This Data Sheds a Revealing Light on Today’s Cannabis Consumers

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There’s no single description for cannabis consumers, but as a composite, they’re 30-something college graduates working full-time jobs. They’re committed to social justice and legal reform, they’re hungry for information, and they use cannabis primarily as a wellness tool.

Those findings, from a first-of-its-kind, 50-state study by Oasis Intelligence, mean to dispel some long-held myths about cannabis fans as hard-partying, aimless stoners with little social conscience.

While trying to change some outdated thinking, much of it left over from the ill-fated “war on drugs” and fueled by exaggerated characters in pop culture, researchers think the data gathered from 20,000 people could provide brands with valuable insights into the best ways to reach a dynamic and growing demographic.

“Cannabis consumers aren’t what they’ve been painted to be,” says Laura Albers, co-founder of Oasis Intelligence. “And the industry has a lot of promise. It’s been deemed an essential business during the Covid-19 crisis, and it has the opportunity to transform our economy. And legalization will continue to be a major issue, especially in an election year.”

The study, published Tuesday, was conducted in late 2019, before the public health crisis and the subsequent lockdown spurred a new green rush this spring. While prepping for another round of research this summer that will look at attitudes and behavior during the pandemic, Oasis execs call

the findings “the most comprehensive profile of the modern cannabis consumer to date.”

Co-founder Ben Woo says the work is an attempt to “provide meaningful numbers across states,” with the kind of consumer deep dive that’s common in packaged goods but previously unavailable for cannabis.

The research uncovered what cannabis consumers are buying—flower, edibles and, increasingly, THC-infused drinks—along with where they’re getting information (mostly from friends and family, but internet sources are important too) and how they feel about decriminalization (overwhelmingly in favor).

Here are some highlights of the study, which polled people in each U.S. state and Washington, D.C., meaning opinions came from states where there’s no legal cannabis sales along with those that allow recreational and medical sales.

A lifestyle product, a big pharma antidote

The Top 3 reasons cited for consuming cannabis are anxiety (51%), depression (44%) and insomnia (31%), with users saying they’re most attuned to brand values like “wellness,” “natural” and “relaxed.” 48% say they consume cannabis for wellness and medical reasons rather than recreational purposes, and 19% make no distinction between the two. Only about one in five say they use cannabis solely for recreational purposes.

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“If you look at the space five or 10 years ago, there were a bunch of brands that sounded like missiles and fighter jets, with names like TKO,” Woo says. “There’s been a big shift to more approachable brands. The industry didn’t invent the idea of wellness, but it’s leaned into the trend.”

Of those polled, 83% say they use cannabis weekly, 60% spend more than $50 a month on cannabis products and 38% spend more than $100.

Flower and edibles are the most popular forms of cannabis, while interest in infused beverages has doubled recently, with 17% of the survey's participants saying they use the products. Price was a key driver for 50% of consumers, and 46% bought directly from a dispensary.

Legal and equitable

The majority of people in the poll (79%) say they think cannabis should be legal everywhere, and the same number said cannabis should be more accepted in society. Only a small portion, 18%, still consider it a gateway drug, and most see the positives outweighing the negatives.

On a number of social issue questions, those in the survey ranked higher than the general public. For instance, 76% of cannabis consumers support programs that would erase felony records for cannabis crimes—and a recent Quinnipiac study found 63% of Americans agreed with such a move. According to the ACLU, Black people are four times more likely than whites to be arrested on cannabis charges, and in some areas of the U.S. those numbers double.

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