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WAITING TO INHALE: HOW MEDICAL CANNABIS ENTREPRENEURS ARE DESTIGMATIZING THEIR INDUSTRY (SUMMARY)

Kisha Lashley
University of Virginia, USA, Lashley@virginia.edu

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

**WAITING TO INHALE: HOW MEDICAL CANNABIS
ENTREPRENEURS ARE DESTIGMATIZING THEIR INDUSTRY**

Kisha Lashley, University of Virginia, USA

Principal Topics

Stigma is an organizational reality. Scholars have long demonstrated its ubiquity in various forms; as a repercussion of particularly unacceptable organizational behavior (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992), as a result of undesirable organizational outcomes (Elsbach, 1994; Sutton & Callahan, 1987), or even as a consequence of unintended associations with stigmatized groups (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Furthermore, organizations can be subject to “core” stigma (Hudson, 2008), and be stigmatized through their mere existence when important audiences view their practices and/or key clients with disdain (Helms & Patterson, 2014; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Vergne, 2012). These audiences often impose sanctions and/or withhold support, thereby threatening the organizations’ abilities to fulfill their goals (Hudson, 2008). However, scholarship on core stigma has generally focused on organizational attempts to exist within the confines of that stigma, while avoiding its negative consequences (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Vergne, 2012). Yet, some entrepreneurs, aspire to normalcy for their firms, and strive to remove the stigma. As such, the question becomes, how do firms remove core stigma? In this study I seek to understand how entrepreneurs in the core- stigmatized medical cannabis industry are attempting to increase audience support and remove organizational stigma.

Method

Given our limited understanding of the stigma removal process, I employ a qualitative, grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006) where I use both archival and qualitative interview data.

Results and Implications

My findings suggest that organizations can reduce core stigma through a process of *morality infusion*, where they use narratives and substantive actions to tie their firms and industry to an alternative set of values, thus creating an identity and image that resonate with critical stakeholders. As such, I contribute to the literature on organizational core stigma. I also contribute to the entrepreneurship literature by considering the actions of firms that are capitalizing on opportunities with widespread negative social evaluations. In the entrepreneurial context, even when not facing stigma, firms must often interface with contentious audiences, particularly when promoting paradigm-shifting innovations (Lynch, Cole, McNally & Jordan, 2010). My findings highlight role of strategically meshing language with actions to build stakeholder support.

CONTACT: Kisha Lashley; Lashley@virginia.edu; (T) 434-243-1582 University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400173, Charlottesville VA 22904-4173, USA.