

Mixed-Methods Analysis of Consumer Perceptions of Carbonated Caffeinated Applemust (MUST Energy)

**A Study to Position MUST Energy within the Swedish Fika
and Energy Drink Landscape**

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2026**



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Popular Science Summary

Imagine a hot summer afternoon in Sweden. You're sitting down with friends for a relaxing fika break, desperately craving something cold and refreshing, yet you still find yourself holding a warm cup of coffee. Why do we stick to hot drinks when we want to wind down, but only grab a cold energy drink when we are rushing to power through a task?

At the same time, have you ever looked at someone carrying a specific brand of energy drink and instantly made assumptions about their lifestyle or hobbies? When we see these products repeatedly, our brains naturally link the beverage to a specific human identity.

This thesis dives into that exact puzzle by using a method called “projective personification” to uncover the imaginations and stereotypes that dictate what we choose to drink when we need a caffeine boost. The focal point of the study is a new Swedish energy drink called MUST Energy, made from applemust with a healthy kick of caffeine, giving you the same energy boost as a standard cup of coffee without the synthetic chemicals or subsequent jitters.

Opinions were gathered from nearly 100 survey respondents, and detailed interviews were conducted. The interview participants played a “persona game” where they were asked to imagine popular caffeinated beverages as people at a social party. The results revealed a fascinating social hierarchy: Coffee was seen as the sophisticated, reliable hardworker whom everyone respects, while tea was the calm, mindful friend you turn to for a comforting chat. On the other hand, the energy drinks were seen as polarised, alternative figures, ranging from secretive, rebellious night-owls to intense, hyperactive corporate grinders. Fitness-focused energy drinks were visualised to be loud, superficial, and overly performative, seeming unapproachable to the average person.

Since energy drinks carry a reputation for being fake or unhealthy, their personas completely clash with the peaceful, egalitarian spirit of a traditional Swedish fika. Such beverages face sensory hurdles inside a traditional fika setting. This is where MUST Energy enters the room. Interview participants personified it as an upgraded, balanced, clean, nature-lover who enjoys outdoor movement and environmental mindfulness.

Taking the findings of this thesis together, MUST Energy is positioned for the “modern fika”, serving as a sustainable, mindful companion for active, contemporary moments like hikes, commutes, and outdoor social gatherings where the core spirit of taking a restorative break remains essential.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the consumer perceptions and social positioning of MUST Energy, a sustainable, carbonated caffeinated applemust, within a contemporary market divided between the restorative fika culture of coffee and tea and the fast utility of industrial energy drinks. As cognitive load reaches a critical threshold for students and young professionals, the need for recovery strategies has transformed caffeine from a sensory ritual into a functional reagent.

Through a mixed-methods approach involving a quantitative survey (n=94) and qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=17), this study utilises projective persona techniques to map the social archetypes associated with various caffeinated beverages. The findings identify a clear taxonomy of beverage personalities: Coffee as the “hardworking boss” and universal baseline, tea as a “supportive shoulder” for mindfulness, and energy drinks as polarised figures of rebellion or performative fitness. MUST Energy emerges as a sophisticated hybrid, perceived as a “balanced nature lover” that bridges the gap between naturalness and performance.

Evaluating this project through a holistic food systems lens reveals a distinct value-action gap among consumers. Despite a high logical agreement with sustainable practices, with 85% of survey respondents supporting the use of circular ingredients, actual consumer choices remain primarily dictated by availability, convenience, and sensory preferences. Furthermore, the research also identifies a critical naming barrier, where the terminology of “ugly” fruit acts as a psychological deterrent, and the terminology of “rescued” fruit is found to be significantly more emotionally resonant and culturally inclusive.

This study identifies the sensory profile of cold carbonation to present a hurdle for integration into the traditional indoor fika. However, MUST Energy is found to be perfectly positioned for the “modern” fika of active, outdoor, and professional settings. Thus, the research provides a strategic framework for positioning this sustainable energy drink by aligning ingredient transparency with the social identities of the modern Swedish consumer.

Keywords: Caffeinated applemust, energy drink, fika, consumer perceptions, projective personification, consumption rituals.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In the current academic and professional landscape of Sweden, the cognitive load placed on individuals has reached a critical threshold. Recent research into the mental health profiles of Swedish students indicates that a significant portion of the population navigates a state of high exhaustion and emotional depletion, where vulnerable or troubled profiles are increasingly common due to intense academic demands. Within such high-pressure environments, managing energy resources and the ability to find effective recovery periods have become the primary determinants of academic success and long-term professional resilience (Hadziabdic, 2025; Maurer, 2024).

To manage this persistent strain, the Swedish workforce and student body rely on specific recovery strategies, especially the psychological detachment and relaxation encapsulated in *fika*. Research by Yngve et al. (2023) suggests that *fika* serves as a vital social and restorative tool, allowing for a temporary pause from the demands of work. While the *fika* is often described as a social break, it is seen as an indoor picnic that mimics the restorative and soothing qualities of nature to combat cognitive depletion within sterile office or university settings (Öberg, 2025).

However, a notable paradox exists within the Swedish market regarding how different caffeinated beverages are utilised during and after these periods of rest. Traditionally, during the restorative phase of a break, individuals realise they must eventually sustain their focus to carry on with their upcoming tasks, naturally drawing them toward caffeine consumption as a transitional tool. Yet, the moment and context of this consumption vary drastically by category. While traditional hot beverages are firmly embedded within the relaxing, slow-paced environment of the social break, cold energy drinks are almost exclusively consumed during active, high-intensity periods of work or gaming rather than as a tool for recovery.

This functional separation highlights a stark psychological divide in consumer expectations. Research by Somogyi et al. (2025) suggests that while coffee is often associated with positive, placebo-inducing expectations of performance and health, synthetic energy drinks frequently elicit nocebo effects, where consumers anticipate chemical crashes and health risks. This creates a distinct market tension where the consumer explicitly seeks the raw efficiency of an energy drink to power through cognitive exhaustion, but remains attached to the perceived safety, naturalness, and restorative context of coffee and tea. Sonestedt and Lukic (2024) also note the increasing consumer interest in the naturalness of these caffeinated beverages. Interestingly, this demand for cleaner functional alternatives is concentrated heavily within the 18-35 age group, a young adult demographic that also represents the primary market driver for energy drink consumption in Europe (Teijeiro et al., 2025).

MUST Energy, a Swedish startup based in Skåne, was developed to solve the gap in energy drinks. By producing a carbonated, caffeinated applemust, the company offers a clean-label alternative. While the brand has successfully generated buzz among early adopters, it currently operates in a space where consumer trust in food sustainability is increasingly fragile (Vallerie et al., 2026). The summary of the 2024 EIT Food Trust Report also highlights that the number of European consumers who consider sustainability when choosing food and beverages has been declining since 2020. Therefore, this thesis explores the possibility of consuming MUST

Energy across different contexts, particularly its potential to be embedded in the fika tradition, to understand the deeper social and psychological barriers that dictate caffeinated beverage choice in Sweden.

2 Aim and Research Objectives

The primary aim of this thesis is to investigate the consumer perceptions and contextual positioning of MUST Energy within the contemporary Swedish beverage landscape. By exploring the tension between traditional social rituals and modern lifestyle, this study seeks to determine if a sustainable, clean-label hybrid can bridge the gap between the fika table and the “grind culture” of energy drinks.

Through this multi-level comparative and interconnected food systems approach, the research evaluates the interplay between ingredient transparency, sustainability narratives, and the social archetypes associated with different caffeinated beverages.

This thesis is guided by the central research objectives listed below:

- To map the prevailing caffeine consumption habits and motivations among the 18-35 demographic in Sweden.
- To identify and analyse the social personas attached to coffee, tea, and common energy drinks through projective techniques, uncovering the stereotypes that influence consumer choice.
- To evaluate the market fit of the MUST Energy concept and the product’s outward perceptions.
- To assess the potential for non-traditional beverages to permeate the Swedish fika culture, identifying the barriers that prevent or facilitate this transition.

3 Literature Review

3.1 The Sociocultural Framework of the Swedish Fika

The Swedish coffee break, or fika, serves as a vital social institution that facilitates communal bonding and national identity, operating far beyond the simple act of caffeine consumption. In the Swedish context, fika is not merely a pause in the workday but a structured social pillar. Yngve et al. (2023) emphasise that the social meeting often outweighs the physical intake of the beverage itself. This practice is so deeply tied to the national interest that it provides a primary framework for building personal relationships and facilitating workplace social interaction (Öberg et al., 2024). The role of fika even extends into the realm of high-level Scandinavian peace diplomacy, where “brewing peace” happens one cup at a time, illustrating the profound trust and egalitarian values embedded in the ritual (Andersson and Gabriellsson, 2024).

Coffee has historically acted as the primary anchor for this ritual, evolving from a luxury import into what researchers describe as a ‘cultural superfood’ that signifies social cohesion. However,

the dominance of the coffee bean has not always been a certainty. Salamonik (2024) explored how Sweden has a long history of manufacturing and debating coffee substitutes when economic factors and trade restrictions in the 19th century forced consumers to seek alternatives, such as the introduction of roasted chicory root and the roasted seeds of *Astragalus boeticus* (“Swedish coffee”), owing to wartime shortages. This historical adaptability suggests that while coffee is the traditional centrepiece, the culture can incorporate modern adaptations that align with prevailing national values.

The functional role of coffee in Swedish daily life is deeply tied to the need for sustained cognitive performance and physical alertness. According to the review conducted by Sonestedt and Lukic (2024), caffeinated beverages like coffee and tea are often consumed as fluids that provide physiological benefits beyond simple hydration. In the Swedish workplace and academic environment, coffee is treated as a necessary baseline for functioning. Scander et al. (2018) found that beverage consumption patterns are highly specific to meal types, with coffee serving as an energy contributor used to fill energy gaps during non-meal intervals.

The functional aspect is not just about the presence of caffeine, but about the reliability of the delivery system. Yngve et al. (2023) explain that while the fika break is a social event, many Swedes rely on the caffeine in coffee to transition between tasks or to manage the cognitive load throughout the day. Unlike energy drinks, which are often associated with high-intensity energy spikes and subsequent crashes, coffee is culturally perceived as providing a more stable, mellow form of alertness. This perception allows it to be used as a tool for alertness and productivity (Yngve et al., 2023) that is socially acceptable in almost every professional setting.

While the caffeine provides the function, the social ritual of fika provides the meaning. The role of coffee as a social glue is rooted in the concept of commensality, the act of eating and drinking together to strengthen social bonds. Öberg (2025) describes fika as a multi-dimensional taxonomy that facilitates egalitarianism in Swedish society, which refers to the belief that all people are fundamentally equal and deserve equal rights, opportunities, and status.

Since everyone, regardless of their rank in a company, stops for the same beverage at the same time, coffee acts as a leveller that breaks hierarchical barriers. Rather than being just a drink, coffee is a vehicle for social networking and informal communication.

Öberg et al. (2024) further elaborate that this social ritual is in the interest of the nation, acting as a structured time for connection, cosiness and comfort. During these breaks, the sensory experience of the warm mug, the aroma of the beans, and the accompanying pastry takes precedence over the need for a caffeine kick.

This is the reason why coffee is difficult to replace in this context. A cold, carbonated energy drink does not offer the same sensory warmth that defines the fika atmosphere. Bunge et al. (2025) suggest that this culture is so strong that it can even be leveraged to drive food system transformations, as the fika table is where new ideas and values are shared and normalised.

Ultimately, the reason Swedes drink coffee during fika is that the beverage facilitates a specific type of social interaction essential to the Swedish well-being narrative, rather than just for a quick caffeine boost. As Malefors et al. (2024) note, the fika ritual is so central to daily life that even its environmental impacts, such as food waste, are being studied. This highlights that coffee is not just a personal choice but a significant part of the national food system.

3.2 Energy Drink Consumption

The focus on the 18-35 age demographic for energy drink consumption is grounded in European and Swedish consumption data, which identifies this group as the primary and dominant consumer base for functional energy products. According to a systematic review by Teijeiro et al. (2025), young adults and older adolescents constitute the heaviest users of energy drinks across Europe, with lifetime prevalence rates exceeding 54.7% (Alonso-Diego et al., 2023). In Sweden, this demographic group is uniquely positioned between traditional socio-cultural expectations and intense modern performance demands. Academic and professional workloads peak during this lifecycle window, driving individuals to systematically rely on external stimulants to manage fatigue and sustain focus during long study or work blocks (Granda et al., 2024).

Furthermore, this demographic prominence is shaped by shifting legal and marketing structures within the Nordic region. In Sweden and several other EU member states, voluntary retail measures and statutory frameworks restrict the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to minors under the age of 18 (Granda et al., 2024; European Parliament, 2025). Consequently, the 18-35 cohort represents the youngest legal, independent purchasing bracket with both the disposable income and lifestyle autonomy to freely integrate energy drinks into their daily routines. Unlike older demographics who default rigidly to traditional coffee habits, these young adults view energy drinks as a socially acceptable tool for performance enhancement and identity signalling, making them the market drivers for functional energy drinks.

This 18-35 demographic segment also highlights a broader behavioural shift, where caffeine consumption is increasingly defined by a transition from ritualistic enjoyment to functional utility. This functional alignment is steered largely by the high-pressure demands of modern academia and the workforce, although it equally extends into contemporary lifestyle habits. Studies regarding energy drink consumption in Europe, such as the work by Teijeiro et al. (2025), indicate that this age group prioritises immediate alertness and physical stimulation to manage rigorous daily schedules, and fuel high-engagement activities. Specifically, energy drinks are heavily utilised as performance reagents during long gaming sessions, esports, and athletic or fitness routines (Zucconi et al., 2013), allowing users to maximise energy release during both cognitive tasks and physical exertion. In these spaces, caffeine is treated as a strategic reagent deployed to cross energy gaps, reinforcing why this specific lifecycle window represents the peak consumption baseline.

The motivations for choosing energy drinks are deeply tied to social identity and belonging. Lundin and Persson (2025) suggest that the “social blaze” of peer pressure and environmental cues is often more influential than the “caffeine craze” in initiating these behaviours. Consuming specific energy drink brands functions as a social badge, signalling membership in subcultures like the fitness community, gaming circles, or high-intensity professional groups. This is a powerful driver for this age group, as the choice of brand reflects an individual’s lifestyle and perceived peer alignment. The researchers further elaborate that the physical presence of the can in social or workspace settings acts as a non-verbal cue that reinforces the consumer's self-image. Vähäkangas (2021) similarly observed among Finnish university students that consumers tend to select brands that are visibly accepted by the majority, reinforcing the role of peer influence.

This visibility is heavily complemented through product branding and digital marketing, which act as primary drivers for consumption. Björk (2024) analysed Swedish Instagram marketing for brands like NOCCO and found that they visualise an energetic and high-performance reality

using intense colours and engaging language. This visual narrative is often softened through representations of health, where that images of fruit and natural motifs are utilised to tone down the chemical and synthetic associations of the beverage.

Packaging and national identity also play a pivotal role in establishing trust within the Swedish market. Andersson (2020) found that incorporating themes of nature and nationalism can make a product feel more local and socially acceptable. When a functional beverage manages to present itself through a sophisticated lens, it becomes more fitting for professional or public settings. Svensson et al. (2021) note that this is seen in the massive success of domestic brands like NOCCO and Celsius, which have successfully repositioned energy drinks from junk soda to lifestyle supplements. Their research also highlights that for Swedish youth, frequent energy drink intake has become a symbol of a faster, more individualised lifestyle that stands in direct opposition to the traditional, collective fika culture.

Finally, while social factors and marketing may initiate consumption, the habit eventually becomes internalised. Lundin and Persson (2025) found that as individuals mature, the influence of peers diminishes, and consumption is sustained by the individual's own evaluation of the drink's benefits. Once a consumer associates a specific beverage with a successful performance outcome, the psychological reinforcement creates strong brand loyalty and repeat purchasing (Kowalska et al., 2024). Furthermore, the Swedish market's emphasis on new flavours and limited-edition releases caters to the consumers' desire for novelty and authentic experiences, even within a synthetic category. This repeat purchase behaviour is further reinforced by availability, where the presence of these drinks in supermarkets, gyms, and convenience stores makes them the choice for a quick energy fix. This explains why energy drinks have successfully carved out a permanent space in the Swedish beverage market.

However, Hemmerling et al. (2016) identified that the primary obstacle preventing energy drinks from achieving the same social status as coffee or tea is a deeply held naturalness bias by consumers. The researchers suggest an "attitude-liking gap" among European consumers, where consumers seek functional energy but are repelled by the chemical and synthetic profile of industrial energy brands.

This distrust is further intensified by marketing terminology. Radaelli et al. (2025) highlight how the misuse of natural claims on labels can lead to consumer scepticism when the product's ingredients do not align with their perception and understanding of wholesomeness. This discrepancy creates a conflict where the presence of synthetic additives invalidates the brand's health claims, ultimately leading consumers to favour more transparent, common caffeinated alternatives. Many potential energy drink users avoid the category entirely due to concerns over artificial sweeteners like sucralose, preferring the perceived safety of a coffee bean or a tea leaf. Sonestedt et al. (2024) further confirm that traditional beverages like coffee and tea are viewed through a healthier lens compared to processed, sugar-laden, or artificially sweetened alternatives.

3.3 Perceptions of Upcycled Foods

A transformative trend in food systems is the rising acceptance of upcycled ingredients, specifically aesthetically imperfect or "ugly" fruits. Malefors et al. (2024) examined the Swedish fika

in the context of food waste, suggesting that utilising rescued produce in traditional rituals could have a significant positive environmental impact.

This trend also aligns with a broader Swedish industry narrative identified by Cramner (2024). She notes that processing companies in the Swedish beverage industry are increasingly leading circular economy practices by repurposing by-products into new beverages. This transition is already visible in the market through brands like Rscued, which produces juice from saved fruit, and Simply No Waste, which utilises unconventional ingredients like avocado pits.

While consumers have historically preferred perfect produce, there is a growing segment that views rescued fruit as a superior, ethical choice. For a product like MUST Energy, utilising Skåne-grown apples that would otherwise go to waste allows it to bridge the gap between “natural” coffee and “industrial” energy drinks.

3.4 Gaps in Literature

While there is a wealth of research on the cultural significance of the Swedish fika and on the health and social impacts of energy drink consumption among youth, a significant gap exists at the intersection of these two worlds. Both domains represent distinct methods of managing energy through caffeine, yet literature rarely treats them as competing segments within the broader landscape of caffeinated beverages. Existing studies provide a deep understanding of fika as a social institution, but they rarely account for how this traditional ritual is being pressured or modified by the rise of functional beverages. Conversely, studies on energy drinks often focus on health risks and behaviours, without exploring how these beverages might be attempting to find a seat at the social fika table.

Furthermore, although many scholars discuss the perceived incompatibility between the fast culture of energy drinks and the slow ritual of fika, there is a lack of qualitative or quantitative studies that justify and explain the reason behind this resistance. Most claims about the exclusion of energy drinks from fika are based on historical tradition rather than contemporary consumer data.

This study seeks to fill this gap by providing primary evidence on how consumers actually perceive caffeine beverages, ranging from fika beverages to functional tools. By investigating the potential for a hybrid beverage like MUST Energy to bridge this divide, this research offers a unique perspective that is currently missing from both food sociology and marketing literature.

4 Materials and Methodology

4.1 Project Collaboration and Establishment

This thesis project was done in collaboration with MUST Energy, a Swedish startup focused on creating sustainable and clean-label functional beverages. The company uses a food systems approach by rescuing “ugly” apples from Skåne, that is, apples of high quality which do not meet the aesthetic standards for supermarket shelves. MUST Energy has developed and

patented caffeinated apple must called “Energimust”. The beverage is produced without any added refined sugars or artificial additives. While most commercial energy drinks use synthetic ingredients and heavy sweeteners to hide the bitterness of caffeine, MUST Energy aims to provide a natural alternative through its unique apple-based formula.

The connection with MUST Energy was established by proposing a research topic focused on experimenting with different flavour compositions for their beverage. After further discussion and refinement with the company, we narrowed the focus to a topic more relevant to their current needs, a mixed-method analysis of consumer perceptions about their beverage. This shift allowed the project to move from technical flavour trials to a deeper investigation of how modern consumers view sustainable energy drinks compared to commonly available alternatives.

4.2 Preparation for Study

The research design was structured around the core principles of mixed-methods research (qualitative and quantitative) outlined in Bryman’s (2016) *Social Research Methods*. A convergent mixed-methods design was implemented, involving a quantitative survey to map macro-level consumer patterns, which were then contextualised by micro-level qualitative data. According to Bryman (2016), combining these two research mechanisms achieves a sense of completeness that a single approach cannot provide. In the context of this study, this methodology allows the macro patterns observed in the quantitative survey data to be investigated alongside the behavioural nuances of the qualitative survey. These integrated datasets provide both the statistical validation and the cultural depth required to accurately map consumer perceptions and identify the exact spaces where MUST Energy can be strategically positioned.

Following Bryman’s framework for qualitative interviewing, data collection relied on a semi-structured interview guide featuring open-ended and probing questions. This allowed participants to guide the narrative and express their genuine perspectives on beverage consumption. This approach also minimises researcher-induced bias or leading responses. Furthermore, the data collection adhered to Bryman’s ethical standards for social research, specifically regarding informed consent and confidentiality. It was aligned with Lund University’s internal guidelines to ensure full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) under Swedish and EU law.

During the design phase of the survey and interview guides, soft drinks were initially considered as part of the broader beverage scope. This was because soft drinks often provide a sugar rush or contain trace amounts of caffeine, which can offer a boost in energy comparable to more standard caffeinated drinks. However, upon further consideration, it was decided to exclude data specifically related to soft drinks from the final analysis. Since the primary aim of this research is to investigate the transition and perception of caffeine as a functional reagent, a beverage that does not contain caffeine or only contains it in negligible amounts, did not meet the necessary criteria for this study.

4.3 Survey Design and Procedure

The quantitative phase of the thesis was conducted through a digital survey (n=94). This study recruited individuals residing in Sweden to ensure appropriate insights into perceptions of a

locally produced, sustainable energy drink. Since MUST Energy uses apples from Skåne and is designed to fit into Swedish consumption habits, it was necessary to gather perspectives from those familiar with the local culture and regional food systems.

To reach a wide range of respondents, the survey was published using social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Facebook. To gather more participants within the local community, flyers were distributed around the libraries in Lund and Malmö. Additionally, the project details were communicated to individuals met in public spaces to encourage diverse participation.

The survey was designed in alignment with the principles for self-completion questionnaires outlined by Bryman (2016) to minimise respondent fatigue and non-response rates. Following Bryman’s criteria for self-administered survey layouts, the questionnaire avoided dense formatting and visually overwhelming question matrices that usually trigger high abandonment rates. To optimise the abstract concept validity and internal reliability, survey questions were constructed following Bryman’s rules for question wording, where they were kept short, unambiguous, and entirely closed-ended. By utilising Google Forms’ predefined multiple-choice categories and balanced Likert scales, the data could be uniformly coded, ensuring standardisation across all respondents and allowing for a reliable quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire was also organised to move smoothly from behavioural parameters to more complex attitudinal reflections. The full list of survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The survey opened with demographic questions and then branched into general caffeine consumption patterns. The second part led respondents into separate questionnaires based on their primary caffeinated beverage of choice, and delved deeper into consumption motivations, associations, situational consumption contexts and brand-specific purchasing frequencies. The third section gathered all respondents back into a unified track to assess specific characteristic choices and their understanding of the caffeinated beverage market. Some questions were on preferences regarding natural vs. synthetic caffeine origins, sweetening options, and the ethical perception of utilising “ugly fruit” as an ingredient to mitigate waste. This section then introduced the concept of MUST Energy, without revealing the beverage’s identity. Questions captured how consumers naturally categorise this beverage, identified the hypothetical life situations where they would consume it, measured commercial viability, etc. Finally, the survey concluded with an open-ended feedback section for qualitative consumer commentary and an explicit, GDPR-compliant data privacy statement confirming that data would be securely processed under the legal framework of public interest for research at Lund University.

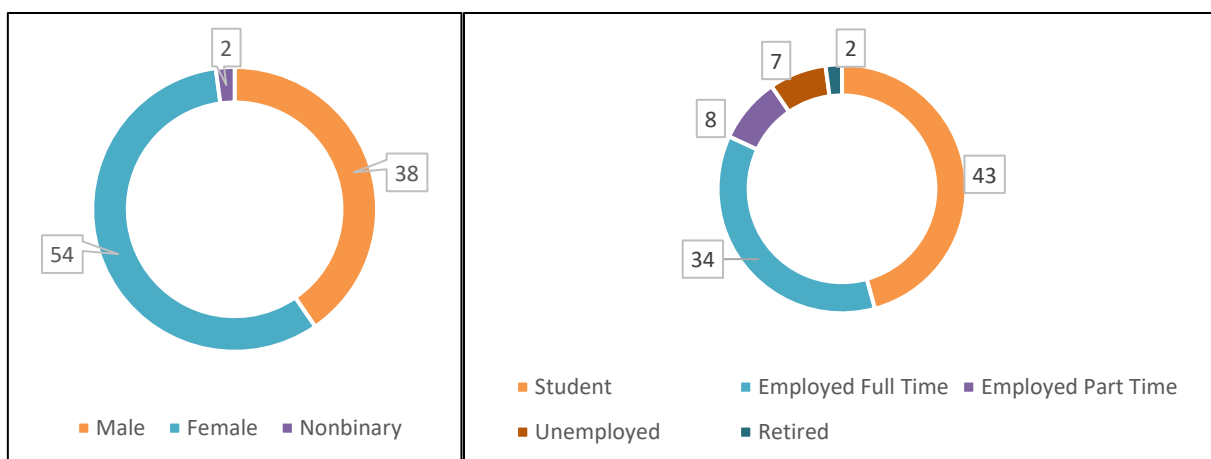


Figure 1. Gender distribution and professional breakdown of survey participants (n=94).

The survey reached a diverse audience (n=94), primarily within the university and professional networks in Sweden, with a gender distribution of 57.4% female and 40.4% male, as seen in Figure 1. The age distribution showed a strong concentration in the young adult demographic, with a significant peak at 24 years of age representing 10.6% of the sample, followed by 23 and 27 years of age at 7.4% each. Despite this concentration, the sample included respondents aged 19 to 68, providing a broad spectrum of consumer views across different life stages. In terms of professional background, the largest segment was students at 45.7%, followed by full-time employees at 36.2% and part-time employees at 8.5%. Geographically, the majority of respondents reside in Lund at 37.2% and Malmö at 22.3%, with a significant presence from Stockholm at 16% and Göteborg at 13.8%.

4.4 Interview Design

The qualitative phase of this study implemented semi-structured interviews to explore the reasoning and personal values behind the choices made in the survey. According to Bryman (2016), semi-structured interviewing is an ideal methodological tool when the researcher seeks to maintain a clear thematic focus while simultaneously allowing participants to introduce unexpected perspectives and elaborate on their personal experiences. Following Bryman's framework for interview guide formulation, the questions were constructed to be open-ended, non-leading, and sequentially organised to facilitate a natural conversational flow. This ensured the discussion of a standard set of topics and allowed the interview to organically adapt to the unique insights of each interviewee.

Within the interviews, direct questions (e.g., "Why do you consume this brand?") often struggle to uncover the underlying emotional and cultural factors that guide choice. As Donoghue (2000) notes, direct questioning frequently encounters rationalisation bias, where participants subconsciously provide socially desirable and highly rational answers based on dry parameters like price, availability, or functional necessity.

To bypass these barriers and avoid conventional response patterns, this thesis incorporates projective techniques. Projective techniques use ambiguous stimuli or tasks to engage the storytelling tendencies of the human mind, allowing individuals to externally visualise unconscious attitudes, hidden motives, and complex emotional associations (Mesías et al., 2018). Presenting an indirect task allows participants to project their own authentic feelings onto an external object. This principle is then combined with Aaker's (1997) seminal theory of Brand Personality, defining it as the specific set of human characteristics or symbolic traits associated with a commercial brand. The researcher demonstrates that consumers systematically map human traits onto brands across distinct dimensions.

Putting a unique spin on these established frameworks led to 'Projective Personification', a method for mapping these symbolic product identities to reveal how a product is positioned within the consumer's socio-cultural matrix. In this technique, products are stripped of their commodity identity and value and evaluated as social actors with distinct lifestyles. By transforming a simple beverage into a relatable human persona, participants freely convey subtle cultural stigmas without feeling self-conscious. In this context, using projective personalities facilitates an insightful storytelling session to capture the truth of how consumers perceive these

caffeinated drinks. This was achieved by conducting a structured “Persona Game” during the interviews, which is elaborated further in Section 4.5.

4.5 Interview Structure and Procedure

At the end of the survey (Section 4.3), an option was provided for respondents to volunteer for a follow-up interview. Interviews were conducted with 17 individuals who represented various backgrounds, including students and working professionals. All interview sessions were carried out in group rooms at the Lund University Library and Kemicentrum, Lund University, to ensure a comfortable, quiet and private environment.

The interview consisted of main leading questions followed by anticipated follow-up questions. It was structured into four main parts, each serving a specific purpose in building a complete picture of how people interact with and think about caffeine. See Appendix 2 for the complete interview questionnaire.

The first section on personal narratives establishes a baseline for each participant's relationship with caffeine. Instead of just asking what they drink, this part focused on the need behind consumption to understand if the participant viewed caffeine as a functional and performance tool or as a sensory ritual for enjoyment. By asking them to describe their positive and negative physical responses in their own words, the specific pain points that affect their daily lives could be identified. This provided the necessary context to see if their current habits actually align with their ideal preferences later in the interview.

The second part of the interview introduced the Persona Game discussed in Section 4.4. Participants were asked to visualise coffee, tea, Monster, Red Bull, and NOCCO as people at a social event. This was a key part of the study because people often find it easier to describe a brand's attributes, qualities or social standing when they think of it as a person rather than just a liquid. By asking about each beverage persona's appearance, occupation, hobbies, their loudness, and whether they were the odd ones, interviewees were able to express the social stigmas and stereotypes attached to these beverages. This section was significant for identifying the social gap that MUST Energy would eventually need to fill.

The third section shifted the focus toward the ideal caffeinated beverage. In this part, participants were given a list of characteristics (Appendix far2 - A3) and asked to pick their top three priorities. This was designed to force a trade-off, revealing what consumers actually value most. Following this with a gap analysis was important because it highlighted the frustration many feel when their go-to drink doesn't actually have the traits they desire. Linking the participant's own personality to their designed beverage helped determine if they were looking for a drink that reflected who they are or who they want to be.

The final part was the concept evaluation of MUST Energy, without revealing the beverage's identity. This section introduced the specific idea of the energy drink made from “ugly apples”. This tested the real-world appeal of the sustainability narrative and the 100mg caffeine dose. Ending the interview by involving the persona game once again allowed the investigation into whether this new drink would sit socially compared to the established caffeine giants.

17 individuals registered and participated in the qualitative semi-structured interviews. The demographic breakdown of the interviewees was balanced with respect to gender, comprising an almost equal number of female and male participants. In terms of professional distribution, the sample was predominantly reflective of the university ecosystem, consisting of 64.7% university students and 29.4% full-time employees. The age profile of the participants spanned from 19 to 42 years, capturing a wide range of generational perspectives. The majority of the interviewees resided in or around Lund, which allowed for in-person interviews. For the remaining participants, the interviews were conducted in an online format to ensure convenience and accessibility.

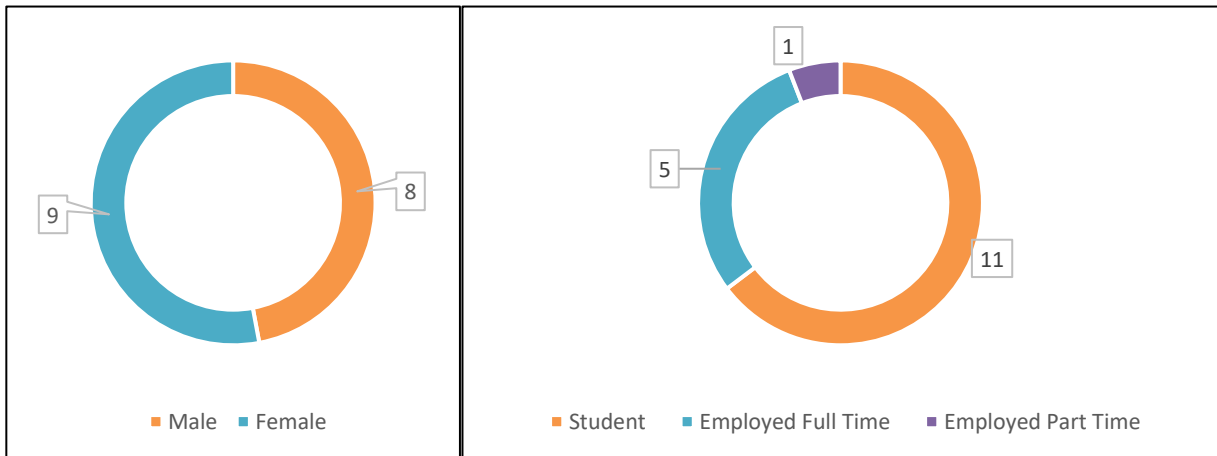


Figure 2. Gender distribution and professional breakdown of interview participants (n=17).

4.6 Ethics and Responsibility

The study followed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to ensure and protect participant privacy. Before starting the survey and interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, the sensitivity of the information, and their right to withdraw at any time. All data was processed in accordance with the legal basis of public interest for research as defined by the GDPR. All interviews were audio-recorded only after obtaining explicit consent. To ensure confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed during the analysis, and participants are referred to by numerical identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) in the final report.

To ensure the results were unbiased, measures were taken to ensure that researcher bias, personal background and enthusiasm did not influence participant responses. Neutrality was prioritised by using neutral phrasing and allowing participants to finish their thoughts without interruption.

4.7 Data Analysis

The analysis began by organising the raw data into a format that was easy to review. Audio recordings from the 17 semi-structured interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word transcription tools and manually corrected afterwards. For the quantitative data, survey responses were exported from Google Forms into Google Sheets to categorise and compare the results. All these files were stored on secure retrieval systems to maintain participant confidentiality.

The data obtained from the surveys and interviews were analysed using a thematic approach. This involved reading through the text to identify recurring patterns or similar opinions shared by the participants. Content analysis was done to group these views into themes that matched the research objectives. Information from the literature review was used to supplement these findings and provide a scientific context for the consumer behaviours observed.

4.8 Usage of AI

To maintain academic transparency standards, generative artificial intelligence was used as a supportive tool during data analysis and compilation of the thesis report. Specifically, the large language model Google Gemini (Version 1.5 Pro) was implemented. The model assisted in reviewing background research papers and identifying key findings, which were cross-checked and proofread to ensure accuracy of understanding. The tool was also used for standard editing tasks, such as checking reference formats and suggesting better vocabulary or sentence connectors to refine the thesis. It was also used to obtain a second opinion during data analysis. For the quantitative data, AI was used to verify patterns identified to ensure no trends were overlooked or misidentified. For the qualitative data, the model assisted in organising and pinning down specific personas for each caffeinated beverage. Finally, the draft report was run through the AI to check for shortcomings and areas for improvement.

Throughout this process, the AI was strictly used for its advisory and editorial capacity. The final analysis, thematic validation and conclusions remain entirely under my own independent work and oversight.

5 Results

5.1 Survey Results

5.1.1 General Caffeine Consumption Habits and Perceptions

Caffeine consumption is a deeply ingrained habit for the surveyed population, with all respondents confirming they consume caffeinated beverages. Coffee is the most preferred beverage at 55.3%, followed by tea at 20.2% and energy drinks at 16%. Figure 3 highlights the daily consumption patterns, revealing that the majority of participants consume multiple beverages per day, with 38.3% consuming two, 22.3% consuming three, 21.3% consuming one, and 13.8% consuming four or more beverages.

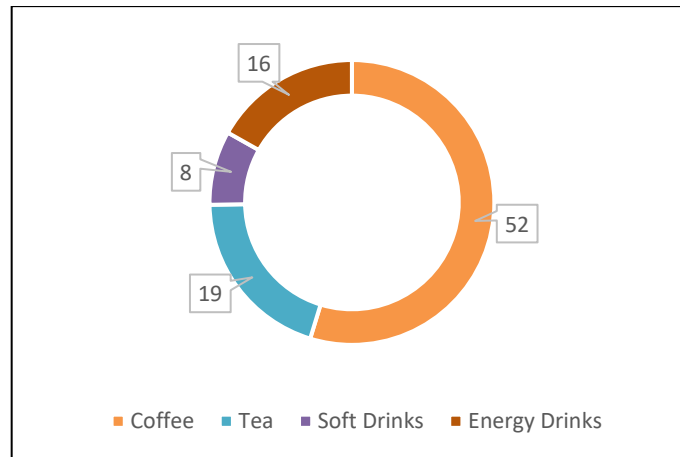


Figure 3. Survey participants' primary caffeinated beverage choices. (Responses to Section 1 Question 5: "Do you consume caffeinated beverages? Choose the one you consume the most.") (n=94).

A notable question to analyse consumers' understanding and perceptions of caffeinated beverages was to choose all the words they associate with them in general. The responses are depicted in Figure 4 below. The associations with caffeinated drinks are predominantly functional and ritualistic, as the strongest associations collectively identified by all are daily routine or habit at 61.7%, social fika at 54.3%, and alertness at 50%. The negative associations, such as dependency or addiction and sleep issues, were also equally noted by 24.5% of all participants, but remained less frequent than the perceived functional benefits.

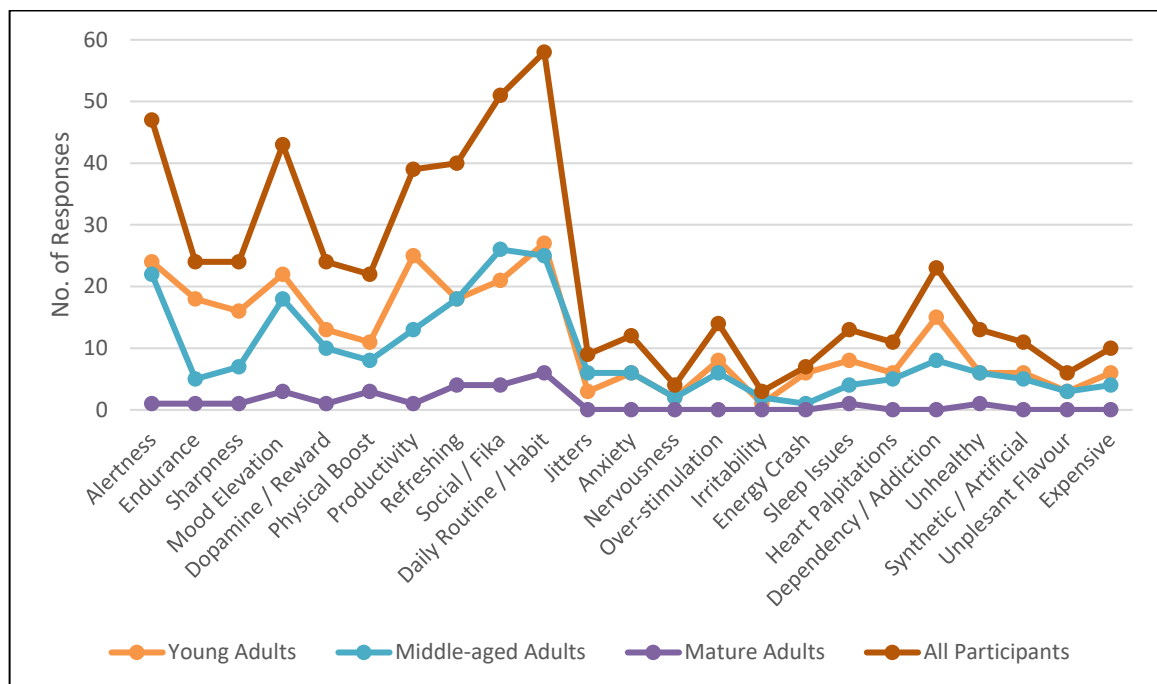


Figure 4. Survey results illustrating the primary semantic associations and emotional attributes connected to caffeinated beverages in general. (Responses to Section 7, Question 1: "Which of the following words or feelings do you most strongly associate with caffeinated beverages in general?") (n=94).

These responses contrast with the associations given for energy drinks specifically, which are characterised by industrial and negative descriptors as depicted in Figure 5. The most significant associations with energy drinks are chemical/synthetic/artificial (62.8%) and unhealthy (60.6%), followed by being overprocessed (47.9%) and creating a dependency/addiction (45.7%).

Another section of the survey evaluated the factors that influence participants' choice of a caffeinated beverage, which revealed that consumers place the highest importance on sensory attributes and ingredient quality. On a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = not important at all and 5 = extremely important), taste and natural ingredients received consistently high ratings from the majority of respondents. There is also a notable preference for how the product is sweetened. 100% natural fruit sugars are highly favoured, whereas "zero" versions containing artificial sweeteners like sucralose or aspartame received much lower enjoyment ratings. Furthermore, a significant portion of the sample expressed that it is important for caffeine to be naturally derived from sources like coffee beans or fruit rather than being synthetic.

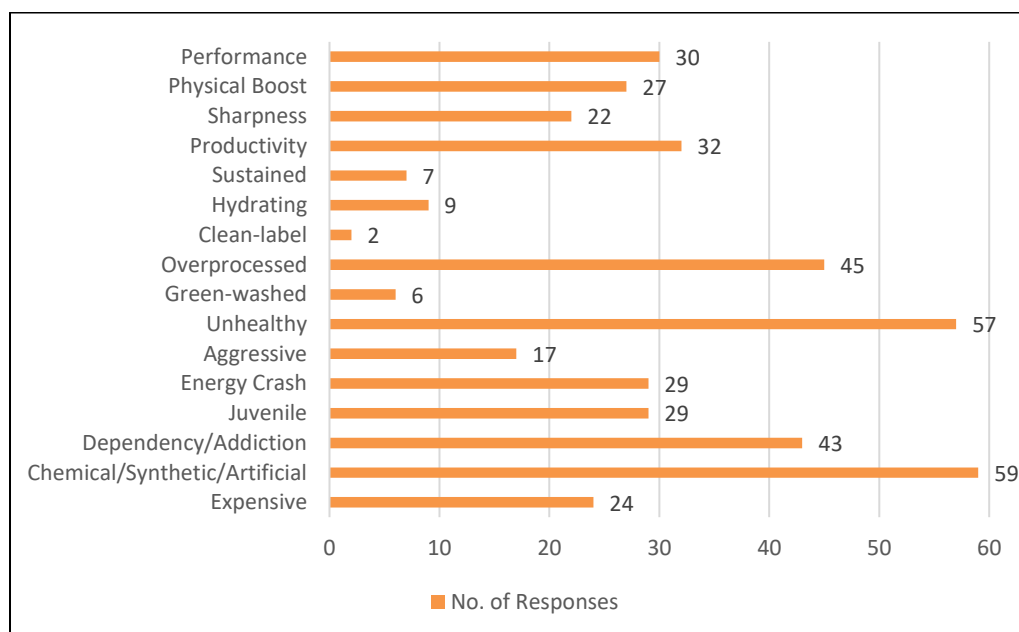


Figure 5. Survey results showing the primary semantic associations and emotional attributes connected specifically to energy drinks. (Responses to Section 7, Question 2: "Which of the following words or feelings do you most strongly associate with energy drinks?") (n=94).

Figure 6 below shows the ratings given by respondents when asked to evaluate their perception of sustainability across different beverage categories. A rating of 1 meant the beverage is not sustainable at all, and a rating of 5 meant the beverage is highly sustainable. It is noted that coffee and tea are perceived as the most sustainable options, frequently receiving ratings of 4 or 5. Soft drinks and global energy drink brands are viewed as significantly less sustainable, often scoring 1 or 2 on the same scale. However, local and craft energy drinks are perceived more favourably than their global counterparts, indicating that country of origin and production scale influence environmental trust.

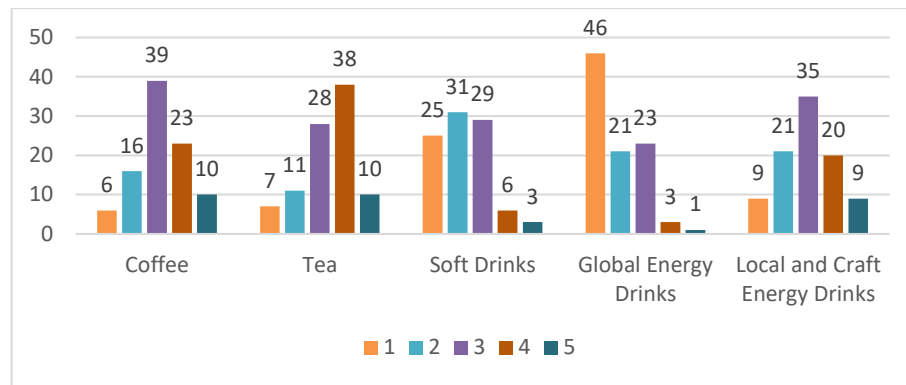


Figure 6. Survey respondents' comparative perception of sustainability across various caffeinated beverage categories. (Responses to Section 7, Question 4: "How sustainable do you perceive the following beverages to be? (1 = Not sustainable at all, 5 = Highly sustainable)" (n=94).

While data was collected for soft drink consumers as outlined in Appendix 1, this segment was excluded from further analysis due to the lack of functional caffeine concentrations, as justified in Section 4.2.

5.1.1.1 Comparison of Caffeine Consumption Habits by Demographic

A significant shift in consumption behaviour was observed when comparing caffeine habits among the young adults (aged below 30), middle-aged adults (aged from 30 - 50) and mature adults (above 50) demographics. Younger adults (n=45), who consist primarily of students, demonstrate a more utility-driven consumption pattern. Within this group, 64.1% and 51.1% of participants cite productivity and alertness, respectively, as their primary motivations. This group is also the most frequent consumer of energy drinks, comprising of 60% of all energy drink consumers. They use them as a tool for deep-focus tasks or late-night studying. Adding on, 46.6% of this group related caffeine to daily habits and routine.

A different perspective is seen among middle-aged adults (n=36), a group largely made up of employed professionals. Here, 75% of participants consume coffee, with 58.3% selecting it as their primary beverage. Rather than seeking a pure performance boost, these respondents prioritise the social aspect and the daily ritual of caffeinated beverages. This indicates that for working-age adults, caffeine has transitioned into a social and sensory experience rather than remaining a simple tool for performance.

Mature adults (n=12) share this preference for the social side of caffeine, strongly linking consumption to fika and established daily routines. Two-thirds of this group identify coffee as their most-consumed drink, and average two caffeinated beverages per day. Energy drinks are almost entirely absent in this demographic. Only one respondent reported regular consumption, associating caffeine with alertness, endurance, and as a dopamine reward.

5.1.2 Coffee Consumption Patterns

Among the 94 total survey respondents, 64 participants consume coffee, with 52 participants establishing coffee as their most consumed caffeinated beverage. This consumer group is primarily female and consists largely of students and full-time employees residing in urban centres like Lund and Malmö.

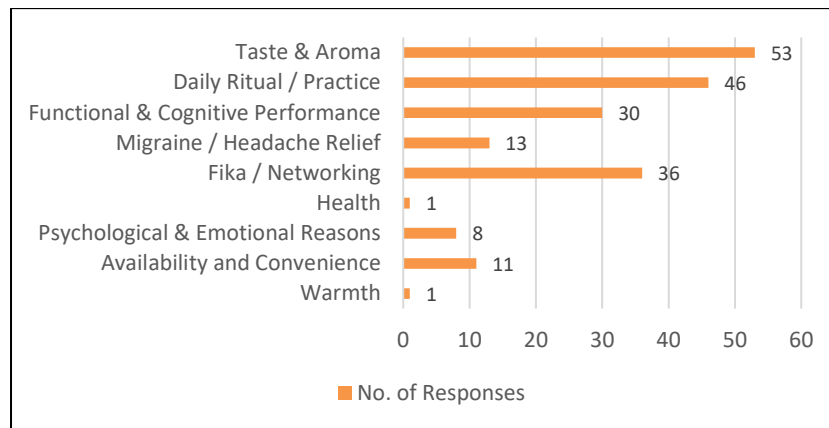


Figure 7. Survey results identifying the key behavioural drivers and motivations behind coffee consumption among designated coffee drinkers. (Responses to Section 3, Question 1: “Why do you drink coffee?”) (n=64).

As seen in the figure above, the primary motivations for the consumption of coffee are its taste and aroma, closely followed by the importance of daily ritual. The social significance of the beverage is particularly strong, with 56.2% selecting coffee specifically for social networking and fika. Figure 8 shows that the coffee drinkers’ experiences after consumption are generally positive, with mental clarity, relaxation, and increased motivation being the most frequently reported effects.

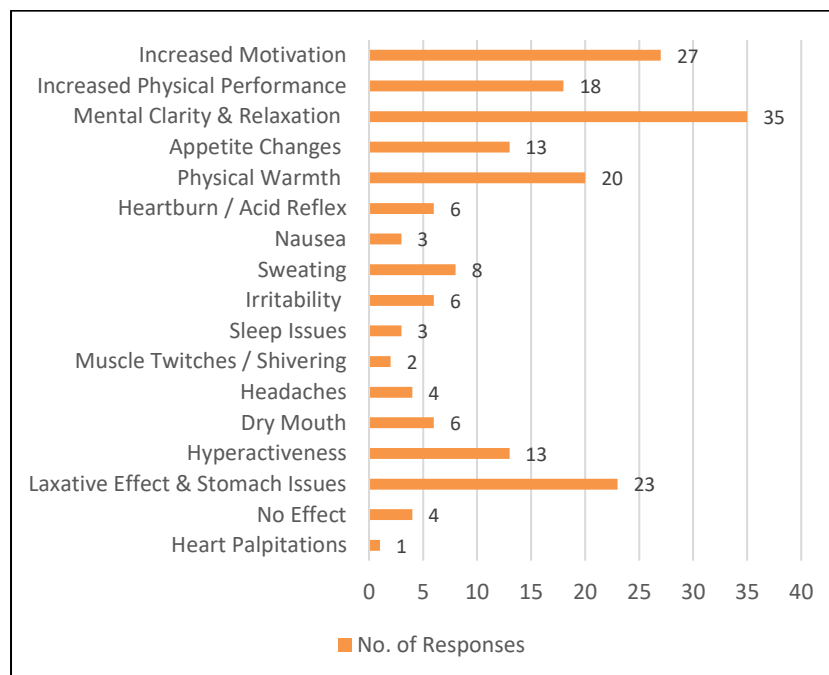


Figure 8. Survey results depicting the various after-effects reported by coffee drinkers following consumption. (Responses to Section 3, Question 2: “Which of these have you experienced after drinking coffee?”) (n=64).

Interestingly, despite the common stigma regarding coffee breath, a significant portion of the group viewed the aftertaste neutrally on a 5-point Likert scale, while the second-largest segment actually described the experience as pleasant. Even with this high level of satisfaction,

approximately a quarter of respondents admitted to having considered switching to a different beverage, with tea being the most frequently cited alternative.

5.1.3 Tea Consumption Patterns

Tea was selected as the primary caffeinated beverage of choice by 19 participants, and 63 individuals do consume tea, representing a secondary but significant consumer segment. This demographic is predominantly female and characterised by a relatively balanced split between students and working professionals.

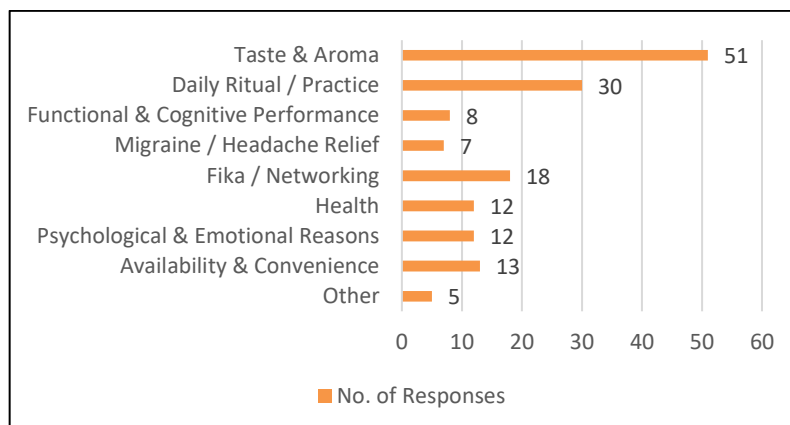


Figure 9. Survey results illustrating the behavioural drivers and motivations behind tea consumption among designated tea drinkers. (Responses to Section 4, Question 1: “Why do you drink tea?”) (n=63).

While tea’s taste and aroma remain the leading drivers for tea drinkers, visible in Figure 9 above, this group does emphasise the daily rituals of having tea, convenience and health reasons as core factors for their preference. Notably, from Figure 10, common post-consumption experiences include physical warmth and mental clarity, aligning with the perception of tea as a milder and more soothing stimulant.

Unlike coffee or energy drink consumers, tea drinkers show high loyalty to their choice, with the majority having never considered switching to another caffeinated alternative.

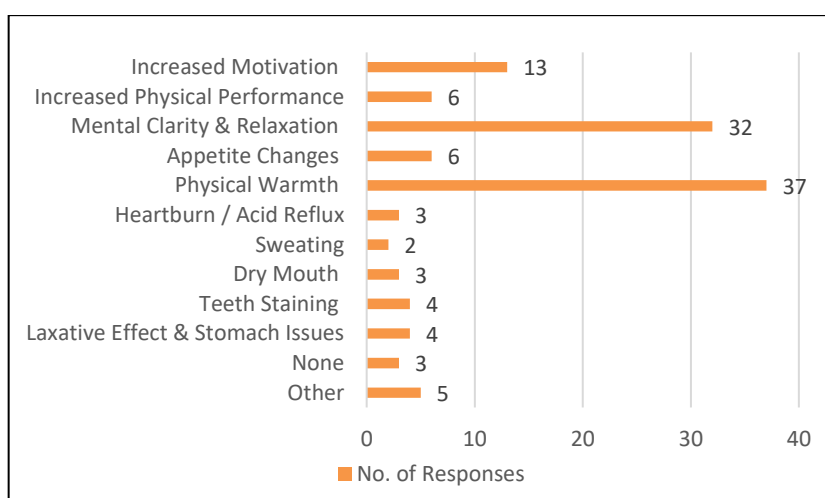


Figure 10. Survey results demonstrating the various after-effects reported by tea drinkers following consumption. (Responses to Section 4, Question 2: “Which of these have you experienced after drinking tea?”) (n=63).

5.1.4 Energy Drink Consumption Patterns

Energy drinks serve as the primary caffeinated beverage for 16% of the total survey respondents. While 15 participants chose this as their most-consumed option, a total of 24 individuals provided detailed data regarding their energy drink habits, indicating significant secondary usage within the broader sample. This group is heavily defined by the young adult demographic who utilise these beverages primarily as tools for performance and focus.

A notable outlier in this group is a 55-year-old male employed full-time who consumes two caffeinated beverages daily and identifies energy drinks as his primary choice. This consumer associates the intake with alertness, endurance, and a dopamine reward, representing a minority in an otherwise youth-dominated segment.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of responses when this consumer group was asked when and why they choose to drink energy drinks. The observation is that the motivations behind energy drink consumption are strictly utility-based, and contrast with the social nature of coffee and tea. The most common scenarios for consumption include while working or performing deep-focus tasks (54.2%), while studying or attending lectures (41.7%), and as a means to combat the post-lunch energy slump (37.5%).

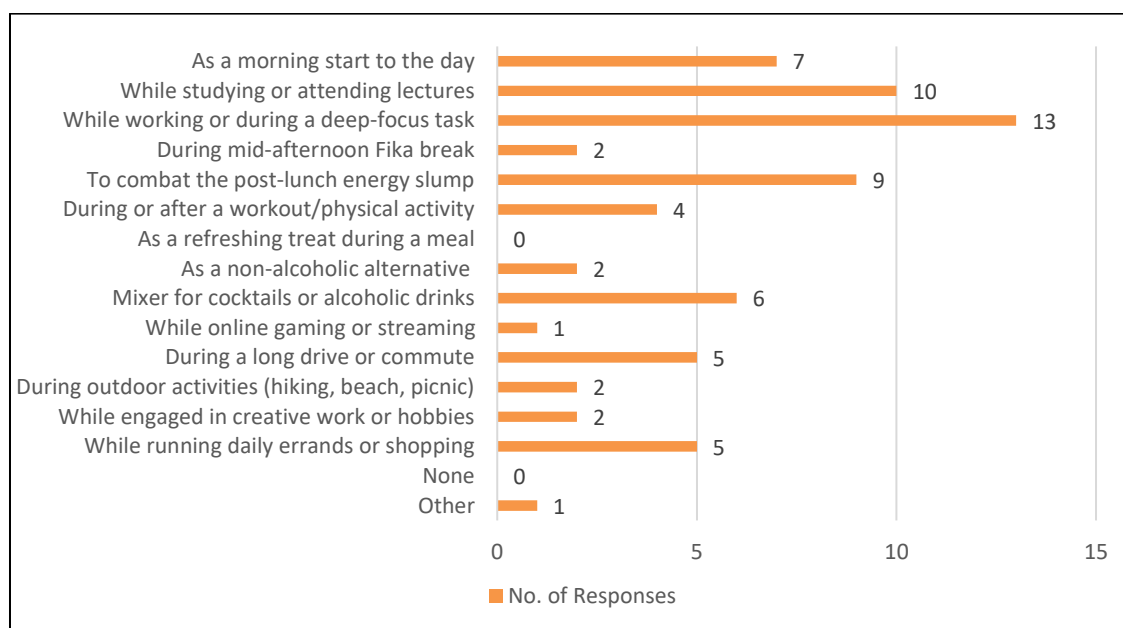


Figure 11. Survey results identifying the contexts and motivations behind energy drink usage among designated energy drink consumers. (Responses to Section 6, Question 1: “When and why do you drink energy drinks?”) (n=24).

In terms of brand preference, the market is led by global giants, with Monster and Red Bull, each consumed by 54.2% of the respondents, followed closely by functional fitness brands NOCCO and Celsius at 45.8% each. When selecting a preferred brand, participants prioritise functional delivery alongside sensory experience, as illustrated in Figure 12.

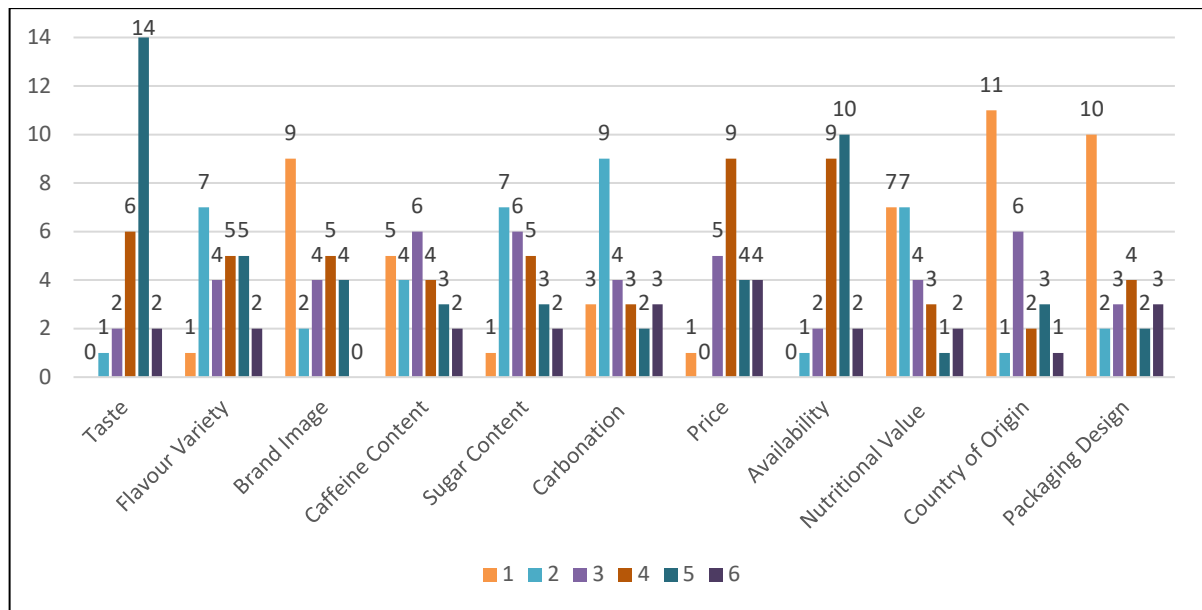


Figure 12. Energy drink consumers' evaluation of the relative importance of different decision-making factors when selecting an energy drink. (Responses to Section 6, Question 4: "On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important each of the following factors is when choosing your preferred energy drink (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important, 6 = No opinion)" (n=24).

While taste is rated as the most critical factor, the majority of consumers also identified price and availability as important considerations. On the other hand, factors like country of origin and packaging design do not matter to the majority of participants. Brand image also showed a relatively low impact, with 11 respondents rating it as unimportant compared to only 9 who considered it a priority.

The survey showed fairly equal responses on both sides of the scale regarding the importance of caffeine and sugar content. Even though the raw importance of caffeine was split, the follow-up question depicted in Figure 13 reveals a clear preference for moderate intensity through standard caffeine content rather than high intensity options meant for maximum energy release and impact.

A similar trend was observed with sugar present in the beverage. Despite the mixed feelings about sugar content, half of the respondents stated that the inclusion of artificial sweeteners, such as sucralose or aspartame, does not actually influence their decision to avoid a specific brand.

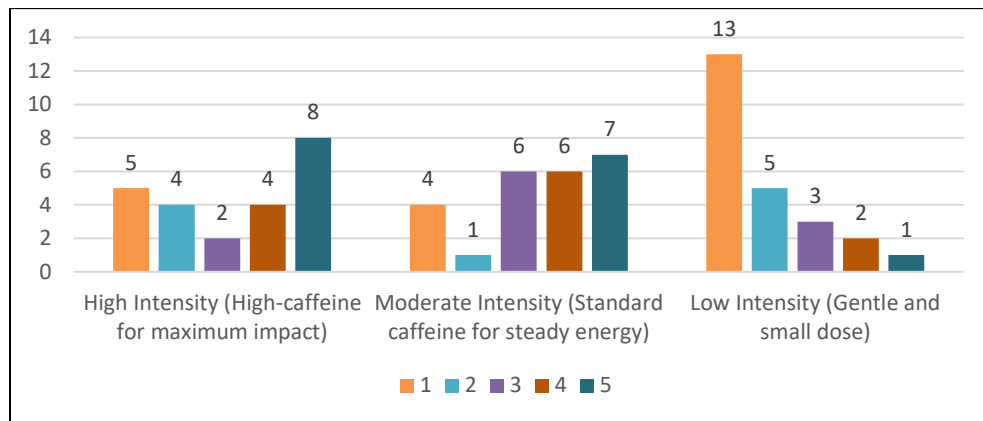


Figure 13. Energy drink consumers' stated preferences regarding the intensity of energy release. (Responses to Section 6, Question 6: "On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you prefer the following types of energy release? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)") (n=24).

5.1.5 Perceptions about MUST Energy

The concept of MUST Energy as a carbonated, caffeinated drink made from the juice of "ugly" apples was presented to respondents to understand market fit and appeal. Participants primarily categorised this beverage as a natural energy drink (56.4%), followed by 37.2% considering it as a workday/productivity beverage and 34% as an artisanal/craft caffeinated soda. Figure 14 also shows that the description resonated as a clean-label beverage for 29.8% of the sample, suggesting that the absence of artificial additives is a key identifying feature for consumers.

Respondents could imagine themselves consuming MUST Energy in a variety of situational contexts that bridge the gap between utility and leisure. The most popular scenarios included drinking the beverage to combat the post-lunch energy slump (29.8%), during a long drive or commute (33.0%), or while working or during a deep-focus task (30.9%). Additionally, 26.6% of participants saw it as a fit for outdoor activities and 29.8% as a mid-afternoon fika break option, which is a situation traditionally dominated by coffee.

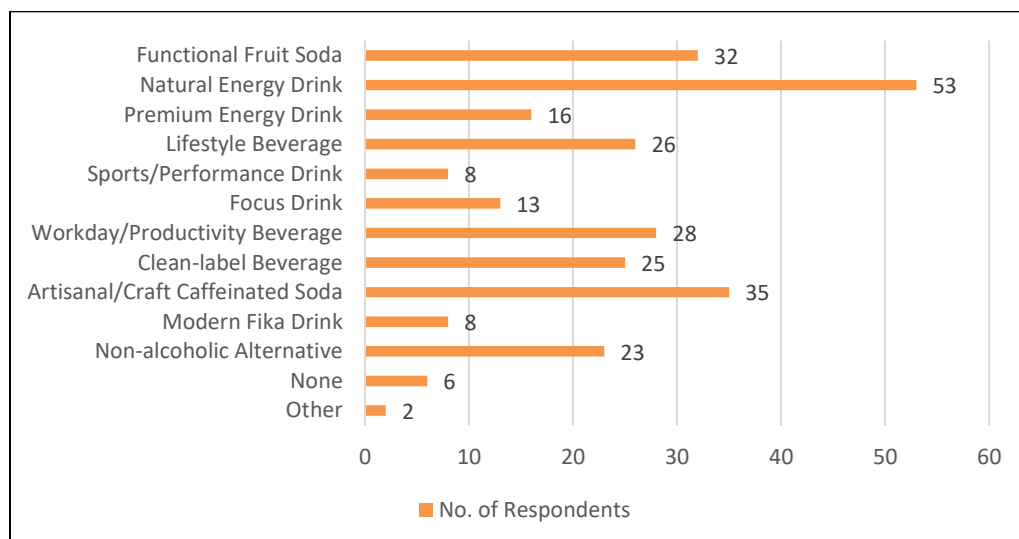


Figure 14. Survey respondents' categorisation of the MUST Energy product description. (Responses to Section 7, Question 10: "Based on this description, how would you categorise this beverage?") (n=94).

Willingness to engage with the product was high, with 30.9% of respondents stating they would be extremely likely to try the drink if it were readily available. Regarding the price point for a 250ml can, the most common response was 26 - 30 SEK, supported by 33% of the sample. Another 24.5% were willing to pay 21 - 25 SEK, while 18.1% indicated they would not purchase the product, due to a general avoidance of carbonated and energy drinks.

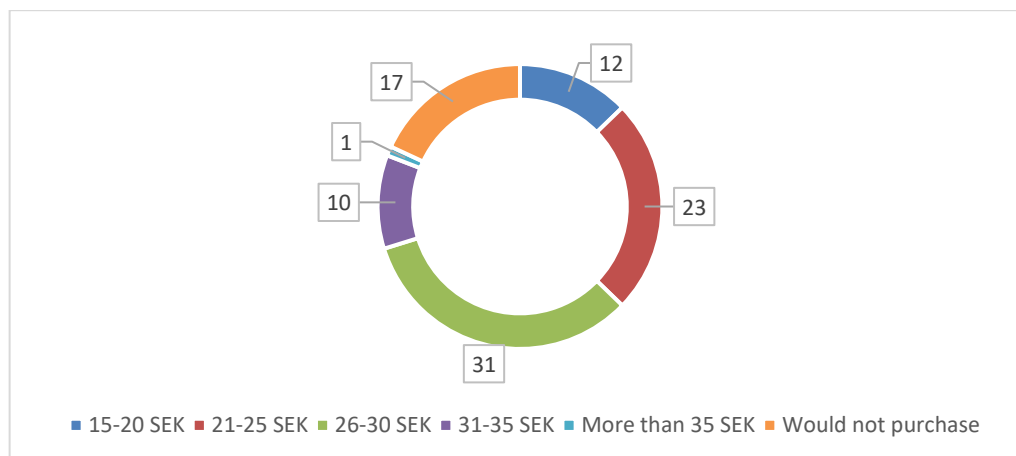


Figure 15. Survey respondents' stated willingness to pay for a 250ml can of MUST Energy. (Responses to Section 7, Question 13: "A standard energy drink or premium coffee typically costs between 20-35 SEK. How much would you be willing to pay for a 250ml can of the sustainable, apple-based caffeinated beverage described above?") (n=94).

5.2 Interview Results

Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted to dive deeper into the personal motivations and social perceptions behind caffeine consumption. These sessions allowed for the exploration of how individuals view different beverages as social actors and how they envision their ideal caffeinated product. By avoiding the structural constraints of standard questionnaire formats, the qualitative interviews conducted brought forward the authentic, everyday voices of the participants, highlighting how closely intertwined beverage choices are with self-identity and lifestyle.

5.2.1 Caffeine as a Ritual and Functional Tool

The interviews revealed that caffeine intake is divided into two main categories: ritualistic consumption and functional utility. For many participants, the act of drinking their caffeinated beverage, mostly coffee or tea, is a deeply ingrained habit that provides a sense of structure to their day. Participant 14 emphasised that the preparation process itself is as important as the caffeine itself, explaining:

"For me, the ritual of making coffee is like, it's everything. I like grinding my own beans, hearing the machine, and holding that warm mug before I even open my laptop. It feels so peaceful, you know? Like a calm moment before the chaos of the day. If I miss it, my whole morning slightly feels off, not just because of missing caffeine, but because I missed that morning routine."

Similarly, participants described their morning beverages as a non-negotiable gateway that allows them to mentally transition into a productive working mindset.

In contrast, a significant portion of the interviewees, particularly students, view caffeine primarily as a functional tool for performance and physical enhancement. For these individuals, taste or routine takes a backseat to raw operational efficiency. An example is participant 8's description of their caffeine intake, which is calculated around physical milestones and their gym schedule:

"I mostly drink Red Bull /.../ I take caffeine mostly to finish what I need to do, like when I'm heading to the gym or if I have to study. I'll think, "Okay, I need to plug in energy right now to smash this workout or maybe to stay focused for the next few hours." /.../ I guess caffeine is just functional for me. It's about getting that fast boost to push myself, instead of bedrotting all day."

Participant 13 added to this performance narrative, describing how they use caffeine to forcibly clear mental blockages during heavy workloads:

"When the burnout hits, and you're just staring at a screen, I open an energy drink to literally shock my system and smack myself back into focus. It's like, I need it to grind when my brain wants to shut down."

Following this discussion, participants were questioned on their experiences with caffeine reception. The positive experiences with caffeine were highly consistent across the group, with participants highlighting feelings of sharpness, productivity, and a general mood lift. As Participant 1 noted, coffee helps them *"clear the morning fog and makes me feel way more capable of doing complex tasks"* when arriving at the university.

However, the negative experiences were equal and often quite intense. Multiple interviewees expressed a strong distaste for the reactions caused by excessive or rapid caffeine intake, such as heart palpitations, sudden jitters, and the subsequent energy crash that leaves them feeling more exhausted than they were initially. Participant 9 shared a particularly distressing encounter with over-stimulation:

"I didn't know cold brew had a lot of caffeine and had this awful experience when I drank too much of it on an empty stomach. I was feeling anxious and could feel palpitations. I wasn't really anxious about anything and thought, "Why am I feeling so anxious? Why is my heart racing?" And then I saw the caffeine content, and the proportion was super high. Then, things made sense."

The consensus among interviewees who consume energy drinks was that while the alertness provided by caffeine is highly desired, the physical and emotional cost of common energy drinks is often seen as too high a price to pay. When exploring specific turn-offs regarding energy drinks, Participant 7 highlighted an important aversion:

"My biggest fear and turn-off with energy drinks is just the chemical aspect. I feel like it's fake energy. I had one before an exam once, and my heart was beating so fast I couldn't concentrate, and then an hour later, I just crashed completely. It takes away your control, well, at least for me /.../ For me to ever drink an energy drink regularly, it would have to be completely natural, transparent and not give me that heart race."

5.2.2 The Social Identity of Beverages: The Persona Game

During the interviews, a personification exercise was used to uncover the social stereotypes associated with different drinks. Participants were asked to imagine various beverages as people attending a social gathering, such as a party or a professional networking event. This indirect method bypassed standard rationalisation biases, allowing interviewees to freely project their authentic perceptions, biases, and social stigmas onto the brands.

5.2.2.1 Personification of Coffee

When discussing the coffee persona, participants frequently related it to a high-status, reliable, professional identity that draws respect and admiration in a workplace setting. It was consistently described as a sophisticated, middle-aged professional, and overwhelmingly visualised as a masculine figure, specifically, *“an older man, maybe a dad or someone very stable,”* as mentioned by Participant 15. Participant 5 provided a highly detailed depiction of this archetype:

“Coffee is definitely a guy ... the hardworking boss dressed in something elegant, maybe a sharp suit. He’s in his mid-thirties, always on his phone, and moving from one meeting to another. He’s productive, reliable, and has his life totally sorted out /.../ Everyone at the party respects him because he’s successful and looks like one of those established adults. He can fit in anywhere, from the corporate meeting room to a casual chat in the park.”

Participant 3 supported this imagery, adding:

“Coffee is that mature guy who walks into the office with total confidence. He doesn’t need to yell to get attention. His presence, just the way he walks and talks, signals everyone at the office that it’s time to work /.../ He’s professional, a bit serious, and the whole place runs because of him /.../ He’s the person you know you can rely on when things get chaotic.”

Interviewees also enthusiastically described the coffee persona at the social setting. For instance, Participant 11 described:

“Oh, coffee is the centre of the event. He’s standing under the nice lighting, holding a small plate, talking to the others. You look at him and you just think, “Yeah, that guy has his life completely under control”.”

5.2.2.2 Personification of Tea

The tea persona was clearly defined by a sense of tranquillity, intellectualism, and emotional safety that stood in contrast to profiles of the other caffeinated beverages. Tea was often depicted as a wise, soft-spoken, and deeply mindful woman, with “grandmother”, “librarian”, and “mature woman” being the most common identities. Participant 2 described the character saying:

“Tea is like a wise, soft-spoken, calm, intellectual woman, maybe an academic or a librarian. She’s probably sitting in a cosy, quiet corner, reading a book or having a deep, comforting conversation with one person.”

Participant 4 also illustrated a wholesome, elder personality for tea, saying, *“I picture an old lady knitting and having a nice relaxing cup of tea and biscuits. She’s good for advice and is very sensible.”*

Some interviewees imagined the tea persona to be middle-aged, with Participant 6 describing the personality of tea to “/.../ *take part in reflection and wellness activities or groups... She’s the person you go to when you need emotional support.*” Participant 7 added a similar perspective, observing:

“The tea woman doesn’t care about the corporate life or going to the gym or those lifestyle trends. She’s all about mindfulness, self-improvement, and is balanced emotionally and in life. She feels safe and wholesome, like someone who genuinely takes care of her inner self and the people around her.”

Participant 7 visualised tea to be “*just free-flowing, hopping from conversation to conversation*” and Participant 13 further expanded on the peaceful nature of the tea persona:

“Tea is in her warm cardigan, and is listening to whoever is speaking. Tea doesn’t push any of her thoughts or agenda /.../ She’s completely disconnected from the younger, crazy energy of the rest of the group.”

These descriptions highlight how tea is commonly associated with slow-paced, reflective, and restorative activities rather than with fast-paced, high-pressure environments such as modern workplaces and gyms.

5.2.2.3 Personification of Monster Energy

Monster Energy was consistently viewed as a teenager or young male tied to the stereotypes of gaming subcultures and teenage rebellion. The collective imagination for the Monster persona is a dark, edgy, secretive, night-owl figure who listens to rock music, particularly. This persona was also tied to computer science, coding projects and creative activities in general. Participant 13 described this persona quite vividly:

“Monster is that secretive emo, punk kid in high school who you know nothing about. You just know he spends his entire time gaming in his room, that’s probably dark and smelly, until early morning, like 6 am. He’s surrounded by screens, his phone and his dual monitor gaming set-up. Maybe once he grows up, he’ll work in IT and stay glued to his screens.”

Participant 11 visualises Monster Energy to be “/.../ *messy vibes. He’s a teenager with a skateboard, causing ruckus all the time. If I saw him, I’d be like, “What are you doing? Where are your parents?”/.../ He’s one of those kinds of rebellious teens.*”

The majority of survey respondents indicated that they do not identify with this brand persona, noting that they typically would not interact with such an individual in daily life. This was mirrored by Participant 14 who noted the unapproachable nature of this persona, which could be what the general consumer related to as well:

“The Monster kid is just too loud and alternative. He’s wearing chains and looks aggressive. But he’s really just weird and looks childish with his vibe. I think he realises that and that makes him feel detached from normal situations.”

5.2.2.4 Personification of Red Bull

Red Bull was typically envisioned as an intense, hyper-energetic, high-achieving young professional who thrives in dynamic, high-adrenaline environments. This persona was mostly

gendered as a mid-twenty's male, and seen as an adventurous risk-taker, being outgoing and resilient. Participants familiar with Red Bull's sponsorship of extreme sports often referred to this persona as an "adrenaline junkie", while others called this persona a "corporate grinder" and a "finance bro". Participant 13 outlined this persona:

"Red Bull is that guy in class who's super energetic and a bit of a risk-taker, even though he hasn't slept in 24 hours. He works incredibly hard 'cuz he's under so much pressure. You see him completely locked in at the library, studying. But the second he finishes, he's gone outdoors to do something crazy."

Participant 12 labelled the persona as a *".../ daredevil who's always on the go"*. They added that this individual *".../ is constantly bouncing around the room, and honestly, he might even be a bit of a show-off because his energy is just so high and intense"*. Participant 11 also added to this active personality, saying, *"It's giving frat boy. A bit of engineering too."*

Some interviewees elaborated on the fun, 'on-the-edge' persona of the Red Bull persona. For instance, Participant 2 characterised:

"I would say that Red Bull is a very chill, relaxed person. He graduated from university but just wants to enjoy life. He's not really serious about working in corporate. He's living off his parents' money, he also did a paid internship and so he's just living life with the money that he has right now. Maybe he does these weird, extraordinary activities, or he's at the club getting blackout drunk."

Participant 15 described quite a chaotic personality for Red Bull, as *".../ that person of the office that completely does the unexpected. They're the ones who might show up at a party, have one too many drinks, and be found releasing balloons off the roof."*

Despite these enthusiastic, descriptive illustrations, many participants admitted their aversion to the beverage due to its artificial and medicinal taste. Participant 17 noted:

"I got some Red Bull and NOCCO cans for free at a career fair. Otherwise, I never buy them. .../ I don't like their taste, why would someone see them as tasty?"

5.2.2.5 Personification of NOCCO:

The persona for NOCCO was an exceptionally specific and fascinating case, strongly tied to fitness culture, social media, and body image. While viewed as energetic, it carried a heavy stigma of being performative, superficial or overly staged. Participant 5 was exceptionally direct:

"NOCCO is definitely a gym bro. 100%. He's constantly hitting the gym, and loves to talk loudly about his PRs and macros. He's all about fitness and high performance, but it feels a bit fake, like he's doing it just to show off to everyone else."

Participant 17 also mentioned similar qualities, saying, *"I think NOCCO will be that guy who wants to look cool and brags a lot about things. You want to approach him, but when you speak to him, he intimidates and other people. So, I wouldn't want to stick with him. .../ It's just that they need the attention. If nobody's talking, they are the ones who will."*

Participant 14 offered an alternative take on this fitness-driven archetype, imagining a feminine character:

“I see NOCCO as a female fitness influencer. She spends a huge amount of time on social media, filming her workouts, and is completely obsessed with health, aesthetics, trends, fashion, and how she looks to her followers.”

Participant 9 added to this performative focus by elaborating, *“NOCCO is that person who keeps their can perfectly on the library desk so everyone passing by can see it. They want to show off like they’re this super disciplined, productive, aesthetic person, even if they’re just scrolling on their phone with the laptop open.”*

Participant 15 also highlighted the alienation caused by this aesthetic:

“The NOCCO bro is so wrapped up in fitness, influencers and gym subcultures that he feels totally artificial and virtual. If you aren’t part of his world of interests, he’s obviously unapproachable and overwhelming to hang out with.”

Beyond this narrative, several interviewees noted that the vibrant packaging design and specific flavour profiles of NOCCO strongly reminded them of disposable vapes and snus canisters. Participants reported their observation that consumers who regularly carry NOCCO often utilise these nicotine alternatives. This aesthetic creates an aversion for the participants to even hold the can, wanting to distance themselves from both the perceived superficial gym subculture and its accompanying lifestyle habits.

5.2.2.6 Persona Interactions at the Social Event

When the interviewees were asked to place these diverse beverage personas together at a social gathering, with the suggestion of a networking event or party, the majority of interviewees chose to describe the beverages interacting in the context of a party, likely due to relatability and ease of imagination. A fascinating set of friction points emerged during this discussion. The energy drink characters (Monster, Red Bull, NOCCO) were collectively identified as the loudest group in the room, constantly seeking attention. However, they were imagined to struggle heavily to socialise and fit into a more grown-up or mature environment, whereas coffee was visualised to be capable of that. Participant 17 envisioned a clear social hierarchy that places coffee at the top:

“Coffee has the best personality. Coffee may go talk to people, and they also approach coffee. They also approach tea, but tea is having very deep conversations with everyone. (The) Coffee person is just, very easy to mingle with, and so everyone at the party naturally goes toward him. /.../ The energy drinks are trying too hard to look cool, they’re actually teaching each other bad things... Monster and Red Bull are instigating drunk NOCCO... They’re all very immature, and nobody wants to talk to them.”

Similar to the comment above on the energy drink personas, these drinks frequently shared the title of being the odd one out when compared to the calm, universally accepted, and professional personas of coffee and tea. Participant 3 highlighted how those personas alienate themselves at the event:

“The energy drink guys don't know how to just sit still and be part of a group conversation. Red Bull is running around looking for something goofy and crazy to do, and NOCCO is judging everyone else.”

Participant 10 explained, *“The coffee and the tea academics are on the sidelines and are having actual, meaningful conversations. They're more mature and are looking down on the monster and NOCCO who are on the dancefloor, acting all kiddish.”*

Participant 16 noted, *“Monster has this weird energy. I feel like they're sitting in the corner playing on their phone and not talking to anyone”*, while Participant 6 mentioned, *“The NOCCO guy is definitely the odd one out. He doesn't know where he exists. He's like an NPC (Non-playable character in video games).”* Participant 15 added that the aggressive branding of these drinks could make them feel completely out of place in normal, everyday settings.

Participant 13 summarised their discomfort felt toward the industrial beverages through the beverage personalities:

“It feels like the energy drinks are living on a completely different, chaotic side of life. They bring this fake energy to a space that is supposed to be enthusiastic, real and like taking a break.”

This highlights a significant social barrier for energy drink brands, as their personas are strongly linked to specific activities, making them feel out of place in broader, everyday social rituals. Such observations support Svensson's (2021) assertion that energy drinks represent an individualised lifestyle among youth.

5.2.3 Designing the Ideal Caffeinated Beverage

The participants were asked to prioritise characteristics for their dream caffeinated drink, and the results showed a strong desire for a product that combines the energy delivery of an energy drink with the natural profile of coffee or tea. As seen in Figure 16 below, the most sought-after traits were a natural flavour, steady energy release between 80 and 100mg, and a complete lack of artificial colours or preservatives. When describing the persona of this ideal beverage, participants created a character that was highly successful and optimistic. They imagined someone who was energetic and productive like the “coffee boss” but also healthy, approachable, and environmentally conscious.

Participant 4 said this ideal persona was *“/.../ someone who just completely has their life together. They're energetic and productive like the coffee person, but they're also very friendly, healthy, and environmentally conscious. They aren't stressed ... They just have this natural, clean aura.”*

There was a notable gap between what participants currently consume and what their ideal caffeine drink represented. For instance, participants 8 and 16 mentioned that they often drink energy drinks or coffee out of convenience, even though they dislike the synthetic taste or the heavy aftertaste. They felt that their current choices did not accurately reflect their own values or the healthy, balanced personas they designed for their ideal drink.

By creating this persona, participants were able to articulate a need for a beverage that feels modern and high-performing without the negative social stigma of being unhealthy or artificial.

This suggests that a product successfully filling this gap would not only satisfy a functional need but also a social desire to be seen as a conscious and balanced consumer.

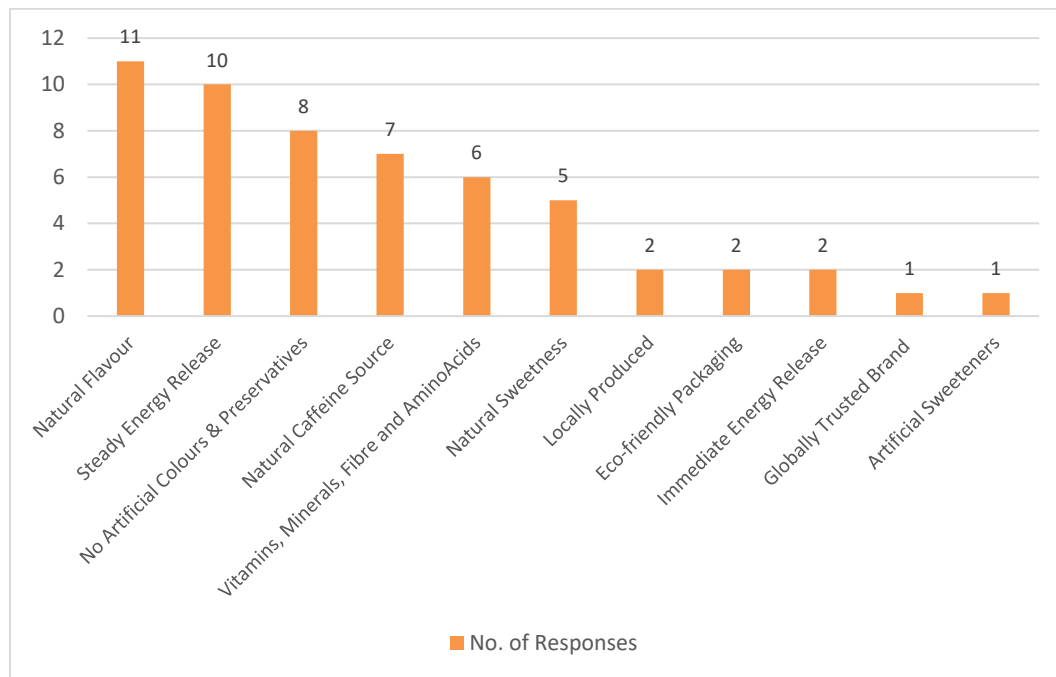


Figure 16. Interviewees' (n=17) top three characteristics of an ideal caffeinated beverage.

5.2.4 Perception of the MUST Energy Product Concept

In the final section of the qualitative study, the concept of MUST Energy was introduced to the participants without initially revealing the brand's identity. The initial reactions across all 17 interviews were overwhelmingly positive. Most participants were excited by the 100mg caffeine content, which they felt was the perfect middle ground for staying alert without inducing physical jitters, anxiety or feeling overstimulated as associated with high-caffeine drinks. Participant 1 asserted, *“/.../ I don't consume energy drinks a lot, but if this was there at my local supermarket, I would pick it, even if it's a little bit more expensive, because I know the drink is good. It fits with what I kind of need, at the moment.”*

The circular economy approach of using fruit that would otherwise be discarded waste was seen as a major strength for the brand's authenticity and environmental trust. Most participants found this concept to be a step towards sustainable energy drinks. There were some significant discussions with a few interviewees regarding the terminology of “ugly” fruits. Some participants expressed that this term triggered negative associations regarding food quality, even though they knew there is no compromise in quality. For instance, Participant 16 argued:

“Why can't we just say apples? They are apples in the end of the day. Like, is it the yummiest apple? Tell me that... It's like you're putting a question mark into a statement that doesn't need a question mark.”

Participant 11 suggested a more descriptive and sophisticated approach to branding:

“When you said ‘ugly’ apples, I imagined mush or harmed in some way. I think that can be a bit of a turn-off for people. Just as you said, maybe they don't have the perfect shape, calling them ‘imperfect’ or ‘visually imperfect’ sounds better.”

When the terms “rescued” and “wonky” were suggested, they were found to be quite powerful and emotionally resonant. Participant 11 continued the discussion to highlight this emotional connection:

“I like calling them ‘rescued’ apples. I feel like it has this emotional connection. So, if you're drinking this, it's like you're saving a puppy.”

When interviewees were asked to re-engage with the personification exercise and introduce the MUST Energy concept as a person, participants described a highly desirable, relatable, and inclusive character, often terming it as an upgraded version of the coffee persona. This beverage was consistently associated with being sophisticated, knowledgeable, productive and mature. The personality was also envisioned as an active, eco-conscious individual who values restorative connections with nature, finding mental clarity and energy through outdoor movement and environmental mindfulness.

Participant 17 imagined a very pleasant character, describing “*They go on jogs, chill swims, and they like journaling and drawing in their journal while sitting under a tree in the park.*”

Participant 11 explained the social character of the persona:

“The MUST Energy persona is the cousin of my ideal beverage persona. They’re always positive, you look forward to working with them, they’re a team player, they’re a good friend and just a really comfortable person to be around.”

Participant 3, who has consumed the beverage before, also described an interesting animal-loving persona, “*I think they are more of an outdoorsy person who even lives outside the city. They’d even walk back home after a party, even though it’s a long distance /.../ I’m actually imagining, like a horse girl, someone who’s around horses and animals at least.*”. In a follow-up question regarding their likely consumption context, they specifically noted they could consume the beverage at 2:00 PM and feel “totally fine,” whereas the intensity of coffee at that hour would feel like “too much” and potentially disrupt their evening.

Interestingly, almost all interviewees described the MUST Energy personification with gender-neutral terms or explicitly stated they couldn’t picture a gender, suggesting the persona is androgynous. Participant 16 noted:

“It feels very clean and androgynous. It’s not aggressively male like a gym drink, and it’s not super soft either. It’s just a cool, balanced person.”

In the social event setting described by the participants earlier in the interview, this new persona was seen as the bridge that could comfortably talk to the coffee and the energy drink personas, effectively filling the social gap between the beverage personas identified in earlier sections of the interview. Participant 10 particularly described the persona as “*a breath of fresh air*”.

When the sample of MUST Energy was presented to participants at the end of the interviews, almost all of them described the aesthetic and look of the cans as clean, transparent, honest, and no-nonsense. They agreed with their perceptions as a purity-forward beverage, thereby steering away from the chemical stigma that often deters consumers from the energy drink category

By combining the professional reliability of coffee, the mindful comfort of tea, and the functional utility of an energy drink, the MUST Energy concept successfully established an identity that resonates deeply with the lifestyle goals of the modern, sustainability-minded Swedish consumer.

6 Discussions

6.1 Why do people choose their caffeinated beverage?

The decision to consume a specific caffeinated beverage is rarely a simple choice of taste. Instead, from a food systems perspective, it appears to be a complex negotiation between the value and commercial availability of the product and the consumer's biological need, social identity, and situational usage.

The survey results in Section 5.1.2.1 established a clear demographic divide, with younger participants favouring utility and performance while older respondents prioritised the social and sensory ritual of having a caffeinated beverage during fika. However, the interviews added a layer of nuance to this, suggesting that even for the youth, caffeine has moved from a choice to a baseline requirement. To highlight, interview participant 2 described coffee as her daily baseline, reserving energy drinks only when she needs an extra boost for exams or athletic races. This suggests that for many, caffeine is not a stimulant used to get ahead, but a tool used simply to get started. A caffeine drink in the morning serves as the psychological on-switch for the mundane rituals, like having a shower while getting ready for university or work, essentially to overcome the initial drowsy lethargy to meet standard daily productivity.

This noticeable transition from ritual to necessity of having caffeine points toward a psychological and biological habit that many participants seemed only partially aware of. While interview participant 13 explicitly described himself as being addicted to the rush of energy drinks to combat feeling burned out, a more subtle dependency exists within the coffee and tea drinkers as well. Physical reliance often appears not as a peak in energy, but as the avoidance of a low. For regular consumers of caffeine, its absence leads to a mental fog or a lack of motivation that prevents them from engaging with their daily tasks.

From the above discussion, we can infer that this reliance is reinforced by a psychological body clock where the brain begins to anticipate the caffeine spike at specific intervals. The mere smell of coffee or the sound of cracking open an energy drink can trigger a sense of readiness, as the body has been conditioned to expect a chemical intervention at that exact hour of the day. This creates a cycle where the choice of beverage is dictated by the time of day and the expected crash rather than a genuine desire for the caffeinated drink itself.

Cultural upbringing also plays a significant role in why coffee and tea remain the primary choices for comfort. A portion of interview participants noted that they find a genuine sense of appreciation in the sensory experience of coffee because it is rooted in their ethnicity. This aligns with the study by Sonestedt et al. (2024), which describes coffee and tea being perceived as wholesome because they are associated with traditions and natural ingredients.

Adding on, the choice of a caffeinated beverage in a social setting is where the outward persona of the drink becomes most apparent. As discussed in the literature, carrying a specific drink acts as a visual badge of personality. In a library or office setting, holding a NOCCO immediately aligns the consumer with an active, physically driven and performative gym personality. Conversely, carrying a Monster or Red Bull often projects the image of someone who needs a spark-like energy boost to get through a study session at the library before heading off to a party or an intense gaming session.

These contrast sharply with the more established, yet invisible, personas of coffee and tea. A coffee drinker is often viewed as the hardworker or the reliable professional whose life is put together and follows a set routine. Meanwhile, a tea drinker projects the introverted artist or the journal writer, suggesting a calm, knowledgeable, and healthy lifestyle.

The introduction of MUST Energy into this social landscape created a new persona, the balanced nature lover. In the interviews, this beverage was associated with being sophisticated, knowledgeable and mature, yet still active. In a social gathering, holding a MUST Energy sends a different signal than a Red Bull, suggesting the consumer is cool and productive, but also mindful of sustainability and quality. This perceivable personality through outward appearance is why many students in the library feel the need to have an energy drink on their desk, not just for the caffeine, but to look socially acceptable and part of the grind culture.

6.2 Caffeinated Beverage Perceptions

This section synthesises the quantitative findings from the survey with the qualitative insights from the interviews to map out how each beverage is positioned within the average consumer's mind.

6.2.1 Coffee: The Universal Baseline for Caffeine

Coffee is the most prevalent and reliable beverage in the study, functioning as the ultimate “hardworking boss” of the Swedish caffeine landscape. Both the survey data and the interviews suggest that coffee is synonymous with a person who is successful and has their life entirely sorted. Participants envisioned someone sophisticated, reliable, and fundamentally put-together. This unanimous persona portrays coffee as a symbol of established adulthood.

In this context, drinking coffee becomes a performative act. It is the beverage one chooses while studying or working to align oneself with the image of a focused and sophisticated professional. It is the drink of choice for those who are serious about their tasks and wish to project an aura of competence and authority.

Beyond the professional image, the sensory qualities of coffee, specifically its warmth, serve as a vital psychological anchor. While survey respondents rated coffee highly for its taste, the interviews revealed that the warmth of a ceramic mug provides a unique sense of comfort that cold alternatives cannot replicate. This warmth satisfies a physical need and acts as a form of encouragement and motivation. It creates a stable environment for productivity where the consumer feels supported by the ritual.

Since coffee is also understood as a natural and traditional stimulant, there is virtually no criticism regarding the physical feeling it provides. This reliability is further supported by the industry's marketing, which is often subtle and focused on origin and quality. This allows coffee

to fit seamlessly into any universal usage case, from a high-stakes board meeting to a quiet university library, without appearing out of place.

The convenience and universal availability of coffee further solidify its status as the unquestioned default. It is so ingrained in the social fabric that its presence requires no justification. Whether it is a mediocre office coffee or a premium artisanal roast, the functional delivery of the caffeine to initiate the workday remains the primary objective.

This combination of availability, sensory comfort, and professional identity effectively encapsulates the common perception of coffee as the ultimate symbol of corporate productivity and established adulthood.

6.2.2 Tea: The Supportive Shoulder

Through this study, tea has been noted to be perceived as the healthy, milder alternative in the caffeinated beverage market. It occupies a space of restoration and personal well-being. Survey data established tea as a major secondary drink for many, and the interviews highlighted its role as an evening wind-down beverage chosen for its calming effects rather than an energy boost. Furthermore, participants viewed tea as being as universally available as coffee, which establishes it as a similarly reliable and constant presence in their lives.

However, while coffee's availability is tied to corporate productivity, the reliability of tea is linked to its physiological and emotional safety. It is valued because it causes no physical jitters or emotional distress, providing a steady warmth that allows the consumer to remain centred and calm. This sense of safety makes tea a fundamental tool for mindfulness and self-improvement. The interviews revealed that tea is often associated with someone who uses the beverage to facilitate internal connection and self-reflection. The physical warmth of the cup serves to calm the nerves and helps the individual wind down, creating a dedicated space for journaling, creative work, or simply spending quiet time alone.

Unlike the performance-driven energy drinks or coffee, tea does not necessarily stimulate external functioning. Instead, it encourages the consumer to work on themselves and connect with their own thoughts. It is a beverage that assists in the process of becoming a better, more balanced person through relaxation and focused self-care. By providing warmth and comfort without the pressure of productivity, tea acts as a supportive shoulder that helps the individual reconnect with their inner self and prioritise personal restoration.

6.2.3 Monster: The Alternative Personality

Monster Energy is perceived through a lens of alternative subculture, often associated with a persona that is introverted, secretive, and perhaps a little "crazy". Unlike the persona of coffee, the Monster drinker is seen as a mysterious individual who might spend hours alone in their room, engaged in intense, independent activities like gaming, coding, or creative projects. This persona is seen as dark and bold, but not necessarily negatively. They project a rebellious personality that values independence over traditional social standards.

This perception is heavily cultivated by the company's marketing strategy, which eschews traditional corporate advertising in favour of sponsoring high-energy, niche events such as extreme sports, metal festivals, and gaming tournaments. These associations reinforce the idea that Monster is a drink for those who operate outside the mainstream.

The packaging design also plays a fundamental role in cementing this identity, utilising a gothic, punk, and emo aesthetic that is immediately recognisable. The iconic green claw marks against a black background signal a bold, alternative lifestyle that appeals to a specific demographic while acting as a barrier for others at the same time. The interviews revealed that for those who do not align with this aesthetic, the brand can feel unapproachable. Participants noted that even if they require a functional boost through an energy drink, the intense look of the can makes the drink feel like a mismatch for their own self-image. Consequently, the drink is not only often avoided because of its comparatively lower caffeine content, but also due to the appearance of the brand being too loud for a consumer who prefers a more subtle or natural lifestyle.

Apart from the aesthetic, Monster carries a notable chemical stigma that was prominent in the survey results. Over 60% of respondents labelled global energy drinks as unhealthy and synthetic, illustrating that Monster is often viewed more as a laboratory-made concoction than a beverage.

This perception creates a psychological barrier where the drink is seen to be risky, even when it isn't being used for hardcore athletic performance. In the interviews, this was described as a trade-off. Energy drink consumers like participant 13 resort to it during periods of extreme burnout, treating the drink as a high-intensity intervention rather than a daily pleasure. Since the drink is so closely associated with artificiality, it remains relegated to specific, high-utility impromptu situations where the need for a cognitive spark outweighs the desire for a clean or socially safe beverage.

Ultimately, Monster is perceived as a polarising, high-voltage tool that functions less as a drink and more as a bold statement of alternative identity and survival-driven utility.

6.2.4 Red Bull: The High-Stakes Perseverer

Unlike the other beverages, Red Bull occupies a specific position in the study. The consumer is perceived as someone who values their time and uses the caffeine to ensure they have enough energy left for themselves to transition into an energetic, social or outgoing activity.

This aligns with the study by Lundin and Persson (2025), where the beverage acts as a badge of a high-intensity, multi-faceted lifestyle. Having a Red Bull on a desk signals a persona that is currently enduring a difficult task but refuses to be defeated by it. Both the survey and the interviews suggest that the drink is a tool for those who need a functional rush to remain determined. It creates an image of a student who is battling through their workload with the explicit intention of finishing so they can reward themselves later.

The brand is uniquely and almost equally linked to both the library and the extreme outdoor arena. This dual identity is strongly reinforced by Red Bull's aggressive global marketing, which sponsors everything from high-altitude skydiving to high-stakes esports. Owing to this, the persona of the Red Bull drinker is seen as someone who will persevere through their professional responsibilities and then immediately transition into something crazy, energetic, or social.

However, this energetic and social appeal must contend with the strong, unhealthy stigma revealed in the survey, where a majority of respondents categorised global energy drinks as over-processed and synthetic. While interview participant 8 noted they usually drink Red Bull out of habit, others expressed a dislike for the medicinal taste, with participant 17 suggesting they would only consume it if it were handed out for free.

This implies that Red Bull is often chosen more for its reliability as an energy supplement than for sensory pleasure. The iconic slim blue-and-silver can has become a universal symbol for the “work hard, play hard” mentality. It is the drink of choice for a survival-driven productivity evident in high-pressure academic environments, even if it is not viewed with the same whole-some lens as coffee.

6.2.5 NOCCO: The Performative High-Performer

NOCCO is perceived much differently than common energy drinks since it is a functional fitness supplement, marketed through a lens of health and athleticism. Its clean image, emphasised by the inclusion of BCAAs and being sugar-free, allows it to bypass the junk soda stigma that plagues other energy drinks. Furthermore, as a brand made in Sweden, there is a sense of national pride associated with its success. The bright coloured cans and focus on specific lifestyle flavours give it a modern, youthful, and energetic feel as well.

However, the interviews revealed a significant tension between the brand's intended functional image and how it is perceived in a social context. While NOCCO drinkers are seen as high-performance, focused, and energetic, there is a recurring perception that the brand is fake and overly performative. Participants suggested that drinking a NOCCO can feel like an act for social media or to signal a disciplined gym lifestyle that may or may not be authentic.

This performative aspect can be described with the situation of studying in the library with a NOCCO on the desk. It signals that the student is taking their work seriously, reinforcing their identity as a high-performer even when they are not in a fitness environment. For these consumers, the can acts as a social badge of productivity.

Despite its success among high-performers, the aggressive nature of NOCCO's marketing and packaging acts as a major deterrent for the average consumer. While the pastel colours are meant to feel modern, some participants explicitly linked the colourful design of the cans to the aesthetics of vapes and snus. Adding on, the advertising attracts the high-performer persona, but simultaneously alienates those who find the high-intensity, social-media-driven aesthetic to be artificial and overwhelming. This association with addictive products, combined with the brand's marketed intense gym lifestyle, makes the beverage feel unapproachable to those who value a more clean and subtle lifestyle.

Thus, NOCCO is perceived as a powerful symbol of performance, serving as a functional badge for the ambitious while being viewed as a performative, high-intensity beverage by those outside of the fitness subculture.

6.2.6 MUST Energy: The Sophisticated Hybrid

During the persona exercises, interview respondents also consistently identified MUST Energy as a nature-loving individual who is both academically and professionally successful. This persona was often described as a younger, upgraded version of the “hardworking boss” persona associated with coffee. This raises an important argument about how the beverage compares to coffee in real-world situations. While coffee is the established morning on-switch, MUST Energy is viewed as a more adaptable tool for the rest of the day. An example is Interview Participant 3's personal experience comparing the high intensity of an afternoon coffee versus a subtle can of MUST energy. This suggests that MUST Energy offers a smoother, more manageable caffeine delivery that fits into the gaps where coffee feels too heavy or intrusive.

The beverage also shares the aspect of mindfulness and self-care qualities with the tea persona. While tea is linked to introverted activities like journaling or winding down at home, MUST Energy is perceived as the outdoor equivalent. Interview participants associated it with spending time connecting with nature and being mindful during physical activities like hiking or walking. It takes the calming, restorative essence of tea and combines it with a functional energy boost suitable for an active lifestyle. This makes MUST Energy a unique companion for those who want to work on themselves and stay healthy, while still providing the functional and mental clarity needed to complete their professional and personal responsibilities.

Adding on, interview respondents found the MUST Energy persona to be the most desirable person to have a conversation with. The persona was viewed as significantly more mature and approachable. It carried a sense of clarity and androgyny that makes it feel inclusive, rather than maximalist and loud. By combining the positive aspects of coffee, tea, and energy drinks, MUST Energy creates a unique, positive combination that is perfect for the modern, sustainability-minded consumer.

The packaging design is also identified to play a role in this positive perception. Almost all interview participants described the aesthetic of the cans as clean, transparent, honest, and no-nonsense. They perceived it as a purity-forward beverage, thereby steering away from the chemical stigma associated with the energy drink category. Moreover, instead of the provocative imagery found on other energy drinks, MUST Energy communicates a sustainable, sophisticated and collected identity that makes it feel appropriate for a professional meeting, a group discussion during lectures and even a high-end fika.

Expanding on the implication of fika, a particularly compelling finding is that a significant 29.8% of survey respondents explicitly associated the concept of MUST Energy with mid-day fika (Figure 14), despite never having physically seen or tasted the product. It is understood that this connection stems from a shared functional purpose. While energy drinks are usually consumed for a cognitive boost and to combat fatigue (Lundin, 2026), coffee and tea are routinely also consumed for the exact same reasons during a fika break. By framing MUST Energy as a mellow, natural alternative to overbearing energy drinks, respondents organically recognised it as a culturally appropriate fit for a restorative pause.

Beyond immediate functional utility, this association may also be rooted in a deeper, nostalgic phenomenon. In Sweden, children are served traditional applemust or sodas as a caffeine-free alternative during family fika gatherings. From this perspective, MUST Energy functions almost as an upgraded, adult iteration of a childhood fika staple. Because this study did not explicitly document the cultural backgrounds or childhood traditions of the survey cohort, this nostalgic link cannot be statistically verified. Furthermore, this childhood connection did not surface during the 17 individual interviews. Hence, further qualitative research would be required to verify whether childhood fika memories actively influence the receptivity to MUST Energy.

By successfully blending the professional reliability of coffee, the mindful essence of tea, functional utility of energy drinks, a clean design and a sense of nostalgia, MUST Energy breaks through traditional chemical stigmas to position itself as an adaptable, socially acceptable hybrid.

6.3 Sustainability: The Intersection of Ethical Intentions and Realities

This section discusses one of the most notable paradoxes within the broader food system, the disconnection between a consumer's stated ethical values and their actual purchasing behaviour. While the participants expressed a high degree of concern for sustainability, their choices in the caffeinated beverage market often prioritise immediate functional and social needs over long-term environmental goals.

6.3.1 The Sustainability Gap

The survey results indicated a clear stated preference for sustainability, with a remarkable 85% of respondents agreeing that utilising “ugly” fruit is a meaningful sustainable practice. However, a significant discrepancy exists between these attitudes and the caffeinated beverages participants actually consume on a daily basis. This aligns with what Hemmerling et al. (2016) describe as the attitude-liking gap, where European consumers express a strong preference for naturalness and ethics but often fail to translate these intentions into their final purchase.

In this study, while participants practice sustainability in other areas of their lives, such as biking, recycling, and avoiding overconsumption, their beverage choice remains largely dictated by factors like availability, convenience, and reliance. For many, the need to overcome a morning mental fog or a mid-afternoon energy crash outweighs the desire to seek out a sustainable alternative, especially if that alternative is not as readily accessible as a standard office coffee or a convenience-store energy drink.

This is further complicated by a growing scepticism regarding greenwashing. With respect to this current study, as consumers become more aware of marketing tactics, they tend to overanalyse whether a product claiming to be sustainable is truly ethical or simply utilising a trend for profit. This question leads them back to what they find comfortable and familiar. In the interviews, participants noted that they are more likely to stick with established, popular brands that are most prevalent because the effort required to try out and verify a new brand feels too high.

Even though coffee and tea are perceived as more natural and therefore more sustainable than synthetic energy drinks, there is still a general lack of awareness regarding the systemic inequalities and unfair treatment present in global coffee and cocoa production. Because these products are so ingrained in the fika culture, their ethical complexities are often overlooked in favour of the local perception of them being a wholesome baseline. A thorough investigation of the above would necessitate a different methodological framework and is therefore precluded from this analysis.

6.3.2 The Terminology of Imperfectly Perfect Fruit

An important set of conversations in the qualitative data was the negative impact of the word “ugly” when applied to food. While interview participants understood the environmental benefit of using aesthetically imperfect fruit, the word itself triggered a subconscious turnoff. A significant portion of interview participants specifically mentioned that this word evokes images of mushy, harmed, or darkened fruit, which creates an intuitive barrier to the consumption of fruits termed as such.

In the context of European Union regulations, the marketing of imperfect produce is governed by specific marketing standards for fruits and vegetables (Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2429), which traditionally categorise produce into Class I and Class II based on appearance. While the EU has recently eased these standards to reduce food waste, allow for

the sale of such fruit, and promote a circular economy, there is no official legal requirement to label such fruit as “ugly”, “wonky”, “rescued”, etc.

The consensus among interview participants was the need for a more inclusive and less misleading term. For instance, “rescued” implies a heroic or ethical action done by the consumer, creating an emotional connection that the term “ugly” lacks.

This suggests that for sustainable products like MUST Energy to succeed, they must bridge the gap between their outlook and the language used to describe their product and its ingredients. For MUST Energy, the terminology must align with the sophisticated persona of the drink. When the language is adjusted to be more specific and positive, it removes the visual barrier of harmed fruit and allows the consumer to feel that their purchase is contributing toward a better cause.

6.3.3 Does Sustainability Actually Sell?

Ultimately, in the context of the Swedish caffeinated beverage market, sustainability does not yet function as the primary driver of purchase. It rather acts as a plus point. Consumers in this study prioritise taste, functionality, and social identity in order. They agree to choose MUST Energy in the future since it symbolises a balanced persona, provides a milder caffeine boost, and the fact that it is made from rescued Swedish apples, serving as a secondary justification that makes them feel good about their decision. Sustainability provides a sense of contribution and moral alignment, but it cannot yet compete with the factors of low price or higher convenience.

Therefore, for a sustainable energy drink to truly permeate the market, it must first meet the consumer's underlying demand for efficacy and social status. Sustainability adds depth and trust, but the delivery of energy and the aesthetic of the brand are what ultimately drive the repeat purchase.

6.4 Can the Swedish fika culture be permeated by other beverages?

Whether a new beverage can truly settle into the Swedish fika culture depends on more than just its caffeine content. From the literature review, it is understood that a new beverage in fika would require an alignment with the deep-seated values of equality, comfort, and social glue that define the ritual.

From a general perspective, conventional energy drinks clash with the collective values of the fika beverage landscape. Their performance-driven usage shows a deeply individualised consumption pattern that sets them apart, as detailed by Svensson et al. (2021), who note that energy drink intake serves as a clear symbol of an individual lifestyle. The qualitative data from this study subtly hint at the specific spatial dynamics driving this isolation.

Unlike the communal rituals of coffee and tea, energy drinks are overwhelmingly consumed in solitary or task-focused environments. In digital spaces like online gaming, consumers are physically isolated in their rooms. In the gym setting, fitness routines are highly personal. Even when working out in groups, having an energy drink remains as an individual choice rather than a shared social ritual. For students and working professionals, such beverages are treated as a personal tool to complete a specific, independent task. While group study sessions may feature multiple cans, the common late-night workflow remains solitary. This signals that energy drinks

lack the inherent “social glue” found in coffee, tea, or even alcohol, and remain associated with private, individual productivity.

On the other hand, MUST Energy shares significant common ground with coffee, particularly regarding the concept of safe ingredients. When individuals brew their own coffee, there is a distinct sense of security and transparency in knowing exactly what is going into the cup. MUST Energy taps into this same psychological need by offering a no-nonsense, transparent list of ingredients, essentially carbonated apple juice with added caffeine. By stripping away the complex chemical additives found in industrial energy drinks, MUST Energy positions itself as a clean alternative that matches the naturalness of the traditional coffee or tea baseline.

Alongside that, MUST Energy’s caffeine content of 32mg per 100ml is comparable to a standard cup of brewed coffee, ensuring a mellow and steady lift rather than the sharp spike in energy levels. Furthermore, since MUST Energy retains the natural polyphenols and other bioactive compounds present in Swedish apples. The combination of caffeine with these fruit-derived bioactives suggests it could be more beneficial than the combinations found in traditional coffee or tea (currently under study). Since the energy delivery is as gentle and familiar as that of coffee, it provides a strong functional argument for MUST Energy’s inclusion in the ritual.

However, the primary barrier to total integration of other beverages is in the sensory aspect. As noted in the literature review, fika is designed to be a pausing moment to wind down and mellow out before resuming a task. Coffee and tea provide a specific sense of stability through their warmth and aroma that a cold, carbonated energy drink cannot replicate, unless the consumer prefers a microwaved cup of one. For many of the participants in this study, the heat of the mug is synonymous with the comfort of the break itself. While an energy drink is a high-intensity tool designed to push through a task, fika is about the temporary disregard of that pressure. This is why having a cold energy drink in a room full of warm mugs can make a person feel like the odd one out. Even with a sophisticated can design, the act of drinking a cold stimulant can still feel juvenile or like an outsider’s choice in a setting that values a collective, shared sensory experience.

This social friction represents perhaps one of the most significant structural hurdles for integration. Traditionally, fika functions as an egalitarian space where social differences and professional hierarchies are intentionally set aside, allowing peers to connect on equal terms. If a beverage carries an aggressive visual identity or signals a high-intensity “grind culture”, it actively steers away from the core communal purpose of the ritual.

However, this socio-cultural friction may not affect all consumers equally. As discussed previously, children included in family fika gatherings are served non-caffeinated alternatives such as applemust or sodas. For individuals who retain a strong nostalgic attachment to these childhood habits, introducing a fruit-must hybrid like MUST Energy to the table may not feel culturally out of place. This could effectively neutralise the social stigma associated with modern functional drinks.

An even broader behavioural shift is occurring among the younger demographic, who are increasingly prioritising their own personal values and functional needs over how they are perceived by the collective. There is a growing sense of standing up for oneself, where individuals choose a beverage that aligns with their personal lifestyle rather than strictly following the established societal standards. It is entirely possible that in some corner of Sweden, functional

beverages and energy drinks are already creating a permanent place within the *fika* break, moving away from the rigid, traditional coffee-and-tea rule.

Ultimately, MUST Energy holds a unique potential that conventional energy drinks lack. Even though the majority of survey respondents did not automatically classify it as a primary fika beverage, nearly 30% could readily imagine it as a fika companion. This alignment is understood to be driven by its clean-label sustainability, sophisticated identity, and Swedish origin, which effectively shield the beverage from the chemical stigmas that alienate energy drink consumers from social gatherings. Furthermore, this acceptance is reinforced by the shared functional objective of fatigue mitigation and possibly, a nostalgia for childhood fika traditions. While its cold, carbonated profile indicates that it may remain a secondary choice for the traditional, indoor fika ritual, it is well-positioned for contemporary, active moments such as hikes, commutes, or outdoor social gatherings where a warm mug is impractical. Rather than attempting to replace the ceramic cup of coffee, MUST Energy provides a viable option for the core spirit of the fika pause to transition seamlessly into the active lifestyles of modern consumers in Sweden.

7 Applications and Future Research

This thesis demonstrates the value of utilising a holistic food systems approach to address modern challenges in sustainability and consumer well-being. Rather than analysing MUST Energy and its acceptance in isolation, this study integrates the dimensions of food science and development with sociocultural frameworks and commercial market dynamics. Future research and new product development projects can utilise this food systems model to evaluate how new, circular food products and beverages can be introduced without disrupting deeply rooted social customs. By balancing the technical constraints of food formulation with the sociocultural expectations of a target demographic, research can design more effective interventions to reduce waste and offer healthier functional options.

Additionally, this research provides a framework for using projective personas to map out consumer perceptions in a way that goes beyond simple demographics. By identifying personas and archetypes, researchers can better understand the psychological and social costumes that consumers visualise when choosing a product and wear when consuming it. This technique of projective personification can be applied to other product categories where tradition and innovation are in conflict.

For the corporate world, and specifically for the development of MUST Energy, these findings provide a clear roadmap for future marketing campaigns. The data suggests that the milder energy boost of MUST Energy is a good solution for times when coffee is perceived as too heavy and traditional energy drinks are seen as too aggressive. Marketing efforts could focus on these middle-of-the-day use cases. Additionally, the identified persona allows for targeted storytelling that highlights the drink's outdoor and mindful qualities, catering to consumers who want to remain active and sustainable without the performative aesthetic associated with current market leaders.

Building on the results of this study, academia could pursue a deeper investigation into the physiological synergy between caffeine and the natural bioactive compounds found in

applemust. While this research focused on consumer perception, a laboratory-based study could explore whether the polyphenols and antioxidants in apples actually mitigate the energy crash or jitters associated with common energy drinks.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study following the consumption habits of the 18-35 age group over several years would be incredibly useful. This would help determine if the internalised habit of energy drink consumption eventually leads these consumers to create a new culture that blends functional needs with social conventions.

On a broader scale, there is a clear need for more research on the influence of up-and-coming functional beverages on existing beverage cultures around the world. Specifically, it would be interesting to see if such beverages would face sensory hurdles in other strong, established beverage cultures. Potential areas of exploration include the espresso-driven rituals of Italy or the deeply rooted, tea-centric traditions of the UK.

Future research should also collaborate with regulatory bodies, food policy sociologists, and agricultural marketing boards to establish a standardised, inclusive, and non-misleading linguistic terminology for “ugly” and imperfect produce. Given that current EU marketing standards focus on visual classifications, there is a critical need to determine which frameworks best prevent consumer scepticism.

8 Conclusion

This research has successfully mapped the complex intersection of tradition and functional utility within the Swedish caffeinated beverage market. It is evident from both the quantitative and the qualitative data that the choice of a beverage isn’t just a simple matter of taste, but rather, a sophisticated negotiation of biological needs, situational context, and social identity. While coffee remains the undisputed standard of Swedish professional life, and tea continues to serve as the restorative and support system for personal mindfulness, traditional energy drinks still struggle against the stigmas of being juvenile, rebellious, or fake. In this polarised landscape, MUST Energy emerges as a unique and sophisticated hybrid. By offering a purity-forward profile, it successfully bridges the gap between natural tradition and modern functionality, and is perceived as a knowledgeable, mature, and environmentally conscious character.

The study also highlighted a significant sensory and cultural wall that guards the traditional Swedish fika. The warmth and aroma provided by coffee and tea create a sense of social stability and egalitarianism that cold, carbonated energy beverages struggle to replicate. However, the research reveals a noticeable shift among the younger demographic, who are increasingly prioritising personal values and functional requirements over societal standards. While the traditional indoor fika may remain anchored by the cup of coffee, MUST Energy is perfectly positioned for the modern fika, appealing to active, contemporary moments such as hikes, commutes, and outdoor social gatherings where the spirit of the pause from daily life remains essential.

Regarding sustainability, the findings identified a critical value-action gap. While consumers express a high logical agreement with sustainable practices, they are heavily influenced by branding and terminology. The research suggests that the terminology of “ugly” fruit acts as a

psychological deterrent, whereas the term “rescued” fruit creates a heroic, emotional connection to the beverage.

While this thesis focuses specifically on one local beverage entering the fika landscape, it opens up a broader, more significant academic question regarding how other novel functional beverages will navigate these established cultural boundaries in the future. By verifying consumer perceptions both qualitatively and quantitatively through a food systems lens, this research successfully addresses a distinct gap in the literature, providing a method for directly consulting caffeinated beverage consumers to determine whether alternative functional beverages can truly earn a seat at the traditional fika table.

To conclude, MUST Energy is more than just a new caffeinated beverage. By providing a mellow caffeine delivery comparable to coffee, while retaining the bioactive benefits of Swedish apples, it offers a blueprint for a future where high performance and natural well-being are no longer in conflict. MUST Energy does not need to replace the coffee bean to be successful. It simply needs to occupy the new, more mindful spaces that modern consumers in Sweden are carving out for themselves. Overall, MUST Energy is perceived as an eco-friendly alternative that establishes itself as an accessible, highly functional caffeinated drink designed for anyone and everyone.

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10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Title: Consumer Perceptions of Caffeinated Beverages

Section 1

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a Master's thesis study at Lund University, Department of Process and Life Science Engineering (LTH). This study investigates consumer perceptions, consumption habits, and attitudes toward sustainable functional beverages. Your insights will contribute to research on circular food systems and the shift toward "clean-label" products. The survey is anonymous and takes approximately 7–10 minutes to complete.

Question	Answer Options
1. Age	Open-ended (numeric)
2. Gender	Multiple choice: Male, Female, Prefer not to say, Other (open-ended)
3. Profession	Multiple choice: Employed full-time, Employed part-time, Self-employed / Business owner, Student, Unemployed, Retired, Other (open-ended)
4. City you reside in	Multiple choice: Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, Uppsala, Västerås, Örebro, Linköping, Helsingborg, Jönköping, Norrköping, Lund, Umeå, Gävle, Borås, Södertälje, Other (open-ended)
5. Do you consume caffeinated beverages? Choose the one you consume the most.	Multiple choice: Coffee, Tea, Soft drinks, Energy drinks, I don't consume caffeine
6. How many caffeinated beverages do you consume on a typical day?	Multiple choice: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 and above

[Survey jumps to the respective section based on response to question 5 above.]

Section 2: Non-Caffeine Consumers

Question	Answer Options
1. Why do you avoid caffeine?	Checkboxes: Health concerns, Sleep issues, Psychological and neurological reasons,

	Cultural and spiritual reasons, Clean living, Economic, Other (open-ended)
2. What is your alternative for energy?	Checkboxes: Naps / Meditation, Exercise and yoga, Hydration, Music, Fruits, sugary foods, etc., Other (open-ended)
3. Would you be open to trying a caffeinated beverage?	Multiple choice: Yes, No, Maybe
4. If you chose yes, which caffeinated beverage would you like to try?	Multiple choice: Coffee, Tea, Soft drinks, Energy drinks

Section 3: Coffee Consumers

Question	Answer Options
1. Why do you drink coffee?	Checkboxes: Taste and aroma, Daily ritual / practice, Functional and cognitive performance, Migraine / headache relief, Fika / Networking, Health, Psychological and emotional reasons, Availability and convenience, Other (open-ended)
2. Which of these have you experienced after drinking coffee?	Checkboxes: Increased motivation, Increased physical performance, Mental clarity and relaxation, Appetite changes, Physical warmth, Heartburn or acid reflux, Nausea, Sweating, Irritability, Muscle twitches and/or shivering, Headaches, Dry mouth, Hyperactiveness, Laxative effect, Other (open-ended)
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe the aftertaste and coffee breath after drinking coffee?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Very unpleasant and 5 = Very pleasant
4. Have you thought of switching out coffee for other caffeinated beverages?	Multiple choice: Yes, No, Maybe
5. If you answered yes above, which other caffeinated beverage would you choose?	Multiple choice: Tea, Soft drinks, Energy drinks
6. Do you consume any of these other beverages as well? (If you have already answered a section, please	Multiple choice: Tea, Soft drinks, Energy drinks, No

choose a different one. Or select 'No' to continue)	
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[Survey jumps to the appropriate section based on the response to question 6 above.]

Section 4: Tea Consumers

Question	Answer Options
1. Why do you drink tea ?	Checkboxes: Taste and aroma, Daily ritual / practice, Functional and cognitive performance, Migraine / headache relief, Fika / Networking, Health, Psychological and emotional reasons, Availability and convenience, Other (open-ended)
2. Which of these have you experienced after drinking tea?	Checkboxes: Increased motivation, Increased physical performance, Mental clarity and relaxation, Appetite changes, Physical warmth, Heartburn or acid reflux, Nausea, Sweating, Dry mouth, Teeth staining, Laxative effect, Other (open-ended)
3. Have you thought of switching out tea for other caffeinated beverages?	Multiple choice: Yes, No, Maybe
4. Do you consume any of these other beverages as well? (If you have already answered a section, please choose a different one. Or select 'No' to continue)	Multiple choice: Coffee , Soft drinks, Energy drinks, No

[Survey jumps to the appropriate section based on the response to question 4 above.]

Section 5: Soft Drink Consumers

Question	Answer Options
1. Name the caffeinated soft drink you consume	Open-ended (text field)
2. Are you aware of the caffeine content in this beverage?	Multiple choice: Yes, No, Maybe
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how much you enjoy each of the following types	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: With added sugar, 'Zero' versions with

of soft drinks (1 = Do not like at all, 5 = Like very much)	artificial sweeteners, Natural flavours, Artificial flavours
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent is carbonation (fizziness) a reason for you to choose your caffeinated beverage?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Not a reason and 5 = An important reason
5. Do you consume any of these other beverages as well? (If you have already answered a section, please choose a different one. Or select 'No' to continue)	Multiple choice: Coffee, Tea, Energy drinks, No

[Survey jumps to the appropriate section based on the response to question 5 above.]

Section 6: Energy Drink Consumers

Questions	Answer Options
1. When and why do you drink energy drinks?	Checkboxes: As a morning start to the day, While studying or attending lectures, While working or during a deep-focus task, During mid-afternoon Fika break, To combat the post-lunch energy slump, During or after a workout/physical activity, As a refreshing treat during a meal, As a non-alcoholic alternative to cider or beer, As a mixer for cocktails or alcoholic drinks, While online gaming or streaming, During a long drive or commute, During outdoor activities (e.g., hiking, beach, picnic), While engaged in creative work or hobbies, While running daily errands or shopping, None, Other (open-ended)
2. Which of these energy drinks do you consume?	Checkboxes: Monster, Red Bull, NOCCO, Celsius, Latitude 65, Clean Drink, Pändy, Other (open-ended)
3. How often do you purchase each of the following energy drink brands? (1 = Never, 5 = Always)	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: Monster, Red Bull, NOCCO, Celsius, Latitude 65, Clean Drink, Pändy
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important each of the following factors is when choosing your preferred energy drink (1 = Not important at all, 5	Linear scale from 1 to 6 on a multiple choice grid: Taste, Flavour variety, Brand image, Caffeine content, Sugar content,

= Extremely important, 6 = No opinion)	Carbonation, Price, Availability, Nutritional value, Country of origin, Packaging design
5. Based on the caffeine concentration (mg per 100 ml), which represents the strength of the drink, how likely are you to purchase each of the following brands? (1 = Would not purchase, 5 = Will definitely purchase)	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: Celsius (~61 mg / 100 ml), NOCCO (55mg / 100ml), Clean Drink (55 mg / 100 ml), Latitude 65 (55 mg / 100 ml), Red Bull (32 mg / 100 ml), Monster (32 mg / 100 ml), Pändy (~30 mg / 100 ml)
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you prefer the following types of energy release? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much)	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: High Intensity (High-caffeine for maximum impact), Moderate Intensity (Standard caffeine for steady energy), Low Intensity (Gentle and small dose)
7. How often do you leave an energy drink unfinished because it has warmed up and the taste has changed?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Never and 5 = Always
8. To what extent does the inclusion of artificial sweeteners (like sucralose or aspartame) influence your decision to avoid a specific brand?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = No influence at all and 5 = Significant influence
9. How much does the visual design of a can influence your willingness to drink it in a professional or public setting?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = No influence at all and 5 = Significant influence
10. Where do you purchase energy drinks?	Checkboxes: Supermarkets (ICA, Coop, Hemköp), Discount stores (Willy's, Lidl), Convenience stores (Pressbyrån, 7-Eleven), Gas stations (Circle K, OKQ8, Preem, ST1), Candy stores (Hemmakväll, Kandy'z), Apotek, Gyms and sports centres, Mini marts and Tobak & Spel shops, Online website, Vending machines, Other (open-ended)
11. Do you consume any of these other beverages as well? (If you have already answered a section, please choose a different one. Or select 'No' to continue)	Multiple choice: Coffee, Tea, Soft drinks, No

[Survey jumps to the appropriate section based on the response to question 11 above.]

Section 7: Perceptions of Caffeinated Beverages

Question	Answer Options
1. Which of the following words or feelings do you most strongly associate with caffeinated beverages in general?	Checkboxes: Alertness, Endurance, Sharpness, Mood Elevation, Dopamine / Reward, Physical Boost, Productivity, Refreshing, Social / Fika, Daily Routine / Habit, Jitters, Anxiety, Nervousness, Over-stimulation, Irritability, Energy Crash, Insomnia / Sleep issues, Heart Palpitations, Dependency / Addiction, Unhealthy, Chemical / Synthetic / Artificial, Too sweet, Too bitter, Expensive
2. Which of the following words or feelings do you most strongly associate with energy drinks ?	Checkboxes: Performance, Physical Boost, Sharpness, Productivity, Sustained, Hydrating, Clean-label, Overprocessed, Greenwashed, Unhealthy, Aggressive, Energy Crash, Juvenile, Dependency / Addiction, Chemical / Synthetic / Artificial, Expensive
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important each of the following factors is when choosing your preferred caffeinated beverage (1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important, 6 = No opinion)	Linear scale from 1 to 6 on a multiple choice grid: Taste, Flavour variety, Aroma, Carbonation, Temperature, Caffeine content, Nutritional additives (vitamins, minerals, fibre, amino acids), Origin of ingredients, Natural ingredients, Sugar content, Steady energy release, Price, Availability, Country of origin, Sustainability, Packaging design, Beverage volume
4. How sustainable do you perceive the following beverages to be? (1= Not sustainable at all, 5 = Highly sustainable)	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: Coffee, Tea, Soft drinks, Global energy drinks (Monster, Red Bull), Local and craft energy drinks
5. How important is it that the caffeine in a beverage is naturally derived (e.g., from coffee beans, tea, or fruit) rather than synthetic (lab-made)?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Not important at all and 5 = Extremely important
6. When a caffeinated beverage contains vitamins, minerals, which source do you prefer?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly prefer added/synthetic supplements and 5 = Strongly prefer naturally present
7. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you prefer each of the following sweetening options? (1 = Do not like at all, 5 = Like very much)	Linear scale from 1 to 5 on a multiple choice grid: 100% Natural fruit sugars, Added cane sugar/beet sugar, Sugar-free (Artificial sweeteners)

8. If a product uses 'ugly fruits' (aesthetically imperfect but high-quality fruit) as an ingredient, how would you rate your perception of that product on a scale of 1 to 5? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree, 6 = No opinion)	Linear scale from 1 to 6 on a multiple choice grid: It is an eco-friendly and sustainable choice, It feels like a premium product, It feels like a 'leftover' or lower-quality product, It makes the brand feel more trustworthy
9. How likely would you be to choose a locally owned/produced caffeinated beverage over an established global brand?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Most likely to choose global brands and 5 = Most likely to choose local brand
Consider this beverage concept: a carbonated, caffeinated drink made from juice of locally available ugly apples. It contains 100mg of caffeine / 250ml, no added sugar, and no artificial additives.	
10. Based on this description, how would you categorize this beverage?	Checkboxes: Functional fruit soda, Natural energy drink, Premium energy drink, Lifestyle beverage, Sports/Performance drink, Focus drink, Workday/Productivity beverage, Clean-label beverage, Artisanal/Craft caffeinated soda, Modern Fika drink, Non-alcoholic cider alternative, None, Other (open-ended)
11. In which of the following situations could you imagine yourself drinking this beverage?	Checkboxes: As a morning start to the day, While studying or attending lectures, While working or during a deep-focus task, During mid-afternoon Fika break, To combat the post-lunch energy slump, During or after a workout/physical activity, As a refreshing treat during a meal, As a non-alcoholic alternative to cider or beer, As a mixer for cocktails or alcoholic drinks, While online gaming or streaming, During a long drive or commute, During outdoor activities (e.g., hiking, beach, picnic), While engaged in creative work or hobbies, While running daily errands or shopping, None, Other (open-ended)
12. How likely would you be to try this caffeinated beverage if it were readily available?	Linear scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Very unlikely and 5 = Very likely
13. A standard energy drink or premium coffee typically costs between 20-35 SEK. How much would you be willing to pay for a 250ml can of the	Multiple choice: 15-20 SEK, 21-25 SEK, 26-30 SEK, 31-35 SEK, More than 35 SEK, Would not purchase

sustainable, apple-based caffeinated beverage described above?	
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Section 8: Final Section

Question	Answer Options
1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your caffeinated beverage habits?	Open-ended (text field)
2. Would you like to share more of your thoughts by participating in a 1-1 interview? If yes, please share your contact details (Email ID or Whatsapp number) to be contacted. Interview participants will receive a free beverage sample!	Open-ended (text field)
3. The data collected in this survey will be used solely for my Master's thesis project at LTH, Lund University. In accordance with GDPR, the processing of personal data within the framework of this thesis is supported by the legal basis of "public interest" for research. Your responses will be anonymized. Any personal data (like your email) will be stored securely and deleted once the thesis work has been examined and graded (scheduled for June 2026). You have the right to request access to the data I have collected about you, or to ask for its correction or deletion at any time before it is fully anonymized.	Checkbox: I confirm that I have read the information provided and I consent to my anonymized responses being used for this research study.

10.2 Appendix 2: Interview Questionnaire

To be read before starting the interview:

The purpose of this interview is to understand your perceptions and thoughts about caffeinated beverages and concepts related to energy drinks. The interview shouldn't take longer than 45 minutes. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you can skip a question or stop the interview as well. This interview will be audio recorded, and I have your consent for that as well. The results will be anonymous, but the thesis report may contain direct quotes from the interview.

Part 1:

1. Do you drink caffeinated beverages? Which ones?
2. When do you need your caffeinated beverage? What time(s) of the day?
3. Why do you drink your caffeinated beverage? Is it for your functioning, performance, etc., or because you enjoy the taste?
4. How do you usually feel 30 minutes after drinking your caffeinated beverage?
 - a. Describe your positive experience with caffeine
 - b. Describe your negative experience with caffeine
 - c. If needed, show list A4.
5. Have you thought of consuming an energy drink? When and why?

[If the participant says no, continue with the following questions]

6. Have you had a bad experience with energy drinks?
7. What is your biggest fear or turn-off regarding energy drinks?
8. What would it take for you to consume an energy drink?

Part 2:

Imagine there's a social gathering, like a party or a networking event. The people invited are coffee, tea, Coca-Cola, Monster, Red Bull and NOCCO. For this activity, I'd like you to visualise what these drinks would look like as people. You can describe their personality, vibe, occupation or profession, gender, hobbies they'd engage in, whether they're a morning person or an all-nighter, and anything else you can imagine and visualise.

[Repeat keywords if the participant appears to need a refresher. Once they complete the persona descriptions, continue with the following questions.]

1. Now that you've described these beverage personas, who do you think is the loudest person in the room? Are they social and talking to other people?
2. Is someone the odd one out in this gathering? Why?

Part 3:

[The energy drink characteristics in A3 are written onto small individual pieces of paper. Hand out these chits to the participants in a random, shuffled order. When the interview is conducted online, copy the list in A3 and paste it in the online meeting chat box.]

These chits of paper have different traits that a caffeinated beverage can have. If you were designing your dream caffeinated drink, which 3 of these traits would be your top priority?

[Let the participant make their choice. After they choose, continue with the following questions.]

1. Why did you select the following characteristics?
2. Why didn't you select the other ones? Are they unimportant or undesirable?

3. Now think about your go-to caffeine drink. Which of these traits does it actually have? Is there a gap you notice between what you want and what you currently drink?
4. Moving back to the persona game, I'd like you to visualise and describe the caffeinated beverage you created as a person.

[Refresh the participant with the descriptors in Part 2 if needed. Once they complete their description, continue with the following questions.]

5. What kind of person is your drink at the event? Are they interacting with everyone?
6. Do you see yourself or a version of yourself in this beverage personality?

Part 4:

I'd like to tell you a concept for a new beverage. It is a carbonated drink made from 'ugly' apples [explain if needed]. It contains 100mg of caffeine per serving, which is equivalent to one cup of coffee. It has no added refined sugar and no artificial additives.

1. What is your first impression of this product? Is this a beverage you'd drink?
2. How do you feel about using 'ugly fruit' as an ingredient?
3. Coming back to the persona game, what kind of a person do you imagine this beverage to be?
4. How would they interact with the others at the party?
5. Do you have any other comments about the product?

[To conclude the interview, hand over a free sample of MUST Energy and inform the participant that this is the caffeinated apple drink described earlier. Note if their feelings towards the product change after seeing the can.]

----- End of interview -----

A1: If the participant doesn't consume caffeine:

1. What is your biggest fear or turn-off regarding caffeine?
2. What would it take for you to consume a caffeinated beverage?
3. What do you associate caffeine with? [If needed, show list A4.]
4. What do you do for energy and activeness?
5. Continue with Part 2.

A2: If the participant doesn't take coffee/tea:

1. Have you consumed coffee/tea before? Why did you drink it? Why did you discontinue?
2. If you can recall, what was your body's response to caffeine in coffee/tea? [If needed, show list A4.]
3. Continue with Part 1 Q5.

A3: Characteristics for the ideal energy drink game:

- Fast Energy Spike (180mg+)
- Steady Energy Release (80–100mg)
- Natural Caffeine Source
- Natural Sweetness
- Natural Flavour
- Synthetic Flavour
- Added Vitamins, Minerals, BCAA/Amino Acids
- No Artificial Colours or Preservatives
- Locally Produced
- Eco-friendly Packaging
- Premium
- Global/Trusted Brand Name

List A4: (Listed on the Notes app on the phone and given to the participant. If the interview is conducted online, paste the following in the online meeting chat box.) Alertness, focus, mood elevation, confidence, increased stamina, helps with digestion, digestive discomfort, increased heartbeat, increased urination, trembling, nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, sleep problems, energy crash.