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The drunk side of trust: Generalized and instantaneous trust at gathering events

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ABSTRACT

We present novel evidence on the nexus between alcohol intake and trust at a large cultural gathering event. Throughout six editions, we interviewed nearly 2,000 attendees and collected an objective measure of alcohol intake (Blood Alcohol Concentration, BAC) using electronic breathalyzers and self-perceived measures of intoxication. We elicited different self-reported trust measures toward eventgoers and the general public. While alcohol intoxication is not correlated with trust toward the general public, there is a positive and significant nexus between alcohol intake and trust toward the other participants in the event (*Instantaneous trust*). Only a small part of this effect (15%) is driven by an increased trust in other drinkers at the event. Taken together, these findings indicate endogenous group formation regarding alcohol intake.

1. Introduction

Alcohol abuse is widely recognized as a hazard. Its negative consequences range from increased fatal car accidents (Baughman et al., 2001) to workplace absenteeism (Johansson et al., 2014), from risky sexual behavior and higher levels of sexually transmitted infections (Carpenter, 2005) to criminality (Hansen & Waddell, 2018) and chronic diseases (Conover & Scrimgeour, 2013; Rehm et al., 2017).

Less is known about the behavioral effects of moderate social drinking. Several studies have investigated which preferences are affected by alcohol intake to understand what drives the change in behavior. The most natural candidates are risk aversion and impulsiveness, intended as a lack of self-control (Anderson & Mellor, 2008; Burghart et al., 2013; Corazzini et al., 2015; Proestakis et al., 2013). Other contributions have studied the link between alcohol intake and altruism (Bregu et al., 2017; Corazzini et al., 2015; Fielding et al., 2018), cooperation and intergroup competitiveness (Hopthrow et al., 2007), as well as negotiation (Au & Zhang, 2016; Branas-Garza et al., 2023). The evidence on the effects of alcohol intake on these behavioral traits is generally inconclusive.[4]

In this paper, we focus on a large social event with thousands of attendees and test if and under which conditions moderate drinking affects trust (Au & Zhang, 2016; Frank et al., 2014). We collected our data during one of the most important European folk music festivals

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[4] Corazzini et al. (2015) document a negative relationship between alcohol intake and altruism. In contrast, Au and Zhang (2016) do not find any effect of alcohol on altruism. Hopthrow et al. (2007) do not report any influence of alcohol intake on cooperative choices at the individual level but report lower cooperation at the group level after consuming alcohol than after taking the placebo. In contrast, experimental subjects in Au and Zhang (2016) are more willing to collaborate (consequently, the negotiation process is smoother) after consuming moderate alcohol. These studies often involve laboratory experiments. By exogenously manipulating the alcohol intake, lab experiments solve the problem of self-selection into the (alcoholic) treatment. However, laboratory experiments intrinsically miss the social dimension of alcohol intake that field data capture.

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— called "La Notte della Taranta (https://www.lanottedellataranta.it/en/)". Throughout six editions with approximately 200,000 attendees per year, we interviewed nearly 2,000 attendees and collected three self-reported measures of trust: generalized trust, instantaneous trust, and trust toward drinkers. The well-known concept of *Generalized trust* (see, for instance, the World Value Survey) is meant to capture a general tendency to trust a stranger. *Instantaneous trust*, instead, is understood as a form of trust "generated by the mere fact of taking part in a shared experience [...], instantaneous both in its formation and in its expiration" (Attanasi et al., 2013, p. 237). It focuses on how much people trust other participants in a shared experience, in our case, a massive gathering event. This local dimension stems from the event atmosphere and sharing of a particular experience. The enhancement of social capital due to festival attendance is often discussed in the cultural economics literature (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006), but rigorous empirical evidence is scarce (see Attanasi et al. (2013) for an exception). Finally, *Trust toward drinkers* refers to the trust placed in other drinkers at the event.

In such a large music event, drinking happens naturally. We collected both objective and subjective measures of alcohol intoxication. Over 1,800 respondents underwent an alcohol test – via electronic breathalyzers – to measure their actual intoxication level. To the best of our knowledge, we are the first to collect an objective and validated measure of alcohol intake in a survey study. In addition, we asked for respondents' beliefs about their Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) level and their beliefs about the average BAC level of festival attendees.

Our study is well located within a vast body of clinical and economic literature that examines the effects of alcohol intake on several dimensions related to decision-making (Au et al., 2022; Branas-Garza et al., 2023; Duke & Begue, 2015; Karlsson et al., 2022; Paruzel-Czachura et al., 2023; Richards et al., 1999). Some of these studies use self-reported measures relating trust to alcohol consumption. As for the specific event where our survey was conducted, other studies rely on surveys administered to comparable samples, with interviews run under similar conditions and similar questionnaire structure, although with different items and research questions (see, e.g., Vergine et al., 2024, on the 2022–2023 edition), some of them including our self-reported trust measures (Attanasi et al. (2013) on the 2007–2011 editions, Attanasi et al. (2019) on the 2007–2009 editions, Attanasi et al. (2024a) on the 2017 edition), although none of them focuses on the relation between alcohol and trust.

The study closest to ours is Attanasi et al. (2024b), which collected data during one edition (2013) of the same festival and focused on strategic altruism in an incentive-compatible two-subject trust game. We depart from this study in at least two dimensions. First, we focus on different types of trust (generalized vs. instantaneous) and relate them to measures of beliefs about the intoxication level of other participants. Second, our trust measures are not limited to only two subjects, but they capture trust within groups, regardless of the group size. From a broader perspective, no study has investigated whether endogenous group formation in terms of alcohol intake would facilitate the augmentation of trust among gathering event attendees.

Our contribution to the literature is threefold. First, we provide an exact measure of respondents' alcohol intake while most of the evidence on a positive association between trust and alcohol intake only comes from survey data with only self-reported intoxication measures (Åslund & Nilsson, 2013; Fielding et al., 2018; Seid, 2016).[5] This is crucial because beliefs about alcohol intake are typically imprecise in population surveys (Livingston & Callinan, 2015). Second, our setting allows us to distinguish whether alcohol consumption correlates with trust in general or only with instantaneous trust. In the first case, the festival would only be an occasion to consume alcohol but would not interact with alcohol to form social capital. On the contrary, in the latter case, one could attribute the additional social capital induced by alcohol intake to something specific to the event. Finally, field data allows us to observe a broader range of intoxication levels compared to experiments where the administration of alcohol is limited to relatively small doses. Observational data do not allow us to control for self-selection or make any causality claims. However, lab experiments intrinsically miss the social dimension of alcohol intake, making it virtually impossible to study instantaneous trust.

We report three main findings. First, there seems to be no mechanical effect of alcohol consumption, as generalized trust and BAC levels are not correlated. Second, we document a positive and significant nexus between alcohol intake and instantaneous trust. Finally, we investigate to what extent the nexus between instantaneous trust and alcohol intake refers indistinguishably to all the event participants or those who share similar behavior. We find that only a small part of the effect on instantaneous trust (15%) is explained by increased trust in other drinkers. We conclude that the association between instantaneous trust and alcohol intake relates to the decision to attend the same event, thereby sharing the same experience.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the cultural festival, the data collection, and the characteristics of our sample. Section 3 presents the main results, and Section 4 concludes.

2. Data and methodology

In this section, we describe the main features of the cultural festival where the survey took place, the characteristics of our sample, and the survey instrument — with a particular focus on measures of trust and alcohol intake.

The festival. "La Notte della Taranta" festival is among the most important European folk music festivals. The first edition took place in 1998. Since then, the festival has been held each year in August in the province of Lecce (South of Italy). The original aim of the festival was to recover and reanimate the traditional local folk music called "pizzica". Over the years, the scope has broadened as the organizers involved international musicians in the final concert to melt different folk music and styles. Although weakening the traditional connotation of the festival, this has boosted the number of attendees, especially tourists, with more than half of the attendees being non-local in the editions of the last decade.[6]

The festival features 15 itinerant minor concerts (approximately 85,000 attendees per year, with a median of 7,000 attendees per concert) and a final concert held in Melpignano (about 200,000 attendees annually). The final concert in Melpignano consists of a one-night colossal dance floor. We collected data during the final concert's six consecutive editions 2012–2017. Entry is free for all concerts. Regarding the transportation modes to reach the venue, about three-fourths came by private transport, which encompasses both cars and private buses. The remaining fourth consists of public transport in the form of trains (25,000 attendants) and buses (18,000 attendants).

Data collection. We collected survey data through guided interviews.[7] A total of 15 to 25 interviewers per year, both males and females,

[5] The one exception is Frank et al. (2014), which combines self-reported alcohol consumption data with liver cirrhosis data, to construct a more reliable index of alcohol consumption at the aggregate level.

[6] For a more detailed description of "La Notte della Taranta" festival, see Attanasi et al. (2013).

[7] Our data were collected from 2012 to 2017. In 2011, when the project was designed, pre-registration was not the norm in the social sciences (e.g., Open Science Framework was founded in 2013 — see Foster and Deardorff (2017), p. 1). Furthermore, none of the authors' institutions requested IRB clearance for merely observational studies when the surveys were administered. Indeed, indirect ethics approval was obtained in the 2013 edition, since Attanasi et al. (2024b) conducted a stage field experiment (with alcohol consumption elicited with the same procedure and our trust questions used as controls) for which IRB clearance was required (and obtained) by Georgia State University.

approached festival attendees in random and independent order during the final concert. Each year, data collection started at 5 pm and ran until 3 am. The survey instrument included several socio-demographic questions and questions on trust, alcohol intake, and risk preferences.[8] Here, we primarily focus on the questions on trust and the items regarding alcohol intake.[9]

A total of 2,663 attendees were randomly approached and completed the interview, which lasted seven minutes on average.[10] Once they completed the questionnaire, we asked a random sub-sample of respondents to undergo an alcohol test. We measured the alcohol intoxication using Tesmed Safety digital professional alcoholmeters (electronic breathalyzers).[11] The limited number of devices has forced us to administer the alcohol test only to a (random) sub-sample of respondents.[12] Since we are interested in objective measures of alcohol intake, we restrict our analysis to the $n = 1811$ people who participated in the interview and agreed to take the alcohol test. Only about 10% of those asked refused to take the test, with no correlation between rejection of the test and the subject's estimated alcohol intoxication (Somer's D $= -0.0122$, p-value $= 0.8583$).[13]

Characteristics of the sample. Table 1 reports summary statistics for our pool of respondents. The sample is gender-balanced and mainly consists of young adults: 39.9% are 25 years old or younger, and 26.9% are between 26 and 30; 58.4% of respondents have completed at most high school, and as to their employment, the two highest frequencies relate to being an employee (28.8%) and a student (29.3%). Furthermore, 53.3% of the respondents are tourists, and 44.2% participate in the festival for the first time.

Measures of alcohol intake. We collected both objective and subjective measures of alcohol intake and beliefs. In particular, we elicited beliefs about one's alcohol intoxication (*Belief own BAC*) with the following question: "Considering that the legal alcohol limit for driving is 0.5 (g/l), how much do you think is your alcohol level right now?". We also elicited the beliefs about other participants' intoxication level (*Belief others' BAC*) by asking: "How much do you think is the average alcohol level right now at the festival?". Notably, attendees were informed about the possibility of a BAC measurement only at the end of the questionnaire, not to influence the belief elicitation stage. Based on these elicitations, we adopt the following notation: BAC_i denotes the individual's measured BAC; $\widehat{BAC}_i$ represents the individual's perceived BAC (*Belief own BAC*), and $\widehat{BAC}_{-i}$ captures the individual's perceived BAC regarding other attendees at the festival (*Belief others' BAC*). With this, *Placebo BAC* is defined as the difference between the perceived and the actual level of intoxication of the respondent. *Delta Beliefs* represents the difference between beliefs about one's own and others' level of intoxication.

Finally, we collected a measure of *Propensity to drink*, which captures individuals' drinking habits in daily life and not in connection with the specific night of the event. Specifically, we asked respondents, "How would you define your alcohol consumption throughout the year?". The variable takes value 1 for respondents who report a low level of alcohol consumption (47% of our sample), 2 for an intermediate level (46%), and 3 for a high level (7%).

Table 1 also reports descriptive statistics for our alcohol-related measures. The average BAC_i for the full sample is 0.33 g/l, with no significant gender difference. If we restrict our sample to those with a strictly positive BAC, we have a value of 0.52 g/l, slightly above the legal limit (0.50) for driving under the influence established by Italian legislation.

Table 1
Sample overview.

Socio-demographic characteristics					
	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Female (D)	1809	0.499	0.500	0	1
Age					
Up to 25 (D)	1806	0.399	0.490	0	1
Between 26 and 30 (D)	1806	0.269	0.444	0	1
Between 31 and 39 (D)	1806	0.199	0.399	0	1
Between 40 and 60 (D)	1806	0.107	0.310	0	1
Over 60 (D)	1806	0.026	0.159	0	1
Education					
No high school (D)	1795	0.124	0.330	0	1
High school (D)	1795	0.584	0.493	0	1
College (D)	1795	0.291	0.455	0	1
Employment					
Artist (D)	1794	0.022	0.148	0	1
Unpaid care worker (D)	1794	0.027	0.163	0	1
Employee (D)	1794	0.288	0.453	0	1
Unemployed (D)	1794	0.134	0.341	0	1
Freelancer (D)	1794	0.127	0.333	0	1
Self-employed (D)	1794	0.077	0.267	0	1
Retired/Disabled (D)	1794	0.026	0.158	0	1
Student(D)	1794	0.293	0.455	0	1
Other(D)	1794	0.005	0.071	0	1
Tourist					
Tourist (D)	1811	0.533	0.499	0	1
First time at NdT (D)	1626	0.442	0.497	0	1
Alcohol measurement					
	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
BAC (alcohol test) [BAC_i]	1811	0.33	0.42	0.00	1.90
Belief own BAC [$\widehat{BAC}_i$]	1799	0.35	0.41	0.00	1.90
Belief others' BAC [$\widehat{BAC}_{-i}$]	1762	1.01	0.50	0.00	1.90
Propensity to drink	1781	1.60	0.61	1	3
Placebo BAC	1799	0.020	0.321	−1.60	1.70
Delta Beliefs	1758	−0.657	0.523	−1.90	0.90
Trust variables					
	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Instantaneous trust (D)	1811	0.20	0.40	0	1
Trust in drinkers (D)	1811	0.13	0.34	0	1
Generalized trust (D)	1797	0.39	0.49	0	1

Notes: Dummy variables are marked with D.

[8] The questionnaire is reported in Appendix B. The questionnaire items were kept constant over the whole survey period of six editions.

[9] The list of selected variables is reported in Appendix A.

[10] Unfinished questionnaires, resulting from interviewees dropping out during the interview, or those completed by interviewees who were deemed not to be taking the questions seriously by the interviewer, were excluded from the sample. Together, these exclusions accounted for only 89 observations across the six surveyed editions of the event, representing about 3% of the attendees randomly approached and completing the interview. We believe this is due to the interviewer's notification to attendees, upon random approach, that the interview might last up to 10 min, which may have deterred those unwilling to invest their time or engage seriously with the questions.

[11] Electronic reusable breathalyzers are extremely frail and delicate. We performed maintenance checks and fine-tuned their precision before the final concert of the festival, as well as periodically throughout the year between two consecutive editions of the festival. During this period, the breathalyzers were not used for any other field studies.

[12] We had 10 electronic reusable breathalyzers per festival edition, with an average lifespan of 4 editions per breathalyzer, due to factors such as overuse in previous editions or wear and tear over the year between two consecutive editions. Breathalyzers that were not working properly when tested between editions were replaced. Therefore, we ended up using about 20 breathalyzers across the six editions, with some being employed in all six editions, and others only in the last two. We are confident that breathalyzer substitution had no effect because, throughout the six surveyed years, we always bought the same model of electronic breathalyzer. Additionally, when substituting a breathalyzer, we made some pilots to ensure that the new one provided results similar to those of the reused breathalyzers under the same conditions.

[13] Absent an objective measure of alcohol intake in this context, we use the interviewer's subjective evaluation. The interviewers were asked to rate (null, low, or high) the perceived intoxication level of all the attendees surveyed. For the respondents who accepted to take the alcohol test, the correlation between the interviewer's subjective evaluation and the objective measure of alcohol intoxication is higher than 50%, significant at the 1% level.

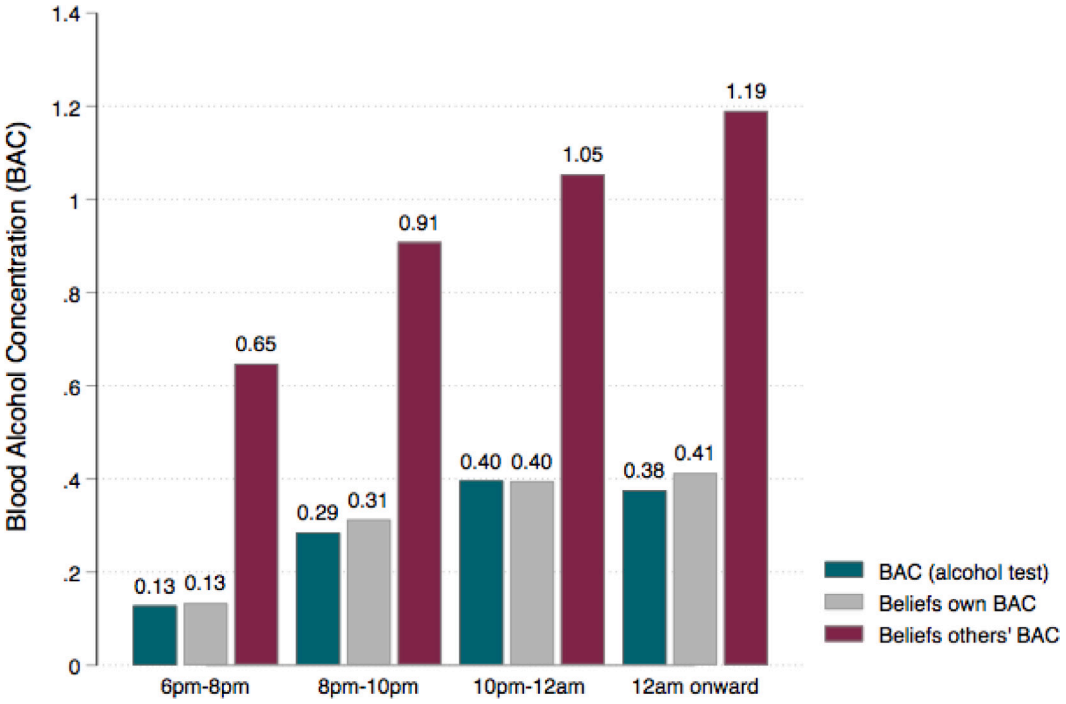

Fig. 1. Beliefs about BAC and measured BAC (alcohol test), by hours.

At the aggregate level, respondents can estimate their BAC level fairly well (the average $\widehat{BAC}_i$ for the full sample equals 0.35, which is very aligned to the average BAC_i). We do not find any statistically significant difference when comparing the discrepancy between measured and self-reported own BAC. More detailed analyses show that respondents overestimate their BAC when their BAC_i is below the legal threshold for driving but underestimate it when above the legal threshold for driving. Interestingly, while respondents have fairly accurate beliefs about their BAC level, they massively overestimate the average BAC of the other attendees (the average $\widehat{BAC}\_i$ is 1.01 g/l). This overestimation is in line with the literature on alcohol and drug consumption among adolescents and young adults, which reports the vast overestimation of alcohol and drug use among their peers (Kypri & Langley, 2003; Lewis & Neighbors, 2004; Martens et al., 2006). A possible explanation could be that even a small fraction of drunk people might amplify the general perception of alcohol intake. Fig. 1 reports the distribution of our three measures of alcohol intake over time.[14] As one might expect, both actual consumption and the corresponding beliefs increase during the night. However, a sizable overestimation of others' BAC is already evident among respondents interviewed during the first part of the festival (from 5.00 pm to 9.00 pm).

Trust variables. We asked questions referring to three types of trust and the corresponding summary statistics are also summarized in Table 1:[15]

- **Generalized trust:** *"Generally speaking, do you think that most of the people can be trusted or that it is better not to trust others? [Yes, most of the people can be trusted/No, one can never be too careful]"*. This is a commonly used measure in international surveys, such as the World Value Survey, and should be independent of attendees' experience of the event. As a control, we also collected a similar measure on a scale from 0 to 10. For comparability with the other binary measures of trust, we focus on the first generalized trust question in our primary analysis.[16]
- **Instantaneous trust:** *"For the mere fact that a person (you do not know) is here tonight, does she deserve to be trusted more than a person you do not know and who is not here tonight? [Yes/No/I don't know]"*. This question captures an enhanced sense of trust generated by the mere fact of taking part in a shared experience. It can derive from a sense of similarity with other participants who chose the same event, potentially revealing some similarity in preferences or values. The instantaneous component of trust could also stem from the context, which might increase the overall sense of optimism and, hence, trust in fellow attendees.[17]
- **Trust in drinkers:** *"Would you trust more a person who is drinking alcohol tonight or a person who is not drinking alcohol? [Yes/No/I don't know]"*. Here, we capture the trust in drinkers at the festival. Importantly, we are not asking about trust in drinkers in general, but whether someone would trust more a person drinking during the event or not. To some extent, one could think of (moderately)

[14] Fig. 1 reports statistics for all interviews conducted after midnight in one bracket, as only 5% of our respondents were interviewed after 2:00 a.m.

[15] All trust-related measures in this paper are self-reported. While the lack of monetary incentives might raise some doubts about the validity of the responses, it is important to note that some measures, such as generalized trust, are widely used in social sciences. Furthermore, evidence suggests that such self-reported questions correlate with incentivized experimental measures of trust and trustworthiness (Banerjee et al., 2021; Glaeser et al., 2000).

[16] We can compare our results for Generalized trust with the ones from two large cross-sectional surveys: the General Social Survey (GSS) and the World Value Survey (WVS). The GSS has data for respondents from the USA for the years 2012, 2014, and 2016 — which covers our survey period. In this sample, 33% of people say that most people can be trusted, which is quite similar to the 39% observed in our sample. WVS data were collected in Italy in Wave 7 (2017–2022) and Wave 5 (2005–2009). In both waves, the share of people who reply that most people can be trusted is about 27%, and this percentage increases to about 30% if we restrict the analysis to people up to 29 years of age, which is the modal category in our sample.

[17] We can compare our results for instantaneous trust to those of Attanasi et al. (2013), who introduced this variable for the first time. The 21% they reported in the final concert of their last surveyed edition (2011) – Fig. 2, p. 238 – is essentially the same as the one we detected (20%) in the same final concert, on average, across the next six editions (2012–2017).

Table 2
Correlation table.

	Generalized trust (D)	Instantaneous trust (D)	Trust in drinkers (D)	BAC (alcohol test)	Belief own BAC	Belief others' BAC
Generalized trust (D)	1.0000					
Instantaneous trust (D)	0.2886	1.0000				
	(0.0000)					
Trust in drinkers (D)	0.0491	0.1398	1.0000			
	(0.0373)	(0.0000)				
BAC (alcohol test)	0.0484	0.1299	0.1270	1.0000		
	(0.0402)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)			
Belief own BAC	0.0492	0.1308	0.1366	0.6946	1.0000	
	(0.0377)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)		
Belief others' BAC	−0.0405	0.0473	0.0229	0.2704	0.3510	1.0000
	(0.0903)	(0.0471)	(0.3373)	(0.0000)	(0.0000)	

drinking during the final concert as a signal that someone is embracing the spirit of the event.

Table 2 reports the pairwise correlation among trust and alcohol-related variables (p-values are reported in parenthesis). All three trust variables are positively and significantly correlated, even though coefficients are not always large, especially when considering Trust in drinkers. As one should expect, we observe a very strong correlation between the actual BAC and the Belief about own BAC. Although less marked, Beliefs about others' BAC are also highly correlated with one's level of intoxication — both self-reported and measured via breathalyzer. We also observe a positive correlation between trust measures and alcohol measures, with the only exception of the one between Generalized Trust and Belief about Others' BAC.

Given that one may reasonably argue that respondents with a high BAC level may be prone to answer survey questions randomly, or at least in a less accurate manner, we provide two consistency checks of the data collected. These checks show that subjects in our sample responded to the questionnaire in a consistent manner, also in case of high alcohol intoxication. First, we check the consistency of respondents' answers by looking at two very related questions: one asks them their belief about others' BAC ($\widehat{BAC}_{-i}$), the other their guess of the share of attendees consuming alcohol during the festival. We examine the correlation between these two variables, splitting the sample between non-intoxicated (BAC < 0.5) and intoxicated (BAC ≥ 0.5) subjects. We find that correlation coefficients are positive and significant in both sub-samples ($\rho = 0.1647$ for non-intoxicated, $\rho = 0.0831$ for intoxicated), and when testing for the equality of the two correlations, we do not detect significant differences (p-value $= 0.1084$).

Second, we have a measure which is not related to our main variables of interest: two questions aim at detecting inconsistencies using hypothetical choices to participate in a risky lottery. More specifically, each interviewee was faced with a hypothetical situation where he/she was asked to choose whether or not to buy a ticket, thereby contributing to create a fund. This fund would be randomly assigned to one out of 100 subjects (including the interviewee) who were attending the concert and had bought the ticket as well (Attanasi et al., 2013, 2019; Guiso & Paiella, 2008). This hypothetical situation was proposed twice, namely with a low-price L (either €0.5 or €2) and with a high-price H (either €5 or €7).[18] Rationality in decision making under risk imposes that a subject should not pay price H if he/she has chosen not to pay price L.[19] We find that the fraction of inconsistent interviewees is negligible, and the fraction of inconsistent answers among non-intoxicated subjects (BAC < 0.5) and intoxicated subjects (BAC ≥ 0.5) is not significantly different (two-sample test of proportions, p-value $= 0.9515$).

In principle, we cannot exclude that intoxicated respondents may be affected by a sort of confirmation bias. Reporting a higher level of instantaneous trust (and trust in drinkers) may in fact provide a justification for their decision to attend the festival and drink. However, the evidence corroborating the reliability of the answers seems to be reassuring that this effect, if present, should be of second-order importance.

3. Results

In this section, we first investigate whether alcohol intake triggers a "pharmacological" kind of connection with other people's perceived level of trustworthiness, i.e., whether alcohol intake positively correlates with generalized trust. We then proceed to test whether alcohol intake plays an effect on trusting others through the event itself, or in other words, whether it correlates with instantaneous trust. We further explore the nexus between alcohol intake and trust by checking whether the effect is mediated by a sense of homophily with other festival attendees who consume alcohol or is instead related to the event in general. Toward this goal, we exploit *Trust in drinkers* in a mediation analysis of alcohol intake on instantaneous trust. In what follows, we take the convention to consider as significant only the coefficients reporting a p-value below 5%.

Alcohol intake and generalized trust. To explore this relationship, we run a series of logit regressions where the dependent variable is *Generalized trust* (Table 3). The measured *BAC (alcohol test)* is not associated with higher levels of generalized trust. This holds for every model reported in Table 3, also when accounting for possible non-linearities in BAC, as we do in Model 2. In Model 3, we introduce a dummy taking value one if the measured BAC is equal to zero (*BAC zero*); this is meant to capture possible discontinuities between people who do not drink at all vs. drinkers (light or heavy). Model 4 encompasses two additional variables: *Placebo BAC* and *Delta Beliefs*. Recall that *Placebo BAC* is defined as the difference between the perceived and the actual level of intoxication of the respondent. *Delta Beliefs* represents the difference between beliefs about one's own and others' level of intoxication. The purpose of this specification is to try to disentangle the real effects of alcohol intake from its perception.[20] Negative values of *Delta Beliefs* imply that the respondent perceives the other attendees as more intoxicated than him/herself. The positive and strongly significant coefficient of this variable captures a decrease in generalized trust when respondents believe they are surrounded by more intoxicated attendees. While, in principle, the perceived gap in alcohol intoxication should not affect festival participants' generalized trust, thinking of being surrounded

[18] See Questions 11 and 12 in the Questionnaire in Appendix B.

[19] A risk-averse subject should participate in none of the two lotteries, with the unwillingness to participate being higher for lottery with price H. A risk-seeking subject should participate in both lotteries, with the willingness to participate being higher for the lottery with price H.

[20] A few experimental studies on alcohol include placebo treatments, in which, prior to behavioral tasks, subjects are asked to drink a beverage with an evident alcoholic smell but without any alcohol content (see, for instance, Corazzini et al. (2015) and Hopthrow et al. (2007)). In our field study, this was impossible to implement. Therefore, we opted for proxying a placebo treatment by asking the perceived level of intoxication directly to the subjects before measuring their actual intoxication through alcohol tests.

Table 3
Generalized trust.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
BAC (alcohol test)	0.040	0.004	0.026	0.014
	(0.033)	(0.081)	(0.039)	(0.040)
Propensity to drink	0.002	0.005	−0.000	−0.007
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
BAC^2 (alcohol test)		0.025		
		(0.052)		
BAC zero			−0.021	
			(0.034)	
Placebo BAC				0.015
				(0.046)
Delta beliefs				0.083 ***
				(0.029)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N.obs.	1559	1559	1559	1529

Notes: Logit regressions with marginal effects. The dependent variable takes value 1 if the responder answered "*Yes, most of the people can be trusted*" to the question "*Generally speaking, do you think that most of the people can be trusted or that it is better not to trust others?*" and 0 if he/she answered "*No, one can never be too careful*". The following socio-demographic control variables are added: *Female* takes value 1 for female and 0 otherwise; for *Age* we included the following age intervals: less than 25, 26–30, 31–39, 40–60, and 60+; for *Education* we constructed three dummies: college or more, high school, middle school or lower; for *Job* we considered three categories: freelancer & self-employed, employee, unemployed; *Local* is a dummy taking value 1 if the respondent declares to be from the province of Lecce (area where the festival is held); *Risk taking* is a dummy taking value 1 if the respondent declares to take the risky action (as based on the second hypotetical questions administered to respondents); for the *Time dummies*, we consider the following intervals: 5–9 pm, 9 pm–midnight, after midnight. Symbols ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table 4
Instantaneous trust.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
BAC (alcohol test)	0.098 ***	0.089 ***	0.178 ***	0.062 **	0.119 ***
	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.060)	(0.026)	(0.027)
Propensity to drink	0.008	0.012	0.006	0.006	0.011
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Generalized trust (D)		0.221 ***	0.221 ***	0.220 ***	0.223 ***
		(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
BAC^2 (alcohol test)			−0.060 *		
			(0.036)		
BAC zero				−0.049 *	
				(0.027)	
Placebo BAC					0.058
					(0.036)
Delta beliefs					−0.019
					(0.024)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N.obs.	1573	1559	1559	1559	1529

Notes: Logit regressions with marginal effects. The dependent variable takes value 1 if the responder answered "*Yes*" to the question *"For the mere fact that a person (you do not know) is here tonight, does she deserve to be trusted more than a person you do not know and who is not here tonight?"* and 0 if the answer is "*No*". For a detailed description of the socio-demographic control variables and time dummies, see notes to Table 3. Symbols ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

by drunk people has a minor spillover effect that can reduce trust in a much broader context. More importantly toward our research question, also in this specification, generalized trust does not react to the measured level of alcohol intake. These results remain robust when rerunning Model 4 by restricting the sample to respondents with strictly negative *Delta Beliefs*.

Result 1. *Overall, we do not find a pharmacological nexus between alcohol intake and generalized trust.*

Alcohol intake and instantaneous trust. Table 4 reports a series of logit regressions where the dependent variable is a dummy for *Instantaneous trust*. The main regressor of interest is again *BAC (alcohol test)*, i.e., the measured level of alcohol intoxication of the respondent. The positive and highly significant coefficient of *BAC (alcohol test)* in our baseline specification (Model 1) suggests a positive association between alcohol intake and instantaneous trust in fellow participants to the festival. This result is robust to the inclusion of a series of additional controls. In Model 2, we include *Generalized trust* as the two dimensions of trust are positively and significantly correlated ($\rho = 0.289, p < 0.01$, from Table 2). Intuitively, the inclusion of *Generalized trust* is meant to control for how trustful a subject is regardless of the event. Not surprisingly, the coefficient of *Generalized trust* turns out to be positive and significant. What is more important, however, is that the coefficient of *BAC (alcohol test)* remains virtually unchanged despite the inclusion of this control. The subsequent specifications mirror what is done when analyzing *Generalized trust*. In Model 3, we include the squared term of BAC to account for possible non-linearities in the correlation between BAC and instantaneous trust. We find a slightly significant concave pattern, with a predicted maximum at very high levels of intoxication ($BAC \approx 1.5$). In Model 4, we control for whether subjects did not consume alcohol at all (BAC zero), and also in this case we find evidence of an increasing pattern. Model 5 partials out the effect of intoxication perceptions by including *Placebo BAC* and *Delta Beliefs*. In contrast to what is observed in Table 3, *Delta beliefs* is not significant. Hence, thinking of being surrounded by drunk people does not decrease *Instantaneous trust*.

The positive and significant coefficient for *BAC (alcohol test)* is confirmed in all these specifications. The magnitude of the effect is sizable. Using the specification in Model 5, a $BAC = 0.5$ (the legal limit to drive) implies an increased likelihood of trusting someone who participates at the festival of about 6 percentage points.

Result 2. *Higher levels of alcohol intake are associated with higher levels of instantaneous trust.*

The role of trust in drinkers. So far, data suggest that alcohol consumption is not associated to an increase in trust toward everybody (generalized trust, Table 3), but rather a specific increase in trust toward festival attendees (instantaneous trust, Table 4).

We shed additional light on this finding by examining whether the effect is driven by the event itself or by a sense of homophily with other participants at the event. To do this, we exploit the variable *Trust in drinkers*, which takes value one if the respondent answered *"Yes"* to the question *"Would you trust more a person who is drinking alcohol tonight or a person who is not drinking alcohol?"* and zero if he/she answered *"No"*.

In Table 5, we run the same set of specifications as in Table 3, but this time the dependent variable is *Trust in drinkers*. Results show that participants with a higher BAC level tend to trust other drinkers at the festival more than the sober attendees. The coefficient for *BAC (alcohol test)* is positive and highly significant in all specifications, except in Model 2, which includes the squared term of BAC. Hence, the results suggest that there might be a sort of endogenous group formation at work. Drinkers at the festival might identify more with other drinkers and perceive the alcohol intake as a way to fully embrace the festive nature of the gathering. If this is the case, alcohol intake may also reduce the social distance among attendees and other drinkers in particular. In line with other evidence in the literature showing that the level of social distance affects trust behavior (Binzel & Fehr, 2013; Lee, 2010; Song et al., 2012), it is then not surprising that trust toward other drinkers is higher.

Given the role played by *Trust in drinkers*, one could reasonably argue that the increase in *Instantaneous trust* may not regard the festival

Table 5
Trust in drinkers.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
BAC (alcohol test)	0.087	***	0.081		0.082	***	0.090	***
	(0.020)		(0.052)		(0.024)		(0.025)	
Propensity to drink	0.025	*	0.025	*	0.024	*	0.021	
	(0.014)		(0.014)		(0.014)		(0.014)	
BAC^2 (alcohol test)			0.004					
			(0.031)					
BAC zero					−0.010			
					(0.024)			
Placebo BAC							0.038	
							(0.029)	
Delta beliefs							0.034	
							(0.021)	
Controls	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Year dummies	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Time dummies	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
N.obs.	1573		1573		1573		1541	

Notes: Logit regressions with marginal effects. The dependent variable takes value 1 if the responder answered *"Yes"* to the question *"Would you trust more a person who is drinking alcohol tonight or a person who is not drinking alcohol?"* and 0 if he/she answered *"No"*. For a detailed description of the socio-demographic control variables and time dummies, see notes to Table 3. Symbols ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

as a whole but rather concentrate on other drinkers only. In order to dispel this doubt, we perform a mediation analysis of alcohol intake on instantaneous trust, in which the mediating variable is *Trust in drinkers*, using the technique proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Our purpose is to estimate how much of the effect of alcohol intake on instantaneous trust is due to the increased trust on other festival attendees who consume alcohol and how much is instead a general effect. The indirect effect of *BAC (alcohol test)* on *Instantaneous Trust* is statistically significant but small [effect = 15%, 95% C.I. (.10035, .29761)].[21] The mediation analysis suggests, therefore, that the bulk of the change in *Instantaneous Trust* is direct, while the enhanced feeling of group belonging among drinkers has only a limited impact on instantaneous trust.

Result 3. *Higher levels of alcohol intake are associated with higher levels of trust in drinkers. However, the mediated effect of alcohol intake on instantaneous trust – through trust in drinkers – accounts for only 15% of the total effect.*

4. Conclusions

The relationship between social capital and alcohol intake has attracted much attention from researchers in social sciences, medicine, and psychology in the past decades. The reason for such an interest is that alcohol intake at moderate levels is widely recognized to be a lubricant for social interactions (Au & Zhang, 2016; Frank et al., 2014). However, little is known about the underlying mechanisms of such stylized fact.

To shed more light on this association, we empirically investigate if alcohol intake correlates with trust by administering a survey to nearly 2,000 attendees of the final concert of "La Notte della Taranta Festival", the biggest concert in Europe dedicated to traditional music, throughout six consecutive editions (2012–2017). We interview a randomly selected sample of event attendees and measure their blood alcohol concentration through electronic breathalyzers. Unlike previous studies, we gain information on three dimensions of trust: (i) *Generalized trust*, i.e., a general tendency to trust a stranger; (ii) *Instantaneous trust*, i.e., how much attendees to the festival trust other people present at the gathering event; and (iii) *Trust in drinkers*, i.e., how much festival attendees trust other festival attendees who are consuming alcohol. In addition, we elicit respondents' beliefs about their own and other festival attendees' alcohol intoxication.

Our findings show that generalized trust seems to be a personal characteristic unrelated to alcohol intake. Generalized trust is instead negatively correlated to the belief in others' alcohol intoxication at the event. In other words, thinking of being surrounded by drunk people has a minor spillover effect that can reduce trust in a much broader context. In contrast, we find that alcohol intake is positively correlated with instantaneous trust and trust in drinkers at the same cultural gathering event.

We also find that most subjects think that they are drinking less than other festival attendees. The fact that alcohol intake helps trusting more someone who is drinking (even more than oneself, given the measured beliefs) can be seen as a form of acceptance of such group behavior. If alcohol intake is indeed perceived as a sign of belonging to the same group, it is not surprising that trust levels toward other drinkers are higher, in line with previous evidence (Binzel & Fehr, 2013; Lee, 2010; Song et al., 2012) showing that trust decreases with social distance.

This result speaks in favor of a sort of endogenous group formation, with drinkers trusting other attendees (and other drinkers) more as they are all part of a shared event where alcohol intake is widely accepted and considered almost a norm. As pointed out by Agnoli et al. (2018), who conducted a discrete choice experiment survey administered to a sample of young alcohol consumers from Italy, socialization represents the primary motivation for alcohol consumption, and socializing with friends and peers exhibits more importance than the type of alcoholic beverage itself in determining the consumption context. We show with a mediation analysis that trust to drinkers only accounts for 15% of the total effect of the association between alcohol intake and instantaneous trust. The bulk of the increase in instantaneous trust is genuinely explained by alcohol intake. It is important to notice that our setting does not allow us to establish any causal direction of the effect. Indeed, it could well be the case that an increase in instantaneous trust could facilitate alcohol consumption, as festival attendees might feel more at ease in drinking if they trust other drinkers.

Our work presents some limitations. The most important one is that festival attendees self-select into alcohol consumption, preventing us from providing a causal interpretation of the results. Yet, we do control for a number of individual characteristics, including respondents' propensity to drink in daily life. Moreover, the absence of a random allocation of subjects into treatments, as in lab experiments, should be weighted by the larger number of subjects available and the more natural setting in which the social component of alcohol intake is fully at work. Future research could also explore the role of monetary incentives in this context and test for an interaction between incentives, measures of trust, and alcohol consumption. Additionally, the scope of the current study could be expanded to consider the effects of recreational drugs, a phenomenon that is commonly encountered at large gatherings in countries that permit personal consumption.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Giuseppe Attanasi: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Stefania Bortolotti:** Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Methodology. **Simona Cicognani:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Antonio Filippin:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

[21] Complete results of the mediation analysis are available upon request.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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Appendix A. List of selected variables

Variables	Definition
Socio-demographic variables	
Female (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent is female [question 1]
Age	Respondent's age in intervals (1 if <= 25; 2 if 26–30; 3 if 31–39; 4 if 40–60; 5 if >60) [question 2]
Education	Respondent's education (1 if primary school; 2 if secondary school; 3 if high school; 4 if bachelor; 5 if Master/Ph.D.) [question 21]
Occupation	Respondent's occupation (1 if artist; 2 if unpaid care worker; 3 if employee; 4 if unemployed; 5 if freelancer; 6 if self-employed; 7 if retired/disabled; 8 if student; 9 if other) [question 22]
Tourist (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent regularly lives during the year outside the area where the concert is held (province of Lecce) [question 3]
Originary (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent is originary from the area where the concert is held (province of Lecce) [question 4]
First time at NdT (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent is at "La Notte della Taranta (NdT) Festival" for the first time [question 5]
Low-stake risk	Respondent's proneness to low-stake risk (hypothetical question: 1 if respondent agrees to buy a lottery ticket of either 0.5 or 2 euros; 0 otherwise) [question 11]
High-stake risk	Respondent's proneness to high-stake risk (hypothetical question: 1 if respondent agrees to buy a lottery ticket of either 5 or 7 euros; 0 otherwise) [question 12]
Alcohol variables	
Belief own BAC	Respondent's answer to "In consideration of the fact that the legal alcohol limit for driving is 0.5 (g/l), how much do you think is your alcohol level right now?" [question 23]
Belief others' BAC	Respondent's answer to "How much do you think is the average alcohol level right now at the Festival?" [question 24]
BAC (alcohol test)	Respondent's BAC measured at the Festival through electronic breathalyzer [question 25]
Propensity to drink	Respondent's answer to "How would you define your alcohol consumption throughout the year?"(1 if low; 2 if intermediate; 3 if high) [question 18]
Placebo BAC	Belief own BAC − BAC (alcohol test)
Delta Beliefs	Belief own BAC − Belief others' BAC
Trust variables	
Generalized trust (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondents' answer to "Generally speaking, do you think that most of the people can be trusted or that it is better not to trust others?" is "Yes, most of the people can be trusted" [question 7]
Generalized trust (0–10 scale)	Respondent's answer to "From 0 to 10, how much do you trust other people in general, where 0 indicates "it is better not to trust at all" and 10 indicates "it is better to fully trust"? [question 8]
Instantaneous trust (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent's answer to "For the mere fact that a person (you do not know) is here tonight, does she deserve to be trusted more than a person you do not know and who is not here tonight?" is "Yes" [question 9]
Trust in drinkers (D)	Dummy = 1 if respondent's answer to "Would you trust more a person who is drinking alcohol tonight or a person who is not drinking alcohol?" is "Yes" [question 20]

Notes: D: dummy variable; in squared brackets: number of the corresponding question in the Questionnaire.

Appendix B. Questionnaire

PLACE and DAY of the interview:
TIME of the interview:
Interviewer's name:

1. Gender:
   Male/Female
2. Age range:
   up to 25/26–30/31–39/40–60/more than 60
3. Where do you regularly live during the year?
   Village where the Concert is held/Province of Lecce/Apulia, but outside the Province of Lecce/Italy, but outside Apulia/Abroad
4. Are you originary from the area (Province of Lecce)?
   Yes/No
5. First time at the Festival La Notte della Taranta?
   Yes/No
6. Would you be willing to pay a small amount to take part in the final concert of La Notte della Taranta?
   Yes/No/I don't know
7. Generally speaking, do you think that most of the people can be trusted or that it is better not to trust others?
   Yes, most of the people can be trusted/No, one can never be too careful
8. From 0 to 10, how much do you trust other people in general, where 0 indicates "it is better not to trust at all" and 10 indicates "it is better to fully trust"?
   0/1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/10
9. For the mere fact that a person (you do not know) is here tonight, does she deserve to be trusted more than a person you do not know and who is not here tonight?
   Yes/No/I don't know

10. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question: Which one of the following items pushes you to have a greater trust towards a person who is here tonight (and that you don't know)?[22]
    - there is a lot of people
    - there is a lot of people dancing
    - there is a lot of people drinking
    - the type of music
    - you are sharing the same experience of the final concert of La Notte della Taranta
    - here the traditional folk music from Salento is being promoted
    - you feel part of a community characterized by the same tastes and values
    - you trust the organizers of La Notte della Taranta Festival
    - Other (specify)
11. HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION: Would you agree to pay a ticket of 0.5/2 Euros to create a fund that at the end of the evening is assigned to a person drawn at random among 100 participants? Yes/No/I don't know
12. HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION: Would you agree to pay a ticket of 5/7 Euros to create a fund that at the end of the evening is assigned to a person drawn at random among 100 participants? Yes/No/I don't know
13. In percentage terms, how many Festival attendees have consumed (are consuming or will consume) alcohol during the final concert?
14. In your opinion, in percentage terms, how many Festival attendees have consumed (are consuming or will consume) cannabis (or other drugs) during the final concert?
15. Have you consumed or will you consume alcohol during the final concert?
    Yes/No
16. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, have you consumed more or less with respect to other nights in which you went out in this period?
    More/Less/The same amount
17. If "More" or "Less": In which way have the following factors influenced your choice of drinking more or less alcohol: (On a scale from 1 to 5)[23]
    - I must drive (only if answer is "Less")
    - tonight there is a lot of people
    - tonight there is a lot of people dancing
    - tonight there is a lot of people drinking
    - the type of music
    - the fact of being at the final concert of La Notte della Taranta Festival
18. How would you define your alcohol consumption throughout the year?
    Low/Intermediate/High
19. Would you participate in the final concert of La Notte della Taranta Festival if alcohol consumption were forbidden?
    Yes/No/I don't know
20. Would you trust more a person who is drinking alcohol tonight or a person who is not drinking alcohol?
    Yes/No/I don't know
21. Education:
    Primary school/Secondary school/High school/University degree/Post-graduate degrees (Master/Ph.D.)
22. Job:
    Artist/Unpaid care worker/Public or private Employee/Unemployed/Freelancer/Self-employed/Retired or Disabled/Student/Other (specify)
23. In consideration of the fact that the legal alcohol limit for driving is 0.5 (g/l), how much do you think is your alcohol level right now?
24. How much do you think is the average alcohol level right now at the Festival?
25. Respondent's measured BAC:

[22] Multiple answers were possible in this question.

[23] In this question, respondents were asked to report a number from 1 to 5 for each of the categories reported in the question.

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