

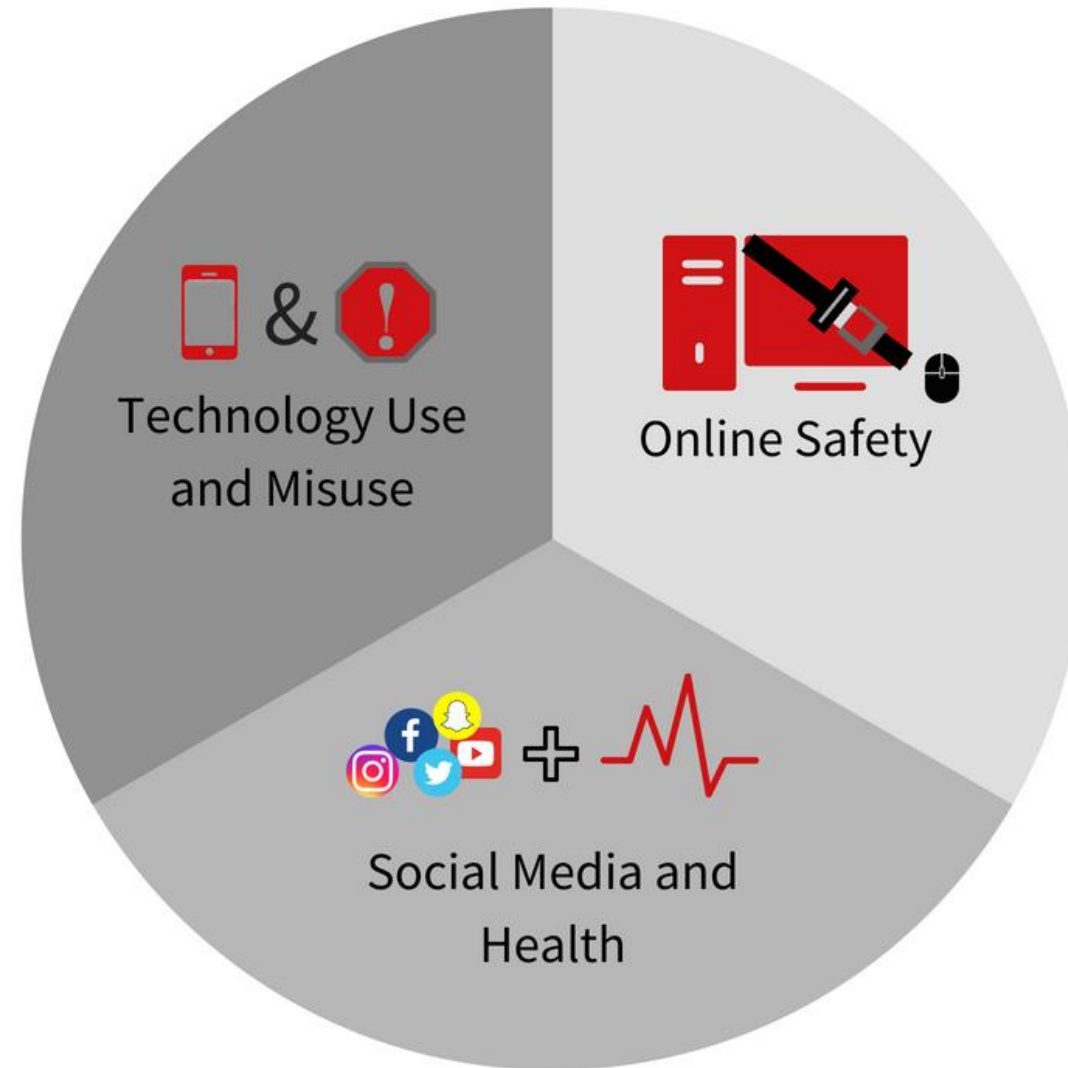
ETHNOGRAPHY OF CANNABIS MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Objectives

- To provide context on the current state of recreational cannabis legislation
 - *Online advertising regulations & social media promotion*
- To describe our novel ethnographic approach to studying retail cannabis promotions on social media
 - *Background of project & study objectives*
 - *Definition of ethnography*
 - *Past research using ethnography on social media and substance use*
 - *Key elements of the study design*
 - *How our approach was unique*
- To report findings of our study
- To suggest implications and recommendations for substance use prevention among youth

POLICY OVERVIEW

Recreational cannabis legislation

Cannabis advertising laws

Cannabis promotion on social media

Recreational Cannabis Legalization

- As of now, 11 states and Washington D.C. have legalized cannabis for non-medical use
 - *7 have active retail markets*
- Most major social media platforms prohibit the direct advertising of cannabis, because the federal government's Controlled Substances Act lists it as a Schedule 1 substance with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse
- Cannabis businesses may create business pages that social media users can follow and interact with
 - *This is a primary form of retail cannabis marketing referred to as cannabis promotion on social media*

Summary of Cannabis Advertising Laws (CO, WA, OR, AK)

- Advertisements cannot contain information that is false or misleading
- Advertisements cannot depict a person under the age of 21 consuming cannabis
- Advertisements cannot include a character or toy that appeals to people under the age of 21, along with celebrities or words that refer to products commonly associated with minors
- No encouragement of excessive consumption
- No claims of curative or therapeutic effects
- No giveaways, coupons, and promotional activities that encourage the sale of cannabis
- No online marketing unless less than 30% of the audience is under the age of 21
- Advertisements must contain disclaimers/warnings

Cannabis Advertising Laws (continued)

- Important to note ad laws vary by state, are constantly changing, and difficult to enforce
- Washington has the most comprehensive ad law policy, with other state policies based on this
- Differences by state include:
 - *Alaska ad laws were temporarily repealed in 2018, now in effect*
 - *Colorado ad laws are the least stringent- allow for excessive consumption, curative or therapeutic effects, depiction of marijuana consumption, giveaways and promotions, disclaimers, use of celebrities*
 - *Oregon ad laws prohibit use of celebrities, images of minors, or words that refer to products commonly associated with minors, attribution of human characteristics to animals, plants or other objects, attribution of unnatural human abilities*
 - *Washington ad laws removed social media specific language in 2016*

AK: <https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/Portals/9/pub/MCB/StatutesAndRegulations/MarijuanaRegulations.pdf>

CO: www.Colorado.gov

OR: <https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/displayDivisionRules.action?selectedDivision=3873>

WA: Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board lcb.wa.gov

Cannabis Promotion on Social Media

- Many cannabis companies are promoting through social media due to stricter laws prohibiting more traditional types of marketing that may be easily viewable to youth (ex. TV, radio)
- Social media sites have become stricter about regulating content, specifically regarding illegal and unethical behavior
- Cannabis companies are not allowed to directly sell products online, yet many still post prices and sales to attract consumers
 - *Many cannabis social media accounts get deactivated and reactivated*
- It is unclear whether social media promotions are required to follow advertising laws, so this may provide a loophole for cannabis businesses to avoid restrictions

BACKGROUND

Background of project & study objectives



Adolescent Social Media Use

- The majority of 13 to 17 year-olds (97%) use at least one of 7 major social media platforms; 71% use 2 or more
- Most popular sites are YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%), and Snapchat (69%)
- Almost half (45%) are online almost constantly

Social Media Use & Adolescent Health

- Social media use among adolescents has been positively linked with identity development, social support, peer relationships, and self-disclosure
- Adversely, social media use has been associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes in adolescents
 - *These include decreased sleep, depression, social anxiety, self-esteem, cyberbullying, problems at school, and exposure to developmentally inappropriate content*

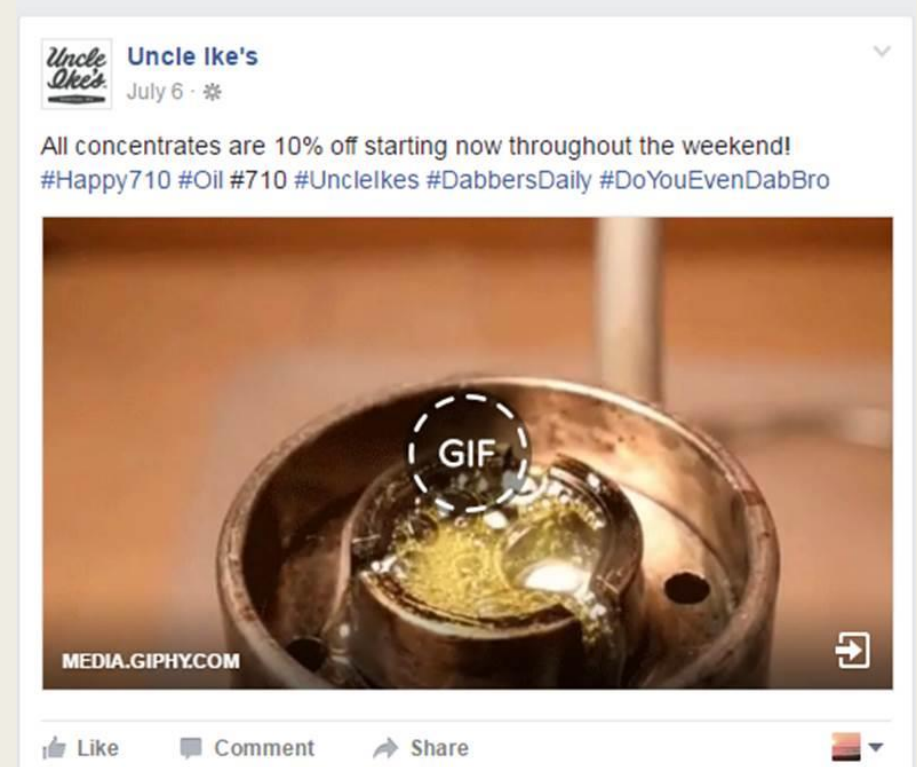
Previous Study Objectives

- **Aim 1:** To conduct a content analysis of recreational cannabis business social media promotions in Washington State
- **Aim 2:** To understand youth perspectives on cannabis social media promotions through focus groups
- **Aim 3:** Intended to inform the subsequent larger study



Content Analysis

- **Definition:** Content analysis is a way to **systematically** describe written or visual communication.
 - *Categories are defined before analysis based on theory and previous research findings*



Content Analysis: Example



greenleafak • Follow
Green Leaf Sitka

greenleafak You know you want this....
#orangeberrycush #fridayniight #greenleafak #dispensary

20 likes
OCTOBER 21, 2017

C21
June 30, 2017 · 🌐

Smoking hash with our, very own, Jeremiah! He's kind of our extract genius and chief!

We've got the Green Barn Farms - A Cannabis Farmers' Co-op hash he smoked in this video here in the shop now! Be sure to give it a try!!!

#recreationalrelaxation

YOUTUBE.COM
Cannabis 21 Presents: How to Smoke Hash Like a Budtender with Jeremiah
Jeremiah (IG @thegreatganjagod) has taken the time to show us how to smoke hash without any herb...



denverkushclub • Follow
Denver, Colorado

denverkushclub Tomorrow is edible Tuesday! All edibles/topicals are 20% off 🍪 Sweet Grass will also be here 4pm-7pm offering exclusive deals on their delicious products!

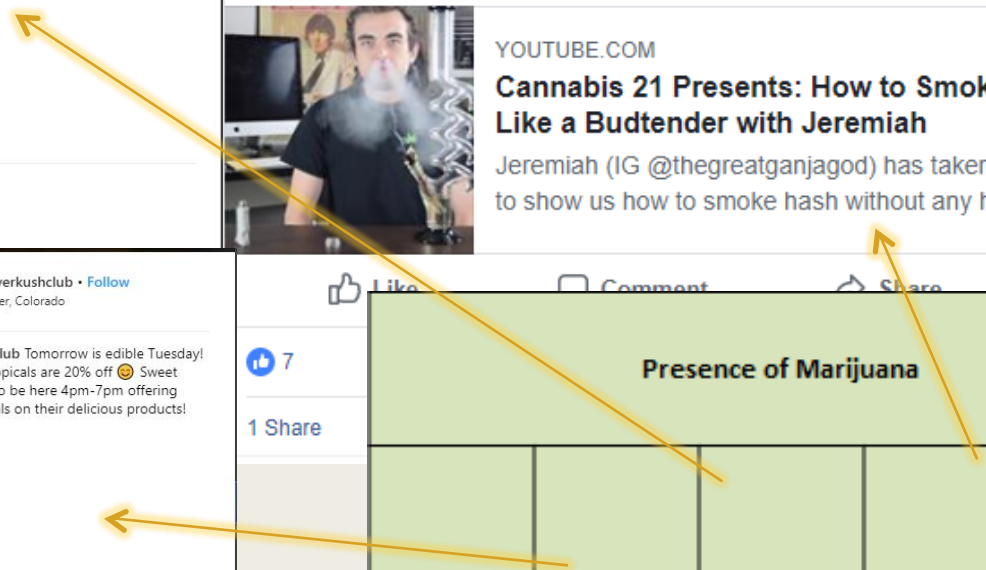
26 likes
OCTOBER 23, 2017

Add a comment...

Like Comment Share

7
1 Share

Presence of Marijuana				
Main Advertised Product	Sweets	Image of MJ product	Use of MJ product	Lists price?



Previous Study

- Themes informed by literature of youth-targeted advertising of tobacco and alcohol, also various theories
 - *“Lifestyle Appeal” Category (Hong et al.)*
 - Outdoorsy, glamorous, techie, alternative, etc.
 - *“Non-MJ Recreational Activities” Category (Nicholls)*
 - *“Target Audience” Category (Social-Cognitive Theory)*
 - Female, LGBTQ, dog owners, etc.
- We also noticed a theme of a culture around cannabis, identification with a community of cannabis users, and emphasis on habitual use
- These coding tactics were hard to define and use; **overall unsuccessful**

Previous Study (continued)

- We noticed content that could be appealing to youth which would not be considered youth appeal content under the advertising policies
 - *Sweets*
 - *Pop culture*
- Focus groups highlighted some themes that could not be identified using content analysis
 - *Normalization of cannabis*
 - *Tone*
- We needed a new strategy to capture these themes...


Current Study: Background & Context

- **NEW POLICY:** As of 2016, 7 states had legalized recreational cannabis
- **VARIATION IN AD LAWS:** Online advertising laws varied greatly by state, with laws being virtually non-existent in some states
- **SOCIAL NETWORKING GROWTH:** User engagement and youth presence on Instagram is increasing, presenting new and unique platform for promotions
- **NEEDED:** Exploration of differences in social media promotions and youth perspectives between states




Current Study: Objectives

- **Aim 1:** To determine the reach of cannabis promotions and advertisements among adolescents in states with active legal cannabis markets
- **Aim 2:** To conduct a theory-driven content analysis of recreational cannabis social media promotions in Washington, Colorado, Oregon, and Alaska
 - *Ethnography*

 **Canuvo**
September 19 at 11:53am · 🌐

The TODAY show recently covered a story on 'Marijuana Moms,' mothers who say that smoking cannabis helps them to be better parents. In the below article, you'll learn about a group of cannabis activists including Kaycee Bawdon who "is out to show that smoking marijuana while taking care of children is perfectly acceptable. [...] Bawdon, 30, and her friends believe marijuana helps treat pain and depression and also helps them relax and boosts their productivity."

"I feel like ... [See More](#)



'Marijuana moms' say smoking pot makes them better parents

These moms aim to erase the stigma surrounding marijuana use while parenting children, saying it has made them better parents and more productive.

TODAY.COM

AIM 1: Survey

- Survey through Qualtrics with 900 adolescents ages 15-19 that live in a state where recreational cannabis has been legalized
- Variables of interest:
 - *Exposure to cannabis promotions and ads*
 - *Cannabis use behaviors*
 - *Media use*

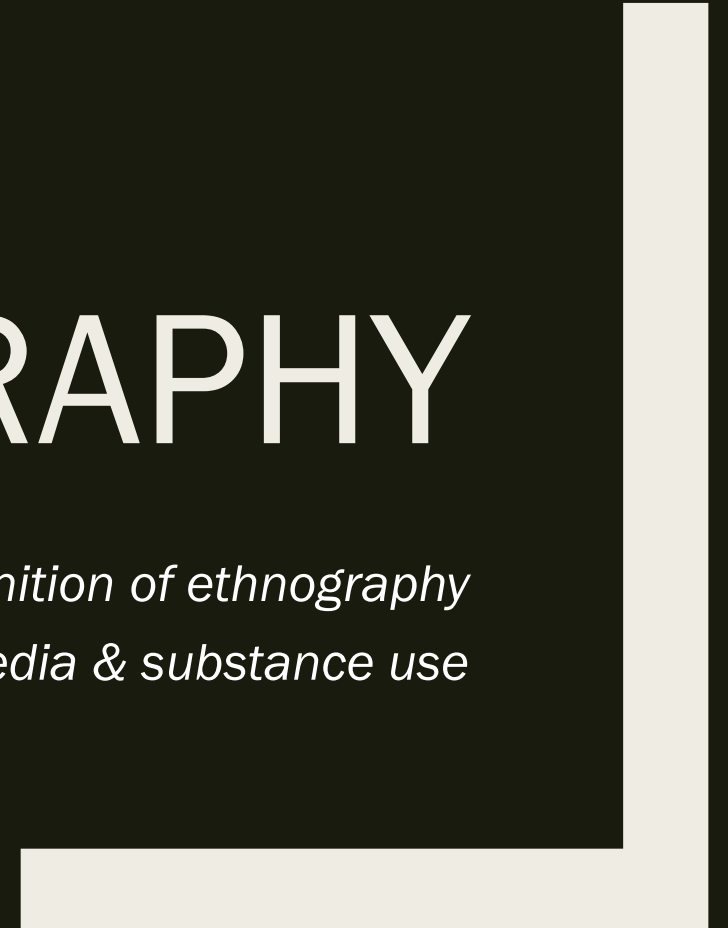
Survey Results

- 30% of youth reported using cannabis in the past 12 months, and 26.9% reported use in the past 28 days
 - *Consistent with large, national surveys*
- 94% of youth reported some form of exposure to cannabis marketing
- Roughly one in three youth engaged with cannabis promotions on social media
- Youth who engage with cannabis promotions and brands had higher odds of past-year cannabis use
- Odds of past-year cannabis use increased by 44% with each additional social media platform where adolescents reported exposure

ETHNOGRAPHY

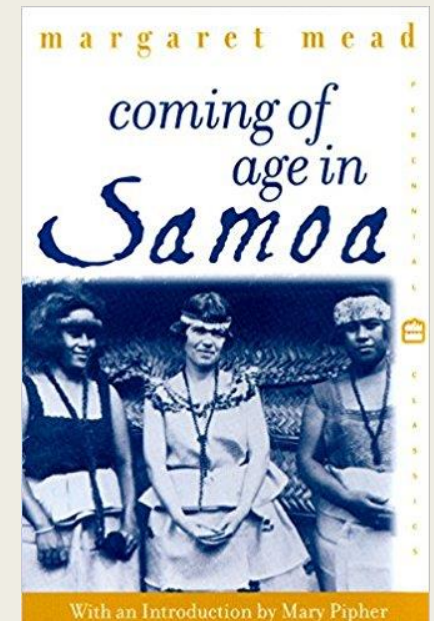
Definition of ethnography

Past research using ethnography to study social media & substance use



Ethnography Definition

- “An **ethnography** is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. ...As a process, ethnography involves prolonged observation of the group, typically through **participant observation** in which the researcher is **immersed** in the day-to-day lives of the people...The researcher studies the meanings of **behavior**, **language**, and interactions of the **culture-sharing group**.”
 - *Five Qualitative Traditions of Inquiry*
- Typically used in anthropological research
 - Famous example: *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead



Types of Participant Observation



Complete Observer

- *Detached observer*
- *Participants are unaware they are being observed*

Observer as Participant

- *The researcher has limited interaction with participants*
- *Participants recognize the goals of the researcher*

Participant as Observer

- *Researcher is fully engaged with participants*
- *Participants know they are being studied*

Complete Participant

- *Researcher is fully immersed in the culture they are observing*
- *Participants are unaware research is being conducted*



Ethnography on Social Media

- *Cyber-ethnography* is ethnography of technologically facilitated interactions, where individuals are considered to be co-located in an online space
- Typical examples focus on bridging online and offline experiences of people on social media
 - Following individuals' activities
- Some use *multisite ethnography* to follow individuals across places (e.g. websites) to capture the interconnectedness of the internet
- Unique from traditional ethnography, which rely on interviews or participant observation in-person, and reconfigures social media as the fieldwork environment
 - *Social media as the research site*

“Social Media Ethnography: The digital researcher in a messy web”

- Looked at “how, why and with what consequences activists use social media”
 - *They found that this question could not be answered by typical, more quantitative methods of analyzing social media content*
- Researchers interacted with participants both online and offline to make connections “between online and locality-based realities”
 - *“...it enabled us to follow ethnographically the (dis)continuities between the experienced realities of face-to-face and social media movement and socialities.”*
- This is a departure from earlier approaches to internet ethnography which took place solely online and was considered “lurking” instead of interacting with the social media, but using online and offline interactions is now common practice

“Intoxigenic digital spaces? Youth, social networking sites and alcohol marketing”

- Researchers observed peer-to-peer interactions on a popular social networking site to evaluate discussions and views of alcohol marketing
 - *Participants contributions to social media sites were collected and became ethnographic data that were analyzed as text*
- The study found that youth use the social networking sites to create social identities and digital spaces toward normalizing alcohol consumption
- This study is an example of **complete observer cyber-ethnography**, or “lurking,” where researchers did not interact with participants online and ethnography was conducted solely online

Ethnography on Adolescent Substance Use

- Limited research exists but typical design includes:
 - *Key informant and intercept interviews*
 - Qualitative, in-depth interviews with community members
 - Conducted in the moment during field observation to reach residents in their ‘lived spaces’
 - *Participant observation*
 - *Virtual and sensory ethnography (visual anthropology)*
 - “Use of multisensory-experiential data, including vision, taste, hearing, smell, and touch” (1)
 - *Ethnographic mapping/geo-mapping*
 - Helps to visualize the layout of social networks and concepts, including social identities (2)

Nakamura, 2013, “Making Sense of Sensory Ethnography: The Sensual and the Multisensory,” p. 133

Edberg, M., Cleary, S., Simmons, L., Cubilla-Batista, I., Andrade, E., & Gudger, G., 2015, Defining the “Community”: Applying Ethnographic Methods for a Latino Immigrant Health Intervention”

“Ethnographies of youth drug use in Asia”

- Study examined youth motives and methods of substance use in 7 Asian countries across varying socio-economic backgrounds
- Ethnographies (participant observation, virtual and sensory) help to understand youth’s lived experiences and how they change over time, including the living conditions and lifestyles in which drugs often play key roles
 - *Participant observation allows for building relationships with participants over time to gain their trust- helpful as youth are not always honest about their substance use and may be fearful of retaliation from the police in societies that criminalize drug use*
 - “The trust I gained from informants was shown in their willingness to divulge information that was both highly personal and, for the most part, illegal” (p. 750)

“Ethnographies of youth drug use in Asia” (continued)

- Study revealed the social relations surrounding drug use, including how the ‘lived effects’ of drugs are generated, how knowledge of specific drugs travels through youth networks, and how drug use is mediated by social media and the Internet
- Important findings included youth reasons for drug use:
 - *Outcome expectations- happiness, escape and forget*
 - *Friend norms- bond with friends, gain status among peers, methods of drug use*
 - Study found that youth were making logical, informed decisions regarding their substance use
 - Pain is viewed as a positive sign of drug efficacy
- Researchers advocate for harm reduction programs

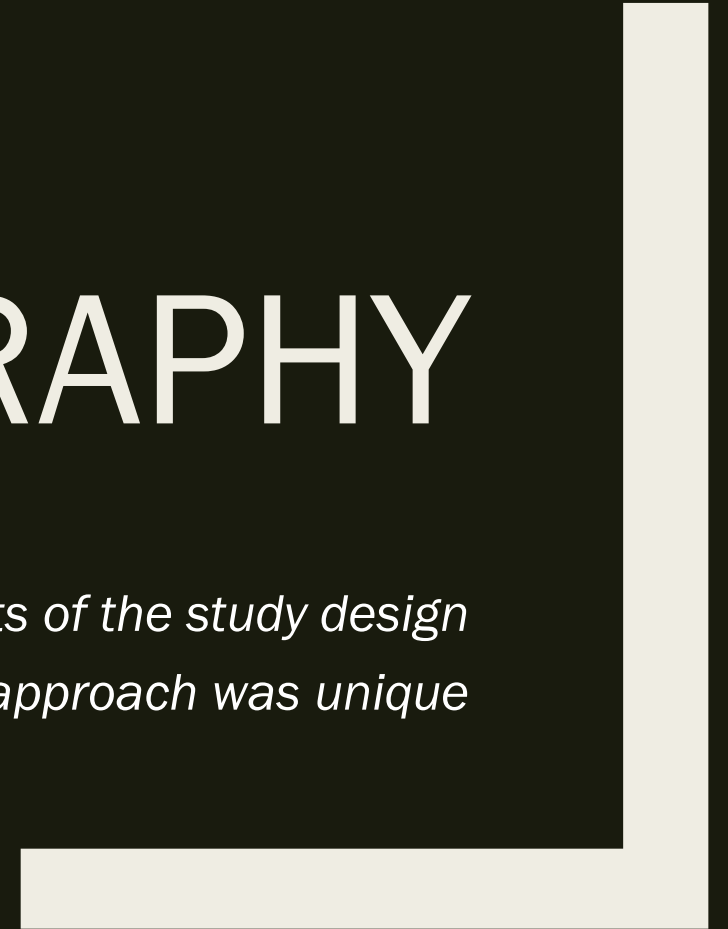
Gap in the literature

- Limited research exists looking at adolescent substance use using ethnography
- Social media ethnography has previously focused on interactions with social media, rather than primarily analyzing online content
 - *Since cannabis use is illegal for adolescents, ethical implications for research require a unique approach*
- Ethnography has not been previously used to assess the relationship between social media and drug use in adolescents

ETHNOGRAPHY

Key elements of the study design

How our approach was unique



Methodology

- Our goal was: To identify ways cannabis businesses cultivate an online presence and exert influence that may reach youth
- We utilized a **multisite, cyber-ethnography** approach to analyze content on retail cannabis Facebook and Instagram pages
 - *Only focused on online content, rather than bridging online and offline experiences, since that was not relevant for cannabis businesses*
- We used Carspecken's five stages of qualitative research
- We looked at posts from 14 businesses across 4 states over a 1 year period

Stage 1 – Compiling the Primary Record

- **Description:** This step is comprised mainly of fieldwork by observers and recording of field notes
- Ideally, ethnography should begin with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance, and the researcher then builds a “thick description” by unobtrusively observing social practices that may occur routinely
- The goal is to avoid biases or preconceived notions of the culture being observed

Spradley, J. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Hardcastle, M., et al. (2006). Carspecken’s Five-Stage Critical Qualitative Research Method: An Application to Nursing Research. *Qualitative Health Research*. 16, 151-161.

Stage 1 – Compiling the Primary Record

- Each ethnography consisted of **6 months of content on one business** social media page, either on Facebook or Instagram
 - *About 3 weeks*
- An ethnography of the business page was due at the end of each assignment, after the researcher had been sufficiently exposed to and immersed in the pages content



Prompts

- What main *themes* did you notice from this business's posts? (~100 words)
- What do you feel are the main *values* of this business after coding their posts? (~100 words)
- Please describe a *typical customer* that you think this business is targeting or trying to appeal to with these advertisements. (~100 words)
- Anything else you think is pertinent about this business's posts? (tone, trends, etc.)

Example ethnography

- Please describe a *typical customer* that you think this business is targeting or trying to appeal to with these advertisements. (~100 words)
 - *“The majority of posts appeal to a regular user who is educated and well-informed by promoting a variety of consumption methods, discussion of different product strains and keeping up with the latest marijuana news, discussion around legalization, research articles and a marijuana convention. Posts target consumers who care about buying locally and being involved in their local community. Many posts reference living the Pacific Northwest lifestyle- for example ‘Love this PNW life’ and may be trying to appeal to consumers who follow a healthy lifestyle and care about wellness (for example, references to healthy eating, gluten-free, veganism, and yoga). Other posts target consumers who may be interested in specific hobbies such as cooking and music.”*

Stage 2 – Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis

- **Description:** Analysis and review of the data that has been compiled
- This step also involves reflection on the cultural context and site of observation, including relations between participants
- During this stage, initial impressions of themes are documented and areas are identified that may need further exploration in proceeding stages

Stage 2 – Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis

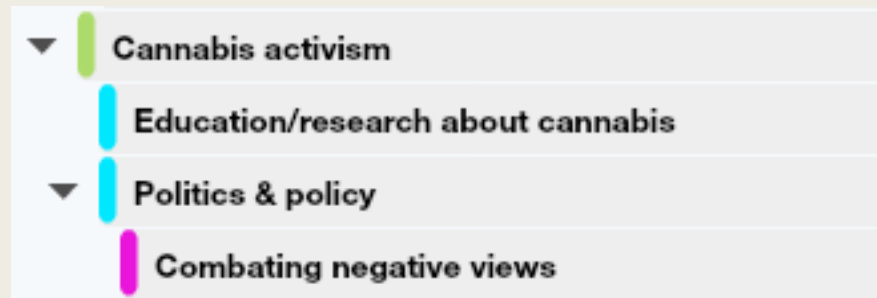
- **2 researchers** completed an ethnography for **each** social media page
- **4 total researchers** completed an ethnography for each businesses content on both Facebook and Instagram
 - *This helps to eliminate bias (triangulation)*
 - *This is somewhat alternative to reconstructive analysis*
- After data collection, we had a debriefing meeting with all researchers to discuss the experience and initial thoughts on larger themes
 - *This allowed us to look at the big picture before going into detailed data analysis*
 - *A list was compiled of initial themes*

Stage 3 – Dialogical Data Generation

- **Description:** Engagement in a dialogical approach to gain an insider's position with respect to culture
- Unique from stages 1 and 2, which involved solely an outsider perspective
- This step also involves making connections between data points and checking the data against themes identified in earlier steps

Stage 3 – Dialogical Data Generation

- This was a multi-site study following individual cannabis business profiles across Facebook and Instagram
 - *Analysis was not done separately, but we captured a more holistic picture of the businesses interaction with social media*
- Three researchers read through all field notes and constructed initial lists of themes individually



Stage 4 – Describing System Relations

- **Description:** During this stage, themes are extracted from the data, giving evidence to support these themes from the primary data
- A full description of the documented relationships and typical events is developed
- Reflexivity is also involved in this stage, where researchers reflect on their own biases and assumptions to prevent them from influencing the study

Stage 4 – Describing System Relations

- **Dedoose**, a qualitative analysis software, was used to extract themes from the compiled text
 - *Three researchers came to consensus on an initial list of themes, informed by experiences discussed with the group and responses to the text*
 - *Themes were applied to compiled text for each cannabis business*

Dedoose

Document: C21 Facebook & Instagram

C21 Facebook

This business is focused on brand loyalty and uses a variety of social media platforms to engage with consumers; website blog posts include recipes for infusing marijuana into cooking, Instagram photos feature aesthetically pleasing content with a theme of relaxation and stress relief, YouTube and Facebook Live videos feature store employees smoking and promote overconsumption. Links to outside blog posts emphasize legalization, health benefits of marijuana, and other related news. Store employees are frequently featured in posts, loyal users are targeted with a VIP program, and product giveaway/promotions frequently occur.

C21 supports other local businesses in their community and frequently promotes other businesses on their Facebook page in addition to participating in community events. For example, several posts encouraged customers to donate to a community food drive with the message, "Be good to one another."

The majority of posts appeal to a regular user who is educated and well-informed by promoting a variety of consumption methods, discussion of different product strains and keeping up with the latest marijuana news, discussion around legalization, research articles and a marijuana convention. Posts target consumers who care about buying locally and being involved in their local community. Many posts reference living the Pacific Northwest lifestyle- for example "Love this PNW life" and may be trying to appeal to consumers who follow a healthy lifestyle and care about wellness (for example, references to healthy eating, gluten-free, veganism, and yoga). Other posts target consumers who may be interested in specific hobbies such as cooking and music.

This business features many concerning posts that appeal to youth and some instances of using sex appeal to depict a glamorized lifestyle- one example post featured young-looking models in bikinis and advertised a giveaway trip to Hawaii. Other patterns include inserting marijuana imagery into non-marijuana images- example photos include the Statue of Liberty, babies, and cats smoking joints. Marijuana slang and hashtags are used frequently, especially #shoplocal and #recreationalrelaxation.

C21 Facebook

Large giveaways that require user engagement that require high engagement and spread of their content and page through sharing. Implying that you need cannabis. Focus on need for medical marijuana by patients. Focus on cannabis industry and economic growth from legalization. Talking a lot about progressive new cannabis trends and businesses. Often not a focus on specific products. Connecting cannabis to relaxation or events like music festivals or religious festivals. Asking questions to invite user engagement. Assuming that reader enjoys cannabis. Some posts don't mention cannabis directly at all. Implying that you need cannabis at certain times, e.g. Mondays. Don't rely on promoting products or discounts. Lots of pictures of nature and colorful shapes and groups of people connected to cannabis. Suggests involving cannabis in what you already do and it will be better. Created a "VIP" club to set up a direct line of contact to followers to send texts about deals and events. States that cannabis products can make your life easier. Suggests ignoring responsibilities to get high. Tying cannabis use to adventure and nature.

Discussing medical marijuana use in the workplace and comparing to traditional pharmaceuticals. Combatting negative cannabis views, and extrapolating/normalizing their views to all of Washington. Some posts not related to marijuana, just about store charity/ event involvement. Did not delete comments about ways to illegally transport cannabis across state lines. Often discussing laws about carrying cannabis, usually implying they do not support them. Suggests that MJ is a good gift for your loved ones. Spreading ideas about "stoner" normalization. Depicts cannabis as inspiring, thought-provoking, blissful, and creative. Supporting education about different aspects of cannabis. Supporting local artists. The only warning appears to be mocking warnings. Explicitly connecting specific times (the weekend) to getting high. They seem to have a strong community backing them and lots of user engagement. Supporting illegal cannabis growing and distribution.

Seems to be aimed at users often, especially heavy users and those who engage in "stoner culture" with a lot of hippy-vibe posts, and also those who care about what is happening in cannabis research, technology, and industry. Invites a lot of comments from followers about their use who are heavy users. Multiple instances of editing children's cartoons to include or reference cannabis (Spongebob, Garfield), which targets youth. Several references to older people using cannabis. Female-specific articles. Tips and information on how to use cannabis, so targeting new users/non users or encouraging people to try new, stronger methods (Dabbing 101). Posts imply their audience is mainly users and those who follow the business closely and engage with it from the local community. Don't seem to be trying to pull in new customers, not a lot of hashtags or promotions.

Very deep sort of tone, saying you will experience the world differently with cannabis. First-pers on perspective, personal tone from staff, talking about their smoking habits and smoking on live video and encouraging viewers to as well.

C21 Instagram

Main theme of this business on Instagram is the connection to community both on Instagram and external communities throughout Washington. This is done through regular posting about charity events held at the store, such as food drives or employees volunteering with a local non-profit. This theme also is seen through the use of many marijuana related hashtags in each post, such as #weedstagram, #cannabiscommunity, and #legalweed, all allowing the business's posts to then be more easily connected to these online communities and readily followed by users. Another theme of the business are regular deals on products and highlighting of marijuana companies and their products through deals advertised through the company's social media page.

The main values of the company include connection and active participation in the surrounding community, as well as cannabis communities. An additional value of the company includes offering regular deals to incentivize customers coming into their store. They also value the marijuana growing process and the opportunity to show customer their own process of growing and work by their employees. The business emphasizes displaying products sold in store through high quality images of the marijuana or marijuana product and often promotes their brand through merchandise seen in the photos as well.

Atypical customer of this business is likely somebody in their mid to late twenties based on the images of employees and others in photos used by the business. They seem to target those who use cannabis for relaxation rather than to simply get high. Atypical customer is somebody who knows marijuana and marijuana products enough to try a variety of items or want the newest and best product. The business promotes to this type of customer through language used in posting including calling certain weed "fire" and other marijuana slang.

Selection: (32-32)

Selection Info

- C21 Facebook & Instagram (...)
- Consumer engagement
- Brand loyalty
- Branding
- High marketing/branding
- Style

Codes

- Normalizing cannabis use
 - Pop culture
 - Lifestyle/hobby
 - Inserting marijuana into non-marijuana...
 - Time-specific
- Cannabis activism
 - Education/research about cannabis
 - Politics & policy
- Cannabis focus
 - Focus on specific products
 - General marijuana reference/imagery
 - Marijuana often not mentioned directly...
- Community-oriented
 - Acknowledging or thanking community...

Stage 5 – System Relations as Explained by Findings

- An important part of ethnographic research and the Carspecken framework is to create a narrative that describes the specific culture
 - *Our goal was: To identify ways cannabis businesses cultivate an online presence and exert influence that may reach youth*
- This analytic step aims to develop a **thick description** through the process of qualitative analysis
- Qualitative analysis data and immersive experience were reflected upon to determine the most important themes
- Narratives for major themes were constructed using our experience as observers, content analysis data and process, and all available collected data from researchers
 - *In this way, themes became interconnected to create a more cohesive picture*

RESULTS

What we learned



Theme- Normalizing Cannabis

- Direct vs. non-direct
 - Examples of **direct** include:
 - Changing stereotypes through combatting negative views
 - Community involvement
 - Cannabis research and education
 - Connections to popular culture
 - Increasing personal relevance by targeting specific demographics and hobbies



Normalizing Cannabis (continued)

- Direct vs. non-direct
 - Examples of **indirect** include:
 - Setting outcome expectations (health, happiness)
 - Inserting cannabis into non-cannabis images (memes)
 - Using popular hashtags (#girlscoutcookies)
 - Group identity (local community, inclusive language)



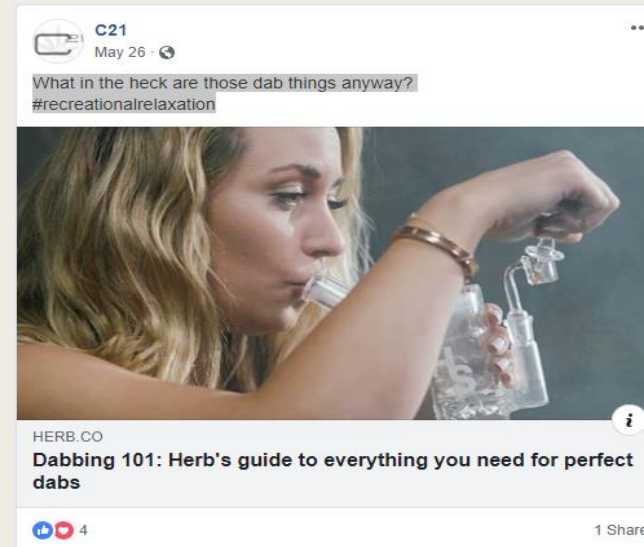
Theme- Targeting Current vs. New Users

- Current user targeting:

- Slang
- Reference to a cannabis community or lifestyle
- Presumptuous language around cannabis use

- Non-user targeting (new users):

- Tips
- Education
- Etiquette for cannabis use
- Vague or sparse references to cannabis



Results (continued)

- These themes go beyond what is included in current online cannabis marketing regulations, but include several elements that youth have reported as appealing or influential to them in a previous study
- Businesses posts included a variety of themes and target audiences, appealing to a broad overall audience instead of finding a niche
- Businesses attempted to tap into existing communities on social media and in their local communities, while also building a community uniting the cannabis industry and users

IMPLICATIONS

Where to go from here



Implications

■ Policymakers

- *In a digital context where more youth are spending time on social media, it is important for policymakers to consider additional restrictions for cannabis businesses who market their products through social media*
 - Blocking access to cannabis business pages for youth under age 21
 - Additional regulations for cannabis businesses marketing on social media
 - *Specific hashtags, images, and content may directly or indirectly appeal to youth and could lead youth to cannabis business pages*
 - Examples include: use of sweets, references to pop culture, memes and cartoons, youthful looking models and celebrities
 - Stricter enforcement of regulations
 - *Regulations differ widely across states- more uniform regulations could improve enforcement*
 - Given difficulties in regulating online content, there are recommendations to ban cannabis marketing from social media completely
 - Encourage industry to consider developmental concerns when introducing new social media that is marketed to adolescents
 - Fund programs that promote digital literacy in the classroom

Implications

- The cannabis industry is adapting based on changes in advertising policy due to legalization and increased public acceptance of cannabis
- Changing practices to be more acceptable publicly
 - *Themes of changing stereotypes, community involvement, cannabis research and education*
- Example post from one cannabis business:

The name change will allow us to present ourselves on a more universal level, connecting with the communities at large. Furthermore, as part of this exciting change, our logo has progressed to encompass a more unbiased feel. Being that we are part of an emerging industry that once was clouded in secrecy and taboo, we face many challenges; advertising is one of them. There are many regulations that we must adhere too, the name changes and new logo allows us to maneuver in these legal waters a bit easier.

Implications (continued)

■ Parents/Educators/Healthcare Professionals

- *It is important for those involved in substance prevention efforts to be familiar with online content that may be accessible to youth*
 - Healthcare professionals can help with increasing awareness of parent & youth social media use
 - Parents can help by asking children about their social media use & setting limits when appropriate
 - *Sites with a low barrier to entry (ex. Instagram and Facebook have 13 yr. old age requirement to join)*
 - *Parents can create their own social media profiles but be aware of privacy settings and youth having multiple profiles (public vs. private)*
 - *Potential positive and negative outcomes of using social media*
 - *Awareness & monitoring of youth substance use, including having conversations around the normalization of cannabis use as acceptance is increasing*
 - Educators can help by teaching digital literacy skills in the classroom setting

Future Studies

- There is still a lot to learn about different types of ethnography
- Future research could focus active participation ethnography
 - *Could interact with pages, or study those posting or interacting with posts*
 - *Researchers were only immersed for 3 weeks in our study, could have had one researcher follow the business longer*
 - *This passive participation limits the ability to establish rapport and immerse oneself in the field, the researcher's worldview may influence data collection and interpretation*
- More unique approaches are needed to assess adolescent substance use

QUESTIONS?

Thank you!

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