

Red Bull Marketing Research Project

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Company Profile

With its iconic slogan "Red Bull gives you wings," Red Bull GmbH has established itself as one of the most iconic energy drink companies in the world. Under the leadership of its founder and current CEO, Dietrich Mateschitz, the company maintains the highest market share of any energy drink company across the globe ("Top Energy Drink Companies in the U.S.," 2019). Mateschitz founded Red Bull in 1984, launching the iconic energy drink in Austria, where its headquarters are located to this day.

According to Forbes magazine, Red Bull has sold a cumulative 75 billion cans since its introduction and has also sold 6.8 billion cans across 171 countries in 2019, generating a revenue of \$6.5 billion. The company's mission statement is as follows: "We are dedicated to uphold Red Bull standards, while maintaining a leadership position in the energy drinks category when delivering superior customer service in a highly efficient and profitable manner. We create a culture where employees share best practices dedicated to coaching and developing our organization as an employer of choice" (Ramos, 2012).

Red Bull energy drinks are appreciated worldwide by top athletes, busy professionals, college students, and travelers. To satisfy such a wide range of customers, the company offers a variety of flavors and editions of its energy drinks. In addition to their original Red Bull Energy Drink, the company has added a sugar-free and a zero edition. Most recently, it released new flavors, including peach, yellow, blue, coconut, green, orange, pear, and red.

The company's marketing strategy speaks to Red Bull's success and serves as its competitive advantage, setting it apart from competitors, which include Monster, Rockstar, and Bang Energy. The company generates awareness through proprietary extreme sports events, including Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series, Red Bull Air Race, Red Bull Crashed Ice, stand-out stunts such as the Stratos space diving project, and many other sponsored events listed on their website.

The company has also found success in other marketing strategies, such as advertisements in the form of cartoons. Red Bull's unique storytelling approach includes producing cartoons featuring the world-famous slogan "Red Bull gives you wings" in campaigns that showcase the company's personality in a fun way. Another famous strategy has been filling cities with their blue and silver cars with huge size cans on top. Not only are these cars easily recognizable but they are also associated with free drinks, which are handed to the public by their representatives. Such strategy represents both an effective and personal way to advertise its products, placing Red Bull's energy drinks as not only as products but as a fun experience.



Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths

Red Bull has proven its success and popularity since its founding. Most impressively, its products taste similar to energy drinks of other companies and yet, Red Bull manages to stand out because of the way the company has branded itself.

Red Bull's marketing strategy is very cohesive from its sponsorships and events to its website and social media platforms. It is also especially unique within the energy drink realm because no other energy drink company markets itself as an extreme-sports drink. By sponsoring different sport events and over 500 athletes, Red Bull places its products as the lead drinks for extreme sport-athletes (Spurgeon, 2013).

The popularity of the company's drinks is highly associated with their placement as an experiential brand by sponsoring experiences so that customers will relate the products to specific experiences. For instance, Red Bull sponsors numerous music festivals and hands out free drinks so that people think of Red Bull when they attend music festivals in the future, making its energy drinks the actors, not simply products. Similarly, Red Bull's famous soapboxing event is an event highly associated with Red Bull's energy drinks, an event where anyone can build their own vehicle out of whatever they want and fly it down a hill, which supports their branding as an extreme sports drink ("Red Bull Events," n.d.).

Red Bull's sustainability mission is another one of its strengths as a company since all products come in 100% recyclable aluminum cans ("Red Bull Products," n.d.). As climate change becomes a bigger consumer concern, companies that strive to be environmentally friendly tend to see growth in sales, especially within a younger demographic. Red Bull claims that 80% of the energy used in their facilities comes from renewable sources ("A can has more than one life," n.d.). The company has also implemented a 'Wall-to-Wall' production at their factory, which means that the cans are manufactured and filled up at the same place, saving the energy that would otherwise be wasted in transportation ("A can has more than one life," n.d.).

Weaknesses

On the other hand, some of Red Bull's strengths can also act against them, such as its marketing strategy. It can be argued that their strategy is appealing and successful among male customers since it sells the idea of being a radical athlete by drinking the energy drink through videos and pictures on their website and social media. Yet, as the company advertises its product at masculine athletic or extreme sports events, people who are not interested in sports may not



consider purchasing a Red Bull drink or even feel intimidated by the “radicalness” associated with the product.

Another major weakness is that Red Bull products are generally seen as unhealthy. According to the Department of Agriculture (2019), an 8-ounce can of Red Bull contains 30 mg of caffeine, while the same volume of coffee contains around 100 mg, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (n.d.). Although the regular Red Bull contains more sugar than a cup of coffee, there are alternative Red Bull products that contain zero sugar. However, it is still regarded as an unhealthy drink due to inefficient advertisements that do not highlight the nutritional aspects of the product. As a result, Red Bull loses valuable customers that perceive energy drinks as unhealthy due to the stigma associated with them.

Opportunities & Threats

Opportunities

While Red Bull held over 35% of the energy drink market share in 2019, a greater share than its competitors, saturation of the market continues and Red Bull has to compete for customers (Bedford, 2020). Red Bull is privately owned, unlike some of its competitors such as Monster, which is distributed by The Coca-Cola Company and, as a result, is sold in places that have contracts with Coca-Cola. Colleges that sign a contract with Coca-Cola sell only Monster products in Coca-Cola vending machines and student stores, giving Monster a potential monopoly on campuses filled with potential consumers (Williams, 2012). Therefore, an opportunity for Red Bull would be to break into campuses that have deals with Coca-Cola through third party vending machines, preventing Coca-Cola from blocking the sale of Red Bull energy drinks. In addition to this opportunity, Red Bull could also increase its marketing and brand awareness by advertising where its products are sold off-campus.

There is an opportunity to broaden the target market of Red Bull by targeting more women. The company already sponsors female musicians and athletes but it could increase its sponsorship and better advertise its target audience (Halloran, 2017). For instance, there is a lack of women featured on their website and social media platforms, which could be easily solved by sponsoring more women. In addition, very few energy drinks specifically target women and as a giant in the market, Red Bull has the opportunity to absorb this in their marketing strategy and differentiate itself from other brands that marginalize women in their marketing.

The growing global market of energy drinks is expected to hit \$84.7 billion by 2026 (Trent, 2019). The market is growing largely in Asia-Pacific, a highly populous area of the world (Asia-Pacific Energy Drinks Market: Growth: Trends: Forecast (2019-2024)). In China



specifically, there is a growing demand for functional beverages, so Red Bull has the opportunity to break into the market and create a large presence before other companies through marketing. The company is already a global brand and could use this growing market to expand its global reach. The brand has a large number of resources that can help it break into the new market that smaller competitors might not be able to.

Currently, Red Bull is produced in Austria and Switzerland but new production facilities in other territories could decrease internal costs. A manufacturing plant is currently underway in Arizona, for instance, and Red Bull's canning facility in Glendale has added 100 jobs (Fifield, 2019). Currently, the energy drink is being made in Europe and shipped around the world, but opening a manufacturing site in the United States has the opportunity to cut down on costs.

Threats

No different from any other industry, threats to the Red Bull brand are predominantly its competitors. Recently, a giant has entered the energy drink cooler: Coca-Cola. As it squeezes in for shelf space, inevitably, something will have to come out. Will it mean a reduction of the Red Bull line of products? Perhaps Monster's product line? Regulation by some retailers has Coke Energy expelled from the cool kids' table. It will have to be shelved with other soft drinks, not energy drinks, as a condition of litigation with partner, Monster. Red Bull and Monster currently make up nearly 75% of the U.S. energy drink market and it's not difficult to understand why Coca-Cola wants a piece of it (Mordor 2019).

A series of significant threats to Red Bull involves its potential harm to health. The public maintains a generally negative impression of energy drinks because of perceived health threats (Al-Shaar et al., 2017). Medical communities continue to research possible negative effects ranging "from risk-seeking behavior, such as substance misuse and aggression, mental health problems in the form of anxiety and stress, to increased blood pressure, obesity, kidney damage, fatigue, stomachaches and irritation" (Frontiers, 2017). Governments have and may add to regulations that place special taxes on or prevent the sale of energy drinks to the public. Clearly, this would be hazardous to Red Bull's profitability.

Key Issues

Potential Harm to Health

The World Health Organization released a report in 2014 suggesting that "increased consumption of energy drinks may pose a danger to public health, especially among young



people” (WHO/Europe, para. 1). Energy drinks are non-alcoholic beverages that contain caffeine, vitamins, and other ingredients, for example, taurine, ginseng, and guarana. They are typically marketed as boosting energy and increasing physical and mental performance.

In 2015, the Mayo Clinic presented a study demonstrating that a single energy drink raised the drinker’s blood pressure and cortisol levels, a measure of stress, setting off a number of investigations into the health effects of all energy drinks. Mayo Clinic Cardiologist, Anna Svatikova, M.D., Ph.D. confirms “increases in blood pressure are accompanied by increases in norepinephrine, a stress hormone chemical, and this could predispose an increased risk of cardiac events – even in healthy people” (Klein, 2015).

In the U.S., many energy drink companies, including Red Bull, have found an FDA loophole through which they can classify their products as food supplements. While the FDA regulates dietary supplements and ingredients, it does so under a different set of regulations than those that cover conventional foods, leaving manufacturers able to put as much caffeine in them as they want. They can even mix caffeine with other stimulants in such a way that it could cause cardiovascular or nervous system problems.

An original Red Bull energy drink contains 1500mg of taurine, 113.5mg of caffeine and 39g of sugar and 160 calories in their larger, 12oz can. Although it has sugar, Red Bull is not necessarily as bad for one’s health as people assume. In 2008, France’s health authorities concluded that the taurine level in Red Bull was not harmful and lifted its 8-year ban against products containing the amino acid (Tandy, 2008). The amount of caffeine is similar to a cup of coffee and less than that of some sodas. In a can of Red Bull, the most harmful ingredients are caffeine and sugar, two of the ingredients people have been warned about in any product for decades. When comparing Red Bull’s calorie count to a 16-ounce latte from Starbucks, the blonde vanilla latte has 240 calories, 80 more than the 12oz can of Red Bull (Starbucks, 2020).

Male-Centered Advertising

Currently, the videos on Red Bull’s social media platforms, sponsored events, and their general branding can be perceived as too masculine because of a predominance of male athletes as well as activities and even colors associated with men. In fact, Red Bull may even be intimidating for some people due to the essence of radical athleticism that is present throughout their entire marketing strategy. From the sound effects in their videos to the adrenaline-rush people are expected to get from quickly glancing at the company’s website, Red Bull makes one thing clear: their products are designed for people that “live life on the edge.”

Research shows that 68.9% of people that drink Red Bull once or twice a month are male. This means that only 31.3% of consumers that drink one or two Red Bulls a month are women.



Out of more frequent consumers, specifically, people that drink 5 or more Red Bulls monthly, an overwhelming 73.9% are men. Women represent only 26.1% of Red Bull's most frequent consumers (See Exhibit 1). This research shows that while many women drink Red Bull, there is a large gap in the number of men and women that consume the energy drink. It is not a coincidence that the overwhelming majority of Red Bull's consumers are men, as they are the company's target audience. In fact, a 2016 study reported that 20% of female respondents consume energy drinks almost daily, only 7% less than men. 43% of women claimed they consumed energy drinks several times a week. 49% of men claimed the same (Statista Survey, 2016). This proves that women are large consumers of energy drinks, not that far behind men, and yet, represent a small portion of Red Bull's consumers when contrasted with men.

Though Red Bull has made efforts to appeal to female customers in the past, like hosting campus events with female participants and sponsoring female athletes, more can certainly be done to better include women as part of its target audience ("Red Bull's Integrated Marketing Communication," 2013). Red Bull's target audience, though very well represented, could be expanded. Although some of the athletes that Red Bull sponsors are women, the average non-extreme-sport athlete is not as well represented through Red Bull's current marketing strategy. Their social media platforms and website show professional surfers riding giant waves, motorcycle racers speeding through dangerous terrain, and snowboard phenomenons flying through the mountains. These videos do not highlight what the average Red Bull consumer does in their day-to-day lives, which can cause potential customers to feel like they do not belong.

A campaign that focused on promoting Red Bull as an energy drink that helps regular men and women be powerful, or live life on the edge, is something that would follow Red Bull's general aesthetic and strategy, but also include people that may be intimidated by their products. A hashtag like #PowerfulWomenDrinkRedBull would be also effective in including women in their strategy without changing their demographic entirely or excluding men from the narrative. Another suggestion regarding changes that Red Bull can make includes a campaign focused on the regular college student. Exhibit 1 shows that only 5.6% of people that drink Red Bull once or twice a month are college students. Yet, college students consume large amounts of caffeine throughout their time at school. Red Bull should use this as an opportunity to attract new buyers because their product is a solution to a problem many college students face. This would show men and women in natural settings, like a library or a dorm room using Red Bull as a means to be powerful and complete their work. The college-student point of view is important because as an energy drink, Red Bull should be promoted as something that will get a student through an all-nighter or a stressful day.



Summary of Findings & Ideas for Primary Research

Red Bull GmbH, founded in 1984 by Dietrich Mateschitz in Austria ("Company Facts," n.d.), is an energy drink company, famous for its iconic slogan "Red Bull gives you wiiiings." It has the largest market share among energy drink companies, with products that are consumed worldwide and that generate billions in revenue in 2019, according to Forbes. Its target audience, 18-34-year-old men, ranges from athletes to students, which is why the company strives to implement new editions of products in order to satisfy a wide range of customers (Bergstrom, 2017). Among its most notable characteristics lies its unique marketing strategies, including sponsored events, cartoon advertisements, and customized cars for the distribution of free drinks. Based on these marketing strategies, it is possible to identify opportunities to enhance market productivity. At the same time, opportunities lie within addressing the company's weaknesses and solving its threats.

Research shows that Red Bull has a huge competitive advantage when it comes to extreme sports athletes. By sponsoring numerous events, such as Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series, as well as over 500 athletes, the company has become a reference for those motivated by adrenaline (Spurgeon, 2013). As an experiential brand, Red Bull also looks for opportunities to lead people to associate their products with specific experiences, such as music festivals. In addition, the company has also had a good reputation in terms of sustainability issues by producing 100% recyclable aluminum cans and saving energy by implementing wall to wall production which cuts down on carbon emissions ("Red Bull Products," n.d.).

At the same time, Red Bull has faced issues regarding its very masculine approach to sales, as well as its perception as an unhealthy drink. The company's social media platforms and website are very focused on extreme sports, which is unappealing to a lot of people. It has also not found success in advertising nutritional information regarding its products, which are seen by the general public as unhealthy. Regarding its competition, the main disadvantage for Red Bull is the partnerships that other brands have with distributors, such as Monster and Coca-Cola. Such contracts prevent Red Bull from selling in locations where Coca-Cola is present, giving the advantage to one of the company's main competitors, Monster (Williams, 2012).

Nevertheless, all weaknesses and threats can be addressed through different marketing strategies and campaigns. Further research can be conducted on the best ways to advertise products as healthy options, breaking the stigmas and stereotypes regarding energy drinks. Red Bull can better infiltrate college campuses by conducting deals with third party vending machines, which would prevent Coca-Cola from blocking the sale of Red Bull's products. In addition, the company could better advertise where its products are sold off-campus and increase the promotion strategies of handing out free cans on campuses. In regards to its gender-based



marketing, in order to include more women, the company could feature more women on the company's media platforms and starting campaigns that empower women, such as #PowerfulWomenDrinkRedBull.

Other opportunities include market expansion since the growing global market of energy drinks is expected to continue growing, especially in the Asia-Pacific area. Production facilities in other territories could also decrease the costs of manufacturing the products, as well as represent a possible increase in the number of customers. Lastly, further research must be conducted on the possible impacts the introduction of Coca-Cola in the energy drink business may have on Red Bull's sales and overall success.

Looking ahead, there is much to explore in terms of research to maximize Red Bull's opportunities. Surveys will serve to assess students' views on Red Bull products and on the brand in comparison to its competitors. It will be interesting to find out what consumers perceive when looking at current Red Bull advertisements, especially in terms of being healthy or unhealthy, which will help the company address misconceptions about energy drink ingredients. Focus groups will certainly be helpful to address the gender gap that exists among Red Bull's customers, providing insights on how to better advertise its products to potential female customers. Although the current marketing strategy works effectively among the targeted male population, it would be beneficial to find a way to better include the female population. Therefore, primary research through surveys, interviews, and focus groups will help identify where the company lacks strength in terms of targeting consumers. Such information will then be turned into action plans to make Red Bull even more competitive in the market.

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EXHIBIT 1 - Red Bull Consumption Demographic

Enter Crosstab Name	TOTAL	GENDER: MALE	GENDER: FEMALE	FULL/PART TIME COLLEGE STUDENT CURRENTLY: FULL-COLLEGE STUDENT
TOTAL	13,296	5,761	7,535	583
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	100%	48.3%	51.7%	5%
	100	100	100	100
ENERGY DRINKS & SHOTS-#DRNKS LST 30 DAYS: RED BULL REGULAR: 0	62	** 30	* 32	** 11
	0.8%	** 0.8%	* 0.7%	** 2.5%
	100%	** 50.2%	* 49.8%	** 16.6%
	100	** 104	* 96	** 331
ENERGY DRINKS & SHOTS-#DRNKS LST 30 DAYS: RED BULL REGULAR: 1-2	241	156	85	** 18
	2.5%	3.6%	1.5%	** 2.8%
	100%	68.9%	31.1%	** 5.6%
	100	143	60	** 110
ENERGY DRINKS & SHOTS-#DRNKS LST 30 DAYS: RED BULL REGULAR: 3-4	105	69	* 36	** 5
	1.2%	1.9%	* 0.6%	** 1.4%
	100%	73.4%	* 26.6%	** 5.8%
	100	152	* 51	** 116
ENERGY DRINKS & SHOTS-#DRNKS LST 30 DAYS: RED BULL REGULAR: 5 OR MORE	118	75	* 43	** 9
	1.1%	1.8%	* 0.6%	** 1%
	100%	73.9%	* 26.1%	** 4.4%
	100	153	* 50	** 88

Background

Red Bull is often associated with being an unhealthy beverage, regardless of calories or caffeine levels. It is also a company that makes use of a gendered marketing strategy, something that can be observed by looking at the company's website, social media platforms, sponsored events, and even its packaging design. To unveil whether these factors influence the average consumer, a focus group was conducted. Some of the specific research questions asked are outlined below:

1. What are some words that you associate with Red Bull?
2. Do you believe a can of Red Bull to be more caloric than a grande latte from Starbucks?
3. Do you know what Taurine is? If so, what do you associate with it?
4. Who do you think the Red Bull target audience is? Why?
5. Do you think that Red Bull is a brand that appeals to women?

Method

The focus group was conducted in a classroom at the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. There were 7 participants, 3 of which were women. All participants were 18 to 22-year-old college students. The general procedure followed was laid out as the following:

1. Ice-breaker question(s)
2. Consumer habits questions
3. Brand association questions
4. Health questions
5. Website and Instagram questions
6. Gender-based marketing questions
7. What the brand can do to improve questions

Results

Red Bull's target audience and marketing strategy made up much of the first key discussion point, as all three women in the focus group claimed they felt left out of Red Bull's marketing strategy. One participant said that she did not "feel like Red Bull specifically targets women. They lean more naturally toward men. That doesn't necessarily offend me, but it's interesting to note." Another participant said that she believes Red Bull's marketing strategy is "tilted toward men. The look of the product is pretty abrasive. The color scheme and logo are very manly and harsh." Another participant claimed that she did not "feel represented at all. This is pretty much the opposite of who I am." With regard to Red Bull's Instagram, one participant noted that "they are not purposely not targeting women, it just tends to happen. Red Bull is more geared towards men because of the nature of its product, but they do care about female representation," pointing out that there are some women highlighted on the platform but not as many on its website. Still discussing the company's gender-based marketing strategy, a 20-year-old male athlete said he did not feel represented by Red Bull either: "I don't think it

targets me. It just targets adventurous people and people who like extreme sports. As a swimmer, I never felt inclined to use it.”

The second key discussion was the general perception that Red Bull's products are unhealthy and how the company, according to a participant, “would have to enter an entirely different market” in order to attract some consumers. One group member posited, “I automatically associate anything Red Bull with chemicals and unhealthiness. If they created a totally different brand, I might try it.” Another added, “whatever they produce will still have the connotation of unhealthy for me.” Although 5 of the 7 participants stated that they believed Red Bull to have fewer calories than a grande latte from Starbucks, the majority also believed Red Bull to be “full of chemicals.” All participants agreed that Red Bull is perceived to be generally unhealthy and none were familiar with taurine, a widely debated ingredient.

Discussion

The focus group primarily served to assess the unhealthiness and gendered marketing strategy associated with the Red Bull brand and products. The results of the focus group align with the expectations of Red Bull being perceived as generally unhealthy and male-oriented. There were some surprising discoveries, however. For example, a male athlete admitted that he did not at all feel represented by the brand. Despite being expected to be the one to identify most with Red Bull, given the company's current target audience and marketing strategy, his response highlighted how the brand is not necessarily appealing to all athletes. He claimed that Red Bull appeals to more adventurous people and extreme athletes, rather than those who participate in less extreme sports like himself. Nevertheless, his insight does not disprove that Red Bull advertises more to men. The female participants identified the general impression of the website and Instagram as “cool”, but said it did not attract them due to the “edginess” of the videos and photos, the “abrasive color scheme,” the number of male versus female athletes shown on the website, and the “harsh lines on the Red Bull packaging,” which reminded them of a logo for a car company. These insights suggest that Red Bull’s packaging, media platforms, and general way of branding itself does not appeal to the average 18 to 22-year-old woman.

Secondly, the focus group illustrated that Red Bull energy drinks are strongly associated with unhealthiness. However, most of the participants believed Red Bull to have fewer calories than a medium-sized Starbucks latte. The participants did not know what taurine was, which hindered a discussion on that subject. This proves that the participants believe Red Bull to be a very unhealthy drink without ever having heard of one of its main ingredients.

The question to probe further is this: How can Red Bull expand its marketing platform to include the female audience? Just as important is discovering why the general public has an overall perception of energy drinks as unhealthy. Investigating these issues would allow Red Bull to make necessary changes to its advertising approaches in order to target more women and to eliminate, or at least mitigate, the association between unhealthiness and energy drinks.

The group dynamic was positive and flowed well due to the participants’ willingness to share their strong opinions on the topic. The moderator was careful to give each focus group

participant the chance to speak by directly asking each member to respond to questions individually. As a result, the focus group participants were very engaged and provided a lot of insights. The focus group was limited due to the small size of only seven participants and the lack of more female participants. A larger focus group and more time to conduct the focus group would have yielded more detailed responses. More participants would have allowed for a better group division, facilitating the discussion of the company's gendered marketing strategy.

Moderator's Guide

1. Ice-breaker:
 - Raise your hand if you feel like you could use an energy boost right now?
2. Consumer habits:
 - What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear the words 'energy drinks'?
 - What are your habits regarding energy drinks?
 - Is there a brand you prefer?
 - How many energy drinks do you have on a weekly basis?
3. Brand association:
 - What comes to mind when you think of Red Bull?
 - Do you associate Red Bull with any specific experiences?
 - In what situations have you had a Red Bull energy drink?
 - How many times a month do you drink a Red Bull energy drink?
4. Health connotations
 - Compared to a medium-sized latte from Starbucks, do you believe a regular Red Bull to have more, less or the same amount of calories?
 - Do you know what Taurine is?
 - What do you associate with it?
 - Why do you think Red Bull is unhealthy?
5. Website and Instagram
 - *Show participants the company's website*
 - Is it effective to convince you to purchase a Red Bull product?
 - Who do you think the target audience is? Why?
 - *Show participants the company's Instagram for 1 minute*
 - What aspects do you like / not like about Red Bull's Instagram?
 - What aspects appeal to you the most?
6. Gender-based marketing
 - Do you feel represented by Red Bull?
 - Why or why not?
 - For women specifically, does Red Bull feel like a brand that appeals to you?
 - Why or why not?
7. What the brand can do improve
 - What is something Red Bull could do to attract you more?

Background

The purpose of the ethnography study is to observe and interact with students at East Carolina University to gain a better understanding of how college students perceive Red Bull. The goal was to understand the environment students consume energy drinks, why they consume energy drinks, how often they consume energy drinks and if female or male college students are more perceptive to Red Bull. The ethnographic research builds on the previous research as there is a greater engagement with the target audience and the research adds qualitative data about consumers' opinions of Red Bull in an environment they would consume the product.

Observations

My observations of the students at ECU was conducted on February 26th, 2020 from 4:00pm to 7:00pm at the student union and Joyner library. I work for Red Bull as a part of the Wings Team, a group of college students given the task of sampling Red Bull to prospective consumers and gauging their opinions on the product. Therefore my observations were conducted during work. In the student union, many students were eating an early dinner or studying with friends in a relaxed and loud environment. Around 150 students were on the main floor around 4:00pm, shortly before dinner. 100 students accepted a Red Bull with varying preferences for the original energy drink and sugar free. One male student told me that he does not like sugar free drinks in general and asked specifically for the full sugar drink. The idea of “diet drinks” tasting differently occurred several times and the students indicated that these drinks were subpar in regards to flavor. 30 of the 100 people that accepted the drink asked for the sugar free option. While some students wanted sugar free and others viewed the option poorly, there was a theme of focusing on sugar free.

While asking about preference of sugar content, I asked students how often they consume Red Bull while at the student union. One female said that she does not consider herself a frequent user but has a Red Bull before her 8 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, this is the consumption of a regular user. Of the 100 people sampled, 79 were considered to be infrequent users, meaning they have consumed a Red Bull 1-3 times a month. These students said that they have an energy drink when they need the energy for activities like studying or partying. 30 of those that agreed to take a Red Bull were regular users such as the girl that drinks a Red Bull before her classes. The regular users have incorporated the energy into their routine and associated it with an aspect of their life such as early classes. Many students associated the drink with a specific event in their life. The theme of moments and specific times to drink energy drinks is evident in the students.

At Joyner library around 5:30 many students were studying for upcoming midterms. ECU only has one main library where many students congregate to study individually in cubes, at group tables or at an open computer lab. The library main floor of the library is very social and only moderately quiet. There is a Starbucks near the entrance and many students were drinking coffee while studying. Of the students drinking an energy drink, they were drinking Monster. I saw no Red Bull available for sale on campus and when asking a female that was drinking a Monster energy drink if she would like to try a Red Bull she said “thank you so much, I normally drink Red Bull but I have not been able to find it on campus anywhere.” ECU could have a closed contract with Coca-Cola, preventing the sale of other competing drinks on campus.

Even the students drinking coffee wanted a Red Bull while studying and many people seemed to be familiar with the product and the editions available. While the students were in the library, one woman told us that she mainly drinks Coconut Berry Red Bull “as a mixer while partying.” Only a few students specifically referenced Red Bull and the consumption of alcohol but those that did strongly associated the two. Many students said “I could use the energy”, indicating that they drank the product only when they felt tired or thought of the drink as a solution to fatigue. Due to the frequency of the phrase, it felt like insider language within the campus. Of the near 200 students on the main floor of the library, 150 people accepted the Red Bull. When students denied the offer of the energy drink they said that they would be up all night, their heart would race, or they don’t drink energy drinks. No students referenced Red Bull as unhealthy but underlying health concerns were apparent in around 15% of the students. The students given a Red Bull were very evenly male and female, there was no glaring distinction between the amount of women wanting a Red Bull compared to males. Due to the environment, I believe that many students were more open to drinking a Red Bull or trying it as they saw the product as a way to help them with their studies.

Reflections

The study focused on how students perceived the product and their receptiveness to drinking Red Bull. The information gathered indicated that students associated different times and places to have an energy drink. While some students did not drink energy drinks, none said specifically because they viewed them as unhealthy but instead indicated that they could not consume them because of their own health condition. Many students felt the need for energy while studying more so than other students, implying that they want the drink more for the functional purpose rather than the taste.

This exercise was very comfortable for me because I do something similar everyday at work. Due to my familiarity with the product and being paid to encourage people to try the product there is bias in my observations. I have a positive bias towards Red Bull which might prevent me

from processing all negative comments about the product. However, I purposely tried to pay attention to the initial responses to the product and focus on the reasons people denied the offer. While I am biased towards Red Bull, the findings can still be useful to the research study.

Background

The survey that has been created and published will allow for a closer examination of Red Bull's strengths and weaknesses. There are two main issues this survey aims to address, the first being consumers' negative connotation of the health effects of energy drinks, and the latter being consumers' perception of gender-based marketing employed by energy drink companies and Red Bull specifically. The survey was created with the aim to further the research already done by previous focus groups, interviews, and ethnographic studies. Different from previous research, however, this survey aimed to highlight more specific memories and explore a deeper layer of consumer behavior. The survey tests whether consumers' perception of health affects their energy drink preferences and why. It also aims to understand how consumers feel about gender-specific marketing and whether that negatively affects their perception of a brand. The research questions the survey was based on include "What are college students' perceptions of Red Bull" and "How do negative health connotations and gender-based marketing affect college students' perception of Red Bull?"

Method

The Red Bull team developed an online survey using Qualtrics. We launched the survey on April 9th and closed it on April 13th. The participants were recruited from the MEJO 379.003 class as well as shared with friends of the members of the group via social media.

The total number of participants was 51, including 38 people who identified as female (74.51 percent), 12 who identified as male (25.53 percent) and 1 person chose not to say (1.96 percent). A total of 49 people (96.08 percent) identified as heterosexual/straight and 2 people (3.92 percent) identified as bisexual. Of the 51 people that completed the survey, 46 were college students (90.20 percent), which is further broken down into: 7 freshmen (13.73 percent), 23 sophomores (45.10 percent), 9 juniors (17.65 percent), 5 seniors (9.8 percent, of which 1.96 percent was in the fifth year); 5 people were not students (9.8 percent). Another relevant demographic was whether or not people identified themselves as an athlete ("athlete" in this case referring to those who play sports on a regular basis). A total of 17 people (33.33 percent) said yes and 34 said no (66.67 percent).

We measured customers' perception of how healthy energy drinks are. Response options were on a scale from 1 (extremely unhealthy) to 5 (extremely healthy). We also asked how often consumers opt for the sugar-free version when purchasing an energy drink. Response options were on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). We measured consumers' perception of the Red Bull branding by asking them to describe Red Bull as a person. This aimed to reveal how consumers really felt about Red Bull, as it is easier for consumers to explain their perception of a brand if the brand is described as a person instead of a company. We measured consumers' perception of Red Bull's target audience. Response options were: women between 18-35 years old, men between 18-35 years old, men and women between 18-35 years old, women between 36-50 years old, men between 36-50 years old, men and women between 36-50 years old, and everyone (no specific gender or age). We measured how strongly people agreed with the statement: "ads for energy drinks are generally not appealing to women." Response options were

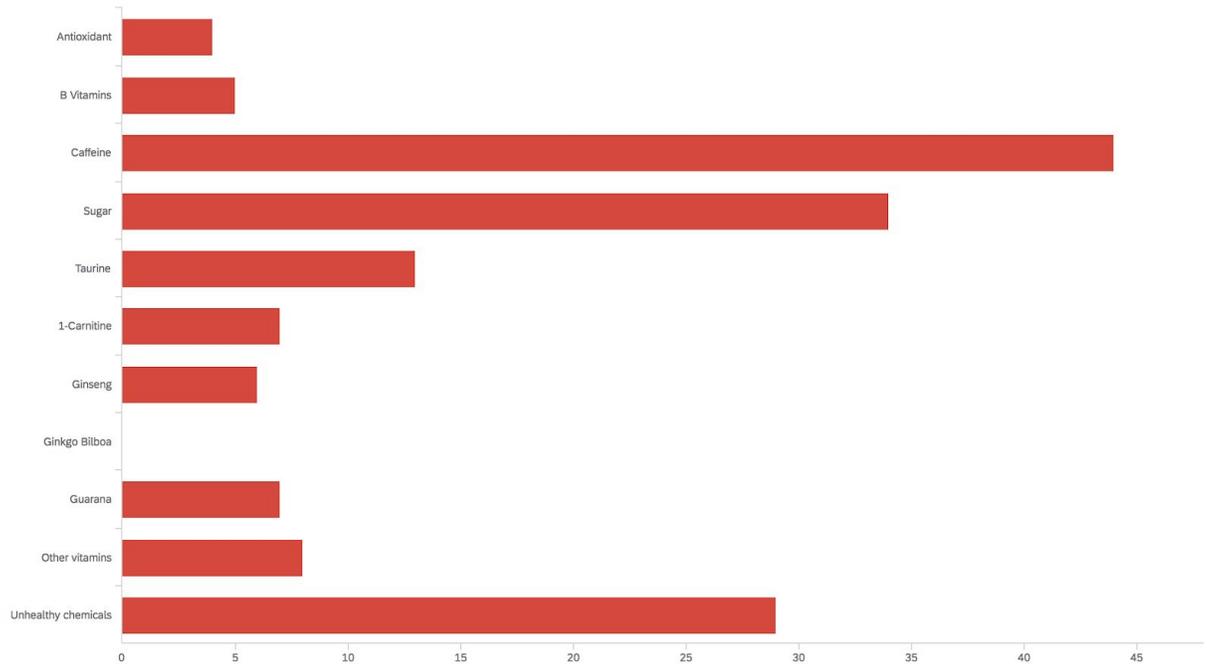
on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey also measured ethnography as it asked whether respondents were college students, what their sexual orientation is, whether they consider themselves to be athletes, what social media platforms they are active on, and a few other demographic questions.

Results

Health :

The survey focused heavily on consumers' opinions of energy drinks in regards to health. When asked about the healthiness of energy drinks, 19 (37.25 %) of the participants view energy drinks as “extremely unhealthy” while 27 (52.94%) selected “moderately unhealthy” and only 5 (9.80%) of the 51 participants selected “neither healthy or unhealthy.” No participants viewed energy drinks as moderately or extremely healthy.

However, only 25 (49.02%) participants factor ingredients into their decision making when purchasing an energy drink. Cross sectioned with the number of energy drinks people consume in a month, of the 23 participants that consume at least one energy drink a month, 13 (56%) people do not factor ingredients into their decision making. The four highest selected ingredients when asked “what ingredients are you certain energy drinks have?” are caffeine (86.27%), sugar (66.67%), unhealthy chemicals (56.86%), and taurine (25.49%). Taurine is an amino acid that is commonly used in the discussion of energy drinks as being potentially harmful to consumers, however, of the 13 participants that selected taurine as a known ingredient, only 5 (38.46%) included taurine in their list of ingredients they consider to be harmful to their health. Below is a graph representing the data from the participants selecting all of the ingredients that they are aware of in energy drinks.



The survey included questions about coffee consumption and 80.39% of the participants believe that energy drinks have more caffeine than a cup of coffee. 25 (69.44%) participants of those that think coffee has less caffeine do not drink energy drinks. Related, only 8 of the 28 participants that do not consume energy drinks never drink coffee (28.57%). The correlation between

Gendered Marketing:

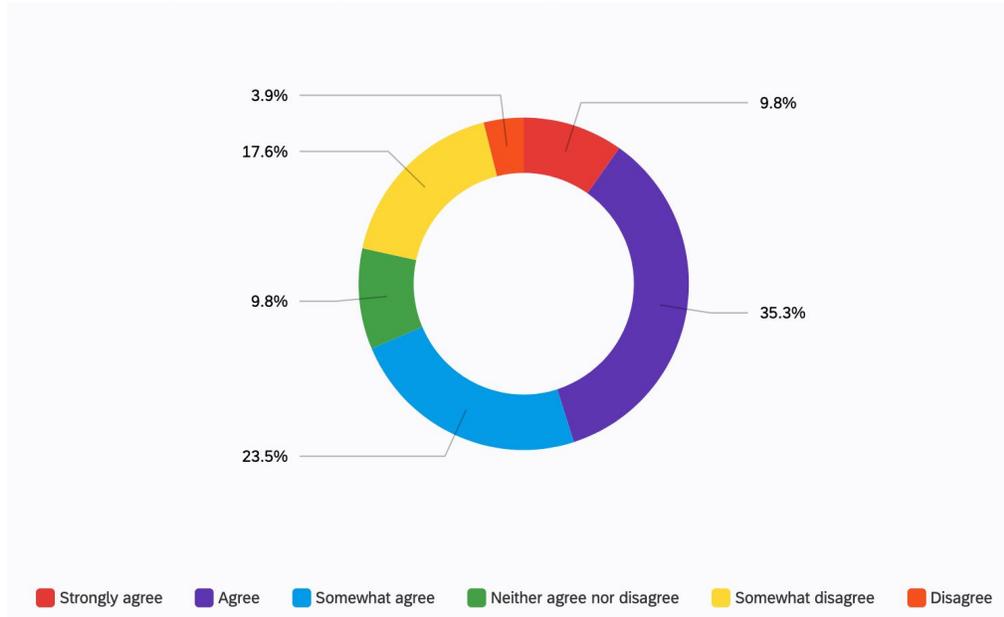
First, it's significant to note that 96% of participants stated that they were aware of the concept of gendered marketing. With regard to our research around gendered marketing, the results show a trend in the opinion that energy drink companies not only target young men in their marketing and advertisements, but that young men are the primary consumers. That being said, only 10% of participants did not agree that energy drink companies cater to a specific market based on gender. In fact, 71% of participants agreed with the statement "Energy drinks are related to masculinity" (though none chose to indicate why that might be).

When asked, 90% of participants agreed that energy drinks ads feature young men engaged in extreme sports and just 12% did not agree that young males are the heaviest users of energy drinks.

While 56% of participants indicated that Red Bull's target audience are both males and females aged 18-35, 69% also stated that energy drink company's ads are not targeted at women. This is a contradiction. See the graphs below.

Who is Red Bull’s target audience?

Ads for energy drinks are generally not targeted a women.”



Discussion

The survey overall aims to understand college students' perception on energy drinks, specifically regarding their health aspect and the gender-specific marketing strategy energy drink companies employ. Our results indicate that the majority of participants acknowledge that energy drinks are unhealthy, which is consistent with the general perception. However, what's interesting is that 49.02% of the participants factor in ingredients in their decision making process. This suggests that more than half of the participants' perception of energy drinks as being unhealthy was influenced by the popular negative opinion.

Background

Red Bull GmbH is an energy drink company, holding the highest market share in its industry. After conducting a SWOT analysis and analyzing secondary researches, the company's main weaknesses were identified as the predominance of males among its consumers and branding, and a strong association with unhealthiness. The data collected for the secondary research assignment found that even though women are large consumers of energy drinks, they still represent a small portion of Red Bull's target audience. In addition, the WHO suggested that increased consumption of energy drinks may pose a danger to public health, but other studies found that the amount of caffeine in energy drinks is similar to a cup of coffee. The questions addressed during the project were: 1. Do women feel represented by Red Bull's marketing? and 2. What factors create a strong association between Red Bull and unhealthiness for consumers?

The focus group conducted addressed consumer habits and brand associations. The results found that most women do not feel represented by Red Bull and that its marketing strategy is tilted toward men. Interestingly, however, the focus group found that not necessarily all men, even athletic men, feel represented by Red Bull. All participants agreed that energy drinks are unhealthy, but most could not point out what ingredients make them unhealthy. The survey aimed to explore a deeper layer of consumer behavior. A total of 71.7% agreed with the statement "Energy drinks are related to masculinity." No participants viewed energy drinks as moderately or extremely healthy. The survey also found that the ingredients most participants believed to be in energy drinks were caffeine, sugar, unhealthy chemicals, and taurine. Lastly, the experiment was based on the stimuli of two similar Red Bull magazine covers, one featuring a man and the other a woman. It found that most people preferred more "striking, edgy, and strong" and that those who preferred the female cover chose it because it was a "feminist cover."

Insight #1: Gendered Marketing

To unveil whether gender-based marketing influences the average consumer, multiple studies were conducted. The focus group had 7 participants, three of whom were women, and all were 18 to 22-year-old college students. It revealed that males and females agree that energy drinks are consumed mostly by young men. This perception was further highlighted in the survey with 80.4% of respondents indicating the same. The focus group collectively felt that the same group (young men) was targeted by energy drink advertisements, particularly by Red Bull due to its receptiveness to images promoting masculinity, thrill-seeking, and "coolness." Female participants said they shied away from the brand due to the edgy, masculine feel that appeals to young masculine men.

The survey allowed for a closer examination of the perception of Red Bull's consumers of gender-specific marketing efforts and whether it affects their energy drink preferences and why. The survey collected data from 51 people, composed of 74.51% people who identified as female and 25.53% as male. Another relevant demographic showed that 33.33% of the participants identified as athletes ("athlete" in the survey was defined as those who play sports on a regular basis). The survey's in-depth inquiry ultimately revealed that while a majority of participants agreed that Red Bull used gendered marketing strategies, they did not believe it

affected energy drink brand preferences or weigh in on a buyer's decision to drink Red Bull, which was somewhat contradicted in later questions about Red Bull's target audience and representation of different social groups.

The experiment used two covers from Red Bull's magazine, "The Red Bulletin". The first featured a male on a motorcycle with darker colors, while the second presented a woman with brighter colors, which helped assess visual impacts and their effects on consumers. Of the 33 participants, 82% identified as female and 93% identified as straight. Participants' average age was 19 years old with a total of 54% identifying as white and 36% as Asian. Considering that the SWOT analysis highlighted Red Bull's powerful brand - one that includes a unique, extreme sports-based marketing strategy - the experiment confirmed the effectiveness of this strategy as more respondents preferred the cover that featured a man. While some revealed that a cover was appealing because the featured athlete was attractive, more participants said the appeal was due to "striking, edgy, and strong" elements in the preferred cover.

Insight #2: Health

The studies also focused largely on the participants' perceptions of energy drinks in regards to health, especially Red Bull. In the focus group and interviews, "chemicals" was a common response among participants when asked to share the first word that came to mind when thinking of energy drinks. In the survey, 56.36% of participants indicated that they are certain energy drinks contain "unhealthy chemicals". The association of Red Bull with chemicals was a pattern throughout the research and indicated that people hesitated to drink energy drinks due to the perception of being potentially harmful to their health.

A majority of the participants in our focus group, interviews, and survey believed one Red Bull energy drink to contain more caffeine than a cup of coffee. Yet, 40% of survey participants drink coffee but do not drink energy drinks. The survey also showed that over 60% of non-energy drink consumers believe that energy drinks contain more caffeine, which indicates a stigma that energy drinks are high in caffeine concentration, contributing to an overall unhealthy image. At the same time, nearly half of the participants that did not drink energy drinks viewed them as "okay to drink in moderation," something that was mentioned in the survey and individual interviews as well.

While many students in the focus group and interviews could not pinpoint exactly why they believe energy drinks are unhealthy, the combination of our researches indicates that chemicals and caffeine fuel the unhealthy notion. Identifying the ingredients students are cautious of and appealing to the consumption of energy drinks in moderation can be helpful for Red Bull to combat the unhealthy impression of its products.

Insight #3: Personas

Although we geared our research to gender and health-related questions, it became clear that people also have very strong associations and perceptions of Red Bull that spanned beyond these insights. A third insight was highlighted especially by the different situations and places that consumers associate with consuming a Red Bull drink. The focus group, interviews, and survey showed that many consumers make a close connection between energy drinks and a

specific occasion, which creates the possibility of advertising to different audiences and representing different consumers through the creation of “Red Bull personas.”

For instance, many consumers associate energy drinks with studying because they need a boost of energy to stay awake and be productive. In one of the ethnographic studies conducted on the ECU campus, a student shared that she only drinks Red Bull for early morning classes. As a result, these consumers often think of places such as libraries as the ideal to drink an energy drink. Commonly mixed with alcoholic beverages, energy drinks have also become a popular part of the nightlife scene, giving party-goers a boost of energy along with their drinks. In the survey, 38% of participants selected partying or clubbing as the ideal situation to drink a Red Bull. Other consumers associate Red Bull with sporting events or sports themselves. Athletes and sports-lovers associate Red Bull with some of their favorite activities due to the company’s current marketing strategy that focuses on extreme sports. The studies also found unexpected Red Bull consumers, including moms, who drink energy drinks throughout the day to maintain their energy levels high for all of their kids’ activities. These personas will allow for more consumer representation while breaking the stereotype that there is only one type of Red Bull consumer.

Our research showed that most Red Bull consumers associate the energy drink with a specific occasion, and they tend not to consume the energy drink elsewhere. For example, people who associate Red Bull with partying will most likely not have an energy drink while studying. As a result, Red Bull has an opportunity to expand its consumer base by marketing its products as multi-purpose, suited for different types of people and occasions.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, research methods including a focus group, interviews, a survey, and an experiment have provided three valuable insights for our client, Red Bull. Firstly, we found that most people perceive Red Bull's marketing strategies to be targeted toward young men, and most women did not feel represented by the company's marketing efforts. Interestingly, however, we found that a good number of male participants, who are within the age range of the company's targeted audience, did not feel represented either because they did not identify with being an athlete or as extreme sports lovers. Secondly, we found that most participants considered energy drinks to be unhealthy, but most were not able to explain why. Lastly, the fact that we found most people only associate Red Bull with one or a few settings was eye-opening. Based on our research and insights we make the following recommendations:

1. Incorporate a wider range of segments in its marketing efforts to allow the company's branding to reach more customers. For example, Red Bull could promote events for both men and women and that are not necessarily related to extreme sports.
2. Publicly address the unhealthy perceptions associated with its products. By sharing information with the public about the ingredients of the company's energy drinks, Red Bull will seem more authentic and sincere. Red Bull also needs to invest in marketing efforts that emphasize how its products are not unhealthy on popular social platforms.

3. Create different Red Bull “personas” for the company’s advertisements to break the stereotypes of being a masculine brand and an unhealthy drink. It should redefine the brand as a multi-faceted company, representing more than just young, sporty men. By emphasizing that there are many types of Red Bull consumers, one of them being extreme sports athletes, Red Bull can also revert the association the brand has with unhealthiness, as athletes tend to care more about their diets and overall health.