



# Buzzed Driving Tagline Exploratory Research

*The Advertising Council & Ahzul*

*June 10, 2024*



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# Background, Objectives & Methodology

# Research Background & Objectives

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The Ad Council and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have been working together for more than 30 years to develop public service communications to reduce the incidence of alcohol-impaired driving.

The Buzzed Driving Prevention campaign targets young males aged 21-34 and focuses on the dangers of “buzzed driving.”

Research conducted in 2022 indicated that the **conversation around “buzzed driving” had shifted, suggesting that new research was needed to better understand the effectiveness of the current tagline.**

## Research Objectives

- This current round of exploratory aimed to **uncover the effectiveness of the tagline given shifts in attitudes and driving behaviors pertaining to “buzzed driving”**:
  - **Uncover** attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions around the idea that “buzzed driving is drunk driving”
  - **Understand** if the tagline “buzzed driving is drunk driving” is helping or hurting the PSA materials
  - **Explore** any tweaks or changes that can be made to the tagline to make it feel less subjective. These tweaks could pertain to the line itself or accompanying copy
  - **Evaluate** whether the team should continue using “buzzed driving is drunk driving” in the PSA materials given its high recognition among the audience

# Research Configuration & Methodology

## Overview

- N=8 Virtual Focus Groups
- Recruited 6 to seat 4-5 per group
- 75 minutes each (plus 15 min tech check)

## Research Recruitment Specs

- Males 21-34 (even representation of Gen Z and Millennials)
- Must drink alcohol outside the home regularly
- Must own an automobile, and personally drive to/from social occasions at least occasionally
- Screen out those who “strongly agree” that “If I were feeling ‘buzzed’ or somewhat impaired, I will ALWAYS get a ride rather than drive myself”
- National recruit, with a good mix of race/ethnicity, education level, HHI, etc.
- Mix of marital status (single vs. live-in-partner/married)
- Mid-to Heavy digital users

## Focus Group Composition

## Groups

Gen Z Males: 21-27

4

Millennial Males: 28-34

4

**Total**

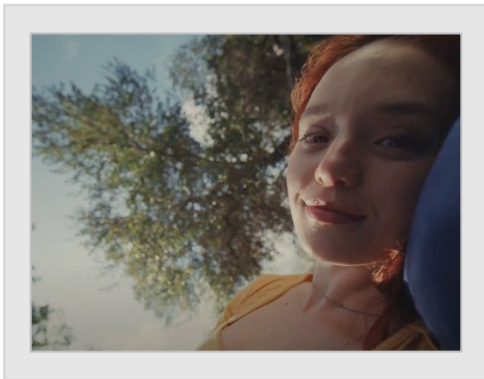
**8**

# Research Approach

We first engaged in a brief discussion about driving and drinking behaviors. We then showed a recent 60-second PSA titled "Your Life Sounds Great" in order to introduce and gain reactions to the campaign tagline "Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving." Following this discussion, we exposed respondents to both existing and new taglines related to drinking and driving for the purpose of gaining learnings on what types of messages resonate most and why. We also gave respondents the opportunity to write their own tagline.

## Your Life Sounds Great

Video :60



## Campaign Tagline

Tested

**“Buzzed Driving Is Drunk Driving”**

## Existing & New Taglines

Tested

- **“Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over”** (NHTSA)
- **“Friends Don’t Let Friends Drive Drunk”** (NHTSA)
- **“Drive Sober, Arrive Alive”** (Arrive Alive, DE)
- **“When You Drive, Never Drink”** (Heineken)
- **“Don’t Drink and Drive. You’re Not as Good as You Think”** (Australian Government)
- **“Buzzed Driving: It’s Not Worth the Risk”** (Original)
- **“Buzzed Driving: The Worst Party Trick”** (Original)
- **“Buzzed? Bus, Rideshare, or Friend – The Choice is Yours”** (Original)
- **“One Drink, Too Many to Drive”** (Original)

# Executive Summary

# Young men describe a spectrum of intoxication with many stages

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“Buzzed” falls into a grey area where control is lessened but some still feel they can drive

- **Intoxication is a spectrum:** Most young men describe a spectrum of intoxication where “buzzed” or “tipsy” falls somewhere in between “1-2 drinks” and “drunk.”
- **Approach to driving while intoxicated varies:** While some young men believe driving under any influence is unsafe, others express greater confidence in their abilities to drive while under the influence of alcohol, depending on how they feel and how much they’ve had to drink.
- **“Buzzed driving” = less control:** While everyone acknowledges there are some potential dangers of “buzzed driving”, most believe “buzzed driving” means having *less control*, while drunk driving means *no control*.



# Misperceptions exist around determining safety to drive and how to sober up

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Misperceptions, social norms, and faulty rationalizations sometimes lead to “buzzed driving”

- **Young men rely on a mix of subjective and objective cues and signs to determine their level of intoxication:** Informal signs like intuitively “knowing their tolerance” are used alongside more explicit indicators of impairment like stumbling or slurring speech to determine whether they are sober enough to drive.
- **Flawed tactics to sober up persist:** These same young men implement a variety of tactics to sober up before driving, which they believe will make them safe to drive. Methods range from reliable strategies like waiting it out at a friend’s house to chugging water before driving home.
- **Complex social factors impact young men:** At least to some extent, social norms also play a role in how young men view intoxication and what’s acceptable, as well as irrational justifications that influence their decision-making.

# “Buzzed driving is drunk driving” is believable — but mostly because of the potential legal consequences

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“Buzzed driving” is not viewed as the same as drunk driving when it comes to other potential consequences

- **“Buzzed driving” is only associated with legal consequences:** When young men think about the potential consequences of “buzzed driving”, “getting pulled over” is what comes to mind for most. Young men are often most concerned about the legal consequences or potentially killing someone because of “buzzed driving”. They view the penalties for both drunk driving and “buzzed driving” as the same, reinforcing their understanding that in theory “Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving” because of the similar legal consequences.
- **Emphasize the consequences:** However, beyond legal consequences, “buzzed driving” is not considered the same as drunk driving, particularly because other potential consequences, such as personal, financial, and moral impacts, are not at the forefront in their mind when it comes to consequences. However, there is an opportunity to highlight the full spectrum of consequence to show that there is lot more at risk.

# Key Findings

*Buzzed Driving Beliefs, Attitudes & Perceptions*

# Gen Z and Millennial men see intoxication as a spectrum, with several different phases

- Young men map drinking and driving ability on a spectrum from sober to drunk, with distinct phases in between.
- Each phase is associated with a different set of feelings and behaviors that also correlate to a willingness to drive or not.
- “Buzzed driving” falls somewhere in between “1-2 drinks” and “drunk” on the spectrum of intoxication, with most young men describing the behaviors of “buzzed” drinking as slower reaction times, less control, **but still functioning**. Some young men also discuss tolerance and how this spectrum can change depending on a person's body composition and other variables that impact tolerance.
- Most also acknowledge that **driving while “buzzed” is not ideal but happens occasionally or has happened in the past.**

## Spectrum of Intoxication

	Sober	1-2 Drinks	Buzzed/Tipsy	Drunk
 Behavior	Full control of cognitive and bodily functions	Slightly less control, feeling warm, fuzzy and happy	Slower movement/reaction time, less control but still functioning	Difficulty walking, slurred speech, no control
Thoughts About Driving	Everyone considers it safe to operate a vehicle while completely sober	Most consider it safe to drive after 1-2 drinks	Most recognize there is a risk involved, but occasionally it happens	Never safe or socially acceptable to drive

*“It would start with no drinks, then move to a couple of drinks. Going beyond that is like going from green to yellow. In that gray/yellow area, I start to feel a bit tipsy. Tipsy to buzzed is my limit, and red is a no-go. I always limit myself because I’m cautious when I drink. I don’t want to drink too much because I’ve had one or two bad days where the next day, I just feel terrible.”*  
**Hispanic, Male, 23**

*“Yeah, that warm fuzzy feeling is the first stage of it. That’s when you start realizing, okay, now you’re feeling it. I don’t experience it a ton personally, but I know you can recognize it in other people. When their words start slurring, or when they forget they just told you the same thing, you can tell they’re deeper into their drinking based on their interactions, volume, and things like that.”*  
**White, Male, 30**

# The signs of being “okay to drive” are subjective

Young men each have their own methods to gauge their intoxication levels throughout the night. A mix of “signs”, some more legitimate than others, helps them determine whether they are safe to drive:

## Intuition & Feelings



**Intuition:** Feeling like you're safe to drive home because you know your body best

**Feeling:** Changes in usual habits (e.g., not wanting a cigarette)

## Mood & Emotions



### Mood & Emotions:

- Happiness
- Excitement
- Sociability
- Confusion
- Relaxation
- Confidence

## External Measures



**Time:** Amount of time passed between each drink and, after last drink

**Number of Drinks:** Number of drinks during the night

**Weight:** Ability to drink more depending on weight

## Physical Signs



**Balance & Coordination:** Stumbling, feeling unsteady, dizziness, reduced motor skills

**Speech:** Slurring words, incoherent speech

**Reaction Time:** Slow reaction times

## More Objective

*“Yeah, I think it's just trusting your intuition. You know, because I've been tipsy and I've been drunk, and I think it comes down to that point of decision-making where it's like, 'How much longer am I gonna be here? What's my level of function like?' Like, okay, we've had our two, okay, let me just chill out, let me not drink anymore.’ I think nowadays, everyone asks their homie to drink water, like right before you leave, like 'Yo, you should drink some water, like you drove here, bro. Take a water bottle.' Like, I'll take two for myself, like I'm gonna chug those right before.”*

**Hispanic, Male, 24**

*“For me, it's whether or not I can stop smiling, or if the room is spinning, I do this thing where if I move my neck side to side, and it feels like I can do it very fast, that's when I know I've had too much, honestly. I have a way of gauging it. And then if I move my neck side to side, and I can feel myself getting tired from doing it, then I know, okay, I'm competent enough to drive, or whatnot.”*

**Black, Male, 26**

# Misperceptions around the effectiveness of “sobering up” tactics exist

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Gen Z and Millennial men also believe they can rely on varied techniques to limit the effect that alcohol has on them, or to be able to quickly sober up.



**Time** - Waiting it out until the body sobers up naturally



**Pacing** - Managing the amount of alcohol consumed throughout the night



**Water** - Drinking water throughout the night and/or chugging water before driving home



**Food** - Eating a large meal before, during or after drink to help absorb alcohol



**Sleeping** - Resting in the car for a few minutes before driving home

*“I have driven buzzed and drunk. But now, I don’t drive drunk anymore. I did that maybe a couple of times when I was a kid, maybe even under the drinking age. So, I mean, I was a real kid. Like, I didn’t know what I was doing. I’ve told myself I would never do that ever again. I do have a couple of drinks and drive. I think someone mentioned that food really stops the effects of alcohol. So if I’m at a restaurant, I can definitely have a few more drinks.”*

**Asian, Male, 26**

*“Yeah, I agree. I think I am a buzzed driver. When I do drink and drive, I don’t get really, really drunk and then drive. I prefer to wait it out until I’m more buzzed, if anything. I also agree with sleeping in your car, man. If you’re too drunk, you stay at your friend’s house or stay at the bar a little longer, or just go to your car and chill out for a bit and eat something.”*

**Hispanic, Male, 24**

# Complex social dynamics and justifications can lead to “buzzed driving”

- **For Millennial and Gen Z men, driving while “buzzed” is typically frowned upon within their social circles.**
  - Many emphasize the importance of having a designated driver (DD) or a clear exit plan such as an Uber, Lyft or a rideshare service, during weekend outings at clubs, concert venues or bars.
  - However, a conflicting social expectation also exists. For some Gen Z men in particular, not being able to handle their liquor well or needing someone else to drive them home is seen as “lame”, particularly in front of women.
  - In theory, these men disapprove of “buzzed driving” and value having a designated driver, but also want to appear capable of handling their alcohol and driving home, so their actual behaviors don’t always match up with these beliefs.
- **There is also the belief that “buzzed” means they’re still (mostly) in control, which can foster justifications for risky behavior.**
  - Young men can more easily rationalize a short drive home as less risky.
  - Or even convince themselves a few drinks improve their motor skills, enabling them to drive safely.

*“I know some people, live on windy, unpredictable roads. And then you have people who live in very flat, uneventful areas. It’s not like a video game, but you can categorize roads as easy, intermediate, and difficult. So, yeah, I don’t know, I think it’s not the strongest argument to talk about, but I just brought up distance because it might be something to consider.”*

**White, Male, 32**

*“I don’t know if it’s a pride thing or being embarrassed, but as a guy, drinking so much that you can’t drive is kind of embarrassing. I mean, if a lady does that, yeah, it’s cool. But as a guy, you have to be responsible enough to want to have fun and get home safely.”*

**Black, Male, 26**

# Most young men see a clear distinction between being “buzzed” and “drunk”

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- **Awareness of the risks and dangers of drunk driving is widespread and consistent among respondents.**
  - Most are familiar with the obvious consequences (e.g., death, car accidents, DUIs, jail time) and believe driving while heavily intoxicated is a poor decision.
  - There is general agreement among most young men that any alcohol consumption could potentially impair driving ability, though the extent to which they believe this and act upon it varies greatly. Some men have a stricter view, while others are more confident in their ability to make it home safely while intoxicated.
- **However, a disconnect emerges when it comes to “buzzed driving”:**
  - Most acknowledge certain risks associated with “buzzed driving”, such as reduced control, slower reaction times, and poorer coordination.
  - That said, most also believe that these risks are not as severe as those of drunk driving, which they believe is a much higher risk that can result in fatalities and a higher likelihood of getting pulled over, which will likely come with more extreme consequences.

*“I would say it's close to being drunk, but maybe not fully. I mean, I wouldn't recommend either, obviously, but I think at least with buzzed driving, you have a little more awareness. Obviously, drunk driving is taking a big risk, potentially impacting other people's lives, I guess.”*

**White, Male, 30**

*“I don't think I really know the definition of 'buzzed.' I think buzzed driving is an indicator of how the night is going. I don't see anything wrong with it, but the implications are serious—putting your life and others' lives at risk. Just because you're buzzed doesn't mean you're fully drunk, but there's still a level of risk and responsibility you should hold, regardless of how you're feeling.”*


**Hispanic, Male, 26**



# For most, the similarities between “buzzed driving” and “drunk driving” begin and end with the potential legal and associated financial consequences

- Gen Z and Millennial men recognize that both “buzzed driving” and “drunk driving” have the potential to **carry similar consequences from a legal and, to a lesser extent, financial perspective.**
- On an intellectual level, many **agree with the statement “Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving”, primarily because both carry potential legal consequences.**

## Spectrum of Consequences

		1-2 Drinks	Buzzed/Tipsy	Drunk
	Legal	None	Speeding tickets, fines, DUI, license suspension for traffic violations (if caught)	Jail, fines, license suspension for traffic violations or DUI
	Financial	None	Costs associated with DUI (if caught)	Costs associated with DUI or car accidents
	Safety/Physical	None	None or minimal (depending on alcohol tolerance)	Potential for serious accidents which cause physical harm to self and others
	Social	None	Negative impact on relationships and reputation if they seem unable to drive or if they potentially get into an accident (though most don't believe this would happen)	Negative impact on relationships and reputation
	Emotional	None	None or minimal	Guilt, shame, and regret

## Beyond legal consequences, however, most don't consider "buzzed driving" to be the same as "drunk driving"

- **Most young men perceive very different potential physical, social, and emotional consequences for "buzzed" and "drunk" driving.**
  - While some agree that it is possible to experience some of the other consequences, at least in theory, most agreed that the likelihood of those things happening was much less because they still feel that they have some control while driving "buzzed."

*"Buzzed driving is like 50/50. You think you might be good to go because you had some water and feel fine, but you could still be over the limit. Let's say you're speeding or driving slowly; it takes one curious cop to pull you over and ask if you've been drinking. Whether you're honest or not, if they give you a breathalyzer, it might show you're over the limit even if you feel fine and are just five minutes from home. Then you're in trouble. It just takes one little thing, like not using your blinker, for a cop to pull you over."*

**Black, Male, 26**

*"I'd say in general, yes [buzzed driving is drunk driving] but it feels like a lesser version. To me, drinking and driving means not being able to balance at all, getting pulled over, arrested, and ending up in jail. Buzzed driving feels like a dumbed-down version of that."*

**White, Male, 22**

*"I believe most people would agree that if you're drunk driving, you're taking a much greater risk and facing much greater consequences compared to buzzed driving. If you get pulled over and blow an extreme DUI, the consequences and risks are much higher than if you blow just slightly over the legal limit."*

**White, Male, 27**

*"I mean, I would say that the majority of people would also say that buzzed driving and drunk driving are not the same, or else there wouldn't be the legal distinctions. Most people feel there is a difference between buzzed and drunk driving because the law is designed that way. The main factors that differentiate buzzed driving from drunk driving are your tolerance and how much you can handle."*

**White, Male, 27**

# Key Findings

*Tagline Reactions & Learnings*

# While the tagline reinforces existing beliefs for some, others feel it doesn't apply to them

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- The tagline **reinforces existing beliefs about driving while intoxicated for young men who are already less likely to drive “buzzed”** and makes them feel even more strongly against buzzed driving.
- Young men who see greater distinctions between the consequences of driving “buzzed” and “drunk” do start to question whether they’re being as safe as they could, however, the **idea seems to resonate more on an intellectual level than a personal one.**
- While they technically agree that the potential consequences could be the same if they are pulled over, most don’t believe other consequences would happen to them.

*“I mean, not really. I know my limits with buzzed driving, so I feel comfortable doing it within those limits. It doesn't make me rethink it. If I were drunk like the guy in the ad, I wouldn't be getting in a car. I understand they want to portray a message, but if they actually showed the person at that stage, it might be more effective in getting the message across. But it doesn't really make me think twice.”*

**White, Male, 32**

*“Yeah, I've heard the phrase before, 'buzzed driving is drunk driving.' I personally agree with that. I think it's necessary that we talk about it more now because generations have added these other words that describe the stages of drinking and driving. Saying 'buzzed driving is drunk driving' really helps bring the message across that there's a very fine line. Obviously, the line is relative, but the moment that you're impaired in any way is when you shouldn't be driving. So, there's not really any change in my thought because that's a thought that I agree with. I just wholeheartedly agree with it.”*

**White, Male, 30**

# However, there were some consistent learnings across audiences

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- **The tagline is memorable and catchy**, especially compared to other tested taglines, because it is pithy, simple, and flows easily.
- **Some reacted positively to the black-and-white nature of the tagline as it cuts through the gray area surrounding the issue**, emphasizing how “buzzed driving” is just as dangerous as drunk driving.
  - **Conversely, due to the definitive nature of the tagline**, some men felt the line was too subjective and not believable, given that “buzzed driving” can be interpreted differently by different people.
- **Several expressed a desire for more information about the specific risks and consequences of “buzzed driving.”** They felt the ad should focus on a broader range of negative outcomes beyond accidents because many have driven “buzzed” without experiencing an accident, leading them to believe the tagline doesn't reflect their reality. A scenario that aligns more closely with their own experiences backed by data and facts would make the tagline more believable.
- **For some, the PSA materials were seen as confusing, with the main character behaving more “drunk” than “buzzed.”** The main actor appeared more than “buzzed” because of his stumbling, while others were confused by the oncoming traffic that caused the accident. These details detracted from the effectiveness of the tagline because it didn't feel authentic to their experiences of being and driving “buzzed.”

*“I think [the tagline] just takes the gray area away and makes it more black and white. If you're having drinks and get behind the wheel, it could lead to an adverse situation. It removes the 'I only had one or two drinks' excuse and instead says, 'Hey, just don't do it.'”*

**Black, Male, 34**

*“I think it's an appeal to emotion. I believe you can present statistics in a commercial effectively. If you can provide me with some sort of information, even just one figure, to show me that drunk driving is the same as buzzed driving, then I would probably accept the commercial.”*

**Asian, Male, 25**

# Insights from other taglines align with what resonates in the current tagline

- Most ultimately chose the original tagline “Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving” as the best option. It was memorable, concise, and non-judgmental, delivering a clear and easy-to-understand message.
- But there were learnings from the existing and original taglines which tested the point of strengths of the original tagline.

*“I don't like it [When You Drive, Never Drink] because it's telling me what to do, and I'm going to do the opposite, basically. So, I think it's going to have a reverse effect on people.”*

**Hispanic, Male, 27**

*“It's catchy, that's the first thing—it's catchy. It's almost comedic in a way, like something you would tell teenagers: 'Drive sober or get pulled over.' Probably if there was a cop standing there, you'd remember it. But I like it because drinking and driving is everybody's business once you're on the public roads.”*

**Black, Male, 26**

- **Direct, catchy, and pithy taglines are more effective because they are memorable and easy to understand.**
  - “Buzzed Driving: It's Not Worth the Risk” was seen as informative but not memorable
  - “Buzzed? Bus, Rideshare, or Friend – The Choice is Yours” was wordy and too long
  - “Drive Sober, Arrive Alive” has a catchy rhyme (but was viewed as unrealistic because it suggests people must stay completely sober)
- **Most prefer an accountability message over fear-mongering messages or a message that is absolute.**
  - “Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk” was seen as putting responsibility on others but also group accountability by others
- **Many dislike the idea of abstaining from alcohol completely and don't want to be talked down to or told what to do.**
  - “When You Drive, Never Drink” was seen as unrealistic
  - “Don't Drink and Drive. You're Not as Good as You Think” was unique but not very nice
- **Certain colloquial language and themes such as “lit” or “party trick” can resonate with specific audiences, but it doesn't work for everyone.**
  - “Buzzed Driving: The Worst Party Trick” was considered too subjective; not everyone drinks at parties

# The taglines Gen-Z and Millennial men created convey a desire for consequences to be communicated more clearly

- When we asked young men to write their own tagline, many focused (directly or indirectly) on the legal and financial risks associated with “buzzed driving.”
- Others focused more on more general messages around risk education and safety, though it is important to note that this does not align with their stated attitudes around the perceived risks of driving “buzzed.”

*“I just thought about the financial implications behind potentially facing criminal charges for drunk or buzzed driving. From the perspective of, ‘Would you rather pay for your Uber ride to or from wherever you may be drinking? Or would you rather pay if you get pulled over for buzzed driving and face those consequences?’”*

**White, Male, 34**

- **Focus on Legal or Financial Risks**
  - Uber < Bail Money
  - Buzzed Driving Can Land You In Jail
  - Buzzed is Enough to Ruin Everything
  - Buzzed + Driving = Game Over
- **Desire for More Risk Education**
  - One Drink You Should Probably Rethink
  - Thinking of Driving Buzzed? Think Again
  - Driving Buzzed? Know the Risk
- **Focus on Safety**
  - Buzzed Driving is Not Safe Driving
  - Your Life is Not Worth a Quick Buzz
  - Save a Life: Don’t Drink and Drive
  - Don’t let the Buzz Be The Last #BuzzResponsibly
  - Your Safety Always Comes First
- **Positive Outcomes**
  - An Uber with Friends is More Fun than Driving Buzzed

# Final Thoughts



# Final Thoughts

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- **“Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving” can work -- if accompanied by legal consequences.**
  - Gen Z and Millennial men most associate the potential consequences of “buzzed driving” with getting pulled over and potentially getting a DUI. Where possible, including the legal repercussions of “buzzed driving” could help increase the idea's impact as it serves as a reminder of consequences they know exist and want to avoid.
- **If legal consequences are not possible to include, most Gen-Z and Millennial men will have to be convinced that financial, social, or physical harm is possible with “buzzed driving” in order for the idea to impact behaviors.**
  - Showing young men that there are physical, social, and personal repercussions caused by “buzzed driving” could significantly enhance the tagline's impact. Emphasizing those types of consequences could strengthen the tagline's effectiveness.
- **Data can help prove that “buzzed driving” is as dangerous as drunk driving.**
  - Respondents expressed that the tagline would be more believable if it were presented with additional information, such as facts or statistics that explain how “buzzed driving” can lead to similar outcomes as drunk driving.
- **When creating communications, ensure that how “buzzed” is portrayed reflects how these men experience it.**
  - Visuals should clearly communicate a realistic depiction of “buzzed driving” to help drive home how “buzzed driving” can look safe and appear normal but can still lead to consequences. Respondents need to see themselves and how they experience and describe “buzzed” in the PSA materials to relate to the ads and believe the tagline.

# Thank you!

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