

Project Title: Animate: Anti-Doping Intervention in promotion clean sports behaviours

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Tier: 2

The use of Performance Enhancing Drugs (PEDs) or methods to improve sports performance is a pervasive phenomenon, involving also young athletes. It is well known that doping can have significant negative health consequences for athletes and contributes to an undesirable image of the sport in society. To understand the reasons why athletes intentionally use banned substances or methods, antidoping research has focused on socio-cognitive factors in predicting doping behavior. However, very little is known about resources that may promote positive anti-doping outcomes in young athletes. In recent years, antidoping research shift the focus from understanding what drives some athletes to dope, to concentrating on how "clean athletes" behave. An emerging theme in anti-doping education programs is based on the assumption that with proper intervention athletes can adopt clean sports behaviors. The most recent anti-doping literature shows that personal values linked to 'clean athlete identity' are among the strongest protective factors. This new theme emphasizes the need for sport and anti-doping organizations to develop interventions that effectively support a prevention paradigm, targeting precisely the variables that can foster and support clean sports behaviors.

Furthermore, given the spread of the use of technology among the young, and the recent adoption of new forms of technology-driven education, also – but not only - because of the last pandemic event, there is also an opportunity in engaging athletes using new technological-driven antidoping interventions. Using new forms of digital education (e.g., e-learning and Serious Game), we can simulate real-life situations supporting the decision-making process and educating users on how it is possible to optimize their decisions. These tools provide representations of real-life conditions to modify attitudes and behaviors in different contexts, such as the field of health, education, and training.

In line with the above, the overall aim of the present project is to investigate psychological factors that may predict clean sports behaviors by developing, implementing, and evaluating Digital Learning Objects that focus on socio-cognitive variables and values targeting young athletes. In order to summarize the aims and research questions of our project, we could define three specific objectives. First, to develop, implement, and evaluate a novel digital anti-doping intervention targeting psychological mechanisms (e.g., motivational, and socio-cognitive variables) in predicting and promoting clean sport behaviors in young track and field athletes. Second, to examine whether a digital intervention would be as effective as its face-to-face version. Thirdly, to examine whether the digital intervention is equally effective in two countries (i.e. Italy and France).

Given the dearth of cross-cultural anti-doping research, the proposed project involves a European organization of sports federations active in different Anti-Doping programs (i.e., ADAE), and two ADOs (i.e., Italian and French, as partners and endorser respectively). We believe that the usability of the digital tools might contribute to standardizing and spread easily the educational anti-doping programs.