website did you order New Psychoactive Substance? (*several answers are possible*) *(Random OFF)***
When they tick one line, the second part of the line appears

| | | 1 time | 2-5 times | 6-10 times | >10 times |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **22.1 shops where New Psychoactive Substance are presented with branded names (Spice, Volcano, Dove, NRG-3 etc.) or as incense, fertilizer, cleaning agent, which sell mainly seeds, plants, accessories, natural products.** | ❑ | 1 time ❑ | 2-5 times ❑ | 6-10 times ❑ | >10 times ❑ |
| **2.2 shop where New Psychoactive Substance are mainly presented with their chemical name (alphaPVP, 5-IT, 25C-NBOME, etc.), with sober design** | ❑ | 1 time ❑ | 2-5 times ❑ | 6-10 times ❑ | >10 times ❑ |
| **2.3 Classified ads** | ❑ | 1 time ❑ | 2-5 times ❑ | 6-10 times ❑ | >10 times ❑ |
| **22.4 Silk Road and similar** | ❑ | 1 time ❑ | 2-5 times ❑ | 6-10 times ❑ | >10 times ❑ |
| **22.5 Other type of shop, please specify:** ✎ _____ | ❑ | 1 time ❑ | 2-5 times ❑ | 6-10 times ❑ | >10 times ❑ |

no obligation to answer

**23. Can you list the name of the shops at which you bought during last 12 months?**
*(Random OFF*

a.    Please write the name(s): ✎ ...................................................

b. I don´t remember the name of the shop  (go to 25)

c.    I don´t want to answer this question (go to 25)

24. **Which were the most important criteria for you when you selected the shops in the last 12 months? (*no more than 5*)**
       Randomized ranking.

   a.     I followed the advice of other users
   b.     I had a good experience with the shop already
   c.     Its use the site of a Secure payment method
   d.     Good profile at pages where client share their experience (fe.; SafeOrScam)
   e.     It is specialized into one substance
   f.     this was cheaper than other online shops
   g.     The New Psychoactive Substance are of better quality than other online shops
   h.     The New Psychoactive Substance are shipped in discrete packets
   i.     The shipment was more reliable than other sites
   j.     The New Psychoactive Substance I was looking for was not available in other online shops
   k.     No o online shop sends to my country the New Psychoactive Substance I was looking for
   l.     No specific criterion
   m. Other✎_____

25. **During the last 12 months, on how many different online shops have you ordered?** *(Random OFF)*

   a.       1
   b.      2 to 5
   c.       5 to 10
   d.      More then 10

## C – Information

## We are now going to talk about your information about the NPS

26. **Where did you look for information about New Psychoactive Substance? (*several answers are possible*)** Randomized ranking.

   a. from an online shop
   b. from a web forum If selected, the following answers are displayed
   French speaking          English speaking          Polish     Czech speaking

   Other✎_____
   c. from friends / family / acquaintances
   d. I don't need any information
   e.     from my dealer
   f. from TV/radio
   g. from newspapers, magazines
   h. i don't have any information
   i. Other

**27. Can you list the name of the forums at which you look most often for information during last 12 months?** *(Random OFF)* **(OPTIONAL)**

    a.    Most often (if there is such a forums for you): ✎ ...................................................
    b.    I don´t remember the name of the forums
    c.    I don´t want to answer this question

**28. Do you agree with the following statements** *(Random OFF)*

|  | a. Yes, it's true for most of them | b. Yes, it's true for a few of them | c. No, it's not true | d. adding comments | I don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **28.1 New Psychoactive Substance are less harmful than illicit substances** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **28.2 New Psychoactive Substance are of better quality than illicit substances (much pure, less cutting agent)** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **28.3 New Psychoactive Substance are less addictive than other illicit drugs** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **28.4 The effects of New Psychoactive Substance are stronger than other illicit drugs** | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## D – Demographics

## We would like to know a bit more about you

**29. What is your highest academic education attained?** *(Random OFF)*

Each country should use its our scale according to their educational system. For comparison we can recode this into the years of education.

**30. Currently, what is your position on the labour market? (Please select \*only one\* from the following options. If more than one option applies to you, please select the one you consider as the most important)** *(Random OFF)*

    a.    Employed
    b.    Self-employed (licence holder, businessperson)
    c.    Employed and self-employed in parallel
    d.    Retired
    e.    Working retired
    f.    Retired due to disability g.    Student (high school)
    h.    Student (university)
    i.    On maternity or parental leave
    j.    Unemployed – registered at the Job´s Office
    k.    Unemployed – not registered at the Job´s Office

    l.    Other, please specify: ✎ _____

**31. How would you describe your place of residence?** *(Random OFF)*

        a. A large city (>50,000 inhabitants) or its close suburb (less than 30 minutes transport)
        b. A small or medium city of around 5,000 to 50,000 inhabitants
        c. A village (<5,000 inhabitants) far from a large city (more than 30 minutes transport)

**32. (FR) currently, where do you live?** *(Random OFF)* **(OPTIONAL)**
simplechoice

        a. At home (personal flat or house, flatshare…)
        b. At my parents home
        c. Accommodation in an institution
        d. Mobile home, squat, streets
        e. Other _____

**33. (FR) Currently, you live with :** *(Random OFF)* **(OPTIONAL)**
        b. Alone (with or without children)
        c. In couple
        d. With friend(s)
        e. With your parents (one or two)

**34. What are your income from all resources available to you monthly (including income, allowances, etc.)?** *(Random OFF)*

        a.    Less than 400 €
        b. Between 400 and 800 €
        c.    Between 800 and 1,500 €
        d. Between 1,500 and 2,500 €
        e.    More than 2,500 €
        f.    Other ✎ _____

**35. (FR) Do you have sexual relationship with** *(Random OFF)* **(OPTIONAL)**

        a. Men
        b. Women
        c. Both

**36. According to your opinion, how the New Psychoactive Substance market should be prohibited? Regulated? By who?** *Randomized ranking.* **(OPTIONAL)**

        a. No regulation
        b. Vendors shall regulate themselves
        c. Market shall be regulated by customer reviews, like e-bay d. Consumer safety legislation, like for food or supplements
        e. Medicines legislation, for instance like for pain medication
        f. Similarly to tobacco and alcohol
        g. Through criminal law – they shall be banned

        h. Other: ✎ _____

37. **Would you like to leave a comment about the survey or about the new psychoactive substances in general?**

✎......................................................................................

......................................................................................

......................................................................................

......................................................................................

# Annex 2. A list of selected companies offering services in the field of online survey

www.fluidsurveys.com

www.questionpro.com

www.surveygizmo.com

www.zoomerang.com

www.checkbox.com

www.chumpsoft.com

www.confirmit.com

www.inquisite.com

www.limesurvey.org

www.project-redcap.org

www.hostedsurvey.com

www.instantsurvey.com

www.mineful.com

www.surveymethods.com

www.surveygalaxy.com

www.createsurvey.com

www.createsurvey.com

www.keysurvey.com

www.questionpro.com

www.qualtrics.com

www.vovici.com www.zipsurvey.com

www.zoomerang.com