

# The sustainability in alcohol consumption: the “drink responsibly” frontier

Alcohol  
consumption

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The excessive consumption of alcohol in numerous countries in the world, combined with the progressively younger age of the consumers, made it necessary for companies to use instruments of communication aimed at the development of consumption responsibility, so as to prevent reckless behaviour and the health risks thereto associated. The purpose of this paper is to assess the visibility and effectiveness of responsible consumption messages used for the sale of the product “beer” (on packaging and in advertisements); the study used a sample audience made up of teenagers and young adults from southern Italy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The methodology used was that of the focus group. Three interview sessions were conducted, one dedicated to teenagers, age 16–17 years, and two dedicated to young adult panels, age 20–24 years. A ten-question questionnaire was designed prior to the conduction of the focus groups, and it was used in all the sessions.

**Findings** – The study shows the weak efficacy of the “drink responsibly” communication campaigns carried out by beer manufacturers. The totality of the interviewees failed to remember the existence of the “drink responsibly” messages and, even after supplementary visual stimulation, they were mostly disinterested, defining the fact that companies from the alcoholic drinks industry carry out consumption awareness campaigns as an out-and-out nonsensical contradiction.

**Originality/value** – The survey draws attention to the perception by young audiences of the more recent “drink responsibly” communication campaigns carried out by beer manufacturers, aiming at encouraging a more responsible attitude to alcohol consumption. There still are not many such inquests aimed at determining the response of young people to the use of slogans and commercials connected to responsible drinking in the literature; therefore, this study aimed at filling this gap. In fact, the authors believe this study is important for assessing the effectiveness of such instruments for achieving greater responsibility in the use of alcoholic drinks, so as to develop better awareness in the ranks of youths. Among the new communication strategies that were proposed to the participants, there were video commercials containing responsible consumption messages and the new prohibition marks placed directly on the product labels.

**Keywords** Alcohol, Alcohol consumption, Focus group, Qualitative methods, Public health, Corporate social responsibility

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

The widespread phenomenon of excessive alcohol consumption determines today a growing focus on the execution of initiatives aimed at the prevention of incorrect behaviours and the subsequent health risks. The principles of sustainability also fully apply to the need of reducing and correcting the new consumption trends in young people, who consume more alcoholic drinks at different times compared with the traditional consumption, usually during

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meals, as in the long-standing Italian tradition. New models that beckon use of alcoholic drinks concentrated in specific times of the day are affirmed, with the ingestion of large quantities (Beccaria *et al.*, 2015; Rolando *et al.*, 2012). We are talking about the binge drinking phenomenon, which is widespread internationally and raises alarms due to the young age of those who engage in it and for the consequent health effects (Miller *et al.*, 2007). The companies that produce alcoholic drinks consider that sustaining a moderate and conscientious consumption model is an act of social responsibility, as they are informed about the risks derived from an incorrect use of these substances both for the individual and the community. Over the years, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has increasingly become a fundamental part of company success (Waage, 2007), and it represents the way in which organisations may integrate sustainability goals into their strategy (Lozano, 2013). The beer sector is particularly sensitive to the initiatives of CSR, which are specifically aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm, although the objectives of reducing the consumption and the one of inexpensiveness are conflicting. However, several authors have highlighted the diverse initiatives that may be included in the concept of social responsibility (Jones *et al.*, 2011; Mialon and McCambridge, 2018). Organisations are today increasingly seeking to adopt more ethical and responsible behaviours towards consumers (Mueller Loose and Remaud, 2013). This allows them to achieve positive results in terms of reputation, customer loyalty and trust (Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.*, 2019; Stanaland *et al.*, 2011), brand equity (Esmailpour and Barjoei, 2016; Iaia *et al.*, 2019; Rahman *et al.*, 2019) as well as financial performances (Jones *et al.*, 2005; Salehi *et al.*, 2018; Tarabella and Burchi, 2013). CSR has become a crucial aspect, as it has important strategic implications for companies in all sectors for the relations it creates with internal and external stakeholders. In this way, a true virtuous cycle is activated, which generates two-way flows between companies and stakeholders. The two-way effect, which is created whenever stakeholders become more aware of responsibility issues, can act as a driver for further improvements in company CSR behaviours, as stated by Marques *et al.* (2019). Over the past years, the beer sector, known for its self-regulatory capacity (Dobre Baron and Nitescu, 2019; Majlath and Ricordel, 2019), has shown an increasing interest towards the aforementioned CSR practices. In fact, it has strengthened its communication strategies, in consideration of the influence advertising wields upon the current and future alcohol consumption by adolescents (Berey *et al.*, 2017). It is apparent that the responsible consumption messages are an essential element of corporate communication, to contribute to the consumer education towards a correct lifestyle, for themselves and for the others. To this end, the biggest multinational companies selling and distributing alcoholic drinks do their best to promote a more responsible communication in comparison to the past. They describe the damages alcohol may cause if drunk irresponsibly and authoritatively forbid alcohol consumption to minors, as well as drivers and pregnant women, with the use of slogans and innovative labels with responsibility disclaimers. The goal of the research, which covers an interesting area of investigation, also rather unexplored by the literature, is to evaluate the visibility of the messages related to the responsible consumption of alcohol and the perception of their effectiveness on young consumers. The investigation methodology is based on the use of focus groups, organised on a total sample of 21 Italian young people, divided in age groups and resident in two cities in southern Italy. The significant outcome the research has produced is the limited effectiveness of the responsible consumption campaigns promoted by beer producers, as related to their ability to discourage the alcohol consumption among young people, making no distinction between young men and women.

## 2. Beer sector in Italy and CSR

The beer sector is crucial in the global economic scenario; with a production of 1.94 billion hectolitres, it is the most popular drink worldwide (Cabras *et al.*, 2016; Statista, 2019). In Italy, the beer sector has produced more than 16 million hectolitres in 2018 and has

achieved important results, thanks to steadily increasing investments in innovation. In particular, the expansion and success of this sector on domestic and foreign markets are absolutely unprecedented in the national agri-food panorama (Francioni *et al.*, 2019). Thanks to its dynamic character, the sector has attracted foreign investments, thus generating important corporate transactions like takeovers and mergers between groups of different sizes, with the subsequent internationalisation of a sector typically characterised by a domestic production. Another factor that has greatly contributed to the consumption growth is the *craft beer revolution*, which started off in the USA and has spread in many countries throughout the world, including the Italian market (Fastigi *et al.*, 2015; Fastigi *et al.*, 2018). The two dynamics analysed – internationalisation and increase in consumption – have shed light on the need to adhere to CSR models aimed to consolidate increasingly sustainable management and consumption models (Corsini *et al.*, 2019). This is even more relevant if we consider that young people are the principal consumers of the beer product, which is their favourite drink, compared to all the other alcohol drinks available on the market (ISTAT, 2018; Jaworski and Fabisiak, 2018). The companies of this sector have greatly improved their communication towards consumers, by introducing the responsible drinking brands, which are analysed in the present research. In fact, this commitment is more closely linked to large companies than to small craft enterprises. However, the *craft beer revolution* has become the bearer of values like the return to tradition, to the community and a wide interpretation of sustainability, including environmental and socio-economic parameters, not typically associated with the ethical paradoxes belonging to the multinationals of the sector (Hindy, 2014; Ness, 2018; Reid and Gatrell, 2017).

### 3. Analysis of the literature

#### 3.1 Alcohol and adolescents

The high rate of improper and irresponsible alcohol use by the adolescents is a well-known phenomenon in literature (Beck and Treiman, 1996; D'Alessio *et al.*, 2006; Hingson *et al.*, 2009; LaBrie *et al.*, 2010; Morean *et al.*, 2019; Wechsler *et al.*, 1994; White and Labouvie, 1989). As the majority of the cases concerning the initiation to the use of alcohol and excessive alcohol consumption occur during adolescence, therefore elevating the risk of addiction in adult age, it is fundamental to establish the prevention in this period of life or even earlier (Kuntsche *et al.*, 2005). The existing studies in literature mostly concentrate on the analysis of the effects due to alcohol abuse by minors, and only few of them deal with the prevention measures (Demant and Schierff, 2019). The issue of growing alcohol consumption reported in the past years internationally and the dissemination of new consumption models (WHO, 2018) that show mostly an increase in the use of alcohol consumption outside meals among the youngest have today a primary importance on the execution of initiatives aimed at the prevention of incorrect behaviours and the related risks. In Italy, according to the ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics) in 2017, 65.4 per cent of the population of 11-year olds and older consumed at least one alcoholic drink during the year. The percentage of daily consumers of alcoholic drinks amounts to 21.4 per cent, lower than what had been observed ten years earlier (29.3 per cent in 2007). The percentage of occasional alcohol drinkers is on the rise (from 38.9 per cent in 2007 to 44.0 per cent in 2017) and those who drink alcoholic drinks outside meals (from 25.6 per cent in 2007 to 29.2 per cent in 2017) (ISTAT, 2018). By analysing the consumption models of young people aged between 11 and 24, in 2017, in Italy, about 811,000 young people turn out to be involved in the binge drinking phenomenon (ISTAT, 2018), confirming the dissemination of a new social phenomenon known in literature as the so called “binge drinking”. Binge drinking is widely used in the literature (Naimi *et al.*, 2003; Wechsler *et al.*, 1994): it is a common expression used to indicate an excessive episodic consumption of over six glasses of alcoholic drinks of any kind drunk consecutively and concentrated in a short period (one glass corresponds to one alcoholic unit (AU), a standard

measure containing 12 g of pure alcohol) and in a single occasion (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2018). It is a modality of alcohol consumption, initially developed in the countries of Northern Europe and which seems to be largely spread by now even in Italy and in all the European countries in the Mediterranean area, particularly among the young population (Kuntsche *et al.*, 2004). The attraction towards the alcohol of the young who adhere to this model is linked to the immediacy of the “fun” effect, to the desire of following a trend and adhering to alternative behaviours, as getting drunk with others, facilitating socialisation and popularity in the peers group (Costamagna and Beccaria, 2008; Fabbrizzi *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, among adolescents, the consumption of alcohol can be used as an instrument to earn a status within the group: “Drink to be accepted”. They drink to avoid feeling different and to be accepted by others or for the fear of being alone (Hoel *et al.*, 2004; Petrilli *et al.*, 2014). There are interesting differences of genre in the relationship between alcohol consumption and sexuality in the young people aged between 14 and 16. The goal of such consumption amongst young people is really different: girls drink to seem more mature to draw the attention of the older boys, trying to maintain a feminine approach (De Visser and McDonnell, 2012); the boys, who have few possibilities of attracting girls their own age and who do not want to seem immature when approaching younger girls build their masculinity, thanks to the consumption of alcohol (Demant, 2007; Törrönen *et al.*, 2017). If the use of alcohol as an instrument to build the masculinity is frequent amongst adolescents, it is really different for the young adults. In fact, as highlighted by a Swedish research study that analysed different samples of young adults with the focus group technique, these subjects have a tendency to conceal their personal problems matured over time with the use of alcohol and to make up excuses, such as “everyone drinks”, to justify excessive consumption. But mostly, as they are no longer adolescents, they mature a certain knowledge of the drinks, they recognise the quality and the taste and in fact, some claim that “getting drunk is easier if the beer is good!” (Abrahamson, 2004). Lastly, we should not underestimate the isolated cases of alcohol consumption, which are accompanied by anti-social behaviours in response to negative interpersonal exchanges (Mohr *et al.*, 2001), even if they are not as frequent.

### 3.2 Alcohol and advertising communication

In the literature, different authors agree on the fact that the advertising of alcohol influences the behaviour of the individuals starting from the pre-adolescence (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Pasch *et al.*, 2007), and that it has a considerable effect on its consumption during the adolescence (Anderson *et al.*, 2009; Berey *et al.*, 2017; Grenard *et al.*, 2013; Padon *et al.*, 2018; Saffer, 2002; Snyder *et al.*, 2006). The advertising communication represents a lever of the marketing mix largely used by the companies operating in this field. According to Nielsen data (2017), the merchandising of beverages and alcohol represented in 2016 about 5 per cent of the total investments in the Italian advertising market. The models proposed by the advertising of alcohol have a strongly attraction effect on the youngest, mainly because they are linked to the sharing of experiences with positive consequences or attributes, which result desirable for them (Grube and Waiters, 2005). Alcohol is often perceived as an element able to ease the relationships with others, and its consumption is often associated with food, fun and friendship (Pettigrew and Charters, 2006). Therefore, alcohol advertisements suggest a lifestyle that, albeit unreal, evokes the possible world of the brand and its values; in addition, even though manufacturers state that their advertising messages address 18- and 30-year-old people, as required by law, the segment interested in them seems to be below that age (Costamagna and Beccaria, 2008). In fact, a lot of alcohol advertisements violate the guidelines of the sector, directing the promotion of the brands to a very young audience and placing it on specific magazines and social networks, being the latter largely used by young people (Barry *et al.*, 2015, 2018; Jernigan *et al.*, 2005; Mart, 2011; Noel *et al.*, 2018; Rhoades and

Jernigan, 2012; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016; Ross *et al.*, 2016). The youngest seem to be particularly sensitive to the persuasive messages contained in the alcohol ads: it has been estimated that a reduction of these ads can produce a modest decrease in the consumption of alcohol amongst adolescents (Faulkner *et al.*, 2017; Saffer and Dave, 2006). The more these ads contain elements seen as “nice” by young people, the more they are attractive and efficient (Kim and Park, 2018). In fact, those who perceive the ads stimuli as nice showed at the same time the intention to buy the brand and its promoted products (Chen *et al.*, 2005). In the past years, the biggest multinationals launched some awareness activities to fight the problems related to alcohol abuse by promoting a responsible use of it. One sector that is particularly active in the use of these messages is that of beer, but it should be also noted that interesting studies are focused on understanding both companies and consumers behaviours in the wine sector (Annunziata *et al.*, 2016; Gil and Sánchez, 1997; Goldsmith and d’Hauteville, 1998; Spielmann *et al.*, 2016; Vrontis *et al.*, 2016). Even some specific research studies made in the brewing sector show how the responsible messages are actually used in an ambiguous way with the goal of pushing sales and improving the public image at the same time (Knai *et al.*, 2015; Smith *et al.*, 2006). A group of researchers in the USA carried out an inquiry that foresaw a textual descriptive analysis of the messages related to the “responsible drinking” that appeared in all the advertisements concerning beer, alcohol and alcopops published in the national magazines from 2008 to 2010 ( $n = 1795$ ). Amongst the results obtained, relevant data are that in the messages in which there were messages related to the responsible consumption and the “tagline” (as tagline, we mean a short and direct sentence that immediately resumes the vocation of a brand, a product or a company), in 95 per cent of the cases the images about the tagline turned out to be more prominent. Therefore, the messages about responsibility seem to be used with the goal of promoting the product rather than giving information about public health, as reported by Smith *et al.*, 2014). However, there are cases in which the advertising campaign managed to discourage the consumption of alcohol among individuals. In fact, it is argued that the individuals who are exposed to the ads containing warnings about the damaging effects deriving from alcohol consumption have made fewer drinking requests than those who were subject to exclusive promotions aimed exclusively at the product (Stautz and Marteau, 2016). For this reason, making ads that contain warnings about alcohol consumption able to generate negative emotions can be considered as an effective strategy to reduce its consumption (Stautz *et al.*, 2016).

#### 4. Samples and methodology

The goal of the research study is to evaluate the visibility of the messages related to a responsible consumption of alcohol and the perception of their effectiveness on young consumers.

The methodology chosen to conduct the research is focus group [1]. This technique is a carefully planned discussion to obtain information about a specific area of interest; we carried out a group interview led by a moderator who proposed some stimuli to the participants, following a pretty much structured track (Krueger, 1994).

The people taking part in the focus group, who were carefully pre-contacted with the use of face-to-face micro-interviews in the weeks before the survey, have been selected on the basis of three criteria:

- (1) they had to be beer consumers;
- (2) they had to know the product of the research to generate a spontaneous and interactive discussion based on real knowledge; and
- (3) the age group, as the goal of the research study is focused on adolescents and young adults.

On the basis of these three factors, the participants of the focus group have been chosen amongst the adolescents aged between 16 and 17 and young adults aged between 20 and 24. For the underage participants to take part in the survey, it was necessary to ask for the parents' authorisations by means of a specific signed form. The sample was formed by people aged between 16 and 17, with reference to the works of [Beccaria et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Beccaria \(2014\)](#). According to the authors, in fact, talking about the drinking culture in Italy means talking about the so-called "wet culture", which is typical of Mediterranean countries and is characterised by the social and convivial aspect of drinking, as opposed to the "dry culture", typical of northern Europe, where the prevailing aspect of alcohol is the intoxicating one.

The socialising process among Mediterranean wet cultures makes the adolescent alcohol experience different; in fact, the first taste does not correspond to the actual consumption, as the onset of regular and daily consumption occurs between 16 and 17 ([Beccaria, 2014](#)). To achieve the objectives set by the research, the 16–17 and 20–24 age groups were considered, to ascertain if there is any behaviour contiguity between the two age groups under scrutiny and if different consumption behaviours occur in adulthood as related to the responsibility of alcohol drinking.

For the first group, to make the research more complete, the choice was to select those adolescents who attended different educational institutions, except the hotel and catering schools [2]. The young adults were selected regardless of their field of work or study.

Three groups were selected, one panel of adolescents, composed of five individuals, and another two of young adults, both composed of eight participants, as shown in [Table 1](#).

The interviews were made according to subsequent levels of analysis, starting from a first investigation concerning the level of knowledge of the products and the brands used for the development of a responsible consumption until reaching an acknowledgement of the behaviours consequent to the levels of knowledge declared.

Ultimately, the track of the interview has been divided in three sections:

- (1) First section: "*Consumption and knowledge of labels*". The first phase of the investigation aimed at acquiring information about the knowledge of the product and the consumption patterns of the examined sample: average quantity of beers consumed in a week, occasions and places of consumption.
- (2) In this first phase, the participants were asked to describe the labels of the beers they consumed most frequently, to understand if they remembered the presence of responsibility messages.
- (3) Subsequently, they were shown for a few minutes some beer bottles on which the responsibility messages were printed on the back and on the neck of some bottles; we observed the attention level that they had for the banning seals and for the slogan Be responsible to evaluate if, after viewing the bottle, they quoted these messages when asked the following question: "*What do you remember of the label you have just seen?*". The brands shown were: Moretti, Tennent's, Peroni and Dreher, with different alcoholic typology, price and style. In the analysis of the results, the outcome about consumption styles and knowledge of labels are presented separately.

Target age	Gender	Sample	N°	Profession
16–17	M, F		5	High school students
20–24	M, F		3	University students
	M		13	Workers; unemployed
Tot.			21	

**Table 1.**  
The final sample: age,  
gender, profession

**Note(s):** M = male; F = female

- (4) Second section: “*Watching ads*”. Two ads were shown to the participants. The ads were selected because they contained some activities in which the participants could easily identify themselves. Both ads were made by the Heineken company, a company for which the responsibility message is a focal point in its marketing activity. The first spot “Heineken: the “Experiment” directed by Philip Andelman, was produced in 2014 and set in a Miami nightclub; it promotes a responsible consumption by inviting people to not drink in excess in the evenings out with friends. In the second spot entitled “When you drive, never drink”, Heineken invites not to drink when you have to drive.
- (5) Third section: About “*Communication*”. There were four key questions useful to understand and deepen the participants’ opinions about the responsibility messages showed in the first and second part of the interview and about the communication of responsibility messages promoted by the companies producing beer and its effectiveness in reducing excessive consumption. More specifically, the participants were asked to say what responsible consumption of alcohol means for them, and if, in their opinion, the ads really promote a responsible consumption and if they ever noticed the message “drink responsibly” before. Three focus groups were carried out, with the average duration of 1 h. The number of participants in each session were between five and eight, for a total sample of 21 interviewees. For each focus group, we used the same interview structure that includes a total of ten guide questions concerning each goal, to conduct and actively sustain the discussion between all the participants.
- (6) Each discussion session has been recorded with an electronic device and then transcribed, to prevent any loss of information useful to the research. The research is restricted to two cities in southern Italy and, therefore, it cannot be considered as representative of the general behaviour of the young people, even considering the relevant differences between southern and northern Italy (Petrilli *et al.*, 2014) and with northern Europe and the rest of the world (Hingson, *et al.*, 2009; Kuntsche *et al.*, 2005; Miller *et al.*, 2007; Rolando *et al.*, 2012; Törrönen *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, as it has been conducted in summer, the interview includes the trend of consuming more beer during the summer. In conclusion, even if it is not representative, the sample of adolescents and young adults can be considered a first useful step to investigate consumption patterns of a product with a growing demand at the national level in the future.

## 5. Analysis of results

### 5.1 Consumption styles

On average, the amounts consumed by the participants in both age brackets, (adolescents aged between 16 and 17 and young people aged between 20 and 24), is about six beers per week. As far as the occasions and the places of consumption are concerned, the majority of the participants belonging to both groups mainly associates this drink to the relaxing times, drinking it in the evening after work or as aperitif before going out. Beer is mostly considered as a beverage to drink in great company, it is an excuse to be together and it is a real ritual. In almost all the cases, the beer is bought and consumed at the brewery, at the pub, in bars and at pizza restaurants, except for particular and less frequent situations, such as a dinner or watching a movie at home. In such cases, beer is generally bought from the supermarket to save money, as there the price is lower and it is possible to buy more beer. Below, in [Table 2](#), are listed the most meaningful answers emerged from the discussion, indicating in parenthesis the sex and age (woman/man, age).

5.2 Knowledge of the labels

To understand the level of knowledge of the labels and to determine if the participants were aware of the presence or absence of responsibility messages present on the bottles of some brands, we decided to start the interview by recalling their memories.

In all the answers of both groups (16–17; 20–24), the elements emerged during the discussion and mostly described as follows: logo, colour, stopper and other little details about the front of the bottle. It has to be highlighted that no references were made to the responsibility messages. Here, in Table 3, are two of the most representative quotes.

At this point, the participants were shown some labels of beer bottles of different brands to verify if they could identify the responsibility messages or not.

The examination of the labels, both the front and back, lasted few minutes, the memories described before have been enriched with other elements, mainly concerning the brand: logo, colour, some phrases and this time, other little details such as the decorations. The statements below bear witness of this (Table 4).

If we examine the entire sample ( $n = 21$ ), it can be pointed out that two participants belonging to the target 20–24 noticed the responsibility messages on the back of the bottle, declaring the following (Table 5).

**Table 2.**  
Some sentences showing the consumption style of the sample examined

Gender, target-age	Consumption styles
Woman, target 16–17	“In summer I drink a lot more beer because it’s more refreshing, on the average 5 beers per week. Beer is like a coffee for us, in the evening we drink beer with friends to spend time together, it’s an occasion to be together one evening. I buy it in bars”
Man, target 20–24	“As far as I’m concerned, in winter I hardly drink beer because I do not feel the need, I do not like to drink during winter, but during summer I enjoy drinking 6 or 7 beers per week. In summer, every chance you get is a good time to drink”
Woman, target 20–24	“For me, it’s the opposite. I don’t like beer a lot, but since there are not many occasions to have fun during the year, I often go to the brewery, so the consumption of beer is more frequent”

**Table 3.**  
Some comments about what the sample examined remembers about the beer label

Gender, target-age	Knowledge of the labels
Man, target 20–24	What I remember about Nastro is the inscription on the label “Superior Beer”
Woman, target 20–24	“What I remember about Tennent’s is the blue logo with the red T. And the golden stopper with a red T”

**Table 4.**  
Some statements after looking at the beer labels containing the responsible drinking messages

Gender, target-age	Knowledge of the labels
Woman, target 20–24	“Something I noticed about Tennent’s which I could not remember before is that in the back part, there are some leaves with the ingredients. I do not remember anything about Peroni, I see it but it’s like I can’t watch it. While I remember a phrase on Moretti: “An Italian story”, the expiration date”
Man, target 20–24	“About Peroni, the signature of Giovanni Peroni. On the Tennent’s, I noticed the T which has very strong colour. About Moretti, the old man who drinks”
Woman, target 16–17	“I noticed that both Moretti and Peroni have spikes of wheat all around, and that all the three bottles use the colour gold, I don’t know why. . .”

We can, therefore, state that the totality of the sample ( $n = 21$ ) did not remember the presence of a responsibility communication promoted by the beer manufacturers before taking a look at the products, but above all, more than 90 per cent of the participants were totally indifferent to the bans and with the wording *Beviresponsabile.it*, presented as visual stimuli during the interview. There are different reasons.

Almost the totality of the sample who declared to have never seen the responsibility messages excuse this lack of knowledge with the fact that bans are not “*well positioned*” or “*highlighted*”. Even after having carefully examined them, the opinions are not favourable. In fact, they judge these messages as being “*confusing*”, “*ridiculous*”, “*meaningless and not useful*”.

### 5.3 Viewing of the advertising spots

During the second section of the interview, the participants watched two TV ads made by the Heineken company in which they highlighted the importance of responsible consumption of beer in two different contexts: fun in the nightclub and driving cars.

All the participants easily understood the references to a responsible consumption present in both the ads, but the one that had the greater impact on both targets was the ad “When you Drive, Never Drink”, which communicated how important was not to drink when you should drive. On the contrary, the ad entitled “Dance More, Drink Slow” set in a Miami nightclub was judged negatively by almost all the sample, because it was perceived as fake and contradictory. Associating a minor alcohol consumption to the fun in the nightclub is, maybe, a difficult task.

Nevertheless, when they were asked the goal the company had in adopting this model of communication that condemned the excessive consumption of alcohol, the participants seemed to be sceptical and doubtful about the good will of the company promoting such messages (Table 6).

### 5.4 Communication

From the analysis of the answers, it can be noticed how the “responsible drinking” is a highly subjective topic and linked to self-knowledge and of the own limits. It is curious to notice the

Gender, target-age	Knowledge of the labels
Man, target 20–24	“When I watched the labels on the back, I noticed the different symbols, pregnant women should not drink, not even the minors. . .”
Man, target 20–24	“There is a very long presentation in Moretti, the ratio with kcals and all the due recommendations. Shouldn’t drink it during pregnancy or if you’re a minor”

**Table 5.**  
The declarations of the consumers noticing the responsible drinking messages after the inspection

Gender, target-age	Viewing of the advertising spots
Man, target 20–24	“The goal of the company is still to sell. Regardless of the ad’s goal. In my opinion, they are always interested in selling. It’s a war to produce the best TV ad and advertise the product”
Man, target 20–24	“They know how to use the marketing but I agree with him, the goal is to sell”
Man, target 20–24	“The goal of the company is to sell. That’s it. It’s all about marketing. They play with that, they want to sell”
Man, target 16–17	“They want you to believe that selling beer is not important for them. It’s a staging just to communicate that they care about their clients”

**Table 6.**  
Some statements about the objectives of the companies adopting responsible drinking communication models according to the sample

total absence of references to health problems (physical or not) derived from an irresponsible consumption of alcohol. Excessive consumption is condemned mostly if associated to driving vehicles, an activity considered dangerous for the own health and for others. The common opinion is that the acceptable quantity is two beers, considered harmless, especially if consumed during meals. According to the majority of the participants, this is the limit that should not be passed. According to some participants, however, drinking responsibly with friends is not so easy as it could seem (Table 7).

While researching on the role of responsibility communication and the influence it should have on individuals, we notice how difficult it is for companies to communicate an effective message to condemn an excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks and, at the same time, be credible in the consumer's eyes.

Here are some relevant statements about that (Tables 8 and 9).

Therefore, considering the relevant amount of unfavourable opinions, it seems difficult that these messages, made with the goal to discourage the excessive consumption of beer, can effectively succeed in their intentions.

The participants do not believe that advertising ads and the messages on the labels can succeed in reducing the excessive consumption of beer. These messages "outlive their purpose", and they are classified as useless:

## 6. Conclusions

*Industrial implication.* The growing consumption of alcohol in the ranks of teenagers over the recent years arouses great concern internationally. The present research aims to identify the

**Table 7.**  
Some participants explain why drinking responsibly is not easy

Gender, target-age	Communication
Man, target 20–24	"Drinking responsibly when you are with friends is impossible, you start drinking and you do not know when you'll stop. If you want to drink responsibly, you should not go out. When there are 4 or 5 individuals around a table with chips and nuts, you drink while talking with friends"
Man, target 20–24	"Drinking responsibly means you should not cross your line, when you cross your own line you should ask for help. According to me, drinking responsibly is really difficult, because if you're used to it in a certain environment, with certain people, it is really difficult to drink responsibly"

**Table 8.**  
Sentences about the participants' opinions about the role of the responsible drinking communication

Gender, target-age	Communication
Man, target 16–17	"I see it as a fake message. I see it negatively, as they wanted to deceive us, not as a caring mum who tells you "you should not drink..."
Woman, target 16–17	"To be honest, I agree. The fact is that they're still sponsoring alcohol, like it or not, it produces an effect on your body"
Woman, target 16–17	"I think that they promote a responsible consumption but I can hardly believe that. . . here's an example: it's like if the pizza maker makes a TV ad "eat less, otherwise the risk of obesity increases", I can't think that. . . there must be something's up"

**Table 9.**  
Sentences reporting the participants' opinions about the role of the responsible drinking communication

Gender, target-age	Communication
Man, target 20–24	"I think they are pointless"
Man, target 20–24	"We take for granted that advertising is fake"

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most effective messages to reduce alcohol consumption and drive people to adopt a more responsible approach to it, after analysing the relationship between the responsible consumption messages and the response in terms of perception by the youth.

The first relevant data that emerge from the study of the sample under inquiry are the weak effectiveness of the responsible consumption campaigns promoted by beer manufacturers in terms of discouraging the consumption of alcohol by some of the demographics at risk, like underage people and pregnant women. More precisely, we found that the entirety of the sample under investigation failed to remember the very existence of the “drink responsibly” messages and, what is more, even after the messages were shown to them, the people in the sample proved to be mostly disinterested. Among the notable elements, we found that the positioning of the mark plays a crucial role in capturing the attention of the consumers so that many of the participants in the focus groups better remembered the messages printed on the front or central part of the bottle, where the elements connected to the brand (logo, ornaments, colours) and the phrases that advertise the product (slogan, characteristics, claims) are located, but from which the responsible consumption messages are completely absent. The result achieved, although needing further study, can represent a key instrument to better formulate the responsible drinking messages adopted in the selling of the beer product. It is to note that, for all the focus groups, the responsible consumption messages broadcast through commercials have a greater impact on the consumers, at least as concerns the combination between alcohol consumption and the dangers of drunk driving, thus reinforcing the importance of using commercials. However, as a weakness, the videos were met with a certain degree of mistrust and scepticism regarding the good faith of the companies that promote such messages, with the participants defining the action of companies from the alcohol industry undertaking initiatives related to raising awareness about alcohol consumption as a nonsensical contradiction.

We must say that, over the past years, many communication companies connected to the beer industry have invested considerable sums into the dissemination of information regarding the dangers of drinking alcohol in certain circumstances, improving the level of knowledge about the side effects of alcohol, especially among youths. Even more widespread results can be obtained with joint policies implemented by policy makers and industries in the sector.

*Theoretical implication.* Alcohol consumption among young people is a phenomenon characterised by different sociological and cultural implications. It is necessary to take into account the speed with which the alcohol consumption models and habits vary in time and in reference to the geographical area (Fogarty, 2006); for instance, when talking about the drinking culture in Italy and particularly in the South, there are significant differences both from northern Italy (Petrilli *et al.*, 2014) and from the rest of Europe (Kuntsche *et al.*, 2005; Rolando *et al.*, 2012; Törrönen *et al.*, 2017) and the rest of the world (Hingson *et al.*, 2009; Miller *et al.*, 2007). As concerns the data obtained for the drinking habits of our sample of youths from southern Italy, the results yielded by the research are in line with the existing literature (Petrilli *et al.*, 2014).

Also, regarding the speed and the dynamic of the changes in habits and consumption of alcohol by young people, the literature further states that the drinking habits of youths from the Mediterranean region are becoming similar to those of Northern Europeans (Jarvinen and Romm, 2007; Leifman, 2001; Room, 2010), and it can, therefore, be presumed that the behaviour of young people from the south of Italy will soon suffer changes.

The results of the interviews show interesting analogies with other studies present in the literature. In particular with the affirmations of Jones and Gregory (2009) in a study aiming at investigating the comprehension of the “drink responsibly” messages, where in a sample of six focus groups formed of young Australians, the messages were recognised by the youths, but the information was used not for the reduction, but often times the increase of alcohol use.

This distorted effect of the message comes from the fact that the wish to drink is stronger than the concept of responsibility, at least judging by the statements of the majority of participants in the inquest, given that the wish to drink is connected to the “buzz” that one wants to obtain by drinking and that it goes together very well with the new consumption model known as “binge drinking”.

The dangers of this attitude are double: on the one hand, because of the drinkers developing tolerance, which drives them to a progressive increase of the quantities necessary for obtaining the “buzz”, and on the other hand, because it associates the use of alcohol to the consumption of other substances known to have similar effects, so much so that the literature dubs them “gateway drugs” (Kandel *et al.*, 1992). According to Smith *et al.* (2006), age level is a key individual difference variable that is expected to mediate audience responses to “drink responsibly” campaign messages because developmental progression during adolescence has maturational implications for both sophistication of message processing and predisposition towards alcohol.

Analysing the results of the focus groups, we noticed how in terms of communication there are numerous contradictions that give rise to countless questions regarding the effectiveness and the credibility of corporate communication aimed at the dissemination of more responsible alcohol consumption models. On the basis of these considerations, we propose the use of “drink responsibly” messages that are differentiated by product, depending on the age group of the target audiences. Of course, this will require more extensive studies about the product type for the consumption of different age groups, to differentiate the products and direct them to the corresponding age in a more accurate manner. However, it is important to note that advocates of standard drink labels have always been clear that they are unlikely to be effective in influencing alcohol consumption in isolation unless they are part of a strong policy package. A coordinated approach to interventions on availability and marketing, public education and individual treatment is the key to reducing risky drinking behaviour, and alcohol problems in adolescence and young adulthood (Bonomo, 2005; Davey *et al.*, 2002; Jones and Gregory, 2009). It is of paramount importance that there be a sort of co-makership between manufacturers, consumers, policy-makers and medical research centres, which have always been attentive to this issue. In fact, this has been witnessed by the continuous innovations in the equipment used to monitor the consumption and in medical treatments, to activate a virtuous circle that would affect the regulation (Jones *et al.*, 2017), the communication and the perception of alcohol consumption, achieve more responsible behaviour and avoid diseases related to alcohol abuse (Rubinsky *et al.*, 2019). The present study can contribute to open up interesting avenues for future research in a field that is still rather unexplored by the academic literature. The results of the survey would require further investigation, in particular taking into account larger age groups and a more balanced professional status sample, to keep under control any bias problems, to enrich the existing studies and to gain better knowledge of the phenomenon analysed. Future studies will concern the analysis of a more homogeneous sample in terms of age, educational level and social characteristics.

#### Notes

1. These are the articles and the books checked for the execution of the focus group: Krueger, 1994. Focus Groups: a practical guide for applied research. Sage Publications, Newbury Park; Migliorini and Rania, 2001. I Focus Group: Uno strumento per la ricerca qualitativa. Animazione Sociale, pp. 82–88; Stagi, 2000. Il focus group come tecnica di valutazione. Pregi, difetti, potenzialità. Fondare la valutazione, Issue 20, pp. 67–88; Zammuner, 2003. I Focus Group. Aspetti della Psicologia, Il Mulino, Bologna.
2. We decided to exclude these students to have only neutral answers, as the adolescents attending the hotel and catering school know beer better than their peers, as they acquired said knowledge during the studies.

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