

## Living in the Sweet Trap: Consumer Lived Experiences of Persistent High-Sugar Beverage Consumption

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### ABSTRACT

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine consumers' lived experiences of persistent high-sugar beverage consumption. Drawing on in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected participants in Makassar, Indonesia, four superordinate themes were identified: (1) sensory pleasure as sanctuary, (2) the brand as emotional companion, (3) the rationalisation-indulgence dialectic, and (4) habituation and identity entanglement. The findings reveal that continued consumption is sustained not by low health awareness, but by deeply embedded affective, embodied, and social mechanisms that consistently override rational health considerations. These insights advance understanding of the sweet consumption trap and carry implications for affect-sensitive public health interventions and responsible marketing.

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## INTRODUCTION

The global persistence of sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) consumption in the face of intensifying public health warnings represents one of the most compelling paradoxes in contemporary consumer behaviour research. Epidemiological evidence has long established the association between frequent SSB intake and elevated risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome (Malik et al., 2010; WHO, 2015). Yet, despite this well-documented evidence, consumption rates remain high, particularly in emerging urban markets across Southeast Asia (Popkin & Hawkes, 2016).

A foundational study by Ridha and Zaimar (2026), employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), established that brand image and sensory appeal exert significant positive effects on consumers' emotional attachment and continuance purchase intention toward high-sugar beverages. That study introduced the conceptual metaphor of the *sweet consumption trap* – a condition in which affective and sensory-driven mechanisms collectively override rational health considerations. Health risk awareness, while negatively associated with purchase intention, demonstrated a comparatively weaker effect than emotional and sensory predictors, suggesting that cognitive knowledge alone is insufficient to disrupt established consumption behaviour.

Although these quantitative findings provide robust statistical evidence for the structural determinants of persistent high-sugar beverage consumption, they remain limited in explaining how such behaviour is subjectively experienced and interpreted by consumers themselves. Existing survey-based studies predominantly capture behavioural relationships at an aggregate level, but offer limited insight into the personal meanings, emotional negotiations, and embodied routines that sustain consumption in everyday life. Consequently, an important research gap remains in understanding how consumers make sense of continued high-sugar beverage consumption despite explicit awareness of associated health risks.

This limitation is theoretically significant because persistent consumption is not solely a matter of rational decision-making, but also involves affective attachment, sensory gratification, habitual repetition, and social meaning that are often inaccessible through quantitative approaches. While prior studies confirm that the sweet consumption trap exists, they do not sufficiently illuminate what it feels like to be inside that trap: how consumers negotiate competing desires, how pleasure repeatedly overrides health considerations, and how sugary drinks become embedded in everyday identity and lived experience. These are fundamentally phenomenological questions.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), developed by Jonathan Smith (1996, 2009), is ideally positioned to address this gap. IPA seeks to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds, emphasising the experiential quality of phenomena as they are lived and interpreted by individuals. In the context of SSB consumption, IPA offers a means of accessing the thick, first-person texture of consumer experience: the moment-to-moment sensory encounter, the affective resonance of familiar brands, the

internal dialogue between knowledge and desire, and the subtle ways in which habitual consumption becomes identity-constituting.

This study therefore poses the following research question: *How do consumers subjectively experience and make sense of their persistent consumption of high-sugar beverages?* In pursuing this question, the study does not seek to test hypotheses or generalise statistically, but to generate rich, idiographic insight that complements and deepens the quantitative account offered by Ridha and Zaimar (2026). Together, the two studies constitute a sequential mixed-methods research programme in which quantitative findings motivate and orient qualitative inquiry.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The theoretical framework reviews relevant literature on sensory pleasure, emotional attachment, health-risk rationalisation, and the phenomenological tradition in consumer research. The methodology section details the IPA design, participant selection, data collection, and analytical procedure. The findings section presents four superordinate themes with supporting subordinate themes and verbatim extracts. The discussion situates the findings within existing theory and elaborates their implications. The paper concludes with theoretical contributions, practical recommendations, and directions for future research.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***The Sweet Consumption Trap: Quantitative Foundations***

The conceptual anchor for the present study is the sweet consumption trap, first formalised by Ridha and Zaimar (2026). In that model, brand image encompassing perceived attractiveness, credibility, reputation, and lifestyle congruence and sensory appeal comprising taste, aroma, visual presentation, and overall hedonic gratification function as dual antecedents of emotional attachment, which in turn exerts the strongest direct influence on continuance purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.52, p < .001$ ). Emotional attachment also partially mediates the relationships of brand image and sensory appeal with purchase intention, confirming its role as a key psychological mechanism. Health risk awareness negatively but weakly predicts purchase intention ( $\beta = -0.18, p < .05$ ), reinforcing the primacy of affect over cognition in shaping sustained behaviour.

These findings converge with attachment theory in consumer behaviour (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010), which holds that emotionally attached consumers are more resistant to attitude-inconsistent information, less sensitive to negative cues, and more inclined toward long-term relational persistence with brands. They are also consistent with dual-process accounts (Hofmann et al., 2009), wherein automatic, affectively laden processing frequently overrides deliberate, health-motivated cognition.

### ***Sensory Experience and Hedonic Pleasure in Food Consumption***

Sensory marketing theory (Krishna, 2012) proposes that multisensory engagement with food and beverage products generates experiential value that transcends functional utility, forging affective responses that condition future behaviour. Taste and sweetness, in particular, activate reward pathways and

generate rapid hedonic reinforcement (Liem & Russell, 2019), making high-sugar beverages potent vehicles for pleasure. Spence (2015, 2020) further demonstrates that sensory cues—visual, olfactory, and auditory—shape expectation, perception, and post-consumption satisfaction in ways that operate largely beneath the threshold of conscious deliberation.

From a phenomenological perspective, sensory pleasure is not merely a stimulus-response event but a mode of being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the lived body holds that sensory experience is irreducibly subjective, situated, and meaning-laden. The taste of a particular beverage is not an isolated sensory datum; it is encountered within a context of memory, social relation, and affective tone that transforms it into a qualitatively rich experience. This phenomenological dimension of sensory pleasure is precisely what IPA is equipped to reveal.

### ***Emotional Attachment, Brand Meaning, and Identity***

Brand attachment theory (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005) conceptualises the consumer-brand relationship as an emotional bond characterised by a strong, affectively valenced cognitive and behavioural orientation toward the brand. Brands in the food and beverage sector frequently embed themselves within lifestyle narratives, social rituals, and self-concept (Keller, 2013), making brand consumption an act of identity expression and maintenance. In Indonesian urban contexts, specific beverage brands—including sweetened coffee, bubble tea, and flavoured milk—have become cultural signifiers of youth identity, socialisation, and modernity.

Recent research by Ridha (2025) on visual aesthetics and emotional resonance in social media marketing demonstrates that aesthetically pleasing branded content evokes positive emotional resonance that strengthens consumer-brand attachment and sustains engagement. This visual dimension of brand experience is particularly salient in the digital consumption environment, where high-sugar beverage brands deploy carefully crafted imagery to encode hedonic promise and social aspiration.

### ***Health Risk Awareness and the Rationalisation-Indulgence Dynamic***

A consistent finding across the SSB literature is that health risk awareness, while cognitively accessible to many consumers, fails to reliably translate into behaviour change (Bucher et al., 2016; Grimm et al., 2018). This gap between knowledge and action is particularly pronounced when hedonic rewards are immediate and salient while health consequences are temporally distal and probabilistic (Raghunathan et al., 2006). Ares et al. (2018) further observe that consumers often develop flexible rationalisation strategies that permit continued unhealthy consumption while preserving a positive self-image.

Phenomenologically, this dynamic can be understood as an ongoing dialectic between two competing modes of self-understanding: the health-conscious subject who knows the risks, and the pleasure-seeking subject who desires immediate gratification. IPA's focus on the complexity and ambivalence of lived experience makes it especially well-suited to exploring how this dialectic is negotiated, sustained, and sometimes resolved in everyday consumption.

### *Phenomenological Approaches in Consumer Research*

Phenomenological inquiry in consumer research has a substantial tradition, originating with Thompson et al.'s (1989) foundational work on the lifeworld of shopping and Arnould and Thompson's (2005) delineation of Consumer Culture Theory. IPA, as developed by Smith et al. (2009), is distinguished by its dual commitment to idiography attending closely to individual cases before seeking patterns across participants and interpretive depth, through which the analyst moves beyond surface description to engage with underlying meanings and concerns. IPA has been applied productively in health-related consumer research, including studies on disordered eating (Rance et al., 2017), alcohol consumption (Gill, 2012), and chronic illness self-management (Smith & Osborn, 2008), but its application to SSB consumption remains largely absent from the literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how individuals make sense of significant personal experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA was selected because it is suitable for examining the subjective meaning of persistent high-sugar beverage consumption and allows in-depth interpretation of lived experience through a hermeneutic approach.

### *Participants*

Twelve participants were recruited purposively from urban consumers in Makassar, Indonesia. Inclusion criteria were: aged 18–35 years, consuming high-sugar beverages at least three times per week for six months, and awareness of health risks associated with sugar intake. The sample consisted of seven women and five men from student, professional, and self-employed backgrounds.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Freq./Week</b>
Andi	22	M	University Student	5×
Bintang	24	M	University Student	6×
Citra	21	F	University Student	4×
Dian	23	F	University Student	4×
Eka	20	F	University Student	5×
Farid	27	M	Young Professional	7×
Gita	26	F	Young Professional	4×
Hendra	29	M	Young Professional	5×
Indah	28	F	Young Professional	6×
Joko	32	M	Self-Employed	5×
Kartika	30	F	Self-Employed	6×
Luki	33	M	Self-Employed	4×

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth individual Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between January and March 2026. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes, were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide explored sensory experience, emotional meaning, brand attachment, health awareness, and daily consumption routines.

### **Analytical Procedure**

Analysis followed Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step IPA procedure: repeated reading, initial noting, emergent theme development, cross-case clustering, theme refinement, and interpretive writing. Rigour was supported through reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and member checking.

## **RESULTS**

Four superordinate themes emerged from the IPA analysis, each encompassing two or three subordinate themes. Table 2 provides a thematic overview.

Table 2. Thematic Structure

<b>Superordinate Theme</b>	<b>Subordinate Themes</b>
1. Sensory Pleasure as Sanctuary	1a. Sweetness as immediate comfort 1b. Ritual and rhythm of sensory encounter 1c. Sensory memory and nostalgic return
2. The Brand as Emotional Companion	2a. Familiarity and trust in the brand 2b. Brand as social currency and identity signal 2c. Visual and aesthetic resonance
3. The Rationalisation-Indulgence Dialectic	3a. Guilt, justification, and negotiated permission 3b. Temporal bracketing of health concern 3c. Selective health literacy
4. The Trap of Habituation and Identity Entanglement	4a. Embodied habit and involuntary craving 4b. Consumption as self-narrative 4c. Social pressure and collective consumption

### **Theme 1: Sensory Pleasure as Sanctuary**

All twelve participants described their experience of high-sugar beverage consumption in intensely sensory terms, foregrounding the immediate, physically gratifying quality of the encounter. However, the phenomenological texture of this pleasure extended well beyond simple taste preference; for most participants, it carried the affective quality of refuge, comfort, and restoration.

#### **1a. Sweetness as Immediate Comfort**

Participants consistently described the experience of sweetness as a form of emotional relief, particularly in the context of stress or exhaustion. The beverage functioned as a micro-sanctuary a brief, embodied withdrawal from the demands of academic or professional life.

*"After a long lecture, I don't think about calories or sugar content. " + "I just need that cold, sweet feeling. It resets me somehow – like I can breathe again." (Farid, 27)*

Farid's account captures the immediacy of sensory relief and its affective interpretation as psychological reset. Similarly, Kartika described the first sip of her sweetened coffee as a 'signal to my body that the morning has properly started', suggesting that sweetness functions as an embodied cue for affective state transition. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion of bodily intentionality helps illuminate this: the body reaches toward the beverage not merely in response to hunger or thirst but as an anticipatory structure of comfort and restoration.

### ***1b. Ritual and Rhythm of Sensory Encounter***

For the majority of participants, SSB consumption was embedded in structured daily routines that invested sensory encounters with temporal and relational significance. The beverage was not merely consumed; it was encountered at particular times, in particular places, and with particular people, forming a sensory scaffold for the day's rhythm.

*"There is a specific corner near my office where I always buy my bubble tea at 3 PM. The smell, the way the pearls settle, the first pull through the straw – it is like a ceremony. " + "I would feel something important was missing if I skipped it." (Indah, 28)*

Indah's description of consumption as a 'ceremony' points to the ritual character of the encounter, in which sensory elements smell, texture, sound are not incidental but constitutive of the experience's meaning. Ritualised consumption, as McCracken (1986) notes, is a mechanism for transferring cultural meaning to the consumer; here, the ritual serves additionally as a temporal marker and an embodied act of self-care.

### ***1c. Sensory Memory and Nostalgic Return***

Several participants described a notable temporal dimension to their sensory experience, in which particular tastes or aromas evoked biographical memories that amplified the affective value of consumption. Eka, for instance, described the taste of flavoured milk as transporting her back to childhood afternoons with her grandmother, investing a routine purchase with profound nostalgic resonance. Joko similarly recalled that the particular sweetness of his preferred packaged SSB was associated with celebration and reward in his family of origin.

*"It doesn't just taste sweet. It tastes like when I was a child and everything was simpler. That's not something you can replace with a healthier option." (Eka, 20)*

Eka's account illustrates how sensory pleasure accrues layers of biographical meaning through Proustian memory, rendering taste a portal to personal history. This temporal dimension of sensory experience deepens the phenomenon beyond hedonic preference into what might be described as existential anchoring.

## ***Theme 2: The Brand as Emotional Companion***

All participants demonstrated a meaningful orientation toward specific brands that exceeded functional preference. Brands were experienced not merely as product categories but as relational entities partners in daily life carrying affective significance, social meaning, and aesthetic value.

### ***2a. Familiarity and Trust in the Brand***

Participants described their preferred brands in terms typically reserved for close interpersonal relationships: reliability, predictability, and non-judgement. Bintang's account was exemplary:

*"I know exactly what I am going to get. It never disappoints me. In a day full of surprises and pressures, my coffee is the one thing I can absolutely rely on."* (Bintang, 24)

Bintang's framing of the brand as a reliable constant amid daily uncertainty resonates with Thomson et al.'s (2005) characterisation of strong brand attachment as analogous to human attachment security. The brand provides a 'safe haven' a consistent, comforting presence that reduces psychological uncertainty and provides affective regulation.

### ***2b. Brand as Social Currency and Identity Signal***

Several participants, particularly students and young professionals, articulated the social significance of specific brands within their peer networks. Consuming a particular bubble tea brand, for instance, was understood as participation in a shared youth culture a visible statement of belonging and aesthetic sensibility.

*"If you're at a study group and everyone has the same brand of bubble tea, it feels like you belong. Choosing a different brand, or worse, not having one would feel weird, like you don't fit in."* (Andi, 22)

Andi's account reveals how consumption functions as a social performance in which brand choice signals group membership and cultural literacy. The affective investment in the brand is therefore not merely personal but socially embedded and interpersonally regulated.

### ***2c. Visual and Aesthetic Resonance***

Multiple participants referenced the visual appeal of beverage packaging, in-store aesthetics, and social media branded content as significant contributors to their brand attachment. Participants described being drawn to brands that produced 'beautiful' beverages aesthetically pleasing presentations that generated positive anticipation before consumption had even begun. Consistent with Ridha's (2025) finding on visual aesthetics and emotional resonance in social media marketing, this pre-consumption visual engagement was experienced as emotionally priming, generating pleasurable anticipation that enhanced the value of the eventual sensory encounter.

## ***Theme 3: The Rationalisation-Indulgence Dialectic***

A defining feature of participants' accounts was a pervasive, often subtle tension between awareness of health risk and the desire for continued

consumption. Rather than resolving this tension in favour of either health or indulgence, participants actively managed it through a variety of cognitive and narrative strategies.

### ***3a. Guilt, Justification, and Negotiated Permission***

Most participants acknowledged experiencing guilt or discomfort in relation to their consumption, but consistently described mechanisms by which this discomfort was resolved in favour of continued indulgence. These mechanisms included temporal compensation ('I'll exercise tomorrow'), relative comparison ('I eat healthier than most of my friends'), and exceptionalism ('Today is a stressful day; I deserve this').

*"Yes, I know it's not good for me. But I have been working since six in the morning. At some point you need to give yourself permission to just enjoy something without analysing it."* (Hendra, 29)

Hendra's framing 'give yourself permission' captures the structure of negotiated indulgence particularly clearly. The consumption is not thoughtless; it is actively sanctioned through a moral calculus in which effort and reward are balanced. This aligns with Raghunathan et al.'s (2006) 'unhealthy = tasty' intuition and with broader research on moral licensing in food-related self-regulation.

### ***3b. Temporal Bracketing of Health Concern***

Participants frequently described health concerns as belonging to a different, future-oriented temporality that was effectively bracketed during the act of consumption. Health considerations were not denied but deferred – assigned to a temporal domain that was experienced as separate from the immediate pleasure of drinking.

*"In the moment, health just doesn't enter my mind. It's like that world – the one with diets and doctors exists somewhere else. Right now there is just this drink and how it tastes."* (Dian, 23)

Dian's account of 'that world' as spatially and temporally 'elsewhere' illuminates a phenomenologically significant feature of consumption experience: the power of present sensory absorption to effectively exclude distal cognitive content. This is consistent with Husserl's (1913) description of intentional horizon the way in which objects of consciousness occupy a foreground of attention that renders alternative perspectives relatively invisible.

### ***3c. Selective Health Literacy***

Several participants demonstrated sophisticated, if partial, engagement with health information. Rather than being uninformed, they selectively attended to health narratives that were consistent with continued consumption emphasising moderate risk, citing contradictory evidence, or constructing narratives in which their personal resilience mitigated general health claims.

*"I've read that it's bad if you drink a lot, every single day, for years. But I don't think what I do counts as extreme. My body can handle it. I'm young."* (Luki, 33)

#### ***Theme 4: The Trap of Habituation and Identity Entanglement***

The fourth and perhaps most theoretically generative superordinate theme concerns the ways in which SSB consumption becomes structurally embedded in embodied habit, personal narrative, and social obligation. Participants described experiences of being 'stuck' in consumption patterns that they could intellectually question but experientially could not leave.

##### ***4a. Embodied Habit and Involuntary Craving***

Multiple participants described craving as a bodily experience that preceded and bypassed rational deliberation. The body was experienced as having its own desires, which demanded satisfaction independently of cognitive endorsement.

*"By 2 PM my body already knows it wants bubble tea. I haven't decided anything my feet are just walking to the shop. I'm not even thinking about it."* (Citra, 21)

Citra's description of her 'feet just walking' invokes the phenomenological concept of habitual body schema (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) the way in which repeated behaviour becomes sedimented in the body as a pre-reflective orientation that enacts itself prior to conscious intention. At this level, the sweet consumption trap is genuinely a trap: the consumer is not freely choosing but being carried by habit.

##### ***4b. Consumption as Self-Narrative***

For several participants, high-sugar beverage consumption had become integrated into their self-concept to the degree that the prospect of cessation was experienced as a form of self-loss. Their preferred beverage was not merely something they consumed; it was something they were.

*"If someone told me I could never drink sweetened coffee again, I think I would feel like I was losing a part of myself. It's not just coffee. It's who I am in the mornings."* (Farid, 27)

Farid's statement 'it's who I am in the mornings' reveals the identity-constituting function of consumption: the beverage is a prop in the performance of a particular self. Belk's (1988) concept of the extended self is pertinent here; when possessions and consumption habits are incorporated into self-definition, their loss is experienced as a form of amputation.

##### ***4c. Social Pressure and Collective Consumption***

Finally, participants described social contexts in which consumption was not individually initiated but collectively compelled. Shared purchases, reciprocal invitation, and peer norms created an interpersonal architecture that made non-consumption socially costly.

*"When my friends all order bubble tea I never think twice, I just order too. Not ordering would feel antisocial. It would mean I'm not fully part of what's happening."* (Gita, 26)

Gita's account highlights the social normativity of SSB consumption within peer groups, where abstention carries the risk of exclusion and disconnection. The trap is thus not only individual but collectively maintained reproduced

through shared practices that distribute and normalise consumption across social networks.

## DISCUSSION

The four superordinate themes identified through IPA analysis converge to offer a rich, experiential account of the sweet consumption trap first formalised by Ridha and Zaimar (2026). Whereas the earlier quantitative study confirmed structural relationships among brand image, sensory appeal, emotional attachment, and continuance purchase intention, the present findings illuminate the experiential substance of these relationships: the lived texture through which they are enacted, sustained, and made meaningful. In this sense, the current study extends previous behavioural explanation by demonstrating that persistent high-sugar beverage consumption is also shaped by embodied interpretation, affective routine, and subjective meaning.

The first theme, sensory pleasure as sanctuary, extends the quantitative finding on sensory appeal by revealing that the pleasurable sensory encounter is not merely a stimulus for positive affect but a qualitatively structured experience of bodily comfort, temporal ritual, and nostalgic memory. Sensory pleasure functions as a mode of existential restoration, making SSB consumption phenomenologically significant in ways that purely hedonic accounts obscure. This finding is consistent with emotional eating research (Macht, 2008), which identifies sensory intake as a regulator of emotional state, but it also extends sensory marketing theory by showing that sweetness is experienced not only as product gratification but as emotional refuge. While Krishna (2012) and Spence (2020) emphasise sensory cues as drivers of consumer response, the present findings indicate that sensory appeal in high-sugar beverage consumption also operates as embodied affect regulation embedded in everyday life.

The second theme, the brand as emotional companion, complements and deepens the quantitative finding on brand image and emotional attachment by revealing the relational, social, and aesthetic dimensions of brand experience that sustain consumption. Brands are not merely perceptual categories but relational entities experienced as reliable, socially meaningful, and aesthetically pleasurable partners in daily life. This finding supports brand attachment theory (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010), particularly the idea that strong attachment resembles interpersonal security and familiarity. However, the present study further suggests that attachment in beverage consumption is reinforced through ritual repetition and peer recognition, making brand attachment more socially enacted than earlier models typically emphasise. The finding on visual and aesthetic resonance also aligns with Ridha's (2025) research on visual aesthetics in social media marketing, confirming the pre-consumption role of brand imagery in priming emotional engagement.

The third theme, the rationalisation-indulgence dialectic, provides phenomenological substance to the quantitative finding that health risk awareness, while significant, is weaker than affective predictors of purchase intention. IPA reveals the active cognitive and narrative work through which consumers manage the tension between health knowledge and consumption

desire. This dialectic is not a simple failure of self-control but a sophisticated, ongoing negotiation that draws on moral licensing, temporal bracketing, and selective health literacy. These findings reinforce previous work on unhealthy food rationalisation (Raghunathan et al., 2006), yet add a phenomenological layer by showing how health concern is deliberately displaced during consumption moments. Rather than lacking knowledge, participants demonstrate temporal separation between health awareness and sensory indulgence. This has important implications for public health communication design: messages that simply increase health knowledge are unlikely to disturb the equilibrium of the dialectic, since the dialectic has evolved precisely to accommodate and neutralise such messages.

The fourth and most theoretically novel theme, the trap of habituation and identity entanglement, introduces two dimensions of the phenomenon that remain largely invisible to quantitative analysis: the pre-reflective embodied habit that enacts consumption without deliberate choice, and the identity-constituting function of consumption that makes cessation feel like self-loss. Existing quantitative consumer studies rarely capture how repeated consumption becomes sedimented into bodily routine and personal identity. By contrast, the present findings suggest that the trap metaphor is not merely rhetorical but phenomenologically precise: for many consumers, SSB consumption has become a structural feature of embodied, social, and narrative existence from which extraction requires not merely information or intention but a reorganisation of self and habit. Theoretically, this finding extends consumer behaviour discussion by introducing habitual body schema as a useful interpretive lens for understanding persistent unhealthy consumption.

Taken together, the findings suggest that effective interventions – whether public health campaigns or responsible marketing initiatives – must engage at the affective, embodied, and social levels rather than the purely informational. Interventions that offer emotionally resonant alternative narratives, build healthier sensory rituals, and engage peer networks may be more effective than those relying solely on cognitive risk communication. Overall, the study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that persistent high-sugar beverage consumption should be understood not only through cognitive and affective predictors but also through phenomenological mechanisms that shape everyday behavioural persistence. For marketers, the findings also underscore the ethical responsibility attached to the deliberate cultivation of sensory pleasure, brand attachment, and habitual consumption, particularly in product categories associated with documented health risk.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study set out to examine how consumers subjectively experience and make sense of their persistent consumption of high-sugar beverages, employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to generate rich, first-person insight into the lived dimensions of the sweet consumption trap. Four overarching themes were identified: sensory pleasure as sanctuary, the brand as emotional companion, the rationalisation–indulgence dialectic, and the trap of habituation and identity

entanglement. Together, these themes reveal that persistent SSB consumption is not reducible to a deficit of health knowledge or rational agency, but is embedded in embodied pleasure, biographical memory, relational brand meaning, self-narrative, and social norm dimensions that cognitive-informational interventions cannot adequately address.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it offers the first IPA account of SSB consumption, advancing a phenomenologically grounded understanding of the sweet consumption trap that complements the structural model of Ridha and Zaimar (2026). Second, it demonstrates the value of sequential mixed-methods design in consumer behaviour research, wherein quantitative findings motivate and orient qualitative inquiry and the two accounts achieve mutual enrichment. Third, it introduces the concept of the habituated body schema as a theoretical resource for understanding the pre-reflective, non-deliberate dimension of unhealthy consumption behaviour.

Practically, the findings support the design of affect-sensitive public health campaigns that engage emotional and social dimensions of consumption rather than relying on risk information alone. They also call for a more nuanced understanding of marketing ethics in the high-sugar beverage category, where powerful branding strategies may be deepening habitual and identity-constituting consumption patterns that consumers subsequently experience as traps.

Limitations of the study include its single-city geographic scope, its focus on young adults, and the inherent interpretive subjectivity of IPA, which limits transferability rather than statistical generalisability. Future research might apply IPA to older or more health-compromised populations, explore cross-cultural variation in the phenomenology of SSB consumption, or examine the experiential dynamics of successful cessation. Further studies may also integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine how phenomenological meanings identified in this study can be operationalised into measurable behavioural constructs across larger populations. In particular, future research may investigate how embodied habit, emotional attachment, and identity-related consumption interact over time in different demographic groups and cultural settings, thereby extending the sweet consumption trap framework into broader consumer health contexts. Longitudinal designs may also help explain whether changes in life stage, health condition, or social environment alter the persistence of high-sugar beverage consumption.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

Future research is recommended to explore broader psychological, social, and environmental determinants that sustain long-term high-sugar beverage consumption, including peer influence, digital marketing exposure, lifestyle patterns, and socioeconomic factors across different age groups and cultural contexts. In addition, future studies may apply longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to better understand behavioral change processes and evaluate the effectiveness of public health interventions, policy regulations, and educational campaigns aimed at reducing excessive sugar intake and promoting healthier beverage choices in diverse populations.

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