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Blending Tradition with Experience: The Impact of Hybrid Marketing on Consumer Perceptions in the Caffeinated Beverage Sector.

A Generational Study of Emotional Engagement, Authenticity, and Brand Loyalty Among Millennials and Generation Z in Europe.

National College of Ireland

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Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving digital culture, traditional marketing strategies have increasingly struggled to establish meaningful resonance with younger demographics. This study explores hybrid methods-mixing traditional ads with experiential ads and tests their impact on how Millennial and Gen Z caffeine-based drink fans in Europe think, feel, and stay loyal.

Guided by Pine and Gilmores (1998) notion of the Experience Economy and Zarantonello and Schmitts (2010) Brand Experience Scale, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the Brand Relationship Theory (Fournier, 1998), Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) authenticity framework, and Kumar and Reinartz's (2016) hybrid marketing model, the work asks whether a blended approach can fill the gaps left by straightforward promotion and at the same time tap into the sensory power of live interaction. Anchored in interpretivism, the work follows an inductive, qualitative methodology. Ten enthusiastic consumers of caffeinated-based products were selected for semi-structured interviews and split evenly between Millennial and Gen Z cohorts. The recording sessions focused on mindset, emotional triggers, and the meaning of authenticity within the two age groups.

The research aimed to analyse if traditional advertising still makes people recognise a brand and establishes trustworthiness but also analyse if the same approach is finding difficulties reaching younger consumers because it feels superficial and unilateral. The findings were supported by case study analyses of iconic hybrid campaigns, including Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" and Red Bull "Gives you wings". Campaigns that have broad reach with these immersive moments stand out as the strongest.

Findings indicate that while traditional advertising maintains brand recognition and conveys trustworthiness, it often appears superficial to younger audiences. Hybrid campaigns, by contrast, create stronger emotional connections, with immersive moments emerging as the most effective in driving brand loyalty. This research contributes to understanding how hybrid marketing can bridge generational engagement gaps in the beverage sector.

Key words: Hybrid Marketing; Emotional Engagement; Generation Z; Millennials; Brand Authenticity; Caffeinated Beverages; Consumer Behaviour

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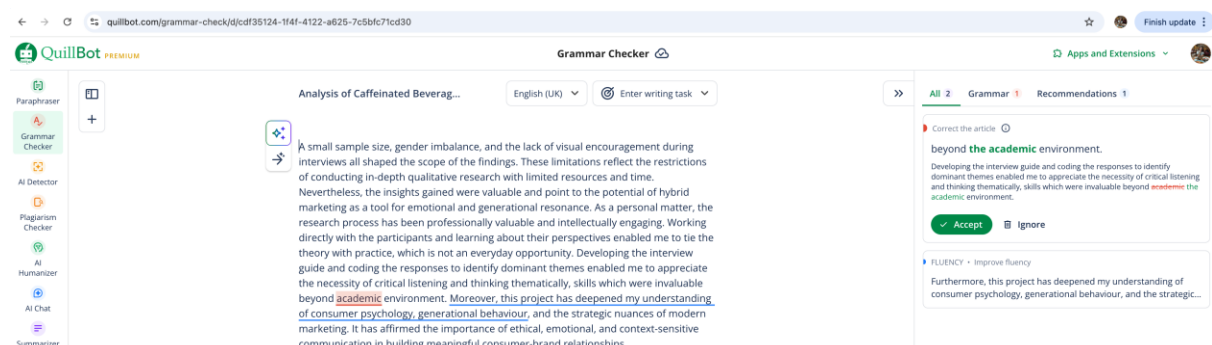| Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
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okay, thanks to clarify to me. So these are my decisions about my methodology approach: pragmatism as a research philosophy, for research approach is abductive, research design are exploratory and descriptive, data collection methods is quantitative and Sampling Sampling Strateg ⬇ ethod and Survey

Acknowledgements

Table Content

Chapter 1

Introduction

Every sector has experienced a high evolution in merchandising strategies throughout the years. This is because they had to keep up with the rapidly changing consumer expectations. For a long time, people have considered traditional marketing methods like TV, radio, and print as reliable ways to reach large audiences and deliver brand communication consistently. Most of the brand trust is built through exposure along these methods, with 71% of people declaring yes to television advertisements (Nielsen, 2022). However, the effectiveness of traditional marketing in creating emotional connections and loyalty has declined, mostly among Millennials and Generation Z, who call for authenticity and personalised experiences (Deloitte, 2021). These groups not only originated online but also care deeply about authenticity, relationships, and interactions, as well as how their values align with the brands they consume.

As a result of shifts in marketing, branding has started to include experiential marketing, where consumers interact with brands. It goes beyond message dissemination and focuses on designing impactful interactions with consumers to help develop strong emotional attachments with the brands, which in turn ensure customer loyalty. In the words of Pine and Gilmore (1998), the "experience economy" is when marketing is focused on participation and interaction that is entertaining, educational, aesthetic, or escapist. Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) state that "experiential marketing relates to involvement marketing; it affects all the senses or relates to emotions and is from a relational perspective." While modern approaches have proven productive, using only one form of marketing still has it is limitations when trying to intensify trust and commitment with the brand. This gap illustrates an opportunity to understand why hybrid marketing integrating traditional and experiential components has proven more effective. Through fascinating experiences aligned with stimulating traditional media, marketers were able to identify a vast expanse of consumer attention. Caffeinated-based drinks consist a very competitive and brand-saturated sector, making them particularly qualified for exploring the role of hybrid marketing strategies. Brands such as Coca-Cola, Red Bull, Monster Energy, and PepsiCo have built campaigns that exceed product promotion, aligning themselves with cultural icons, high-adrenaline activities, and seasonal traditions (e.g., Coca-Cola's Christmas adverts or Red Bull's extreme sports sponsorships). These products were also situated at the intersection of impulse purchasing and identity expression, making them ideal for examining emotional

triggers, authenticity, and brand loyalty especially among Gen Z and Millennial audiences (Krishna, 2012; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). As both demographic groups place growing emphasis on personalised, immersive, and value-driven marketing, the caffeinate based drinks sector offers a highly relevant and dynamic case for studying hybrid branding effectiveness.

However, in relation to these two generations specifically within the caffeinated beverage market, there is a deficit of focused observed research investigating the performance of these strategies.

This study explored the critical function of hybrid marketing in shaping consumer-brand relations. This work analyses the effects that hybrid marketing instruments have within the European caffeinated-based market. The target audience extends across Generation Z and Millennials and focuses on the emotions and relationships that a brand evokes with those amplified through experiential marketing versus traditional marketing. Moreover, it investigates how effectively hybrid approaches manage to respond to shifts in the likes and dislikes during the digital evolution among these groups. By evaluating the emotional and psychological aspects of consumer relationships and the long-term effects of hybrid marketing. Based on this objective, the research is guided by the following question: "How do hybrid marketing strategies influence brand perception, emotional engagement, and loyalty among Millennial and Generation Z consumers of caffeinated-based beverages in Europe?"

These two generations constitute a considerable portion of the market, but their unique value systems, expectations, and behaviours dare standard classical marketing approaches make them particularly appealing. With this focus, the study attempts to advance the discourse on the loyalty of consumer-brand relationships and the evolution of marketing frameworks. For this purpose, the work attempts to outline the most important arguments related to traditional and hybrid marketing, including experiential marketing and the debates associated with them.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a more comprehensive understanding and perception of the hybrid marketing strategies. Therefore, the research question tried to help to identify how that strategy is useful and aesthetically appealing to develop better relationships with their customers. The answer to that question is intended to be guidance on how to use the experience to satisfy customer expectations and needs because these are the elements that make a business more successful than it is competitors.

Firstly, the research will list features and characteristics that increase the shopping connection for consumers, follow, emphasise an understanding of both the advantages and challenges

associated with it. Subsequently, this literature review is organised as follows to discover the most impactful experiential elements of the customer buying process: the relevant literature with a focus on the connection between traditional marketing and experiential marketing is presented. The results were illustrated, followed by a discussion of the most important identified aspects, and finally, materials and methods were provided.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

An analysis of historical marketing development actions in marketing methods reflects wide changes in society and technology, as well as improvements in consumer behaviour. Markedly, Millennials and the next generation, Gen Z, have instigated changes from more traditional tactics of marketing to more engaging and hybrid tactics. This literature review focuses on these domains: 1) evolution and impact of advertising; (2) the consumer decision-making process with an emphasis on Millennials and Gen Z; (3) advantages and disadvantages of traditional marketing; (4) the role and influence of experiential marketing; and (5) the new frontiers of hybrid marketing. The focus of these domains was to identify conceptual gaps and contribute to the development of a theoretical framework for the research.

This study was supported by two key interrelated theories: the theory of planned behaviour (Ajsen, 1991) and the brand relationship theory (Fournier, 1998).

The theory of planned behaviour presents insights into how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence purpose and consumption, specifically among younger demographics. Meanwhile, brand relationship theory supports the understanding of consumers emotionally and socially connecting with brands as relationship partners, which was particularly suitable when analysing loyalty and authenticity within hybrid marketing. These pillars conduct the analyses of how Millennials and Gen Z emotionally reply to hybrid marketing strategies for caffeine-based beverages.

Market Landscape of Caffeinated Beverages

The global soft drink industry remains one of the most lucrative and competitive sectors within the consumer goods market. As illustrated in Figure 1, Coca-Cola led the global non-alcoholic beverage section in 2024, making a brand value of over $35 billion USD, followed

by Pepsi at $20.2 billion and Red Bull at $8.4 billion (Statista, 2024).

Brand value of the most valuable non-alcoholic beverage brands worldwide as of 2024 (in million U.S. dollars)

Brand value of the most valuable soft drink brands worldwide 2024

Brand value in million U.S. dollars.

Brand	Value
Coca-Cola	35,022
Pepsi	20,209
Red Bull	8,392
Nongfu Spring	8,306
Monster	7,434
Gatorade	5,443
Dr. Pepper	4,759
Sprite	4,543
Nescafé	4,452
Nespresso	2,578

Description: With a brand value of over 35 billion U.S. dollars, Coca-Cola was by far the most valuable non-alcoholic beverage brand in the world in 2024. Pepsi ranked second that year, with a value of around 20 billion U.S. dollars. Read more
Note(s): Worldwide; 2024
Source(s): Brand Finance

statista

Figure 1: Brand value of the most valuable non-alcoholic beverage brands worldwide as of 2024 (Statista, 2024)

These figures emphasise the extraordinary cultural and economic power of caffeinated soft drink brands. Their continued dominance not only justifies their marketing influence but also positions them as ideal case studies for evaluating hybrid marketing strategies.

Furthermore, the growing revenue of caffeinated beverages, particularly energy and sports drinks, adds an additional layer of relevance to this research. As shown in Figure 2, global revenue from soft drinks including carbonated, non-carbonated, and energy drinks was predicted to grow notably between 2018 and 2029. Energy and sports drinks, many of which were caffeine-based, represent a rapidly expanding segment expected to overcome $250 billion USD by 2029 (Statista, 2025).
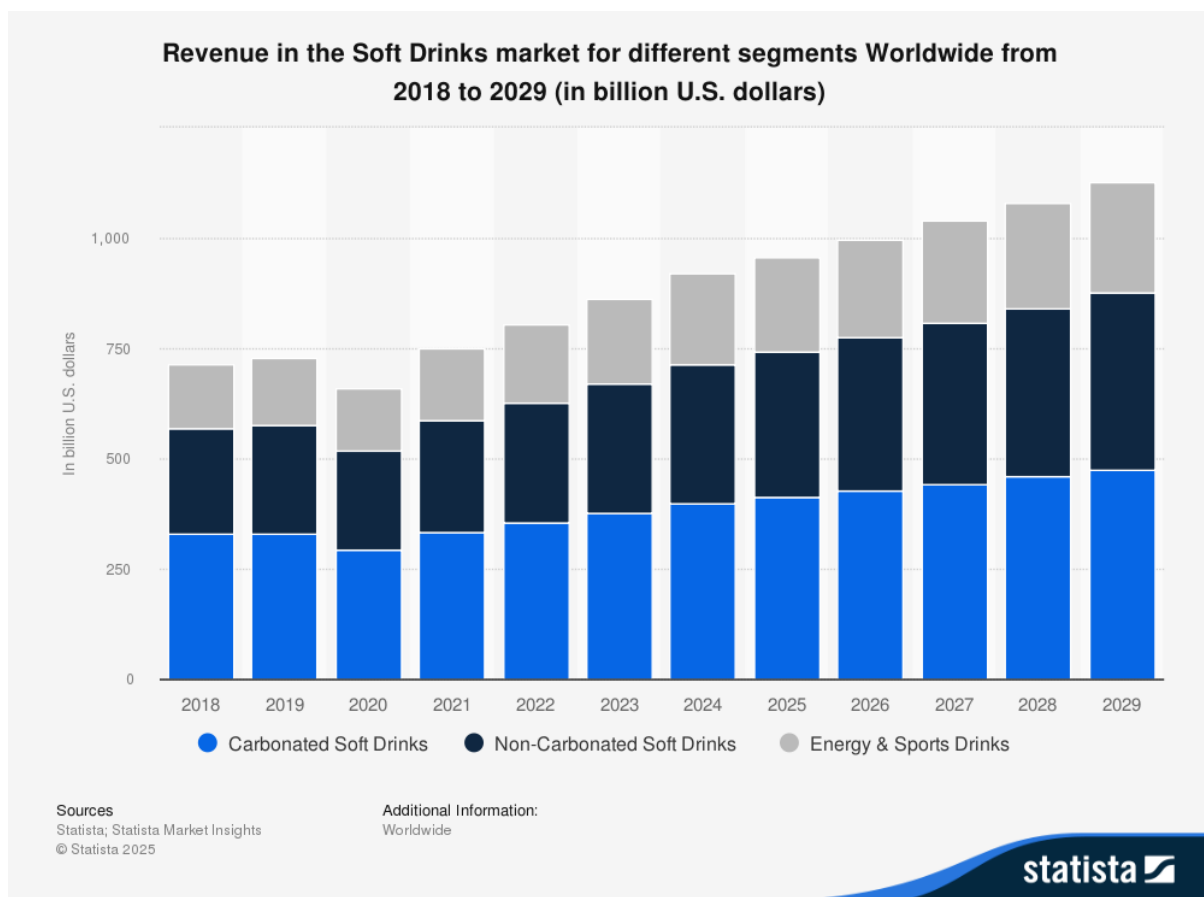
Figure 2: Revenue in the Soft Drinks Market for Different Segments Worldwide from 2018 to 2029 (Statista, 2025)

These numbers reflect not only consumer demand but also the assertive marketing efforts that fuel consumption.

Given the high brand equity and expanding consumption trends, caffeinated beverage brands are in particular suited for hybrid marketing research. These brands are known for mixing traditional campaigns with experiential, digital, and lifestyle-based approaches ranging from Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" to Red Bull's extreme sports sponsorships. Their global attendance across both physical and digital touchpoints offers a strong context for examining generational perceptions of trust, authenticity, emotional engagement, and brand loyalty.

Advertising influence

Currently promotional ads are everywhere, whether on the street or on social media. Consumers find themselves overload with advertisements which guide their habits, such to shop or eat.

 In order to generate influence among the target audience, marketers share an image of what success looks like along with constructing an image of what constitutes socially acceptable success in society. This kind of influence was particularly potent in lifestyle-driven industries such as caffeinated beverages, where marketing does more than recommend; it build

emotional attachment and brand identity. Advertising has been improving their presentation from merely show a product to telling a story. Whether through a billboard on the busy areas or a branded TikTok challenge, marketers intentions was to connect with consumers at a psychological and emotional level (Kotler et al., 2021). It was no longer just about information; it was about aspiration. A well-done advertisement doesn't simply promote a drink; it offers a version of the ideal lifestyle: energetic, attractive, and adventurous. This approach was constantly seen in campaigns by brands like Red Bull, Monster, or Coca-Cola, which frequently associate caffeine drinks with performance, youth culture, and adrenaline. It was focus was often on providing viewers with a mosaic of splendid "ideal life" scenarios featuring the product as it was scoring component. Advertisements that are visually appealing as well as emotionally resonant have the power to shift one's preference towards even deep-rooted brand loyalty over time. In this regard, advertisements transform into tools for cultural impact rather than just nowadays communication mechanism.

Modern advertising works across a hybrid of channels. Traditional platforms like television, radio, newspapers, and outdoor posters are still important, especially for their reach and brand credibility. However, digital platforms, particularly social media, branded websites, and influencer collaborations, have taken attention for engaging younger consumers. Currently, a strong advertisement was not one that only sells a product but one that remains in the viewer's memory. Concise, consistent messaging was key. As ads become more immersive and personalised, it was influence becomes not only stronger but also more subtle, placing itself in daily choices and long-term brand relationships.

Consumer decision making-process

Consumer behaviour refers to the processes individuals go through in selecting, purchasing, using, and evaluating products and services to satisfy personal needs and desires. Understanding consumer behaviour was essential for modern marketing strategies. A complex mix of psychological, social, and cultural factors fundamentally influence consumer behaviour. More precisely, customer purchase behaviour approaches the methods that person uses to search for, select, and add goods or services, along with their analytical and affective reflect before, during, and after consumption. As noted by Kardes (2011), these processes are the outcome of internal factors (like motivation, perception, learning and attitudes) and external ones (culture, social groups, and advert communications). In an era of media oversaturation and competitive branding, advertisers face a growing challenge: understanding and predicting how consumers make decisions in a fragmented media landscape. Belch

(2008) noted that consumer behaviour involves more than only what people buy but also how they process information, evaluate their choices, and emotionally engage with brands. Typically, consumer decision-making was conceptualised as a structured process that individuals follow when interacting with products or services. One of the most widely accepted structure in marketing literature was the five-stage decision-making model, which profile the sequential steps consumers take from recognising a need to reflecting on their purchase experience.

According to Kottler (2012), this model consists of the following stages:

1. Problem Recognition – The process begins when a consumer recognises a need or problem, such as fatigue, focus loss, or the desire for an energy boost. In caffeine marketing, this was often triggered by messaging that links the product with desired mental or physical states

2. Information Search – Once a need was recognised, consumers seek information internally from memory or externally via advertisements, social media, peer recommendations, or product reviews. Brand familiarity and repeated advertising exposure (especially through hybrid channels) can play a key role at this stage.

3. Evaluation of Alternatives – Consumers compare product options based on attributes such as flavour, brand image, lifestyle fit, and perceived quality. For caffeine drinkers, emotional resonance (e.g., "this brand fit is my identity") was often just as important as functional claims.

4. Purchase Decision – After judge options, the consumer get a purchase intention, though this may still be influenced by circumstantial factors like pricing, availability, or in-store promotions.

5. Post-Purchase Evaluation – At last, the consumer evaluates the product based on whether it met their expectations. Good experiences fortify loyalty and repeat purchase, while disappointment may lead to brand switching.

While this process may appear linear, Rossiter (1997) argues that information search and evaluation can continue even after the purchase was made especially when consumers reflect on emotional satisfaction or share their experience online

The term "consumer" may refer to both individuals and organisations, but in the context of this research, it focuses on the end-user namely, Millennials and Generation Z caffeine drinkers in Europe.

In sectors like caffeinated-based drinks, where most of the brands play not just on taste but on authentic and lifestyle alignment, a clear comprehension of this behavioural influence was essential. The decision to purchase a caffeine-based drink was rarely just about caffeine. It

involves psychological factors connected to lifestyle, identity, convenience, and even social class (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). The cognitive and emotional drivers behind caffeine expending are particularly nuanced. From one perspective, caffeine was associated with alertness, productivity, and mental performance. Many caffeine drink brands associate themselves with emotional states like confidence, coolness, or freedom. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that consumer intent was driven not just by attitudes toward the product, but by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control factors highly influenced by peer behaviour and media exposure.

Traditional Marketing: Strengths and Limitations

Promotional methods like television, radio, newspapers, and billboards were considered traditional marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2012). These methods have been praised for their broad reach and ability to deliver consistent brand messaging across large audiences. Traditional advertising has long played a central role in shaping consumer perceptions of caffeine-based drinks, especially in Europe. These campaigns regularly focused on mass-market reach through television, billboards, and print merchandising that empower brand consistency, broad visibility, and emotional sonority. Coca-Cola's Christmas advertisement was one of the most famous commercials, first aired in the UK in 1995. Showing the now-famous red Coca-Cola truck and the jingle "Holidays are Coming," the advert has become deeply associated with traditional festivity and nostalgia. It was emotional touch, consistent branding, and annual repetition that have made it one of the most memorable TV campaigns globally (Coca-Cola, 2022).Research by Nielsen (2022) shows that over 60% of viewers associate the advert with the "start of Christmas," demonstrating the emotional anchoring power of traditional advertising in shaping consumer sentiment. Belch and Belch (2018) emphasise that traditional marketing was effective in raising brand awareness and credibility through visual storytelling.

Figure 3: Coca-Cola "Holidays are Coming" advertisement by Coca-Cola website

Similarly, Red Bull's traditional television and print campaigns have relied on consistent use of slogans and simple animation to bring a direct, humorous message. The slogan "Red Bull Gives You Wings" has been in use since 1997 and continues to be central to their global brand identity. According to a 2020 Campaign Monitor report, the slogan enjoys one of the highest unaided recall rates among beverage advertisements, particularly among Millennials who encountered it during their teenage years.
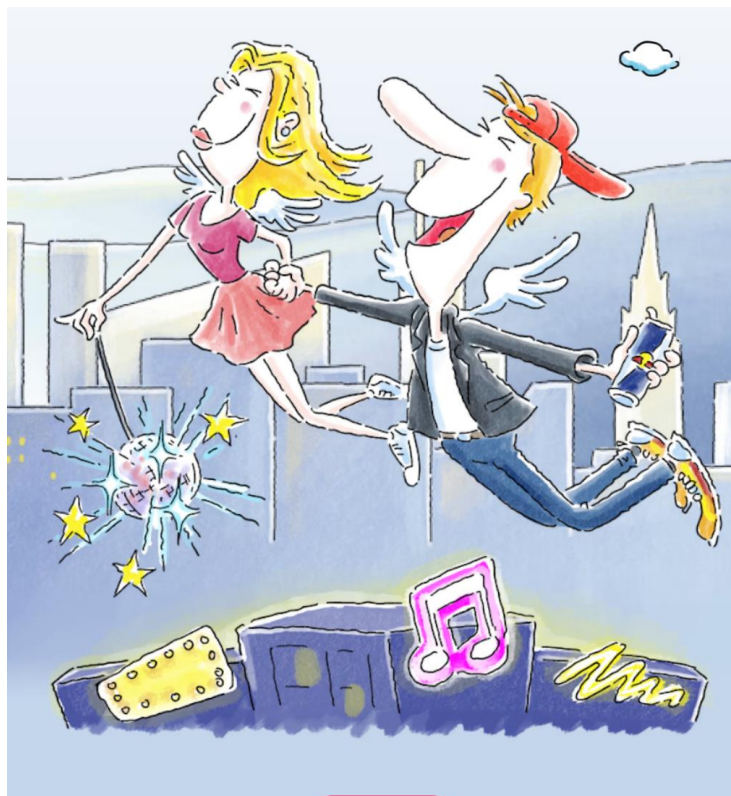

Figure 4: Red Bull "gives you wiiings" advertisement by Red Bull website.

Even in the face of such new developments in the business world, these traditional and basic

principles remain valid, such as the importance of marketing in making people aware of a brand. These traditional formats aid in building brand awareness and long-term memory through visual and auditory repetition. As Kotler and Keller (2012) state, such strategies work by relating the product with familiar emotions, seasonal rituals, or aspirational lifestyles. However, while they remain successful in creating top-of-mind awareness, they were less equipped to build two-way emotional connection or personalised brand engagement, particularly with Gen Z. Recent data emphasise the generational impact of marketing personalisation on consumer spending. According to a 2025 Twilio survey, 65% of Generation Z and 62% of Millennials reported that personalisation positively influenced their spending habits (see Figure 5). This finding reinforces the strategic importance of personalised hybrid campaigns, as these younger cohorts demonstrate a strong behavioural response to tailored brand interactions.

Share of consumers spending more due to personalization in selected countries worldwide as of May 2025, by generation

Impact of marketing personalization on spending worldwide 2025

Description: During a 2025 survey of consumers in selected countries worldwide, 65 percent of Generation Z respondents said personalization influenced their spending, followed by 62 percent of millennials. In contrast, only 35 percent of baby boomers reported the same. Read more
Note(s): Worldwide; January 3 to February 17, 2025; 7,640 respondents; among smartphone owners who have shopped online in the past six months
Source(s): Twilio

statista

Figure 5: Share of consumers spending more due to personalization in selected countries worldwide as of May 2025, by generation (Twilio, 2025; Statista, 2025).

This gap in engagement capacity emphasise the reason for integrate hybrid marketing, which blend the scope of traditional marketing with the interactivity and personalisation of modern marketing (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Zarantonello and Smith (2010) conducted a study and noticed that conventional advertisements were not working as well, considering that only 45% of consumers could remember an advertisement a week later. Traditional marketing has limitations, which have been recognised even more during the digital age. Turnbull and Fill (2019) showed how consumers have become more non-believer of one-way communication without any attempts at personal engagement. In general, conventional campaigns rarely succeed in achieving deep engagement or emotional resonance, especially among young

people who value genuine and participatory interactions (Fromm and Read, 2018). Therefore, companies that depend on traditional strategies were likely to be viewed as irrelevant or out of touch with their audiences, because there were identifiable shortcomings even in respect to marketing. Reflecting on the research that Annisa et al. (2023) conducted, was apparent that traditional methods ignore or do not integrate sensory and emotional aspects that were more worth to younger generations in building satisfaction and loyalty.

Experiential Marketing: Engaging the Senses and Emotions

Based on Pine and Gilmore's work on the "experience economy" (1998), this marketing approach defines emotional connections and consumer participation as essential components to building brand loyalty. Instead of communicating a message traditionally, experiential marketing seeks to have consumers "live" the brand through immersive events, installations, and activations. It has been suggested that experiential marketing was the most effective with Millennials and Gen Z because of their preference for experiences over possessions (Fromm & Garton, 2013). The report by Deloitte (2021) underlines the trend, with 62% of the analysed sample of Millennials and Generation Z preferring to be sold with a straightforward and friendly approach. Moreover, the rising investment in experiential marketing underscores it was recognised effectiveness across industries. As reported, global spending on experiential marketing was projected to reach $128.3 billion USD in 2024, up from $116.1 billion in 2023, marking over 10% year-over-year growth (Statista, 2024). This upward trend not only consider increased brand confidence in experience-led strategies but also mean a full recovery and expansion beyond pre-pandemic levels, with the 2024 figure surpassing 2019's $122 billion benchmark. The shift underscore how companies are now prioritising emotionally resonant, involving campaigns that move beyond conventional, one-way communication to create meaningful consumer-brand connections, especially among experience-driven demographics such as Millennials and Generation Z.
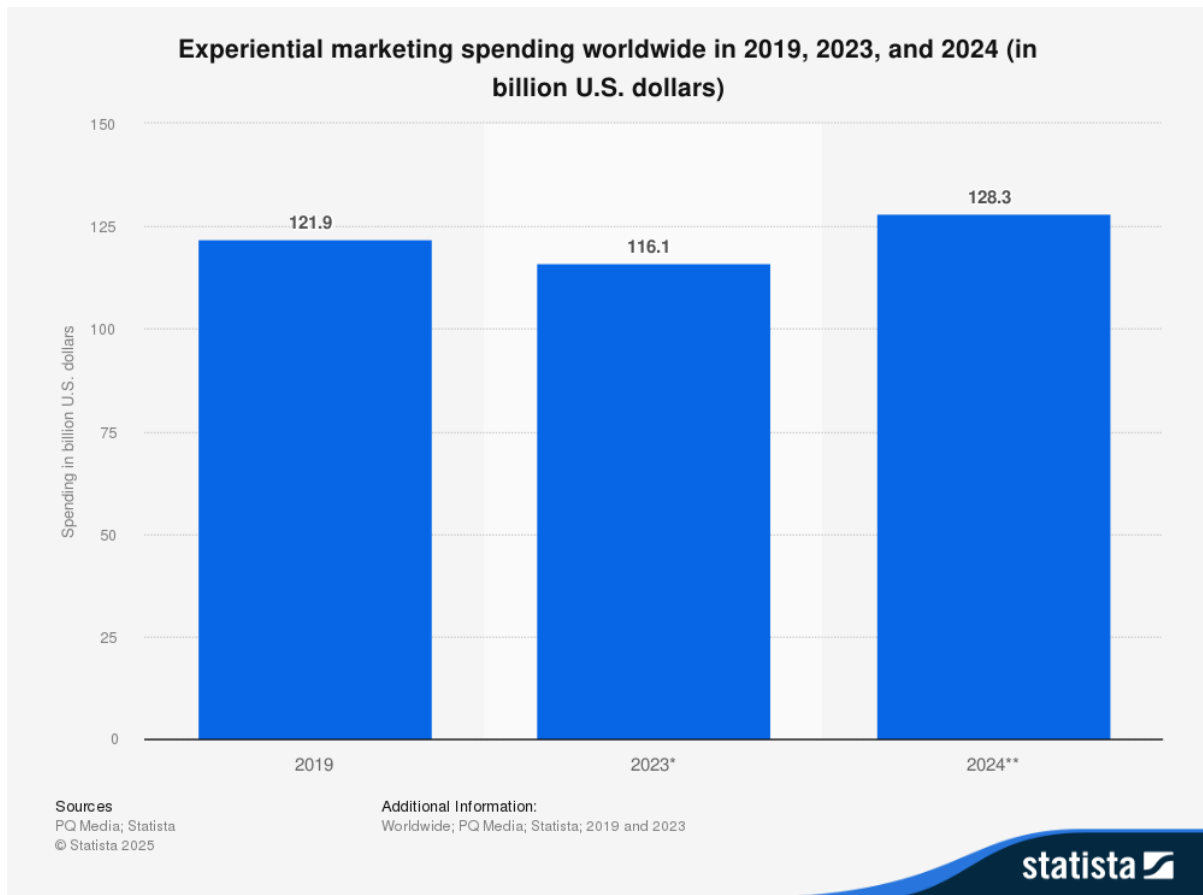
Figure 6: Experiential marketing spending worldwide in 2019, 2023, and 2024 (Statista, 2025)

These were applicable examples of how marketing practices have shifted beyond basically providing a service or product. Haeckel et al. (2003) claim that customers tend to remember brands better after participating in engaging activities because memory encoding and retrieval processes were played during such activities. Moreover, trust and positive brand advocacy have been shown to increase following live marketing experiences (Smilansky, 2009). Both experiential marketing and the millennials alongside Gen Z go hand in hand with each other. These live marketing activities allow the consumers to alter their brands with the aid of a plethora of activities, such as Pepsi's Live for Now, enabling them to develop a connection and forge loyalty. In a similar manner, online experiential marketing alongside tailored content, quizzes, and challenges has helped form bonds with the younger generation.

Complementing live experiences, the "Brand Experience Scale" drafted by Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) helps to understand the five ways in which a consumer interacts with a brand:

Sensory: The sensorial reaction associated with the brand.

Affective: The sentiments that were engendered by the brand.

Intellectual: The thought-provoking elements of the brand.

Behavioural: The brand endorsed behaviour and actions.

Relational: The brand led relationships and social contacts.

These components illustrated the focus of experiential marketing which was built a comprehensive brand. Muthiah and Suja (2017) stand by these claims as they found Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate factors as being able to define the relationship between a brand and the consumer. They further noted that sponsorships, events and even online challenges greatly impact consumer engagement and loyalty.

Experiential marketing, however, has disadvantages. Adoption was limited by high costs, low scalability, and challenges associated with ROI measurement (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Also, without unification in broader marketing frameworks, experiential marketing efforts were unlikely to create sustained consumer engagement.

Hybrid Marketing: Bridging the Gap

Hybrid marketing, which mixes traditional and experiential communication strategies, was increasingly considered an inevitable growth in consumer engagement. According to Kumar and Reinartz (2016), hybrid styles support brands in achieving both mass marketing and in-depth psychological and emotional bonding with the audience. This dual advantage was particularly useful in consumer-centric markets like beverages where differentiation goes beyond product attributes. These strategies hybrid marketing support the reach and credibility of traditional forms by adding the personalisation and interactivity of digital and experiential forms. For example, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign reached mass recognition through TV and outdoor ads while driving emotional relevance through personalised packaging and social media co-creation (British Journal of Mass Communication, 2024).
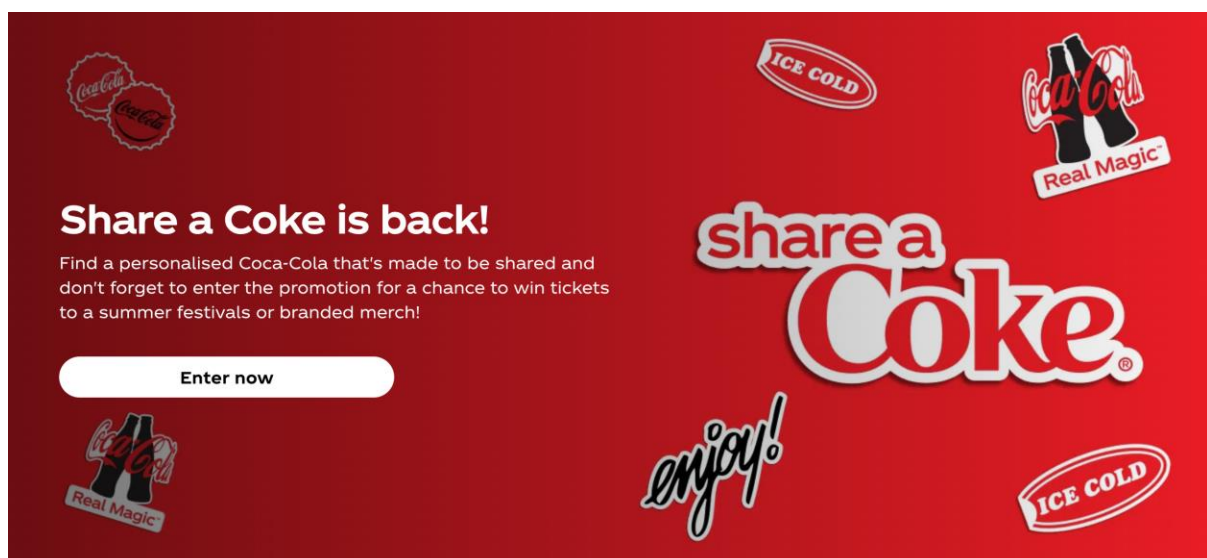

Figure 7: Hybrid marketing campaign "Share a coke" by Coke website.

As customers try to build deeper relationships and navigate abundant content, the hybrid strategy became even more relevant.

Additionally, strategically executed hybrid campaigns impact brand equity and consumer behaviour. According to Godey et al. (2016), luxury and FMCG brands that invest in synchronism between social media and traditional advertising increase returns on consumer loyalty and brand image. Their study highlights the importance of consistency through platforms, noting that when digital and offline messaging were misaligned, consumers often lose trust in the brand. This highlighted the need for cohesive hybrid approaches, especially in markets such as caffeinated beverages, where the emotional and symbolic consumption far exceeds functional use, acting as a booster for energy, a performance enhancer, or identity expression.

In short, hybrid marketing was not only about merging different methods together but also about constructing meaningful, multi-sensory, and multi-touchpoint narratives. Brands operating in youth-orientated spaces must ensure that experiential and emotional resonance was sustained across platforms in a way that reflects the values and preferences of their target audience.

In this context, I'd like to draw attention to recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) as critical emerging technologies that facilitate enhancing hybrid marketing approaches. Nowadays, brands can use AI, AR, or VR to offer products in a fully immersive 3D environment that was tailored to each individual consumer.

Moreover, social media provides scope to further derive and extend the effects of hybrid campaigns by allowing brands to interact with consumers in real time. These approaches were particularly effective in guiding customers throughout the entire decision-making process. A billboard might trigger problem recognition; a YouTube ad might aid information search; an Instagram poll might support brand evaluation; and a branded hashtag challenge might encourage post-purchase advocacy.

Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign was a case in point, which involved the selling of soda bottles that have been customised with specific names. This made it possible to interact with the consumers in an emotional way both digitally and physically. Making sales opportunities increase and growth customer intimacy were achieved through innovation. It used traditional large-scale media to launch an amplified, personalised brand experience, which was enhanced through social media as well as on-site activations, made a good example of experiential marketing. Pepsi has also used traditional endorsements and live music events to emotionally engage with the youth audience (PepsiCo, 2021).

Traditional marketing still wins respect for it was wide audience and trusted feel, so the paper weighs it against hands-on experiential work, which sparks emotion through direct play. Hit

cases like Coca-Cola's Share a Coke and Procter & Gamble's Thank You, Mom offer instructive examples of how these approaches can complement one another to meet evolving consumer needs. These examples above attend as benchmarks for value the effectiveness of hybrid marketing strategies. "The Campaign Asia (2024) report on hybrid marketing underscores the importance of analysing how virtual and physical elements interact to create united brand experiences. This provides a foundation for evaluating hybrid campaigns' potential to meet evolving consumer demands".

When marketing a caffeinated drink, a brand might pair a big TV spot during a prime football game with tailored posts on social media, sponsor a local event, and even throw in a fun quiz or challenge in a mobile app. Through this combination of techniques, the campaign was aimed at the reasoning part of the consumer and the emotions that drive purchasing decisions. Despite these improvements, there is still a gap within the literature surrounding hybrid marketing. Most studies focus on traditional or experiential methods individually. Further studies examining the effects of hybrid strategies on consumer perception across different demographics and industry sectors were required.

Brand Authenticity and Trust in Youth-Oriented Marketing

In an era of corporate scepticism and overexposure to marketing, authenticity has become a cornerstone of successful brand engagement, particularly among Millennials and Generation Z. These cohorts, shaped by digital transparency and social activism, were highly attuned to inconsistency between a brand's message and it was actual behaviour (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Authenticity, defined as the perception that a brand was true to itself, transparent, and value-driven, is now a key determinant of trust and loyalty (Morhart et al., 2015).

Experiential marketing tends to perform better than traditional media in conveying authenticity because it invites direct interaction, emotional immersion, and perceived sincerity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Younger consumers may see advertisements for things they want to buy as "fake" because they were presented in a linear, one-sided, and pre-planned way. The trust gap can be resolved effortlessly with experience-driven marketing that combines the reliability and coverage of traditional media with the emotional appeal as well as openness of modern media.

These marketers need to be certain their messaging resonates on a human level because the emotions associated with freedom, performance, and energy must feel real. Coca-Cola's Share a Coke campaign serves as an example of a brand activating personal relevance and lifestyle alignment to bolster authenticity. Consumers who see brands as authentic tend to

overlook brand errors, defend the brand, and develop loyalty towards it (Morhart et al., 2015). Therefore, authenticity was not only a moral persuasion but also serves as a strategic advantage in competing for the attention of young consumers.

Sensory Branding in Experiential Campaigns

Sensory branding denotes the use of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch in creating strong, effective associations between a consumer and a brand (Krishna, 2012). This method was useful in hybrid and experiential marketing because the goal was to go beyond instructing the consumer to engulf them in a multi-dimensional brand experience. Sensory marketing rise emotional involvement, and aids recall for Millennials and Gen Z, who wish active engagement and prefer rich, meaningful experiences (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

For manufacturers of caffeinated beverages, sensory branding plays a crucial role in shaping community identity. In case you didn't know, Coca-Cola has distinct brand assets, like the colour red, their signature contour bottle, and the "fizz" sound that was made when one opens a can. Red Bull activates the auditory and visual senses through their music and visuals at sporting events and associated youth culture, which reinforce brand associations with adrenaline. These sensory prompts access memory recall ads and increase brand recognition and emotional connectedness (Lindstrom, 2005).

Experiential campaigns boost these reactions more using interactive habits to engage many senses at once, such as pop-up and tasting booths or VR experiences. For example, a Coca-Cola experiential booth might combine music, customised drinks, and brand merchandise to create a holistic encounter that lingers in the consumer's memory. This multi-sensory engagement was hard to replicate in traditional ads solo, which was why hybrid campaigns that combine broad-reach messaging with sensory-rich experiences tend to exceed either in isolation.

Consumer Empowerment and Customisation in Marketing

Consumers today, particularly those belonging to the Millennial and Gen Z segments, increasingly demand personalised, interactive, and participatory marketing. The shift from mass communication to co-creation allows consumers to take part in shaping the brand experience. This sense of ownership builds loyalty, enhances perceived value, and increases brand advocacy (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The success of Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign was a good example; by allowing

consumers to find bottles with their names or those of loved ones, the brand transformed a standard purchase into a personalised experience. Likewise, social media challenges or design-your-own-can promotions gave Gen Z users the sense that they were part of the brand community rather than being sold to. Research by Fuchs & Schreier (2011) confirms that when customers co-create, they feel more connected to the product, even if quality or functionality was unchanged. Rather than operating in silos, successful campaigns now span broadcast, social media, influencer content, and immersive experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This integrated approach supports more dynamic engagement, in particular in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sectors such as caffeinated beverages, where lifestyle branding and real-time interaction were key to consumer retention. Dwivedi et al. (2021) argue that hybrid strategies were no longer optional but essential for addressing the behavioural complexity and fragmented attention of digitally proficient consumers. This shift from transactional promotion to relational, multi-platform storytelling has become critical in the youth market, especially among Generation Z.

Hybrid marketing influence and impacts this motivation for empowerment by integrating the scope of traditional marketing with modern digital engagement that enables customisation, voting, sharing, as well as other forms of feedback. In the caffeine-based industry, this might involve inviting consumers to name a new flavour, share their stories through branded hashtags, or design limited-edition packaging. These strategies increase emotional engagement and reflect a brand's responsiveness, a characteristic highly valued by younger, digitally experience audiences (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016).

Millennials and Gen Z: New Expectations and Behaviours

Today, Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z (1997-2012) rank among the loudest buyer voices in most markets. Both age groups, wired and socially aware, demand brands demonstrate their commitment to honesty and transparency (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Memorable experiences were relevant for the Millennials, although they also value authenticity and social responsibility.

For Generation Z, social responsibility, individualisation, and self-expression were even more critical (Williams et al., 2020). Their loyalty was earned through meaningful storytelling, community engagement, and transparency (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Their preferred advertising style combined core values with an emotional appeal, although they were open to traditional tactics of advertising.

 As digital natives raised in a hyper-connected and globalised world, Gen Z consumers expect

instant access, real-time dialogue, and genuine inclusivity. They exhibit a more analytical approach to scrutinising silly slogans or performative branding and were more inclined to criticise companies that do not align with their values (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Research by Deloitte (2021) showed that Gen Z engages with TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, spending hours into watching short clips and viewing photos. Because the generation scrolls toward friends' posts, influencers, and authentic user clips, marketers can no longer depend only on attractive ads or folders. They must invest in the assertive approach for that generation.

This shift in the method of purchase request a shift in marketing strategy. Brands can not lean on old-fashioned push ads that only publish one message in one direction. Now they must use hybrid marketing that welcomes, foster, and learns from real two-way conversations. This approach aligns with Brand Relationship Theory (Fournier, 1998), which suggests people treat brands like partners in their lives, not just as unknown suppliers of products. Seemiller and Grace (2016) reported that Gen Z expects a dialogue to take place and does not value common brand communications.

In summary, marketers who succeed with Millennials and Gen Z keep their promises, show real emotion, stay updated with the tech market, and embrace authenticity and transparency. These generations were not just customers; they were collaborators, critics, and promoters shaping brand narratives in real time.

Gaps in the Literature

Although both traditional and experiential marketing have been extensively studied, the concept of hybrid marketing remains unknown in academic literature, especially in the context of generational differences and specific industries such as caffeine-based beverages. Few research has been conducted focusing on the impacts of hybrid marketing on trust, brand perception, and brand loyalty, especially with respect to Millennial and Generation Z consumers. Besides, well-known campaigns (e.g., Share a Coke, P&G) are global, and while campaigns have received widespread acclaim globally, there was limited research analysing their effectiveness specifically among European Millennials and Gen Z caffeine consumers, particularly in terms of emotional engagement and loyalty.

Also, the combination of emotional involvement, brand experience, and generational engagement was a very interesting but under-researched topic. Hybrid methods combine the positive aspects of traditional marketing and the experiential approach together to provide better solutions to newer marketing challenges.

Considering these gaps, this dissertation was looking to explore how hybrid marketing combining traditional and experiential strategies impacts brand perception, emotional engagement, and loyalty among Millennials and Generation Z within the European caffeinated-based beverage sector. By analysing real-world hybrid campaigns alongside qualitative insights from consumers, the research aims to contribute to the emerging field of hybrid marketing.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter lays out the step-by-step plan the study followed to see how blended marketing tactics shape Millennial and Gen Z interaction with caffeinated drinks across Europe. It defines the researched philosophy, the general approach, interview questions, how the data was collected and sampled, the ethical guardrails set, the tools used to make sense of the numbers, and a plain talk on what still could go wrong and why each part links back to the initial questions.

Methodology simply means the clear map and reasoning that guides any research journey. It covers the underlying philosophy, whether the work was qualitative or quantitative, the practical techniques – interviews, surveys, or the like – and the analytic tools that turn raw material into answers. A solid methodology keeps results trustworthy, ensures they speak to the aims set out, and lets readers know the journey was planned, not left to chance.

Philosophical Assumptions

This research adopted an interpretivist philosophy, which highlights the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals in their social contexts. Interpretivism holds that what people call reality – meaning, truth or fact – was built by social interactions and was clearest when we listen to individual stories (Saunders et al., 2019).

This method was particularly appropriate for marketing research focused on how individuals read branding efforts and emotionally engage with marketing content. In this context, understanding consumer perceptions of hybrid marketing campaigns required access to participant interpretations shaped by their cultural, generational, and experiential contexts. The objective was to understand how young consumers interpret diverse online, live, or traditional marketing communication, which aligns with the pursuit of multifaceted,

contextually rich responses.

The study also aligned with the ontological position of relativism, which indicated that reality varies depending on individuals' perspectives, and with the epistemological stance of subjectivism, which holds that knowledge was best acquired through close interaction with research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was crucial for exploring how different consumers emotionally and psychologically connected with the hybrid marketing approach. Rather than looking for universal laws, this research aims to interpret patterns of meaning in a particular social and generational context.

Interpretivism contrasts with positivist paradigms, which seek objective truths. Instead, this research was concerned with subjective meanings, especially as they pertain to emotional relevance and brand connection, areas that cannot be quantitatively measured in a meaningful way (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Given that experiential marketing and hybrid strategies often rely on symbolic interaction, the interpretivist philosophy supported an exploratory and participant-centred inquiry into how consumers internalised and reacted to such marketing. This study employed an inductive research approach in these analyses, allowing theory to emerge from the data rather than being tested through a predetermined hypothesis (Bryman, 2016). This approach was relevant to the topic, since hybrid marketing was still a fresh field and researchers did not yet know exactly what kinds of emotion it provoke in younger consumers.

Inductive research aligned well with the exploratory goals of this dissertation. Since emotional engagement, trust, and loyalty were complex and subjective phenomena, it was crucial to allow participants to express their perspectives without constraint. By interpreting emerging patterns from qualitative data, this approach supported the development of context-sensitive findings that reflect real-world brand-consumer dynamics.

Research Instruments

This chapter outlines the research instruments and methods used to collect qualitative data for the thesis. Addressing complex human behaviours, human perceptions and human experiences required an extensive consideration which happens to lend itself to qualitative approaches. Oppositely to quantitative methods that focus on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative design prioritises rich, descriptive insight, with focus to understand why and how behind participant responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was particularly applicable to exploratory research, especially in marketing, where the consideration of consumer and brand attachment, emotional engagement, and personal relevance were

important considerations. Within this context, the qualitative framework allowed us to remain focused intently on how members of Generation Z and Millennials interpreted hybrid marketing within the caffeine drink sector. The thesis was based on open interviews aimed at capturing the emotions and experiences of the participants. These were vital in determining the efficacy of a campaign, the authenticity, the loyalty and the extent of real devotion of the customer to the campaign, which was precisely why they were so hard to evaluate.

Qualitative Analyses

An interview guide consisting of 10 semi-structured questions was chosen to balance structure with flexibility, allowing participants to express personal insights while keeping the conversation aligned with the research objectives. This method allowed the researcher to guide the conversation around key themes (such as authenticity, brand loyalty, and campaign recall) while also giving participants the freedom to share personal narratives and unanticipated perspectives.

Based on themes that emerged from the literature, including brand authenticity (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010), what was included were the key themes mentioned above, which covered real matches with brand campaigns – both the classic ads and hands-on events – how marketing blended emotions, how real and trustworthy brands seemed, and which channels and formats people liked best. Also, experiential marketing (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and generational consumer behaviour (Annisa et al., 2023; Deloitte, 2021). Questions addressed participants' engagement with traditional and experiential caffeine marketing, emotional responses, trust, and brand loyalty. This approach was especially appropriate for exploratory, interpretivist research, as it encourages participants to expand on their experiences, beliefs, and emotions in their own words (Bryman, 2016). Also, it was therefore not only methodologically appropriate but also central to generating the kind of actionable, real-world understanding that quantitative measures alone could not offer.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who fall within the Millennial (ages 27–44) and Gen Z (ages 13–26) cohorts and who have experience engaging with caffeinated beverage brands in Europe.

The interviews were conducted with both Gen Z and Millennials, 5 people of each generation, which makes a total of 10 participants. Participants were interviewed via Microsoft Teams video call, which makes it very convenient for them. Participants from both generations felt comfortable sharing their thoughts in private. Also received the flexibility to join from their home. Each interview lasted between twenty and thirty-five minutes. All

interviews were voice recorded with consent and transcribed. An interview guide was developed based on themes drawn from the literature review and research objectives. The interview questions can be checked in the appendix. Key topics included:

- Experiences with traditional vs. experiential marketing: Influenced by Kotler et al. (2017), Pine & Gilmore's (1998) and Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010). Questions like 2 and 3, were designed to examine how participants distinguish between passive exposure (traditional ads) and active engagement (experiential marketing) a key issue in evaluating hybrid marketing's effectiveness.

- Emotional responses to brand campaigns: Influenced Krishna (2012), to assess how emotionally resonant content the question 9 (e.g., nostalgic or inclusive messaging) shapes perceptions, preferences, and recommendations a key goal for campaigns in saturated markets like caffeine-based beverages.

- Definitions of authenticity and trust: Influenced by Beverland & Farrelly (2010), Francis & Hoefel (2018), Gilmore & Pine (2007), and Morhart et al. (2015) the questions 1,4 and 8 were shaped around to recognised authenticity, trust, and brand values. These questions investigated how consumers interpret brand sincerity, corporate responsibility, and value alignment essential for understanding long-term trust and loyalty in younger demographics.

- Opinions on hybrid strategies: Influenced by Dwivedi et al. (2021), Godey et al. (2016), Kumar & Reinartz (2016) and Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) questions 5, 7 10 and 11 assisted to assess how multi-format, integrated campaigns were received by digital-native audiences, and whether they strengthen relationships or simply improve visibility.

- Lifestyle alignment and brand identity: Influenced by Belch & Belch (2018), Gilmore & Pine (2007), and Fromm & Garton (2013) the questions 6 was elaborated to evaluate whether marketing campaigns were perceived as believable or exaggerated based on lifestyle alignment, especially in health-sensitive categories like energy drinks. This insight supports better targeting and message framing.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the role of hybrid marketing (combining traditional and experiential techniques) in shaping brand perceptions among Millennial and Gen Z caffeine consumers in Europe.

2. To explore the impact of event sponsorships, digital marketing, and lifestyle branding on the caffeine industry's consumer engagement and behaviour.

3. To investigate emotionally and psychologically driven loyalty of consumers and the

levels of interaction and attachment the consumers have which include brand love, and brand loyalty.

4. To assess the long-term effects of hybrid marketing strategies on customer retention, emotional loyalty, and brand equity, particularly through repeated and meaningful consumer-brand experiences.

5. To determine how caffeine drink brands can leverage associations with adrenaline-driven activities (e.g., extreme sports, fitness culture) in hybrid campaigns to enhance resonance with younger consumers.

Data Coding and Analyses

To transform participant responses into meaningful findings, this study adopted a qualitative thematic analysis approach following the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was especially well-suited to interpretivist research, as it allows for the systematic identification, organisation, and interpretation of themes grounded in participants' own language and lived experiences. Instead of applying an inflexible framework, this open-ended study looked to foster the development of more advanced understandings related to the perceptions and feelings of Millennials and Generation Z regarding hybrid marketing in the context of the caffeine-based beverage industry. This analysis approach expressed relationships that were more complex than straightforward surface-level relationships among variables. It aimed to connect the stories of participants to the overarching questions and goals of the study. All manual coding and thematic development were conducted in Microsoft Excel to maintain a close connection to the data and ensure clarity at every step of the analysis.

The research had walked through this six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to turn words into clear findings:

a. Familiarisation: Read over the responses to all the questions to get a feel for the data.

b. Coding: Identify recurrent ideas with various labels or "codes" (for instance: 'authenticity', 'emotional appeal', 'personalised').

c. Grouping Themes: Join such codes into wider areas of concern (e.g., the area "Brand Engagement" "emotional appeal", and "impact" could be incorporated).

d. Interpretation: Work through the themes with the intention of looking for trends, patterns and insights that might be useful in answering your research question.

e. Qualitative: data analysis tools to cross-reference responses, for example, in Excel to encode and systematise answers manually.

f. Triangulation: Check the validity of the results obtained against other sources of information (for example, the results of the case study mentioned in the dissertation).

While the methodology chosen was appropriate for the research aims, several limitations must be acknowledged:

Sample size: With 10 participants, the findings cannot be generalised to a broader population.

Self-report bias: Participants may have presented favourable or exaggerated opinions based on perceived expectations.

Cultural diversity: While participants were based in Europe, intra-European cultural differences may have influenced responses in nuanced ways not fully accounted for.

Nonetheless, the study offers rich, qualitative insights into the emotional, psychological, and experiential dimensions of hybrid marketing.

Interview Approach

Because all interviews were done by phone meeting through Microsoft Teams, was essential to set a friendly yet informative tone right from the start. To build trust and prompt honest responses, each participant received a short note in the meeting invitation phase. The note briefly explained the study, it was goals, and why their voice mattered. Structuring the study as an examination of hybrid marketing's impact on Millennials and Generation Z's perceptions of caffeinated beverages sought to make them feel informed, valued, and connected to the discussion. Ethically, within qualitative interpretivist approaches where shared understanding enriches the data, we gather (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants were also informed of the study's voluntary nature and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Along with the note, were included a consent form and a copy of the interview questions so they could review the materials before the session. All those documents can be found on the appendix.

Microsoft Teams

The research objective was to obtain information from European Gen Z and millennials about their perspectives and experiences on hybrid marketing in the caffeine-based drinks sector. In this study, qualitative interviews were held using Microsoft Teams, which was convenient for both researcher and participants. This format also made it possible to securely audio record and transcribe the responses, which was done with the participants' consent. Prior to the interview, participants were requested to sign the consent form indicating their age group and country of residence, after which they answered a set of semi-structured questions relevant to

the study themes.

These data collection methods ensure reliability and validity while capturing the multidimensional nature of consumer behaviour. Also, allowing participants to elaborate on their personal interpretations, emotional responses, and behavioural tendencies in relation to marketing campaigns. The methodology not only addresses the research objectives but also provides actionable insights for brands aiming to thrive in today's hybridised marketing environment.

Advertisement Case Support

In line with an interpretivist qualitative approach, this study employed case studies to complement interviews. Case study research enables in-depth, contextualised analysis of contemporary phenomena. This made it possible to observe concepts like emotional engagement and brand loyalty in action. Examining "real-life" campaigns helped ground theoretical ideas in practice. Additionally, the use of case studies and interviews increases in methodological triangulation — multiple data sources (interview transcripts, campaign materials, reports) were compared to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

For each interview were send a Microsoft Teams invitation, attached were 3 documents: Interview questions, Interview introduction and Consent form, which the intuit was clarify any doubts before the interviews began. These documents can be found on the appendix section. It was given the opportunity to them ask any questions or express doubts concerning about interview process and the questionnaire content before starting the interview. This step was essential to ensure clarity and promote a comfortable, transparent environment in line with ethical research practice. To facilitate understanding and improve the quality of responses, especially regarding hybrid marketing tactics, brief examples of well-known hybrid campaigns were presented in the explanation part before at the beginning of each interview session. These included Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" and Procter & Gamble's "Thank You, Mom" campaigns. Talk about these explanatory advertisements helped participants assimilate the semi-structured questions to real-life brand experiences, thereby assisting with deeper reflection and more contextually answers. This preparatory stage was particularly useful to balance acknowledgement between the participants given the varying degrees of marketing literacy among them and enhanced the overall reliability of the data collected.

In practice, cross-checking themes from participant interviews against the details of actual

marketing campaigns increases confidence in the findings. This was compatible with interpretivist philosophy, which values deep immersion in factors and acknowledges that multiple perspectives enrich effectiveness.

The two cases selected – Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" and P&G's "Thank You, Mom" – were chosen because each exemplifies a hybrid marketing method integrating traditional and experiential mechanisms. For instance, Share a Coke fused personalised packaging (bottles and cans printed with names) with digital and live components (Coca-Cola, 2025). The 2025 relaunch included QR-code-activated apps and social media experiences alongside traditional TV, outdoor and in-store activation. Likewise, P&G's Olympic "Thank You, Mom" campaign blended broadcast advertising with interactive elements and live experiences. According to it was creators, P&G built a dedicated "family home" at the Games and a digital platform for consumers to thank their own mothers. Both campaigns were categorically planned to create emotional engagement and authenticity. Coca-Cola noted that Gen Z consumers "seek authenticity and connection" in a digital world, and that sharing a Coke offers a tangible way "to show you care" (Coca-Cola, 2025).

P&G similarly aimed to "create a truly global, authentic connection" by celebrating athletes' mothers. In sum, each campaign employs storytelling and participation to foster emotional bonds with the brand, thereby supporting the study's focus on authenticity and brand loyalty. Crucially, these campaigns target Millennials and Gen Z. Marketing reports emphasise that these younger cohorts value personalisation and real-world experiences. Empirical responses to Share a Coke illustrate strong affective reactions: recipients felt "special" and reported that seeing their own name on a bottle made them feel known by the brand and more willing to buy. Using the Coca-Cola brand name and substituting it with other individual names nurtured a sense of belonging and connection among everyone. Identification was crucial for any individual, and hence it was important to grab his attention. To change people's behaviour in regard to the campaign, they understood was psychology and creatively incorporated individuals' names that were very significant. P&G's focus on family message, building goodwill and loyalty across generations. By analysing such campaigns, the study anchors abstract theories of emotional branding in concrete examples. Case study analysis thus contributes to triangulation and embodies the interpretivist philosophy: it shows how and why marketing messages work in practice, providing holistic insight into consumer–brand relationships.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed solid ethical rules, so every participant was protected and treated with respect. Before start collecting any data, the participants were informed about the research intention and was collect the consent form from each part involved. Participants learned why the research was done, also were informed how the researcher was planning to use the information that they provided. Also, was informed they could step back at any time without losing anything. All responses were anonymised to protect participant identity; pseudonyms were used in transcripts, reporting and data were securely stored in compliance with GDPR and university guidelines. Only the researcher and academic supervisor had access to the raw data. Furthermore, ethical approval will be formally requested from the National College of Ireland's ethics committee to validate the research process. These ethical protocols were designed to maintain transparency, trust, and academic integrity throughout the research project.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analyses

To overarching research question "How do hybrid marketing strategies influence brand perception, emotional engagement, and loyalty among Millennial and Generation Z consumers of caffeinated-based beverages in Europe?" This chapter organizes findings thematically. Each theme captures participants perceive, emotionally respond to, and develop loyalty toward brands. Emotional resonance such as nostalgia, authenticity, and sensory elements enhances brand perception. Hybrid marketing strategies that involve personalisation and interactivity increase emotional engagement, particularly among Gen Z. Nevertheless, trust and lasting loyalty to the brand were built through a campaign's perceived authenticity, alignment with consumer values, and the alignment with palpable experiences, and not merely through creativity.

The findings were collected of qualitative interviews conducted with five Generation Z aged between 21 and 26 and five Millennium aged between 27 and 33 participants, who consume caffeinated-based beverages and reside in Europe. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-steps thematic analysis framework will be employed, and interviews were coded manually in Excel and analysed for patterns and insights. The responses were categorized according to overarching themes considering the repetition of the same words, their contextual meaning, and sentiments across the interview. Based on the data, several important themes came forward revealing the extent to which different generations partake in hybrid marketing

within the caffeinated-based industry. These findings were analysed concerning existing literature and the objectives of the study.

The figure in the bottom provides an interviewed profile of the research. The candidates provide a balanced generational comparison while reflecting a female-dominated gender sample. Although gender was not the main investigation of the research, the predominance of women may influence interpretations of brand engagement, emotional resonance, and social values. This was relevant given previous research showing that women tend to react more strongly to emotional and experiential marketing tactics (Putrevu, 2001; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015).

Interviewed	Male	Female	Millennium	Gen. Z
1		X		X
2		X	X	
3		X	X	
4		X		X
5		X		X
6	X			X
7		X	X	
8		X		X
9		X	X	
10		X	X	

Figure 8: Participant Demographic Distribution by Gender and Generation by author's own (2025)

This specific topic distribution of gender will be discussed further in the limitations.

Emotional Engagement as a Driver of Brand Perception

Emotional elements, particularly tied to nostalgic advertising, emerged as a powerful factor shaping Millennial and Gen. Z perceptions of caffeinated-based brands. Participants often cited memorable adverts from childhood or adolescence, such as Coca-Cola's Christmas campaign, as emotionally well built and culturally landmark.

> *"The Coke ad with the polar bear, it is emotional. It sticks." (Interviewed Millennium 10).*
> *"The truck campaign always meant it is Christmas time, it feels very inspiring" (Interviewed Gen. Z 5).*

This supports Pine and Gilmore's (1998) "Experience Economy," where bonds formed emotionally can drastically shift how a person perceives a hectic routine and turns it into an event worth remembering.

Also, according to them, emotional responses were central to brand experience. For millennials, who began their consuming journey in the pre or early digital age, older ads evoke strong emotions. Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) have developed a Brand Experience Scale that centres on social and emotional engagement with a certain brand, defining "affective" and "relational" brand experiences as primary facets of the brand engagement continuous. For Gen Z, emotional triggers such as music, seasonality, or childhood memories can expand a campaign's longevity and impact.

Although Gen Z was often recognised as digitally native and trend-driven, this study reveals that nostalgic traditional ads still carry emotional weight, especially when tied to cultural or personal milestones.

This finding challenges the theory that Gen Z was reluctant to traditional advertising. Instead, it suggested that emotionally resonant traditional campaigns can still build brand perception among the younger public, especially when the content ties into their own life experiences.
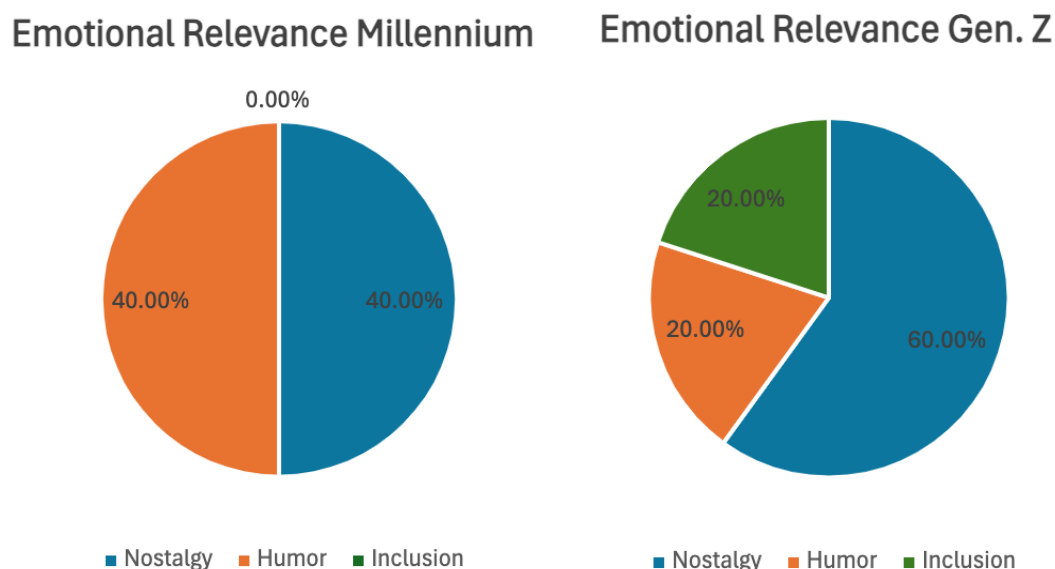
Figure 9: Emotional Relevance Factors Among Millennial and Gen. Z Participants by author's own (2025)

Authenticity and Brand Trust: Foundations for Loyalty

From an inclusivity view regarding social care, interviewees emphasised valuing brands that demonstrates authenticity through inclusivity. Caffeinated-based brands were intently associated with their recognised corporate social responsibility and authenticity, according to the participants.

Interviewees from both categories pay attention authenticity and consistency in branding. Millennials value brand authenticity and expect a coherent relationship between brand decisions, actions, and communications. For such consumers, authenticity includes brand

social responsibility and ethical operation.

> *"It doesn't feel right when Red Bull sponsors the Olympics… it doesn't match." (Interviewed Millennium 7).*

This comment shows criticism for brands that come off as inauthentic or disingenuous. This aligns with Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) statement regarding authenticity being a long-term construct, resulting from enduring consistency and genuine intention, not simply message control.

This case was expression of dissatisfaction from the participants regarding the advertising of caffeinated beverages using a health or sports angle that was contrary to the caffeinated nature of the product.

> *"It really depends on the type of marketing like because, so I don't like when sports drinks are trying to like pass as something that's like healthy or you know like good for your fitness or whatever because of like the chemical way that it is produced like I think it is very hypocritical. (Interviewed Millennium 9)."*

While Red Bull was viewed as a logical fit for athletic sponsorships due to it was extreme sports positioning, in the sense of healthy drinks, it was criticised when marketed alongside that imagery.

This distinction indicates that Millennials were not only conscious of message content but also of message-context alignment, a form of what Gilmore and Pine (2007) called "congruence authenticity.".

These views align with Morhart et al.'s (2015) and Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) work, which emphasise that authenticity involves not just messaging but consistency between brand identity and behaviour.

> *"I give importance to inclusion and whether earnings go to good causes" (Interviewed Gen. Z 4).*

Gen Z's requirement for social responsibility and ethical transparency was well-documented (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), and this study supports that authenticity was a key factor in shaping their brand loyalty even in low-involvement categories like beverages. This topic shows how brand perception and loyalty were shaped by moral and contextual cues, particularly in a market as competitive and saturated as caffeinated-based beverages.

Hybrid Marketing: Enhancing Personalisation and Emotional Engagement

Participants viewed hybrid campaigns as creative and engaging, especially when they incorporated personalisation or meaningful interactivity. Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign was once again a commonly referenced example of successful hybrid marketing.

When asked about campaigns that blend traditional and experiential elements, most participants recognised the added value of hybrid marketing. The Coca-Cola "Share a Coke" campaign was referenced as a memorable and impactful example of personalisation in marketing.

> *"It was cool when I saw my friend's name, I took a picture and sent it."(Interviewed Gen. Z 5)*

> *"The names on the Coke cans were fun, but I'd buy Coke anyway."(Interviewed Millenium 3)*

Even though participants did not always indicate that hybrid campaigns impacted their purchasing behaviour directly, they acknowledged that these approaches made brands feel "modern," "inclusive," and "aware of our generation." The mix of traditional reach with digital interactivity appears to align well with Gen Z's desire for both visibility and individuality.

This supports the argument by Kumar and Reinartz (2016) that hybrid marketing strengthens engagement by combining broad message reach with deeper personal relevance. It also demonstrates that co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) and user-generated content continue to be powerful tools in building emotional connection.

While hybrid strategies were acknowledged as more engaging than purely traditional ones, many Millennial participants noted that their own purchasing behaviour was rarely changed by these efforts. Most described themselves as already loyal to certain caffeine brands and found hybrid campaigns to be more effective in reinforcing awareness rather than driving new conversions.

This supports Kumar and Reinartz's (2016) theory that hybrid marketing strategies evoke stronger emotional connection with integrated messaging. However, it also shows that for older consumers, hybrid strategies may be more useful in retention and reinforcement, rather than acquisition.

This reinforces the difference between the two generations: for Gen Z, visibility and interaction were far more important, while Millennials lean more towards loyalty and brand history in their perception.

Sensory Branding and Identity Recall in Perception Building

Across both generations recalled specific brand elements such as slogans, colours, and music more vividly than campaign narratives. Red Bull's "gives you wings" and Coca-Cola's festive jingles were cited repeatedly.

> *"Even if I forget the ad, the music brings it back" (Interviewed Gen. Z 5)*

"Red Bull's slogan is iconic, it is always stuck with me" (interviewed Gen. Z 6).

This supports Lindstrom's (2005) and Krishna's (2012) work on sensory branding which pointed out that the importance of audio-visual effects can significantly enhance memorability. In this interview, Gen Z participants revealed that catchy jingles, visuals, and product aesthetics made the ads more unforgettable even when the narrative was forgettable. By connecting sensory branding with hybrid campaigns, the data underscores how sensory inputs reinforce both brand perception and emotional engagement.

Brand familiarity and slogan recognition, while rooted in traditional advertising, still have relevance when mixed with experiential or digital formats, reinforcing the hybrid marketing value proposition.

> *"I always liked Coke more than Pepsi, maybe because of the ads growing up." (Interviewed Millennium 2).*

> *"Pepsi has fun ads, but I'd still buy Coke" (Interviewed Millennium 7).*

For Millennials, who encountered these brand cues earlier and more frequently than Gen Z, these elements now function as identity markers of long-standing consumer relationships. Moreover, the multisensory nature of effective hybrid campaigns appears to be particularly resonant. When experiential and traditional elements were combined, sensory branding plays a crucial role in bridging the two.

Digital Engagement: Trust, Overload, and Mixed Loyalty Responses

While digital engagement was a symbol of contemporary hybrid marketing, responses across both Millennial and Generation Z group reveal a more careful and complex relationship with digital brand interaction than often presumed. Although social media plays a main role in daily life, it does not automatically generate trust or emotional loyalty. For some Millennials interviewed, social media was seen as a practical and convenient means of engaging with brands:

> "Everyone is connected on social media every day, so this kind of trustable approach" (Interviewed Millennium 7).

Suggesting that frequent exposure builds familiarity and a baseline sense of brand authenticity. This coincides with previous findings that digital familiarity can serve as an agent for credibility, particularly among digital immigrants who adapted to online spaces (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

However, this feeling was not universal. Other Millennial participants expressed well-built loyalty toward offline brand interactions, suggesting that digital touchpoints alone were insufficient to inspire consumer confidence. For instance, one participant stated:

"I trust more when I experience the brand in real life, not online." (Interviewed Millennium 9).

Indicating that physical presence or product trial reinforces authenticity more effectively than digital campaigns.

Among Gen Z participants, a degree of digital scepticism was also evident, despite their identity as digital natives. One Gen Z participant reported:

"I don't really participate in digital challenges, so it doesn't change my view." (Interviewed Gen Z 4)

Implying that passive or low-engagement digital formats fail to influence brand perception. Another Gen Z interviewee shared:

"When I go, for example, somewhere in the shop, I better see a banner but not on social media. There is too much information now in social media." (Interviewed Gen Z 5)

This response reflects the problem of content overload and consumer fatigue, an obstacle to trust and meaningful engagement noted in recent advertising literature (Dhir et al., 2018). Overall, the interviews highlight a trust conflict: while social media provide reach and visibility, interviewees from both generations expressed greater trust when marketing was tangible, contextual, and tied to real-life experience. This underscores the value of hybrid campaigns that move beyond algorithm-driven exposure and instead create integrated experiences that transition smoothly from digital to physical contexts.

Sports & Lifestyle Imagery: When Perception Conflicts with Product Reality

Opinions were classified based on the effectiveness of associating caffeine drinks with high-energy sports or fitness culture. While some participants appreciated the positioning with an active lifestyle, others found these claims misleading or incompatible with health concerns related   to   energy   drinks.
Consumers were aware of health consequences and dislike misleading sports interconnections unless they were event-based and contextually suitable.

"Energy drinks and sports? I don't trust that they're bad for your heart." (Interviewed Gen Z 5).
"It is not healthy. Associating it with fitness feels fake." (Interviewed Millennium 2).
"They link it to productiveness, so it feels like it fits the active lifestyle" (Interviewed Millennium 8).

This suggests that lifestyle branding must be carefully evaluated. As Belch and Belch (2018) point out, credibility in advertising was crucial, especially in health-related categories. Brands

threat alienating health-conscious consumers if the marketing narrative does not match the perceived reality of the product.

Performative marketing campaigns or those inconsistent with the product's characteristics risk retaliation, while those rooted in meaningful associations (e.g., Red Bull sponsoring extreme sports) were more readily accepted.

This supports the idea of the importance of aligned messaging. Brands need to make certain that associations with high energy and active lifestyles do not conflict with the product's supposed health benefits. This theme affects brand perception directly: exaggeration or false alignment may alienate consumers.

Conclusion

This analysis provides rich qualitative insights into how hybrid marketing strategies affect brand perception, emotional engagement, and loyalty among Millennial and Generation Z consumers of caffeinated beverages across Europe. Two generational cohorts began to reveal some underlying similarities regarding their understanding and reaction to hybrid campaigns. The findings reveal that Generation Z consumers were both emotionally sophisticated and practically grounded. They seek authenticity, interactivity, and personal relevance from brands but ultimately make buying decisions based on utility and value. Hybrid marketing campaigns that blend traditional emotional cues with personalised, digital experiences appear to resonate best with this cohort. However, authenticity and alignment with real consumer values remain non-negotiable for building trust and long-term engagement. Millennial participants expressed a clear preference for brands that feel authentic, emotionally resonant, and consistent with their own values and expectations. Mostly, participants acknowledged the positive impact of hybrid marketing campaigns on brand recall, yet, on their own, they don't improve purchase intent. Experiential marketing and emotional branding were still critical on a brand level connection, but for this demographic, enduring loyalty was shaped by brand legacy, sensory memories, and lifestyle compatibility than by digital novelty alone.

Unlike Gen Z, who largely expect interaction and real-time dialogue, Millennials still place more value on in-person experiences and heritage-based trust.

The interviews with Gen Z and Millennial participants revealed consistent trends across both generations in how they interpret and react to hybrid marketing campaigns. Emotional storytelling, authenticity, and interactivity remain central to campaign success, but the degree of influence varies depending on prior brand loyalty and context.

Hybrid marketing was seen as more impactful among younger Gen Z audiences, especially when campaigns use digital channels creatively or host real-world events that participants can remember and identify with. However, both generations were cautious of exaggerated associations with sports or health.

When interpreted alongside the Gen Z findings, this chapter reinforces the importance of age-specific tailoring in hybrid marketing strategy. For Millennials, effective campaigns were those that honour legacy, avoid overclaiming, and build on deep-seated emotional and sensory associations, making hybrid marketing not just a creative tool but a strategic bridge between memory and meaning.

Thus, digital engagement was effective primarily when it complements, not replaces, other forms of marketing. Excessive dependence on digital platforms without meaningful interaction risks diminishing brand credibility.

Chapter 5

Discussion and suggestions

This chapter interprets and expands upon the findings presented in the previous section, drawing meaningful connections between participant responses, marketing theory, and industry practice. The objective was to contextualise the emerging themes within the wider academic literature and propose actionable strategies for caffeine-based beverage brands. This discussion also highlights the theoretical and practical contributions of this research while outlining limitations and directions for future study.

Emotional engagement as a brand differentiator

For both Generation Z and Millennials, emotional involvement seemed to be a key factor driving brand recall and brand attachment. While some literature previously stated that Gen Z consumer choices were more data driven and more on the utilitarian side (Francis & Hoefel, 2018), this study is revealing a more nuanced emotional engagement, especially when nostalgia was invoked through Coca Cola's Christmas advertisement or the company's musical jingles. This reinforces Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience economy theory and Zarantonello and Schmitt's (2010) Brand Experience Scale, which highlighted the role of emotions in brand attachment, and campaigns which instigate emotions or a sense of personal relevance engage these dimensions mentioned above.

The durable effect of emotionally resonant campaigns suggests that hybrid marketing

emotional storytelling can transcend generational boundaries and resonate longer in their subconscious. For Millennials, this was deeply rooted in memories; for Gen Z, it may be more tied to shared cultural experiences or flash-moments on social media. This theme confirms that hybrid marketing strategies using emotionally resonant content can strengthen both brand perception and emotional loyalty among younger caffeine drink consumers.

This theme directly answers the core research question by illustrating how emotional engagement delivered through hybrid marketing strategies significantly shapes brand perception and strengthens emotional loyalty among Millennial and Gen Z consumers. It illustrates the value of crafting emotionally compelling narratives that go beyond rational appeals, especially in low-involvement product categories like caffeinated beverages.

Authenticity and Congruence: The Non-Negotiable

The concept of authenticity emerged as a non-negotiable prerequisite, especially among Millennials, who actively examined message-context alignment. Red Bull, for instance, was praised for aligning with extreme sports but censured when positioned as a healthy drink. This assists Gilmore and Pine's (2007) "authenticity matrix" and Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) findings that perceived brand authenticity issues from consistency, credibility, and sincerity. Gen Z, while slightly more tolerant of promotional experimentation, still prioritised inclusion and social good, aligning with the values-based branding literature (Fromm & Gaton, 2013; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). For both generations, incongruence diminished emotional engagement and long-term brand loyalty. These insights directly support the research question by demonstrating how hybrid marketing strategies must not only be emotionally and visually attractive but also rooted in authentic, consistent brand narratives. For Millennial and Gen Z customers, brand perception was highly sensitive to perceived sincerity, which notably influences both emotional engagement and loyalty of them.

Hybrid Marketing: Depth + Reach

The integration of traditional and experiential marketing approaches, termed 'hybrid marketing', was widely acknowledged by participants as more engaging than either strategy alone.

While not always reported to directly influence purchase decisions, hybrid formats increased campaign memorability, perceived brand relevance, and emotional connection, which posits

that integrating broad-reach channels (e.g., television, print) with personalised, experiential components (e.g., name-labelled packaging, user interaction) can amplify brand intimacy and emotional engagement. Campaigns like "Share a Coke" successfully combined mass visibility with personalisation, supporting Kumar and Reinartz's (2016) claims that hybrid strategies foster emotional connection and brand intimacy.

However, there were generational differences indeed; Gen Z appreciated the collaborating and social-sharing aspects of hybrid campaigns, whereas Millennials often considered such efforts as improvements rather than purchase motivators. This corresponds with Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) co-creation theory, which explains that the collaboration between brands and consumers enhances engagement in the relationship but does not necessarily lead to conversions in mature customers.

Also, the generational contrast observed a distinction between active and passive digital consumers: Gen Z looks for interactive and shareable content, while Millennials may engage more reflectively or nostalgically with hybrid formats.

Therefore, this theme aligns with the research question by indicating how hybrid marketing impacts both brand perception (through modernity and inclusiveness), emotional engagement (through personalisation and storytelling), and brand loyalty (especially through user-generated content and cultural resonance). It reinforced the goal that hybrid marketing tactics were not just about coverage but also about making meaningful experiences which relate to generational values and their media consumption habits.

Visual Recall and Sensory Branding

The findings reinforced existing sensory branding research (Lindstrom, 2005; Krishna, 2012), which asserts that multi-sensory marketing can significantly improve brand recall and emotional demonstration, and indicated that jingles, slogans, and visual styles remain strong cognitive anchors for brand recall. Coca-Cola's red-and-white imagery and "Red Bull gives you wings" left a lasting impression on consumers and shaped their perceptions long after the campaign concluded. The result highlights the continued pertinence of traditional branding strategies even in the digital era. Moreover, when mixed with experiential points of contact (e.g., pop-up events or on-pack personalisation), sensory triggers have an enhanced react, particularly among younger consumers.

Most importantly, these sensory elements enabled brands to transcend generational divides. While the importance of narrative and interactivity differs, sight and sound act as common denominators for brand engagement. Sensory anchors increased the emotional connection

and the lifespan of the campaign.

This statement reinforced the central research question, which illustrates how hybrid campaigns, particularly those that incorporate memorable sensory cues, affect emotional engagement and brand perception. Sensory branding, when integrated across traditional and experiential formats, contributes to enduring mental associations that can strengthen loyalty over time, especially in categories like caffeinated beverages where visual identity and energy symbolism were central.

Digital Engagement and Trust: The Generational Divide

Digital marketing still holds a position as a complex area. Both Millennial and Gen Z cohorts were cautious about posting advertisements on their personal social media accounts, although such platforms were an integral part of contemporary hybrid marketing. While online presence and convenience were provided with influence marketing, social media advertising, and engagement advertising, they were enough to gain exposure and convenience, but did not foster the necessary brand loyalty or emotional bond. Gen Z, despite being from the digital era, often showed signs of fatigue or uncertainty toward excessive or overly curated digital advertising.

This finding challenges assumptions within consumer behaviour literature that Gen Z was inherently more trusting of digital media due to their native familiarity (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Fromm & Read, 2010).

Furthermore, Dwivedi et al. (2021) said that digital trust was not caused by platform presence alone, but rather through meaningful interaction. This reinforces the idea that passive digital campaigns (e.g., static Instagram posts or generic ads) did not have the relational power required to inspire loyalty. Trust emerges from the consistency, relevance, and interactive experience aligned with the consumer's identity and values.

Participants' regards toward digital-only campaigns reflect the importance of tangible, real-world touchpoints in establishing brand trust. A few interviewees seemed to prefer more traditional forms of advertising, such as live events, in-store signage or even physical product tests, and regarded them as more trustworthy than social ads, which were driven by algorithms. This data reveals the need to contextualise digital marketing rather than to just deploy.

Furthermore, the findings highlight a generational nuance in digital reception. Gen Z participants were not disinterested in digital campaigns but rather critical of inauthentic or redundant messaging. Gen Z was recognised as valuing interactivity and co-creation in which

their identity was integrated, including social media challenges. On the other hand, Millennials would view digital campaigns as supplementary rather than central, reinforcing loyalty if already established but improbable to drive conversion.

This theme speaks directly to the research question by revealing how hybrid marketing strategies must carefully balance digital and physical components to build brand perception, emotional engagement, and consumer trust. While digital activations offer reach and real-time responsiveness, they do not inherently produce emotional or loyal relationships. For both generations, trust was contingent on experiential relevance and consistency, not merely digital visibility.

Lifestyle Alignment: Benefits and Pitfalls

As cited by Belch and Belch (2018), lifestyle marketing was most effective when there was synergy between a product and lifestyle marketing portraying it. This idea of "message-context congruence" was supported by Gilmore and Pine (2007), who argue that authenticity was derived not only from the message but also from its integration with reality and consumer sentiments.

 Participants' criticism of brands labelling as "healthy" products with high sugar or stimulant levels indicates ethical and transparent branding. This aligns with Beverland and Farrelly (2010) theorising brand authenticity, focusing on the importance of synergy within brand narratives that feel like they have been earned rather than opportunistic. In addition, studies on generational consumer behaviour (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Seemiller & Grace, 2016) suggest, and especially apply to, Gen Z as being the most likely to hold brands accountable for "social and health claims". These expectations, especially for Gen Z, go beyond cause-related marketing to span all product claims, sponsorships, and symbolic associations.

The findings suggest that consumers, especially Generation Z, were sensitive to variances between marketing and actual product attributes. They respect, and even tolerate, associations with productivity, gaming, and extreme sports, but only when those associations were compatible with the brand (e.g., Red Bull sponsoring Formula 1). However, these consumers did not agree to caffeine drinks marketed as fitness or health beverage.

Such behaviour represents a pitfall of lifestyle marketing: when brands exaggerate health benefits or align with lifestyles that contradict their core product characteristics, they risk losing credibility. As many participants described in the research, such brand marketing attempts were perceived as "fake" or "performative".

However, when lifestyle branding was perceived as compatible, for example, energy drinks linked to late-night productivity, gaming, or extreme sports, the association can build stronger brand relevance and emotional resonance. This theme offers an insight into the impact of hybrid marketing strategies on brand image, emotions connected to the brand, and customer loyalty. When well implemented, lifestyle alignment can definitely impact all three by telling stories that sounds with the consumer's reality. On the other hand, misalignment can reduce trust, damaging the emotional impact and loyalty of consumers. Therefore, lifestyle branding works as a crucial but sensitive topic of hybrid strategy design.

Gendered Responses to Emotional and Visual Cues

The study's sample was nine women and one man, which was an imbalanced representation, even though gender wasn't the focus. It showed clear differences in the engagement of the participants with emotional and sensory branding. Female participants often demonstrated stronger affective reactions to campaigns, particularly those involving nostalgia, music, or visual storytelling. These reactions spanned both generations but were especially evident among Millennials, who shared vivid recollections of emotionally charged campaigns like Coca-Cola's Christmas advertisements or personalised messages in "Share a Coke."

These gendered patterns resonate with prior literature on consumer psychology. Putrevu (2001) highlighted the fact that women were more likely to respond emotionally to advertising, while men will act based on utilitarian logic. In terms of branding, female consumers tend to respond more to sensory storytelling and nostalgia, which were the triggers referred to most frequently and were incorporated in the campaigns that were most remembered by participants. The emotional intensity expressed in interviews suggests that hybrid marketing techniques (e.g., music, packaging, shared memories) were particularly effective in building brand attachment among female audiences.

Given that the vast majority of this study's participants were women, the strong emphasis on emotional engagement may, in part, reflect this gender composition. It emphasises even further how women respond more profoundly to visual, auditory, or nostalgic cues in multimedia campaigns.

This pattern suggests that campaigns need to focus on the primary and secondary audience and adapt emotional tone and media style to the audience's media preferences. In the women cases, they might engage more favourably with version directed at family, celebration, inclusion, or shared traditions. On the other hand, advertisements aimed at men would involve a different approach, likely centred on rational benefits or adventure, as emphasised

in Putrevu's (2001) gender scheme paradigm.

This helps answer the overarching research question by demonstrating that emotional involvement and brand perception were shaped by not only generation but also by gender. While hybrid marketing was an effective loyalty-building tool, the emotional and sensory appeal of marketing activities were likely to differ in their effectiveness across demographic subgroups. This suggests the need for layered segmentation strategies that move beyond generational labels alone and consider gendered responses in campaign design.

Theoretical Contributions

This research added to the hybrid marketing and generational consumer behaviour literature by integrating concepts on emotional engagement, authenticity, campaign structuring, and their impact on brand loyalty toward caffeinated beverages. This research contributed to the theory in three fundamental aspects: hybrid marketing and its strategies, authenticity of low-involvement goods, and generational perception of value.

The literature has addressed the hybrid marketing mix combining traditional and experiential marketing techniques in one campaign, so fast-moving consumer goods, such as caffeinated beverages, were also included (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). This study demonstrated that hybrid strategies, when tailored and integrated, can achieve emotional and broad reach gains across channels. Because of the hybrid strategy's emotional depth and broad reach, its applicability to fast-moving consumer goods through caffeinated beverages was validated. This study supported and refined existing hybrid frameworks by showcasing the differing generational gaps in marketing response with a focus on engagement. Gen Z respondents sharply leaned towards interactive and co-creation formats, while emotional familiarity and brand legacy marked Millennial engagement. This perspective enhanced the understanding of segmentation by age in relation to hybrid engagement, thus demonstrating the need and gap in the interrelationship of strategy, media, and age cohort of the consumers.

Authenticity has often been linked to strategic social and ethical marketing for affluent segments, such as luxury fashion brands or even gourmet foods (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). This study demonstrated that low-involvement and high-consumption products like caffeinated beverages also call for sincerity, social alignment, and congruence. It was determined that both Gen Z and Millennial consumers actively evaluate brands to determine if their actions and intentions were aligned. Consider Red Bull's fitness-orientated marketing paradox: the brand's perceived inconsistency has resulted in backlash, while Coca-Cola's success through narratively congruent emotional storytelling provided a contrasting example.

This case study illustrated "message-context congruence", which was a fundamental concept of what Gilmore & Pine (2007) refer to as "authenticity". This theory's application was expanded, showing that consumers did not set aside ethical or emotional considerations even for inexpensive products.

This study built on marketing psychology and generational theory (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Fromm & Garton, 2013) to examined how brand engagement was shaped by value in Generation Z and Millennials. For Gen Z, authenticity is associated with social inclusion, ethical sourcing, and digital interactiveness. Millennials were shaped more by emotional storytelling and personal nostalgia. The study revealed that generational identity was not merely about age or media preference but distinctions of trust, emotional recall, and lifestyle resonance. It adds to and refines the Brand Experience Scale (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010) by demonstrating that not only do campaigns evoke different responses, but that the responses differ within consumer segments.

Limitations

The study was based on a small, deliberate sample of ten participants – five Millennials and five members of Generation Z – drawn from several countries in Europe. Although purposive sampling was applicable for qualitative, exploratory studies that seek in-depth insights (Bryman, 2016), the limited sample size means the findings were not statistically generalisable to the broader population.

The sample also lacked diversity in gender, with 9 of the 10 participants identifying as women. This variance may have formed how certain marketing themes, particularly emotional resonance, authenticity, and social values, were interpreted, given research that indicates women often captivate differently with emotional and sensory branding (Putrevu, 2001; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). While gender was not a principal variable in this research, the distortion may have introduced bias in how participants perceived and reported emotional engagement and loyalty.

Additionally, while participants were recruited from various parts of Europe, there was no structured attempt to control for cultural or regional variation. Consumer behaviour, particularly in relation to branding and digital trust, can vary significantly by country, language, or even local norms. These cultural influences were not the primary focus of this research and were not systematically accounted for, potentially limiting the depth of cross-cultural interpretation.

Another issue was the absence of publicity for particular marketing materials during the

interviews. While participants were mentioned some memorable campaigns (e.g., Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke"), no campaign videos, posters, or in-merchandising were shown. The interviews would yield better results if some form of visual ads were provided to help participants critique hybrid campaigns on not just the ratios of interactivity to passivity, but also on colour schemes, music, brand loyalty, or overall perceived authenticity. This technique could be particularly relevant to the study of hybrid marketing, where the fusion of sensory and emotional elements was central. Future research might incorporate campaign walkthroughs, digital mock-ups, or increased reality experiences to more accurately assess consumer reactions.

At last, the study captures perceptions at a specific moment in time. Hybrid marketing is an evolving field, and consumer expectations, particularly among Gen Z, were constantly changing along with social media trends, influencer behaviours, and technology. Expectations of what is engaging and authentic in 2025 could change in the near future. Therefore, while this dissertation provided a valuable insight for that specific time, it would be unwise to assume it captures the entirety of emerging shifts in hybrid marketing preferences.

Chapter 6

Practical Recommendations

Built on the findings and theoretical contributions, this chapter present to caffeinated drink companies some strategic recommendations focused on increasing consumer engagement, emotional attachment, and brand loyalty with Generation Z and Millennials, based on the previous data collected from the interviews and the academic theories discussed in the previous sections.

1. Adopt Personalised Modular Hybrid Campaigns: Brands could use modular hybrid marketing strategies that balance superficial and deep (catchy slogans, nostalgic marketing, co-creation or user-generated content) engagement. Millennials can be motivated by emotional heritage storytelling, whereas for Gen Z, interactivity is necessary like TikTok challenges, AR filters, QR-activated experiences.

2. Ensure Authenticity Through Message-Context Congruence: Marketing messages must align with the brand's actual values and product identity. Caffeinated drink brands should prioritise marketing messages that reinforce brand congruence with the

target event, for example, sponsoring sports or student events that occur during late-night hours instead of daytime traditional competitions, provided the health message is not substantiated.

3. Emotional Influence Storytelling and Nostalgia: Foster brand loyalty and familiarity by expanding mechanisms of representation. Seasonal and cultural traditions are good opportunities to influence emotional triggers such as music or memory-sharing formats. As an example, to promote beverage products could be slogans as "Energy for the Big Exam" and "My First Coke" that may stimulate curiosity and help in driving consumption.

4. Design for Sensory Consistency Across Platforms: Develop a brand style establishing that packaging, online visuals, music, and slogans work cohesively across all touchpoints, whether it's a YouTube ad, an in-store poster, or a Spotify ad. Keep sensory consistency to reinforce top-of-mind recall.

5. Avoid Oversaturation by Shifting to Quality: Focus on brand and value interactions. Concentrate around engagement metrics that promote user value, clear communication, and relevance. Digital engagement can include activities such as polls, quizzes, and message interactions. Avoid health and wellness-based versions of the caffeine-focused lifestyle. Focus on late-night study and creative work sessions, adrenaline-charged activities such as dance and gaming.

6. Target Lifestyle Messaging with Care: Position caffeine-based drinks around cognitive functions such as focus, alertness, and creativity instead of physical health unless evidence supports it. Adopt a lifestyle approach that focuses on late-night study sessions, creative work, and adrenaline activities like dance and gaming, and should avoid health-based versions.

7. Recognise Gendered Engagement Patterns: Campaigns can be tailored based on emotional resonance with gender, like community and narrative-based family storytelling for women, while still avoiding stereotypes. Gender-neutral inclusive frameworks remain essential to counter exclusion.

8. Co-create with Consumers for Long-Term Loyalty: Allow co-creation and shareable moments across both online and offline platforms. A brand could, for example, host a user-designed limited-edition can competition or run a hashtag challenge where

consumers submit stories tied to caffeine rituals.

Final conclusions

This dissertation proposed to explore a critical question for today's marketing environment: How do hybrid marketing strategies influence brand perception, emotional engagement, and loyalty among Millennial and Generation Z consumers of caffeinated-based beverages in Europe? Through the integration of theoretical marketing models with qualitative research, the analysis has provided an interesting understanding of the millennial and gen Z hybrid marketing reaction in the emotional and experiential marketing lightweight fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. The study was based on foundational theories such as Pine and Gilmore's (1998) "Experience Economy," Beverland and Farrelly's (2010) authenticity framework, and Kumar and Reinartz's (2016) hybrid marketing model. These theories were adapted and applied to the unique context of caffeine-based beverages a product category consistently characterised by routine purchasing, low involvement, and high competition. What emerged was a rich and multi-layered interpretation of how emotional cues, authenticity, sensory recall, and hybrid engagement impact consumer behaviour. More significantly, this research shows that brand narratives and values impact even low-involvement categories. And consumers engage with brands at the very minimum on a subconscious level. They register the stories, signals, and sentiments that brands embed within their marketing strategies. This highlight the importance of emotional branding and hybrid strategies as we are living in an era of consumer values-shift and experience. Looking at the comparison between Generation Z and Millennials revealed both overlaps and important differences. While these generations share aspects of emotional relevance, they tend to express them differently. As the older cohort, Millennials grew up with traditional advertising and the nascent phases of digital marketing. That demographic, as they aged, showed a tremendous emotional resonance with nostalgic cues and jingles as well as legacy advertising campaigns. They appeared to be more aware of content that was exclusively digital. The expectations of Gen Z are often oversimplified, but as digital-first consumers, their approaches are decidedly more sophisticated. Alongside interactivity and innovation, they want responsibility and inclusiveness alongside a real socio-economic impact. They do not just participate in online influencer challenges or promotions. They engage with brands that enable them to create change. Therefore, it can be concluded that engagement for Gen Z is not novelty-seeking, but rooted in authenticity and personal relevance. These results help build a broader understanding of generational marketing and challenge stereotypes that oversimplify consumer behaviours based solely on age or digital

habits. Using a qualitative design was fundamental to the success of this study. The use of semi structured interviews made it possible to gather rich narratives that would not be possible through purely quantitative surveys. Thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied and it allowed the identification of important themes while attending to the realities of the participants. The study provided an interpretivist understanding of marketing, which sees marketing campaigns not merely as communication acts, but as social acts viewed through individual and collective cultures. However, the research had some limitations. A small sample size, gender imbalance, and the lack of visual encouragement during interviews all shaped the scope of the findings. These limitations reflect the restrictions of conducting in-depth qualitative research with limited resources and time. Nevertheless, the insights gained were valuable and point to the potential of hybrid marketing as a tool for emotional and generational resonance. As a personal matter, the research process has been professionally valuable and intellectually engaging. Working directly with the participants and learning about their perspectives enabled me to tie the theory with practice, which is not an everyday opportunity. Developing the interview guide and coding the responses to identify dominant themes enabled me to appreciate the necessity of critical listening and thinking thematically, skills which were invaluable beyond academic environment. Moreover, this project has deepened my understanding of consumer psychology, generational behaviour, and the strategic nuances of modern marketing. It has affirmed the importance of ethical, emotional, and context-sensitive communication in building meaningful consumer-brand relationships.

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Appendix

Subject: Interview Introduction – Dissertation Research Marketing Hybrid on Caffeine-based

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research interview. My name is Paola Estevam Dorneles, and I am currently finishing my Master Science Degree in International Business at the National College of Ireland. This interview is part of my dissertation research, which explore how marketing strategies used by caffeine-based drink brands like energy drinks, coffee-based sodas, or colas influence the perceptions, emotions, and loyalty of consumers, specifically among Millennials and Generation Z in Europe.

This study focuses on **hybrid marketing strategy** impact consisting of traditional advertising television and print media along with live social media events and personalized engagements aimed at building emotional connections towards brands within the caffeine beverage industry.

Your perspectives as a consumer of caffeine drinks will help me most specifically address:

- How do these marketing strategies influence your perception and trust towards brands selling caffeine-based beverages
- Does it foster an emotional bond or increased loyalty towards the product
- What attributes (emotions, visuals depicting akin lifestyles, principal values) predominantly shape your interests

This is your story to tell, do share as much as you can from your lived experiences without hesitation because there are no wrong responses. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential, and you are free to skip any question or withdraw at any time without giving a reason. The information you provide will be used solely for academic purposes and analysed thematically as part of my research.

The interview will consist of around 11 open-ended questions and should take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time.

If you're happy to proceed, we'll begin now. If you have any questions at any point, feel free to ask.

Thank you again for your valuable time and contribution!

Paola Estevam Dorneles
Master's Student – National College of Ireland
Email: x23342773@student.ncirl.ie
Supervisor: Michael Cleary-Gaffney

Interview Questions:

1. What types of caffeinated drinks do you regularly consume, and what brands do you associate with them?

2. Can you recall a traditional advertisement (TV, billboard, print) for a caffeine-based drink? What did you think or feel about it?

3. Have you experienced a caffeine brand through a live event, social media challenge, or personalised campaign? What impact did it have on your impression of the brand?

4. What makes you feel that a caffeine brand is 'authentic'? Can you give an example of a campaign that felt genuine or fake?

5. When thinking about hybrid campaigns that combine traditional and experiential elements (e.g., "Share a Coke"), do they influence your opinion or loyalty more than regular ads? Why or why not?

6. How do you feel when caffeine drinks are advertised alongside sports, fitness, or high-energy lifestyles? Does this affect your perception or interest in the product?

7. What features in marketing catch your attention most: visual style, slogans, music, interactivity, or personalisation?

8. Do you trust caffeine drink brands more when they engage with you through digital platforms (e.g., challenges, polls, co-creation)? Why?

9. What role does emotional relevance (e.g., nostalgia, humor, inclusion) play in whether or not you choose one caffeine brand over another?

10. Would you say hybrid marketing makes caffeine drink brands feel more "in touch" with your generation? Why or why not?

11. Has a caffeine drink campaign ever made you more likely to recommend a brand or post about it online? Why?

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Research

Researcher
Paola Estevam Dorneles
Contact
X23342773@ student.ncirl.ie
Institution
National College of Ireland
Supervisor
Michael Cleary-Gaffney

Purpose of the Research
This research is part of a Master's dissertation at National College Ireland. It looks into the impact of hybrid marketing (a blend of traditional and experiential marketing) on Europe's Millennial and Generation Z consumers in terms of emotional engagement, brand perception, and loyalty towards caffeinated drinks.

Why You Are Invited
You are invited to participate because you often consume caffeinated beverages and are currently included in one of these groups, Millennial or Generation Z category. Your feedback will deepen understanding of how modern marketing strategies tailored to your age group influence your preferences and purchasing habits.

What Participation Involves
A semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. The interview will be recorded (audio only) with your consent. You will be asked about your experiences and opinions of caffeine drink marketing. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without explanation.

Confidentiality
Your identity will be anonymised in all documentation and reports. Data will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher and supervisor. All recordings will be deleted after transcription and final project submission.

Voluntary Participation
Participation is entirely voluntary. There are no risks or benefits beyond contributing to academic research. You can withdraw at any point with no consequence.

Use of Data
Your responses will be used for academic purposes only and may appear in the dissertation or future presentations, but without identifying you.