

Fueling Focus in a Burnt-Out Generation: Understanding Gen Z's Energy Fatigue

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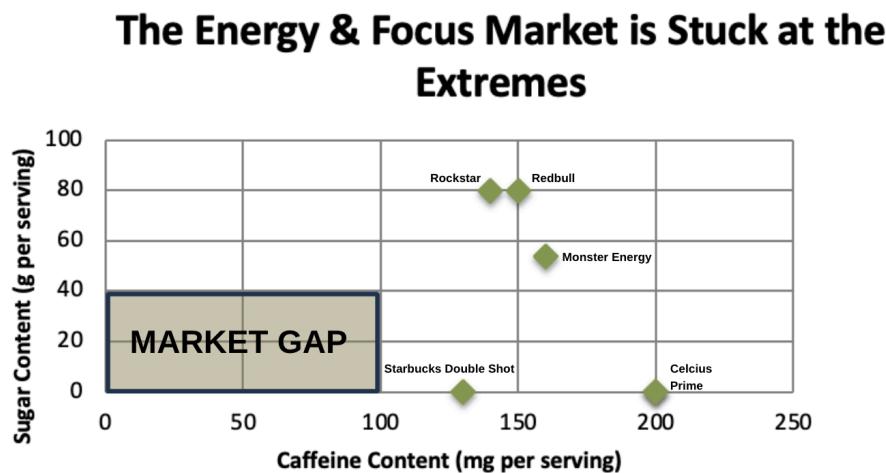
Across college campuses, classrooms, and online spaces, Gen Z is quietly feeling “cooked,” a word that captures the exhaustion, mental fatigue, and overstimulation shaping this generation’s daily life. Young adults today, who live the most digitally connected lives in history, report record levels of burnout and cognitive drain. Yet the energy drink industry continues to market

the same hyperactive lifestyle of non-stop motion and maximum output. That message no longer resonates. The energy and focus beverage market is overdue for a shift.

A combination of survey data we collected from 100 Gen Z students and young adults, and secondary research shows how today's energy products fall short. Most provide a quick boost that fades into anxiety, jitteriness, and fatigue, which many call "fake energy." These drinks amplify stimulation without improving focus or well-being. Gen Z's real need is for steady mental clarity and emotional composure that supports productivity over time. That gap in the market creates space for a new kind of product, one that redefines what "energy" means.

Our product "Calmē", French for calm, fills this gap. The product contains 50 mg of natural caffeine, L-theanine, and B vitamins, working together to maintain mental clarity while preventing energy crashes that occur with popular energy drink brands. Calmē is set apart not only by its ingredients but also by its brand identity. It takes an approach similar to how Liquid Death revolutionized bottled water by pairing authenticity with irony. Calmē promotes mindful energy, an idea centered against constant stimulation, pushing for controlled energy.

The energy and focus market segment has maintained its outdated marketing approach for more than ten years. The energy industry maintains its focus on aggressive and competitive marketing despite consumer fatigue with hustle culture. The introduction of a product that combines cultural appeal with balanced energy and clear thinking enables this concept to transform the entire category. The market shows clear consumer interest, yet remains inactive while the perfect time for market transformation has arrived.



The energy and focus beverage industry has largely transitioned from high-sugar stimulants to fortified, cleaner formulations, yet their marketing messages have not evolved. The energy drink market features Red Bull and Monster as leading brands, which promote competitive high-performance behavior to their consumers. Red Bull uses its marketing campaigns to promote adrenaline-driven activities through its "Gives You Wings" slogan, and Monster uses an aggressive, high-energy brand image. The market has seen the emergence of Celsius and Prime, as well as other brands that use lifestyle marketing to appeal to consumers who want fitness

results and social media popularity. The marketing industry presents energy as a resource that helps people achieve better performance and stay alert.

The marketing strategies used by these brands do not match the way Gen Z people experience life. Young people today experience excessive stimulation while dealing with stress because they seek different approaches to manage their constant need for productivity. The market lacks products that deliver focused energy without causing anxiety or overstimulation to young consumers. A functional beverage exists as a business opportunity that delivers balanced energy with mental clarity and emotional peace.

The company Liquid Death demonstrates how to transform an entire industry through its innovative approach. The company Liquid Death launched in 2018, entering 113,000 retail locations and securing \$1.4 billion in funding through March 2024 (Sacra, 2024). The company achieved success through its innovative approach to water marketing and counter-culture appeal, without any actual product enhancements.

Our product will aim to establish a similar cultural presence in the energy and focus beverage market, delivering continuous mental clarity instead of relying on additional caffeine or brief energy spikes. The brand will represent authenticity and control, validating Gen Z consumers who seek balanced energy with enduring focus. The product will achieve market transformation through its combination of branding that connects with culture and its performance-enhancing features, which resemble Liquid Death's impact on the water industry.

The Gen Z market segment consists of people who share both behavioral patterns and cultural beliefs. The survey by Deloitte (2024) shows that 40% of Gen Z members experience persistent anxiety and stress, which indicates they suffer from burnout. Gallup (2023) demonstrates that people who experience chronic stress develop lower engagement levels and their cognitive abilities decline. A combination of survey data we collected from 100 young adults and secondary research shows how today's energy products fall short. Most provide a quick boost that fades into anxiety and fatigue. Our research shows 77% of students use these drinks, but their main dissatisfaction stems from the side effects: 38% report "energy crashes" and 18% get "jittery feelings." Students call this "fake energy": a jolt that amplifies stimulation without improving focus. Gen Z's real need is for sustained mental clarity and emotional composure, not another spike and crash.

The survey results demonstrate that current energy drinks fail to meet the needs of Gen Z consumers because they offer brief performance boosts but lack sustained mental clarity and health-oriented energy. Social media platforms demonstrate this trend through #overstimulated and "need to go touch grass" memes, which show how people tire of a non-stop work culture. The practice of quiet quitting, along with anti-hustle memes, demonstrates how people reject excessive work activities. Our survey results show that 48% of participants choose to support brands that use authentic and humorous approaches instead of using conventional wellness or performance advertising.

Gen Z Brand Messaging Preferences

Students now try different combinations of drinks and ingredients to develop their own energy boosters, which prevent energy dips and nervousness, and excessive stimulation. The behavior shows that Gen Z members understand their energy requirements and take active steps to control them. A product that delivers these advantages through safe and dependable methods would fulfill the current market requirements.

Our beverage Calmē solves both functional and cultural needs that exist in the energy and focus market segment. The combination of natural caffeine at moderate levels of 50 milligrams with L-theanine and B vitamins in Calmē provides extended mental clarity while preventing the typical energy drink side effects of crashes and jitters. The product functions as a practical option for people who need mental clarity, together with continuous energy levels. The main consumer base for Calmē consists of stressed students who need beverages during their late-night study sessions and project work but need protection from overstimulation side effects. The product line of Calmē establishes a fresh market segment through its dual approach to fulfill practical requirements and match consumer tastes.

Our strategy includes a core element that takes from Liquid Death's successful bottled water market disruption through its bold and culturally relevant messaging approach. The brand used its playful and humorous approach to transform basic water into a lifestyle brand. The energy and focus market will experience a new approach through Calmē, which presents an opposing brand identity to traditional energy drinks. The brand presents itself as calm and authentic while demonstrating confidence through its focus on clarity and balance.

The design elements of the packaging match the brand personality. The design features a minimalistic color scheme with bold text elements that create a raw branding image. The brand message delivers its core value through a direct statement, which reads "focus, without the crash." The approach enables Calmē to differentiate itself from competitors, clashing against the idea of intense energy.



Figure 1: Calmē Energy Drink - Front and Back Design. The design of Calmē packaging follows a simple approach that aligns with its fundamental values of achieving balance and maintaining focus and clarity. The front panel of the packaging shows the brand's focus on delivering calm energy to consumers, while the back section presents detailed information about ingredients and performance benefits for extended mental clarity.

The evidence supporting the market opportunity rests on three pillars: our primary research findings, broader cultural trends, and secondary market reports. Our survey of 100 Gen Z students and young adults showed a clear dislike for current energy products. Many said these drinks left them "so wired I couldn't even focus," highlighting that today's options cause anxiety and energy crashes rather than sustained mental performance. The data shows that while these products offer a quick boost, they fail to support lasting focus and cognitive stability. Cultural trends further support this. TikTok hashtags such as #overstimulated, #burnout (5B+ views), and #quietquitting (890M+ views) (Source: TikTok, retrieved October 2025) shows a growing movement against overexertion and hustle culture.

Experimental behavior among young adults also signals strong market demand. Many young consumers are mixing their own ingredients and beverage blends to avoid crashes and mental overload. A branded product that meets these consumer needs through consistent quality and availability would capture their attention and loyalty.

Secondary research further confirms that this opportunity exists. McKinsey (2025) notes that wellness spending for products emphasizing cognitive support is growing among Gen Z. Mintel (2025) found something similar: young consumers are driving the demand for functional drinks that offer real performance benefits and are made by companies that are labeled as trustworthy. This aligns with a shift in consumer preference away from traditional supplements and toward functional foods and beverages (The Food Institute, 2025). This evidence strongly supports the potential success of a product positioned as calm, authentic, and anti-hustle.

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