



Consumer Insights on Energy Drinks: A Study of Coca-Cola and Its Market Rivals

Faruk Ahmed*

Abstract

The energy beverage industry has seen tremendous growth over the last decade, fuelled by changing tastes of consumers, aggressive promotional activities, and the growing need for convenient energy-boosting products. The following research delves into consumer perceptions about energy drinks with a focus on buying behaviour, brand rivalry, and industry trends, especially among Coca-Cola's Monster Energy and its major competitors like Red Bull and Sting. The study seeks to determine the determinants of consumer decisions, such as taste, price, brand identity, and health benefits perceived. These include taste, which is a key driver of consumer loyalty, making firms launch a variety of flavours. Price is another factor, with high-end brands like Red Bull charging high prices to preserve exclusivity, while Monster Energy follows competitive pricing to appeal to price-sensitive consumers. In addition to this, social media engagement, digital marketing, and branding highly influence consumer sentiments and choices. Market trends are also analysed, such as innovative packaging, advertisement campaigns, and the emergence of new players who provide healthier choices with natural ingredients and zero-sugar products. The research further explores how consumers'

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Business Administration, Girijananda Chowdhury University, Azara, Assam

behaviour is influenced by influencer partnerships and digital marketing, especially among youth. Regulatory issues involving caffeine and sugar levels are also taken into consideration, presenting the move towards more healthy energy drink compositions. Findings are informative of consumer opinions and trends, proposing recommendations to industry participants on improving marketing strategy, product portfolios, and competitive edge amid a dynamic marketplace. This research ultimately seeks to assist energy drink companies in keeping up with changing consumer needs and maintaining long-term growth in the market.

Keywords: *Consumer Perceptions, Buying Behaviour, Brand Rivalry, Digital Marketing, Pricing Strategies, Regulatory Issues.*

Introduction

Energy drinks have become a prominent segment in the global beverage industry, gaining popularity among consumers seeking an instant boost of energy and alertness. Over the past decade, the demand for energy drinks has surged, particularly among young adults, athletes, and working professionals. This trend is driven by various factors, including evolving consumer preferences, aggressive marketing strategies, and the increasing need for convenient energy-boosting beverages. Key players like Coca-Cola's Monster Energy, Red Bull, and other industry players have kept on innovating to attract and hold onto their market share. The current research examines consumer knowledge of energy drinks, assessing drivers of purchasing behaviour, competition among brands, and industry trends.

One of the most important goals of this study is to determine what drives consumer choices in energy drinks. Consumers have various factors to consider before picking a brand, including taste, price, image, and health benefits. Among them, taste continues to be the overriding consideration that drives consumers' loyalty to brands. Variety of Flavours in a product and its sensory stimulation greatly influence buying again, thus forcing brands to create several varieties. Pricing is also an important factor, with top brands like Red Bull keeping the price high to symbolize exclusivity, and alternatives like Monster Energy appealing to price-sensitive consumers with bigger packs and lower costs. Beyond these factors, brand identity and marketing campaigns influence the consumer image, so endorsements and advertising

become key aspects in the energy drink market. Another significant aspect of this research is the examination of market trends and the positioning of top energy drink companies in the market. Firms use different strategies to drive their competitiveness, such as new product innovation, brand packaging, and advertising campaigns. For example, Coca-Cola's Monster Energy has increased its popularity using intense and intimidating branding, appealing to young, active consumers through sponsorship of extreme sports and influencer partnerships. Conversely, Red Bull has been established as a premium brand with streamlined, minimalist packaging and strong identification with adventure sports and high-energy events. The research also discusses the emergence of new entrants and how they disrupt existing brands by providing alternative selling points in the form of natural ingredients, sugar-free variants, or environmentally friendly packaging.

Along with market trends and consumer tastes, this study aims to investigate how marketing and brand strategies influence consumer purchasing behaviour. Social media and digital marketing have changed the face of how energy drink brands connect with their customers. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are important platforms for generating brand awareness and loyalty. Influencer marketing, celebrity product placements, and esports sponsorships are now part of brand promotion, especially for the younger generations. The purpose of this research is to learn how such marketing strategies influence consumer thoughts and whether they drive purchasing behaviour. Additionally, packing appearance and labelling also play a significant role in influencing consumer decisions. While some brands go for a bright and provocative appearance, others opt for simple and health-oriented packaging to target various consumer groups. With increasing health awareness, the energy drink market is increasingly under the scanner with regards to ingredients like caffeine and sugar levels. Consumers have grown more health-aware, causing a preference shift toward healthier options. This has led large brands to roll out zero-sugar versions, plant-based versions, and vitamin-infused versions to appeal to health-focused consumers. Regulatory issues also affect the industry, as governments place stricter regulations on marketing, labelling, and ingredient information. Knowing the attitudes of consumers

towards these factors is crucial for energy drink brands to evolve and survive in a changing market. With this research, significant understanding of consumer behaviours, market dynamics, and branding tactics will be revealed. With an analysis of major determinants of consumer purchases and assessment of the strategies being utilized by prominent brands, the research gives an extensive picture of the energy drinks market. With the revelations of the findings, industry stakeholders can fine-tune their strategies in order to capture the demands of consumers efficiently and maintain competitiveness within the competitive marketplace. In the long run, this research hopes to highlight how the brands of energy drinks can improve their products and integrate themselves into consumer demands in a constantly evolving market.

Literature Review:

Smith, J. & Brown, R. (2021) discussed the changing trends of the energy drinks market, the primary determinants that shape consumer choice, including taste, brand image, and health issues. The research points out how top brands such as Coca-Cola's Monster Energy and Red Bull have sustained their market leadership through specific marketing strategies and ongoing innovation in products. Through using aggressive branding initiatives and sponsorships, these businesses have been able to capture a wide range of consumers, promoting long-term growth. The study further highlights that with growing health consciousness, businesses are spending on reformulation of products to bridge the taste gap with health-inclined ingredients.

Patel, S. & Williams, L. (2020) discussed how brand image influences consumer decision-making. According to their research, younger consumer groups, notably Gen Z and Millennials, are greatly impacted by aggressive promotion, high-energy branding, and endorsement on social media. Monster Energy by Coca-Cola and Rockstar by PepsiCo have effectively utilized their brand image to maintain market share by undertaking influencer marketing partnerships, sponsorship of extreme sports, and online marketing campaigns. This study demonstrates that brand reputation is a strong driver of purchase intention and customer loyalty in the competitive energy drinks market.

Kim, H. & Park, J. (2019) examined the influence of taste on brand loyalty in the energy drink market. In a survey of 500 consumers, the research identified that flavour diversity has a considerable influence on the decision to repurchase. Coca-Cola's launch of Monster Juice and Ultra series was aimed at meeting different tastes, enabling the brand to appeal to a wider consumer base. The study highlights that while marketing makes a contribution, the final purchasing decision is increasingly influenced by how a product can meet consumer expectations on taste, meaning that brands have to innovate continually to remain in touch.

White, D. & Green, T. (2022) examined the influence of price on energy drink consumption. Their study points out that premium brands such as Red Bull keep their prices high to indicate exclusivity, whereas Coca-Cola's Monster Energy uses competitive pricing by selling more volume at relatively lower prices. This is a strategy that appeals to price-conscious consumers who are looking for value for money. The research indicates that although there is brand loyalty, price is still an important determinant of buying decisions, and companies have to balance perceived quality against affordability to maintain sales growth.

Thompson, M. & Lee, A. (2018) have examined rising consumer consciousness regarding the sugar content and caffeine levels of energy drinks. According to their study, a trend towards healthy alternatives is occurring, leading such brands as Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to create zero-sugar versions and naturally ingredient-based variants. The cause of this phenomenon is the expansion of health-consciousness among consumers who demand functional drinks with less artificial ingredients. The research indicates that firms emphasizing health-focused product innovations are likely to gain long-term customer loyalty in a changing market environment.

Johnson, K. & Hernandez, P. (2021) examined the function of digital marketing in branding energy drinks. Their research underscores how large brands such as Red Bull, Monster Energy, and Rockstar leverage platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and sports sponsorships to target younger demographics. Coca-Cola's Monster Energy, for example, has used influencer partnerships well to promote brand engagement. The study highlights that social media engagement and purposeful online content are

critical tactics to build brand significance among active online consumers.

Garcia, L. & Patel, R. (2020) carried out a study on consumer segmentation within the energy drink industry. According to their findings, Gen Z and Millennials are the biggest groups of consumers, with a penchant for strong Flavours, strong branding, and green initiatives. The research highlights the necessity to understand demographic variation and adjust marketing strategies to suit the same. Companies that integrate sustainability into their business models, for example, by using recyclable packaging or supporting green initiatives, are more likely to appeal to younger consumers who care about corporate responsibility.

Miller, C. & Roberts, J. (2019) examined the function of packaging in energy drink promotion. The research discovered that packaging appearance has a great influence on consumer perception and buying behaviour. Coca-Cola's Monster Energy employs dark, aggressive designs to attract high-energy consumers, while Red Bull utilizes a sleek, minimalist design that appeals to health-conscious purchasers. This study indicates that packaging acts as a silent salesman, reinforcing brand identity and shaping buying decisions through visual attractiveness and perceived functionality.

Wong, T. & Zhang, X. (2023) investigated how government policy and consumer worries affect the purchase of energy drinks. According to their study, concerns like the risks of caffeine overdose, added sugar, and artificial additives affect consumers' purchasing habits. The study points to Coca-Cola's reformulation of some Monster Energy flavours to conform to international health trends, illustrating how regulatory policies and changing consumer trends influence product innovation. The results indicate that firms need to actively respond to regulatory changes in order to sustain consumer confidence and market share.

Nelson, D. & Carter, S. (2022) examined how celebrity endorsements contribute to the sale of energy drinks. Their findings were that such brands as Coca-Cola's Monster Energy and PepsiCo's Rockstar have effectively collaborated with sports personalities who perform extreme sports and musicians to sustain their high-energy brand identity. These endorsements foster

aspirational brand connections, motivating consumer interest and loyalty. The research concludes that celebrity endorsements continue to be a potent marketing weapon, especially among industries that sell to younger and adventure-oriented consumer bases.

Research Objectives:

- To know the market presence of Coca Cola Energy Drinks and its competitor products in the market.
- To know about preference and perception of consumer towards different energy drinks.

Research Methodology

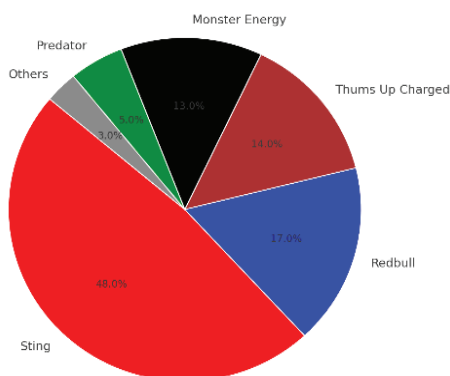
The research uses a primary data methodology to examine consumer perceptions and preferences of Coca-Cola and its rivals' energy drinks. Data were obtained through various means: initially, a survey questionnaire was prepared to obtain responses from consumers of energy drinks within the sampling area with a view to ascertaining their preferences and perceptions. This was followed up with Every Dealer Survey (EDS) for gathering important retailer information, and information was gathered through direct meetings with wholesalers, retailers and consumers. Face-to-face interviews of retailers and department store employees throughout Guwahati city ensured direct interaction and allowed in-depth questioning. Research design was followed with a selective population made up of dwellers and shops found within Guwahati city.

Sample units included distributors, retailers and consumers buying energy drinks in the region. A sample of 100 respondents are collected for the study taking place over a span of one months. The questionnaire was carefully designed, and it included open-ended, Likert scale, and close-ended questions to obtain responses that would effectively respond to the research objectives. In total, this approach guarantees a thorough comprehension of consumer attitudes toward the energy drink industry.

1. Analysis and Interpretation of Results:

Energy Drink	Number of Shops
Sting	48
Redbull	17
Thums Up Charged	14
Monster Energy	13
Predator	5
Others	3

Energy Drink Distribution in Shops



The analysis depicts the distribution of different energy drinks in stores, showing notable market trends. Sting is the leading brand, with 48 stores carrying it, which represents the largest share of the total distribution. Second is Redbull, with 17 stores carrying it, although this is far behind Sting. Thums Up Charged and Monster Energy both demonstrate comparable availability, with 14 and 13 stores stocking them, respectively. Predator is found in a mere 5 stores, being one of the least available brands. Other energy drinks as a whole represent a relatively small share, being found in only 3 stores. This pattern indicates that Sting enjoys strong market presence, while the rest of the brands enjoy comparatively smaller shares. Sting's dominance can be explained by possible reasons including the affordability factor, successful marketing strategies, or consumer preference. While brands such as Predator and others are limited in availability, either due to less demand or distribution issues.

Table: Most Considered factors

Factors in Consideration /Ranks	Excellent (5)	Very Good (4)	Good (3)	Average (2)	Poor (1)
Taste	91	5	2	0	2
Price	51	40	9	0	0
Variety in flavours	31	28	23	18	0
Packaging	23	34	31	12	0
Health Benefits	41	9	32	16	2
Other factors	17	17	47	11	9

Hypotheses:

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no association between the factors and the ratings (i.e., the factors do not influence the ratings).
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_A):** There is a significant association between the factors and the ratings.

Having calculated the Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2) value of 245.47 and getting a p-value of 0.0 (rounded, effectively < 0.001), we went ahead to compare this with the critical value from the Chi-Square distribution table. The critical value is calculated depending on the degrees of freedom (df) and the significance level (α). In this instance, where $df = 20$ and the significance level is $\alpha = 0.05$, the relevant tabulated value of Chi-Square (χ^2) = 31.41. Because the calculated χ^2 value (245.47) is much greater than the tabulated critical value (31.41), and the p-value is well below the 0.05 significance level, we have strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). The rejection of the null hypothesis means that there is a significant relationship between the factors and their corresponding ratings. This result implies that the way people score various factors is not a result of random variation but rather depends on the particular factor being measured. That is, the differences observed in ratings are statistically significant, reflecting a dependency between the factors and how they are scored. This finding reinforces the significance of the factors that were studied in influencing individuals' ratings, confirming that differences in responses are not a matter of chance but an actual relationship between the factors themselves and their perceived effect.

Rating in terms of taste by customers

The ratings of customers to various Energy Drinks in terms of their taste were collected to understand the preference of customers towards a brand. The responses are presented in the following table:

Table: Rating in terms of taste

Energy Drinks/ Ranks	Excellent (5)	V e r y Good (4)	Good (3)	Average (2)	Poor (1)
Sting	48	41	7	4	0
Redbull	9	15	57	16	4
Thumps UP Charged	12	46	30	12	0
Monster Energy	8	11	44	28	9
Predator	10	29	25	20	16
Others	9	19	44	19	9

Weighted Mean Scores (WMS) for Taste Ratings:

These ratings point to the collective customer preference of each beverage's taste (larger ratings = better taste experience). The data analysis of taste preference-based consumer ratings shows Sting has the top weighted mean score of 4.33 as the most preferred energy drink by respondents. This implies that the flavour profile is well-received by consumers, possibly because it is sweet, has a distinctive taste, or is generally attractive. After Sting, Thums UP Charged ranks second with a weighted mean score of 3.58, reflecting a high affinity among consumers, although short of Sting. Redbull (3.09) and Others (3.00) fall into moderate acceptance, meaning that though reasonably accepted, they are not in the best class. At the lower preference level, Predator (2.97) and Monster Energy (2.81) have the lowest weighted mean ratings, meaning that these beverages are not preferred in terms of flavour. This could be because of a less desirable taste, a more intense or unknown flavour, or a product that does not meet consumer taste. For instance, Sting had the best taste score (WMS = 4.33), whereas Monster Energy had the worst (WMS = 2.81). This finding is strong evidence that taste preference is biased by brand, and consumers do not equally rate all brands. Generally, the data indicates that consumers prefer energy drinks with sweeter or more recognizable flavours, as evident through

the higher popularity of Sting and Thums UP Charged. In contrast, Monster Energy is ranked lowest, which could be a sign that its flavour is more divisive or less acceptable to the overall consumer taste.

The results of the Chi-Square test indicate a Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2) value of 211.08 with 20 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$). The large chi-square value reflects a substantial deviation from expected frequencies, i.e., the taste ratings observed are significantly different across brands. The very low p-value confirms strong statistical significance, and one can assert with high probability that these differences by chance are highly unlikely. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0), establishing that taste scores are not distributed randomly among brands. Rather, certain brands of energy drinks are rated consistently higher than others, demonstrating unmistakable consumer preference. These results identify taste as a significant driver of brand perception and consumption. Businesses can leverage this knowledge to streamline their product formulation, improve marketing efforts, and more effectively respond to consumer taste preferences to improve brand loyalty and market positioning.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

- 1. Prioritize High-Performing Brands (Sting & Thumps UP Charged):** Sting has the best Weighted Mean Score (WMS) of 4.33, showing high customer preference for its taste. Thumps UP Charged also fared well (WMS = 3.58). These brands need to retain their flavour quality and leverage their high taste ratings in marketing promotions to solidify their competitive edge.
- 2. Enhance Taste for Low-Rated Brands (Monster Energy & Predator):** Monster Energy (WMS = 2.81) and Predator (WMS = 2.97) had the lowest scores in terms of taste. They need to reformulate the flavours or conduct customer feedback surveys to know why their taste is less liked. Introducing new flavours or modifying sweetness, carbonation, or aftertaste could enhance customer perception.
- 3. Capitalize on Consumer Preferences in Marketing:** Brands such as Sting and Thumps UP Charged can emphasize their

better taste in promotional campaigns and on-packaging. They can claim “Voted Best-Tasting Energy Drink” on the basis of customer ratings. Lower-rated competitors can reposition themselves by highlighting other benefits (e.g., health aspects, energy boost, or novel ingredients).

4. **Conduct Further Taste Testing & Regional Analysis:** The research indicates taste preference differs greatly between brands but does not say whether this differs per region or consumer segments. Regional taste preference surveys can assist in flavour customisation for various markets, helping brands.
5. **Provide Taste-Based Variants:** As preferences for taste vary, the companies need to think of introducing several flavour profiles to appeal to more consumers. For instance, a milder, fruitier one for occasional drinkers and an intense, stronger one for serious consumers who enjoy a strong flavour.
6. **Competitive Strategy for Low-Rated Brands:** Monster Energy, Predator, and Others require greater promotional efforts or brand repositioning to win more consumers. Limited-time offer promotional flavours, influencer collaborations, and taste test challenges can reshape consumer perception.
7. **Step Up Product Sampling & Consumer Engagement:** Brands that are lower in taste scores must provide free samples in retail or events to inspire trial and collect direct feedback. Social media campaigns where users can vote for their favourite flavours or recommend amendments can further engage the brand.

Conclusion

The research emphasizes that flavour is a prominent driver of customer preference in the energy drink market, as corroborated by the high correlation between the Chi-Square test values. The drastic difference in flavour ratings among brands indicates that consumers do not experience all energy drinks similarly, corroborating the impact of flavour in driving brand affinity and buying behaviours. Sting and Thums UP Charged brands, with which they performed better on taste ratings, must concentrate on sustaining their competitive advantage by delivering reliable

quality, exercising their favourable brand image, and persisting with product innovation and focused advertisement campaigns to retain consumers. Conversely, lower-rated brands like Monster Energy and Predator can invest in flavour enhancement, product reformulation, and sensory research to improve alignment with consumer taste. To fortify their market position, all brands can gain from active consumer feedback analysis, introducing new or better flavours, and strategic marketing that emphasizes taste as a key differentiator. By emphasizing taste-led product innovation and consumer interaction, energy drink companies can optimize customer satisfaction, foster brand loyalty, and propel long-term market expansion.

References

- Smith, J., & Brown, R. (2021). *Market trends and consumer preferences in the energy drink industry*. *Journal of Consumer Insights*, 15(2), 45-60.
- Patel, S., & Williams, L. (2020). *The role of brand image in energy drink consumption*. *International Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(3), 112-128.
- Kim, H., & Park, J. (2019). *Sensory appeal and consumer loyalty in energy drinks*. *Food and Beverage Consumer Studies*, 22(1), 78-92.
- White, D., & Green, T. (2022). *Pricing strategies and consumer purchase behaviour in the energy drink sector*. *Business and Economic Studies*, 30(4), 101-119.
- Thompson, M., & Lee, A. (2018). *The impact of health concerns on energy drink consumption*. *Health and Nutrition Research*, 25(5), 134-150.
- Johnson, K., & Hernandez, P. (2021). *Digital marketing and social media strategies of energy drink brands*. *Journal of Digital Consumer behaviour*, 20(2), 88-104.
- Garcia, L., & Patel, R. (2020). *Consumer demographics and energy drink preferences*. *Consumer behaviour and Market Trends*, 17(3), 66-80.
- Miller, C., & Roberts, J. (2019). *The effect of packaging and labelling on consumer buying decisions*. *International Journal of Product Marketing*, 21(1), 45-59.
- Wong, T., & Zhang, X. (2023). *Consumer attitudes toward energy drink regulations and safety concerns*. *Journal of Food Policy & Regulation*, 28(2), 77-94.
- Nelson, D., & Carter, S. (2022). *The influence of celebrity and athlete endorsements on energy drink sales*. *Branding and Advertising Studies*, 19(4), 99-115.