

Academic says the medical marijuana industry is using 'underhand' marketing strategies

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An academic from the University of York claims that some marijuana companies are using underhand marketing techniques to mislead

consumers about their products' medicinal benefits.

In a recent commentary, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, Theodore Caputi says [marijuana](#) marketers are intentionally promoting the results of weak and preliminary studies as evidence of [health benefits](#) before more robust studies are available.

By writing provocative articles on small-scale medical marijuana studies and disseminating them through online blogs, [news sites](#), and [social media sites](#), marketers convey [health claims](#) to consumers.

Biomedical jargon

Mr Caputi, a Ph.D. student from the University of York's Department of Health Sciences, said: "Through authoritative-looking citations and biomedical jargon, consumers can be misled into believing that these relationships between [marijuana use](#) and health benefits are established scientific fact rather than budding theories."

Mr Caputi says marijuana companies use this new marketing technique, referred to as "research as marketing", not only to mislead the public into assuming that the results of weak studies are conclusive, but also to avoid the expensive, large-scale clinical trials that regulators require for companies to make explicit health claims.

"In addition to threatening the safety and autonomy of medical consumers, 'research as marketing' has the potential to diminish the value of rigorous scientific research and undermine consumers' faith in medical sciences," Mr Caputi added.

"If marijuana companies can make health claims through cheap, weak studies, why would they ever invest in expensive, robust studies of marijuana's health risks and benefits?"

"As a society, we will miss out on the benefits of more robust research on the health effects of marijuana use".

International corporations

Marijuana and marijuana-based medical products are now legally sold in 30 US states and some European Union countries.

Widespread medical marijuana legalisation has ushered in an unprecedented level of investment in marijuana, replacing small, independently owned storefronts with polished, national and international corporations.

As the industry has become more sophisticated, so has its marketing.

Mr Caputi says regulators should be tasked with enforcing existing regulation and enforce strict boundaries between free press journalism and marijuana marketing.

Journal editors and the press, aware of "underhand" marketing strategies, should apply additional scrutiny to industry-funded marijuana studies and resist widely publicising preliminary results, Mr Caputi added.

Provided by University of York

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