



# **Market communication about recreational cannabis**

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A hypothetical communication strategy  
for Curaleaf in Denmark

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# ABSTRACT

How to strategize communication about recreational cannabis in Denmark in a hypothetical legalization scenario. Currently, cannabis is not legal in Denmark for recreational use; however, there are political parties that are advocating for legalization, and in that case, an American cannabis company could very well enter the Danish market in the near future. This thesis researches the hypothetical scenario that Curaleaf, an American-based cannabis company, would enter the Danish market in case of legalization. As such, the company would need to market itself to Danes.

This thesis aims to construct and create a strategic communication plan for Curaleaf on the Danish market and if there are any possibilities or limitations. In case of legalization and Curaleaf entered the Danish market, and Curaleaf would need to understand Danes' perceptions and attitudes towards cannabis and how they would possibly react to certain types of cannabis communication.

An online survey was conducted among Danes to understand and examine Danes' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and such towards cannabis in general and furthermore toward possible cannabis communication. The survey asked demographical questions, consumption patterns of cannabis, and attitudes towards certain communicative actions. The results from the survey showed that while most participants do not use cannabis themselves, they are not opposed to legalization or communicative actions related to cannabis. So long as the latter is done in a contained way and not displayed in public. Furthermore, results also showed that Danes are not entirely aware of what benefits cannabis has but rather perceive it as a dangerous substance.

The thesis aims to construct a possibly communication plan for Curaleaf, and in that relation, it analyzed Curaleaf's current communicative actions on the American market to determine and examine if any of the strategic matters could possibly be used on the Danish market. To examine this, a netnographic research was conducted on Curaleaf's Instagram account to obtain knowledge on how Curaleaf communicates to its audience and how the audience reacts. These results showed that Curaleaf is actively communicating about and focusing on the community aspect of the cannabis industry and cares deeply about various societal issues and problems. And furthermore, the results showed that Curaleaf's current consumers are, for the most part, appreciative of all that is being done and support the company.

The above-mentioned methods and results aided in creating a suggestive strategic communication plan, in which it was concluded that Curaleaf could communicate to Danes' using a few of the current strategic measures used on the American market. However, as there Denmark and the U.S. are social and culturally different in the aspect of cannabis, there would need to be

some changes, meaning Curaleaf would have to make a localized strategic communication plan and, furthermore, perhaps make a few different plans to ‘try’ out. Danes would have to be eased into communication about cannabis and be introduced to the product in a simple manner, so Danes do not reject the product but rather could understand the industry, benefits, and possible disadvantages to consumption and the alike.

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# 1. Introduction and Problem Formulation

In Denmark, cannabis is currently illegal as a recreational drug. However, this thesis is based on the assumption that it might be legalized in Denmark in the near future and thus investigates the hypothetical opportunities for a US-American provider of cannabis entering a Danish market. In the last 50 years, Denmark has had policies that ban cannabis; however, in recent years, debates on legalization have increased (Sorgenfrey 2019). While the majority of parties in the Danish parliament are against legalization, quite a few political parties are starting to agree upon the notion that cannabis should be legalized, namely, *Alternativet*, *Enhedslisten*, *SF*, *Radikale*, and *Liberal Alliance* (Jyllands-Posten 2018). For instance, *Alternativet* note that through the 50 years Denmark has pursued policies that ban cannabis, it has financed organized crime and stigmatized and criminalized consumers of cannabis. These parties believe legalizing cannabis is a resourceful way to solve those challenges (Moesgaard 2021). The five parties that favor legalizing cannabis have suggested a five-year trial period with legalized cannabis, where it is legal to buy, possess and consume for own use (*Folketinget*, 2021-22).

Furthermore, studies show that Danes are in favor of legalized cannabis, with more than half the population saying yes to legal cannabis (Sorgenfrey). The legal rapporteur Christina Egelund from *Liberal Alliance* does not doubt that cannabis will at some point be legalized in Denmark because, through observation of the world, there has been a global shift on this topic. Thus, by obtaining experience from other countries where cannabis is legalized, then there could be a shift in the Danish Parliament (Larsen 2017).

Curaleaf Holdings, Inc. is an American cannabis brand founded in 2010, and it produces and distributes cannabis products in North America, having dispensaries in 23 states in the United States. Curaleaf is the world's largest cannabis company by revenue. Although Curaleaf is an American company, the brand does also operate in Europe after it purchased EMMAC Life Sciences Limited (EMMAC) in 2021. EMMAC is the largest consolidated cannabis brand in Europe, allowing Curaleaf to cultivate and distribute on the European market (*Curaleaf Holdings 2021*). Given their status and operations already in Europe, Curaleaf was chosen as a potential entrant to a potential Danish market for recreational use of cannabis. Now, if cannabis does become legal, Curaleaf would have to communicate and market themselves to Danes. Since American and Danish cultures are different in many ways, they would need to create a different or separate communication strategy to fit Denmark. There are myriads of factors to consider when entering a

new market, however, this thesis focuses solely on communication aspects in the case of Curaleaf entering a Danish market.

Communication is an essential aspect of any company, and regardless of which business one is in, communication is needed for success. Communication takes form in many ways but generally speaking, in businesses, internal and external, with the latter being the factor of interest in this thesis. In order to have successful external communication, creating strategies and communication plans is needed (Argenti et al., 2005, 28). *Strategic communication* is an umbrella term, which describes the activities of various disciplines, PR, management, marketing, and so on. There are many definitions and understandings of the term, but most of the definitions interrelate and can be used interchangeably. However, strategic communication is commonly understood as strategies and plans that are created and put in to place in order to find the audiences and affect their consumer behavior, attitudes, perceptions, etc. According to Oxford Bibliographies, strategic communication concerns "communicative efforts by organizations to advance organizational mission" (Thorson 2018). The literature review of this thesis explores some of the definitions.

Not only is it crucial for organizations to create communication strategies, but it is then also necessary to plan the communication from those strategies, especially when entering a new market with a new product. Planning the communication strategies aids companies in being consistent, reaching objectives and goals, and furthermore aids in reaching the right audience in the right places in the right way. In order to create a communication strategy and plans, there are different approaches to take, but in this thesis, primarily theories from Ib Tunby Guldbrandsen and Sine Nørholm Just (*Strategizing Communication*) (2020) and theories from Helle Petersen and Louise Hørslev's (*Kommunikationsplanlægning i praksis*) (2021), will be utilized.

Consumers are different and have different behaviors and decision-making processes, and these can be influenced by culture. Furthermore, with globalization, these change rapidly; thus, marketers need to not only understand the culture and setting they are entering but, more importantly, how consumers behave, purchase, think, etc. And as it would be a new product on a new market and there are cultural differences between Denmark and the US, marketers would have to be extra aware of these factors. Thus, theories on how to approach and locate such differences and how to understand the culture, as culture is many things, are also outlined and discussed. This will be utilized in combination with Guldbrandsen and Just; Petersen and Hørslev, as all steps and aspects of communication strategies and plans should always reflect on the consumers.

The methods utilized in this thesis are survey and netnography. The survey will be conducted to gain (first) insights into Danish consumers' perceptions and understandings in relation to cannabis. Netnography will be used to research what and how Curaleaf is currently communicating on the U.S. market, to relate it back to Danes' opinions from the survey, and how they would possibly respond to communication on cannabis products. Lastly, the thesis will create a suggestive communication plan framework for Curaleaf, one that would entail the above-mentioned factors.

Based on the above outline, the thesis will address/deal with the following problem formulation: How could Curaleaf strategically communicate to Danish consumers in the case of legalized cannabis? What are the opportunities and barriers?

## 2. Context

The history of cannabis in the United States is an account with many turning points. In 1937 the federal government regulated cannabis when the Marijuana Tax Act was passed by Congress (Goggins, 2022). This meant that rather than banning drugs and being affected by legal challenges, Congress decided to tax and regulate drugs, improving the tax revenue (Goggins). Following the years after the Marijuana Tax Act, other acts and bills were put into place on a federal level. But as laws in the U.S differentiate between state laws and federal laws - the federal laws, acts, and bills, cannot necessarily decide what one state can and cannot legalize (Dev, 2021).

There are two main cannabinoids in cannabis, namely THC and CBD. THC is the compound that makes people feel 'high', whereas CBD does not contain the psychoactive compound that produces the 'high' feeling, but it makes the consumer feel calm and is commonly used for stress, depression, pain, etc. But it is not an intoxicant, as THC is (Grotenhermen and Müller-Vahl, 2012, 497). In the U.S, the use, sale, and possession of cannabis over 0.3 % THC is illegal under federal law, but many states have their own laws pertaining to cannabis. In some states, cannabis is legal only for medical use, while in other states, both medical and recreational use is legal (Williams, 2022).

In the states where recreational use is legalized, being in possession or using cannabis complies with state law but technically would be in violation of federal law. However, the chances of the federal law being enforced are negligible, and state legislatures work independently of the U.S. Congress, so the federal government cannot simply order a state to deem something illegal.



The U.S. federal drug policy is called "The Controlled Substances Act (CSA)" (*USC*, 2022), and in this "manufacture, importation, possession, use and distribution of certain narcotics, stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, [etc.]" are regulated and places all substances on a schedule from one to five (*USC*). There have been multiple efforts to reschedule cannabis under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) however, these have failed, and cannabis continues to be viewed as a Schedule I<sup>1</sup> drug under the CSA of 1970, even though it should be on the same level as alcohol. Therefore, cannabis dispensaries across the U.S. are licensed by each state (Nelson, 2019). In 2012 Colorado approved a ballot initiative legalizing the recreational use and sale of cannabis, becoming the first state to do so. And as of 2021, 17 other states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington), have also legalized recreational use of cannabis (Reeves, 2021).

As to why cannabis is legalized in some states, there are possibly multiple reasons, however, a big one could most likely be the financial aspect. Cannabis is quite popular in the U.S, and two-thirds of Americans support the legalization of cannabis. Cannabis brings in a fair amount of tax revenue; for instance, in 2015, Colorado obtained \$135 million in taxes and fees from cannabis sales (*MMP*, 2017). Other states see figures like that and take notice. Furthermore, instead of cannabis being illegal and law enforcement having to enforce cannabis laws, the state governments also save money because court costs drop, and the law enforcement can spend their limited time doing other more important things. Currently, there are only four states in the U.S where cannabis (THC and CBD) is fully illegal, and seven where only CBD is legal (Reeves). Thus, after 25 years since cannabis was first decriminalized in California and allowed for medical use, 46 states have passed bills and acts which provide Americans with the purchase of cannabis that is grown commercially and made in controlled environments (Zheng, 2022).

The U.S. is one of the few places in the world where cannabis, for the most part, is legalized, and there are not many other countries where it is legalized for recreational use. However, in terms of medical use, many countries around the world have legalized medical cannabis, and countries in Europe are following suit, with Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Poland, etc. (Kohut, 2021). However, as for recreational use, there is not yet a country in Europe which have fully legalized cannabis, but there are countries where it has been

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<sup>1</sup> "Schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse" (*DEA*).

decriminalized, and some places it is often unenforced, but nevertheless, still illegal; Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Austria, Belgium, etc. (Cannabis Guide, 2021). The status of cannabis in Denmark is that it is only for medical use, and there are laws pertaining to consumption and possession. Commonly, the 'rule of thumb' is that an individual can possess a certain amount of cannabis for own use, no more than 10 grams, however. And one can consume it within one's own property, but if the police is called, they can arrest the individual. However, if it is a first-time offense, the police often only write a ticket or give a warning (Cannabis Guide). These are not actual laws, and it certainly depends on where it happens and who the police officer is. Even though cannabis is illegal in Denmark, it is not difficult to obtain cannabis. Places such as Freetown Christiania and Thy Lejeren are widely known for cannabis sales, and the police do routinely raid and shut those places down, but they open back up again shortly after (Møller, 2021).

The cannabis industry is rapidly growing, and more countries are legalizing cannabis in different variations. For instance, in 2021, Germany announced they plan to legalize cannabis for recreational purposes for adults in 2022. And this step forward is believed to cause a 'domino-effect' in Denmark and the rest of Europe soon, as the director of a medical cannabis production pharmacy in Denmark states that they expect that the German government's decision to make controlled sales of cannabis to adults legal, will have a significant impact on Denmark and the rest of Europe (Hansen, 2022). Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, Danish political parties are fighting for legalized cannabis, and another party, Frie Grønne, states that Denmark should follow in Germany's footsteps and legalize cannabis for adults for recreational use (Zimmer, 2022).

As cannabis sales in Denmark are heavily related to gangs and crimes, legalization would be a positive thing (Vest-Lillesøe, 2018). Many Danes that consume cannabis for various reasons; however, when the product is bought on the streets, it cannot be known for sure that it is not laced with other substances or things one should not consume (Ringgard, 2021). Therefore, legalizing cannabis could prove to be a positive thing, and it would possibly bring in tax revenues, just as in the U.S.

## 3. Literature review

### *3.1 Strategic communication definitions*

Strategic communication is a growing field of study within communication social sciences and is a multidisciplinary field that draws upon practices of communication found within; public relations, management, marketing, and advertising, mass communication, organization

communication, technical communication, and political communication, among others (Hallahan et al., 2007, 3). The first dedication to strategic communication was in the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, and in that, strategic communication was defined as "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (3). Since the publication of the *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (2007), many researchers and scholars have been interested in investigating the features. There are now myriads of books, publications, articles, etc., on strategic communication. And therefore, there are also many different understandings and definitions of strategic communication.

Argenti, Howell, and Beck see strategic communication as "aligned with the company's overall strategy, to enhance its strategic positioning" (Argenti et al., 2005, 83). Argenti, Howell, and Beck believe that many companies that practice strategic communication take a tactical, short-termed manner, which is, according to them, not strategic and could contradict the overall organizational strategy or obstruct it (87). In relation to this definition, Mahoney, who also understands strategic communication as such, states that communicating strategically is to communicate in an integrated context, and thereby strategic communication and planning include "coordinating activities and fine-tuning messages to maximise effectiveness" (Mahoney, 2021, ch. 1). And those activities should then, in turn, also be integrated combined with the organizational strategic plan (ch. 1).

Within the public relations domain, Plowman asserts that ideally, strategic communication would "occur at the highest levels of an organisation and be carried out down through the lowest or tactical levels" (2013, 550). Plowman understands strategic communication as a practice that sets communication goals that are measurable and long-term effects on stakeholders are considered. In this relation, Grunig views strategic communication within the public relations field as a "bridging activity" (2006, 171) standardized between organizations and their stakeholders.

In the management domain, practices of strategic communication are conceptualized "as a situated, socially accomplished activity" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 7), and strategizing communication then refers to "those actions, interactions, and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity" (8). But with such a broad definition, it is understood as strategic and strategizing communication practices include all types of social activity, but strategic actions include "strategic planning, annual reviews, strategy workshops" (8), among others. If not focused on the activities that relate to strategy, then it can be challenging to define what is strategic and what is not.

Other definitions understand strategic communication as a "multidisciplinary endeavour" (Sandhu, 2009, 73) and "requires a purposeful actor, rational and deliberate decision-making" (75). Others believe that strategic communication "prepares organizations for an uncertain future" (Zerfass and Huck, "Innovations, communication, and leadership", 2007, 108).

These are merely some of the many definitions on the topic of strategic communication, and similar to the many definitions of the concepts' strategy' and 'communication', scholars and researchers might never agree on a singular definition of strategic communication. Strategic communication as a concept has been even more broadened and is now also understood as the purposeful communicative actions by nonprofits, government agencies, and celebrities (Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2014, ch. 1). With all the myriad definitions within different domains, some argue that the disciplinary status of strategic communication as a concept remains unclear (Werder et al., 2018, 347) because many authors and scholars have the tendency to use strategic communication in the broadest sense and use it as a term for "any communication by any actor to serve the interests of any constituency" (Zerfass et al., "Strategic communication", 2018, 3). Therefore, some argue that one should concentrate on a particular specific perspective of strategic communication (Nothhaft, 2016).

### *3.2 Strategic communication in marketing*

Such a specified perspective would be the domain of marketing. In this domain, strategic communication often refers to planned communication, campaigns, and tactics and is defined as:

Purposeful communication by a person or an organization designed to persuade audiences with the goal of increasing knowledge, changing attitudes, or inducing desired behavior. Strategic communication campaigns are generally designed to respond to the perceived communications needs of significant publics (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2008, 765).

However, according to Falkheimer and Heide, strategic communication and planned communication are two different aspects and should not be used interchangeably. Falkheimer and Heide assert that planned communication refers to a one-way communication act and thus perceives the receivers (the audience) as passive individuals that are persuadable, able to be controlled and directed (Falkheimer and Heide, 2018). Therefore, Falkheimer and Heide do not believe that strategic communication has much to do with a communication plan relating to strategy because

planned communication does not relate to the overall goal of the organization but "rather to tactical goals" (ch. 3).

But in recent years, strategic communication, in terms of marketing communications, has moved from a direct and passive process to a more collaborative action. Currently, instead of the process consisting of an organization delivering a "specific message through a single utterance to an identified receiver" (Guldbrandsen and Just, 2020, 23), it now consists of a more 'back-and-forth' type of communication. Botan notes that research within the field of marketing communication in terms of strategies is the most "advanced in thinking cocreationally" (Botan, 2017, ch. 2) and that various scholars embrace the notion that value is co-created with the audiences. Such a perspective on marketing communications does not perceive audiences as passive individuals that can simply be affected and controlled but rather understands and explains the superiority of the audience's perception and reception (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 765). Furthermore, this perspective understands that the communicative actions should almost always be reflected back upon the audience, their wants, needs, attitudes, and such (767).

### *3.3 Communication planning*

Although Falkheimer and Heide do not believe that strategic communication involves communication planning, Botan suggests that planning the communication or a campaign is "the essence of strategy" (Botan ch. 2). Planning involves what to communicate, how to communicate it, in what order, to which audiences, and when. Moreover, according to Botan, these facets are mainly strategic issues, but each facet can have tactical elements, but that does not make them any less strategic. According to Guldbrandsen and Just, communication is strategized in terms of marketing in order to "establish and maintain a continuous understanding of markets, create consumer awareness and loyalty and promote sales of the products and/or services the organization offers" (35). Thus, to create consistency in communication and actions to the audience(s), a plan is necessary in most cases. However, suppose the plan merely includes a "tactical, short-term approach to communicating" (Argenti et al. 83). In that case, the plan is not strategic and can weaken the overall organizational long-term goals (83). Marketing strategic communication and planning involves many factors and can be done in different ways, as according to Hoover, a strategic communication plan should include four components, "rationale statement (. . .) situational analysis (. . .) goals and objectives (. . .) and key stakeholders, the message, and media" (Hoover, 2010, 17-20). Hoover suggests that together these four components provide a guide to get from

development to application and will “lead with focus and clarity toward an inspired shared vision of the future” (Hoover 20).

Other scholars suggest other ways of progress, for instance, Petersen and Hørslev assert that the process consists of seven steps; background, communications goal(s), target groups, core messages, channel strategy, questions and answers, and a time frame (Petersen and Hørslev, 2021, 23). Furthermore, Petersen and Hørslev also believe that a communication plan is a continuation of a communications strategy. The views of Petersen and Hørslev will be gone into depth in the theoretical section of this thesis. As mentioned, there are different ideas of what a communication plan consists of, but according to Ferguson, a communication plan provides value and should ideally support the overall objectives and goals, as plans “do not exist in isolation; they are not creative efforts” (Ferguson, 1999, 3).

### *3.4 Consumers, consumption, and culture*

As noted, strategic communication has moved from being a simple linear act from sender to receiver to a more collaborative act between a company and audiences. Thus, one crucial factor in all strategic communication is the audience. According to Vitale, if an organization does not identify the right and appropriate audience for their communication, the communication will simply fail to reach any set goals and objectives (Vitale, 2010, ch. 3). Market research that focuses on the consumers can help organizations locate the right audience, and according to Hague, such research is often referred to "as 'the voice of the customer' (VOC) and can take many forms, from one-off surveys providing feedback on specific issues through to trackers that provide regular feedback from planned studies" (Hague, 2021, ch. 3). Market segmentation allows for organizations to comprehend which audience(s) of consumers should be targeted and to locate who should not be targeted. Segmentation can be done on three different levels, most notably demographics. Segmenting an audience through demographic characteristics looks at age, gender, race, ethnicity, economical status, marital status, etc. These physical aspects are easy for markets to recognize and are one of the easiest ways of describing an audience (Vitale ch. 3). Another way to segment an audience is through behavioral segmentation, and this process can be more challenging to do as consumer behavior in terms of the decision-making process are different from one another, but understanding the consumer's behavior can get organizations "closer to customers than simply knowing their age, their gender or their income group and can be a powerful means of better serving their needs" (Hague ch. 3). The last level is based on understanding individuals' needs and

wants. According to Hague, this is the most challenging segmentation, but if "needs can be recognized and customers can be grouped according to them, it can be a most effective way of positioning a company's products to sell more" (Hague ch. 3). This form of segmentation is most utilized in consumer markets. These different types of audience segmentation all provide different information to a company, and the more information one can collect, the easier it will be to make a communication strategy and plan that reflects on the audience; as mentioned earlier, the strategy and plan should always reflect back upon the audience.

Another factor to consider when identifying an audience is the cultural aspect of any given setting. Culture needs to be considered in not only identifying an audience but strategizing communication and planning in general. According to Varey, communication is the basis of marketing, and marketing is social, and "thus, we need to understand how cultural background influences communication and exchange" (2002, ch. 6). Varey further notes that the notion of communication differs from culture to culture. Varey does not believe that culture and communication can be separated and therefore needs to be a factor that is always considered when communicating.

Culture can be many things and does not only affect how the communication itself, words and images, are perceived but can also affect media habits, product needs, consumer behavior, and the decision-making process (Kim et al., 2018). Therefore, according to Fahy and Jobber, a communication strategy and plan that works in one culture cannot be expected to work in another culture (Fahy and Jobber, 2019, 276). However, some assert that globalization has been an aid in affecting some aspects of consumerism and behaviors, meaning that people around the world can consume the same things (Jain, 7, 2015). But this perception can cause consumers to not feel a connection to a brand because the communicative actions might not resonate with their socio-cultural values, beliefs, perceptions, and so forth (Fahy and Jobber 281). Nevertheless, cultural understanding needs to be a part of the process when strategizing communication and planning the communication (Guldbrandsen and Just 34). There are different ways in which to understand cultural differences. According to Prince and Hoppe, there are four points one needs to concentrate on when communicating across cultures; "examine your own cultural conditioning (. . .) review your experiences with other cultures (. . .) watch for discomfort that can signal cultural differences (. . .) recognize and modify your communication approach" (2000, ch. 2). However, this process takes a stand in that a company has already expanded their business to at least one other culture than their own. If that is not the case, it can be challenging to review experiences with other

cultures. Thus, another way of understanding culture is to perceive culture as content, and according to Okun et al., that is "thing or objects, rather than processes and relationships" (qtd. in Baldwin et al., 2006, part III). Okun et al. believe that this understanding can be useful for those that want to communicate between cultures but "as long as the limits of this frame of reference are as clear as its assets" (qtd. in Baldwin et al., 2006, part III). But this view on culture and differences then notes that processes are not important, and when communicating in a marketing aspect, processes of behavior and decisions are also essential to focus on (Fill and Jamieson, 2014, 12). Another way of understanding culture is in the view of consumer culture. Scholars that have researched this field and coined the term consumer culture theory (CCT) are Arnould and Thompson.

According to Arnould and Thompson, this disciplinary brand covers the "flurry of research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, 868). CCT understands culture as a diversified distribution of connotations and the variety of coinciding "cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historical frame of globalization and market capitalism" (Arnould and Thompson 869). Thus, Arnould and Thompson do not believe that even though people share the same culture, that they necessarily share all the same traits. And that one thing that is affecting that is globalization, as more individuals around the world can share daily aspects without being in the same place, due to the internet, for instance. However, according to Mooij, globalization does not create consumers that are all the same, and even though there is a convergence of "technology, media, and financial systems", desires, needs, and behaviors within consumers cannot be expected to be converging (Mooij, 2018, ch. 1).

Culture is many things, and different scholars have different understandings and definitions of the term. But not only are there different understandings of what culture is, but also how to understand culture and differences there might be (and how to locate them). It can be a puzzle for anyone who wishes to enter a new country and culture with products and services, whether those are new to a given market or not. But in the end, when strategizing communication and creating a communication plan, the culture and audiences are two significant components to consider concurrently, and how to understand either is not a 'set in stone' action. These activities and also the other acts in strategizing communication and planning are, according to Plowman, "elements in a continuous, dynamic, and interactive process that begins with choices among strategic priorities and deep comprehension of attitudes and cultures" (Plowman 550).



## 4. Theory

Firstly, Guldbrandsen and Just's theory on strategic communication will be utilized in order to define what strategic communication is, as there are many different perceptions of what strategizing communication means and how it can be applied. Secondly, Petersen and Hørslev will be utilized as a tool in which to go through the process of creating a communication strategy and then a communication plan. Guldbrandsen and Just also describe how to go about the process, and therefore the two theories will be used interchangeably as they both relate to each other; merely Petersen and Hørslev simply are more application-minded. Furthermore, there will also be uses of other theorists on strategic communication to create nuances of the theoretical framework.

### 4.1 *Strategic communication*

Strategic communication is an intricate and nuanced realm, a field in which there are different understandings and perceptions of what the term means and consists of. To some, the classical understanding of strategic communication is that it is a direct one-way process in which a message is communicated purposefully from the sender to the receiver (Ellis and McClintock, 1994, 28). This understanding thus defines the strategic aspect of strategic communication in a top-down manner, and it relates to viewing communication as transmission. This means that the audience (receiver) is not viewed as a part of the process, the ongoing process that strategic communication should be. Contemporarily, strategic communication is a field that now has a more integrated approach, with a broader and more concerted understanding of the aspect of communication strategies within social and cultural contexts (Guldbrandsen and Just 31). Presently, strategic communication is an interactive and collaborative action where a company still communicates messages to the audience, but rather than presuming the audience receives and understands the message, the company should actively interact with the audience to see if the message(s) are received as desired. And if not, what the company can do to change the reception (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3). This change in strategic communication is, according to Falkheimer and Heide, due to the rise of social media;

“An ideal that is promoted within marketing communication nowadays is co-creation – terms such as a *co*-production, *co*-management, and *collaborative* management have therefore appeared. Social media have changed the conditions for organizations to work

with communication and relationship building with different stakeholders. [...] The opportunities to check, create, influence, recreate, and criticize organizations' messages have never been as good as they are today" (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3).

Others understand strategic communication as external corporate communication actions, such as "public relations, marketing communication, and advertising as well as the various persuasive tools developed to support these practices" (21). However, contemporary research within the different fields of strategic communication is now more related than ever due to "social, cultural and political-economic developments" (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3).

When discussing strategic communication, many of these definitions and understandings of the term are and can be used interchangeably. For example, the definition(s) and understanding of strategic communication used throughout this thesis, is according to Frandsen and Johansen (2017), "strategic communication can be defined as the study of how organizations use communication purposefully to fulfill their overall missions" (qtd. in Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3). And this also relates to Guldbrandsen and Just's assertion of strategic communication as "the process of making communication work strategically for an organization; as the streams of purposeful decisions made and actions taken over time regarding how, when, and with whom to communicate in order to fulfill an organization's goals" (Guldbrandsen and Just 34). However, Guldbrandsen and Just note that strategic communication is too complicated to be defined coherently and straightforwardly.

Organizations make both deliberate and emergent strategic communication decisions, i.e., they do communicate both planned as well as unplanned actions and:

"In some instances, organizations will, indeed, articulate considered intentions for actions (plans) and distribute them meticulously throughout the organization before carefully implementing them. But in other cases, decisions will be made, and outcomes realized despite, or in the absence of, articulated intentions (perspectives)" (34).

In relation to this, Guldbrandsen and Just furthermore assert that to do this process and utilize the entirety of what strategic communication is, all from detailed plan to familiarized actions, they present five modes; the five Ps of strategizing communication. These five modes are strategizing communication as: plan, ploy, pattern, position, and perspective (38). The five modes are going to be used as a form of spectrum of strategic communication, in which a company can fall on either side of it, or switching between certain points.

#### *4.2. Five modes of strategizing communication*

In most cases, the five modes, the different understandings of them, and their practices will intersect one another because "strategizing communication is a performative practice in which multiple principles and practices of strategy are simultaneously constructed and employed" (22). However, as this thesis concerns communication planning stemming from strategy, the mode that will be focused most on is the one of strategizing communication as plan. Reasons for this is because Curaleaf would (hypothetically) be entering a whole new market and culture, and therefore the communication should be deliberate and planned, or at least so in the beginning. This is not to say that the other modes might not be relevant in the long run after Curaleaf would have established themselves on the Danish market or that they cannot do strategic communication without planning, but as a starting point, a plan can help reach a successful campaign. Nonetheless, a short account of the other modes (ploy, pattern, position, and perspective) will also be outlined below for reference points.

In the first mode, strategizing communication as plan, Guldbrandsen and Just explain that strategy is the equivalent to a purposefully designed course of action done by an organization (39). It consists of a set of guidelines made as to how to deal with common and more definite communications. Thus, according to this understanding, strategy is a deliberate plan which gives guidance and order as to "why, what and how the organization communicates" (39). Such a plan generally stems from comprehensive analyses such as segmentation, designs of messages, selection of media, etc. In this sense, strategy is perceived as the "formulation of a course of actions, before action is taken" (Guldbrandsen and Just 39). In creating the plan, there are some variations, for instance, it can be specific and detailed, it can include target audience analysis, market analysis, key performance indicators (KPIs), among others. Or the plan can be abstract and ambiguous, including expected aims and concepts, but would be missing definite definitions of how ideas are turned into messages and actions and how desires are turned into specific and attainable goals. However, no matter which format an organization chooses to plan their strategized communication, the one aspect that is present in all is that the plan is meant to aid organizations in order to communicate a message to an audience in the most convenient manner.

Strategizing communication as ploy refers to a communicative action that is particular and measured yet not planned. This is done in order to act in and take advantage of "specific but unforeseen current development" (Guldbrandsen and Just 38) for the benefit of strategies within an

organization. Although this is not planned, it is still dealt with in a deliberate manner and is related to strategizing as plan, but should, however, not be perceived as 'one-timers' (42) because outcome and application are time-limited. Here it is essential to differentiate between ploys and tactics, as the latter are "concrete micro-actions derived from a master plan whereas ploys are independent strategic moves that might fall well within a strategic plan or pattern (. . .) but might also be totally autonomous" (42).

Next is the strategizing communication as pattern, which is understood as a "temporal regularity of purposeful communicative behaviour" (38). Strategizing communication as pattern means to communicate in a manner that derivatives from previous communication actions, e.g., deliberate communication. This communication does not emerge from specific plans but instead comes from the repetition of particular actions or decisions done before (44). Companies that communicate in patterns use repeated messages, images, actions, etc., thus, over time, are building recognizability for their consumers to perceive. The fourth mode is strategizing communication as position. This is understood as "a 'match' with an organization's environment: a communicative practice that arises from the external context - a practice that emerges from the situation, whether intended or not" (46). This means that communicative actions here respond to a given circumstance the organization might find itself in. A strategy here is an independent facet, it is not something the organization has sat down to go over in deep thought, but rather the strategy occurs when attempting to address assumptions or expectations posed by external factors.

The last mode, strategizing communication as perspective, refers to communicative actions that are "derived from an organization's ingrained way of perceiving the world: and unconscious and unquestioned communicative behaviour, where strategy is to an organization what personality is to an individual" (Guldbrandsen and Just 48). Strategizing communication as perspective is the most emergent mode of the five, and here a strategy only occurs from actions taken from people involved with an organization. This is not to say that an organization does not act strategically when communication as perspective, and it might arise from deliberate plans and decisions, but over time has its own, i.e., "a force that structures human activity just as much as it is the outcome of such activity" (49).

Organizations can as mentioned, carry out their communication strategies in all of the above modes, but most commonly, the notion of strategizing communication as plan does occur in all marketing communication. However, there are also some limitations to planning. Doing analysis and trying to predict a market, consumers, or behaviors, organizations should also be able to strain

away from their strategic plans if it is necessary. Strategy is a never-ending process of collaborative development and should never be perceived as a 'set in stone' or 'one-way passage' (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3). Thus, it can be a troublesome process; however, in order to firstly create a plan that can then later be developed, there are facets that should be considered and gone through when strategizing communication as plan.

### *4.3 Steps of planning strategic communication*

As noted, planned communication that stems from a communication strategy can be done in different ways, but according to Petersen and Hørslev, a communications *plan* consists of seven steps; background, communications goal(s), target groups, core messages, channel strategy, questions and answers, and a time frame (Petersen and Hørslev 23). While Petersen and Hørslev note that a communication *strategy* is followed by a communication *plan*, Falkheimer and Heide note that the two are not related. Falkheimer and Heide state that perceiving a communication strategy as plan is to state that people (the audience) are passive individuals, in which the sender of the communication then has full control over the outcome (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3). But as mentioned earlier, communication (strategy) has moved from being a 'one way communication mind set' and is now a more interactive and collaborative between a company and the audience (Guldbrandsen and Just; Falkheimer and Heide). Falkheimer and Heide state that "planned communication is tactical communication, typically a communication activity to gain more customers or make some target group change its behavior or attitudes" (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 3) and that "planned communication is not related to the overall goal of an organization" (ch. 3). While this can be true in some cases if a company always reflects their choices within the strategy and then followed by the plan upon the audience, then creating a plan for the strategy can still relate to and achieve the overall goal of the company. The overall organizational goal might not relate to all aspects of a planned strategy, but the planned strategy does relate to the overall organizational goal as every communicative step and action taken should move a company closer to the overall goal (Botan ch. 4).

While Guldbrandsen and Just see strategizing or strategic communication as done in different stages, e.g., deliberate to emergent, and that a specific plan is not always conducted, Petersen and Hørslev believe partially otherwise. They understand a communication plan as a continuation of a communication strategy, as the strategy forms the starting point for a more particular plan. They use the term communication strategy in regard to the document that describes

the organization's overall framework for communication and creates structure, coherence, and prioritization in the approach to stakeholders and the use of communication channels (Petersen and Hørslev 20). Moreover, they use the term communication plan concerning the report that deals with a particular subject that must be communicated internally, externally, or both (21). The plan is a structured script, establishing a course from identifying a communication need to the assessment of the exertion, and furthermore that this is done in a well-thought-out manner.

### **4.3.1 Background**

Petersen and Hørslev put forward seven steps an organization needs to go through to create a beneficial communications plan, and it starts with the background. In any organization, the background or reason for needing communication must be gone over and determined. For instance, what happened? Why do we need to communicate? Commonly, these considerations occur at the end of a decision-making process; however, it should come before at the very beginning; otherwise, there is no apparent reason as to why and how to move forward. This applies especially to the communication employees at an organization, but it can also have consequences with the consumers, as there is a risk of inconsistency through the communication later on (Petersen and Hørslev 24). Furthermore, another question an organization should be able to answer when starting a communication plan is; what else is happening in the area - internally or externally - that can affect communication positively or negatively? (25).

For instance, it could be to look at the current events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, the world turned upside down when countries all over went into lock-down, stay-at-home orders, etc., were put into place. During this, organizations had choices to make regarding their communications and marketing. Some companies stopped their ongoing campaigns and changed them to fit better into the current world situation. For instance, Hotels.com had plans to run a set of advertisements from the year prior (2019). In these commercials, the mascot of the company, Captain Obvious, is seen sitting on a plane snacking next to other passengers, who are complaining about not going somewhere 'cool'. Captain Obvious then states 'do not hate like their trip. Book your trip with Hotels.com,' and then the company's tagline comes up "be there, do that, get rewarded'. This commercial was a fun and 'innocent' one, but it was out of sync at the time with the pandemic. Thus, Hotels.com stopped that campaign and quickly came up with a new one. In the new commercial, Captain Obvious is still snacking; however, he is using hand sanitizer first, and

the text on the screen reads, "This is Captain Obvious. He is going to be social distancing for a while. And you should too" (Steinmetz, 2020).

Furthermore, instead of featuring their usual tagline, a new one was shown, which "echoed the current situation "Just Stay Home" (Steinmetz). This is an example of an organization looking at the background, paying attention to what is going on, and how their current communication can be affected either positively or negatively. Had Hotels.com continued with its original campaign, their communication would have been affected negatively, as consumers would most likely have perceived them as insensitive and selfish. This can be a difficult task at hand for organizations to be aware of, as no one could possibly have seen a pandemic happening. But it goes to show that not all communication can be deliberate and planned per se, as according to Guldbrandsen and Just in their description of strategizing communication as position.

### **4.3.2 Communication goals**

The next step Petersen and Hørslev put forward is the one of the communication goals. Petersen and Hørslev mention that the overall goals within an organization are; attention, knowledge (understanding), attitude (acceptance), and action (Petersen and Hørslev 27). However, they focus on such goals within, internally, of an organization and not so much on the sales and marketing. However, those steps are also part of sales and marketing, but in a sense, that is more consumer-oriented. According to Guldbrandsen and Just, objectives and goals could consist of "brand awareness, brand knowledge/comprehension, brand attitude, brand purchase intention" (Guldbrandsen and Just 128). Despite which goals and objectives are set, what is most important is that these principles are followed when planning communication, "objectives should be coherent, engaging, timed, targeted and measurable, meaning that they must match each other and the organization's overall aim, must be interesting and involving (. . .) and, adequate to the chosen audience and that their effect must be testable" (127).

The step of communication goals regards what an organization wishes to archive with their communication and is not to be confused with project goals. The communication goals are part of the overall objectives, which can be fulfilled through communication actions, and this is the focus of planning communication. Whereas project goals could be if an organization wanted to keep or attract members to certain services being offered, then a solution could be the prices and/or quality of the services provided. In such a case, a communication department does not have much say over the prices of services, therefore, the project goals and communication goals should be separated, as what can be achieved through communication is to create awareness of the services and not create

the services itself. Communication goals for marketing companies, for instance, could be that they wish to create awareness about their services and that they have a certain amount of experience in the different areas of a given business or industry compared to others in the same field. Or it could be that a lifestyle brand's goal is to create a story and brand community with its consumers.

Nonetheless, regardless of what the goal is, it is essential to describe and decide on the goal before moving forward to deciding on the channel strategy because only when you know what you want to achieve can you consciously and purposefully choose the right way to communicate (Petersen and Hørslev 25). Therefore, marketing communication goals and objectives are crucial for brands and, furthermore, should always be part of the SMART model: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound (28). If these aspects are not well planned, considered, and carried out, the communication can and, in most cases, will be inconsistent, untrackable, and might result in a loss of customers. This is not to say that unplanned communication, as Guldbrandsen and Just note as emergent, cannot be beneficial for companies in certain situations; however, in most cases, unplanned as well as planned communication still stems from strategies which are put into place as the first step in communication actions for organizations, thus planning always occurs on some level.

### **4.3.3 Target groups and audiences**

In order to carry out the communication goals and objectives, organizations need first to determine their target groups and audiences. However, Guldbrandsen and Just propose that before selecting a target audience(s), an organization must find its position, meaning "the process of aligning an organization's self-perception (identity) with others perception of the organization (image)" (Guldbrandsen and Just 121). Doing so means laying ground for communication that will more effectively get to the target audiences. When an organization positions itself and its image, they do so by looking at the current market, competitors, and maybe even culture. For instance, a company within the automobile industry might wish to or believe that they are the leading brand for sustainability, but before they can determine which audience they are going to target, they need to determine if this perception of others, the public, is the same. It is not helpful to merely state that Tesla is the leading brand within sustainability and then target an audience whose consumer behaviors fit this description if it is not perceived that way by others. Therefore, before deciding on audiences, core messages, etc., it is important to factor in the company's strategic position.

There are different ways of creating a strategy and then a communication plan, and while Guldbrandsen and Just propose three parts, Petersen and Hørslev have seven steps, as mentioned



before. But instead of utilizing the two processes separately, I believe that they can and perhaps should be intertwined, as they can complement each other and create a better plan. For instance, as the step of positioning usually occurs in the end, it might be more favorable for an organization to not necessarily do it first, as according to Gulbrandsen and Just, but rather do it along with determining the audience. Petersen and Hørslev mention the next step in their outline as the one of target audiences, and there within, they start out by mentioning that organizations should always communicate on the terms of the recipients (Petersen and Hørslev 31) and that you should meet them where they are and take communicative standpoints in what occupies them (31). The statement from Gulbrandsen and Just relates to the one from Petersen and Hørslev in the sense that if the two are done simultaneously, positioning an organization within a given market or even societal, thus aligning identity with image, would ultimately be meeting the recipients where they are. The positioning of a company does not happen without giving thought to the public. However, it might be the public, the audience, of another company one, chooses to look at, as for instance in, relation to organizations belonging to the same industry, which then "makes it easier to identify and communicate the uniqueness of the organization and, perhaps to obtain the desired position in the mind of the audience" (Gulbrandsen and Just 122). While this refers to positioning a company in a market among competitors, the positioning process is still done with the public in mind.

In order to perform this combined process, positioning and determining audience, parameters or criteria should be chosen, and one way to do this process is to select criteria that match the position the organization desires to have, and that can then lead the strategic communication. For instance, if we look at Nordic Oil, a Scandinavian CBD brand, they desire to be and also be perceived as the most natural and health-beneficial CBD brand there is, at least in Europe (*Nordic Oil*). These criteria are common in the CBD industry as audiences of such brands seek these, and these criteria are Nordic Oils' most distinguishing features, thus also making them a market leader. However, over the last couple of years, the CBD industry has exploded, and more and more brands are emerging; therefore, it can be difficult for brands as competitors are offering equally natural and health-beneficial products at lower prices. In terms of audiences, they might prioritize different things and criteria; thus, the position an organization wishes to have can never be a given. Therefore, the task at hand would be "to align audiences' interpretative maps with the organization's preferred positioning map, persuading them not only of the organization's unique and desirable position, but also of the relevance of the chosen positioning criteria" (Gulbrandsen and Just 124). Thus, the first effort in the process of determining an audience is to locate groups who

might have the same priorities within the organization's position. Which audience(s) agrees or might be persuaded that a stated positioning criterion of an organization is the actual image of said organization? An organization could segment groups by demographic data, i.e., age, gender, location, etc., or it can be done on more subjective psychographic data, i.e., social class, preferences, etc., (Guldbrandsen and Just 125). As mentioned earlier, the task of positioning and determining audiences should be done alongside each other, as a "back and forth between the criteria, which the organization might emphasize, and the criteria that the audience might (come to) prioritize" (125). Despite which manner the segmentation is done in, the end goal is to discover various potential audience(s) from which an organization can then choose.

#### 4.3.4 Core messages

When an audience is determined and chosen, then an organization needs to choose its core messages, and how to formulate these, in a sense, so they do not only reflect what is wished to be communicated but also what or how the audience wishes to receive them. One must consider the recipients first when deciding on channels and content, as messages must never be angled in a convenient direction for which there is no real evidence (Petersen and Hørslev 35). Furthermore, the messages need to be as clear and concise as possible and should align with the positioning as mentioned earlier preference. According to Petersen and Hørslev, a good rule of thumb is to choose a maximum of five core messages that contain the core of what is to be communicated and should, for instance, contain answers for: what, when, why, and how (35). While these are decent starting points in deciding on core messages, Guldbrandsen and Just propose three aspects that messages should contain an answer that is more fitting for the context of external and marketing communication. Guldbrandsen and Just mention the term unique selling proposition (USP) when talking about 'core messages', and by definition by Rosser Reeves, an American advertising executive, USPs are broken into three parts:

- 1) Each advertisement (or communication) must make a concrete proposition to the stakeholder: 'Buy this product, for this specific benefit' or 'Vote for this party, for this particular reason'.
- 2) The proposition must be unique; it has to offer something the competitors cannot (easily) copy or counter.
- 3) The proposition must be durable and powerful; strong enough 'to move the masses'. That is, it should be able to hold on to existing target groups and attract new ones (qtd. in Guldbrandsen and Just 131).

The USPs of a company are meant to present an audience with reasons why they should purchase a given product or service. Furthermore, Guldbrandsen and Just also mention the term emotional selling proposition (ESP), which in short, is what a brand does to create a personal identity and a bond between itself and the consumer. According to Guldbrandsen and Just, an organization should create both USPs and ESPs, as a way of covering the necessary basis but also make the communication noticeable, by "creating a personality for the organization, establishing a meaningful relationship with the audience, providing guidelines for the organization's style (safety and strength are distinct sensory experiences and, hence, sound and look different)." (131). The core messages or USPs should be an 'inbetween' of the objectives (goals), as mentioned earlier, and how they are conveyed (channel, content, etc.) (127).

#### **4.3.5 Channel strategy**

Next, these USPs and / or ESPs must be communicated, and depending on which communication goals (as mentioned earlier) are set, the channel strategy should reflect on these. If the goals are 'simple', e.g., create awareness and provide knowledge, then the channel strategy can be mass media, for instance, social media (Petersen and Hørslev 37). On the other side, if the goals are to affect perceptions and behavior, there is targeted communication, in which you aim at a smaller group who might share some characteristics. However, it is not necessarily a choice between the two; both should instead be a mix of media, as "without the right media mix, any strategic communication effort is bound to fail" (Guldbrandsen and Just 131). Furthermore, the specific creative strategy, e.g., taglines and images, should then also be adaptable to work across different channels. There are many media for companies to choose between; however, not every media is the right fit, as every choice has pros and cons. For instance, Facebook is an excellent place to provide an audience with fast information and have dialogs with the audience. However, on the other side, it does require constant information, and it also requires that the audience one is trying to reach has a profile. Furthermore, there are many guidelines and restrictions on Facebook, Instagram, and alike as to what companies can show, promote, and sell through these media.

#### **4.3.6 Questions and answers**

When strategizing communication as plan, an important aspect is also to consider which critical questions audiences might pose after receiving a message (through a campaign, for instance). Therefore, all critical questions should be explored, identified, and, if possible, answered

as thoroughly as possible. That way, companies can reduce the risk of running into communication issues and can be prepared to face any problems an audience might have, either with a campaign or a message (Petersen and Hørslev 41).

#### **4.3.7 Time frame**

The last step, time frame, helps to know when to do what. It can be a challenge, but it can allow companies to focus on communication when their business is open and things might be hectic. A time frame should include when to post which message and communications on which channels, but it should also include time for dialogs and feedback because it is vital to listen as much as you communicate (Petersen and Hørslev 44). But, in relation to the step above, a time frame might create a limitation for a company to research which questions might be posed by the audience and thereby also the possibility for a company to answer them at their best (Petersen and Hørslev 41). Thus, a time frame should be created before, during, and after the manner, thus giving space to use aspects from previous communication in future ones. However, even with all the steps followed and a concrete time frame, not everything can be planned and foreseen; therefore, the other modes that Guldbrandsen and Just propose are also relevant to keep in mind.

In most cases, organizations do also communicate in those modes. But with a controversial product such as cannabis, Curaleaf should be as deliberate and planned as possible if they wish to have a good start on the Danish market. Furthermore, not only due to the controversy of the products but also the fact that they would be entering a whole new market and culture. Therefore, planning their communications could be essential for them.

#### *4.4 Cultural aspects of communication*

As mentioned earlier, strategic communication has lately evolved and now considers socio-cultural contexts in a wider and more concerted way (Guldbrandsen and Just 21). Therefore, the role of culture is also a big part of planning communication, and that means that not only should the above-mentioned steps and processes be dealt with, but also the part of the culture in interception with the steps. Of course, culture is many things, but in terms of marketing communications, it is presented as:

A high determining factor in marketing, particularly in the interplay between international and local marketing. Marketers must be sensitive to the reigning aspects and dimensions of culture: shared values, beliefs, religion, language, laws, rituals, attitudes of mind, traditions,

customs, and behaviours learned by members of society from family and other important institutions” (Doyle 'culture', 2016).

One might argue that it is not necessary to differentiate too much between countries and cultures within communications and marketing because of globalization. Due to this progress, many people around the world might share consumer habits, such as drinking Coca-Cola or wearing jeans, and therefore some believe they are the same (Mooij ch. 1). Globalization can, in such a case, make:

Historic differences or geographical divisions less important or outright irrelevant [and] such [an] approach may lead to a naive viewpoint of doing business in the global environment as a uniform exercise; and create an illusion that customer relations and business transactions stay the same across various countries (Kivenzor, 2015, ch. 5).

However, some companies do practice the same marketing and communications across borders, thereby utilizing a standardization strategy. Such a strategy is used by brands such as Adidas or Coca-Cola, thereby creating consistent brand experiences across the world (Fleishman, 2021). Using such a strategy can lower the costs of marketing expenses, and a company also saves time, especially for brands that operate in multiple different countries and cultures.

While some brands can work with a standardization strategy, others cannot, and this might be due to the services or products they are offering. In that case, a company would need to adopt a localization strategy instead (Mooij ch. 1). And similar to many types of marketing, this comes down to the focus on the audience and the culture. This is not to say that culture is not considered while deciding on a standardization strategy, as companies will still have to define that their product or service is of the same stature in a given country. Even a soda brand such as Coca-Cola can run into concerns and difficulties due to demographics and cultural differences because not every market has the same wants and needs. In one country, sodas can be perceived as normal, while in another country, it might be a luxury. In such a case, a standardization communication strategy would not benefit the company (Mooij ch. 1)

As culture is different from country to country, it can be an obstacle for companies, as they should plan their communication and marketing strategy to match a given culture (Fahy and Jobber, 2019, 82). And therefore, what might work in one culture and country, cannot be expected to work

in another. Furthermore, culture is a big component for companies when trying to understand certain people's consumer behavior and decision-making process; thus, culture is also affecting consumption. In creating a localization strategy, not only is the product being defined as common or uncommon on said market, but everything from the product itself, consumer values, behaviors, perceptions, media habits, etc., are considered as all these aspects can be culturally influenced. In that case, companies need to understand how certain things and aspects work in another market, and thus could do marketing research, so the company can choose the right factors to include in their communication plan, so it fits the culture the best, but also reaches the company's goals at the same time (Fahy and Jobber 114).

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory on common values of "individualism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance" (Nakata and Bilgin, 2009, 61) can aid companies in understanding and foreseeing different cultures and markets, within marketing behaviors, consumer modernity, brand credibility, global marketing, etc., (61). As mentioned above, some tend to see globalization as an indication of cultures converging and consumers becoming similar; however, Hofstede's theory understands that cultural differences are still very much present and should still be respected and worked within.

However, as culture is many things, including media habits, globalization does have a say in changing cultures and relating people across the world. People across countries can access the same things and information and buy the same products, even if the product is not marketed in their country. Therefore, companies should also be aware of an aspect of culture and globalization. So that if entering a new market, some of their possible consumers might already have a perception and connection to them from their communications on another market. But if the company then solely relies on Hofstede's understandings and predictions of a culture, some aspects of the culture and its members might not be considered. Because even if people are members of the same culture, they do not necessarily share all the same traits, behaviors, attitudes, etc. This can be due to globalization and/or generational shifts (Arnould and Thompson ch. 1). This is not to say that a company cannot utilize Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, but they should always be sensitive to the changing needs of their consumers. Therefore, the market research should focus mostly on the people and reflect the needs and wants of the people because identifying the right consumer is essential to building successful communicative actions (Kivenzor ch. 5).

To summarize, when building a communication strategy and then planning communication, the above-mentioned steps, and processes from Petersen and Hørslev and Gulbrandsen and Just all

tie in together with culture. The background and communication goals steps also relate to socio-cultural aspects, in the sense that companies need to know and understand what is happening in the area they are communicating. This is not only in reference to what current events might be happening or competitors, but also cultural aspects, such as values, traditions, and beliefs (Kivencor ch. 5). If consideration of the cultural aspects is not taken, it can negatively impact the communication. In the step of defining target audience(s), and then also in relation to positioning, companies most certainly need to not only understand the consumer behavior of a possible audience but also understand how society and culture might have an effect on these (ch. 5). It is not only necessary to position a company on a market as the 'most sustainable' or 'cheapest' product on the market if these terms have different meanings or perceptions in another culture than the company's original home country (Fahy and Jobber 96). Finding an audience is most probably the one step that relates most to culture and is most important in terms of communication success, in the sense that a company's audience in the U.S. might be different from an audience in Europe, i.e., the audience cannot be expected to be similar either. Thus, culture is a significant component to be aware of when doing strategy and planning communications, especially when entering a new market with a product that might not exist on said market yet. Or a product that has a very different status on one market compared to another, as it might be in the case of Curaleaf marketing on the Danish market if cannabis was to be legalized in Denmark.

## 5. Methods and methodology

### *5.1 Philosophical considerations and research design*

Research paradigms are a set of "basic (. . .) beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (Guba, 1990, 17). There are a variety of research designs, and they are categorized based on ontological and epistemological perspectives and methodological approaches. Ontology is concerned with the "existence of, and relationship between different aspects of society, such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures" (Jupp, 2006, 202). Ontology examines the nature of reality and is interested in addressing the questions 'what is reality?' (Kuhn, 1970, 98). Epistemology is concerned with the "possibility, nature, sources and limits of human knowledge" (Jupp 92). Epistemology examines how one can explore and know reality and refers to how individuals understand knowledge. It addresses the question, "how can I know reality?" (Kuhn 110).

The research focus of this thesis will seek to understand how/if Danes consume cannabis, their perceptions, and opinions on the substance, and how they believe that cannabis could/should be communicated on the Danish market in case of legalization. This research focus will thus seek to understand a social phenomenon, which refers to actions, behaviors, and events that occur due to social influence(s) (Bryman, 2012, 102). Moreover, a large part of communicating strategically focuses on the audience and their settings (cultural and social surroundings). Thus, the research paradigm of this thesis will be social constructivism.

In social constructivism, the ontological stance is that there is no single truth or reality and that reality is created by individuals in groups. Thus, there are multiple realities (Bryman 33). Social constructivism claims that "social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman 33). This ontological perspective suggests that social actors constantly create and construct reality, social phenomena, and their meanings. Furthermore, in social constructivism, it is indicated that the phenomenon above and groups are not only being formed during social interaction(s) but rather that they are "in a constant state of revision" (33). Therefore, social entities are not considered objective, as separate from social actors, but instead as social constructions that are created through perceptions and actions. The epistemological stance of this thesis will be interpretivism. Interpretivism takes the stand that reality needs to be interpreted and the epistemological perspective "respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman 30). In relation to the ontological stance, social constructivism, there are multiple realities, meaning that Curaleaf would need to understand Danes' reality in order to figure out how to communicate to them strategically and create a communication plan that suits Danes and applies to them, and that Curaleaf might not be able to duplicate their current communication on the American market to the Danish market and expect it to work. Thus, reality and society in Denmark and for Danes will need to be interpreted in order to determine Danes' perceptions, behaviors, beliefs, norms, and other interpretive filters through which individuals perceive and understand the world (Chowdhury, 2014, 433).

As mentioned, the research question of this thesis is how Curaleaf could strategically communicate to Danish consumers in case cannabis is legalized in the future. Furthermore, to examine how Curaleaf could communicate to Danish consumers, different data will be needed. On this basis, it was determined that a self-completion questionnaire (survey) and netnographic research will presumably provide the necessary data for researching how Curaleaf could



communicate strategically, creating a communications plan based on the steps and processes mentioned in the theoretical framework.

This thesis will use a mixed-methods design to benefit from both the detailed and contextualized observations of qualitative data and the generalizable and valid observations of quantitative data (George 2022). The survey is intended to provide quantitative data about Danish consumers that is meant to be helpful in combination with the theoretical framework of strategic communication, and the netnographic research is intended to provide qualitative data that will help understand the online community(ies) of Curaleaf and their current consumers. Thus, the strengths and advantages of qualitative data may reduce the weaknesses of quantitative data and vice versa. Furthermore, in relation to the epistemological and ontological perspectives of the thesis, mixed methods will combine the two perspectives and might also aid in reducing some objectivity or subjectivity of either one. It is important to note that these two methods are commonly not utilized collectively in the same research as they do generally point in different directions. Therefore, in their most extreme forms, the two methods are not compatible. However, as the research focus connects to constructing a brand on a new market, and the research is somewhat in-between traditions of either method, the two methods thus inspire this research, and so is the research design. By using mixed-method research, the research focus is believed to be able to be analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework to get a better and more comprehensive understanding of culture (also cannabis culture), Danish consumers, and how to plan strategic communication in a new market. The two methods will be further discussed and elaborated on below.

## *5.2 Methods*

### **5.2.1 Netnography**

Netnography is a branch of ethnography. It adapts some of the methods used in ethnography but studies online communities and is used in marketing research. Netnography is a qualitative research method utilized to obtain qualitative data about online consumer groups and understand sociocultural contexts and influences. According to Kozinets (2002), "one of the major purposes of marketing research is to identify and understand the tastes, desires, relevant symbol systems, and decision-making influences of particular consumers and consumer groups" (Kozinets, "The field behind the screen", 2002, 61).

As previously mentioned, the research topic focuses on how Curaleaf could strategically communicate to Danes, and in the theoretical framework, it was outlined that one crucial aspect of planning communication is audiences, messages, and how the former interact or react to messages.

As mentioned above, social constructivism refers to the creation of knowledge from interactions with situations and environments. It is not finding the truth that is important but instead interpreting the meanings created through social life (Trainor and Graue, 2013, ch. 2). Therefore, netnography is an appropriate method for examining meanings and messages created on and through Curaleafs online communities. How do individuals interpret and perceive them and create meanings, and could the communicative actions from Curaleaf possibly be recreated to and among Danish consumers and communities with sociocultural differences?

An online community is when there are interactions between consumers and companies, for example, and there are many online platforms where netnography can be applied. Curaleaf uses channels such as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. According to Kozinets (2015), when using netnography in research, one should look for communities that are "active, they have recent regular communications (. . .), interactive, that have a flow of communications between participants (. . .) [and] rich in data, offering more detailed or descriptively rich data" (Kozinets, *Netnography*, 2015, ch. 7). Curaleafs Instagram<sup>2</sup> has the most followers and posts; thus, that account is the most active, and there are always interactions between participants and/or the company and participants. Thus, Instagram was chosen as the channel to apply netnographic research to, as the site also contains information that relates to the thesis' research focus.

Netnography will be used in this thesis to study the interactions between Curaleafs Instagram account and its consumers. Netnography is an interpretive research method, and thus it will be used to observe and interpret messages communicated on Curaleafs Instagram account and how consumers interact or react to them.

Due to the theoretical framework of strategizing communication and planning, it was determined that using this method to obtain such data will be suitable, as it will be necessary to observe how Curaleaf is currently communicating to their consumers and then use that data to understand the company better but also use the data in comparison and addition to the survey data, to examine if Danes would appreciate such actions and communication. Furthermore, netnography is "far less time consuming and elaborate" (Kozinets, "The field behind the screen", 62), as opposed to traditional ethnography or even interviews, it is flexible, and "compared with focus groups and personal interviews, netnography is far less obtrusive, because it is conducted using observations of consumers in a context that is not fabricated by the marketing researcher" (62).

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<sup>2</sup> Curaleafs Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/curaleaf.usa/>

The researcher position in the netnographic study will be the one Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2012), pose as the 'lurker', and "the lurker takes on a passive role, (. . .), but he or she does not reveal his or her identity" (68). The approach will be a passive and covert one because it will not be necessary to interact with others on the Instagram account, as the data needed is merely to detect in what way Curaleaf is communicating to their current consumers and how interaction occurs, as this is an essential aspect of strategic communication. Furthermore, by taking the 'lurker' approach, there will be no interference with ongoing communication, and the approach will not "influence the study subject" (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 69).

Even with the advantages netnography is intended to provide in this research, there might also be some disadvantages. The philosophical stance of interpretivism includes studying phenomenology, i.e., "a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world" (Bryman 30). Thus, there is a risk of the researcher having preconceptions of the world, in this case, the American society on Curaleaf's Instagram, and according to Kozinets (2002), there is then a risk of misrepresentation when analyzing the netnographic data, as it relies on the researcher to interpret the findings (Kozinets, "The field behind the screen"). One way to reduce this risk would be to apply more than one method in the research of the world (netnographic). However, this will not be possible due to time constraints and limitations. However, the findings from the netnographic data are not going to be definitive understandings but rather understood as indications. Furthermore, various types of content, reactions, and interactions will be observed, and this is intended to create some nuances and broader meanings. The questions that will be posed in the netnographic research are as follows: 1. What content does Curaleaf post? 2. What reactions do the community have? And 3. How does Curaleaf interact with the community?

### **5.2.2 Survey**

An online survey was chosen as "a survey is a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the large population of which the entities are members" (Wolf, 2016, ch. 1). The survey will be conducted to obtain and measure Danish consumers' perceptions of cannabis, consumption behaviors of the substance, general understanding of the substance, and how they think it could/should be communicated, i.e., which aspects should be included, and which should be excluded. Advantages of it being an online survey will be that it is costless, it will be quicker to

conduct, and any possible effects the interviewer might bring upon the participant will be reduced (Bryman 233). Furthermore, due to the nature of the questions asked in the survey, which will be explained later, it was determined that the chance that more people will respond to the survey will be improved and that those respondents will be more comfortable being honest, for instance, on cannabis consumption habits.

A survey is intended to aid the researcher in collecting a more considerable amount of data than with, for instance, interviews or focus groups, and thus it will be a vast asset in research where social and cultural constructs will be of focus. Furthermore, utilizing a survey will create reliability in the research, as surveys are standardized because the same questions will be phrased in the exact same way and will then be posed to the respondents. However, if the questions are phrased in an insufficient manner, respondents might interpret their meaning differently, and that might cause a reduction in the questions' reliability (Bryman 203). A further outline of the questions that will be presented in the survey will be described later.

The survey will be used to observe situations and actions that affect Danes in terms of perception of cannabis, consumption, and general opinions within the communication of cannabis. Such situations and acts do not only influence Danes in terms of values, beliefs, ideas, etc., but they can also influence ways in which Danes perceive different aspects of social actions, and in this case, that could be communication and marketing efforts consumer behavior and perceptions. The survey is intended to provide quantitative data, and thus, obtaining quantitative and measurable data might allow for better knowledge that will possibly lead to an understanding of the social world (Bryman 319). However, this is not to state that the world can be entirely measured, as positivists assert (Bryman 199), but rather that a social world, in this case, Danes and cannabis perceptions, etc., will be researched and then measured in order to interpret later the numbers and statistics in line with the theories posed. And because that reality or social world is still believed to be socially constructed, the ontological stance of social constructivism still applies to this, even though that stance is primarily used in qualitative research.

### *5.2.3 Survey design*

The survey will be created using SurveyXact and will be distributed on online platforms, such as my personal Facebook and LinkedIn account, and a survey group on Facebook; a group for universities students where they can post their survey for others to participate, and also participate in other's surveys, to help one another. The survey will take a maximum of 5 minutes to

answer, and participants will be informed of the anonymity of the survey and that no data that can lead back to a particular individual will be stored. Furthermore, participants will also be informed on what topic the survey is researching and that they can at any time stop any participation and exit the survey. It will be a non-probability method of sampling called snowballing. This type of sampling method is commonly used for qualitative research; however, it can also be used for quantitative research; when the researcher needs to focus upon or to reflect on relationships between people, tracing connections through snowball sampling may be a better approach than conventional probability sampling" (Bryman 203). Using snowball sampling is generally done when the population is hidden or difficult to identify; however, in this case, it was decided to use this sampling due to the nature of the research topic and questions. Furthermore, it is also simple and cost-efficient. Although it is not reasonably possible to generalize from a snowball sampling, the survey will not particularly be used for a generalization per se, but rather to obtain insight into a topic that is currently non-existent in Denmark and to work from there.

#### 5.2.3.1 Questions

The survey will mainly contain closed questions, in which the respondents will be presented with response options from which they can choose the most suitable answer. Utilizing close-ended questions enhances the "comparability of answers" (Bryman 249) due to the pre-coding from the fixed response options because, with open-ended questions, such compatibility can be complex. This, in turn, then, can also pose certain reliability, especially in questions six through nine.

Questions	Topics
1-5	Demographics
6-9	Consumption
10-16	Perceptions, beliefs, attitudes

**Figure 1: Areas of interest of survey questions**

Question 6 will ask about prior cannabis consumption. In this question, the respondents who will answer yes will be sent on to question 6b, where they will be asked if they are currently using it, and then if yes is answered, they will be asked how often they use it in question 6c. On the other

hand, if question 6 is answered with a no, then respondents will not be presented with the questions above but will instead be presented with question 6b on why they have never consumed cannabis. After the questions 6, 6a, 6b, and 6c are asked, in whichever way, all respondents will then be led back on the same track, with question 7 about if cannabis was to be legalized if that could have a possible influence on their cannabis consumption.

As all respondents will not be presented with all the questions in the same way and order, it can be argued that full reliability might not be reached. However, it will be too confusing for respondents to answer questions about how often they use cannabis if they have never tried it before. Furthermore, it will also be challenging to compare answers if all participants are going to be posed with all of those questions. Therefore, there will be a smaller differentiation between respondents and the questions posed to them in that section of the survey. Reliability might not be reached due to the difference in the questions; however, due to the nature of those questions, presenting all responses with the question about how often one consumes cannabis if they previously answer they have never consumed it might be going to cause less reliability (Bryman 252).

Close-ended questions and fixed response options can be limiting and can cause invalid data if respondents do not find any of the response options suitable for them; and therefore, the data might not be representative of respondents' true opinions in some cases (Bryman 250). Thus, some questions in the survey will also contain an open-ended response option. Questions 2 and 5 relating to demographics; 6a+8 relating to consumption; 11+12 relating to perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs will have a response option of 'other' in which respondents will have the option to choose and also explain their response if none of the other options are suitable enough for them (see appendix A, page 6-8). Questions 7, and 10 will be close-ended questions with response options of 'yes', 'no', 'maybe', or 'do not know'. However, for 'yes', 'no', and 'maybe' in question 7, respondents will be given the option to further explain their response in terms of why they chose that response, e.g., yes, no, or maybe. And in question 10, 'yes' and 'no' will contain the same options. However, for the questions that will include open-ended answers, participants will be allowed to simply write an 'X' in the typing boxes, so they in that way will not feel forced to elaborate or pick any of the other options that will not require a written answer.

The response options will consist of different options, which will be shown in the figure below (see figure 2).

Questions	Response options
1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (demographics) 6a and 6c (consumption)	Single select multiple choice option
6, 6b, 7, 9 (consumption) 10 (perceptions, beliefs, attitudes)	Dichotomous (7 and 9 allowed for indication of intensity in responses)
8 (consumption) 11, and 12 (perceptions, beliefs, attitudes)	Multiple choices with multiple select option
13, 14, 15, and 16 (perceptions, beliefs, attitudes)	Likert scale

**Figure 2: Response options in survey**

Single select multiple-choice options are chosen for those questions (1-6, and 6c) as these questions need only one answer in terms of demographics and consumption patterns, and behaviors. Instead of having the respondents write their own answers to those questions, they will be given a set of options that is best suitable for the research so as not to obtain unnecessary data. Furthermore, the options are going to be mutually exclusive and will not overlap (Bryman 252). Dichotomous options are chosen for questions (6, 6b, 7, and 9-10) because such response types help segment audiences effectively. Furthermore, it also simplifies the survey experience for the participants (Fogli and Herkenhoff, 2018, ch. 4). However, questions 7 and 9 will include a 'maybe' and a 'do not know' option because if merely two options (dichotomous) will be available for those questions, it can cause a feeling of limitation within the participants (Fogli and Herkenhoff, 2018, ch. 4). Therefore, it is determined that there is going to be a need to allow participants to "indicate levels of intensity in their replies so that they are not forced into 'yes' or 'no' answers where the intensity of feeling may be more appropriate" (Bryman 265). Multiple select multiple-choice options will be chosen for questions 8 relating to consumption and 11-12 relating to perceptions etc., as these are going to need to contain more than one single answer, as the nature of the questions might allude to there being many different answers. And because it cannot be a given that all think alike, even in the same society, participants will be presented with a list of response options for a given question, in which they can choose all that applied to their answers. Furthermore, those questions will also contain 'another' option, where participants can write their own answer if the list does not show it.

By presenting respondents with such options, it is intended to allow for answers that can provide a more in-depth understanding of responses. And because not all Danes share all the same socially constructed traits, beliefs, and such, giving them the opportunity to write down their reasons allows for some more in-depth data on why Danes might be opposed to cannabis consumption, the communication about it, and such. Those answers can, in turn, be a favorable tool when strategizing communication and creating a communications plan, as there is then going to be data on what to avoid and what not to do. Lastly, a Likert scale will be used for questions 13-16 relating to perceptions, etc., as these questions will ask about attitudes and beliefs, and responses need to indicate to which extent they agree or disagree with the statements in those questions. Also, it is important to note that questions 13-16 will not be presented as actual questions but rather statements. But for the sake of clarity, 13-16 will be referred to as 'questions' throughout the thesis.

According to Bryman, there are different rules or ways of process when designing questions for a survey. One of these is "always bear in mind your research questions" (Bryman 254), and the questions from the survey will all be created with that in mind and will address the different aspects of the research question, along with the theoretical framework. More specific rules for asking questions include "avoid ambiguous terms in questions (. . .) [and] avoid long questions" (Bryman 255), and the questions will also align with these rules as there will be no ambiguity or long questions. Another rule that Bryman state is important to follow in designing survey questions is to not ask "very general questions" (257), as such questions can "lack a frame of reference" (257). The survey in this thesis will contain a few questions that are somewhat general, for instance, question 6a (see appendix A, page 3). However, in order to reduce any lack of reference, question 6a will have a fixed response option that will give the respondent a clearer idea of what is meant by the question, and there will also be an option to write one's own answer. It is going to be the same case for question 8.

Due to the nature of the research and the theoretical framework on strategic communication and planning, the survey questions will follow the steps and processes mentioned in the theory. For instance, in the theoretical framework, it is mentioned that when entering a new market, a company needs to determine its target audience(s). Therefore questions 1-5 will ask demographic questions that are intended to be used to determine a possible contemporary target audience for Curaleaf from the ones that answer the survey. Questions 6-9 will connect to questions 1-5, as the former are questions about cannabis consumption. With the data from questions 1-5, it might be possible to go



to questions 6-9 and see which demographics either have used or currently use cannabis and, furthermore, other aspects of consumption.

That data is meant to help in understanding how or if Danes use cannabis and how often it occurs. In terms of how Curaleaf could possibly communicate on the Danish market, questions 10-16 asked about thoughts, beliefs, and ideas about cannabis as a recreational drug and how it can be communicated on the Danish market, in their opinion. That data is meant to help in determining what type of communication Danes find appropriate about cannabis and what they desire, and that is intended to be a tool in the steps of strategizing communication and planning messages and channel choices.

#### *5.2.4 Ethical considerations*

In both survey research and netnographic research, there are some ethical issues and considerations that must be taken into account. In survey research, one of the "golden rules" is getting consent and that "respondents' cooperation is voluntary and must be based on adequate information about the information they will be asked for, the purpose for which it will be collected, that their identity will be protected, with whom it might be shared and in what form" (Wolf ch. 7). Such a potential ethical issue will be reduced and considered in the form of written informed consent at the start of the survey. In that written informed consent, the participants will be given adequate information about the survey and what it entails, and no personal information will be obtained or stored. Participants will also be informed that they can at any point stop any participation and exit the survey. By doing this, participants will have enough information about what they are going to participate in, which is one of the most important ethical issues to consider when conducting surveys (Wolf ch. 7). Furthermore, by promising and assuring complete anonymity, it can help "elicit (. . .) honest responses" (Fogli and Herkenhoff ch. 4).

The questions that will be posed in survey research can also be ethically incorrect in terms of subjectivity, leading questions, and if formulated in a way that can question morals (Fogli ch. 4). To ensure this does not occur, the survey questions will be reviewed more than once in order to formulate the questions in the correct manner (ch. 4).

In netnographic research, ethical questions that can be relevant include (but are not limited to); "Are online social interactions private or public?" and "Whose consent do we need to gain in netnography?" (Kozinets, Netnography, ch. 6). According to Kozinets (2015), researchers should "always fully disclose his/her presence, affiliations and intentions during any research interactions"

(Netnography, ch. 6), in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity to members of the online community and obtain 'feedback' from the members. However, according to Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, ethical issues of netnography relate to which research position is being taken. Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen state that there "are occasions when disguised observations are the only option" (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 67). As Curaleafs Instagram account is public, it was decided that a 'lurker' position and covert approach is suitable (67). If it was going to be an overt approach, there might be a risk of interfering with the naturally occurring interactions on the Instagram account (67). Thus, as Curaleafs Instagram page is a public page and not a close account or group where special access is needed, the question about if the online interactions are private or public will not pose an ethical issue per se in this thesis. As for whose consent is needed, there is no need for consent as, again, no names or personal information is going to be used from the netnographic research data and because the Instagram page is a public site (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 68).

## 6. Analysis

The analysis section will be divided into two separate parts. The first part will consist of the survey and netnography data. These two datasets will be processed, analyzed, and presented to obtain an outline of the data and what it displays. This part will be a more concrete and descriptive aspect of the analysis section; however, it will display essential and interesting points from the survey and netnographic research. The findings and any indications will be further explored in the second part. As the research focus of the thesis is how Curaleaf could communicate strategically on the Danish market, the second part will consist of a more reflective and discussive examination of the findings along with the theoretical framework to present a suggestive strategic communication plan for Curaleaf on the Danish market. However, the second part will also incorporate critical points of the data and theory.

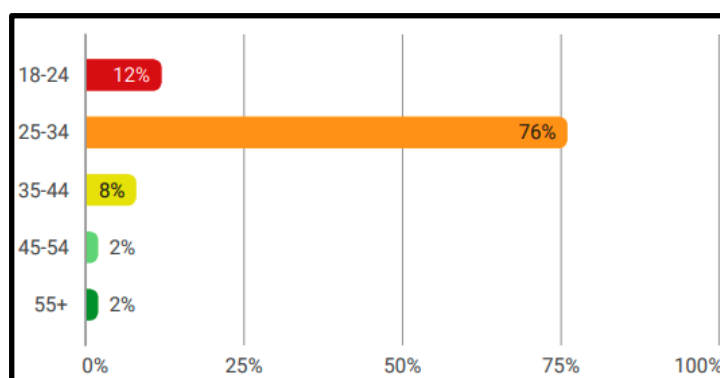
### *6.1 Survey results*

The survey was available and open for responses for three weeks, and it generated 51 fully completed answers, while there were 16 incomplete responses. The 16 incomplete responses were filtered out before analyzing the data. The survey was created using SurveyXact, a web-based analysis tool Aalborg University provides. SurveyXact has software and analysis applications in different diagrams and charts. Thus, the analysis of the survey data utilizes these tools, and the

results will be displayed using pie charts and bar charts to visualize the data representation. The survey was initially distributed in Danish, as this was most appropriate as the problem formulation focuses on the Danish market. However, after closing the survey for any further responses, the questions and response options were translated into English for the thesis. But there will only be a copy of the Danish version in appendix A. However, in the thesis, I will be using the English version. Moreover, any elaborated answers from respondents used in the thesis will also be translated into English (but can be found in Danish in appendix A, pages 11-13).

### 6.1.1 Demographics

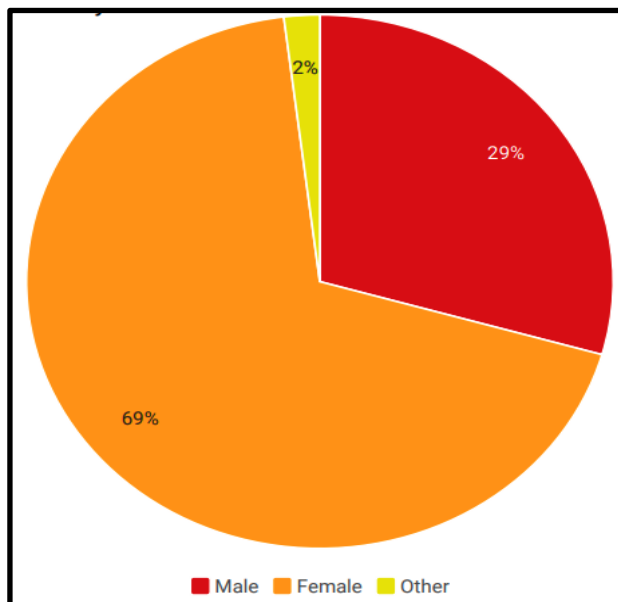
As mentioned in the methodology section, questions 1-5 asked respondents demographic questions. Q1 asked about age groups, and as can be observed in figure 3, the primary age group is 25-34, with 76 percent of the responses, and the next largest age group is 18-24. As mentioned in the methodology section, the survey was distributed using the snowballing sampling method on my personal Facebook and LinkedIn accounts and in a survey Facebook group for university students. Moreover, according to Facebook statistics in Denmark, people aged 25-34 are the largest user group (NapoleonCat 2020). This could be one reason for the findings in figure 3; however, another reason could also be that due to the nature of the research topic and the survey, the younger generations (Gen Z and millennials) are either more open and/or do have knowledge about cannabis.



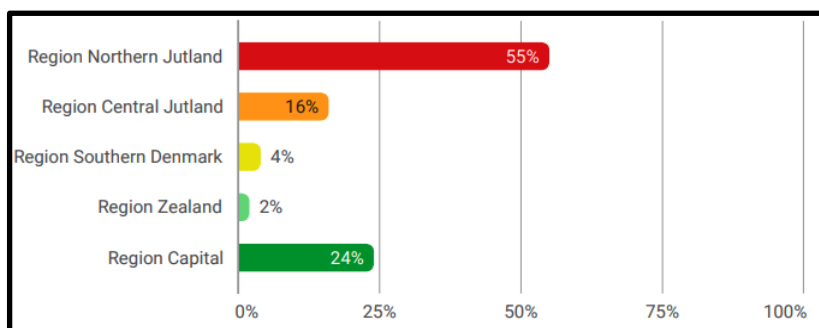
*Figure 3: Age Groups*

Q2, asked about gender identity and figure 4 shows that most respondents are women, with 69 percent. Q3 concerned location in Denmark and was divided into regions. Here the majority reside in Northern Jutland and then the capital, Copenhagen. Q4 asked about level of education, and Q5 asked about current occupation. As seen in figure 6, out of the 51 respondents, 43 percent have

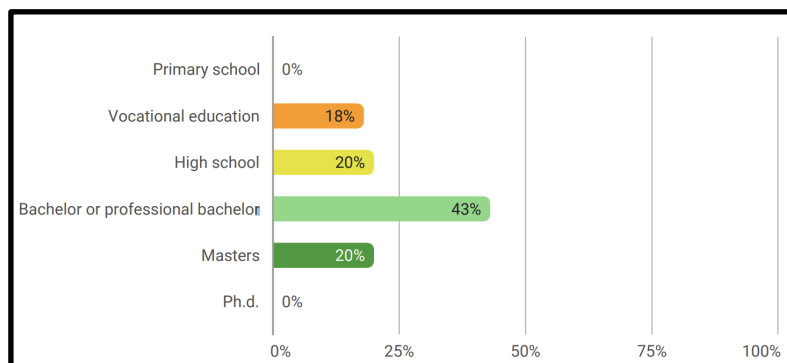
finished a bachelor's or a professional bachelor's degree, and then 20 percent for both a master's degree and a high school diploma. Q5 shows that 47 percent of the respondents are students, and 35 percent work full time. These findings indicate what a possible target group/audience could be. The results indicate that it is females ages 25-34 with a higher level of education who are either currently students or working full time. This will be discussed in more detail in section 6.3.3.



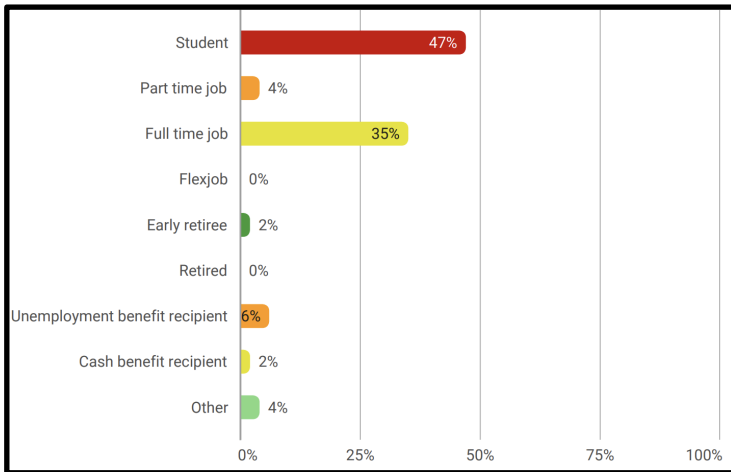
*Figure 4: Gender*



*Figure 5: Location*



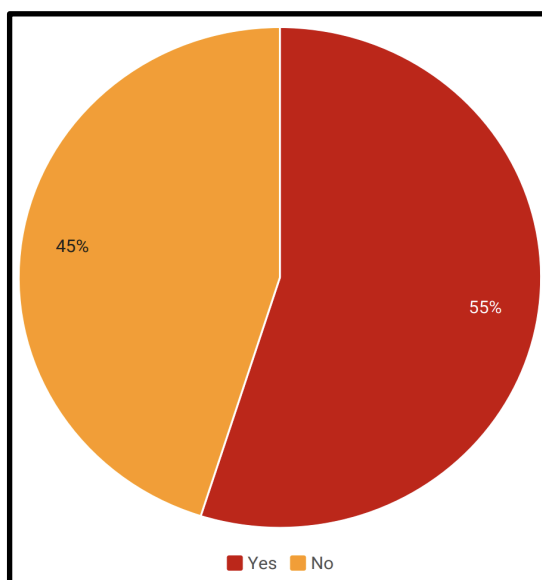
*Figure 6: Educational level*



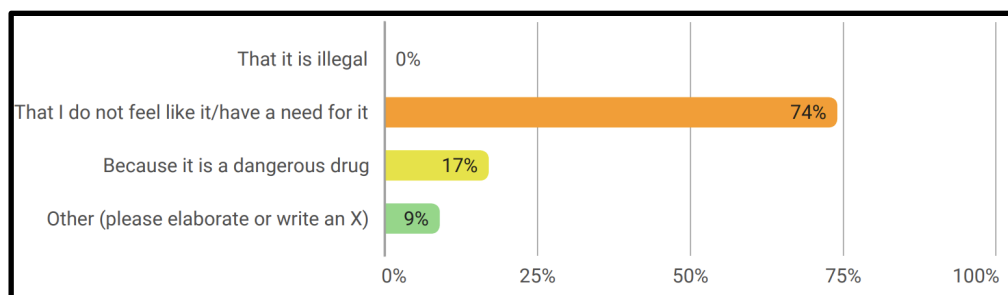
**Figure 7: Occupation**

### 6.1.2 Consumption

As mentioned previously, questions 6-9 asked respondents about previous and possible current cannabis consumption. As seen in figure 8, 55 percent responded 'no' when asked about prior cannabis use, and 45 percent said 'yes'. If respondents answered 'no' in Q6, they were then led to Q6a, asking why they had not used cannabis before. In figure 9, findings show that out of the 55 percent that have not consumed cannabis before the survey participation, the main reason is that they have not needed it, with 74 percent of the answers. While it is only 17 percent that notes it is because cannabis is a dangerous drug. This finding can indicate that Danes' non-cannabis consumption does not relate to the substance being illegal, but rather that they merely do not wish to consume it. However, it can also be because some respondents might connect dangerous with illegality, which is, therefore, the reason for non-consumption.



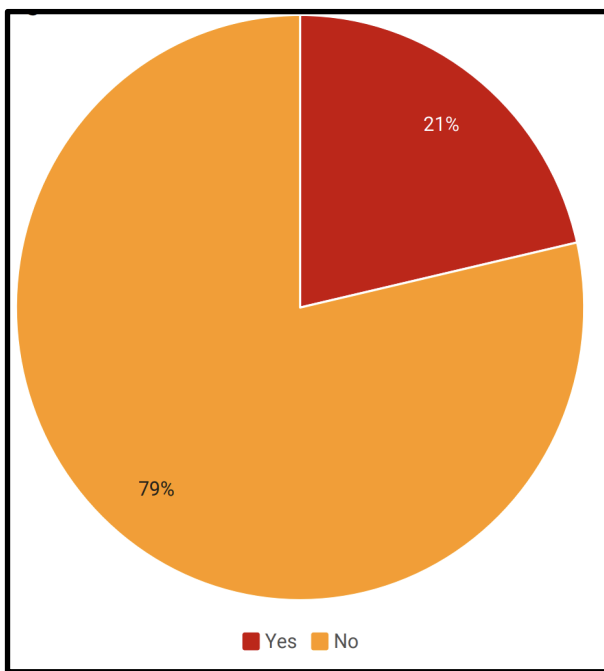
**Figure 8: Previous cannabis use**



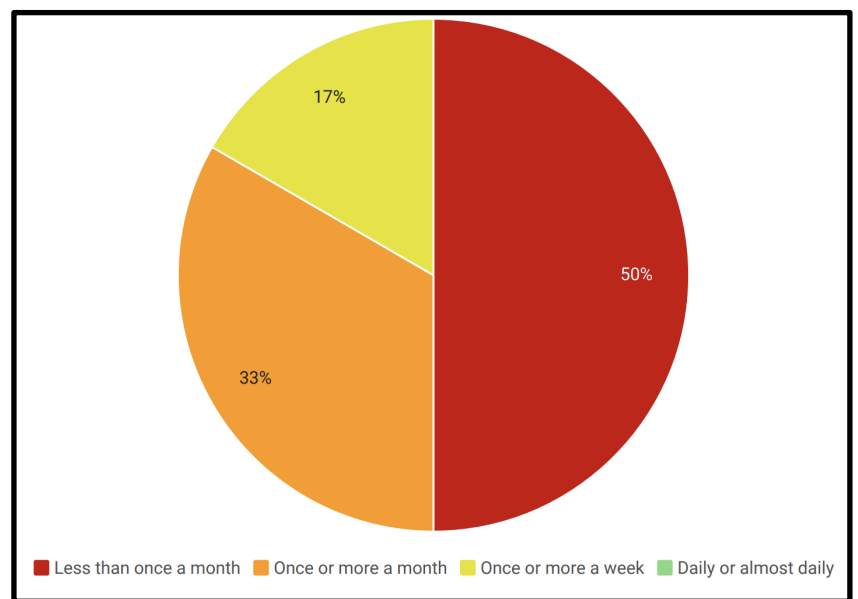
**Figure 9: Reasons for no prior consumption**

However, if respondents answered 'yes' in Q6, they were then led to Q6b, which asked about current cannabis consumption. Out of the 45 percent that answered 'yes' in Q6, only 21 percent said they are also currently using cannabis (see figure 10). Those 21 percent were then led to Q6c, which asked about consumption patterns. Here those respondents could choose how often they consume cannabis, and 50 percent stated they use cannabis less than once a month, while 33 percent said they use it once or more a month. None of the respondents indicated that they use cannabis daily or almost daily.

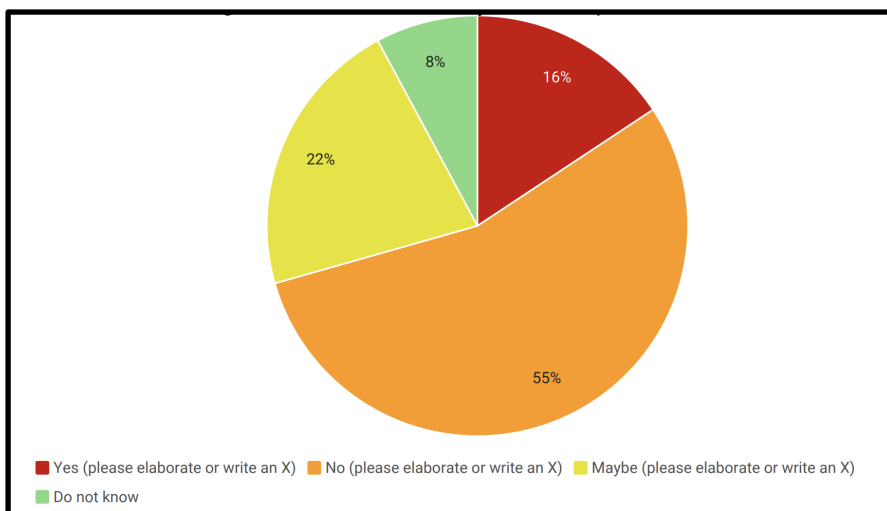
Results from questions 6, 6a, 6b, and 6c can indicate various aspects. For example, one could argue that the reason for 79 percent stating that they have tried but do not currently consume cannabis is due to the illegality of the substance. Alternatively, people do not trust the substance to be clean because it is illegal. Due to such possible speculations, all respondents were asked in Q7 that in the case of cannabis legalization, if that might affect any consumption of cannabis. And as seen in figure 12, only 16 percent said 'yes' to the fact that their cannabis consumption would be affected by legalization. 55 percent said that legalization would not affect their consumption of cannabis, while 22 percent said that it might affect consumption.



**Figure 10: Current cannabis use**



**Figure 11: Consumption pattern**



**Figure 12: Legalization affecting consumption**

Furthermore, in Q7, respondents had the option to comment on their answers. Among the 16 percent that answered 'yes', six respondents elaborated their answer and indicated reasons for why their consumption could be affected. The main reasons include; safety when purchasing, availability, clean product, and information about the products (see figure 13). Among the 22 percent that indicated that legalization of cannabis might affect their consumption, reasons include health benefits, feelings of safety, and becoming more appealing (see figure 14). As for the 55 percent of respondents that said their cannabis consumption would not be affected by legalization, the main reasons include: no need for it and not enough information about the use [of cannabis] (see figure 15). These findings could indicate that the legalization of cannabis could induce or change some individuals' cannabis consumption. Furthermore, the findings from the comments in Q7 (figures 13 and 14) could also demonstrate how the communication about and concerning the product could become and which information should be included.

- I would be more comfortable buying and using it [cannabis], as it would then have been made in a controlled and safe environment
- Because in that case it would be easier to buy, and I would (most likely) get more information about the pros and cons about it [cannabis]
- In case of health issues, then yes.
- By having a safe and secure way to make cannabis and consume it, then at certain occasions I would use it
- If it was legalized, it would be easier to acquire. Therefore, I would probably use it more frequently

*Figure 13: Reasons for affected consumption<sup>3</sup>*

- It would then be a treatment like other drugs
- I would probably feel safer about using the product
- Maybe it would give [me] 'more' desire to try it [cannabis]
- Would probably never use it regularly, but if it became legal, I could probably be more likely to use it a little more often in social contexts
- It is not as such something I am interested in at the moment, but I think I would seek it out more if it was legal to use, because I have enjoyed it the times, I have used cannabis. But that it is illegal probably generally holds me back from seeking it out myself, so it has always been through others that I have used cannabis
- Only in case I got sick

*Figure 14: Reasons for possible affection of consumption*

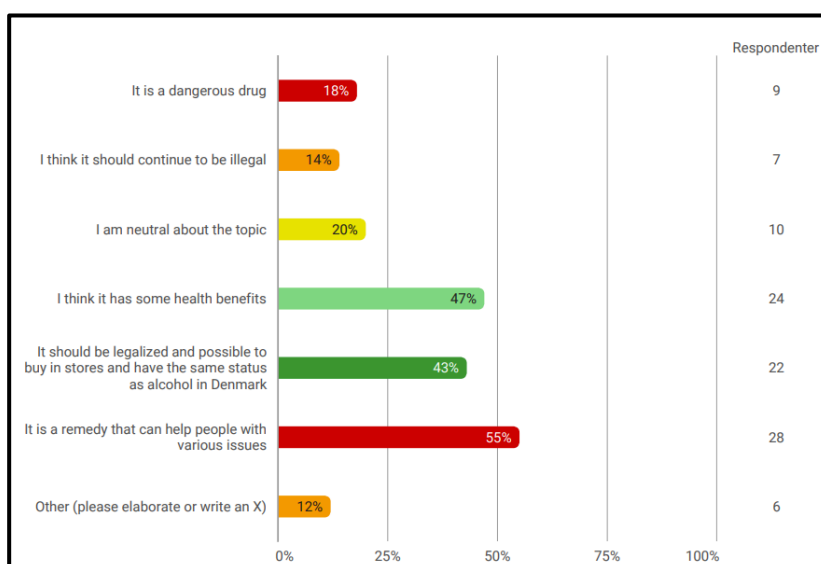
<sup>3</sup> For all the comments respondents made and that is used in the analysis, answers have been edited for conciseness, and clarity. Full responses can be found in Danish in appendix A on pages 11-13.



- I do not feel the need to use cannabis
- It is still dangerous
- I do not like to smoke
- I would still not want to use cannabis
- Ignorance of the consequences of use
- Would not affect my opinion on cannabis
- I would be afraid to try it

**Figure 15: Reasons for no affection of consumption**

Q7 and the response options and answers could lead to an indication as to what people think of cannabis. For example, the number of respondents answering 'no' to prior or current cannabis consumption in Q6 and Q6b and the amount stating that legalization would not affect their consumption could indicate that respondents' general idea of cannabis is negatively charged. Therefore, in Q8, respondents were asked what they generally think about cannabis. The results from Q8 show that nine respondents believe that cannabis is a dangerous drug, and seven respondents believe it should continue to remain illegal (see figure 16).



**Figure 16: General perceptions of cannabis<sup>4</sup>**

However, 28 respondents perceive cannabis as a remedy that can help people with various issues, while 24 respondents perceive cannabis as having health benefits. Moreover, 22 respondents believe that cannabis should be legalized and possible to purchase in stores while having the same status as alcohol in Denmark (see figure 16). 6 respondents chose the 'other' option, where they could comment and state their thoughts on cannabis. Among those, the general conciseness is that

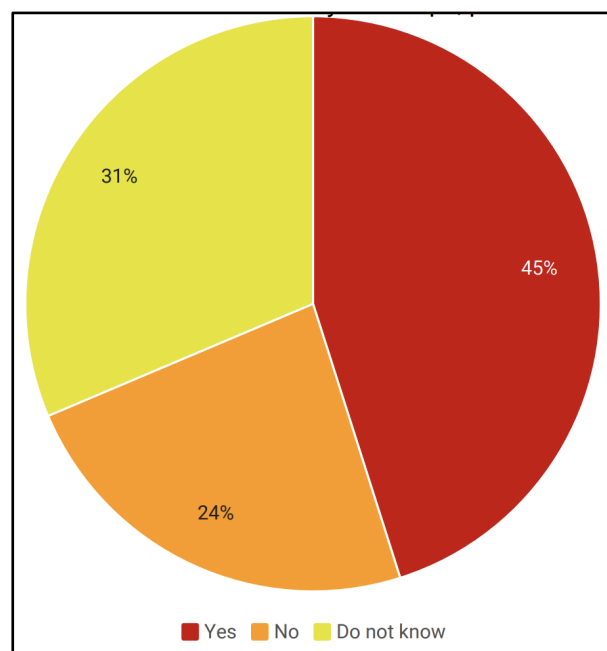
<sup>4</sup> Here respondents could choose more than one option; thus, the results are presented in response numbers instead of percentages (see figure 16).

cannabis should be legal, but in a controlled manner, such as medical, and should only be available for purchase at specific locations (see figure 17).

- Should only be legalized for medical reasons
- Should be handled like tobacco
- It should be regulated. Not on the same level as alcohol, but a level above. Only available at specific locations
- There should be strict rules about the use of cannabis if it becomes legal

**Figure 17: Added responses about perception**

Lastly, in the question related to consumption, respondents were asked in Q9 if they would prefer cannabis to be easier to purchase, in shops and pharmacies, etc. Figure 18 shows that 45 percent of all respondents want cannabis to be easier to buy, while 24 percent stated it should not, and 31 percent do not know.



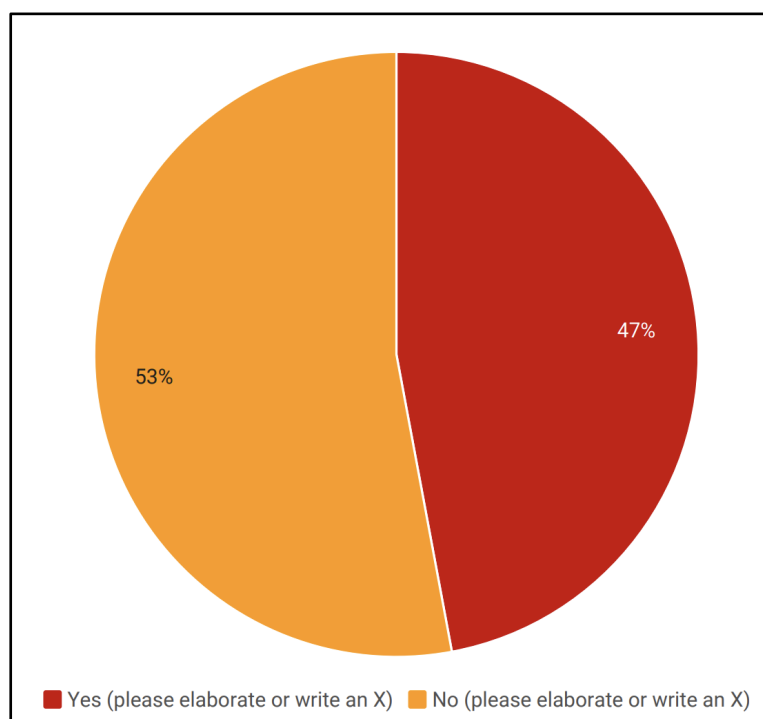
**Figure 18: Preference of cannabis accessibility**

The findings from Q8 and Q9 (figures 16 and 18) indicate that the general perception of cannabis among the 51 respondents is positive, as compared to the number of respondents stating that they do not use cannabis currently or have never done it. Thus, such findings can indicate that even though individuals do not consume the product themselves and might never intend to, they still believe

cannabis to be a valuable remedy for people. Furthermore, there is a desire for cannabis to be more accessible, for instance, at a pharmacy.

### 6.1.3 Communication preferences about cannabis

The last part of the survey, questions 10-16, asked respondents how they think communication and marketing of cannabis should or could be on the Danish market. Q10 asked respondents if they think cannabis as an intoxicant should be communicated on the Danish market (if legalized), and 53 percent answered 'no', while 47 percent answered 'yes' (see figure 19). In addition to Q10, respondents could further comment. Amongst the ones that did add an answer for responding 'no', some main reasons include: should not be marketed, but rather only communicated for easily accessible information, that it is an intoxicant and that it is dangerous (see figure 20).



*Figure 19: Preference of communication and marketing of cannabis*

- You should not **market intoxicants** that are dangerous
- Because it is an **intoxicant**.
- I do not see a reason to **market** stimulating substances. Alcohol should not be **marketed** either
- For the same reason that there are limitations on other **intoxicants**
- It should only be used medically
- I do not think it is necessary to **market**, as it might still feel 'illegal'.
- Not as alcohol is **marketed**.
- Should not be **marketed** as an **intoxicant**, but rather as a natural medicine

*Figure 20: Added responses to no marketing and communication about cannabis*

As can be observed in figure 19, the words shown in bold indicate two things. Firstly, there is seemingly a theme in the comments for 'no' that cannabis as an intoxicant should not be marketed. However, this finding can be a result of the fact that the Q10 included and referred to cannabis as an intoxicant instead of a recreational drug, which is what was meant by it. However, as the survey was initially distributed in Danish, it was determined that most might not be aware of the definition of 'recreational' but do know of 'intoxicant' (rusmiddel). Using the word 'intoxicant' instead was intended to have the same meaning as 'recreational'; however, it does not seem that respondents perceived it as such. Despite a misstep in word choice, another aspect that can be perceived among the comments is that cannabis should not be marketed or advertised. Instead, cannabis should merely be communicated so that information is easily accessible. Among the 47 percent of respondents that answered 'yes' in Q10, comments mainly included: the importance of informational discourse, similarity to alcohol and tobacco marketing, and informing about the product (see figure 21).

- Yes, but **in line with alcohol and tobacco** (which are also intoxicants)
- Even though you cannot advertise for smoking, does not mean you cannot advertise for other products
- Because it is **less dangerous than alcohol**
- Maybe not **as an intoxicant**, but certainly should be communicated on the same **level as alcohol**
- Yes, it would create **more opportunities for discourse** about the substance

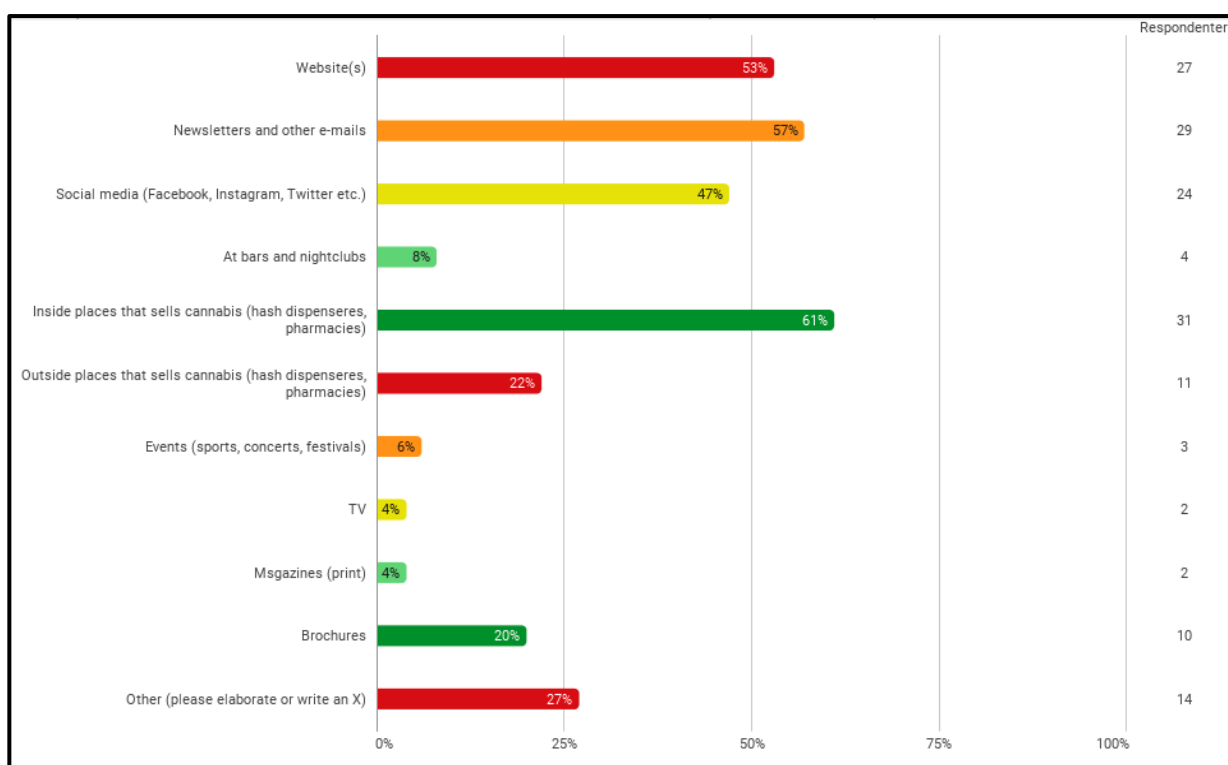
*Figure 21: Added responses to marketing and communication about cannabis*

In figure 21, some of the words in the added responses are bolded, and these findings indicate that respondents that think cannabis should be marketed and communicated do so because it is important to create awareness and that it is no different from alcohol; if not even better than alcohol. Thus, the comments from figures 20 and 21, respectively 'no' and 'yes', can indicate that

respondents generally do think cannabis should be communicated and that it should either be in line with alcohol or similar.

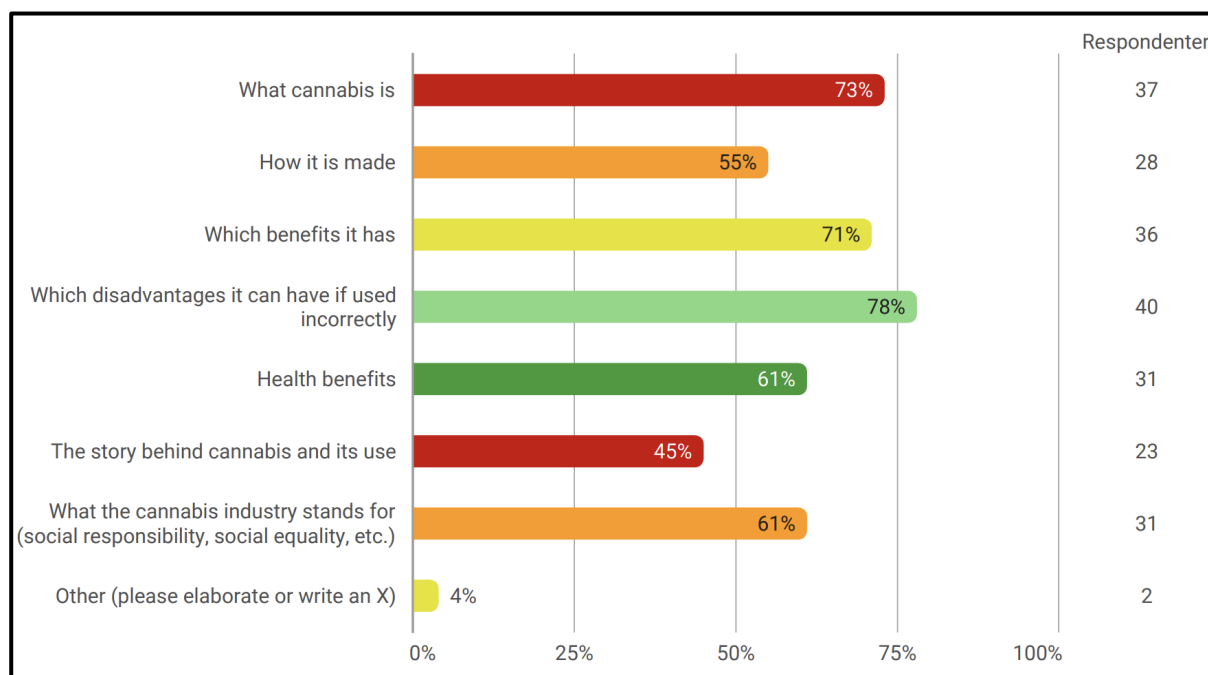
Next, Q11 asked respondents where they think cannabis should or can be marketed on the Danish market. The results from Q11 display that the option with the most choices is 'inside places that sell cannabis', which can be pharmacies, dispensaries, etc. (see figure 22). And then, there are 27 responses for websites, 29 for newsletters and other emails, and 24 for social media. Those are the options with the most choices, and these can reflect the primary age group of the respondents. Or it can indicate that these are the best places for cannabis communication.

Then respondents were asked, in Q12, what type of information should be communicated about cannabis as an intoxicant<sup>5</sup>. Results here are that respondents think that cannabis communication should involve the disadvantages cannabis use can have and then what cannabis is. Furthermore, respondents seem to agree that the communication should also include benefits, what the industry stands for, and how it is made (see figure 23). These findings indicate that respondents are not entirely aware of what cannabis is and that such information seems essential to communicate.



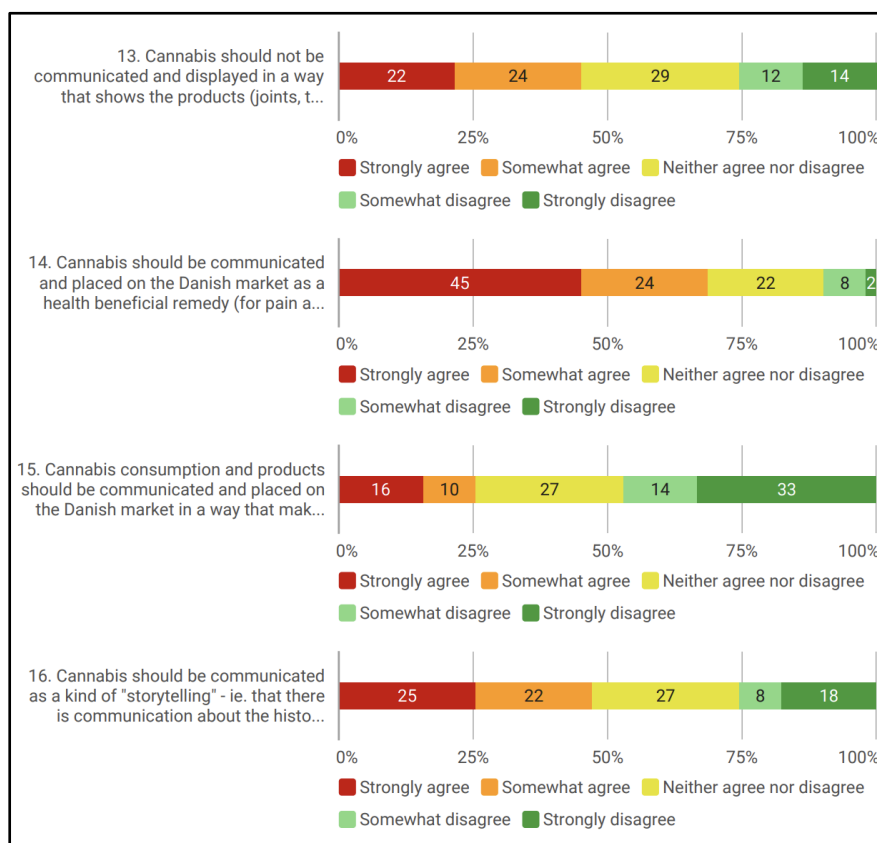
**Figure 22: Places to communicate and market cannabis**

<sup>5</sup> Here, respondents could choose more than one option; thus, the results are presented in response numbers instead of percentages (see figure 23).



**Figure 23: Types of information**

Questions 13-16 asked respondents to indicate to which degree they agree or disagree on specific aspects of cannabis communication. Therefore, questions 13-16 were formulated as statements and not questions. Q13 stated that cannabis should not be displayed and communicated, so the products are shown, i.e., joints, plants, etc. Here the main conciseness is that respondents neither agree nor disagree. Q14 stated that cannabis should be communicated on the Danish market as a health-beneficial remedy, and here the joint opinion is strongly agreed, with 45 percent. Q15 stated that cannabis should be communicated on the Danish market in a manner that makes people feel part of a community, and here respondents strongly disagreed, with 33 percent, while 27 percent remained neutral. Q16 stated that cannabis should be communicated in a 'storytelling' way that includes information about the industry, the people, etc. Again, most respondents remained neutral, with 27 percent, while 25 percent strongly agreed. Furthermore, displaying joints and cannabis plants does not seem to be favorable among the respondents (see figure 24).



**Figure 24: Level of agree or disagreement on communication statements**

The findings from questions 13-16 display respondents' beliefs and attitudes toward cannabis communication as relatively positive, with some exceptions. The communication and placement of cannabis on the Danish market should be focused on health benefits, but not so there is a 'community' created around the substance. However, on the other hand, respondents also seem to agree that the story of cannabis and included aspects should also be present. This can be influenced by Danish culture, globalization, and intercultural factors.

## 6.2 Netnography results

As mentioned in the methodology section, the netnographic research was conducted by observing Curaleaf's Instagram account and content. The research focus of the netnography was to observe the online community of Curaleaf and how the company communicates to and interacts with its audience. Therefore, the research questions posed for the netnographic research were; 1. What content does Curaleaf post? 2. What reactions do the community have? And 3. How does Curaleaf interact with the community? The questions were intended to examine the community that is often created within cannabis use and to obtain data that can be useful in the second part of the

analysis. The netnographic research results and findings will be used to produce a suggestive communication plan for Curaleaf in Denmark. As the research position for the netnographic research was 'lurker', there were no interactions between the researcher and the community (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen 68). It was simply observed with the three research questions in mind. The data collected through the netnography will be displayed below, using screenshots of necessary content/interactions to answer the three research questions.

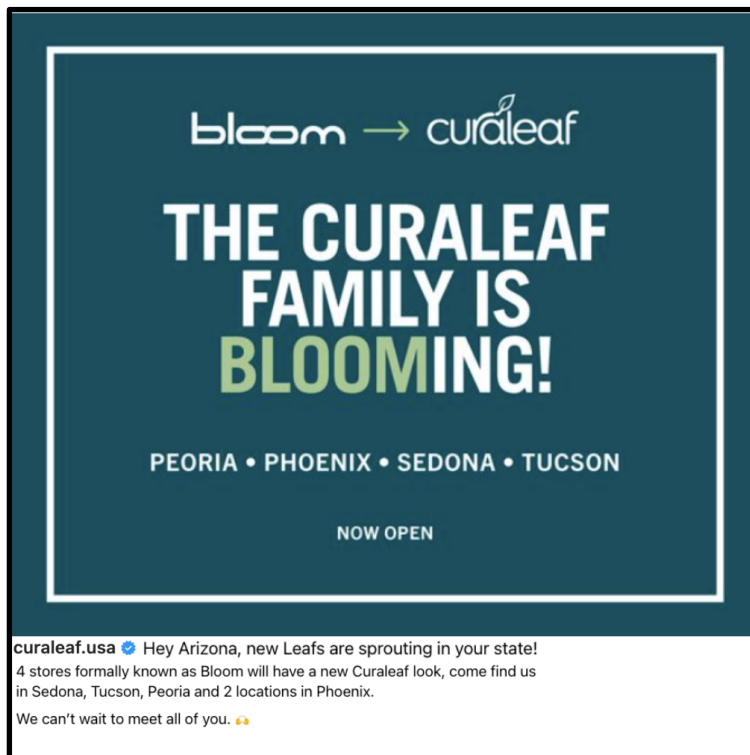
Below the types of content on Curaleaf's Instagram account will be presented, and while this is not typically done in netnographic research, this was chosen as a first step of the research in order to create the foundation of the netnographic research and analysis. The presentation of the types of content will then be utilized to analyze how Curaleaf's audience reacts and how Curaleaf communicates to its audience through the types of content mentioned.

### **6.2.1 Types of content**

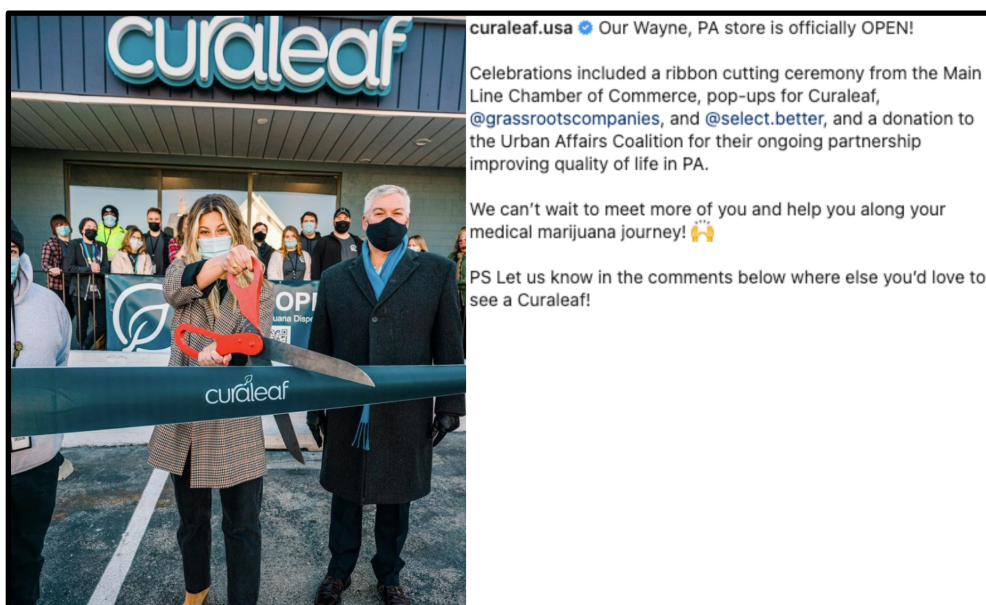
The people behind Curaleaf post on its Instagram account regularly, and through the netnographic research, it was observed that content spans wide and contains promotional, informational, educational, branding, etc. For example, Curaleaf's promotional Instagram content involves informing people about new locations for dispensaries. However, after observing various promotional posts, the content of the posts does not merely concern new locations but rather the way Curaleaf communicates and relays it to their audience; they are creating a sense of togetherness and closeness to their audience/community.

For instance, as seen in figure 25, recent content about a new location displays that four new places are opening in Arizona, shops formerly known as 'bloom'. But what Curaleaf does is not only promote four new shops but signify that Curaleaf is a 'family'. Formulating a promotional post as such can be an indication that Curaleaf thinks and wishes to signal to their audience and community that they are like a family. Furthermore, it might appear to the audience that they are not simply promoting new shops. Another way Curaleaf is displaying a new location opening is to post about the event that happened during the opening, and along with the caption, it can be observed that they genuinely do see the company and community as a family (see figure 26).





*Figure 25: Instagram post (15/3/22)*



*Figure 26: Instagram post (12/3/22)*

By not merely posting simple and general promotional content, such as linking to new products, showing the new locations on a map, or similar, Curaleaf is inviting their community to be a part of the expansion of their company and the expansion of the cannabis industry.

Curaleaf also posts informational content to inform the audience about cannabis legalization, legislation, and new reforms (see figure 27). For example, the figure below showcases two posts about new reforms and changed legalizations. New Jersey has recently moved from being a medical-only state to being a recreational state regarding cannabis use, and in New York, important cannabis reforms (changes in the laws) are taking place, meaning that more people in New York will be able to have access to the plant (cannabis). By posting such content, Curaleaf displays to their audience that they care about the cannabis industry, the people, and the future, as Curaleaf believes cannabis is a vital aspect of the future of the people. Furthermore, the New York post caption notes some of the highlights of the reforms. By doing this, Curaleaf informs individuals of changes that can affect them and their community, either for better or worse.



*Figure 27: Instagram posts (21/4/22+12/4/22)*

Other posts that are regularly posted on the Instagram page regard educational content. For instance, in figure 28, Curaleaf provides people with a guide to finding the best strain of cannabis, Sativa, or Indica, and how each works and for what purposes. Another post that is observed as educational is the one shown in figure 29. Here Curaleaf posted another guide to the particular 'terpenes' - terpenes are the compounds responsible for the way most plants smell (Pax Labs 2021). Here they include descriptions of different terpenes in cannabis. By posting educational content, Curaleaf possibly ensures safer and better product consumption. And it displays to their audience that they are cornered about peoples knowledge and engaged in educating.



Figure 28: Instagram post (2/3/22)



Figure 29: Instagram post (29/3/22)

The educational content does not seem only to regard cannabis use, different types of cannabis, and such. However, through observation, Curaleaf also has content that might appear educational but also contains some promotional material. For instance, Curaleaf is greatly concerned about social problems, including social equity, social responsibility, social impact, etc. One issue they have paid much attention to recently is breast cancer. From the imagery and caption, as seen in figure 30, Curaleaf informs people about 'breast cancer action month' and how people can help. However, what is promotional about this post, is that they mention that people can "support through dispensary purchases to create impact in your community" (see figure 30). By combining breast cancer action and inciting consumers to donate through purchases, it might be perceived as an 'unethical' promotion, i.e., taking advantage of it; however, they do also post other content that solely focuses on breast cancer and educating people about it (see figure 31).



*Figure 30: Instagram post (22/10/21)*



*Figure 31: Instagram post (19/10/21)*

Observing Curaleaf's Instagram, it can be seen that there are various posts about various social issues and responsibilities, some that both include some promotional content and some that do not. For instance, figure 32 displays three different posts, each with its own message, but all focusing on raising awareness and educating people on the matters. The three topics in figure 32, AIDS, Last Prisoner Project, and Veterans cannabis rights, all relate to cannabis and the industry in different ways, and what Curaleaf does by posting such content without promoting themselves or their products is signaling to audiences and consumers that the cannabis industry stands for more.

These topics tie into their 'Rooted in Good' Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. The pillars of that initiative are; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Social Equity; and Sustainability. Thus, Curaleaf is working on making the cannabis industry more inclusive, diverse, and sustainable (Curaleaf). In figure 33, some of the content relating to the 'Rooted in Good' is shown.

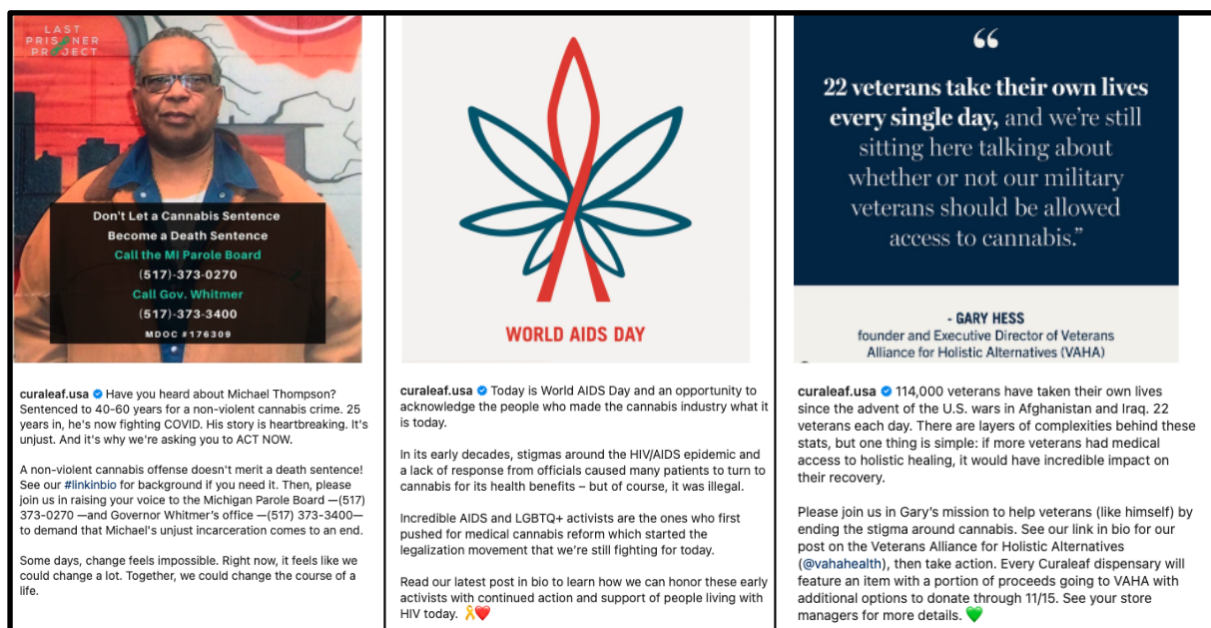
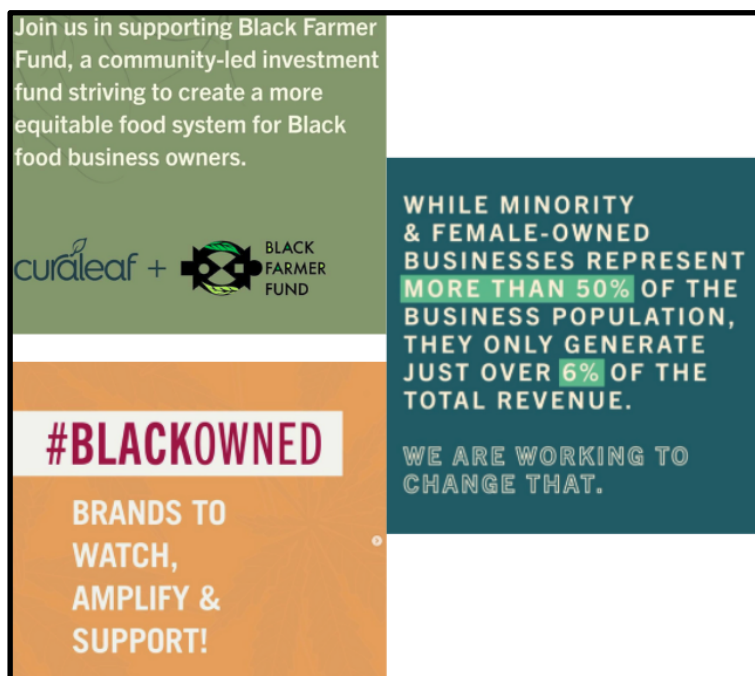


Figure 32: Instagram post (17/8/21+1/12/21+11/11/21)



*Figure 33: Instagram post (3/2/22+13/8/21+17/2/22)*

Curaleaf communicates to its consumers that making great products is not enough through this initiative. They must "also create a meaningful, inclusive experience for all - our employees, customers, patients, shareholders and communities" (*Curaleaf*). Thus, through their communication, one cannot or should not ignore these issues when being a part of the cannabis community and culture. These are essential aspects to take part in.

Moreover, not only does Curaleaf 'promise' to do good, but they genuinely seem to do so and also inform their consumers about the steps they are taking and the progress. In figure 34, Curaleaf outlines some of their 'social impact' goals that are part of 'Rooted in Good' and progresses. And, in figure 35, there is a summary of 'Rooted in Good' general progress of the first year since launching.



Curaleaf also has another initiative, which relates to 'Rooted in Good' - which is called 'I Cannabis - Cannabis with Confidence'. This initiative shows people that the cannabis plant is not intimidating. It is not shameful to consume, but it can be challenging to share it, as there is still a stigma attached to cannabis use. The content regarding the 'I Cannabis' initiative displays people telling their stories about cannabis and how it has changed their lives for the better. There are many posts regarding this initiative, and many of them show and introduce the people behind the Curaleaf company, the Curaleaf family (see figure 36). There is also 'I Cannabis' content that shows 'regular' consumers, and lastly, there are also posts with people that are athletes, ambassadors, survivors, and so forth. It is not so much about the certain person per se; they all have stories relating to the advantages cannabis use has given them and improved their lives. By both presenting the people behind Curaleaf, 'regular' consumers, people with breast cancer, veterans, etc., Curaleaf is, with their 'storytelling' content, creating a community in which consumers can feel represented, and connected, safe, and heard. They are working to destigmatize cannabis, instilling confidence in people and creating a sense of normality within sharing consumption.



*Figure 36: Instagram post (31/8/21)*

### 6.2.2 Community reaction

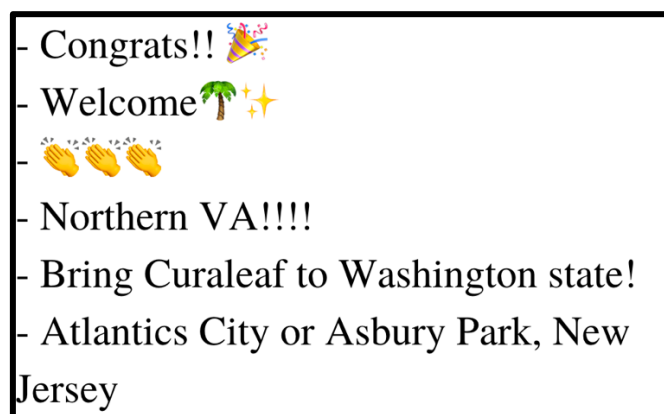
Curaleaf, at the moment, has almost 60.000 followers on Instagram. The types of content discussed earlier can be argued to be creating a community that concerns all things cannabis related.



Therefore, there are bound to be reactions from followers and consumers, and the following will take a closer look at some reactions within the Curaleaf community on Instagram.

Through the netnographic research, it was observed that the community's reactions to content highly depend on the type of content posted. For instance, when promotional content, i.e., new locations are opening, is posted, the general reaction seems to be congratulatory and complimentary (see figure 37). Furthermore, when Curaleaf communicates about new locations, they commonly write, "Let us know in the comments below where else you'd love to see a Curaleaf!" in the caption. This does also spark a reaction within the audience, and they comment on various places in the states where they wish for a new location (see figure 37). Thus, the promotional content also serves as a way to say, 'we want to hear your opinions and needs'.

Other promotional content, i.e., when there are new products or restocks, reactions are grateful and appreciative. For instance, when Curaleaf captioned a post; "Congrats, New York. Whole flower is here and will be available at all Curaleaf locations!" (*Curaleaf Instagram*<sup>6</sup>), reactions span from, 'Good job NY', to 'This calls for a celebration' and 'Wow! Never thought this day would come!' (appendix B, page 2). However, not all of the reactions to the promotional content are positive; some reactions are negative. These reactions can be seen in figure 38, and they were commented on a post that regarded a new type of product.



**Figure 37: Instagram comments<sup>7</sup> (12/3/22-14/3-22)**

<sup>6</sup> Curaleaf Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/curaleaf.usa/>

<sup>7</sup> Instagram usernames have been removed from all figures that display comments. But original screenshots of the comments can be found in Appendix B with usernames.

- I can't believe people smoke these corporate mids
- This is the worst company ever
- Bud is trash here
- Curaleaf sells moldy shit weed

**Figure 38: Instagram comments (13/2/22-7/3/22)**

These reactions can indicate that some people in the cannabis community do not think fondly of the corporate side to it all and/or that the products are not of good quality because Curaleaf is only concerned about money. But by looking at a number of different promotional content and commentary, the general reactions seem to be positive.

In terms of the informational content on Instagram, reactions here also differ a bit. When Curaleaf informs the community about new laws and changes concerning cannabis use, people's reactions are thankful for the information, asking further questions regarding news and such, and again, celebratory (when the news is good). See figure 39, where reactions to a few posts about reforms and legislation are displayed.

- When will we be able to come in and buy recreational?
- Freakin amazing ! New Jersey will be the reason cannabis stigmatize will change so much more in the next few years.
- How does this impact medical patients at your facilities, if at all?
- This is fantastic news.

**Figure 39: Instagram comments (12/4/22-21/4/22)**

When the informational content is about 'guides', what and how to choose, usage, differences, etc., reactions are rarely positive. Figure 28 displays a post about Sativa vs. Indica, strains of cannabis, and the differences between them. However, after looking at the reactions, there seems to be a general dislike as people state the information as untrue and unresearched (see figure 40).

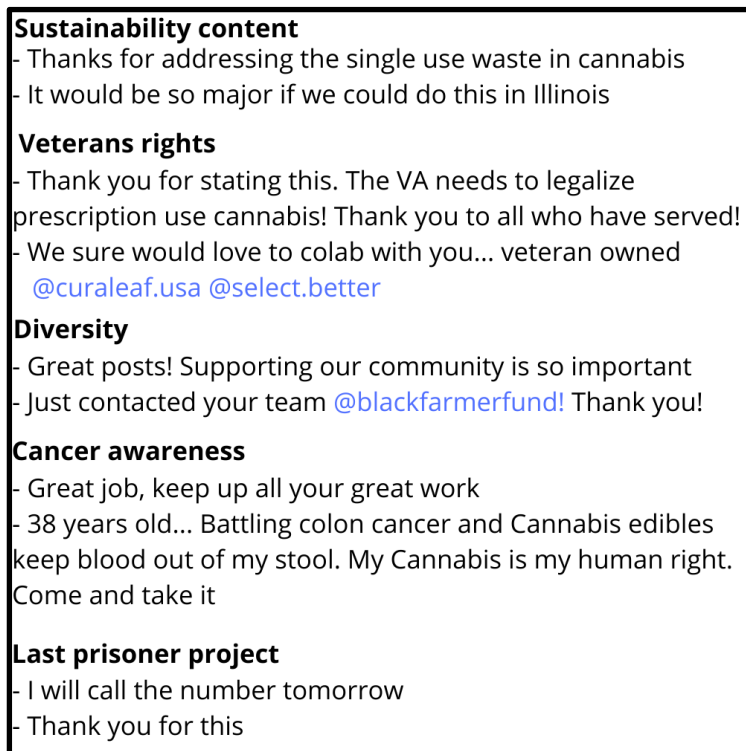
Furthermore, by looking at other similar content, it can also be observed that a more significant part of the community does not agree with them on the information and is calling for Curaleaf to do

better and get more educated. However, it is hard to assert whether the information Curaleaf provides through their content on cannabis use and differences is wrong, as cannabis affects very individually and such.

- Sometimes sativa can upset anxiety though!
- This is simply untrue. Please research before you post this type of information.
- Its not that black and white
- Fake news
- Any ever research how they came up with the difference lmao 🤔👁️ if you did you know they mean nothing.
- That's not how it works. Its about terpenes and how they interact with your body's chemistry and cannabinoid receptors

**Figure 40: Instagram comments (2/3/22-5/3/22)**

Looking through the educational content, it appears that the general type of reaction from the community is positive, encouraging, thankful, and uplifting. There are people thanking Curaleaf for standing and speaking up about discrimination in the industry and the lack of diversity and inclusivity. People are also asking further questions about how they can help or what will possibly happen in the future. See different reactions to this type of educational content in figure 41.



*Figure 41: Instagram comments (17/8/21-22/4/22)*

Reactions also show that if the content/caption encourages people to take action, i.e., calling a number, signing petitions, sharing, etc., many people do so and communicate it back to Curaleaf. Furthermore, there are also comments from people going through some of the issues they are communicating about - some with breast cancer share their stories with cannabis use, for instance. There is rarely any negativity among reactions throughout this type of content. But in that case, it stems from the fact that Curaleaf is 'getting political', and some individuals do not care for that type of content. Nonetheless, Curaleaf continues to post this educational content, as they are 'Rooted in Good' and are working to change the cannabis industry for the better.

As mentioned earlier, much of Curaleaf's content regards their 'I Cannabis - Cannabis with Confidence' initiative. After observing reactions, this content seems to, for the most part, only receive positive reactions and comments. Reactions do not differ from these posts regarding being an athlete, Curaleaf employee, breast cancer survivor, etc. There is a consensus of gratitude for people sharing their stories. As shown in figure 42, the content gives consumers confidence in sharing their stories, as is the idea with the initiative.

- Cannabis has helped me with treatment, without it I would not have been able to get through chemotherapy and all the side effects it had on me. I am stage 2 breast cancer and cannabis has been a vital daily treatment and has made me able to face me life and keep pushing forward

- I always talk to seniors about edibles and how they have relieved my pain and cut my opioid use in half. I also totally enjoy the care free feeling I am enjoying every day, I deal with large sums of money even with dosing multiple times a day and still feel confident in myself

- Inspired

- Love this campaign! Incredibly inspiring. We admire you guys doing great things and helping all the people heal

- This is great. I am four years cancer free due to cannabis

- Heck yeah! Stage 4 here and I use marijuana LIBERALLY for my side effects as well

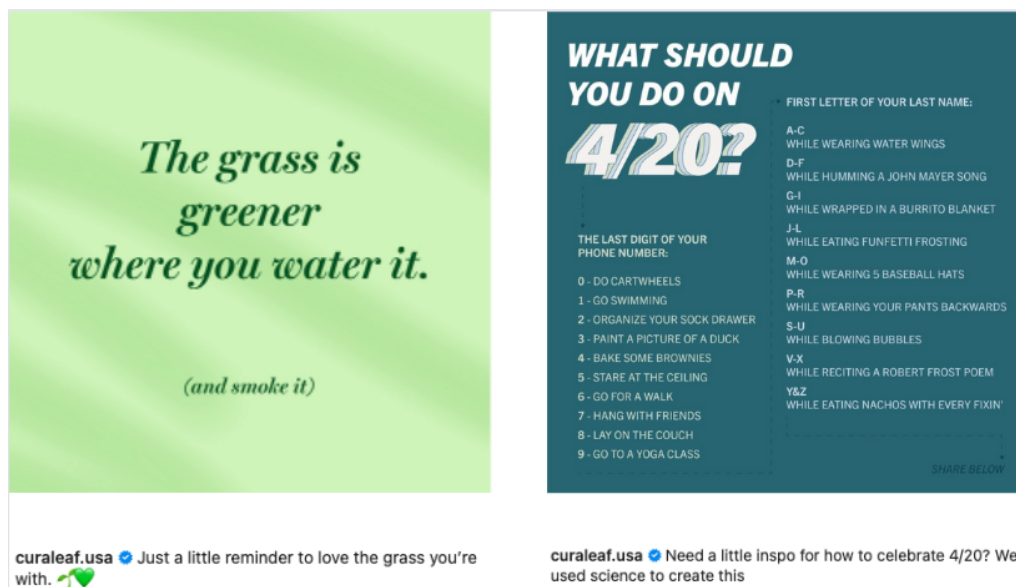
- I am a breast cancer survivor and long time customer of Curaleaf. Thanks for sharing your voice

**Figure 42: Instagram comments (31/8/21-14/10/21)**

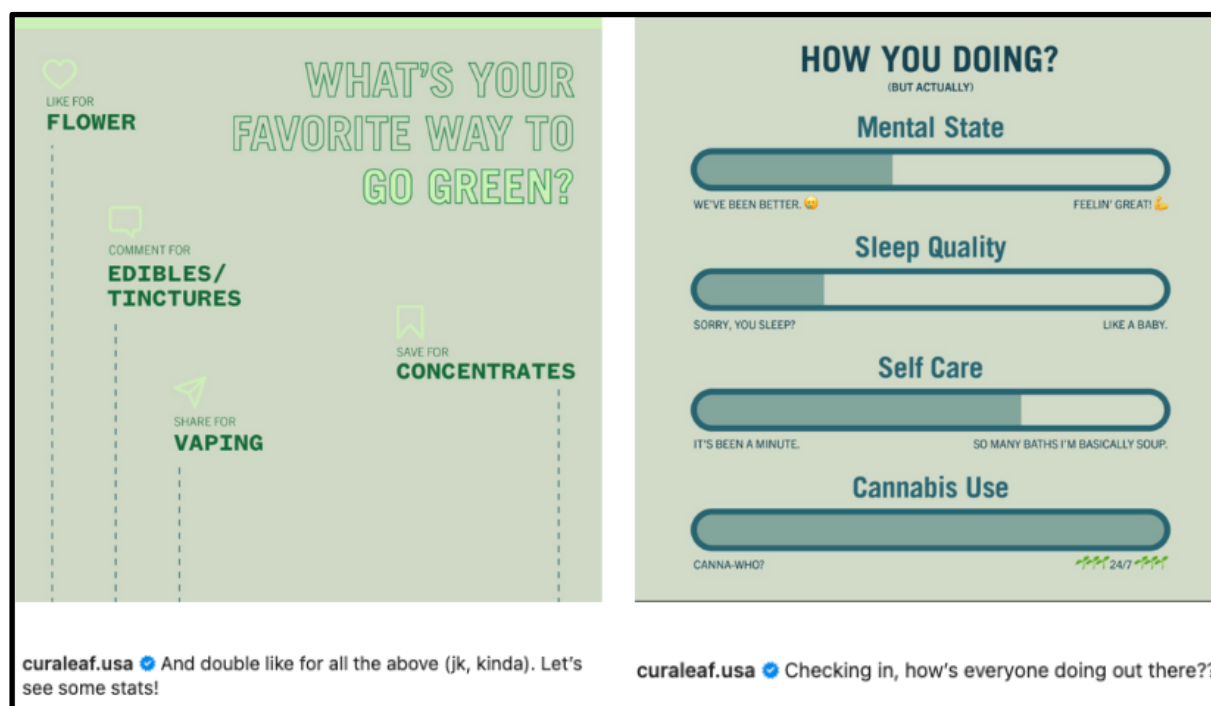
### 6.2.3 Interactions

The last question posed in the netnographic research was 'How does Curaleaf interact with the community?'. Such a question can be answered in different ways, and interacting with people does not necessarily mean direct communication between two individuals; it can also occur as indirect communication. After observing the Instagram account, findings point to three kinds of interaction between Curaleaf and the community; indirect communication, direct communication, and responsiveness. These types of interactions appear in types of relatable content, engaging content, and contemporary topics. As shown in figure 43, the indirect interactions occur in the type of content that can be labeled as 'relatable', and/or less serious (compared to some of the serious topics they communicate about). Such content is being perceived by the audience as amusing and something they can identify with and relate to. Posting such content that does not call for people to purchase anything, no action is needed, or even commentary, it signals to the audience that Curaleaf is more than a business; or at least their Instagram is. Rather than always promoting products, Curaleaf displays they know their audience and are 'with the times', as not all content needs an agenda.

Concerning the direct interactions Curaleaf has with their audience, it is observed that this is a two-step occurrence. Firstly, content that involves direct communication with the audience can be seen in figure 44. Here Curaleaf is asking people questions and is encouraging people to answer in the comments. The two posts seen in figure 44 can indicate that Curaleaf wishes to get to know its audience better, and doing this can build customer relationships that last long term, as the people commenting on the questions seem to be appreciative of the fact that Curaleaf cares about their mental state and wants to get insights into their preferences.



**Figure 43: Instagram indirect interactions (28/4/22+20/4/22)**



*Figure 44: Instagram direct interactions (3/5/22+22/2/22)*

Asking direct questions in content opens up for both answers and insights, but then Curaleaf can also reply, thereby interacting directly with individuals. When Curaleaf replies to these types of comments, the 'tone' of the content is kept intact and less serious, and replies are simply acknowledging people.

Other direct interactions observed through the content can be seen in the educational content. In most educational posts, people are positive and want to participate in the conversations about the issues/topics, and when they express this, Curaleaf generally responds with either a green heart emoji (♥) and/or a 'thank you'. Either when people share their own stories relating to some of the 'Rooted in Good' content or 'I Cannabis - Cannabis with Confidence'. Thus, Curaleaf is communicating to their audience that they see them and appreciate them.

Other interactions can be seen when Curaleaf is, for instance, talking about an initiative they are currently working on or an event they had where they raised money for a specific issue. In that content, Curaleaf is thanking people involved and always thanking the audience for participation, sharing messages, and helping in raising awareness. They also ask for feedback on products or how locations can become better, making the audience feel included.

The netnographic research aided in answering the three research questions posed, and to summarize, all the findings in the three questions, Curaleaf's content, the reactions, and interactions

from and with the community, can point to that this it is in many ways a community, in which there are several different people, there is focus on issues and topics that relate to the cannabis industry as a whole, and not just Curaleaf as a company. So much of the communication from Curaleaf, either in the form of indirect or direct interactions, can give a sense of inclusion, togetherness, connections, and feeling part of the change. And that is possibly what Curaleaf intends to do with the communication; to create a family. These communicative actions are presumably part of Curaleaf's strategic communication plan on the American market, in which the company has established itself among its audiences as inclusive, a community and changing the cannabis industry. But if Curaleaf were to enter another market with a different culture, in which the company is not established yet, Curaleaf might have to create another strategic communication plan.

### *6.3 Findings in relation to theoretical framework*

After presenting the findings and results from the survey and netnography research, it will now be further examined and analyzed with the theoretical framework. To analyze and demonstrate how Curaleaf could potentially strategize communication on the Danish market, steps and communication planning processes will be utilized to analyze the results from sections 6.1 and 6.2. This will emerge into a suggestive communication plan for Curaleaf on the Danish market. Lastly, a summary and discussion of the analytical points and findings will be presented.

#### **6.3.1 Background and communication need**

When a brand decides to communicate and market itself to its audiences, the reason(s) behind the communication need should be determined. According to Petersen and Hørslev, this is the first step in creating a strategic communications plan. The 'background' of communicating would mean that the communication is a response to events, occurrences, etc. (23). This can either be inside the company, i.e., new products/lines, new locations/markets, a new campaign/initiative, or it can be outside the company, i.e., national/international issues, current events, political stances, economic problematics, etc. Or, in the case of Curaleaf communicating on the Danish market, a mixture of both internal and external 'needs'. Petersen and Hørslev believe that the 'background' for communication needs should answer questions such as 'what happened?' and 'why do we need to communicate?' (23).

Curaleaf could answer these questions in their current setting in the U.S., but it would not be easy to do so in a new context. The questions posed by Petersen and Hørslev indicate that a brand is



already established and positioned within a given market and therefore points to when internal events are happening, for instance, the launch of a new product or campaign. But for Curaleaf, the 'background' step would need to look more into the external factors, new market, cultural, and societal aspects. If we assert that Curaleaf would be the first cannabis brand in Denmark in case of legalization, they will have nothing to compare and contrast to and start from the ground up. If Curaleaf simply answered the internal 'background' questions, it would possibly be in a profitable manner, i.e., 'It is legal', 'We want to expand'. But by simply doing this, Curaleaf would then not get an understanding of the setting and might implement their current communication plan onto the Danish market, and it is not a given that it could work among Danes. They would need a deeper insight into the Danish market to see and determine communication needs, to see if any changes can be made without compromising their brand identity in the process. By doing this, they would have a starting point in creating a strategic communication plan for Denmark. Market research would help get insights into perceptions, beliefs, and values around cannabis in Denmark. Because cannabis is a controversial product (legal or not), communication concerning it would possibly be different in Denmark than in the U.S. However, it should also include an outline of cultural and societal factors that might negatively or positively affect communication (Falkheimer and Heide ch. 4).

Given that cannabis is currently illegal in Denmark, the following 'background' information will be based on assumptions of what it would possibly look like in the case of legalization. Secondary data from internet searches show in 2016, a majority of Danes wished for legalized cannabis and that the freedom to choose for oneself should be given to them (Pedersen 2016). Then, in 2019, more Danes say yes to legalized cannabis. Another survey from 2018 shows that thousands of Danes self-medicate with cannabis instead of prescription drugs and that 91 percent of those do not have a prescription for medical cannabis; thus, it is obtained illegally (Ringgaard 2021). Furthermore, Danes believe that legalizing cannabis would decrease the criminality around the drug and that people who do consume it would then not consume a substance they cannot be sure is clean (such as the 91 percent who self-medicate) (Ringgaard). As mentioned, the questions Petersen and Hørslev pose are in an 'already established, internal mode', but if Curaleaf first considered the context of communication needs, as Falkheimer and Heide note, as the socio-cultural factors, they could then answer the questions Petersen and Hørslev ask in a more elaborated manner.

For instance, 'What happened?' would be answered with 'Cannabis is now legal in Denmark after many years of political debate, and Danes now have the option to choose for themselves whether or not they wish to consume it'. And then, in terms of 'Why do we need to communicate' it

could be answered with 'Legalization in Denmark, means expansion in the cannabis industry - and that in turn then means we then must communicate to Danish consumers, so they can become a part of the change of societal issues related to the cannabis industry'. And societal issues, in this case, could be decreased criminality and removing the stigma around cannabis use for pain relief and other causes.

But Petersen and Hørslev believe that by taking this first step, a company would then have a good starting point in a strategic communication plan. However, according to Falkheimer and Heide, context, culture, and society are constantly evolving and changing (ch. 8), and therefore during the 'background' step, it could also be necessary to look at other factors that relate to the cannabis industry, such as tobacco. Currently, the Danish government is taking steps to prevent more from starting smoking and getting people to quit. For example, the Danish government made it a rule that all cigarette packs are a neutral color because they believe that the 'bright' colors of the packages make them more appealing to buy and try (Kræftens bekæmpelse). Such changes could also be posed upon cannabis, and therefore the 'background' would change, and thereby the strategy would not be befitting. But as Guldbrandsen and Just state, strategic communication does not always involve every step to be part of a deliberate plan but rather, some of the processes also need to be an in-between of deliberate and emergent (36). Thus, according to Guldbrandsen and Just, the strategic communication in this part would be strategizing communication as a mixture of plan, and ploy, meaning that some of the communication is not planned per se but is still considered, in case of "specific, but unforeseen current development" (38).

### **6.3.2 Communication goals**

After the background step, a brand should be able to describe the problem, challenge, or potential for communication, and then based on that description, communication goals are identified (Petersen and Hørslev 25). Unfortunately, Curaleafs current communication goals are not information that can be determined. Such information is commonly confidential and not shared with the public; thus, there is no way of knowing for sure. However, according to Guldbrandsen and Just, the communication goals and objectives should echo the communication need but also the position the company wishes to have in a given setting (127).

Curaleafs (desired) position on the cannabis market can be that of a moral, ethical, and honest company, i.e., 'Rooted in Good'. The netnographic findings showed that a great deal of Curaleafs Instagram content relates to 'doing good'; Veterans' rights, breast cancer, pride,

inclusivity, etc. This displays the moralities and brand identity, but the netnographic findings also showed that people do not always respond well to their 'doing good' content and, in fact, accuse them of being wrong. This points to the fact that Curaleaf might not know their audience well enough or that the audience has gotten wrong impressions of the brand through time. A brand's position and the audience are related, and therefore, before Curaleaf can position itself on the Danish market, they need to get a sense of what a potential target group perceives them to be. And to do that, communication goals and objectives should be somewhat established. Guldbrandsen and Just believe that objectives should be established after the position and the audience are determined (127); however, a 'starting position' should be decided upon for the Danish market as to guide the communication goals. If a starting position is discussed and it relates to the general brand identity, then it would advance the determination of communication goals and objectives. And then, the position will be further decided upon during audience choices. Thus, it is a 'back-and-forth' process (Guldbrandsen and Just 128).

A desired position for the Danish market could be similar to the American position; however, they could also position themselves as one of the largest cannabis companies in the U.S (Borchardt, 2021). And therefore, possibly appear more appealing to the audience in terms of credibility and such (Guldbrandsen and Just 124). In 1961 marketing researchers Solomon Dutka and Russell Colley proposed a helpful model for setting sufficient objectives, named the DAGMAR model. The model includes a series of steps and elements that do not demand that all of them are worked through (Guldbrandsen and Just 128).



*Figure 45: DAGMAR model* (Guldbrandsen and Just 128)

As for Curaleaf, not having to work through the whole model, it would mean that they could focus their attention on communication goals within 'Brand awareness' and 'Brand knowledge/comprehension'. One can possibly assume that Danes are not aware of the American cannabis brand, and unfortunately, the survey did not obtain data on this matter. However, due to social media and globalization, there is a chance that Danes have been introduced to the brand, but nonetheless, Curaleaf should start with goals within those elements, and those goals would then be described as 'create brand awareness to the public' and 'communicate knowledgeable information to potential consumers'. Then, according to Falkheimer and Heide, after the brand has been established on the Danish market, they could move to set goals within the levels of 'brand purchase intention', 'satisfaction', or 'brand loyalty' (ch. 4). Having a starting position similar to the American one and goals within 'brand' and 'brand knowledge' would presumably provide Curaleaf with indications on how the audience perceives them, aiding in being strategic to that audience group.

### **6.3.3 Positioning and audience**

The communication goals and objectives cannot be carried out without an audience, and therefore, the next step in creating a strategic communication plan is determining the target audience (Petersen and Hørslev 31). However, as mentioned in the theory section, determining the audience should be done simultaneously with positioning, and as mentioned above, a starting position for Curaleaf on the Danish market could be similar to their American position, which concerns their morality, and focuses on social problems. But when determining the position, it includes "aligning an organization's self-perception (identity) with others' perception of the organization (image)" (Guldbrandsen and Just 121), and therefore the Danish market should be researched first for attitudes and perceptions.

Curaleaf's identity and self-perception are that they are 'Rooted in Good', that they are taking actions to change the inequalities that relate to cannabis, and as shown in the netnographic findings, a myriad of problems relates to the cannabis industry and consumption. Curaleaf communicates to create a sense of community; they use communication in a 'storytelling' manner, creating a bond with their audience. And this is also part of their identity, that they are a family. The survey findings showed that respondents disagree with the fact that cannabis should be communicated and placed on the Danish market in a way that makes you feel part of a community. However, respondents did agree more on the fact that cannabis should be communicated in a 'storytelling' way, so knowledge

and information about the industry, products, and people behind it are obtained. The latter falls in line with the suggested communication goals for Curaleaf in Denmark.

But the fact that communication should not include a community feel per se would mean that Curaleaf would have to change its position on the Danish market to some degree, or at least so in the beginning. The survey findings showed that respondents' general perception of cannabis is that it is a health beneficial remedy and that it can help people with various issues. Furthermore, respondents also agreed upon the fact that cannabis should be communicated and placed on the Danish market as such. Adjusting their position to this would still fall in line with their brand identity, as this is part of their 'I Cannabis' ideology. Thus, the position on the Danish market could instead be a stronger stance in the health benefits of cannabis and that theirs are made in workings with the regularities of cannabis productions and only from the best plant. The survey findings on disagreement on community creation could be due to the fact that cannabis is illegal in Denmark and that a (hypothetical) legalization would presumably not remove the feeling of it being illegal, judged, and such at once. Even for cannabis consumers. Curaleaf stands for destigmatizing cannabis, and therefore, their position would also include criteria that regard educating Danes on cannabis and thereby working in removing culturally created stigmas. And this is also part of Curaleaf's brand identity.

When a position and criteria are determined, then Curaleaf can begin segmenting audiences into groups that might align with those criteria (Guldbrandsen and Just 130). Curaleaf could segment groups by demographic data, and as mentioned earlier, the survey findings showed that a possible target group would be female sages 25-34 with a higher level of education who are either currently students or working full time. This would be a starting target group for Curaleaf on the Danish market and does not reflect the entirety of the Danish population. However, another way to segment groups is by psychographic data, i.e., social class, preferences, etc. (Petersen and Hørslev 32), and such data could be preferences within health benefits and social issues (related to cannabis in Denmark), wishing to lower criminality, etc. Segmenting groups from psychographic data would possibly provide Curaleaf with a larger potential audience from which they could then target. As mentioned earlier, the task of positioning and determining audiences should be done alongside each other, as a "back and forth between the criteria, which the organization might emphasize, and the criteria that the audience might (come to) prioritize" (125).

### 6.3.4 Core messages

Deciding on what to communicate, i.e., the core messages of communication, is another strategic step, as it should follow and relate to both the desired position and the audience in terms of how they perceive Curaleaf (Guldbrandsen and Hørslev 133). While Petersen and Hørslev state that core messages should answer the 'what, when, why, and how' of communication (35), this does not work well with external communication, as it is not focused on the audience as much. And according to Botan, communication should meet recipients where they are (ch. 4). Therefore, in order to meet the audience where they are, core messages should instead contain aspects of the communication goals, position desire, and reflect the audience (socio-cultural aspects).

When an audience is determined and chosen, then an organization needs to choose its core messages, and how to formulate these, in a sense, so they do not only reflect what is wished to be communicated but also what or how the audience wishes to receive them. As mentioned in the theory section, unique selling propositions (USPs) are generally helpful in deciding what to communicate and display all the logical reasons to purchase (Guldbrandsen and Just 130). However, due to the nature of Curaleaf's brand, i.e., cannabis is controversial for many, it would presumably serve better if Curaleaf created emotional selling propositions (ESPs), which display and defines emotional reasons for purchase (130). This would aid in creating a personal identity for the brand and also establish a bond between them and the audience. Despite the survey findings showing that respondents do not believe that cannabis should be communicated with a 'community sense', creating ESPs would not necessarily involve that. The communication goals, as mentioned earlier, should be to educate Danes on cannabis, the industry, what it stands for, etc., and using ESPs to communicate would "invoke certain feelings in relation to the objective[s] of the communication" (Guldbrandsen and Just 130).

One of Curaleaf's current ESPs is their 'Rooted in Good' initiative, as this appeals to people's emotions by doing good in the society, and changing the cannabis industry for the better, as shown in the netnographic findings. This initiative could also be implemented into the Danish market and contain most of the same 'activities', as for instance, removing the stigmatization of cannabis, and everybody should have access, and the survey findings indicated that Danes do think about these things. But, one aspect they could 'replace' on the Danish market is the one communicating greatly about the inequalities that Black Americans have and are currently facing for cannabis-related offenses, as the netnographic findings showed they currently do. While this is certainly a fundamental issue to solve and action for change, it might not be as relevant in Denmark. As cannabis has not been illegal in Denmark, there is not necessarily a need to change that. However,

what Curaleaf could instead include in their 'Rooted in Good' campaign in Denmark to invoke emotions, could be to shed light on the crime related to cannabis and gangs, as this is a more significant issue in Denmark and most likely something Danes want to get rid of. And for those that do consume cannabis, communicating that purchasing cannabis at Curaleaf helps in reducing the criminality will most likely invoke feelings of integrity, morality, and such.

Creating ESPs means determining whether or not a product, service, or brand can make audiences feel certain emotions, and in Denmark, Curaleaf, both brand and products could make Danes feel accepted, less judged, bettering society, and healthy/pain-free. Combining these emotions could possibly then also create happiness, which is one of the most powerful emotions the majority of people desire. And emotions are the one factor that influences most consumer behavior (Dyck, 2014, ch. 5). Thus, instead of creating USPs and focusing on the actual product(s) and logical reasons, such as 'Purchase this product if you want to be pain-free', Curaleaf should instead create ESPs and focus more on their brand identity, doing good, such as 'I Cannabis - And so can you' relating to legalization, or 'Rooted in Good - bettering yourself and us'.

The survey findings showed that cannabis communication should include information about what cannabis is, how it should be used correctly, and what the cannabis industry stands for. These indicators would then align with ESP core messages, as mentioned above, where there is a focus on what cannabis consumption and the industry can do for individuals but also society as a whole. On the other hand, several respondents also indicated that they think cannabis should have the same status as alcohol does in Denmark, and some stated that it is less dangerous than alcohol. But as the drinking culture is well established in Denmark, it would mean that communicating and placing cannabis in the same category might not be helpful for Curaleaf to do so. Entering the Danish market, introducing cannabis as the 'same' as alcohol could be detrimental, due to stigmas, even in the case of legalization. Thus, in order to achieve the objectives and goals, Curaleaf should use ESPs when communicating the messages concerning educating people on cannabis, the industry, etc.

### **6.3.5 Channel strategy**

Using ESP instead of USP in core messages is a common tactic, especially when brands use social media platforms for most of their communication and interactions with audiences (Dyck ch. 5). And as shown in the netnographic findings, Curaleaf actively uses its Instagram account for its communication. The netnographic findings showed that the Instagram content concerns topics that

are possibly designed to evoke emotions within audiences, rather than merely promoting products or convincing consumers why they should buy their products, in a unique proposition. Even in their promotional content, there is a certain emotional connection. They provide information about their products while simultaneously communicating in an emotional manner.

The channel strategy is, according to Petersen and Hørslev, the next step in creating a strategic communication plan, and the communication goals and objectives that are determined at the beginning should be reflected in the channel choice (37). Petersen and Hørslev state that if the goals are to provide knowledge and create awareness, then a channel choice can be social media, while if the goals are to affect perceptions and behavior, the channel choice should be more targeted, for instance, newsletters (38). However, instead of differentiating between the two, Curaleaf should still use Instagram as their communication channel on the Danish market, as the goals are to provide knowledge, change perceptions, and create awareness. Using a social media channel for these goals does not mean that they are not targeting the 'right' audience, but rather because cannabis would be new in Denmark, it would serve useful to have all the information and communication available to the public that is interested. Instead of having a 'closed' group of recipients to newsletters.

However, the survey findings showed that most of the respondents think that cannabis communication should take place inside places that sell cannabis (dispensaries, pharmacies, etc.), and then newsletters and other emails. These findings can be an indication to once again that Danes view cannabis as an illegal drug and that communication should not be available to the public easily. But if Curaleaf chooses to only communicate through those channels, then there could be a risk at not reaching potential consumers, who might change their behavior and perception if they were informed about the cannabis industry and all that relates. Instead of having to actively seek it out. Guldbrandsen and Just note that the channel strategy should include a mix of channels because "without the right media mix, any strategic communication effort is bound to fail" (131). While this can prove to be true in most cases, Curaleaf should start with Instagram as their main communication channel, where they work with the communication goals and objectives. Then down the line, they could move to use newsletters with deals and such on products.

While Instagram shows to be a valuable choice for Curaleaf currently in the US, Instagram does have regulations on what can be posted, i.e., images and captions, and cannabis communication certainly feels the barriers. However, through the netnographic research, it appears that Curaleaf has found the right and appropriate way to communicate about the different aspects of



their company while still getting the information across to the audience. Thus, it would not seem that using Instagram in Denmark would be any much different, especially when the goals and objectives do not concern promotional aspects.

### 6.3.6 Questions and answers

Communicating the core messages on the chosen channel will, in all probability, lead to questions and reactions from the audience and can appear in the forms of negative attitudes, assumptions, and such. While Petersen and Hørslev suggest that a company should discuss any questions that might be posed to the communicative action (41), this can be difficult to determine for a brand that is entering a new market. For instance, there is hardly a way of knowing for certain what Danes might question in the communication or how they might react to certain aspects of the communication. However, the netnographic findings showed that Curaleaf's American audience asks questions about products, how it works, what they are doing to deal with a certain issue, or how they are working to better the industry. Furthermore, the findings also showed that Curaleaf's current audience in the U.S. is not too fond of the cooperation side of the company and, in comments, expresses their dislike to assumptions that might be true or false to a certain extent. This is something that can be difficult to avoid, as not every individual within a culture or society possesses the same characteristics, values, perceptions, etc., and therefore such questions might be 'ignored'. Curaleaf does not always respond back to these negative comments; however, the reasons for that can be manifold.

But if we focus on the questions Danes might ask, there are a mixture of possibilities. Questions and inquiries about cannabis itself, their purpose on the Danish market, what advantages cannabis can have, and so forth could be questions that Danes would pose when first introduced to communication from Curaleaf. If we assert these as possible questions, then Curaleaf would need to find answers and formulate them properly before the communicative action(s) (Petersen and Hørslev 42). However, while Falkheimer and Heide state that using social media is a good strategy for this communication and a place available to most (ch. 5), where people can ask questions in the comments without having to make direct contact to the company, due to socio-cultural differences this might be different in Denmark. Cannabis as a whole is controversial, even in places where legalization has been for many years, and the survey findings also indicate that respondents perceive cannabis as such to a certain extent. Therefore, thinking that Danes would pose the questions mentioned above on a social media platform open to the public could prove to be wrong.

There would presumably be some sort of caution from Danes in asking questions about what cannabis can do for you or what type they should consume, in Instagram comments, in fear of others seeing it, and judging, due to the stigma around cannabis.

However, a way to avoid this would be to have someone that is monitoring the D.M.s (direct messages) sent on Instagram and communicate to the audience that they are more than welcome to ask any questions by sending a D.M.

### **6.3.7 Timeframe**

The last step in a strategic communication plan is, according to Petersen and Hørslev, a timeframe, referring to the clarity of what happens and when (42). Petersen and Hørslev assert that by adhering to a timeframe that is set from the beginning, it aids in coordinating and timing all the communication efforts rightly. However, a 'strict' timeframe for when to communicate what messages and when to interact with audiences can be limiting for Curaleaf, as they would need to be established on the Danish market among Danish consumers and the society. A timeframe is usually connected to the launch of new products or campaigns (Botan ch. 4), and while Curaleaf's communication and products would also be new in Denmark, it would be a different kind. They are not only introducing Danes to new products or campaigns but a whole new industry that is not currently in Denmark. Therefore, if they stuck to a fixed timeframe, it could limit their opportunities concerning reaching potential audiences, destigmatizing cannabis, etc., before they 'moved on' to their next communication plan, which could be to promote products, etc. But according to Falkheimer and Heide, "planned communication is often based on a traditional one-way communication mindset in which a sender takes the initiative in the communication process and is assumed to be the one that has control over the situation" (ch. 3) but in this case, and for Curaleaf the communicative actions would be a cooperative effort between company and audience, and therefore, if they have a fixed timeframe, it would indicate that Curaleaf would know when goals are reached. And that they have control over the situation. While it is possible to see this from audiences interacting on Instagram, there could still be limitations. Therefore, Curaleaf should always meet them where the audience is, and the strategic communication plan should be able to be changed in accordance with the audience and changing culture. However, on the other hand, by not having a fixed timeframe, Curaleaf would have difficulties in measuring their communication actions, and that loss of data would most likely be hindering their future communication actions and planning.

#### *6.4 Summary and discussion of analytical points and findings*

Based on the analysis, a possible plan for Curaleaf on the Danish market could involve; changing current communication actions to fit the Danish culture, to do thorough market research among Danes, and to possibly be a mixture between deliberate and emergent, such as planning strategies (plural), and less strategic planning (singular). Thus, Curaleaf would need to strategize its communication as either ploy, which according to Guldbrandsen and Just, is communicative measures that are not planned but is "specific and measured" (38). Alternatively, Curaleaf could decide to strategize the communication as position in which communicative actions matches with external factors and is a "practice that arises from, or is an answer to the external context" (38). Both ploy and position would allow Curaleaf to change the course of action if it proved to be received negatively or if other external factors are affecting the communication negatively or positively. However, this would then mean that there would need to be a constant focus on the market and interactions and would also be time-consuming. However, that might, in turn, prove to be helpful in future communication choices and planning. The theories used to guide the suggestive communication plan proved to be useful in terms of the different steps and aspects of strategic communication and also provided nuances in terms of the different understandings and workings within the field and related to the concept.

One aspect that could have been useful in this thesis could have been if the nature of a brand/company was considered along with the guidance of creating strategic communication, i.e., controversial vs. non-controversial. Because as seen in the survey findings, respondents think that some communication about cannabis should occur; however, marketing cannabis should not. This belief presumably stems from the fact that cannabis is too often understood as something that is only smoked, and smoking should not be marketed and encouraged. While this is true for cigarettes, and currently, Denmark is taking actions to decrease smoking, cannabis is much more than something that is smoked. And even smoking it does not include tobacco, nicotine, and a myriad of other harmful things; if it is made in controlled environments.

Furthermore, alcohol is marketed a fair amount on the Danish market, but as drinking is a large part of Danish culture, this makes sense as Danes are presumably accustomed to this marketing and do not perceive it as wrong. Therefore, if Danes were educated about cannabis and the many ways it can be consumed etc., perhaps over time, cannabis could be established on the Danish market similar to alcohol, and then down the line, Curaleaf could safely market the product (all depending on policies of course).

While strategic communication and the domain of marketing consider various factors and aspects, such as consumer behavior/ purchase intention, there is little to no information on how to work with a controversial brand/product strategically. Moreover, because Danes perceive cannabis as smoking and addiction, it is controversial. Therefore, theories and arguments on strategic communication should include factors that can aid companies in overcoming the 'controversy' of a product and how to educate the public on the matter.

And once again, this is possibly due to the stigma attached to cannabis, and people might think that if it is marketed, then more people will start to consume it, including young people. But alcohol is marketed in Denmark, and there is a large drinking culture among Danes and the youth. And according to a handful of respondents, cannabis is no more dangerous than alcohol; in fact, some even stated it is better for you than alcohol. Thus, since alcohol can be marketed and communicated on the Danish market, but not cannabis (according to Danes), it would mean that Curaleaf would have to educate and enlighten Danes first before marketing the product and promoting.

This could be a limitation to Curaleaf on the Danish market, as it could mean marketing cannabis would not please and satisfy Danes, and this would be harmful to a business in the long run. But, perhaps, Danes would simply need time to adjust to the fact that cannabis was legalized, and communicated, and done the line; perhaps they would 'I cannabis' too.

## 7. Discussion

### *7.1 Research limitations*

The methodological choice of conducting survey research was intended to provide insights into Danes' perceptions, attitudes, and values toward cannabis and communication, and it did. However, as surveys are quantitative data, more responses could have improved the data and aided in generalizing the data and giving a broader insight into Danish culture and consumers, which could then be used in communication planning. As mentioned above, the survey did not ask respondents direct questions about certain (possible) core messages, if they were aware of Curaleaf or cannabis companies in general, etc. And answers to these questions could have been helpful when discussing what type of core messages Curaleaf should or could have on the Danish market; however, this analysis took place after the survey was conducted.

Commonly, quantitative methods do not go along with social constructivism and interpretivism but rather positivism. However, positivism states that there is only one reality and

that reality can be measured. But through this thesis, it has been asserted and noted that realities, cultures, societies, etc., are ever-changing and should be treated as such and do not exist in singular. Therefore, using a quantitative method such as a survey to obtain Dane's perceptions and values concerning cannabis can be seen as contrasting when taking a stance in social constructivism and interpreting. However, this choice was intentional, as conducting interviews or focus groups could have caused a lack of data due to the nature of the research. It is no secret that cannabis, in general, is a controversial product, even in places where it is legalized, and people that consume it might not be comfortable expressing this to other people. At least not in person. Therefore, the survey was a safer way for obtaining these opinions and such and was then interpreted, understanding that there is not only one reality, and people in the same culture might feel different about things. However, taking a stance in interpretivism, it can be difficult for the researcher to be completely objective, both with the survey answers but also the netnographic findings and what they indicate.

Netnography is qualitative, and commonly in netnographic research, data triangulation occurs, meaning more than one community is observed. However, in this thesis, only one community was observed, and that was because it is a qualitative method, and also it did not make sense to observe other communities, as there is none relating wholly to Curaleaf. The qualitative method aided in giving insights into Curaleaf's current communicative actions on their Instagram, and while the research questions posed in the research were answered, there were also some lacks. As there were no interactions between the researcher and the community, the interpretations of the data might pose as too subjective, whereas had there been interactions, clarity could have happened, and then some aspects would have been less indicative and more factual. However, this was not done, as that could then, in turn, affect the research and not give a 'natural' setting.

## 8. Conclusion

The problem formulation for this thesis was how Curaleaf could strategically communicate on the Danish market and if there were possibly any limitations or opportunities. Given the fact that cannabis is currently illegal on the Danish market, it would seem as if such a research focus is redundant. However, as societies and cultures change and evolve, there is a possibility that cannabis might become legal (in some way) in Denmark in the near future. And on that basis, any company would need to create a strategy for communicating and marketing themselves.

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that Curaleaf could communicate on the Danish market, by creating a localization strategy plan, compared to a standardization strategy.

However, it would presumably not be as strategically as initially believed. If Curaleaf followed the steps and processes of strategic communication, they could very well be met with certain obstacles, restrictions, difficulties, and such. Because strategic communication theories, or at least the ones utilized in this thesis, do not take the type of company into consideration. And thus, as Curaleaf is a cannabis company, they would have to take other measures when strategizing their communication on the Danish market. For instance, they could choose to do a mixture of deliberate and emergent, such as planning strategies (plural) and less strategic planning (singular). Therefore, the suggestive plan might be more of a guide or something that could be 'consulted' if the time came rather than a concrete plan. As the data did not provide the necessary results to suggest a concrete plan. The survey results showed Danish individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward cannabis and communication, and that was a helpful tool when the suggestive plan was debated.

However, as there is a long way between theory and practice i.e., Danes might behave differently when/if cannabis was legalized and communication began. Therefore, Curaleaf would need to constantly observe the 'landscape' in Denmark and Dane's perceptions and attitudes regarding cannabis, as this is ever-changing, and then the more they communicated about the educational content (information on cannabis, industry, health benefits, etc.), the more Danes would (possibly) recognize and understand the goods of the company and industry. And as mentioned, it would have to be a localization strategy, in which the audience and culture are always of focus; thus, if Curaleaf would always consider the audience, in any aspect, all from what they dislike, desire, and such in terms of communication, it would presumably be a helpful tool for them. They would have to ease Danes into the cannabis industry and understand their values, desires, attitudes, etc. And if cannabis were legalized in Denmark and Curaleaf decided to enter the Danish market, one way they could move forward with initial strategies was to do focus group interviews or observations. That way, they would obtain more insight; however, it could also be a limitation, as this does require time and resources. Nonetheless, in the case of legalization and Curaleaf entering the Danish market, it would seem possible that communicative actions would, in fact, also be a factor that would change society and culture, as it is also evolving. Thus, Danes could also become rooted in the good and experience a new kind of high.

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