

Cannabis use both helps and hurts entrepreneurial creativity

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When entrepreneurs dream up ideas for new businesses, cannabis use might help, and hinder, their creativity, according to a new study in the *Journal of Business Venturing* by Washington State University researchers.

The study found that cannabis-using entrepreneurs generated new [business](#) ideas such as a weightless, gravity-free virtual reality workout, that were more original, but less feasible, compared to those who do not use cannabis.

"Originality and feasibility are both crucial in entrepreneurship—one without the other limits potential value creation," said Benjamin Warnick, lead author of the study and assistant professor in the Department of Management, Information Systems and Entrepreneurship at the WSU Carson College of Business.

Warnick and colleagues found the increased originality and decreased feasibility of cannabis users' business ideas relative to non-users only surfaced for entrepreneurs who reported relatively strong passion for exploring new business ideas. The effect was absent for cannabis-using entrepreneurs with experience founding more than one business.

For the study, Warnick led a team of WSU researchers including Alexander Kier, assistant professor of entrepreneurship in the Carson College of Business, Carrie Cuttler, assistant professor of psychology, and Emily LaFrance, recent WSU psychology Ph.D. graduate.

The 254 entrepreneurs who participated in the study completed a new venture ideation task, generating as many ideas for a new business as possible based on virtual reality technology. The entrepreneurs also answered questions about the extent of their business experience, passion for entrepreneurship and [cannabis use](#) patterns.

A panel of experts then rated the originality and feasibility of the idea each [entrepreneur](#) identified as their best.

For the purposes of their study, the researchers separated the entrepreneurs into cannabis users and non-users. The cannabis users

reported using the drug an average of nearly 20 times in the past month.

The WSU scientists' work could ultimately play a role in helping entrepreneurs and the business community determine if, when and how cannabis use may be beneficial or detrimental to the venture creation process.

"This is the first study we know of that looks at how any kind of drug use influences new business ideation," said Warnick, "But there is still much to explore in this area."

Warnick noted that the cognitive effects of chronic cannabis use have been shown to last for up to a month—including increased impulsivity and free-thinking tendencies.

Results of the current study held whether or not the cannabis users reported being high at the time of the experiment, but the authors call for future research to consider how being high might influence entrepreneurs' creativity via a randomized experiment.

While the results of the study suggest the effects of marijuana use may have some benefits in the early brainstorming stages of the venture ideation process, the researchers stressed the importance of grounding creativity in reality to successfully launch a new company.

"Our results suggest that cannabis-using entrepreneurs might benefit from non-users' insights to develop the feasibility of their ideas," Kier said. "This may be especially true for cannabis users who tend to get very excited about coming up with new ideas or don't have much experience founding [new businesses](#), since others can serve as a grounding influence, providing a reality-check on their ideas."

As legalization of cannabis continues across the country and the stigma

of the drug fades, the researchers hope their work will help paint a clearer picture of the implications of cannabis use among entrepreneurs.

"Clearly there are pros and cons to using cannabis that deserve to be investigated further," Warnick said. "As the wave of cannabis legalization continues across the country, we need to shed light on the actual effects of [cannabis](#) not only in entrepreneurship but in other areas of business as well."

More information: Benjamin J. Warnick et al, Head in the clouds? Cannabis users' creativity in new venture ideation depends on their entrepreneurial passion and experience, *Journal of Business Venturing* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106088](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106088)

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