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Analysis of the Alcohol Industry's Corporate Social Responsibility Practices in Portugal

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Keywords
Alcohol industry · Corporate social responsibility · Health policy · Public health hazards · Public health surveillance

Abstract
Introduction: In Portugal, the alcohol industry (AI) engages in corporate political activity, influencing decision-making and potentially obstructing the implementation of evidence-based alcohol policies, such as higher taxes, stricter advertising laws, and mandatory warning labels on all alcoholic beverages. Yet, no research has been conducted specifically on the industry's corporate social responsibility activities (CSR), which can also hinder the implementation of these cost-effective policies while serving as a means for nurturing its reputation. ***Methods:*** This study addresses this gap by examining the CSR practices of ten AI actors in Portugal. Through qualitative content analysis, data collected from their websites was categorized based on an adapted framework considering seven CSR categories. ***Results:*** The results revealed CSR practices across all categories, with corporate philanthropy and alcohol information provision and education accounting for 65% of the analyzed data. The findings highlight potential conflicts between the public health initiatives of AI in Portugal and its profit-driven objectives. ***Conclusion:*** CSR activities undermine health protection and alcohol harm prevention efforts by promoting a dubious discourse about an undeniably harmful substance. The present study recommends considering vigilant monitoring, regulation, or even the ban on CSR practices of AI in Portugal.

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Análise das práticas de Responsabilidade Social Corporativa da indústria do álcool em Portugal

Palavras Chave
Indústria do Álcool · Responsabilidade Social Corporativa · Política de Saúde · Riscos em Saúde Pública · Vigilância em Saúde Pública

Resumo
Introdução: Em Portugal, a indústria do álcool (IA) está envolvida em atividades políticas corporativas, influenciando a tomada de decisão e potencialmente obstruindo a implementação de políticas de álcool baseadas na evidência, como o aumento de impostos e taxas, a regulação mais rigorosa da publicidade e a adoção de rótulos de advertência obrigatória em todas as bebidas alcoólicas. À atualidade, não foram investigadas

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especificamente as atividades de responsabilidade social corporativas (RSC) da IA, que ao mesmo tempo que servem como um meio para cultivar a sua reputação, também podem dificultar a implementação destas políticas custo-eficazes. ***Métodos:*** Este estudo aborda esta lacuna ao examinar as práticas de RSC de dez actores da IA em Portugal. Através do recurso à análise de conteúdo, os dados extraídos dos seus *websites* foram categorizados com base numa *framework* adaptada considerando sete categorias de RSC. ***Resultados:*** Os resultados revelaram práticas de RSC em todas as categorias, com as atividades de filantropia e de educação e informação sobre álcool a representarem 65% dos dados analisados. Os achados destacam potenciais conflitos entre as iniciativas de saúde pública da IA em Portugal e os seus objetivos orientados para a maximização do lucro. ***Conclusão:*** As atividades de RSC minam os esforços de proteção da saúde e prevenção dos danos causados pelo álcool, gerando um discurso duvidoso sobre uma substância indiscutivelmente prejudicial. O presente estudo recomenda a monitorização, regulamentação ou até mesmo a proibição das práticas de RSC da IA em Portugal.

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Introduction

There is a strong emphasis on alcohol in the Portuguese culture, especially wine: 2019 figures show that the country had higher alcohol consumption per capita than the average of the World Health Organization (WHO) European region, at 12.1 L per capita versus 9.5 L per capita [1] and a much higher recorded wine consumption (6 vs. 2.3 L per capita) [2]. In Portugal, the prevalence of alcohol use in the last 30 days (or current alcohol consumption) has increased from about 49% in 2017 to around 55% in 2022. Indicators like the prevalence of consumption in the last year, severe drunkenness, high-risk consumption, dependency, and youth consumption have worsened during this time [3].

In line with other industries dealing with unhealthy commodities, the alcohol industry (AI) in Portugal uses corporate political activity (CPA) strategies to influence and shape public policy, potentially delaying the implementation of public health evidence-based alcohol control measures such as the WHO "Best Buys" [4] and the "SAFER" initiative [5] and contributing to the above picture [6]. The operational approach of the AI includes actions they believe fall under the umbrella of corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, the primary CSR concept involves corporations taking responsibility for their actions and impacts beyond legal requirements, prioritizing ethical behavior, ensuring transparency, and contributing to sustainable development, health, and well-being [7].

The AI's approach to CSR is diverse, generally aimed at reducing alcohol-related harms, and includes education and information about alcohol, such as school campaigns, the creation of social aspects public relations organizations (SAPROs), environmental sustainability and charity activities, as well as support for sports, music and arts and self-regulation. Other than being a form of self-promotion and marketing tool, these actions may also influence government decisions, hindering the adoption of stricter alcohol policies. For example, the AI's collaborations with governments in addressing alcohol-related harms grant them a role in policy discussions, ultimately contributing to the collaborative shaping of public health policies [8, 9].

Furthermore, an inherent conflict of interest is present: the AI produces, sells, promotes, and profits from a product that can cause health harm and suffering while engaging in actions that are allegedly intended to reduce alcohol consumption [10]. No research has been conducted on AI's CSR activities in Portugal yet. This study aimed to address this gap by identifying the current CSR initiatives undertaken by AI in the Portuguese context and unveiling how such practices may hinder public health efforts toward alcohol control.

Materials and Methods

In this study, data collection and analysis consisted of five steps: (1) selecting a sample of AI actors (2) identifying sources of information (3) collecting data (4) analyzing data and (5) presenting findings. We adopted an organizational understanding of the AI definition, moving beyond a conventional perspective to incorporate a wider range of entities within the industry's organizational framework [11]. Our scope included alcohol producers, retailers, supply chain companies, regulatory agencies, and other relevant organizations in the alcohol field in Portugal.

Based on this approach, we predefined three categories of AI actors according to their primary activity and mission: (1) trade associations (2) manufacturers and brands, and (3) entities involved in regulating or promoting wine. Initially, we compiled a comprehensive list of AI actors operating in Portugal, which we narrowed down through iterative research. Ultimately, we selected ten AI actors that are illustrative of the industry's broad scope of action in the country. Selection criteria included: the number of producers or associates represented, market and sector dominance or relevance, media presence, and the availability of data on CSR initiatives. The full list of actors and justification for the inclusion

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of each actor is detailed in the online supplementary Table S1 (for all online suppl. material, see https://doi.org/10.1159/000540348).

Data was collected between February and March 2023 through searches conducted among the content available on the AI actors' websites, since websites are commonly used for public relations and to advertise their activities [8]. The list of sources used for this study is available in the online supplementary Table S2. Additionally, we reviewed annual reports, press releases, leaflets, pamphlets, commentaries, presentations, as well as transcripts from newspapers, radio broadcasts, and videos, provided they were accessible on the websites or linked to them and were related to the institutional actions, programs and campaigns, and strategic plans aimed at publicizing CSR engagement.

Based on the methodology used by Yoon and Lam [8] we manually reviewed the content of each website in detail, explicitly searching for an initial set of key terms selected from existing literature on CSR in the AI including health, responsible drinking, sustainable development, philanthropy and moderation. While reviewing the content, we expanded our search by including additional relevant terms that emerged during the process, ensuring comprehensive coverage of CSR-related information. Material included CSR actions implemented from 2019 onward, excluding those that were undertaken completely outside the national territory.

A qualitative thematic analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel® to manage the data. Applying a deductive approach, we used a framework adapted from Myalon et al. [9], which considers five main types of CSR initiatives: alcohol information and education provision, drink-driving prevention, research involvement, policy involvement, and the creation of social aspects organizations. Additionally, to provide a broader view of CSR and to deepen our understanding of AI's CSR we included two other categories – corporate philanthropy and self-regulation – identified by Yoon and Lam [8]. For this study, we considered a comprehensive definition of CSR within the AI context that captures a wide range of practices undertaken by AI operators to improve economic, social, and environmental well-being, regardless of whether they openly label them as CSR. These practices included examples of organizational investments in CSR projects and programs, marketing-related CSR actions integrated into product promotion, advertising, public relations campaigns, and event sponsorships. We included actions related to the self-regulation of marketing and/or advertising, as well as CSR initiatives closely linked to the companies' core economic activities, such as initiatives focusing on employee welfare and environmental sustainability, even if they may not fit neatly within a "purer" CSR framework [12–17]. The detailed description of the categories is presented in the online supplementary Table S3.

The data collection and analysis were led by the three authors who are native Portuguese speakers. In a subsequent round, a randomly selected second author conducted a thorough review of the data. Any disagreements in coding were resolved through discussion among the authors. To identify AI's CSR actions, we adapted data extraction tables from Myalon and McCambridge [9] methods, and data were coded under multiple categories when applicable. We present our main results through a narrative accompanied by examples to illustrate them. When presenting data from Table 1, we use references beginning with the letter A. All quotations in the text were translated from Portuguese to English by the first author, a native English speaker, and revised by a second author.

Results

209 written records were collected and analyzed. All seven categories were identified within the coded items. Corporate philanthropy was the most reported, followed by alcohol information and education provision, with 72 (34.8%) and 60 (29%) CSR actions, respectively. These two categories comprised almost 65% of all the information coded. Research involvement was the least reported with only two mentions (less than 1% of the data). Two of the AI actors, Associação de Vinhos e Espirituosas de Portugal – ACIBEV (Wine and Spirits Association of Portugal) and Sociedade Central de Cervejas – SCC (Central Society of Beers), held more than 50% of the records collected. Table 1 lists the occurrences identified.

Corporate Philanthropy

The most frequently coded items include examples of philanthropic practices, such as environmental sustainability and charity work – both representing forms of social outreach initiatives – as well as sponsorship of the arts and culture. AI actors actively emphasize their commitment to creating a "healthier planet" (A19, A20, A33), reducing their ecological footprint (A19, A20, A33, A104, A160, A168), conserving biodiversity (A20, A30, A31, A33), and adopting circular practices (A20, A33, A131, A134). These practices extend to decarbonization (A24, A32, A104, A109, A112, A126, A131, A134, A180, A193), energy and water conservation (A32, A126, A104, A134, 127, A131), and the incorporation of cleaner production technologies (A11, A107, A126, A180, A193). The AI also claims to champion agricultural sustainability, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to food security, the eradication of hunger and climate action (A25, A31, A33).

Sustainability conferences (A109, A157), projects on climate and nature (A30, A155, 157), and city-level commitments highlight their dedication (A128). ACIBEV, for instance, signed the Lisbon European Green Capital 2020 Commitment – Lisbon Climate Action 2030 (A128). To ensure wine production follows sustainable practices, the Instituto da Vinha e do Vinho (Institute of Vine and Wine) has created a national certification standard for sustainability in the wine sector (A153).

The theme of sustainability was found to be intricately tied to the concept of friendship within the narratives of SOGRAPE Wines (SOGRAPE) and Super Bock. Under the banner of "Sograpinesse," SOGRAPE emphasizes fostering relationships based on "integrity, ethics, and responsibility," aiming to cultivate a culture of friendship and happiness while preserving the communities it serves

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Table 1. Corporate social responsibility strategies of the alcohol industry in Portugal

Type of CSR activity identified	Description	Number of occurrences	Reference in the manuscript
Alcohol Information and Education Provision	Offering education and information, such as guidance on personal and/or parental responsibility, moderation, underage drinking, and the health effects of alcohol	60	A4, A8, A9, A10, A12, A14, A15, A16, A23, A38, A40, A41, A43, A44, A45, A47, A48, A49, A50, A52, A53, A54, A55, A56, A58, A60, A63, A68, A74, A76, A79, A93, A94, A95, A97, A99, A132, A136, A138, A139, A140, A141, A143, A147, A149, A151, A154, A159, A171, A176, A182, A184, A186, A189, A198, A199, A200, A203, A204, A205
Voluntary Regulation	Implementing voluntary market initiatives (supporting national industry codes of alcohol advertising standards, establishing internal marketing review committees, and self-regulation systems), training industry employees and stakeholders (training programs about alcohol responsibility for employees, support programs that educate staff about selling and serving responsibly)	14	A5, A6, A46, A65, A66, A67, A69, A78, A106, A144, A145, A177, A181, A185
Drink-Driving Prevention	Efforts to prevent drink-driving through interventions, such as providing information and education	33	A1, A11, A13, A17, A42, A51, A59, A62, A64, A77, A81, A83, A85, A86, A87, A88, A89, A90, A96, A98, A100, A102, A133, A137, A142, A146, A148, A150, A170, A183, A188, A196, A201
Research Involvement	Providing support for alcohol research and researchers as well as disseminating research findings on alcohol and health	2	A197, A207
Policy Involvement	Activities that aim to influence policymaking at any stage of the policymaking process	15	A29, A37, A70, A71, A72, A73, A80, A82, A84, A91, A92, A101, A175, A202, A206
Creation of Social Aspects Organizations	Normally called social aspects public relations organizations (SAPROs), these are non-profit organizations, partnerships, or networks developed or supported at least partially by AI	11	A2, A3, A7, A39, A57, A61, A75, A158, A161, A172, A187
Corporate Philanthropy	This involves sponsoring arts and cultural events and engaging in social outreach activities In addition to participating in disaster relief charity work, like supporting underserved communities, hunger and poverty charities, social outreach also encompasses environmental sustainability initiatives Culture, arts, music and sports sponsorship includes endowments, scholarships, awards and funding for highly publicized events that allow brand name affiliation with popular events. This also involves AI initiatives contributing to the economy, such as supporting the catering sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another example is providing support or partnering with health promotion and protection entities or initiatives	72	28, A129, A130, A131, A134, A135, A152, A153, A155, A156, A157, A160, A162, A163, A164, A165, A166, A167, A168, A169, A173, A174, A178, A179, A180, A190, A191, A192, A193, A194, A19A18, A19, A20, A21, A22, A24, A25, A26, A27, A28, A30, A31, A32, A33, A34, A35, A36, A103, A104, A105, A107, A108, A109, A110, A111, A112, A113, A114, A115, A116, A117, A118, A119, A120, A121, A122, A123, A124, A125, A126, A127, A15

Framework extracted and adapted from Mialon et al. [9] and merged with Yoon et al. [8].

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(A22, A27). Similarly, Super Bock states that "sustainability and friendship go hand in hand," claiming that adopting eco-friendly routines is essential for "building lasting connections" (A164). They highlight the use of reusable cups at sponsored events like Super Bock Super Rock, as a measure to reduce their environmental impact (A168).

SCC champions a sustainable platform, Drinkies 360, allowing "online orders in returnable glass bottles" (A112). It claims

> "We want to be equally great at making a positive impact in a world facing huge challenges: climate change, water scarcity. . ." "Over the past decade. . . we have worked to brew a better world." "We want to raise the bar even higher: setting ourselves on a path to carbon neutrality across our value chain, maximizing circularity and replenishing the water we consume where it matters most." "Circular economy. Less waste" (A131).

COVID-19 provided a timely opportunity for the AI to engage in disaster relief-type charity work. The records mention partnerships with animal non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support companion animals (A124), donation of water bottles (A120), and support to frontline professionals (A179, A193), including delivering menus to healthcare professionals as a "gesture of gratitude" (A122). Several references are made to the production and delivery of hand sanitizer and peracetic acid to a wide range of public and private entities (A119, A194), including "health care centers, security and civil protection forces, and municipal services to keep individuals and communities safe" (A119). As a tribute to doctors and nurses, Super Bock even renamed its alcohol-free beer "Super Doc" and converted the removed alcohol into hand sanitizer gel donated to hospitals to "assist in the fight against COVID-19" (A169).

Several references were found regarding donations during the pandemic, such as the contribution of alcohol sales revenues to hospitals (A103) and support for the community's most vulnerable families:

> "The protocol's value remained the same as in previous years (one hundred thousand euros), totalling, since 2006, an accumulated global amount of one million five hundred and twenty thousand euros." (A118).

AI walked for Mental Health to raise money for the World Federation of Mental Health, demonstrating the industry's commitment to "one of the most affected dimensions of humanity" (A28). Finally, several records mention initiatives and campaigns developed to support closed catering and beverage establishments and national artists (A113, A114, A115, A121, A179, A193):

> "Guinness donated one barrel for every 100 participants in the Instagram live sessions to support its pub partners" (A117).

Sponsorship of arts and culture events is another major subcategory of corporate philanthropy:

> "The sector's contribution to culture, education, and sports through sponsorships, scholarships, and patronage amounted to about 26.6 million euros in 2019 and continued with approximately 24.5 million euros in 2020" (A193).

AI actors support the "territory of music and culture" in "the most emblematic venues," giving their names to "iconic multipurpose venues in Lisbon" like "Sagres Campo Pequeno" (A18), describing it as a "strategic step in consolidating its closeness, popularity, and Portuguese identity" (A18). Super Bock partners with SOGRAPE at the Super Bock Arena (comprises spaces for various types of events, sports, and shows), and there are several references to other Super Bock festivals, such as Super Bock Super Rock, Super Bock in Stock, Supernova, and even a radio station (A165, A166, A167). SOGRAPE is a Patron of Casa da Música (a concert hall in Porto) and has "the commitment to promote and support the Arts and Culture" (A26).

Sponsoring sports and sports events are also common. In line with football being the most popular sport in the world, alcohol brands target it the most as well. Several records were found about the launch of multimedia campaigns, online platforms, and special editions of beer linked to football content, football championships, and the national football team by two actors (Sagres and Super Bock) (A108, A114, A125, A168). Formula 1 was also targeted:

> "F1® returns to Portugal, 24 years later, with our beer as the global sponsor, to celebrate the biggest event in motorsports with Portuguese consumers." "We organized the trophy's arrival in Portugal, through the hands of the legendary driver David Coulthard, and developed various offers and experiences in partner points of sale, large distribution channels, and e-commerce platforms" (A115).

Alcohol Information and Education Provision

Every AI actor included in our study actively provides education and information through their websites, constituting the second most represented category within the records collected. By collaborating with authorities, NGOs, and experts, the industry intends to educate and sensitize as many people as possible (136), believing it to be the best way to combat the "radicalism" associated with alcohol consumption (A93). It rejects the imposition of "restrictions" as they are a "misguided formula with disastrous consequences" (A93).

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AI actors extensively provide health-related information on their websites, addressing the effects and risks of alcohol consumption (A15, A16, A48, 147, A149), including social and health costs (A48, A49) and giving health advice (A41, A44, A45, A54, A58, A138). Nutritional information, including caloric content, is detailed for alcoholic drinks (A4, A16, A68, A198, A199), with some offering an alcohol calculator for estimating blood alcohol content (A4). To learn more about alcohol and health, they recommend visiting international SAPROs like the Knowledge of Beer Institute and the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking (A15, A44).

Two AI websites offer written and video guidelines on "the number of alcohol units that can be consumed" (A43, A44, A54, A60):

> "Based on available scientific evidence and various references provided by several public health authorities, it is acceptable that the range of moderate, low-risk consumption be established within the guidelines outlined below: Up to two drink units per day for women (up to 200 mL of 13% volume wine). Up to three drink units per day for men (up to 300 mL of 13% volume wine)" (A43, A44).

One of them notes that "In Portugal, there are no known official recommendations" (A44). The dedication to discouraging "excessive" or "harmful" alcohol intake and promoting responsible drinking (A4, A16, A48, A147, A149) and moderation (A8, A15, A41, A48, A54, A136, A139, A147, A198, A199) is a consistent and prominent feature across all AI actors' messaging. The emphasis is on individuals being acccountable for their choices (A8, A14, A15, A23, A41, A45, A48, A54, A63, A99, A140, A141, A159, A182, A198, A199):

> "We believe that if you're going to drink" . . ." always do so in moderation, at the right time, in the right place, and for the right reasons" (A16); "The consumption of alcoholic beverages is an individual choice. Personal risks and benefits should be considered before consumption" (A15).

Many AI actors allocate a portion of their marketing budget to campaigns promoting consumers' responsible consumption (A136, A139, A141). Examples include distributing pamphlets to citizens and members of the Parliament (A99) and showcasing films in cinema, television, and the Internet:

> "Intending to raise awareness among consumers about the importance of moderate and responsible consumption, ACIBEV aired its film on television. Under the slogan "Neither more nor less," the film was broadcast on various television channels during the Christmas and New Year season, reaching a total of 5 million viewers" (A76).

Nearly all AI's websites prioritize addressing the matter of alcohol and minors, as evident from their consistent emphasis on preventing underage drinking (A8, A12, A41, A45, A50, A53, A54, A58, A136, A139, A149, A204, A205). The minimum age for alcohol consumption is reiterated, stressing that individuals below this legal threshold should neither purchase nor consume alcohol (A8, A54, A147). Once again, the message is coupled with a focus on discouraging excessive drinking:

> "Drinking heavily during puberty can affect brain, liver, and hormonal system development" (A54).

> "The abusive behavior of young people towards alcoholic beverages, in general, is a matter of concern. . . as this irresponsible consumption is not only harmful to the individual but also society as a whole" (A184).

The Associação Cervejeiros de Portugal – APCV (Brewer's Association of Portugal) emphasizes "educational programs related to harmful alcohol consumption" with active partnerships with entities such as Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude (The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth) and Confederação Nacional das Associações de Pais – CONFAP (National Confederation of Parents' Associations) (A176, A186). The reference to the FALAR CLARO (Speak Clearly) project underscores the association's commitment to assisting teachers, educators, and other professionals with tools to address responsible alcohol consumption and the health risks associated with alcohol consumption by young people (A186).

Drink-Driving Prevention

Six AI actors emphasize their commitment to minimizing harm from alcohol-related road accidents and preventing driving under the influence of alcohol. Their websites prominently display tips, Frequently Asked Questions, and brochures on alcohol and driving, blood alcohol concentrations, and legally specified limits. A consistent message across their platforms is "Not to drive if you've been drinking" (A17, A42, A51, A59, A122, A137, A148, A150, A183).

ACIBEV, a prominent actor in this category, conducts awareness actions, including the distribution of leaflets and offering breath alcohol tests and alcohol-impaired driving simulations in collaboration with the National Road Safety Authority (NRSA). They participated in European road safety campaigns like "Zero Deaths on the Road Every Day" (A77, A89, A102), scientific conferences (A77, A102), working meetings (A83), and events like wine fairs (A62, A64, A77, A81, A85, A86, A87, A88, A96, A98, A100):

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"ACIBEV participated in the online conference "A New Global Decade of Road Safety Measures in Portugal, the EU, and Africa," organized by NRSA as part of the Portuguese European Presidency." (A77); "ACIBEV's Executive Director participated in a working meeting on road safety prevention at the invitation of the Secretary of State for Civil Protection. The agenda focused on how producers of alcoholic beverages can contribute to raising awareness among citizens, preventing driving under the influence of alcohol." (A83); Featured on the SCC website is a video with slogans like "Don't drink when you drive" and "Don't drink if you will be driving" (next to a Heineken bottle). Additionally, there is an image of a parking space with the text: "Drivers: if you have been drinking, you are on the wrong path" (accompanied by the Heineken logo) (A133).

A partnership with the Automóvel Clube de Portugal (Automobile Club of Portugal) is described, as aiming "to promote safe driving and prevent driving under the influence of alcohol." Whenever drivers request roadside assistance, "while waiting for their vehicles to be assisted, they will receive a free and preferably cold Sagres Zero beer, the only brand in the market that takes an active role in social responsibility and driver awareness" (A146). Additionally, as a signatory member of the European Road Safety Letter, APCV mentions its participation in alcohol policy discussions, highlighting CSR initiatives related to both policy involvement and alcohol prevention (A188).

Finally, APCV also supports the Sober Mobility Across Road Transport (SMART) project, which aims to reduce alcohol-related deaths by addressing drunk driving (A201). APCV attended the international conference "SMART - Policies to combat alcohol-impaired driving," organized by the Prevenção Rodoviária Portuguesa (Portuguese Road Safety) and the European Transport Safety Council. The conference brought together representatives from the Ministry of Internal Administration, government agencies, police departments, and other stakeholders (A201).

Self-Regulation

On all but one of the examined trade association's websites, voluntary market initiatives and self-regulation efforts are prominently featured, with a strong emphasis on "voluntarism." These initiatives include the creation of training programs for workers in alcohol-related sectors like hospitality and catering, showcasing figures such as: "138 Training Sessions," "2,389 Training Manuals Distributed," "4,312 Leaflets Distributed," and "training more than 2,300 students" (A5, A46, A65, A66, A78, A106). The primary goals are "minimizing the damage caused by excessive and/or early consumption of alcoholic beverages and developing a strategy that promotes responsible selling" (A67).

"Professionals involved in alcohol sales or service are compared to "police officers" tasked with ensuring legal compliance. They are expected to identify signs of intoxication and deny service to both intoxicated individuals and minors" (A65, A66).

Adopting voluntary codes of conduct for marketing and advertising is also emphasized (A6, A69, A144, A145, A177, A181). The Self-Advertising Regulation Code was designed to ensure ethical and legal compliance in alcohol-related advertising, with AI's materials being assessed by Auto Regulação Publicitária - ARP (Self-Regulation of Advertising). Some websites showcase ARPs findings: "Total number of ads submitted by members had 100% Ethical and Legal Compliance" (A6).

Policy Involvement

AI representatives actively engage with various public and private entities, including health organizations, potentially with conflicting interests, mainly through their membership in the National Alcohol and Health Forum (A29, A37, A70, A80, A179, A206). The actors highlight their collaboration and "multi-partnership" with the Portuguese government, the Health Ministry, and Serviço de Intervenção nos Comportamentos Aditivos e nas Dependências - SICAD (General Directorate for Intervention on Addictive Behaviors and Dependencies), enabling them to implement their "social responsibility programs" (A29): "This membership aligns with the company's Sustainability policy, as it allows SOGRAPE to stand out to the consumer as a responsible organization and directly contributes to the development of effective policies aimed at reducing problems related to harmful alcohol consumption, particularly in the areas mentioned in the National Plan for Reducing Alcohol-Related Problems" (A29).

There are mentions of meetings with national health authorities to discuss alcohol policy and information. Additionally, many industry websites state that the industry shares the same objectives as the health authorities:

"In March the Executive Director of ACIBEV attended the National Drug Council, and in June, participated in SICAD's video conference on alcohol and road accidents in Portugal, at the invitation of the Secretary of State for Civil Protection"; "On the agenda was how producers of alcoholic beverages can contribute to raising awareness among citizens, avoiding driving under the influence of alcohol "(A92, A101).

Creation of Social Aspects Organizations

Portuguese AI has established SAPROs, like Beba com cabeça (Drink Mindfully) and 100% cool, identified in previous research [6] and cited multiple times in our collected materials (A2, A3). This study revealed some new ones, including Menores nem uma gota (Minors, not

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a drop) by Associação Nacional de Bebidas Espirituosas – ANEBE (National Association of Spirit Drinks) and Wine in Moderation, a European SAPRO coordinated nationally by ACIBEV and signed by several others (A39, A57, A61, A75, A158, 161, 172).

Menores nem uma gota is described as aiming "to mobilize Portuguese society to reduce alcohol consumption by minors, following the National Plan for Reducing Addictive Behavior" (A8). They also partner with CONFAP, the National Association of Medical Students, and Madeira Regional Health Secretariat to carry out school projects and radio appearances:

> "Menores nem uma gota will be a partner of Projeto Escola Amiga da Criança (Child-Friendly School Project), a project that recognizes, shares, and encourages educational projects to implement good ideas aimed at the happier development of children in the school environment"; "In partnership with the Regional Health Secretariat of the Autonomous Region of Madeira, we will provide defibrillators and various health kits" (A8).

Wine in Moderation is prominently featured on ACIBEVs website, with materials including brochures and videos (A39, A57). The program aims to "protect young people, children, and unborn babies," "prevent and reduce alcohol-related abuse and harm," "educate both young people and adults" "about the social and health risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption and misuse" and "help them make responsible consumption decisions" (A29).

There are several key missions, including "empowering professionals," promoting "responsible business practices," implementing self-regulation in wine communication, and "providing credible, relevant, and solid scientific information to facilitate dialog regarding wine, health, and social aspects" (A57).

Research Involvement

There were only two references regarding research involvement found on the website of one AI actor. One involves organizing a symposium on "The Value of Nutrition" during a Congress of Nutrition and Food of the Portuguese Nutrition Association. This initiative, previously identified as CPA by Paixão et al. [6], is now also recognized as a CSR effort, according to our analysis. It aligns with the industry's goal to promote public health and enhance its image. The symposium featured discussions on "moderate consumption" within the context of the Mediterranean diet (A207).

Funding for the SMART project, previously discussed in the Drink-Driving Prevention category, serves as another example of this tactic. In this context, the AI actively engages in research focused on road safety and drunk driving prevention. The project aims to address systemic and evidence-based road safety issues, providing a comprehensive analysis of drink-driving situations, covering figures, policies, technology, enforcement, campaigns, and a multi-stakeholder approach. One record highlights a report on Portugal's progress in reducing road deaths attributed to drunk driving over the past decade, stemming from this project. Additionally, the AI participated in a conference under this initiative (A197).

Discussion

This study illustrates the diverse range of CSR initiatives undertaken by AI in Portugal. Furthermore, it sheds some light on the key public messages promoted by the industry about alcohol, health, and policy.

Two primary examples are health information and education. By advocating for education over radicalism and regulations, the AI is referring to effective public health policies such as the ones included in the "SAFER" initiative [5] or the "Best Buys" [4] that, if enforced, could negatively impact the industry's commercial interests [10, 18].

AI's materials highlight specific health risks of alcohol consumption but balance them with benefits, emphasizing how negative outcomes are limited to abuse and excessive or heavy consumption. As a result, misinformation may spread, possibly downplaying public perception of alcohol harm [8, 9, 19, 20].

Another common theme is individual or consumer responsibility, with AI defending individuals' rights and decision-making capacity regarding alcohol consumption. This could be seen as an attempt to seek protection from possible legal liabilities related to harm caused by its products. Tobacco companies previously used this strategy to shift responsibility from the industry to individuals, claiming them to be solely responsible for their actions [21]. Just like with other disease vector industries, we must understand AI tactics' rhetoric and framing to be able to counter them.

The alcohol consumption guidelines provided by AI actors contradict WHO recommendations that there is no safe level of alcohol consumption [22]. Since official public health authorities in Portugal do not provide enough information about alcohol and health, similarly to other countries [23], initiatives such as those fill the gap. Therefore, we believe that public health authorities and professionals must begin discussing why and what they are neglecting, as well as what solutions should be implemented.

Moreover, the proliferation of unscientific and biased health claims indicates that self-regulation, which falls

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under another CSR category, seems to not be effective. Currently, the ARP assesses AI communication materials and advertising. However, being a private marketing and industry consulting agency, we argue that there's insufficient transparency and a lack of third-party oversight. It also appears that AI training programs for alcohol servers and sellers convey conflicting messages: on the one hand, encouraging them to act as salespeople and to promote moderate consumption while simultaneously urging them to engage in alcohol harm prevention. In relying solely on self-regulation and lacking public accountability, AIs voluntarism narratives may attempt to evade effective alcohol control measures [8].

The idea of moderation is included in programs designed for minors, like the SAPRO Menores nem uma gota, despite minors should not consume any alcohol. This is consistent with activities for informing, educating and raising awareness about moderate alcohol consumption among young people as part of the National Youth Plan's actions for preventing risky behaviors in this group [24].

Evidence from other countries shows that educational resources funded by AI actors may prioritize AI interests over those of young people. The emphasis is put on parental or individual responsibility and effective population-based policies are overlooked [25, 26].

According to Portuguese law, "advertising for alcoholic beverages, regardless of the means used for its dissemination, is only allowed when: It is not specifically directed at minors." Additionally: "Commercial communications and advertising for any events involving minors, especially sports, cultural, recreational, or other activities, should not display or make any implicit or explicit mention of the brand or brands of alcoholic beverages" [27]. First, the phrase "advertising for alcoholic beverages not specifically targeted at minors" may allow for different interpretations. Second, we raise concerns about how educational campaigns involving alcohol brands might contribute to brand promotion and potentially break the law by allowing direct communication with minors.

We believe collaborations between schools, government bodies, and health ministry bodies could be rethought since they may be an opportunity for the AI to promote its reputation and position themselves as part of the solution. This, in turn, might divert attention from the urgent need to implement new measures and address existing loopholes in the law, as well as its enforcement [18, 25, 26]. However, we acknowledge that a lack of funding and resources, as well as an overload of work in institutions and organizations, may complicate the necessary efforts to overcome this.

We found examples of AI funding popular cultural, musical, and sports events that youth also attended, suggesting that industry and sport or music can or should coexist. This may be another strategy to establish links with a younger audience, potentially creating emotional connections between companies and events and exploiting these occasions for alcohol advertising and marketing [28–30].

There are concerns regarding this, especially given that the industry has pledged not to advertise to minors and refrain from associating sports and social activities with alcoholic beverages through self-regulating alcohol codes (part of their CSR activities categorized as self-regulation). Thus, linking alcohol to these events may violate these pledges [31, 32].

Despite AIs claims made about its involvement in the National Alcohol and Health Forum, we found no evidence demonstrating that these commitments have contributed to alcohol control in the country. Further, AIs participation in the Forum was described as happening not solely for altruistic purposes, but also to provide a platform for its CPA tactics [6] and CSR activities. The government and institutions serve as proof of credibility, and its participation can be leveraged to boost their image by providing additional positive attention to their actions [33].

It is worth noting that 29 alcohol and health NGOs left the European Alcohol and Health Forum in 2005 after the European Commissioner rejected a request by public health experts to hold a formal meeting with Commission officials to discuss alcohol policy free of vested interest groups. They also claimed that no evidence had been provided to show that the European Alcohol and Health Forum had any effect on public health [34]. How have alcohol consumption trends changed in Portugal since the National Forum's formal launching in 2010? The decrease in total alcohol consumption per capita recorded since 2005 reversed from 2014 onward, with an increase between 2014 and 2019.

Alcohol consumption prevalence during the life course was 74.7% in 2022 and has been relatively stable since 2001 among the Portuguese population aged 15–74, decreasing from 79.1% in 2007 to 73.2% in 2012 but increasing to 85.3% in 2016/2017 [3]. Furthermore, the prevalence of current alcohol consumption has slightly fallen from 49.7% to 48.5% between 2012 and 2017 and risen again to 54.8% in 2022. The prevalence of alcohol consumption in the last year was 70.6% in 2007, 59.9% in 2012, 58.3% in 2016/2017 and 61.5% in 2022 [3]. Explanations to these patterns could be either that public health policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption may have been insufficient or there may be opposing influences at play, such as those associated with the AI (or a combination of these and other factors), but further investigation is required.

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We emphasize the complexity of AI entities' participation in scientific conferences, recognizing its dual role as a CPA and a CSR, with the latter being classified as research involvement [6, 9]. Although framed as contributions to public health, these initiatives primarily serve public relations and image enhancement. Attending such events allows AI to position itself as a legitimate player in public health to policymakers and researchers, with potential tacit acceptance from the other participants [8, 9, 20, 33]. Since any AI's scientific activity may be intended to manipulate or twist science to suit corporate interests [8], we think it is crucial to examine the motivation behind it.

Similarly to tobacco, the AI creates or finances organizations to promote CSR initiatives [8]. One international example is a partnership that gave rise to the International Alliance for Responsible Drinking, a nonprofit organization based on "scientific research" that "aims to combat harmful alcohol consumption and promote responsible drinking" [35].

In our research, we found new Portuguese SAPROs, adding to those already identified by Paixão et al. [6]. There is one specifically aimed at youth that involves collaboration with government agencies. Legitimizing campaigns and activities that may mislead the public about alcohol harm is ethically questionable, and regulation to prevent such initiatives could be considered.

AI may also be engaging in environmental protection practices to greenwash its image while alcohol production and consumption are described as harmful to the environment, causing food insecurity, and contributing to water scarcity. We highlight that AIs commitment to SDGs is incompatible with the fact that alcohol is a barrier to sustainable development, negatively affecting 13 of the 17 goals [36].

In this study, several limitations need to be considered. First, it failed to include all AI's trade associations and manufacturers, including spirits. The selection of the sample of AI actors was not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the broader understanding of AI in Portugal and its CSR practices. Therefore, we chose not to describe our results based on actor categories. Second, it is possible that relying solely on public information could provide a different perspective from internal documentation. Also, we did not explore all the channels through which the industry may communicate its CSR such as social media and advertising campaigns. As a result, CSR activities within the industry may not be fully represented by this study. On the other hand, we did not eliminate duplicate information when it was presented in different formats (leaflets, videos, reports), even when the content was identical. However, we believe that disseminating the same type of information in various formats also indicates an intent to strongly influence the public.

Finally, we acknowledge the interconnection between CSR and CPA, noting that CSR is just one component of CPA. Consequently, material coded as CSR may, in some instances, represent a broader CPA tactic rather than being solely representative of CSR itself.

Despite these limitations, our study identifies AIs CSR strategies undertaken in the Portuguese context comprehensively. Notably, its strength lies in its breadth, examining all available CSR activities from major national AI actors. It offers valuable insights into the landscape of CSR within this sector but hopes to encourage researchers to undertake similar explorations in other sectors.

To conclude, we believe that unbiased public health education on alcohol should be facilitated by public health professionals and others, free from any industry interference. Additionally, we underscore the pivotal role of policymaking in safeguarding public health and the public from potential adverse impacts of the AIs initiatives. Overall, our findings emphasize the need for vigilant monitoring, questioning, critical analysis and potential regulation of industry CSR practices in Portugal.

Statement of Ethics

An ethics statement was not required as the study is based exclusively on data extracted from the websites of the Alcohol Industry actors.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Author Contributions

Francisca Pulido Valente, Ana Carolina Baptista, and Bárbara S. Vieira designed the experiment and collected and analyzed the data. Francisca Pulido Valente supervised and prepared the manuscript draft. All authors approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study, namely all the data extracted and coded, are available on request to the corresponding author.

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