

MONSTER ENERGY FOCUS GROUP

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Introduction

Introduction

What we know from our background research

There has been a significant shift in the energy drink market toward health-conscious, visually appealing, and lifestyle-oriented branding.

Our Research Goal

We want to better understand why women aged 18–23 who drink energy drinks actively choose energy drinks other than Monster, even when they are familiar with or enjoy its taste.

Based on our background research, we observed a significant shift in the energy drink market toward health-conscious, visually appealing, and lifestyle-oriented branding. While legacy brands like Monster Energy continue to dominate in global visibility and sales, newer competitors such as Celsius and Bloom have gained strong traction among Gen Z consumers—particularly college-aged women—by aligning with aesthetic trends, wellness culture, and influencer-driven promotion.

Although Monster Energy has strong name recognition and a bold, established identity, its current branding—rooted in aggressive visuals, male-dominated extreme sports, and a lack of gender inclusivity—may be misaligned with the values and preferences of younger, image-conscious consumers. This disconnect was especially apparent on social media, where Monster's Instagram feed largely lacks visible product integration, gender diversity, or relatable lifestyle content.

Our research set out to explore why female college students aged 18–23, many of whom regularly consume energy drinks, actively avoid Monster Energy in favor of other brands—even when they are familiar with or have previously enjoyed its taste. Through a focus group of seven female-identifying University of Oregon students, we examined the factors that influence their beverage choices and how brand perception, visual design, social status, and gender representation affect their decision-making.

Our findings revealed that visual appeal and branding are often more influential than taste or function. Participants consistently reported that the look, size, and social associations of Monster cans made them hesitant to purchase or carry them publicly.

Additionally, the brand was perceived as male-oriented, outdated, and unaesthetic—especially when compared to competitors that embody a more neutral or feminine identity. This research aims to provide insights into these consumer behaviors and offer strategic recommendations for Monster Energy to evolve its branding and better resonate with a broader, more inclusive market.

Analysis

1. Transcribe conversation
2. Read through transcription
3. Create codes + code transcript
4. Identify themes
5. Refine codes and themes
6. Summarize and evaluate



In order to analyze the data we collected we started by creating a transcript of our focus group. I then read through the transcript in order to familiarize myself with what was said. Once I felt comfortable with the transcript I created codes and coded the transcript. The codes I started with were price, taste, disapproval, concerns, and motivations. As I reviewed the transcript and began to code I added health, visual, perception and awareness. I then decided to remove concerns from the code because I felt that it fell under the same umbrella as motivations. Once I had coded my text I found the most important themes. I went back to refine my codes and themes and then evaluated my findings and summarized them cohesively.

Image:

<https://researchdesignreview.com/2020/10/30/strengths-focus-group-method-overview/>

Codes

- Price
- Taste
- Disapproval
- Motivations
- Health
- Visual
- Perceptions
- Awareness



The codes I used were price, taste, disapproval, motivation, health, visual, perceptions of Monster Energy and awareness.

For price I coded parts that talked about how price affects their decision to buy. For taste I coded everything that talked about how the flavors were a factor. I found areas where our subjects disapproved of the branding/advertisements or certain physical aspects of the can. I coded motivations by identifying what factors would motivate a consumer to purchase Monster Energy. I also included health and visual aspects to find how those factors affected consumers' motivations. To code perception I found excerpts where our subjects talked about how they view Monster Energy and their competitors. And finally, for awareness I coded excerpts that had to do with how much the consumers actually know about the brand.

The most frequently used codes were motivations, perceptions of the brand and visual.

Image:

<https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/26457568-open-school-abstract-with-highlighted-lines-vector-illustration-of-notepad-with-pen-and-highlighter-in-flat-style>.

Motivations

Shelby:
“Make the packaging cuter.”



As for motivations, our focus group consumers do not currently feel motivated to buy Monster Energy Products. We found that the biggest barriers between consumers and Monster Energy sales are the perception of the brand and the visual aspects of their products.

Shelby, an avid energy drink consumer, said, that if Monster Energy “make[s] the packaging cuter” she would be more inclined to purchase their products. Our focus group collectively agreed that if Monster Energy has different packaging and a different brand perception they will be more inclined to buy and use their products.

Top Image: <https://stock.adobe.com/search/images?k=head+brain+outline>.

Bottom Image: <https://www.istockphoto.com/illustrations/eyes-looking-up-cutout>.

Perceptions

Sela:

“...I would lowkey be kind of embarrassed to like open up a Monster [in public]...”



During our focus group we found that our subjects had a perception of Monster Energy that did not align with what they want out of an energy drink. We found that many energy drink brands have certain emotions connected with them. Sela, a regular consumer of energy drinks, said “...I would lowkey be kind of embarrassed to like open up a Monster...”. Our focus group collectively views Monster Energy’s brand as “embarrassing”, saying that they would not purchase their products because they would feel embarrassed to be seen in public this brand’s can. Other brands had much more positive perceptions from our focus group, which will be discussed in depth later.

This is an important barrier to recognize for this brand. Perceptions account for a lot of the reason why people do or do not purchase a product. We must understand what these perceptions are and how we can improve them to find more success for a brand.

Image: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/monster--652459064768089238/>.

Visual

Emie:

“...but they're [Monster Energy cans] really ugly ... like if there's like a huge case of energy drinks, I don't think I'm gonna go for the one that looks the ugliest.”



We found that the visual aspects of Monster Energy sway a lot of consumers to purchase or not purchase their products – and in this case it is persuading them to not purchase. We also found that the look of a can is one of the most important factors that consumers take into account before purchasing a product.

Emie, who consumes energy drinks daily, said, “...they're really ugly... like if there's a huge case of energy drinks, I dont think I'm gonna go for the one that looks the ugliest”. Our focus group thinks that the look of Monster Energy cans are unappealing, calling them “ugly”. They say that out of a choice of multiple energy drinks they would not purchase Monster Energy because it is the least attractive can. Since the look of the can is a major motivation to not purchase Monster Energy's products, it is important barrier to keep in mind.

Image:

<https://www.amazon.com/Niro-Assortment-Monster-Assorted-Beverage/dp/B0C8KLW8R5>

Themes

There is a high disapproval rate and a negative perception of Monster Energy's aesthetic in their product and advertisements.

The way a drink looks visually is very important. The main factor that motivates people to buy a specific product is the look of the product.

There is a sense of embarrassment or being uncool associated with buying/carrying around a can of Monster Energy.



The main themes we identified were based on the perception of Monster Energy and the visual aspects of the drink.

Our three themes are:

1. There is a high disapproval rate and a negative perception of Monster Energy's aesthetic in their product and advertisements.
2. The way a drink looks visually is very important. The main factor that motivates people to buy a specific product is the look of the product.
3. There is a sense of embarrassment or being uncool associated with buying/carrying around a can of Monster Energy.

We have decided to focus mainly on the visual aspects and perceptions of Monster Energy because they are the two main reasons why our focus group does not purchase Monster Energy. These themes were chosen based on the biggest barriers our group told us about and based on what codes were identified most frequently.

Image: <https://www.hatchwise.com/resources/the-history-of-the-monster-logo>

Method

Procedure: Sample Details

- Our sample was recruited from Madison's sorority, Chi Omega.
- We specifically targeted women, aged 18 to 23, who consume energy drinks and have previously tried a Monster Energy product.
- It was important for us to understand why female consumers familiar with Monster Energy may still prefer other brands.



Method:

Procedure:

Our group recruited our sample from Madison's sorority, Chi Omega, specifically focusing on women between the ages of 18 and 23 who consume energy drinks and have previously tried a Monster Energy product. This demographic was important to us because we wanted to understand why consumers choose other energy drinks over Monster Energy and what factors deter them from the brand despite being familiar with it in one way or another.

Procedure: Sample Details

- Our sample size for our focus group was **seven participants**.

- List of Subjects:

1. **Danielle** (age 20)
2. **Lilliana** (age 21)
3. **Sela** (age 20)
4. **Eva** (age 19)
5. **Sasha** (age 19)
6. **Shelby** (age 18)
7. **Emie** (age 19).



- Every participant in this group attend the **University of Oregon** and reside in the **Eugene college area**. Their ages range **from 18 to 21 years old**.

Method:

Procedure:

We were able to recruit seven women (i.e., Danielle, Lilliana, Sela, Eva, Sasha, Shelby, and Emie) for our focus group.

Every person in this group attend the University of Oregon, is between ages 18-21, and reside in Eugene for academic purposes.

Procedure: Focus Group Details



- Our focus group took place in the Chi Omega House (1461 Alder St., Eugene, OR)
- Time: 4:00 p.m.
- Date: Wednesday, April 30th, 2025

Method:

Procedure:

Our focus group happened in the Chi Omega house (*1461 Alder St., Eugene, Oregon*) at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 30th, 2025.

Procedure: Moderator Guide

- There were a total of 20 questions in our Moderator Guide:
 - 1 engagement question
 - 10 general questions
 - 8 questions specific to Monster
 - 1 concluding question
 - We also included additional follow-up questions throughout the focus group discussion.



Method:

Procedure:

We prepared 20 questions in our moderator guide (i.e., 1 engagement question, 10 general questions, 8 questions specifically focused on the brand, and 1 concluding question). Additionally, we included various follow-up questions throughout the focus group discussion.

Procedure: Main Topics of Discussion

- Energy drink flavors
- Preferred drink consumption times
- Social status and perception of energy drinks
- Brand perceptions of Monster Energy and its competitors
- Views of Monster's social media presence
- General energy drink preferences



Method:

Procedure

We explored key topics including energy drink flavors, preferred consumption times, the status and perception of energy drinks, brand perceptions of Monster Energy and its competitors, views on Monster's social media presence, and overall energy drink preferences.

Procedure: Response Rate

- Our response rate was 3.88% as Madison invited 180 people from her sorority, and 7 people ended up participating.
- Both Brenna and Melissa had a response rate of 0%.



Method:

Procedure:

Our response rate was 3.88%: Madison invited all 180 people in her sorority, and 7 people ended up participating.

Melissa and Brenna both had a response rate of 0%. The group ended up relying on Madison's sorority for recruitment!

Results

Brand use and context

Theme: There is a sense of embarrassment or being uncool associated with buying/carrying around a can of Monster Energy.



“I don’t reach for [Monster] because they look so aggressive.”
–Danielle

“...if I was going to class, I would lowkey be kind of embarrassed to open up a Monster”
– Sela

A central theme regarding the brand use and context of Monster was that there is a sense of embarrassment or being uncool associated with buying — or more specifically, carrying around a can of Monster Energy.

Participants overwhelmingly reported that they do not consume Monster Energy regularly and instead see it as a product they might only use in very specific or situational contexts, since it is often associated with extreme physical exertion or male-dominated spaces. Several participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed consuming it in public or social settings due to its size, aesthetic, and broader social associations. This discomfort was particularly relevant in environments like college campuses, where image and presentation often play a role in purchase behavior.

Danielle, a 20-year-old, female-identifying college student at the University of Oregon who does not consider herself loyal to any energy drink brand, said, “I don’t reach for [Monster] because they look so aggressive.” Sela, another 20-year-old, female-identifying student who enjoys Red Bull Rebels from Dutch Bros, shared, “...if I was going to class, I would lowkey be kind of embarrassed to like open up a Monster.”

Overall, participants viewed other energy drinks, such as Celsius or Bloom, as more suited to daily consumption because of their lighter appearance, smaller size, and modern branding. These qualities allow consumers to feel more comfortable drinking them openly in public without fear of judgment or misalignment with their personal

brand.

Consumer motivations

Theme: The way a drink looks visually is very important.



“I’m looking at the fruit on the can. I don’t even have to read it to know what it is.”
– Eva

“If the packaging is cute. The flavors are good. Flavor first, but packaging’s important.”
– Shelby

When talking to participants about what factors they consider when choosing an energy drink, a major theme that emerged was that the way a drink looks visually is very important. While flavor and function remain important, the drink's appearance—particularly its packaging and how it aligns with a consumer's personal aesthetic—often determines whether it will be selected over another product. For many, the drink becomes a part of their outward identity, making visual style and design a priority.

As one participant, Shelby, who enjoys Bloom energy, explained, “If the packaging is cute. The flavors are good. Flavor first, but packaging’s important.” This sentiment reflects a broader preference for branding that feels modern, clean, and intentional. Packaging that communicates freshness, trendiness, or minimalism—such as fruit imagery or sleek, pastel-toned designs—was favored over bold or aggressive branding.

Eva, an avid coffee and energy drink user, added, “I’m looking at the fruit on the can. I don’t even have to read it to know what it is,” highlighting how simple, intuitive visuals enhance appeal and ease of choice. Together, these responses underscore the importance of brand design in appealing to image-conscious consumers who are motivated not just by what’s inside the can, but by how the can fits into their daily routines and public self-presentation.



Consumer Barriers

Theme: The look of the cans and the brand perception are major factors that affect the choice a consumer makes to purchase a product.

Madison: So would you guys say that certain energy drinks have a certain status or a certain perception that goes along with them?

Emie: Yes, for sure.

Melissa: So do you think, even if you find it like good taste wise, do you think the packaging kind of stops you from purchasing a Monster?

Emie: Yeah. **Liliana:** Yeah.

The main consumer barrier we found is that the look of the cans and the brand perception are major factors that affect the choice a consumer makes to purchase a product. Our focus group identified these aspects as more important motivators than taste or price. In this case, the look of the product and brand perception are what create barriers in the consumer purchase journey for Monster Energy.

As mentioned before our group perceives this brand as “ugly” and “embarrassing”. When asked if our focus group thought that certain energy drinks carry a certain perception with them about the person drinking them Emie, a regular energy drink consumer, said “Yes, for sure” and the rest of the group nodded in agreement. We also asked if the packaging stops them from purchasing the product even if they think it tastes good and Emie and Lilliana, both daily energy drink drinker, said “yeah”.

They agree that they would compromise on flavor just to have a drink that they found visually appealing and that has a perception that aligns with them more. This is a crucial barrier to understand because it shows us that the issue is not that consumers don’t enjoy the taste of the product, but rather they don’t enjoy the perceptions and look of the product or brand.

Image: <https://1000logos.net/logo-monster-energy/>

Competitor Comparison

Theme: Monster Energy is viewed as male oriented and less appealing compared to other energy drinks.



Sela: "Yerb is the most attractive. I wanna be like that girl that day. I'll choose a Yerb because that's very much aesthetic, Oregon".

Shelby: "There's no girls."
Emie: "Yeah. Not a woman in sight"

When comparing Monster Energy to its competitors we found that Monster Energy is viewed as male oriented and less appealing compared to other energy drinks.

When asked how our focus group feels about other brands Sela spoke up and said, "Yerb is the most attractive. I wanna be like that girl that day. I'll choose a Yerb because that's very much aesthetic, Oregon". The group agreed that Yerba Mate is viewed as cool and that it makes them feel like a specific type of girl. When we asked about Red Bull Sela said, "Then, Red Bull. I feel like it's neutral". In this scenario "neutral" was positive for the group. They think that anyone can drink them and Sela called them a "classic".

We had our group look at the Monster Energy official Instagram and their reactions were very negative. Emie said, "It's all men...". When asked about their overall impressions of the Instagram Shelby, another daily energy drink consumer, said, "There's no girls." and Emie agreed saying, "Yeah. Not a woman in sight". The Monster Energy Instagram is made up of various videos of men doing different high intensity sports like dirt biking. They were upset by the fact that there were no women being featured since the activities in their content are things that both men and women can do. Our group made the observation that the content is similar to the content Red Bull features on their Instagram. Sasha, who drinks energy drinks most day, said, "But Red Bull also only does skiing and stuff" to which Emie responded, "Yeah. But at least it's aesthetic to look at". This perpetuates the idea that Monster

Energy is perceived as ugly and inferior compared to other brands like Red Bull. Eva said, "This looks like if they didn't have the funds to do what Red Bull does. They like scaled it down."

Our focus group had a preconceived impression that Monster Energy is for men, and after looking at their Instagram this idea was even more solidified. While the Monster Energy Instagram isn't very different than Red Bull's Instagram, our group still agreed that they like Red Bull's content better. They also view Red Bull as neutral, with no gender attached to the brand, which makes them more inclined to purchase Red Bull products.

Image: <https://powayiliad.com/849/pop-culture/energy-drink-red-bull-vs-monster/>

Conclusion

Limitations

#1

Our sample consisted of participants who no longer consume Monster Energy products, or those who dropped the brand—making it challenging to identify motivations for purchasing Monster Energy.

#2

Our sample may not be entirely representative of our target consumers as we relied on a specific population for focus group recruitment.

#3

We had difficulty recruiting participants over the age of 21.

Limitations

During this process, our group was able to identify multiple constraints, or limitations, that could have impacted the viability of our research findings.

First of all, our focus group sample consisted of participants who no longer consume Monster Energy products or those who dropped the brand. This made it more difficult for us to identify participants' motivations for purchasing the product. However, we still considered the research successful because one of our biggest goals was to identify why young women are choosing to drop Monster Energy products.

Another limitation was that being college students made it more difficult to recruit participants for our focus group over the age of 21—even though we aimed to study women aged 18-23. That being said, the scheduling aspect of our focus group limited the number of participants we were able to host (considering everyone has varying times of availability), making coordination more challenging.

Additionally, because we relied on one population for the focus group recruitment (i.e., Chi Omega), our sample may not be the most representative of our target consumers.

Summary of Overall Findings

- Packaging is a significant factor in influencing how our participants purchase energy drinks.
- Each energy drink brand holds a specific social perception that affects overall consumer behaviors.
- The visual aesthetic of Monster Energy products heavily influence whether or not consumers buy them.
- Monster Energy is perceived to be a male-focused brand, potentially limiting its reach to other audiences.

Overall Findings

From our focus group, we learned that packaging is a very important factor for purchasing energy drinks. Specifically, it influences *how* our participants purchase energy drinks. For example, our participant Shelby said, “Flavor first, but packaging’s important.”

We also discovered that each energy drink brand holds a specific social connotation or perception that affects how consumers interact with its products. Our participant, Emie, specifically responded with, “Yes, for sure” to Madison’s question: “So would you guys say that certain energy drinks have a certain status or a certain perception that goes along with them?”

Furthermore, the visual design and overall aesthetic of Monster Energy products is a significant reason as to why our participants do not choose to buy them. For instance, our participant Sela stated that “A Red Bull, or a Yerb, is the most attractive. I wanna be like *that* girl that day.”

And, finally, based on our participants past experiences and perception of Monster’s social media presence, it is perceived to be a male-oriented brand that is limiting its reach to outside audiences. Multiple participants expressed a negative response to Monster’s advertising. For example, Emie said, “It’s all men...”. When they were asked about their feelings toward the brand Instagram, Shelby—an avid energy drink consumer—said, “There’s no girls.”

Opportunities for Future Research

Conduct a Monster Energy taste test with focus group participants, focusing on specific products such as its zero-sugar, juice, tea, and coffee drinks, to identify how women between the ages of 18 to 23 perceive the brand's flavors compared to competitors.

Broaden the age group of our target consumers (e.g., ages 18 to 35) to analyze how perspectives of Monster Energy change across generations.

Compare how men and women in the 18-23 year age range perceive Monster Energy's brand.

Future Research Opportunities

There are a variety of ways we can broaden our research. Our group believes it would be interesting to research a broader age group with our focus group sample, such as ages 18 to 35. It would be insightful to see how perspectives of Monster Energy align or vary for different generations.

We also believe it would be exciting to conduct a taste test with focus group participants, sampling Monster Energy products, such as its zero-sugar, coffee, juice, and tea drinks, to identify how women between the ages of 18-23 perceive Monster Energy flavors compared to competitors.

Finally, it would be valuable to research how men's perspectives of Monster Energy in the same age range differ from women. It would be interesting to see whether men view the brand more positively or negatively and if they prioritize different factors in an energy drink that were not discussed in this specific group.