An analysis of the changing faces of cannabis consumption demographics as marijuana goes mainstream

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Abstract

Popular culture has traditionally tended to paint a skewed image of the average marijuana user. The typical cannabis consumer – we've been led to believe by media imagery – is invariably a lazy, unmotivated millennial, often black, and typically living paycheck-to-paycheck. As cannabis becomes legalized and regulated across the nation, along with the implementation of seed-to-sale systems that track some consumer behavior at the point-of–sale, more information has become available to shed light on cannabis consumer behavior to help lawmakers and businesses make better informed decisions. What is so far resulting is a portrait of the cannabis industry retail landscape looking an awful lot like the same as the landscape for other retail generally.

Popular culture has traditionally tended to paint a skewed image of the average marijuana user. The typical cannabis consumer —- we've been led to believe by media imagery —- is invariably a lazy, unmotivated millennial stoner, usually with a limited vocabulary and wearing tie-dye shirts. *Almost always. (Wall et al., 2011)*

As policy shifts continue to move marijuana use into the mainstream, however, the caricature of the 'lazy pothead' may not hold up to growing reality reflected in self-reported data and point-of-sale consumer behavior. (7)

Here's a look at seven interesting data points from market research and consumer behavior reports in the last two years that look only at cannabis use in states where its consumption and purchase has been fully legalized for recreational use. Together, they paint a picture of cannabis as not merely the habit of the kids anymore.

1. Cannabis consumers tend to earn and build financial equity at roughly the same rate as the general population

In a 2017 survey of more than 3,000 residents from the Greater Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area, Seattle-based think-tank Consumer Research Around Cannabis found that while cannabis consumers trailed the overall market as a whole *slightly* in terms of net worth, the difference didn't amount to a statistically-significant finding to support popular assumptions that cannabis consumption is dominated by lower-income earners. (201)

Cannabis consumer wealth vs. overall market wealth

Data from a 2017 survey of the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area shows that, when it comes to income and home values, cannabis users differ very little from the overall market average.
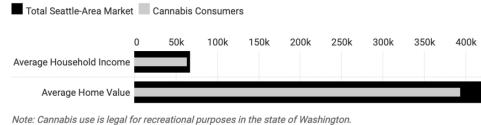
■ Total Seattle-Area Market ▢ Cannabis Consumers

Note: Cannabis use is legal for recreational purposes in the state of Washington.
Chart: CARL V. LEWIS • Source: Consumer Research Around Cannabis

Figure 1: In the chart above, which represents results from a survey of more than 3,000 residents, cannabis consumers reported having nearly the same overall wealth as non-cannabis users.

With average home values just below $400K, the data suggests that cannabis users overall reflect roughly the same financial status as the general population.

2. Cannabis consumers differ little from general population in terms of family, lifestyle choices

Striking a bow to the misconception that cannabis use is limited mainly to young people without families, the same CRAC survey found an only marginal gap between cannabis consumers and the population at large in terms of home ownership and marriage rates.

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