Superpowers in a Can

A Visual Journey Through Energy Drink Posts on Social Media

David Monk

Master of Philosophy (Marketing)
School of Marketing
Curtin University
Perth
2019
Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

(Include where applicable)

Human Ethics (For projects involving human participants/tissue, etc) The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number # RDS - 32 - 16

Signature: .............................................................

Date: 28/2/19

..................................................
Abstract

In the modern world we all live in a visual culture, which is fuelled in part by visual social media on such platforms as Instagram and Pinterest. Energy drink brands have realised this, and are targeting young adults aged 18-30, with attractive visual storylines posted on social media. This study is all about unearthing the brand meaning behind these visual stories.

A visual nethnography is used in this study, which is broken down into three parts. (i) A series of walk through interviews were conducted with a group of young adults, where they pointed out to the researcher the images on Instagram and Pinterest, which they find most engaging and give the reasons why they find them engaging. (ii) These images where then collated and reconstructed using the VINE (Visual Interpretive Narrative Exercise) stories technique to unearth the concrete themes behind the visuals. (iii) The same set of collated images were then run through the 5A’s analysis of Aura, Arcadia, Allegory, Antimony and Archetype to unearth the more abstract themes and give an enriched brand meaning.

Eight participants aged 18-30 took part in the research, with a result of 138 individual images gathered from three leading energy drink brands in the Australian market: Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy. The concrete and abstract themes unearthed portrayed a visually appealing world to this age cohort, filled with familiar characters and stories that they recognise.

The implications for this research may show that the energy drink brands on social media are pushing messages of performance enhancement, risk taking and health promoting behaviours. From which there needs to be stricter control of the advertising messages produced by the energy drink brands.
Acknowledgements

As my own MPhil journey is drawing to a close, I would like to take the time to thank some people who have supported me over the past four years.

First of all I would like to thank my research supervisors Dr Robyn Ouschan and Dr Julie Napoli, for their tireless work and guidance in helping me reach this level. Your methodical approach, tough love and empathetic dedication to my supervision has inspired me to go on to the next exciting chapter of my life.

Third of all I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, George and Dianne Monk for instilling the value of further education into me and putting up with me through the highs and lows of the MPhil process.
# Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... I  
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... III  
Contents ....................................................................................................................... IV  
List of Figures .............................................................................................................. IX  
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... XIII

## Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................. 1  
1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
1.2 History of Energy Drinks ..................................................................................... 2  
1.3 The Controversy of Energy Drinks ....................................................................... 3  
1.3.1 Harmful Ingredients ....................................................................................... 4  
1.3.2 Energy Drinks Marketed as a Healthy Product ............................................... 5  
1.3.3 Energy Drinks Marketed as Performance Enhancers ...................................... 6  
1.3.4 Energy Drinks Encouraging Risk-taking Behaviour ....................................... 6  
1.4 Regulating Energy Drink Marketing ..................................................................... 7  
1.4.1 Industry Self-regulation .................................................................................. 7  
1.4.2 Advertising Standards .................................................................................... 8  
1.5 Lessons Learned from the Marketing of Other Harmful Products ..................... 9  
1.5.1 Comparison to Tobacco Studies ...................................................................... 9  
1.5.2 Comparison to Energy-dense, Nutrient-poor (Junk) Food Studies ................. 10  
1.5.3 Comparison to Alcohol Studies ..................................................................... 10  
1.6 The Power of Social Media Marketing ................................................................. 11  
1.7 Research Questions and Objectives ...................................................................... 13  
1.8 Approach to Study ............................................................................................... 14  
1.9 Significance of the Study ..................................................................................... 15  
1.10 Scope of the Study .............................................................................................. 16  
1.11 Conclusion and Thesis Structure ......................................................................... 17  

## Chapter 2: Literature Review .................................................................................... 18  
2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 18  
2.2 Defining Brand Meaning ....................................................................................... 18  
2.3 Overview of a Framework for Understanding Brand Meaning .......................... 20  
2.3.1 Aura: The Brand’s Essence ............................................................................. 22  
2.3.2 Arcadia: The Brand’s Community ................................................................. 23  
2.3.2.1 Brand Meaning is a Shared Experience .................................................. 23  
2.3.2.2 Brand Morphing ....................................................................................... 26  
2.3.3 Allegory: The Brand Story .............................................................................. 28  
2.3.3.1 Let the Pictures Tell the Story .............................................................. 28  
2.3.3.2 Framing Theory ...................................................................................... 30  
2.3.3.3 Visual Storytelling and Interpreting Visuals: What is Known From Other Social Sciences? .......................................................... 31  
2.3.4 Antinomy: The Brand Paradox ....................................................................... 32  
2.3.4.1 There Are Two Sides to the Same Story ................................................. 33  
2.3.4.2 Is There a Darker Side to Brand Meaning Associated With the Marketing of Harmful Products? ........................................ 34  

IV
Chapter 5: Five ‘A’ Findings

5.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 114
5.2 Aura: The Brand’s Essence ......................................................................................... 114
  5.2.1 Red Bull .................................................................................................................. 114
  5.2.2 Monster Energy ...................................................................................................... 116
  5.2.3 V Energy .................................................................................................................. 118
5.3 Arcadia: The Ideal Community .................................................................................... 120
  5.3.1 Red Bull .................................................................................................................. 120
  5.3.2 Monster Energy ...................................................................................................... 122
  5.3.3 V Energy .................................................................................................................. 124
5.4 Allegory ......................................................................................................................... 124
  5.4.1 Red Bull .................................................................................................................. 124
    5.4.1.1 Red Bull Allegory 1: A Hero’s Journey .............................................................. 125
    5.4.1.2 Red Bull Allegory 2: The Fountain of Youth .................................................... 129
  5.4.2 Monster Energy ...................................................................................................... 131
    5.4.2.1 Monster Energy Allegory 1: Come Into My Lair ............................................. 131
    5.4.2.2 Monster Energy Allegory 2: Welcome to the Resistance .................................. 131
  5.4.3 V Energy .................................................................................................................. 134
    5.4.3.1 V Energy Allegory: Not Being the Tall Poppy .................................................. 134
5.5 Antimony ....................................................................................................................... 135
  5.5.1 Red Bull Paradoxes ............................................................................................... 135
    5.5.1.1 Red Bull Antimony 1: Healthy, Unhealthy ......................................................... 136
    5.5.1.2 Red Bull Antimony 2: Mature and Immature .................................................... 136
    5.5.1.3 Red Bull Antimony 3: Pushing the Limits to Find Peace ................................. 137
    5.5.1.4 Red Bull Antimony 4: A Community of Individuals ....................................... 137
  5.5.2 Monster Energy Paradoxes ..................................................................................... 138
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.4 Implications Behind the Energy Drink Images

6.4.1 Risk-taking Behaviour .................................................. 179
6.4.2 Aggressive Behaviours .................................................. 179

5.5.2.1 Monster Energy Antimony 1: Monster Energy is the Light in a
Dark World ................................................................. 138
5.5.2.2 Monster Energy Antimony 2: Expressing Individualism in a
Collectivist Manner ......................................................... 138
5.5.2.3 Monster Energy Antimony 3: Bright Solo Images v. Stunt Images
in Darker Settings ............................................................ 139
5.5.2.4 Monster Energy Antimony 4: Limited Female Empowerment v.
Objectification ............................................................... 139
5.5.3 V Energy ........................................................................ 140
5.5.3.1 V Energy Paradox: Championing the Mundane .................. 140
5.6 Archetype ....................................................................... 140
5.6.1 Red Bull ....................................................................... 140
5.6.1.1 Dominant Archetype: Hero ........................................... 140
5.6.1.2 Red Bull Shadow Effect 1: Becoming an Arrogant Playboy .. 142
5.6.1.3 Red Bull Shadow Effect 2: Becoming a Fallen Hero ............ 143
5.6.1.4 Red Bull Sub-archetype 1: Explorer ............................... 145
5.6.1.5 Case for the Explorer Archetype .................................... 146
5.6.1.6 Red Bull Sub-archetype 2: Magician ............................. 147
5.6.1.7 Case for the Magician Archetype ................................... 148
5.6.2 Monster Energy ............................................................. 149
5.6.2.1 Dominant Archetype: Outlaw ....................................... 149
5.6.2.2 Case for the Outlaw Archetype ...................................... 150
5.6.2.3 Monster Energy Shadow Effect: Borderline Criminal Behaviour .. 152
5.6.2.4 Monster Energy Sub-archetype: Creator ....................... 153
5.6.2.5 Case for the Creator Archetype .................................... 154
5.6.3 V Energy ....................................................................... 156
5.6.3.1 Dominant Archetype: Jester ........................................... 156
5.6.3.2 Case for the Jester Archetype ....................................... 158
5.6.3.3 Shadow Effect: Jokes That Go Too Far .......................... 160
5.6.3.4 V Energy Sub-archetype: The Guy/Girl Next Door ........... 160
5.6.3.5 Case for Guy/Girl Next Door Sub-archetype ................. 161
5.7 Conclusion ...................................................................... 162

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion ............................................ 163
6.1 Introduction ...................................................................... 163
6.2 VINE Stories Summary .................................................... 163
6.2.1 Cool v. Uncool .............................................................. 164
6.2.2 Light v. Dark ................................................................. 165
6.2.3 Individualism v. Collectivism ......................................... 165
6.2.4 Class Depictions ............................................................ 166
6.2.5 Gender Roles ................................................................. 167
6.2.6 To Defy or Conquer the Natural Environment .................. 168
6.3 Five A Analysis Summary .................................................. 168
6.3.1 Aura ........................................................................... 169
6.3.2 Arcadia ......................................................................... 170
6.3.3 Allegory ......................................................................... 172
6.3.4 Antimony ...................................................................... 175
6.3.5 Archetype ...................................................................... 177
6.4 Implications Behind the Energy Drink Images ....................... 179
6.4.1 Risk-taking Behaviour .................................................. 179
6.4.2 Aggressive Behaviours .................................................. 179
List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Queensland Police Facebook Page........Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 2.2. Absolut Fashion Advert ................................................................. 26
Figure 2.3. Absolut Choice Advert ................................................................. 26
Figure 2.4. Red Bull Pinterest Screen Shot .......................................................... 27
Figure 2.5. The ‘heroes’ journey’ cycle ....................................................................... 28
Figure 3.1. Man in Hammock ........................................................................... 53
Figure 3.2. Racing Driver Doreen Wicke .............................................................. 53
Figure 3.3. Red Bull Hangar 7 and Red Bull Flying Steps ......................................... 55
Figure 3.4. Ford Mustang in Monster Livery .......................................................... 56
Figure 3.5. Hot Rod in Monster Livery .................................................................... 56
Figure 3.6. Conor McGregor in UFC Fight .......................................................... 57
Figure 3.7. MotoGP Racer .................................................................................. 57
Figure 3.8. UFC Fighter ...................................................................................... 57
Figure 3.9. Monster Energy Grid Girls ................................................................. 57
Figure 3.10. Summary of the data analysis procedure ............................................ 65
Figure 4.1. Adventure imagery collated from Red Bull ........................................... 68
Figure 4.2. Snowboarding down an avalanche........Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 4.3. Surfer with head above water .............................................................. 69
Figure 4.4. Skydiving images ............................................................................. 70
Figure 4.5. Red Bull Air Race ............................................................................. 70
Figure 4.6. Red Bull Cliff Diving ......................................................................... 71
Figure 4.7. Jump over canyon on BMX bike ......................................................... 71
Figure 4.8. Red Bull Spiderman reference .............................................................. 72
Figure 4.9. David Coulthard Formula 1 burnout video ............................................ 73
Figure 4.10. Red Bull in solitary pursuits ............................................................... 74
Figure 4.11. Art as an expression of true self .......................................................... 75
Figure 4.12. Red Bull with elitist pursuits ............................................................. 76
Figure 4.13. Swinging off an hot air balloon .......................................................... 77
Figure 4.14. Felix Baumgartner’s Space Jump ....................................................... 78
Figure 4.15. Flying over desert .......................................................................... 78
Figure 4.16. Red Bull Air Race ............................................................................ 78
Figure 4.17. Tightrope over rock ......................................................................... 79
Figure 4.18. Playboys at leisure ......................................................................... 80
Figure 4.19. Aston Martin racing car .................................................................... 80
Figure 4.20. DC Comics’ Wonder Woman. ................................................................. 81
Figure 4.21. Girl jumping over hurdle. ....................................................................... 81
Figure 4.22. Woman Surfer ....................................................................................... 82
Figure 4.23. Working out in a gym ........................................................................... 83
Figure 4.24. Muesli bars ........................................................................................... 83
Figure 4.25. Daniel Ricciardo trying Sumo Wrestling ................................................. 84
Figure 4.26. Gritty urban landscapes from Monster Energy ..................................... 86
Figure 4.27. UFC fighter Conor McGregor endorsing Monster Energy .................... 87
Figure 4.28. Monster Energy fan art .......................................................................... 87
Figure 4.29. Monster Energy can size ......................................................................... 88
Figure 4.30. Three 250 mL cans of different energy drink brands ............................. 89
Figure 4.31. Lewis Hamilton ...................................................................................... 89
Figure 4.32. Ford Mustang drifting ........................................................................... 89
Figure 4.33. Marlon Brando in ‘The Wild One’ .......................................................... 91
Figure 4.34. Various Monster Energy apparel ......................................................... 92
Figure 4.35. Fan-made Monster Energy gumball machine. ... Error! Bookmark not defined.
Figure 4.36. Fan-made Monster Energy claw wall ornament .................................... 93
Figure 4.37. Monster-inspired birthday cake ............................................................. 93
Figure 4.38. Monster Energy wrist band .................................................................. 94
Figure 4.39. Monster Energy video firing a gun ....................................................... 95
Figure 4.40. UFC fight ............................................................................................. 95
Figure 4.41. UFC fighter Conor McGregor embodies male aggression ...................... 96
Figure 4.42. Cat with evil eye represented by Monster Energy branding ............... 97
Figure 4.43. Keep Calm and Drink Monster .............................................................. 97
Figure 4.44. Trucks with Monster Energy livery jumping ....................................... 98
Figure 4.45. UFC fighter. ......................................................................................... 100
Figure 4.46. Brand ambassador and rally driver Ken Block ..................................... 101
Figure 4.47. Monster Energy’s stereotypical depiction of women ............................ 101
Figure 4.48. Positive female role models ................................................................. 102
Figure 4.49. Monster Energy conquering natural environment ............................. 103
Figure 4.50. A selection of images posted on V Energy Australia’s Instagram page .................................................................................. 106
Figure 4.51. V Energy images depicting nerd subculture ........................................ 107
Figure 4.52. V Energy Marvel Superhero films cross promotion .......................... 107
Figure 4.53. V Energy Marvel Avengers cross promotion ..................................... 107
Figure 4.54. V Energy humour appeal examples ................................................. 108
Figure 4.55. Cluttered desk ................................................................................... 109
Figure 4.56. V Energy golf advert and V Energy office worker depiction. .......... 110
Figure 4.57. Try Plan V advert ........................................................................ 110
Figure 4.58. V Energy dog image................................................................... 111
Figure 5.1. Red Bull seizing the day ................................................................. 115
Figure 5.2. An aurora borealis ........................................................................ 116
Figure 5.3. An freestyle skier ......................................................................... 116
Figure 5.4. Monster Energy’s tagline, ‘unleash the beast’. ............................ 117
Figure 5.5. An alluring can of Monster Energy ................................................ 117
Figure 5.6. V Energy all night study crammer .................................................. 118
Figure 5.7. V Energy “Brady Bunch” parody advert ....................................... 119
Figure 5.8. Plane and car racing on beach ....................................................... 121
Figure 5.9. Travis Pastrana riding down a roller coaster ............................... 121
Figure 5.10. Monster Girls in concert .............................................................. 122
Figure 5.11. Motocross rider jumping .............................................................. 123
Figure 5.12. Office worker at desk ................................................................. 124
Figure 5.13. Red Bull’s famous tagline ......................................................... 125
Figure 5.14. The ‘protagonist’ awaits her journey ......................................... 126
Figure 5.15. A monastery in Armenia .............................................................. 126
Figure 5.16. Tandem skydive ....................................................................... 127
Figure 5.17. Craggy mountain ..................................................................... 127
Figure 5.18. Spelunking into a lit up cave ...................................................... 128
Figure 5.19. Red Bull can with magical properties ........................................ 128
Figure 5.20. Street Art taken in Athens, Greece .............................................. 129
Figure 5.21. High dive ................................................................................. 130
Figure 5.22. Red Bull at a party ..................................................................... 130
Figure 5.23. The Monster Army .................................................................... 132
Figure 5.24. Paige Vanzant training for her next bout .................................. 132
Figure 5.25. Two UFC opponents stare each other down ............................ 133
Figure 5.26. Apple’s famous 1984 commercial ............................................. 133
Figure 5.27. G’day America, V Energy advert ............................................... 134
Figure 5.28. Sports champions and Red Bull spokespeople Lindsey Vonn and Mick Fanning. ................................................................. 136
Figure 5.29. Relaxing off a cliff face .............................................................. 137
Figure 5.30. Red Bull Esports, Red Bull Formula One Racing Team Logo, Red Bull FC player ................................................................. 137
Figure 5.31. Tracks left behind on a sand dune .............................................. 138
Figure 5.32. Driving around an aeroplane and entertaining the crowd with motocross jump ................................................................. 138
Figure 5.33. Female UFC Fighter ................................................................. 139
Figure 5.34. The ‘hero’ archetype ................................................................ 141
Figure 5.35. Surfing a tube. ...................................................................... 142
Figure 5.36. Car with Red Bull livery drifting ............................................ 143
Figure 5.37. The fallen hero archetype, as told through Red Bull ............. 144
Figure 5.38. We find your lack of energy disturbing ..................................... 144
Figure 5.39. The ‘explorer’ archetype ........................................................ 145
Figure 5.40. Hiking up a mountain .............................................................. 146
Figure 5.41. Red Bull Pinterest page screenshot ........................................ 147
Figure 5.42. The ‘magician’ archetype ........................................................ 148
Figure 5.43. Josey Wales encapsulates the ‘outlaw’ archetype ................... 149
Figure 5.44. James Dean’s rebel persona captures the ‘outlaw’ archetype .... 150
Figure 5.45. UFC fight .............................................................................. 151
Figure 5.46. Motorbike imagery ................................................................. 152
Figure 5.47. Car drifting up a mountain ...................................................... 153
Figure 5.48. Street artist at work .............................................................. 153
Figure 5.49. Xbox in Monster Energy colours ............................................ 154
Figure 5.50. Parallel between heavy metal imagery with Monster Energy imagery. ................................................................. 155
Figure 5.51. Parallel between hip hop subculture and Monster’s urban ethos 156
Figure 5.52. The jester archetype .............................................................. 157
Figure 5.53. V Energy packaging in jester archetype colours ...................... 158
Figure 5.54. Head suspended in space ...................................................... 158
Figure 5.55. Use of humour relative to thirst in V, Irn-Bru and Fanta ads ...... 159
Figure 5.56. Irn Bru ferret advert ............................................................... 160
Figure 5.57. The “guy next door” archetype .............................................. 161
Figure 5.58. V Energy acting as the guy/girl next door archetype .............. 162
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Sample Population........................................................................................................... 49
Table 3.2: Total Number of Images Chosen by the Participants by Brand ............... 51
Table 3.3: Total Number of Chosen Red Bull Images by Category...................... 52
Table 3.4: Red Bull Additional Images ......................................................................................... 54
Table 3.5: Total Number of Chosen Monster Energy Images by Category ............ 55
Table 3.6: Monster Energy Additional Images................................................................. 58
Table 3.7: Total Number of Chosen Images for V Energy by Category ................. 59
Table 3.8: V Energy Additional Images ................................................................. 59
Table 3.9: 12 Common Brand Archetypes ............................................................. 62

Table 5.1: 141
Table 5.2: 145
Table 5.3: 148
Table 5.4: 150
Table 5.5: 154
Table 5.6: 157
Table 5.7: 161
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The modern world is firmly grounded in a visual culture fuelled in part by the increasing use of image-based social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest. In the mid- to late 2010s, marketers have realised the potential of social media for the application of creating quality marketing content for a brand’s message to rise above the ‘noise’ of traditional advertising (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden 2011; Hellberg 2015). By doing so marketers can establish the online credibility of their brand and implant their brand meaning into the minds of consumers (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Tsimonis and Dimitriadi 2014).

Energy drink brands are no exception, in that their target audience is typically young adults aged between 18 and 30 years old—the same population that are also early adopters of Instagram and Pinterest (Hellberg 2015). These brands have taken their marketing mechanisms online and adapted them to tell their own visual stories (Benmiloud 2016; Rambe and Jafeta 2017). By doing so, these brands generate content for young consumers that can offer an attractive lifestyle depicting a visual world full of over-the-top stunts, exotic locations and beautiful people (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013; Miller 2008).

Nevertheless, these online visual stories on social media are not well documented, particularly in relation to the energy drink brand market (Rambe and Jafeta 2017). As most literature on social media is focused on the more narrative-based platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Hellberg 2015), very little is known about how such brands operate on Instagram and Pinterest. Therefore, this thesis addresses this gap in the knowledge on social media marketing by studying the visuals produced by energy drink brands; it then examines how brand meaning is subsequently interpreted in the minds of their target audience—that is, young adults aged between 18 and 30 years old.

Accordingly, the history of energy drinks will be discussed in Section 1.1, which outlines the product’s development and the marketing mechanisms that typically
accompanied its advertising. Section 1.2 explores the controversy surrounding energy drinks and offers the opposing perspectives of both the medical community and the beverage industry. These two perspectives present a dichotomy outlining the harmful ingredients found within energy drinks and how they are positioned in the marketplace to possess some health benefits. (i.e., enhance performance but also encourage risk-taking behaviours). Section 1.3 next looks at the regulations that go into energy drink marketing, including industry self-regulation and the relevant advertising codes in the Australian market. This section will include comparisons to overseas industries and their regulations of the product. Section 1.4 then compares the marketing of energy drinks with the marketing of other harmful products such as tobacco, junk food and alcohol; this includes any lessons learned from the literature on each product. Finally, Section 1.5 examines the power of social media as a marketing tool and explains why social media is critical in understanding the media habits of young adults. Chapter 1 will conclude with the research questions and objectives, the approach to study, its significance and scope, and the thesis structure moving forward.

1.2 History of Energy Drinks

Energy drinks are non-alcoholic beverages deliberately designed to contain high amounts of caffeine. They have been in the Australian soft drink market since the late 1990s when Red Bull was launched, and today they are part of an industry that is worth US$37 billion worldwide (Euromonitor 2016). The product category has grown exponentially in the past decade, with major brands including Red Bull, V Energy and Monster Energy being sold in Australia (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013; Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014).

Red Bull was the first brand to launch the product category in Europe in 1987 (Euromonitor 2016). Realising that it had developed a unique product, the company decided not to compete directly with established soft drink brands such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi (Reissig et al. 2009). Instead, Red Bull deployed a blue ocean strategy, which was designed to create a whole new product category within the soft drink market for itself (Kim and Marbourgne 2014). Without the appropriate budget to match firmly established brands, Red Bull and other energy drinks companies instead relied upon building up their brands through non-traditional mediums such as word of mouth.
The tactics they deployed involved selling a high-risk lifestyle that appeared attractive to young males in particular (Miller 2008). First, the company handed out free samples at events at which young adults were likely to attend, such as extreme sports events and music festivals (Pomeranz, Munsell and Harris 2013). Next, they sponsored people to perform publicity stunts at these events to sell the idea that anything is possible after consumption (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014). This also promoted the idea that performance enhancement through caffeine has its benefits (Miller 2008), in that an energy boost is what young people need to get through their busy lifestyles (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013).

By the mid-2000s social media was quickly adopted to engage young adults more effectively. This medium became important for telling a brand’s common story and presenting cool, rebellious and independent imagery—a desire many young people possess to feel ‘cool’ and accepted by their peers—to sell energy drinks (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014). Such brands began behaving like a peer to young consumers online. Coupled with thrilling displays of stunts and extreme sports, the popularity of energy drinks went beyond just liking the product (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013), but became an ethos by which to live.

Evidently, more complex and subconscious factors drive energy drink advertising (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013). Hence, the fact that young consumers are increasingly deriving their social media engagement with such brands means this form of marketing may be harmful and, thus, warrants further research.

1.3 The Controversy of Energy Drinks

The controversy behind energy drinks lies in a public debate between the medical community and the beverage industry. The health sector agrees that energy drinks are harmful and the aggressive marketing strategies used therein are responsible for increasing consumption levels among young consumers (Wiggers, Asbridge, Baskerville, Reid and Hammond 2019). The beverage industry denies this and defends energy drinks as merely a product, stating that they are safe and are not targeted at young people, according to industry guidelines (Parker 2014). This section will look at the controversy in more detail by listing the harmful ingredients in energy drinks,
followed by a discussion on how such brands are not only marketed to contain health benefits), but also encourage performance enhancements and risk-taking behaviour.

1.3.1 Harmful Ingredients

There is a lack of public awareness about the dangers of energy drinks. They are still sold with the promise of offering health benefits such as vitamins and other natural ingredients valuable to good health. However, inside the can energy drinks generally contain three harmful ingredients: caffeine, sugar and taurine. These have each been shown to be addictive and cause dependency, caffeine toxicity and in some cases sudden death from cardiac arrhythmia (Pollard, McStay and Meng 2015; Seifert et al. 2011).

Energy drinks are also sold with ‘exotic’ ingredients such as acai, guarana, yerba mate, ginkgo biloba, ginseng and green tea extract (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014; Reissig et al. 2009). Most of these plants native to South America or Asia have high amounts of naturally occurring caffeine, but guarana (in particular) contains the highest known amount of any plant species (Caffeine Advisor 2019). Under Standard 2.6.4 of the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ 2018), the maximum amount of allowable caffeine is 80 mg for a 250 mL can of drink; this is equivalent to one cup of coffee or two cups of tea. However, adding plants such as guarana in addition to the artificial caffeine added during manufacturing only increases the caffeine level from the amount printed on the can (Higgins, Tuttle and Higgins 2010).

Most energy drinks also contain high volumes of sugar (Pollard, McStay and Meng 2015). According to the consumer affairs program ‘The Checkout’, energy drinks can contain anywhere up to five or six teaspoons of sugar a serving (Greenhalgh et al. 2013). Though larger brands such as Red Bull and Rockstar state that they use sucrose, which is apparently safer and naturally sourced, it is still not the most beneficial form of glucose available (Melanson et al 2008). Some lesser known brands on the market such as Duff Energy Drink contain high fructose corn syrup, which is cheap to produce and found to be both dangerous and highly addictive (Melanson et al. 2008).

Taurine mixed with caffeine in such products can cause blood to become sticky, thus, increasing the risk of developing blood clots, which can lead to cardiac arrest and even stroke (Higgins, Tuttle and Higgins 2010; Taylor 2013). Energy drink brands,
particularly Red Bull, have downplayed the claims against taurine, stating it ‘is an amino acid, naturally occurring in the human body and present in the daily diet’, which already produces and performs a ‘wide range of biological processes’ (Red Bull 2019c). Some energy drink companies also claim that taurine is added as a stimulant. The compound’s health benefits have since been disproven in a clinical trial, but it was noted that when ingested in small doses it could be beneficial for neurological health (Red Bull 2019c). Interestingly, the subjects of a study conducted by Whirley and Einat (2008) experienced a decrease in activity. Instead, taurine was understood to function more as a depressant. At best, this may mean it is an unnecessary placebo with no real purpose.

Increased consumption can also have both short- and long-term effects on individuals (Pollard, McStay and Meng 2015). Since energy drinks have been on the shelves, calls to emergency services for caffeine toxicity have increased, with nearly half coming from adolescents under the age of 18 (ABC Science 2011). Caffeine toxicity has similar symptoms to an amphetamine overdose, including throbbing headaches, heart arrhythmia, dizziness and fainting, and in more severe cases death. Thus, energy drinks are not safe for anyone with a pre-existing heart condition, as they can cause sudden cardiac arrest, and predispose insomnia and hypertension in the long term (McGillivray 2010).

1.3.2 Energy Drinks Marketed as a Healthy Product

Some energy drink brands position their product as having health benefits. For example, Red Bull (2019c) claims on its website that the drink ‘vitalizes body and mind’. Often, energy drinks are also sold with the promise of containing beneficial compounds such as B group vitamins, which are clearly marked on the front label of any given can (Pearson 2017); they are also frequently distributed in places such as gyms, where they position themselves as part of a supposed healthy lifestyle (Clark and Landolt 2017). Indeed, some previous studies do support these claims to an extent (Pearson 2017). However, the only evidence-based benefit of their consumption is that energy drinks may improve an adult’s cognitive abilities for a short period of time (Alford, Cox and Wescott 2001; Pearson 2017).
1.3.3 Energy Drinks Marketed as Performance Enhancers

Another concern with energy drinks relates to their supposed performance-enhancing qualities. Most energy drinks are marketed as a product that can boost concentration and performance, but these claims have since been proven false (Arria and O’Brien 2011; SBS World News 2014). In fact, in 2014 a lawsuit in the United States (US) (Careathers v Red Bull North America) saw Red Bull taken to court over false advertising claims. The charge, like with most energy drinks, was that the product was deceptively sold to boost concentration and performance, but its qualities have been proven otherwise (Arria and O’Brien 2011). Consumers are instead more likely to experience a ‘crash and burn’ effect, in that they might feel good for a short while before losing both energy and concentration, until anxiety prompts them to drink more (Peacock, Droste and Bruno 2016). For this very reason, the US Navy has a policy to ground any pilot from an operational flight for 24 hours if traces of energy drinks are found in their system (Sather et al. 2016).

Marketing of the stimulant effects of energy drinks also risks normalising extreme behaviour (Reissig et al. 2009). There appears an emerging societal pressure for people to perform at their peak at all times, and energy drinks are part of this enabling when marketing into this insecurity (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014; Miller 2008). For example, six players from the National Rugby League team the New Zealand Warriors were recently caught doping by mixing prescription drugs with energy drinks—and this is certainly not an isolated incident in professional sports (Rattue 2016).

1.3.4 Energy Drinks Encouraging Risk-taking Behaviour

Another concern relates to the way in which energy drinks promote risk-taking behaviour through their association with extreme sports (Azagba, Langille and Asbridge 2014). People under the age of 25 have not yet fully developed their medial prefrontal cortex, which is the cerebral region that is responsible for detecting risk and danger (Buckley, Chapman and Sheehan 2012). It is unsurprising, then, that Miller (2008) found an offline link in US college students who consume energy drinks and partake in risky behaviours, such as not wearing a seatbelt and engaging in recreational narcotic use.
1.4 Regulating Energy Drink Marketing

Currently, in Australia energy drinks are freely available with no restrictions in place over who can purchase them in public places (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014). They are also subject to industry self-regulation, which has proven in the case of other harmful products to be largely ineffective (Pollay 1994). As with most incidences of industry self-regulation, warning labels often appear in fine print, and the message is often lost to the branding on the package (Hoflander 2011). In this section, comparisons between industry self-regulation of the labelling of energy drinks in Australia and the rest of the world are made, followed by a discussion on the relevant advertising standards that apply to energy drinks sold nationally.

1.4.1 Industry Self-regulation

As mentioned in Section 1.3.1, energy drinks sold in Australia are required to follow the standard caffeine guidelines set by FSANZ of 80 mg per 250 mL. However, independent trials have found that energy drinks contain more than the legal limit.

The harmful effects of energy drinks, especially on young people, have prompted the call for legislation to introduce nationwide age restrictions for individuals under the age of 18. Currently, only a few countries in the world have age limitations in place relative to energy drink consumption, including Lithuania and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Masudi 2014; RT News 2014). In November 2018, a bill was presented to the British Parliament proposing to ban energy drinks to people under the age of 18 (Commons Select Committee 2018). This came as a result of a campaign run by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver who alerted the British public to the dangers of increased energy drink consumption (Dixon 2018).

In Australia, the president of the Australian Medical Association Dr Steve Hambleton in 2013 wanted to see similar legislation enacted after expressing concerns over the safety of these products (Taylor 2013). The Country Women’s Association of New South Wales concurred, circulating a petition that received over 13,000 signatures, which cited energy drinks as unsafe for young adults (The Land 2014). To date, there has not been a bill passed in Australian Parliament to outlaw energy drinks for people under the age of 16.
The Australian Beverages Council in defence of energy drinks has refuted these health risk claims on several occasions, claiming that there is no sound evidence that the labelling regulations are not the toughest in the world and that the industry only markets energy drinks to adults, as they are not safe for children (Parker 2014). However, Parker’s (2014) claims do derive from a scripted press release inevitably designed to spread doubt among the public.

Owens et al. (2014) noted that the beverage industry in the US also denies marketing energy drinks directly to youths. Yet, Red Bull’s online marketing routinely includes displays that act out an ‘adolescent boy’s dream’ (Adams 2015)—hence, supporting independent research that shows energy drink brands directly target their marketing efforts towards younger cohorts (Pomeranz, Munsell and Harris 2013). This may suggest that the 18 to 30 sector is more likely to be exposed to energy drink marketing from a very young age, which may extend towards developing a favourable view of these products well into adulthood.

1.4.2 Advertising Standards

Depending on the product classification of each energy drink there are different advertising standards in place. If classified as a soft drink, according to the Australian Beverages Council industry self-regulation stipulates that warning labels have to be printed on the can and the products must not be marketed to juveniles (Parker 2014). Under the Responsible Children’s Marketing Initiative, in which Coca-Cola and Cadbury Schweppes (both of whom distribute their own brand of energy drink) are signatories, juveniles cannot be directly marketed to unless the product promotes a healthy lifestyle (Australian Food and Grocery Council 2014).

Similar research into alcoholic beverages has shown that while self-regulation may be right in principle, it does not fully prevent minors from being exposed to such advertising, especially online (Winpenny et al. 2011). Further, if said drinks are classified as a health supplement, they automatically come under the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code 2007, which clearly states that no product under this category can be sold with claims of miraculous properties. For example, in 2012 Swisse Vitamins got into legal trouble over this very matter with their range of wellness products that claimed to cure fatigue (Medew and Wells 2012). As such, these codes
apply to advertising both on traditional media (e.g., television) and non-traditional media (e.g., social media).

Given that the industry is self-regulated, it is important to acknowledge how young consumers engage with energy drink brands in a social media context, and what messages they can take away from this exposure. This understanding may then guide industry regulation and encourage meaningful public debate.

1.5 Lessons Learned from the Marketing of Other Harmful Products

From a health promotion perspective, marketing is the main culprit for the increased consumption of energy drinks (Babu, Church and Lewander 2008). However, there is no real clear answer from a social marketing point of view as to why this is the case. As established, young adults primarily engage with the world through a visual culture that plays itself out on social media (Murray 2015). As more energy drink brands have clued onto this trend and identified them as a target audience, it is warranted to study this digital medium of choice.

In turn, this research will attempt to address this gap by examining, in particular, the online images portrayed on Instagram and Pinterest. Section 1.5.1 begins with a review of social marketing studies that have demonstrated the effect of marketing and social media on the consumption of other harmful products such as tobacco, junk food and alcohol.

1.5.1 Comparison to Tobacco Studies

Hoflander (2011) demonstrated that energy drink corporations behave in a similar manner to how the tobacco industry acted in the past, using strategies from the same playbook. There are many similarities between how energy drinks were marketed in the early twenty-first century and how cigarettes were sold in the late twentieth century (Hoflander 2011). Both products were positioned as fashionable items for their period, offering attractive lifestyles to young people built around their respective brands (Hoflander 2011). However, both were also deliberately formulated using a cocktail of chemicals that in independent trials have been found to be addictive (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014; Hoflander 2011). There is also evidence that suggests energy drinks have sponsored favourable academic research into their products, notably that of
Alford, Cox and Wescott (2001). The tobacco industry infamously used similar tactics to counteract cancer links made in 1954 (Brownell and Warner 2009).

1.5.2 Comparison to Energy-dense, Nutrient-poor (Junk) Food Studies

Studies conducted on energy-dense, nutrient-poor (junk) food can be compared to that of energy drink research today, in that both have reached out to the younger generation on multiple channels and increasingly online (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014; Montgomery and Chester 2009). Junk foods and energy drinks also deploy similar tactics to distract consumers away from the warning labels imposed on them: junk foods use inconsistent weights and serving sizes, while energy drinks use elaborate branding (Hebden et al. 2010; Hoflander 2011).

While junk food advertisers have bigger advertising budgets that can outspend any health promotion campaign, there is still a concerted effort in Australia from both state and federal governments warning people against their consumption (Bestman et al. 2015). By comparison, there is still a lack of public awareness alerting the dangers of energy drinks (Babu, Church and Lewander 2008; Taylor 2013).

1.5.3 Comparison to Alcohol Studies

Alcoholic beverages also share a lot in common with energy drinks, as they are often portrayed with jovial and often extroverted messages online (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013; Hoffman et al. 2014). For example, past studies such as Niland et al. (2014) have looked at the effects of alcohol brands posting on social media, but to date the literature around how energy drink brands similarly behave on social media has been lacking.

These jovial and extroverted messages are often shared by consumers within the alcohol brand's social media ecosystem, with their peers as a form of validation (Jernigan and Rushman 2014). Sharing of these extroverted messages from alcohol brands is a cause for concern because, within the context of social media, the peer group acts as influencers over the individual (Moreno, D'Angelo and Whitehill 2016). If the peer group thinks it is okay for intoxicated behaviour to be displayed, then it runs the risk of normalising such behaviour, because the individual would see it as means of fitting in with the group.
Further, as the case with energy drinks, alcoholic beverages also like to display content depicting risk-taking behaviour (Moreno, D'Angelo and Whitehill 2016). Often content containing risk-taking behaviour, which is generated by alcohol brands are found within social settings that young adults are likely to patronise, for example, nightclubs or music festivals (Carah 2017). The reasoning behind is for the alcohol brand to act less like a traditional brand and appear more relatable and authentic in the minds of young consumers, even if it means placing themselves in harm's way (Carah 2017).

However, through alcohol brands depicting risk-taking behaviours runs the risk of young people imitating them in the offline world (Moreno D'Angelo and Whitehill 2014). As there very little intervention from other influencers to prevent risk-taking behaviours from happening. What needs to be understood further if energy drinks also depict risk-taking behaviours online does it lead to imitation in the offline world?

There are other comparisons between energy drinks and alcohol. Notably, Red Bull, which is distributed in nightclubs, features on its Instagram party scene imagery, which wholly promotes the dangerous mixing of its product with alcohol. Hence, this creates a phenomenon of alert drunkenness, which by default promotes risk-taking behaviour (Miller 2008).

That said, there are distinct similarities in the marketing of energy drinks compared to other harmful products. However, as a relatively newer product there is still a lot to learn, especially in terms of gauging the perspective of such brands’ target social media audience: young adults. As such, this study intends to fill this gap by asking typical social media users about particular energy drink brands, including their perceptions and feelings towards the content generated by these companies.

1.6 The Power of Social Media Marketing

Mangold and Faulds (2009) were among the first to identify social media as a new element in the marketing mix that combines elements of traditional (e.g., advertising)
and non-traditional (e.g., word of mouth) means. In the early stages, concerns were raised, in that the adoption of social media as a new medium was rushed by marketers who did not understand its full potential but used it as a means of free advertising (Fournier and Avery 2011). In particular, brand managers payed little regard to what online followers wanted to see or would like to share with their peers (Fournier and Avery 2011).

Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden (2011) suggest that social media exists as more of a marketing ecosystem built upon community engagement with interconnected actors sharing and generating meaning around a brand. A brand manager’s role in this context has become that of a decentralised actor rather than the controller of brand meaning (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden 2011). In this sense, brand managers feed information into the ecosystem, with the intention for followers to ‘like’ and share posts to co-create brand meaning (Laroche, Habibi and Richard 2013). This makes the process of generating meaning a lot more democratic and transparent, as those who have contributed to running said ecosystem derive their own meaning from a brand.

As brand managers are no longer the sole trustee in this regard, the meaning process is shared with members of the public who follow a brand online (Laroche, Habibi and Richard 2013). By doing so, this process can lead to the creation of brand stories in a bottom-up fashion due to sustained levels of public collaboration (Singh and Sonnenburg 2012).

This level of cooperation means that social media has become a powerful tool for marketers to co-create and perpetuate brand meaning among consumers (Brodie et al. 2013). Hence, gauging how brand meaning is actually created through visual posts on social media is warranted for study. Most social media research has tended to explore narratives rather than visuals. Further too this aspect needs to be addressed, as in the past five years the 18 to 30 age group has fallen out of favour with Facebook and other discourse-based platforms, which up to now has dominated the literature on social media (Stoycheff et al. 2017). Instead, this population increasingly prefers to use image-based platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest.

There is also a need to be a break away from limiting studies that focus on singular brands using singular platforms (Rains and Brunner 2015). The shortcoming of this
way of thinking is that it is not congruent with modern social media users, whose online presence extends across at least two to three different platforms (Primack et al 2017). Further, no branded social media presence exists within a vacuum, meaning there are multiple platforms that form part of a wider digital strategy (Rains and Brunner 2015). Instead, to better understand the wider social media ecosystem one must examine multi-level, multi-platform digital approaches.

Generally, social media is used to reach out to different reference groups on different platforms. It can provide a deeper understanding of a brand’s overall digital strategy, as each platform typically requires a different method of communication in terms of content (Rains and Brunner 2015). For example, Instagram requires visual matter (e.g., a photograph) before it can appear online, unlike other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which do not require images before posting (Hellberg 2015).

In terms of energy drinks, research into their marketing online has reached a vital stage. Throughout the last decade marketing scholars have identified social media as the medium of choice for most energy drink brands targeting the young adult market (Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014; Rambe and Jafete 2017). Given that this age cohort, through such phenomena as ‘selfie culture’, frequently communicates with their peers on primarily visual bases, it is becoming increasingly necessary to investigate such marketing practices on these same terms (Murray 2015). As mentioned, despite the greater part of the Western world living within a hyper-visual culture, prior studies have looked exclusively at Facebook and other narrative-based platforms (Hellberg 2015). Hence, academia has ignored and under investigated the emerging dominance of Instagram and Pinterest. To address the ascendency of visual social media, the following research questions and objectives are proposed

1.7 Research Questions and Objectives

This research aimed to address two key questions:

1. What do visual images associated with energy drink brands reveal about the brand and its meaning interpretation to young consumers?
2. What messages (both direct and indirect) do these visuals impart to young consumers?
In answering these questions, this study aimed to address the following objectives:

1. Identify the brand meaning associated with the imagery found on different energy drink brands’ social media platforms, and isolate the similarities and differences between each approach.
2. Reveal the archetypes associated with the imagery found on different energy drink brands’ social media platforms, and identify the similarities and differences between each approach.
3. Unearth risky and/or unhealthy messages and behaviours implied through the imagery found on different energy drink brands’ social media platforms, and identify the similarities and differences between each approach.

1.8 Approach to Study

This study used visual netnographic methods as the overarching research methodology to examine energy drink advertising on social media. According to Kozinets (1998, 2002), a netnography should be designed to collect data as naturally and unobtrusively as possible. Netnographic analysis should also follow a step-by-step approach to explain internet-based cultures (Kozinets 2002), as this offers flexibility for researchers to adapt according to the characteristics of online culture. It also allows other analyses and techniques to be incorporated, in turn. Indeed, visual netnography follows the same step-by-step approach; however, it is adapted to reflect the visual culture of modern internet use on social media.

As with previous qualitative social marketing studies that looked into alcoholic beverages, the ideal sample size for a study such as this required between six and 10 participants, which should be sufficient to reach saturation (Nicholls 2012; Niland et al. 2014). As with the case of alcohol, energy drinks primarily target students and younger age groups. Hence, a sample of eight young adults aged between 18 and 30 years, and who are regular energy drink consumers, was recruited through a convenience sample. Each participant was interviewed while the researcher reviewed the Instagram and Pinterest accounts of different energy drink brands.

Once recruited the participants took part in a walk-through interview in which they discussed with the researcher the images they found most appealing online, providing
reasons for their opinions throughout the session. This was conducted on verified Instagram and Pinterest accounts for brands including Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy. The images selected were then saved for further analysis.

Once collated, the images were subjected to a two-stage visual analysis. In the first stage a visual interpretation narrative exercise (VINE) was used to formulate the concrete themes for each brand. Here, the images were sorted by individual brand and then separated into categories based on the subject matter of each visual. The categories were broken down and reconstructed back into concrete theme clusters, which were based on how the researcher and an expert panel (comprised of two marketing academics) had interpreted them.

Once the concrete theme clusters were established, they were further built into more abstract themes. For this stage, the four actions framework was adapted from a previous netnographic study conducted by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003); this was chosen because it illustrates the complexity of brand meaning and its conceptualisation through four different dimensions. The first is ‘aura’ (brand essence), which relates to the meaning behind a brand’s message, what it stands for, whom the energy drink brand represents and how an energy drink brand wants its consumers to be perceived. Next is ‘arcadia’ (brand community), which relates to the visual representation of a brand’s ideal community on social media. ‘Allegory’ (brand story) refers to the mythology behind a brand and how it plays out in visual stories on social media, and ‘antimony’ (brand paradox) refers to the two contradictory truths that emerge when a brand tells its story (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

A fifth ‘A’ was added—‘archetype’—to explore the unconscious drivers at work when young adults interpret these visuals on social media. This helped to further reveal a brand’s character and to highlight the given energy drink’s personality, as if they were a character from a book or a film.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study represents a move away from narrative-based social media towards more visual-based platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest. Essentially, these platforms allow users to share image-based content such as memes, GIFs and short video
formats. Sharing these visuals now forms an integral part of modern internet usage and, therefore, should be viewed as the focal point for any modern netnography.

By deconstructing visuals from brand-generated content, this study shows how brand meaning is a complex construct containing multiple layers. It is particularly useful for marketers, as this necessitates a better understanding of different visuals and archetypes in digital advertising. This knowledge may help brand managers create more engaging content by demonstrating how images can be built on common narratives found in popular culture.

For social marketers, understanding different brand archetypes can present an alternative angle to the complex relationship between harmful products and their consumers. This knowledge can be used to create more efficient communications strategies to counter toxic trends and to bring about more positive behavioural changes within the public sphere.

1.10 Scope of the Study

This study was qualitative in nature and limited to eight participants in an Australian context. All participants were of Anglo-Celtic origin and spoke English as their first language.

The study was limited to two visual-based social media platforms (Instagram and Pinterest), of which the accounts of three leading energy drink brands in the Australian market (Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy) were examined. The participants were sought to provide their perspectives on brand-generated content featured on each social media page. The data did not focus on user-generated content posted on these social media platforms.

The visual data collected from Instagram came in three different formats: still imagery, GIFs and short videos. The visual data collected from Pinterest regarded still imagery only. For the purpose of data storage, all images collected were taken as screenshots and converted into JPEG format using Adobe Fireworks software.
1.11 Conclusion and Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 has established the research problem in the marketing of energy drinks, including how such brands routinely target young adults. Further, it looked at previous studies on social media and identified that young adults, who constitute the general target audience of energy drink brands, generally prefer to use visual-based social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest—thus, prompting the focus of this study. Chapter 1 also laid down the research questions and objectives, the study approach, its significance and the scope of research.

Chapter 2 is a literature review that looks at the concept of brand meaning, how it can be conceptualised and its complexity, especially within the context of visual-based social media. The literature for each of the five ‘As’ (aura, arcadia, allegory, antimony and archetype) will be individually introduced in detail. Chapter 3 then presents the research methodology for the netnographic study and unpacks the VINE analysis stories to establish concrete themes. Meanwhile, the five ‘As’ help gauge the more abstract themes in the study.

Chapters 4 and 5 are the discussion chapters. The former presents each of the VINE stories for the three brands chosen for analysis, while the latter employs the five A framework to discuss each in greater detail. This concludes into Section 5.6 (‘Archetype’), which is further broken into sub-archetypes (minor characters) and shadow archetypes (the ‘dark side’ of these characters). By doing so, this better conceptualises how Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy are each perceived by their social media followers.

Finally, Chapter 6 discusses and summarises the conclusions garnered from the study. The theoretical, methodological and managerial implications are also presented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Organisations invest many resources in social media to build strong brands. In this regard, prior studies have examined the importance of creating a unified brand identity and communicating this to a target audience, with the general view being that consumers will perceive in equal manner and derive the same meaning from the provided visual cues (Schroeder 2006). It is with this imagery, together with written stimuli, that people make sense of the world. These communication cues are better known as brand meaning (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

This literature review sees brand meaning as a complex construct. Section 2.2 defines the term and traces its origins from conceptualisation in the mid-twentieth century to the present. This section illustrates the changing dynamics from a marketer-led, top-down concept to a bottom-up approach, due in part to the presence and incorporation of social media followers. Section 2.3 then offers a framework adapted from a previous netnography study conducted by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) to depict the complexities of brand meaning. This framework was chosen because it can build on brand meaning in layers, as based on four dimensions: aura (brand essence), arcadia (brand community), allegory (brand story) and antimony (brand paradox). Adding to this is a fifth layer known as ‘archetype’ (brand character). The literature attributed to each individual layer is next looked at in greater detail, for Section 2.4 to conclude the review and recap the research gaps identified in this study.

2.2 Defining Brand Meaning

Brand meaning as a concept can be traced back to the 1950s during which Levy (1959) argued that goods have transferrable symbolic meanings. This meant that consumers are willing to look beyond the utilitarian aspects of a product and purchase a good or service that more closely aligned to their own personal beliefs (Levy 1959). An example of this from the context of Levy’s time (1950s America) concerns automobile brands within General Motors. People starting off in the workforce probably gravitated towards a Chevrolet because it represented high quality and value for money, whereas
those with more financial freedom gravitated towards a Cadillac, as this car conveyed to the world a sense of success (Mark and Pearson 2001).

Levy (1959) may have been among the first to suggest that people have psychological attachments to branded symbols and products. Decades later Sirgy (1982) defined the concept of the real versus the ideal self, and suggested that branded products are an extension of the latter. People desire to consume certain products, as they function to mirror aspects of one’s life, and that brand meaning is transferred back to them. The extended self is the central construct of all theory surrounding brand meaning, and from an anthropological perspective possessions form a large part of one’s personality (i.e., you are what you own) (Belk 1988). It is this bond that makes brand meaning culturally relevant for the time and age; as tastes change over time so does the meaning of a brand (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Rilley 1998). Brand meaning is further shaped by the relationship between the user and the product, suggesting that these attachments are formed by ritualistic behaviours, such as sharing gifts (McCracken 1986). This explains why some brands are only available in the lead-up to certain holidays and events (e.g., a Cadbury Crème Egg is associated with and available at Easter). By sharing different goods at different times of the year, different memories and feelings for consumers are triggered (McCracken 1986), making brand meaning cyclic in nature, as it changes in accordance with consumer behaviour (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Rilley 1998). In recent years social media managers have carried on the concept behind gift giving by creating content that, too, reflects different holidays throughout the year (Loewen 2018). This content, in turn, can be shared among one’s followers.

Of course, brand meaning is not just about seasonality. The same connotations can explain why retro brands are popular (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). As with ritualistic behaviour, brand meaning can latch onto certain periods in time, which can trigger positive emotions such as reflecting upon one’s childhood (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Psychologically, people are partial to think of their early, formative years as one of innocence, whereby marketers behind retro brands can then swoop in to sell them this long-lost fantasy (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). This again demonstrates how brand meaning is pertinent to the person–object dynamic. Marketers remain tantamount to managing meaning while consumers function as their partners.
in inadvertent co-creation (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003) amid their pursuit to gain material pleasure.

Much of the aforementioned literature was created in the twentieth century when brand meaning was produced from individual perspectives. For the most part, brand meaning was dictated by marketers, with consumers expected to interpret meaning in a similar manner and apply it to their own persona. This is what is commonly known as a top-down approach to meaning creation. In the twenty-first century, social media and the web 2.0 saw brand meaning blossom and follow a bottom-up approach, with marketers no longer solely responsible for driving brand engagement, but rather delegating it as a decentralised actor (Brodie et al. 2011). Section 2.3 will illustrate the multiple dimensions by which brand meaning can be constructed using the four A framework set out by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003).

2.3 Overview of a Framework for Understanding Brand Meaning

Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) developed their brand meaning framework by exploring the retro branding surrounding brand communities. In this particular work, the authors looked at the Volkswagen Beetle and the original Star Wars trilogy, and how those particular brands shaped and reshaped the lives of brand fans within their respective communities.

Brown, Kozinets and Sherry’s (2003) framework was inspired by the work of Marxist literature critic Walter Benjamin’s (1999) Arcades Project. Essentially, he conceptualised brand meaning through four ‘As’: aura (the brand’s essence), arcadia (the brand community), allegory (the brand’s story) and antimony (the brand’s paradox).

Aura refers to a brand’s essence, which is the meaning behind its message, what it stands for, whom the brand represents and how the creators want consumers to perceive their brand (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). One key question this raises regards who has ownership over a message. Does the consumer have some autonomy over a brand or is the message led by marketers (Benjamin 1927, cited in Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003) Section 2.3.1 presents a more detailed description of brand aura.
Arcadia refers to an idealised place and the consumer community (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In the context of this study, it is how energy drink brands visually project their sense of ideal community on social media and who is involved therein. The concept of arcadia is important to understand because in popular culture and classical literature there is always an intrinsic need to seek paradise—a fantasy that is better than reality—as a form of escapism (Benjamin 1927, cited in Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In Benjamin’s (1999) unfinished work, the ‘Arcade Project’ described a sense of utopia garnered from visiting Parisian shopping arcades (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) brand meaning is embedded in the concept of retro marketing, which is intertwined with a sense of garnering an ideal past and a utopian communal appeal.

Allegory refers to the mythology behind a brand (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). From a branding perspective, it encapsulates a brand’s story, how it is co-created within communities and how it is played out in both discourse and through various visual mediums. Section 2.3.3 explores previous literature on narrative discourse to discuss and demonstrate how an audience can become emotionally involved with a brand. However, discourse can only go so far in understanding brand meaning, while visuals may demonstrate another feature of a brand story beyond that of a narrative, as reflected in the age old adage, ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ (Pink 2007).

Finally, antimony is a brand’s paradox and represents contradictory truths (brand meanings) that have emerged over time (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). There are often two sides to every story; however, most of the literature is eschewed towards the positive rather than the negative. Section 2.3.4 will address the dark side of brand meaning and how branded messages can have negative consequences, particularly when it comes to the marketing of harmful products.

This literature review incorporates a fifth ‘A’ (archetype) suggested by Mark and Pearson (2001), which helps to explain the process by which brand meaning is generated—especially through visual aids. Archetype frames the online personality of a particular brand through interpretations of one’s visual employments, further defined as universal root characters that live in our collective unconscious (Mark and Pearson 2001). Section 2.3.5 looks at the use of brand archetypes in marketing, before exploring the concepts of sub-archetypes and shadow archetypes.
Together, these five ‘A’ concepts demonstrate that brand meaning has depth and is multi-dimensional in nature through its use of imagery within online contexts. However, consumers do not interpret brand meaning through these cues in a unidimensional way. Rather, such analyses are multilayered and complex. People are merely drawn in through these cues, with which they then connect and engage so that it becomes part of modern life and reality (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Thus, from a brand meaning perspective, it is not simply ‘what we see is what we get’ (Schroeder 2006); rather, verbal and visual cues are interpreted by and connect with consumers at a much deeper level. In this sense, this study examines how consumers interpret visual cues within the context of energy drink images posted on visual-based social media platforms, and how this subsequently shapes brand meaning.

2.3.1 Aura: The Brand’s Essence

What does brand signify? The concept of aura can be traced back to German philosopher Walter Benjamin, and is well understood and utilised within the art and visual communications disciplines (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Within this context, ‘aura’ is defined as the truth and beauty behind artwork and the ‘vibe’ it exudes (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Thus, it represents the immediate feeling viewers get when looking at an original piece of artwork (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003), and whether they can feel the presence of the subject matter in that representation. For example, in Benjamin’s (1999) work any parishioner who enters a church or cathedral feels the aura (presence) of the angels and saints painted onto the walls inside (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Nonetheless, the concept of aura invites the risk of losing an original, intended message created within a work becoming lost to replication. Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) suggest Benjamin (1999) would argue that postcards, for example, which reproduce the artwork found in churches, make an original image lose its aura due to it having been adapted for commercial purposes. Benjamin (1999) would also argue that aura and modern society are not compatible because consumer culture means creating the need to replicate artworks for the purpose of mass redistribution.

From a branding perspective, aura refers to the brand’s essence, which is the meaning behind its message, what it stands for, whom the brand represents, how the brand wants
to be perceived by its consumers and the general vibe that a brand exudes (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). For example, with the Star Wars franchise, the brand’s aura is sacred among fans, who often refer to themselves as ‘Jedi Knights’ (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). The brand fills a void by offering fans some meaning and direction in their lives, much like organised religion would once have done (and perhaps continue to do). This is one way to view the concept of aura through a marketing lens. It is not necessarily the aesthetic that goes into making the brand image. Rather, ‘aura’ refers to how a brand’s images are interpreted and whether the messages behind these images are authentic to the viewer.

Nevertheless, little is known about how aura applies to social media imagery on Instagram and Pinterest. Marketers and social media managers create content for these platforms that is visually relevant to their followers, and not necessarily there to make a sale (Benmiloud 2016). For example, a fashion blogger would use Instagram to photograph themselves wearing the latest fashion trends, not to promote a sale from a particular boutique (Payne 2015). If a brand is being sincere in their visual communication and produces content their audience cares about, then there is a chance that aura is retained because the visual message is intended for that particular audience. Instead, one must understand how a brand can maintain their aura online through visual content on social media.

2.3.2 Arcadia: The Brand’s Community

2.3.2.1 Brand Meaning is a Shared Experience

Arcadia is defined as the idealised place and consumer community of like-minded brand fans (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In Brown, Kozinets and Sherry’s (2003) work on retro marketing arcadia represents a bygone era when people inside these communities had positive memories of a particular brand, and how it reflected a part of their lives. For example, Star Wars fans are often attached to the brand, as it takes them back to their childhood when they first watched the films. In the context of this study, arcadia concerns the ideal brand communities that are built on social media by energy drink brands, and how they are seen through the eyes of followers.

To better understand how communities contribute to brand meaning, one must first recognise what a community is and why they should be investigated. Communities are
in a broad sense a collective of people with their own set of norms (Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann 2005). The study of brand communities in the marketing literature borrows heavily from anthropology and sociology, and shows that invisible consumption from communities of fans can be created around a brand (Boorstin 1974). While the concept of aura relates to how brand meaning is created, ‘arcadia’ shows how it is galvanised, as like-minded individuals connect and congregate, and have a sense of ownership in contributing back to the branded message. From this perspective, communities are a form of arcadia.

A primal, underlying urge integral to humanity is to connect with compatible individuals and form tribes (Cova Kozinets and Shankar 2007). In modernity these tribes do not necessarily mean being confined to a geographical location. Rather, the internet and other forms of mass media has made it possible for a widespread group of people to connect and form their own groups (Maffesoli 1996). As with the notion of aura, there is something very intrinsic about this behaviour. In Benjamin’s (1999) work, people are drawn to Parisian arcades much the same way as the Ancient Greeks were drawn to arcadia, which represents an ideal community where everyone is treated equally (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Early literature on brand community can be traced back to Schouten and McAleander’s (1995) seminal work on the Harley-Davidson owner’s club. They identified the structures and rituals that occurred behind the scenes of this particular brand subculture, and if a new member wants to join the rites of passage they had to undergo to be accepted. Within these brand communities are influencers, reference groups and spokespeople who assist in the brand meaning being transferred. Escalas and Bettman (2005) built on Sirgy’s (1982) work and showed that brand meaning is not only part of the extended self but also part of their independent and dependent self. People often rely on the information and approval of their peers to evaluate their purchases (Escalas and Bettman 2005), but it is usually up to one’s peer group to dictates what brands are acceptable for membership, and if someone wants to join it is a matter of choice whether they want to ‘fit in’. Within the context of Schouten and McAleander’s (1995) example of biker subculture, this notion of desire sees individuals display a sense of rebellion and danger, wear leather on the weekend and,
ultimately, join a motorcycle club and purchase a Harley-Davidson. Over time, this behaviour has become embedded in the meaning of the brand and the lifestyle.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) suggest that it is not only brand worship that is an important piece of community life, it is the fact that everyone involved has an obligation to fulfil a particular role. They identified the most important part of branded community life is camaraderie, in that every member is sympathetic to each other and there is a sense of purpose to join in (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). This explains how collective behaviour works within a brand community.

Studies for online brand communities commonly use netnography as a methodology. Netnography is a portmanteau of the internet and ethnography, and as its name suggests it is applied to the understanding of individuals’ behaviour in online communities. First introduced by Kozinets (1998, 2002), the advantage of netnography is that it observes participants in an unobtrusive setting. Unlike brand communities and fan fests in the offline world (which are brand dominated and, therefore, marketer led), online communities are more democratic in structure and dominated by the sharing of both brand-generated and user-generated content (Brodie et al. 2011). The brand community users dominate and shape brand meaning into something that is relevant to them, while marketers play a decentralised role in this process (Cova and Pace 2006). In a way, online communities better fit into the definition of ‘arcadia’, as within this virtual ‘ideal’ world all participants are considered equal (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Unlike face-to-face brand communities, which operate by sending messages from the top down (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), online or virtual communities form and circulate messages from the bottom up (Cova and Pace 2006). Brand meaning itself is put in the hands of consumers, which can lead towards greater self-empowerment (Cova and Pace 2006). In this context, users take control of the variables set by the marketers and shape brand meaning however they wish (Cova and Pace 2006). This is important to discern, especially when observing online communities on social media because consumer empowerment entails a two-way conversation (Islam and Rahman 2016). This sense of altruism or goodwill builds a strong sense of community, as users feel like they are giving back to a beloved brand, and the more they contribute the more people are likely to follow (Lee Kim and Kim 2011).
The majority of the social media literature views discourse as key to maintaining strong community engagement with consumer–followers. This means moderating the comments section closely. According to Kates and Goh (2003), another aspect of moderation relative to creating brand-generated content through visual aid recognises that the message and, therefore, the meaning can be flexible. This means it can change to suit the audience—a process otherwise known as ‘brand morphing’.

2.3.2.2 Brand Morphing

Brand morphing was first conceptualised by Kates and Goh (2003) to describe how a story behind a brand can shift and change to fit a target audience or particular community. The adverts in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 demonstrate this concept.

Figure 2.2. Absolut Fashion Advert

Source: Brown (2011)

Figure 2.3. Absolut Choice Advert

Source: Media Design School (2009)

In these examples Absolut recognises that both the fashion industry and the LGBTIQ+ community are important target audiences for its product. Here, brand morphing is integral to the wider understanding of branded communities, who become diverse and
defragmented. They are both targeted by Absolut, but through related yet different needs in terms of brand message. Importantly, the Absolut brand itself is still recognisable across both images, evident by the distinct shape of the bottle.

On social media this same notion is demonstrated by energy drinks brands Red Bull and Monster, whose distinct Instagram and Pinterest pages represent different subcultures, from Formula 1 fans to gamers. Both have individual needs, yet the brand message remains the same. For example, Figure 2.4 presents a screenshot of Red Bull’s Pinterest page. It depicts a diverse range of activities and interests to suit different tastes, from motorsports to art.

![Figure 2.4. Red Bull Pinterest Screen Shot](source: Red Bull (2019b))

Although research on brand morphing remains scant, the two examples in Absolut and Red Bull show that brand morphing often employs visual aids to better engage with different groups in society. It is also important to note that as online brand communities transcend the Anglosphere (i.e., the English-speaking world) into other language groups, discourse can become lost in translation, whereas visuals can (more or less) retain meaning, regardless of cross-cultural context (Basil 2011). Hence, what is needed is a better understanding of how brands can visually project their sense of ‘arcadia’ on social media to retain brand meaning across these language and cultural barriers. Indeed, a picture can tell 1,000 words, and these words for a community can tell a story or convey an allegory (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).
2.3.3 Allegory: The Brand Story

2.3.3.1 Let the Pictures Tell the Story

In all communities and societies allegory or storytelling plays an important role in passing meaning from one person to another (Hirschman 2000). Storytelling is a part of human nature and as such is how people are trained to make sense of the world, teaching right from wrong, and good from evil (Hirschman 2000). Storytelling research is emerging in marketing, and as more psychological theory is applied it is recognised that people think more narratively than argumentatively or paradigmatically (Weick 1995, quoted in Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008).

It is also well established that stories follow a certain pattern, which gets retold and re-enacted continually (Moscardo 2017). According to Joseph Campbell (2003), a good narrative involves more than just a beginning, middle and end. Most stories that have been told from antiquity until modern times follow a 12-step cycle, which traces the journey of a hero or protagonist (see Figure 2.5; Hirschman 2000; TED-Ed 2012).

Figure 2.5. The ‘heroes’ journey’ cycle.
Figure 2.5 demonstrates the common pattern that is found in the synopsis of fictional works such as novels, television programs and films. The cycle follows the transformation of an ordinary character at the start of a story and his or her journey of becoming a hero (TED-Ed 2012). The pattern involves the protagonist finding a call to adventure, seeking assistance from someone wise, journeying into an unknown world facing fears, defeating those fears and transforming into a better person by the story’s end, before returning to their ordinary life a stronger individual (TED-Ed 2012).

This pattern, known as the monomyth, is found in narratives from all cultures (Campbell 2003). The monomyth has symbolic value as a means for humans to make sense of things when facing adversity, and to advance themselves, in turn (TED-Ed 2012). For example, ‘crisis’ is facing up to one’s greatest fears in life; once that has happened, only then can we learn from the experience (TED-Ed 2012).

Another framework that explains the effect of storytelling is Ronald Tobias’s (2011) 20 Master Plots. As is the case with Joseph Campbell’s work, the 20 Master Plots reveal an almost universal pattern that is found within all stories in popular culture (Kent 2015). However, unlike Campbell, Tobias’s master plots do not focus on the entire synopsis of a story. Instead, they examine narrative by scene or chapter. These can be further broken down into five categories: quest, adventure, rivalry, underdog and wretched excess (Kent 2015).

Storytelling is primarily transmitted through three different forms: written, verbal and visual. Written and verbal forms of storytelling rely upon language, which can change over time or require translation and may result in the original meaning being lost (Woodside 2010). Conversely, visuals are more universally understood and can be interpreted with deeper meaning (Woodside 2010). In fact, up to 83% of our learning comes from the interpretation of images rather than discourse (Gutierrez 2014).

From a marketing perspective, storytelling plays an important role in reinforcing the collective memory and subconscious of a branded community (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). As social creatures, individuals like to imitate their peers through the consumption of brands and in the process may share their personal experiences with
others (Pentland 2015). The sharing of narratives among consumers involves, if not triggers, deeper emotional connections and subconscious relationships with a brand to be forged (McKee 2003). It is from within the collective subconscious of a brand community that the mythology of a brand subsequently resonates (Belk and Costa 1998). This is precisely why more successful brands have their own allegory; that is, Harley-Davidson does not just sell motorcycles but an ideal image for a ‘43 year old Manager to dress up on the weekend and scare the life out of a country town’ (Papadatos 2006).

Given that marketing forms an integral part of the visual culture that surrounds consumers (Schroeder 2006), visual storytelling is equally important because it offers individuals an interpretive meaning behind a brand and gives them something tangible with which to relate (Woodside and Megehee 2009). Consumers also derive brand meaning from imagery, which forms an important part of contemporary popular culture (Holt 2003). Further, people tend to think more in terms of narrative thinking rather than analytically, so it becomes necessary to understand the story behind a picture and not solely what the symbols represent (Woodside and Megehee 2009). Therefore, visuals constitute an essential part of one’s nurture training (Drew Duncan and Sawyer 2010). Visual data, such as photography and videography, can then provide a source of rich information, as everyday consumption patterns can be readily captured (Belk and Kozinets 2005), and clues that might be hard to find from within written or verbal communication can be located (Rohani, Aung and Rohani 2014; Schroeder 2006).

2.3.3.2 Framing Theory

Critical to all visual storytelling in mass communication is understanding framing theory, which reflects the way in which a narrative is presented within an image (Chong and Druckman 2007). Simply put framing theory reflects how an image captures a moment in time and the way in which it represents the story behind a specific instance (Goffman 1974). The theory can be traced back as early as the 1950s wherein Bateson (1955) explained how framing visual communication derives its meaning from context. Decades later, Goffman (1974), in his work on social movements, showed that framing visuals from traditional mass media is a top-down exercise dominated by the political elites. Modern thinking in framing theory had
shown it to be a collective exercise with multiple actors. Likewise, it could be useful in seeking to understand the attitudes and behaviours of actors within the time period a visual was taken (Chong and Druckman 2007; Vliegenthart 2012).

Framing theory has been applied in disciplines such as journalism, sociology and arts marketing. However, research is scant in relation to how framing theory might be used to understand brand-generated content (particularly on social media platforms such as Instagram) or how it applies to other areas including social marketing (Basil 2011; Petr et al. 2016). In terms of social media, researchers have primarily focused on analysing the narratives and text within the more established platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, leaving analyses of the visual components lacking (Brodie et al. 2013, Niland et al. 2014). Further, as younger social media users (i.e., 18 to 30 year olds) are increasingly turning to visual-based social media platforms, the need to understand how images are interpreted and understood is growing (Salomon 2013). As technologies such as smartphones become more readily available and the general population increases its visual literacy, now is a critical time to begin applying more enhanced forms of visual knowledge and analyses (Basil 2011).

2.3.3.3 Visual Storytelling and Interpreting Visuals: What is Known From Other Social Sciences?

What is known from the arts and social sciences is that visual data provide more enriched narratives compared to written and spoken data, as the former capture a moment in time and context (Hogan 2012). For example, visual data have been used extensively in sociology since Bateson and Mead (1940) conducted their fieldwork on the Balinese and their ceremonial use of water temples (Sullivan 1999). Through such methods as photo voice and drawing elicitation, the data collected are objective and when combined with qualitative interviews provide participants their side of a story (AlGhamdi et al. 2010). Often, these methods also reveal patterns and observations that may be overlooked in quantitative surveys (Hogan 2012).

Art scholars have also used visual interpretation to uncover meaning from image-based stories (Schroeder 2006), especially when critiquing artworks. This method is typically applied not just to observe what is in an image from a literal point of view, but also to
view it contextually by understanding what an artist or photographer is attempting to express, and how an image is intended to affect the audience (Hogan 2012).

Apart from work on body image and marketing of the arts, there is a need for visual interpretation to be applied to other areas of advertising (Basil 2011). Indeed, marketing is a key part of modern visual culture (Holt 2003). Hence, if the same amount of critique (in addition to applying framing theory) was invested into analysing branded content as an art scholar does in their particular field, then there is no reason why visual analysis cannot unearth enriched branded stories.

2.3.3.4 Visuals in Marketing as Part of Popular Culture

Brands should not mimic popular culture but rather be reflective of a certain period’s cultural knowledge (Holt 2003). This has been demonstrated in the marketing of late twentieth-century artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Not only did they both start their careers in advertising, but also through their work they demonstrated that interpreting branded visuals is akin to forming social realities and contemporary narratives for particular eras (Hewer, Brownlie and Kerrigan 2013).

As attitudes and norms change over time so too should a brand’s mythology (Holt 2003). In this sense, it along with visual storytelling are fluid exercises. This means how a brand might have told its story visually back in the 1980s might not be so relevant in the 2010s (Holt 2003). On social media, there is a two-way conversation between the brand and consumer (Merrilees 2016), and this differs from past advertising on traditional mediums such as television or radio. It was Andy Warhol’s coinage of the phrase ‘15 minutes of fame’ (Kerrigan et al. 2011) that helps to explain prevailing attitudes towards contemporary social media content, and in particular the emergence of ‘selfie’ culture online (Murray 2015). Enabling community members to not only to tell their own story but also contribute to a brand’s story makes for a two-way conversation, which enhances a brand’s meaning and its relevance to consumers (Brodie et al. 2011)

Meaning co-creation relies upon allegories being collectively told and retold by various stakeholders, and the subsequent way in which they project themselves within the community (Preece and Kerrigan 2015). Also critical is the need for some sort of gravitational pull or charismatic leadership from a brand to initially draw consumers’
attention (Hewer, Brownlie and Kerrigan 2013). In the case of social media, charismatic leadership is not just limited to a brand manager, due to the decentralised nature of how content is shared. Instead, leadership can also derive from influencers with large social media followings that carry a brand’s message to a mass audience. For example, Monster Energy teamed up with rally driver Ken Block to promote the brand in his online videos (Benmiloud 2016).

Finding plots and stories in visual content posted by energy drink brands online demonstrates a better understanding of their overall content strategy. In a recent industry article Jamal Benmiloud (2016), the former head of marketing for both Red Bull and Monster Energy, stated that visual storytelling constitutes a key component of how energy drink brands approach social media. This is achieved by staying true to a brand’s meaning and creating content that audiences care about. However, there is still a gap in the research in identifying these specific tropes and narratives used by energy drink brands on social media, and how they are subsequently interpreted by followers on Instagram and Pinterest.

2.3.4 Antinomy: The Brand Paradox

2.3.4.1 There Are Two Sides to the Same Story

Antinomy concerns a brand’s paradox, in that through meaning co-creation two contradictory truths can emerge (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). As brand meaning is open to interpretation, it is subjective by nature. Even with the best intentions, two different people can come to two different conclusions when receiving and interpreting a message (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). This suggests that brand meaning does not exist as a singularity, but there may be multiple sides to a story and its associated images (Berthon et al. 2009). Moreover, meaning is more complex, and quite often different interpretations lead to the emergence of vastly different truths.

This duality has arisen due to people’s varied interpretations of branded content, which can and often encourages either positive or negative views of a given brand. Like all paradoxes, two different realities emerge, with neither one being more correct or incorrect. This is important to understand especially in the marketing of harmful products such as energy drinks, as messages can have destructive consequences when misinterpreted. For example, a photo of a motor vehicle ‘drifting’ may appear cool to
its target audience and present a brand as ‘edgy’. However, this may also coax some individuals towards imitation, placing them and others in real danger. This also helps to explain why using a celebrity spokesperson with a controversial past may sometimes be good for generating publicity—that is, if it successfully draws people towards a brand (Saaksjarvi, Hellén and Balabanis 2016). Using a celebrity who is prone to ‘bad’ behaviour might be off-putting for some, but in certain contexts it could be an effective gambit for marketers, perhaps if the target audience proves willing to forgive that celebrity’s past misdeeds, or if a brand’s narrative requires a ‘cool’, anti-establishment edge (Burton, Farrelly and Quester 2001). An extreme example is the Australian internet betting agency Sportsbet, which used convicted drug cheat Ben Johnson as a spokesperson for a 2017 campaign promoting ‘performance enhancing wagering’ (Jones 2018).

The key point here is that it is reasonable to have flaws, as imperfection make a brand appear more human because it is within human nature to make mistakes (Burton, Farrelly and Quester 2001). Having flaws is also particularly relevant to contemporary popular culture, given the popularity of anti-heroes portrayed in modern media (; Meyer 2003). Notably, Burton, Farrelly and Quester (2001) initiated some groundwork on the anti-hero paradox with their paper on negative celebrity spokespeople. However, their work primarily focused on twentieth-century phenomena, so more research is required to understand antimony within the current media landscape, where information is shared and not wholly dictated by marketers.

2.3.4.2 Is There a Darker Side to Brand Meaning Associated With the Marketing of Harmful Products?

Researchers have alluded to the ‘dark side’ of marketing (Grayson and Ambler 1999), yet this is not to suggest that all marketing is evil; rather, certain interpretations sometimes forge inaccurate impressions (Stevens, Kearney and Maclaran 2013). For marketers dealing with co-creation on social media, not all two-way conversations and engagements between brands and consumers will be positive. While negativity might not necessarily entail co-destruction, it can help expose flaws with a brand (Echeverri and Skalen 2011); it can also highlight the societal effects and consequences of brand communications. This is particularly true for harmful products such as energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods, alcoholic beverages, tobacco or energy drinks. Often, harmful
products are depicted as bringing a sense of happiness or joy to one’s life, mostly within social settings (Montgomery and Chester 2009). However, such tactics also run the risk of normalising unhealthy or risky behaviour in society (Miller 2008), thus, for example, placing strain on global health care and preventable disease.

Past studies on harmful product advertising outline a clear link between marketing on social media and unhealthy or risky behaviour. Research conducted by Montgomery and Chester (2009) on junk foods found companies such as Coca-Cola and McDonald’s frequently initiate two-way conversations with teenage social media users into what is known as a ‘marketing ecosystem’. For alcoholic beverages, a study conducted by Hoffman et al. (2014) in the US found college students aged between 15 and 25 and who engaged with alcoholic beverage companies on social media considered binge drinking to be more acceptable and changed their attitude towards heavier consumption. Nicholls (2012) went on to explain why such brands use these strategies, stating that social media is still in its infancy and remains less regulated compared to more traditional mediums such as television or print.

Pollay’s (2002) study on tobacco brands in the US during the late twentieth century, and Siripai and Haywood (2017) in their study on alcoholic brands in the developing world, also demonstrated that meaning co-creation offers consumers a means of escape, primarily through building lifestyle brands with very little information about a product itself. Essentially, it comes down to the way a brand projects its persona online through loaded visual stimuli (Ballantine and Martin 2005).

Energy drinks operate in a similar manner and often promote certain lifestyles and communities centred on pushing boundaries, designating both brand and product to the background. Seldom do these companies publish content about the product itself (Bunting, Baggett and Grigor 2013). This is problematic, as there are negative consequences associated with consuming energy drinks. Notably, research has emerged that links their consumption with destructive behaviour offline. For example, Miller (2008) found a direct link in her study on US college students who consume energy drinks. Overall, they proved more likely to partake in risky behaviours such as driving without a seatbelt or mixing narcotics with alcohol. This only prompts the need for broader and deeper understandings to explain the link between energy drinks and irresponsible behaviour in younger generations.
Acknowledging this dark side, and recognising the evolutionary capacity of brand story and fluid engagement with brand communities, together demonstrate the multilayered and multidimensional nature of brand meaning (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). The challenge in using visual analysis is to unearth how the four A components (aura, arcadia, allegory and antimony) shape the underlying meanings behind a brand. Building upon Brown, Kozinets and Sherry’s (2003) work and borrowing from the psychology literature (Mitchell 2010), there is a need for a fifth ‘A’ (archetype) (Mark and Pearson 2001), which can demonstrate the shape of a brand through external personas and put a face to the faceless.

2.3.5 Archetype: The Brand Characters

2.3.5.1 Brand Meaning Has a Thousand Faces

A sound way of framing brand meaning and brand mythology through visual stimuli is by analysing archetypes (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010; Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008). Archetypes are based on the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s (2014) supposition that our subconscious is built upon having universal root characters. This theory was developed through Jung’s early writing on dream analysis and later verified through his anthropological fieldwork (Odajnyk 2013). Joseph Campbell (2003) through his theory of the monomyth later showed that archetypal behaviour is a universal communication cue that can transcend language and cultural barriers (Campbell and Moyers 1988; Mitchell 2010). As such, archetypes are organs of the psyche that make sense of interpreting visual data through consistent patterns that are inbuilt into all of us (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010).

Some consumer behaviour authors such as Belk and Costa (1998) accurately describe archetypal behaviour without actually mentioning in their writing about the use of fantasy and mythology in marketing. Perhaps the main literary contribution to this field regards Mark and Pearson’s (2001) *The Hero and the Outlaw*, which describes 12 basic archetypes that are used in marketing and effectively introduces the concept to the discipline (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010). Within clinical psychology, there are numerous scholars who also address archetypes (see Bradshaw and Storm 2013; Mitchell 2010; Naifeh and Smith 2003).
According to Caldwell, Henry and Alman (2010) most marketers who are trained to think in market segmentation terms tend to treat archetypes as generalisable outcomes, rendering them close to stereotypes (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010; Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008). This is a pitfall that should be avoided, as archetypes are more comparable to the consistent sum of a set of visual patterns, which constitute an anchor point. Even though the context changes around them, the essence of the character remains the same. For example, the hero archetype of North American folklore is a cowboy, while in the United Kingdom (UK) it is King Arthur’s court in Camelot (Mark and Pearson 2001). It is also important to note that the context surrounding a brand’s personality can change over time (Molnillio, Japutra, Nguyen and Chen 2017).

Both Martin and Woodside (2011) and Woodside and Meghee (2009) have shown that Jungian thought can also be applied to consumer-generated content such as travel blogs. However, these articles focus on narrative analysis, as they are based on blogs and not visual social media content such as images posted on Instagram and Pinterest. They also do not address shadow archetypes, which otherwise constitute a key part of Jung’s work on the concept.

2.3.5.2 Shadow Archetypes

With visual storytelling and archetypes, marketers need to address the shadow or ‘dark side’ of brand meaning (Hirschman 2000; Mark and Pearson 2001). The shadow is a key component of the archetype theory that Jung (2014) identified as the opposition to one’s persona (i.e., the non-ideal self, or the ‘face’ that the world does not want to see) (Berger 2014). In Joseph Campbell’s The Hero’s Journey the shadow is the trial and challenges an ordinary person must face to transform into a hero (Mark and Pearson 2001). The negative aspect to this concept is, thus, important to address for several reasons. When engaging in online communities, the sentiment may not always be positive for a brand; this constitutes a symptom of early co-destruction (Smith 2013). For example, rival fans may take some schadenfreude in other brands’ misery in times of crisis, as such communities tend to be tribal by nature (Hickman and Ward 2007; Maffesoli 1996). More importantly, outside of brand community literature, addressing the dark side of marketing is an effective way of observing how harmful products are marketed. Products that are sold with the promise of bringing consumers joy yet in
reality are detrimental to their wellbeing or have a negative influence on society underscore precisely where the true paradox lies (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Shadow archetypes and anti-heroes, in particular, are prevalent in today’s popular culture (Shafer and Raney. 2012). In fictional literature the audience becomes more captivated by characters drawn from what is known as the grey zone (e.g., observing a lighter side to a villain or having a hero with questionable morals) (Meyer 2003; Mitchell 2015). In marketing, many brands have committed major corporate sins in this sense (e.g., Volkswagen with their emissions cheating scandal or BP with their oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico), yet consumers are likely prepared to forgive such misdeeds (Fedorikhin, Park and Thomson 2008). From a psychological point of view these iniquities could be viewed as the work of the shadow archetype, particularly that of the multiple stakeholders who are instrumental in creating brand meaning (Caru and Cova 2003; Hart and Brady 2005). Indeed, such misgivings could simply be spawned from the intrinsically dark side of human nature that lives within most human beings. Acknowledging that brand meaning is an extension of oneself, it is, therefore, logical to presume that consumers wish to see brands as they do humans: with good and bad qualities (Hart and Brady 2005; Kerrigan et al. 2011). Yet, there remains very little in the extant marketing literature on brand shadow archetypes to draw definitive conclusions.

2.4 Conclusion

Chapter 2 described the multiple layers of brand meaning through the five ‘As’. Aura is the brand’s essence, and has less to do with the aesthetics afforded to produce imagery and more to do with the authenticity of a message. Followers on Instagram and Pinterest demand a genuine connection to a brand, and do not want to be subject to blatant advertising. The challenges brand managers to produce social media content that is faithful to brand meaning.

Arcadia refers to the ideal community of like-minded people who care about a brand. Relative to this study, this refers to how brands use social media to carry certain brand meanings within a community, and delegating brand managers away from enacting top-down methods of control. Rather, letting community members co-create brand meaning from the bottom up is encouraged. Up to now, most brand community
literature was built on the importance of discourse. What is needed now is an understanding of how brands can visually project their ideal communities on budding social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest.

Allegory refers to a brand’s story. In all communities and societies storytelling plays a key role in passing meaning from one person to another. Storytelling research is an emerging area of marketing literature, but a deeper understanding of how meaning is passed through the sharing of brand-generated content on social media is still desired. This can be developed by understanding the plots, tropes and narratives found within visual content, including how each can be interpreted as ‘good’ or ‘bad’—especially when it comes to visual stories produced by ‘harmful’ products such as energy drinks.

Antimony refers to a brand’s paradox, wherein two contradictory truths emerge through different interpretations of brand meaning. Acknowledging both it’s light’ and ‘dark’ aspects is to concede within a social media context that it is acceptable for a brand to have flaws. Indeed, not all meaning created online is positive, but this is not to say that negativity leads to co-destruction. Instead, criticism often makes brands appear more human. In this sense, there exists a gap in the literature on understanding how contradictory truths can emerge when analysing image-based social media content.

Archetype regards a brand’s character or persona as if it were a ‘real’ person. Archetype presents a universal character rather than a stereotype with which people resonate. This concept garners the overall meaning of a brand derived from the sum of its visual patterns and the other four brand meaning layers: aura, arcadia, allegory and antimony. The most intriguing piece missing from archetype studies in marketing concerns the shadow archetype. This concept is particularly relevant to the promotion of harmful products, as it helps to explain the dark side of marketing. Nonetheless, this notion is still not well understood. People may acknowledge that certain products are unhealthy or self-destructive, yet somehow still find something meaningful behind these brands.

As such, Chapter 3 presents the methodology for research. Importantly, it illustrates how the five ‘A’ concepts were integrated into the visual netnography analysis conducted for this study.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The overarching research methodology chosen for this study was a visual analysis, with in a context of a Netnography. Netnography is a portmanteau of the internet and ethnography, and was originally designed by Kozinets (1998). Essentially, it should be devised to collect data as naturally and unobtrusively as possible. As is the case with ethnography, netnography also involves a step-by-step process of observation to analysis (Kozinets 2002), and can be flexible. As such, no two studies are alike.

Netnographies evolve as internet usage changes over time (Bowler 2010). When Kozinets first developed the concept as a methodology, the focus in the late 1990s was primarily on discourse in online chat rooms (Langer and Beckman 2005). In this study the methodology included the analysis of visual elements to reflect modern internet usage on social media.

Studies conducted in the field of anthropology have utilised visual techniques and analyses in the past (Pink 2013). The literature on visual ethnographies dates as far back as the 1940s, with Bateson and Mead’s (1940) work on Balinese water temple culture constituting one of the earliest attempts at conducting a visual ethnographic study (Hogan 2012). As images are used foremost to capture a specific moment in time, their use may have inadvertently been overlooked from data analysis, which is typically gathered solely from written or verbal cues (Pink 2013). For this study, visual netnography was used to examine social media and to explore how brand meaning is derived from visual content posted on Instagram and Pinterest. Thus, this study broke away from traditional research efforts, which primarily entail discourse analysis, and instead chose to incorporate visual analysis techniques to reveal the messages behind such posts.

One key feature of netnography involves the initial observation of communal interactions online (Kozinets 2002). Observing visual data provides a rich information source for qualitative research, which can transfer meaning beyond language barriers and cultural contexts (Belk 2013). To date, the majority of netnographic analyses have relied upon discursive factors, not the visuals shared between online communities.
Further, in marketing (and more specifically social marketing) visuals have been traditionally underused sources of data (Basil 2011).

There is a basic structure that all netnographies need to follow, regardless of the techniques incorporated therein (Bowler 2010). This involves three steps: the entrée (Section 3.2), data collection (Section 3.3), and data analysis and interpretation (Section 3.4). This chapter is organised around these stages.

First, the ‘entrée’ identifies the primary research question and objectives, and sets the parameters for a particular online community in relation to a given study (Kozinets 2010). In Section 3.2, the primary research questions of this thesis are revisited, followed by an overview of the energy drink market in Australia. Next, the three energy drink brands under scrutiny are introduced, as well as the social media platforms surveyed, including justifications for their utilisation.

Next, data collection involved observing online communities through their means of communication, their interactions and the meanings that burgeoned in result (Bowler 2010). As such, Section 3.3 presents the ‘walk-through interview’ technique borrowed from sociology to extract the primary data from the sample participants. Essentially, this method emulates a netnographic study in consumer psychology conducted by Niland et al. (2014). However, unlike Niland et al. (2014), who analysed participants’ responses, this study emphasised their observations. This required a more comprehensive approach of not only observing what types of images the participants selected, but also recording how they described the images, and the meanings they gathered, in turn.

Data analysis and interpretation concerns the classification, coding and context of online communication (Bowler 2010). For data analysis, the images were first organised into thematic clusters using the VINE technique developed by Hinthorne (2012). This technique, borrowed from visual sociology, was used to draw out the concrete themes found within the visual dataset for each energy drink brand. For the abstract themes, the clusters were further incorporated into a framework developed by Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003), which entailed a netnography of retro branding. As first described in Section 1.8, the analytical framework was organised around four concepts: aura, arcadia, allegory and antimony. This particular study was chosen
because it provides a step-by-step approach from which to build a complex and multilayered understanding of brand meaning. Unlike this study, which focused on visuals, Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) primarily conducted a discourse analysis. Further, the analysis in this study incorporated a fifth A factor known as ‘archetype’. Essentially, this provided a sound way of framing the meanings behind the chosen visuals (Mark and Pearson 2001).

3.2 Entrée

This research aimed to address the following questions:

1. What do visual images associated with energy drink brands reveal about the brand and its meaning to young consumers?
2. What messages (both direct and indirect) do these visuals impart to young consumers?

In answering these questions, this study also aimed to address the following objectives:

1. Identify the brand meaning associated with the imagery found on certain energy drink brands’ social media platforms, and identify the similarities and differences between each approach.
2. Reveal the archetypes associated with the imagery found on these social media platforms, and identify the similarities and differences between each brand’s approach.
3. Unearth the risky and/or unhealthy messages and behaviours implied through the imagery found on each brand’s social media platforms, and identify the similarities and differences between each approach.

To answer each research question and address the three research objectives, this study physically and theoretically captured the visual content posted on each energy drink brand’s social media pages. These images were then analysed to identify the overt and implied meanings behind each piece of content.

3.2.1 Overview of Social Media Platforms

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the controversy over energy drinks derives in their targeting to youth markets and their promulgation of ill health in young adults. To
better examine the relationship between this population and energy drink brands, one must look at how the latter generate brand meaning on the preferred media for this age cohort: Instagram and Pinterest (Solomon 2013). As branded social media pages rarely exist independently, most commercial platforms form part of a broader marketing strategy (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Hence, it proved worthwhile to examine more than one social media platform, as multiple sources can forge greater depth of meaning in qualitative research (Taylor and Bogdan 1984). As such, this study used Instagram and Pinterest to conduct a robust netnographic analysis.

**3.2.1.1 Instagram**

Instagram is a free visual sharing platform. It is the most used and perhaps most recognisable of all the image-based social media platforms (Hellberg 2015). Brands that operate on Instagram carefully curate their visual content to appear to their followers as a trustworthy source (Cyca 2018). This visual content comes in three formats: still imagery, GIFs and short videos up to one minute in length.

Approximately one billion users worldwide use Instagram, 59% of whom are regular users under the age of 30, either posting or checking their feeds daily (Clarke 2018). Since 2016, the platform has introduced posts and stories as a means of sharing visual content. However, Instagram stories only last for 24 hours at a time compared to Instagram posts, which are permanent (unless deleted). For the context of this study, only Instagram posts were considered, as these are more accessible to capture and reconcile for future reference.

**3.2.1.2 Pinterest**

Pinterest is another free visual sharing platform, and the second most popular image-based medium among social media users (Hellberg 2015). What makes Pinterest different is its ‘pin’ feature, which allows users to display any still digital image they like onto their page, or ‘board’. As of 2018, there are 250 million users with three billion boards and an estimated 175 individual pins across the platform (Omnicore Agency 2019a). Pinterest is also popular among the energy drink brand age cohort, with an estimated 50% of users aged 18 to 34 active on the platform (Chen 2018).
3.2.1.3 Snapchat

Snapchat is another popular visual sharing platform that allows users to send instant visual messages to one another that disappear after a short period of time. In 2018, approximately 184 million people used the app worldwide, 71% of whom were aged between the 18 and 34 (Omnicore Agency 2019b). Due to the limited lifespan of the visual data on this platform, Snapchat was discounted from the study, as it proved difficult to capture the right posts at the right time.

3.2.2 Energy Drink Brands in Australia

The energy drink market in Australia is currently worth AUD$431 million and is dominated by four major players: V Energy, Red Bull, Coca-Cola Amatil (under their brand Mother Energy) and Monster Energy (Evans 2016). As of 2018, V Energy had the largest market share in Australia, followed by Red Bull and Coca-Cola. Nonetheless, globally the two biggest brands are Red Bull and Monster Energy, both of which partly constitute the focus of this study, as they offer the most visible and followed forms of visual content.

First, Red Bull invented the energy drinks sector and set the benchmark for other brands to emulate (Euromonitor 2016). More than any other product in the category Red Bull has created a lifestyle and globally are the most recognisable energy drink brand, with the second largest market share in Australia after V Energy. As of February 2019, the company has 10.5 million followers on Instagram and almost 28,000 followers on Pinterest (Red Bull 2019a, 2019b).

Second, Monster Energy is owned and manufactured by the Monster Beverage Corporation based in California and distributed in Australia by Cadbury Schweppes. Although small in terms of national market share, Monster has been at the centre of many controversies overseas surrounding energy drink consumption. According to Euromonitor (2016), it is the second largest energy drink brand globally and a serious contender for Red Bull. As of February 2019, Monster Energy (2019b, 2019c) has 5.2 million followers on Instagram and almost 9,000 followers on Pinterest. Evidently, the two most popular energy drink brands chosen for study have a strong digital presence on both Instagram and Pinterest.
The other two popular brands in Australia considered for study were V Energy and Mother Energy. The latter was eliminated from the study because as of 2015 it only had a Facebook page, while V Energy was also initially eliminated because it had no official Pinterest page. However, as some of the participants referred to V Energy during the walk-through interviews it proved a popular brand of choice and was subsequently included for analysis.

3.3 Visual Data Collection

As part of the visual netnographic analysis, it was essential for the researcher to venture out and talk to people aged between 18 and 30 who engage with energy drink brands online. It was likewise necessary to then collect relevant images, which the cohort deemed engaging. To achieve this a series of walk-through interviews were conducted over five months in 2016.

3.3.1 Overview of the Walk-through Interviews

The purpose of this stage was to identify which images on social media the participants found the most engaging and why. It was designed to reveal what sort of themes or familiar stories they garnered when shown the visual material.

All netnographies need to be as natural and unobtrusive as possible (Kozinets 2002). To achieve this, they need to be flexible and allow for techniques such as walk-through interviews to be incorporated (Bowler 2010; Kozinets 2002). This, in turn, allows for observing participants in their natural, online environment. Subsequently, this creates integrity for the study and eliminates the need to push a particular page or selection of stimuli on the participants. It also allows for other brands that may have been overlooked or not considered to enter into the research.

Walk-through interviewing is a technique borrowed from sociology. Its theoretical framework, as is the case with netnography, is derived from social constructivism (Bowler 2010; Garfinkel 1973, quoted in Kusenbach 2003). It is an unstructured interview in the form of an open discussion wherein participants lead the researcher through real-life experiences (Berger 2014). This type of method is generally used in qualitative studies in health care (Garcia-Retamero and Cokely 2013) and consumer psychology (Niland et al. 2014). This study in part emulates that of Niland et al. (2014),
in which participants were asked to present their own personal Facebook pages and talk through images in which they were shown to consume alcohol.

In this study, participants were expected to search online for the first energy drink brand that came to mind. This action was performed through a Google search, with the first Instagram page appearing on the results page being selected. For example, a Google search for Red Bull’s Instagram returns with the brand’s official page. All participants repeated this action for each of the brands and platforms. Next, they talked with the principal researcher through both Red Bull’s and Monster Energy’s Instagram and Pinterest accounts (Euromonitor 2016). (For an overview of these accounts see Section 3.3.3.)

As a guide, the following five prompts and questions were posed during the open discussions:

1. Pick your favourite image(s).
2. Explain to me why it is your favourite.
3. What sort of images would you share with your friends?
4. What sort of images would your friends share with you?
5. Going by the types of images displayed on this page how would you describe the brand if they were a real person?

These questions were repeated for the two brands and the two platforms, starting with the brand the participant chose first. Each participant talked through both brands and their selected images on the social media page they found most engaging or appealing. The participants were encouraged to give their honest feedback about the images.

The walk-through interview cycle depended entirely on the first brand that came to participants’ minds. For example, if one had chosen Red Bull, the cycle began with Red Bull’s Instagram, then Monster Energy’s Instagram, followed by Red Bull’s Pinterest and Monster Energy’s Pinterest.

Each stage involving an individual Instagram and Pinterest page concluded with the participants describing how they perceived each energy drink brand on that particular platform as if they were a real life person, before moving on to the next stage. Each image selected was then saved for later use in the visual analysis. These images were
uploaded online to a private Dropbox folder and offline on a separate USB drive, which was set-up and administrated by the researcher for safekeeping.

3.3.1.1 Allowance for a Third Unlisted Brand

In the case that participants thought of a different unlisted brand, that particular brand was added into the cycle. Allowing this meant that other competitors in the energy drink market that may have initially been overlooked by the researcher were considered for study. This reduced the possibility of influencing the participants and made the process seem as natural and unobtrusive as possible.

The same routine was repeated for unlisted brands, with participants talking through the visual stimuli on Instagram (the more popular platform), then Pinterest (Hellberg 2015). Once this stage of the cycle was complete, the discussion reverted back to analysing Red Bull and Monster Energy across both platforms. Hence, if a participant chose V Energy, the cycle was V Energy’s Instagram, Red Bull’s Instagram, followed by Monster Energy’s Instagram. Both Red Bull’s Pinterest and Monster Energy’s Pinterest would then follow.

3.3.2 Sample

Seven participants aged between 19 and 30 years participated in the study. This sample amount fell within the range of other similar qualitative netnographic studies, which on average consult six to eight participants (e.g., Brodie et al. 2013 had six participants). Research participants were recruited using a convenience sample and primarily through word of mouth. Other participants responded to flyers promoting the study, which were distributed around Australian university campuses. This particular age cohort was targeted because it aligns to that of most energy drink brands’ key target market (Euromonitor 2016; Miller 2008). Previous studies on the marketing of these products (see Azagba, Langille and Asbridge 2014; Costa, Hayley and Miller 2014) have used younger age groups consisting of 12 to 15 year olds. Thus, exploring this older, somewhat more mature cohort is warranted, as very little is known of their perspectives.

Participants were screened for their energy drink consumption and social media usage before taking part in the interviews by text message before the agreed meetings. The
primary criteria participants had to match concerned whether they consumed at least one can of energy drink each day, and that they followed at least one energy drink brand on social media. The sample included both males and females, and all participants were Australian residents or citizens of similar Anglo-Celtic cultural background, with English as their native language. Six identified as Australian, one as Irish and the other was from New Zealand.

Participants took part in comprehensive walk-through interviews conducted across five months spanning May to October 2016. An eighth participant had taken part in a pilot trial conducted in May 2015.

Eight participants sufficed to reach saturation at this stage in the study due to the substantial amount of images collected. In the design stage of the methodology it was anticipated that each participant would choose between two and three images for each brand and platform. The target was set at 120 images, thus, bringing the data sample into similar range of previous netnographic dissertations, such as Bahl’s (2014), which used 100 images. Seven of the eight participants went beyond the anticipated limit and opted to choose between four and five images by brand and platform, bringing the total to 138 images collected for study. By the final stages of the interviews the discourse became increasingly repetitive, indicating that a sufficient amount of data regarding the overall perception of brand meaning was reached, much like other similar sample sizes in previous qualitative studies (Abrams 2010; Coyne 1997).

The first three interviews were conducted in Perth, Western Australia and the last five occurred in Mandurah located in Western Australia. All participants are represented anonymously using a two-letter code; the first was a randomly chosen letter and the second was the first letter of their names. All images chosen were captured using the print screen function and saved on a password-protected USB drive in accordance with Curtin University’s ethics policy for data storage. The participants’ code names, their details and the number of images selected are summarised in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>First chosen brand</th>
<th>Number of images chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 3.1: Sample Population
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Preferred Brand</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12 May 2015</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MH</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25 May 2016</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3 June 2016</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>V Energy</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26 August 2016</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>V Energy</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6 October 2016</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18 October 2016</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Monster Energy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19 October 2016</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Monster Energy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25 October 2016</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | 138

Evidently, four participants had chosen Red Bull as their preferred brand, two had chosen Monster and another two chose V Energy. The two participants that selected V were the only to choose images from the brand’s Instagram page. It is also important to note that this particular Instagram account contained only 24 images in total and no new material since February 2015. This page was the first to appear after searching for ‘V Energy Instagram’ on Google.

In an earlier pilot study in 2015 Participant SK was asked to observe V Energy images after Monster Energy in the walk-through interview cycle. However, he did not find any of the images engaging, while the five other participants did not discuss V Energy at all. Overall, all eight participants had talked the researcher through Red Bull and Monster Energy imagery, regardless of the first brand that came to mind.
Full transcripts of the interviews were taken, with each recording ranging between 25 to 30 minutes in length. The original audio recordings were made on a Sony digital voice recorder, while backup audio recordings were made using a voice recording application on a Samsung Galaxy S5 smartphone. Each transcript totalled approximately six pages in length and took an average of two to three hours to complete. In all, the process of converting the audio material into writing took 16 hours to complete, with an additional 80 hours work on NVivo to cross-reference the transcripts, initially to identify common words and next to match participants’ quotes to the corresponding images.

3.3.3 Cataloguing the Images

A total of 138 images were obtained from the walk-through sessions, of which 130 were identified as unique. Of the total images selected eight were repeated, so they were only counted once. Of the repeated images, two came from Red Bull and four from Monster Energy. The total number of images chosen by the participants is shown in Table 3.2. (Importantly, this table counts individually selected images only and does not include repeated selections.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Instagram images</th>
<th>Pinterest images</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Bull</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster Energy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Energy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>78</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The images were grouped by brand, and separate spreadsheets were made on Microsoft Excel to organise the categories by Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy images. The spreadsheets used for the data analysis were structured according to the visual, its code, various themes and corresponding participant quotations. Each brand was given a unique set of letters, with Red Bull represented by ‘RB’, Monster Energy by ‘ME’ and V Energy represented by ‘V’. The number in the code represented the sequence in which the picture was converted and imported into the spreadsheet using Adobe Fireworks. For example, the image coded RB1 was the first Red Bull image converted for analysis. The original screenshot files were saved after the JPEGs were generated,
as the date stamp on them provided a valuable indication of their actual time of recording.

During this process, all the images were cropped to ensure each fit onto the spreadsheet. Notably, the comments section to the side of each image was removed, as it served no purpose in the visual analysis and because this project focused solely on interpreting social media imagery, not measuring social media discourse.

Further, the themes column on the spreadsheet required a text search analysis on NVivo. The initial step entailed observing the image, finding one or two words that described the image and then searching for any references to the image in all eight transcripts. This process was repeated until the phrases became specific (e.g., ‘I like that it looks cool’). There were 27 individual searches and nine different word tree graphs saved on file.

Linking the images from the transcripts to the spreadsheet involved triangulating the data by matching the date stamp on the images with the date on each transcript.

It is also important to note that not all the images in the spreadsheet had matching quotes. Some participants chose a particular image, told the researcher that it ‘looks cool’ and moved on. Others chose a brand’s Pinterest board as a whole because they liked all of the images; in this instance quotations were matched to the first image individually selected. The image categories featured in the spreadsheet for each brand is summarised in Table 3.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image category</th>
<th>Number of visuals</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motorsport</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy eating</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.3.1 Red Bull

The spreadsheet for Red Bull was 15 pages long and took four hours to complete. In total, 77 individual images were compiled from participants’ selections, of which 43 derived from Instagram and 34 from Pinterest.

Motorsport (28.5%) and adventure (27.%) were the most frequent image categories chosen by the participants, followed by sport (12.9%), surf (9%) and women (5.1%). The theme of aviation also appeared unique to Red Bull. Although this category is specific, subjects depicted in freefall were categorised under ‘sport’ (see Appendix 3.1 for the full list of Red Bull images).

3.3.3.1.1 Repeated Images

Participants SK and WM chose the image depicted in Figure 3.1 from Red Bull’s ‘Travel and Bucket List’ board on Pinterest, while Participants MH, VL and WM selected the image in Figure 3.2 from the ‘People’ board. Overall, there were less repeated images for Red Bull due to the brand’s frequent activity on both platforms.

Figure 3.1. Man in Hammock

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Figure 3.2. Racing Driver Doreen Wicke
3.3.3.1.2 Exploration of Additional Images

Additional images were required to confirm or contradict the themes and observations derived from the primary analysis. As with the participant images, the extra Red Bull Instagram and Pinterest images sourced by the researcher were captured for evaluation. These are catalogued in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: Red Bull Additional Images**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorsport</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy living</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 20 additional images taken from Red Bull’s Instagram were categorised under aviation, adventure, surf, sport, motorsport and healthy living categories, as they were pre-existing themes that had emerged from the interviews. However, this required solidification due to many of the original images’ similar subject matter and because the themes required further exploration. The categories ‘magic’ and ‘art’ were incorporated after more abstract themes had emerged during the process of analysing the use of allegory in relation to Red Bull’s brand meaning; this is discussed further in Chapter 6.

The five images taken from Pinterest were selected from the ‘People’, ‘Bucket List’, and ‘Inspiration’ boards, which were already popular selections among the participants. These already matched the themes of adventure, surf and healthy living. Again, as mentioned in Section 3.3.3, some participants found the brand’s entire Pinterest board engaging and not just individual pinned images.
3.3.3.1.3 Additional Author-sourced Images

Four additional photos relating to the Red Bull brand and incorporated for visual analysis were taken by the principal researcher during a trip to Europe in September 2016. Two were from the Red Bull Hangar-7 in Salzburg, Austria, and another two were advertisements for the Red Bull Flying Steps tour taken in Bratislava, Slovakia. These were used as further evidence in support of the data analysis and Red Bull’s aviation theme. The findings are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

![Figure 3.3. Red Bull Hangar 7 and Red Bull Flying Steps.](image)

Source: Monk (personal photographs)

3.3.3.2 Monster Energy

The spreadsheet for Monster Energy was 10 pages long and took three hours to complete, once the discourse analysis relating to the images was complete. Exactly 47 individual images were taken from the participants, with 29 sourced from Instagram and 18 from Pinterest. The individual categories that emerged are listed in Table 3.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Images</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motorsport</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan art</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFC</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surf</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Motorsport (38.2%), fan art (21.2%), women (10.6%), adventure (10.6%) and UFC (8.5%) were the most frequently chosen categories for Monster Energy. The brand had a comparatively limited amount of activities depicted on social media, which explains why fewer categories than Red Bull are listed. Nonetheless, sharing fan art, which is not brand-generated but rather user-generated content, was unique to Monster Energy’s Pinterest page. This category along with user-generated content will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.3.3.2.1 Repeated Images

Participants VL and WM selected the same Pinterest image depicted in Figure 3.7, while Figure 3.8 (sourced from DeviantArt, a website on which users can upload their own artwork) was selected by CH and WM. Participants CH, MR and WM chose the Instagram image depicted in Figure 3.9, while Figure 3.10 was chosen by Participants MR and VL. Finally, Figure 3.11 was chosen by Participants CH, MR, VL and WM, and Participants SK and MH chose Figure 3.12 from Monster Energy’s Instagram.

**Figure 3.7. Ford Mustang in Monster Livery**

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)

**Figure 3.8. Hot Rod in Monster Livery**
Overall, Monster Energy had a high frequency of repeated images, possibly due to the comparatively limited amount of image categories featured online. Another factor was
that many of the participants found similar images engaging, which encouraged the likelihood for repetition.

3.3.3.2.2 Exploration of Additional Images

As the study themes emerged in the primary research stage, additional images were required to confirm or contradict participants’ observations. As with the participant images, the extra images were captured and delegated for examination by the principal researcher, the categories for which are catalogued in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Monster Energy Additional Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Pinterest</th>
<th>Number of images</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motorsport</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 15 additional images taken from Monster Energy’s Instagram were organised under women, motorsport and UFC categories, which were pre-existing themes that emerged from the interview transcripts. Three of the additional four images in the ‘women’ category were sourced from a separate Monster Energy Girls’ Instagram page. This occurred due to the objections some female participants had in relation to Monster Energy’s depiction of women; thus, further solidification was needed. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

No additional images were required from Monster Energy’s Pinterest, as this particular page primarily featured motorsport and fan art. These were the most dominant themes to emerge and reach a saturation point in relation to the number of images used for analysis.
3.3.3.3 V Energy

The V Energy spreadsheet was two pages in length and took one hour to complete. Only six individual images were chosen (with no repeats), which is low compared to both Red Bull and Monster Energy’s visual samples. This is due to V Energy’s lack of presence on Pinterest and because the brand’s Instagram had not been updated since 2015. To increase objectivity the images used for V Energy were included, as two participants chose the brand first. The individual categories for V Energy are summarised in Table 3.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of images</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace stress</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, three individual categories of humour, stress and sport emerged. However, all six images appeared to overlap in some sense, as images that fell under either stress or sports categories generally used humour or were lighthearted in nature.

3.3.3.3.1 Additional Images

Indeed, only a small number of images to which the participants referred were usable from V Energy’s US Instagram page. However, in January 2017 16 additional images were selected to complement the brand’s thematic analysis. Fifteen were sourced from V Energy’s Australian Instagram page and one extra picture derived from the brand’s original US-based Instagram. The categories for the images are provided in Table 3.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of images</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geek culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace stress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In result, both ‘humour’ and ‘workplace stress’ themes emerged upon analysing the additional images in addition to ‘geek culture’ and ‘Australiana’. Naturally, this variation may be due to the fact that images were obtained from an Australian-based source.

3.4 Visual Data Analysis and Interpretation

In keeping with the step-by-step approach required for visual netnography, the collected images were subjected to two levels of interpretive analysis. First, a VINE analysis was conducted to generate concrete themes related to brand meaning; second, these themes were further analysed using the five A framework to identify higher order, abstract themes.

3.4.1 VINE Stories

The main purpose of the visual analysis was to use the images as a basis through which to better understand each company’s brand meaning. Further, in following Hinthorne’s (2012) VINE stories procedure the visual analysis helped to unearth the themes that emerged from the images in combination with the associated narratives that each brand promotes online. Hinthorne (2012) adopted the technique from the thematic apperception test (TAT) used in clinical psychology. Basically, TAT interviews require participants to tell a story inspired by a visual presented to them (Farnworth 2007, cited in Hinthorne 2012). This particular technique was chosen over other visual analysis techniques because this study applied a similar approach to collating visual stories and interpreting them for analysis. It entailed breaking down the stories and reconstructing them into usable clusters for study (Hinthorne 2012).

In her study, Hinthorne (2012) used eight predetermined images and retrieved the perspectives of 51 participants. For this study, 130 individual images were selected by eight participants and further discussed between three additional people: the principal researcher and two senior marketing academics. The same three-step process was implemented, of breaking down the images and reconstructing them as stories.
In the first step the images gathered from the participants were deconstructed and placed into theme clusters based on the subject matter. There were 20 theme clusters in total across the three brands: nine for Red Bull, eight for Monster Energy and three for V Energy.

The second step saw the transcripts analysed using NVivo software. Nodes were created linking key words and phrases that matched the underlying messages of the theme clusters identified in Step 1.

Finally, in Step 3 the visuals and discourses that shared the same theme cluster were paired to form a story. These formed the basis of discussion with the expert panel. This whole process took three months to complete.

In result, 29 different concrete themes (11 for Red Bull, 12 for Monster Energy and six for V Energy) helped define the concrete themes underpinning the meanings behind energy drink brand. These were subsequently used to identify the more abstract brand meaning themes using the five A framework.

### 3.4.2 Five A Framework

In this stage the visual theme clusters unearthed in the VINE analysis were reanalysed to retrieve more abstract meanings. Essentially, the five A framework aimed to provide a more enriched understanding of brand meaning. All 20 theme clusters from Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy were subjected to each ‘A’, which involved a step-by-step approach, with all three brands being examined simultaneously before moving on to the next stage. For example, in the aura stage Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy were studied at once when the concepts were still fresh in the researcher’s mind, making identification simpler and more effective.

To ensure total objectivity the researcher first brainstormed each of the four ‘As’ for each energy drink brand, as suggested by Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003). The analysis work was then passed onto two independent judges (senior marketing academics at a large Australian university) who reviewed each of the A themes until a consensus was reached for each brand. Working on each category took approximately two to three weeks to complete, and 11 weeks in total. Each stage featured its own line
of questions based on the definitions outlined in Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003). These are as follows:

1. Aura (the brand’s essence): What is the overall vibe of the brand? Have they got an authentic message for the viewer?
2. Arcadia (the brand’s community): What does the brand’s ideal community look like? What type of community is it? Who is in it?
3. Allegory (the brand’s story): What is the plot behind the brand story? Is there a relatable equivalent in popular culture? Is there more than one story?
4. Antimony (the brand’s paradox): What contradictions appear in the storyline? If so, what are they?

To build on this framework, an additional layer (archetype) was introduced to account for any visual interpretations of the social media data. This step was necessary to define each brand’s respective character according to Mark and Pearson’s (2001) *The Hero and the Outlaw*, which provided detailed and clear criteria when linking brand to archetype (Xara-Brasil, Hamza and Marquina 2018). A summary of each archetype is presented in Table 3.9.

### Table 3.9: 12 Common Brand Archetypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archetype</th>
<th>Catchphrase</th>
<th>Brands used</th>
<th>Key words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innocent</td>
<td>‘Free to be you and me’</td>
<td>McDonald’s, Disney, Coca-Cola</td>
<td>Honesty, authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explorer</td>
<td>‘Don’t fence me in’</td>
<td>Jeep, Starbucks, Body Shop, Kathmandu</td>
<td>No boundaries, open road, ruggedness, nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>‘The truth shall set you free’</td>
<td>Curtin University, IBM, CNN</td>
<td>Information, wisdom, dignity, integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>‘Where there is a will there is a way’</td>
<td>ADF, Nike, Fitness First</td>
<td>Courage, pushing limits, proving oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw</td>
<td>‘Rules are meant to be broken’</td>
<td>Harley-Davidson, Rolling Stone Magazine, Uber</td>
<td>Anti-establishment, freedom, causes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archetype</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magician</td>
<td>‘It can happen’</td>
<td>Lotterywest, Apple, Telstra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bring (something) to life, dreams, potions, change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy/girl next door</td>
<td>‘All men and women are created equal’</td>
<td>Spudshed, Ford, Holden, Subway</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regular, ordinary, follower, affable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lover</td>
<td>‘I have only eyes for you’</td>
<td>eHarmony, Shannon’s Car Insurance, Michael Hill Jeweller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seduction, romance, lust, intimacy, sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jester</td>
<td>‘If I cannot dance I want no part in your revolution’</td>
<td>Cadbury, Irn-Bru, Jesters’ Pies, Ben and Jerry’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fun, laughter, amusement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver</td>
<td>‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’</td>
<td>HBF Health Fund, P&amp;G, Unilever, Marriott Hotels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home, support, altruism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>‘If it can be imagined it can be created’</td>
<td>Tate Modern, Lego, APN Outdoor, Art Gallery of Western Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discover, build, making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruler</td>
<td>‘Power is not everything; it is the only thing’</td>
<td>Mercedes Benz, Omega Watches, Forbes Magazine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Power, best, top</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001); Xara-Brasil, Hamza and Marquina (2018)

Mark and Pearson (2001) prescribed a simple mental exercise of choosing a particular brand and running it through each of the 12 archetypes until the most appropriate is reached. This exercise was conducted to identify the perception and feel for each of the brand archetypes, and was repeated for each of the three energy drink brands.

Caldwell, Henry and Alman (2010) cautioned that marketers misuse archetypes as generalisable outcomes like they would with stereotypes. Instead, they should be viewed as visual patterns, as is done in psychology. Thus, this study broke each brand down further into dominant archetype, sub-archetype and shadow archetype.

First, the dominant archetype described the archetype that was most explicit relative to each brand after running the prescribed mental exercise. This was subsequently
repeated to identify each brand’s sub-archetype. Mark and Pearson (2001) in their text made references to sub-archetypes as minor characters—for example, the magician archetype assisting the hero on their journey. One way to understand the use of sub-archetypes in popular culture is to apply them to the character Indiana Jones, who exemplifies not only the hero archetype but also the explorer archetype (Hirschman 2000).

The shadow archetype can either represent the negative traits of or the opposite character to the dominant archetype (Mark and Pearson 2001). Mark and Pearson (2001) identified the shadow for each of their outlined archetypes as ‘traps’, but its origins can be traced back to Jung (2014), who described the concept as the opposite to one’s persona, or the ‘face the world does not want to see’. Indeed, some of the most intriguing characters in popular culture have both good and bad traits, making this archetype undeniably important for humanising even the most questionable of sorts (Mitchell 2015).

As was the case with the concrete themes uncovered from the VINE analysis, the abstract themes that emerged using the five A framework were first developed by the researcher before being discussed with an expert panel. This process ensured that each theme in the discussion was backed by evidence and represented the opinions of participants, not the researcher (Hellberg 2015). In turn, this lead to the creation of 32 abstract themes.

For Red Bull, the five A framework uncovered one aura, one arcadia, three allegories, four antimonies and one dominant archetype (with two shadow effects and two sub-archetypes). For Monster Energy, the framework uncovered one aura, on arcadia, two allegories, four antimonies as well as one dominant archetype, with one shadow effect and one sub-archetype. For V Energy, the framework developed one aura, one arcadia, two allegories, one antimony and one dominant archetype, with one shadow effect and one sub-archetype. All of these concepts are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

3.5 Conclusion

The following diagram in Figure 3.13 summarises the data analysis procedure.
This study was designed to demonstrate how brand meaning is generated by visual content posted on various social media pages for different energy drink brands. As this study employed a visual netnographic analysis it followed a step-by-step approach to reach its intended interpretive goal (Kozinets 2010). The data analysis process involved three stages: i) analysis of the VINE stories (Hinthorne 2012); ii) analysis of the four ‘As’ (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003); and iii) analysis of different brand archetypes (Mark and Pearson 2001).

The VINE stories were employed to identify concrete themes among the images selected for study. The subsequent analysis was designed to reveal more abstract concepts underpinning brand meaning. Next, the four ‘As’ uncovered the aura (essence), arcadia (community), allegory (story) and antimony (paradox) for each brand, with another dimension (archetype) added for more robust analysis. Essentially, archetypes help frame visuals because they represent patterns that are built into our unconscious (Mark and Pearson 2001). Archetypes also help to build an overarching picture of what each energy drink brand means by illustrating the hidden root characters their social media images represent. Through comparisons with pop culture, archetypes provide the likely mental picture of a viewer’s (or participant’s)
unconscious when observing and interpreting certain imagery. This helps to conceptualise deeper underlying brand meanings.

Overall, the three stages of the visual netnographic analysis demonstrated that brand meaning is a complex concept with many layers. As such, Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the VINE stories, and Chapter 5 underpins the five ‘As’.
Chapter 4: Findings of the VINE Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The objective of the VINE analysis was to identify the brand meanings associated with each energy drink brands’ social media content, including any similarities and differences between their individual approaches. A VINE analysis helped to establish any concrete themes that emerged from the brand-generated content posted online. This process involved breaking down the visual content collected from the participants into theme clusters, then matching them with key words and quotations to tell a story.

What did these stories reveal about each individual brand? Upon asking the participants to select the first energy drink brand that came to mind (of which three were chosen, including Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy), the collected visual data unearthed the different ways young adults have viewed, interpreted and shaped brand-generated content posted on their various social media channels. Overall, participants viewed them as cool, engaging and relatable to their own lives.

From the data there is evidence to support the notion that energy drink brands promote health and performance-enhancement benefits, and encourage risk-taking behaviour. Although, these types of messages were not the same across each individual brand.

Overall, 29 different individual themes were unearthed through the participant narratives. Red Bull garnered 10 (see Section 4.2), Monster Energy had 11 (see Section 4.3) and six were noted for V Energy (see Section 4.4).

4.2 Red Bull VINE Analysis

Of the eight participants, three chose Red Bull as their preferred brand, while all participants including those who chose Monster Energy and V Energy had also discussed and selected images from Red Bull’s Instagram and Pinterest feeds. In total, 77 individual images for Red Bull were collected, 43 from Instagram and 34 from Pinterest.

The colours and tones used in most Red Bull images tended to be very bright and were generally anchored in natural settings. For example, emphasis was placed on clear,
blue skies to balance out white snow-capped mountains, green grass or dusty red desert floor, as seen in Figure 4.1. These contrasts inspire viewers to embark on their own journeys just like the subjects in the images; the scenery presented looks challenging but not too perilous or threatening to spark apprehension.

Figure 4.1. Adventure imagery collated from Red Bull.

Source: Red Bull (2019b, 2019c)

The images in Figure 4.1 are the exemplar of Red Bull Imagery. The colours are natural and stark in appearance drawing the viewer’s attention to the landscape of the still image, making it appear to be daunting and challenging. The protagonists featured in the image while seemingly challenged, are also striving to achieve the impossible.

Red Bull appears to favour individual achievements in its imagery, as most of the subjects pictured are journeying alone, perhaps for inspirational or aspirational measure. Overall, the basic visual narrative falls back on asking viewers to ‘look at what I can do’.

4.2.1 Red Bull Themes

The 10 key themes that emerged from the Red Bull VINE analysis included grace under pressure, flight and defying gravity, defying personal limitations, solitary pursuit, elitism, hero worship, playboy culture, Amazonian women, and sports and fitness. Each of these themes are discussed in detail from Sections 4.2.1.1 to 4.2.1.11.

4.2.1.1 Grace Under Pressure

Many of the Red Bull images selected by the research participants were chosen simply because they ‘looked cool’. For example, statements such as ‘none of them catch my attention as such, but they are really cool photos’ (EC) or ‘that looks cool’ (WM) were
fairly common among the participant descriptions. While these statements may just be reflective of the styling, content or quality of the images themselves, describing them as ‘cool’ is telling in itself.

The term ‘cool’ can be defined as grace under pressure (Mohiuddin et al. 2016), remaining calm and collected even in the most treacherous and stressful situations. Its origins date back to early twentieth-century African American jazz culture (Mohiuddin et al. 2016), until it was adopted by Caucasian audiences, first with the (original) hipsters of the 1940s, before spreading into the rock-and-roll and beatnik subcultures of the 1950s (Mohiuddin et al. 2016). Since that time the term ‘cool’ has become synonymous with youth and youth culture.

Some of the images selected by participants depicted situations that could be described as ones of impending doom, yet the subjects within remain calm, collected and entirely in control. For example, Figure 4.2 shows a surfer re-emerging from the water after a wipe-out. Such imagery not only helps to create an aura of cool around the Red Bull brand but also imply that even under the most intense pressure, Red Bull will keep you focused and in control.

![Figure 4.2. Surfer with head above water](Source: Red Bull (2019b))

**4.2.1.2 Flight and Defying Gravity**

A regularly occurring statement among participants related directly to Red Bull’s famous ‘gives you wings’ tagline, which perhaps demonstrates how brand knowledge networks routinely establish in consumers’ minds through effective marketing. For example, in relation to Figure 4.4, MR stated that ‘everybody knows that Red Bull gives you wings and with this picture he has his arms stretched out like he is trying to
fly’. Indeed, the human desire to fly dates back several centuries. To some extent, flying defies nature’s force of gravity, so depicting Red Bull in numerous flight or freefalling situations certainly creates a perception that the brand itself defies nature, and offers individuals a means to experience the thrill of flight (which is contrary to nature’s intent for humans as inherently land-based creatures).

**Figure 4.4. Skydiving image**

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

While all the participants chose at least one image that featured either flight or freefalling, others were drawn to images of the Red Bull Air Race. Notably, participants explained that such depictions were exciting to watch or reminded them of viewing the real-life event at some point in their lives (e.g., Figure 4.5). For example, VL explained how they ‘remember going to [the Air Race] with my family. It was pretty exciting to watch back then’.

**Figure 4.5. Red Bull Air Race**

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

This ability to conjure excitement suggests that there is also an element of nostalgia associated with the brand and the vicarious experiences one gains through viewing rather than directly participating in adrenaline-based pursuits. In this situation, the atmosphere during such events and the excitement felt by those in the crowd are then attributed to Red Bull itself, which helps situate the brand as an appealing source for those seeking high-performance and thrill seeking adventure. Figure 4.6 further reflects this sentiment, along with WM’s explanation that because ‘Red Bull likes to
show people jumping off cliffs’ it matters not whether viewers are unsure of ‘what is happening here, [because] it looks cool’.

Figure 4.6. Red Bull Cliff Diving.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

The tagline that has accompanied the brand for many years has helped create many associations (both positive and negative) in the minds of consumers, which is further reinforced through these images. For example, EC stated that ‘Red Bull looks like someone who flies a fighter jet, and a fighter [pilot] requires more adrenaline’. This likening of Red Bull to a pilot—who experiences constant rushes of excitement and adrenaline, and a sense of satisfaction in demonstrating their mastery over a powerful machine to defy gravity—is captured in Figure 4.1 and further demonstrated in Figure 4.6.

Evidently, Figure 4.7 is a literal expression of Red Bull’s famed tagline, in that the rider in the image appears to be airborne. With his arms spread like an eagle, this image suggests that the rider is emulating a superhero, and for a brief moment in time he can manipulate gravity. As the picture would have viewers believe, Red Bull is not just an ordinary drink but rather it lets consumers achieve the unachievable (in this case flying and defying nature’s gravitational force). That is, Red Bulls helps ordinary people become superhuman.

Figure 4.7. Jump over canyon on BMX bike.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)
4.2.1.3 Defying Personal Limitations

Evidently, Red Bull likes to depict its protagonists achieving incredible feats of human endurance as a metaphor for enhanced performance. This has a lot in common with superhero transformation narratives in which an ordinary character withstands a vehicle of change when faced with adversity, only to become an extraordinary protagonist. For example, Figure 4.8 makes reference to Spider-Man, whose symbol is shown on the subject’s T-shirt. Participant MR chose this particular image because the nerd culture reference appealed to her love of comic books. Thus, although Red Bull portrays images that epitomise ‘cool’ (or grace under pressure), other images are designed to tap into the ordinariness of people and the ‘coolness’ associated with not being cool. Further, these images also suggest that the consumer can metaphorically transform into a superhero-type character after consuming the brand’s product.

Figure 4.8. Red Bull Spiderman reference

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

The performance-enhancement narrative presented here also suggests that Red Bull is a solution to low energy. In this sense, the image in Figure 4.8 relates to defying personal limitations, as Red Bull presents fatigue or inertia as mere barriers to overcome and achieve greatness. Overall, participants interpreted these images as a form of performance enhancement and understood the correlation between suffering fatigue before consuming Red Bull and achieving amazing results following consumption. The still image in Figure 4.9 taken from a burnout video featuring former Formula 1 driver David Coulthard connotes that although the car’s engine initially requires many revs to perform such a stunt, it like other images of high-performance vehicles can likewise act as a metaphor for Red-Bull-fuelled performance enhancement.
Defying personal limitations by maintaining peak performance at all times is ‘like revving up a Formula 1 engine’ according to the participants. Notably, EC explained:

they are trying to say that people are accomplishing these extreme things because they are drinking Red Bull. They are trying to reach out to people who are tired and are skipping food and appealing to that market. You know, you drink an energy drink when you are tired, and you need that to pick you up.

EC went on to say that ‘Red Bull is more like “look at me, and what I can achieve once after drinking”; it looks cooler. Red Bull is trying to do something more genuine’. For these consumers Red Bull is perceived as an authentic energy booster, and one that enables people to maximise their potential and, again, achieve the otherwise unachievable. The images selected by participants all demonstrated how boundaries are pushed or extended by Red Bull, with the implication being that users can too push the boundaries through consumption and ultimately enhance their own personal performance to defy personal limitations. This is further demonstrated by Participant MH:

I would say Red Bull is a person that is looking for energy in the short term probably needs some energy and then a drink. But they would be a person that would be very upbeat; they would be the sort of person that in everything that they would do, they would be pushing it.

Participant MH continued by describing a typical Red Bull consumer as a procrastinator such as a university student, as most like to do things at the last minute and require Red Bull to give them motivational ‘power’. Hence, the implied meaning behind many of the images participants selected is that in a positive context personal

Figure 4.9.David Coulthard Formula 1 burnout video.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)
performance can be enhanced by consuming Red Bull, thus, enabling personal limitations to be overcome.

4.2.1.4 Solitary Pursuit

A stand-out feature on both Red Bull’s Instagram and Pinterest pages was that their subjects appeared almost exclusively on their own or in small groups. This gave the impression that change and overcoming personal limitations are introspective and come from within. For example, note the selection of images taken from Red Bull’s Pinterest in Figure 4.10.

![Figure 4.10. Red Bull in solitary pursuits.](image)

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

As shown, the images can be interpreted as the first step in a three-part journey of finding oneself, and reaching true self-expression and self-actualisation. Relating back to Joseph Campbell (2003), these are some of the same steps when creating a hero.

Solitary pursuit also reflects defying one’s own personal limitations, and striving to attain one’s own personal goals or live out their dreams. It is a spiritual yet introverted form of existence, wherein the subject is not seeking approval from their peers but instead desires solitude or personal reflection. Such a feat proved a common theme that participants unearthed upon viewing Red Bull’s Pinterest page. Notably, EC had described the subject in one Red Bull image as a real-life person, ‘someone who is exciting, an adventurer’. Meanwhile, Participants MR and SK also came to the same conclusion when asked the same question:

They are not just into sports stuff and travel the world. (MR)

People who have just finished high school or uni, 18 to 27; people who are in their 20s who are out there to find themselves. (MH)
I think [Red Bull] are targeting young males aged 20 to 25 years of age. (SK)

Further, as most of the visuals depicted individuals within a stage of self-actualisation, they could also be interpreted as wholly aspirational:

They travel a lot and are quite adventurous; they want to try lots of things. They do want to keep their adrenaline habit to one sort of thing, and they are very multicultural in that they like to experience lots of stuff. (MR)

Moreover, undertaking an adventure is often considered a rite of passage and something that people aged between 18 and 30 across many cultures pursue, as it symbolises transition from youth into adulthood. Finding yourself is a central facet of this concept, and Red Bull (who actively targets this exact population) has realised this and continually attempts to inspire consumers to undertake their own journeys of self-discovery.

4.2.1.5 Expressing Yourself

Self-expression can only come when an individual has truly ‘found themselves’. They have both grounding and knowledge of who they really are, and a clear objective of what they can accomplish.

Figure 4.11 (chosen by Participant MH and sourced from Red Bull’s Pinterest) is an excellent example of ‘true’ self-expression. In particular, the second image shows an undeniably athletic man who, having discovered art as his own form of self-expression, explains how ‘no one believed me’ on his self-reflexive life journey. This image implies that expressing oneself is not just about gaining confidence and displaying it to the world, but also about silencing the doubters and critics (including self-doubt) to achieve personal goals. In posting this online Red Bull tells viewers that doubt is only a barrier to pass in becoming the best version of ‘you’.

Figure 4.11. Art as an expression of true self
Ultimately, self-expression comes down to the individual and how they wish to display it. However, this presents a paradox, as the subject in most visual representations of success tend to centre on individuals partaking in a diverse range of activities. Nonetheless, Red Bull has attempted to overcome this barrier by offering a much broader vision of self-expression. As SK put it during the pilot study:

[Red Bull] seem[s] to have more art, celebrities, and music. On Pinterest, they seem to have both marketer- and user-generated pics, and they are trying to appeal to a wider audience.

4.2.1.6 Elitism

The next stage in this visual journey of self-discovery is reaching a metaphorical (and physical) pinnacle, or the highest level possible in the subject matter’s chosen activity. The protagonists featured in many images seem to exude a high level of confidence and self-belief. As demonstrated in the collection of images in Figure 4.12, they are elites who race cars and aeroplanes, and own yachts. Indeed, these activities are typically reserved for the wealthy and those who have reached a level of self-actualisation, according to Maslow’s hierarchy (McLeod 2018).

Figure 4.12. Red Bull with elitist pursuits

Source: Red Bull (2019b, 2019c)

The notion of depicting oneself at their peak was also reflected in the participant quotations:

They just show that they are more than just an energy drink I guess. (VL)

Yes, there is so much more to Red Bull. It is not on one page, and it has different sections; I don’t know how to describe them. You know who they are but there is more to them than meets the eye. (WM)
VL’s and WM’s quotes imply that Red Bull attempts to go above and beyond what an energy drink can achieve. Under the ‘Values and Lifestyles’ system in psychographics, these quotations and images also show that the brand strives to reach out to the experiencers, in that they are resource rich and are motivated both by physical activity and self-expression (Strategic Business Insights 2019). Experiencers are typically the youngest age cohort, with a median age of 25 and under.

4.2.1.7 Hero Worship

By depicting elitists in perilous situations Red Bull frames itself as an aspirational brand that tells audiences to ‘look at us and what we can accomplish’. However, this was not always the case according to the participants.

Instead, many found the brand’s stunt-based imagery almost fantastical, as if they were a form of entertainment. In particular, note the hot air balloon swing in Figure 4.13.

![Swinging off an hot air balloon](image)

**Figure 4.13. Swinging off an hot air balloon**

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

Further, too, some participant quotations highlight a lack of motivation to emulate these feats. Instead, most preferred just to admire or live vicariously through the images:

There is a lot of extreme sport; it’s mostly what they show and a lot of risk taking, which is kind of cool but personally I would not do it. (SK on Figure 4.14)

I would not do it, but hey it looks pretty exciting. (VL on selecting Figure 4.15)

It is not against Red Bull or anything [because] I love what they do, [but] that takes a fair bit of skill. (VL on selecting Figure 4.16)
Likewise, Participant CH stated in relation to Figure 4.2 their apprehension towards the extreme nature of what appears to be a skier navigating a perilous avalanche:

Somebody snowboarding down a pretty vertical mountain; seems pretty intense. It is something I wouldn’t do, but they have got a good graphic of it.

Probably that one. Because it is something I wouldn’t do.

You got to be pretty ballsy to do that I reckon.

In relation to Figure 4.17, MR stated that they ‘could not do that [because] that takes a lot of balls. I couldn’t do it just above the ground, and that is over a bloomin’ rock’.
Figure 4.17. Tightrope over rock

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

Quotations along the lines of ‘I wouldn’t do it myself’ or ‘you have to be pretty ballsy to do that’ suggests the participants viewed the depicted activities as too extreme to personally attempt themselves; that is, they do not belong to the extreme sports cohort. As such, this suggests the participants engaged in a two-step process when selecting the images. First, the images were visually appealing enough to gain their attention, and participants found them to be well executed and aesthetically pleasing—if the images had not sparked their imaginations they would not have been chosen. Second, the activities depicted were beyond their own capabilities, as the majority require a high amount of training or execution by a well-trained stunt professionals. This in itself requires a lot of capital or an active desire to emulate such feats. Evidently, participants preferred to spectate.

Overall, the style of these visuals is reminiscent of early twentieth-century escapology images featuring the likes of Harry Houdini. The reason for their appeal is that the subjects within these pictures draw one’s attention by performing a dangerous stunt. The viewer is then engaged simply to see if the performer can execute the act correctly—not because they wish to do the same.

4.2.1.8 Playboy Culture

Another example of elitism in Red Bull’s imagery derives in the brand’s depictions of men living playboy lifestyles. A ‘playboy’ can be defined as a man of wealth who spends his time pursuing pleasure, as evidenced in Figure 4.18.
The depiction of Red Bull playboys reminded Participant WM of the character James Bond, when stating, ‘this is like something you see out of a Bond film’. Indeed, his character is the archetypal playboy who is cool, calm and collected, and who travels to exotic locales, drives fast and expensive cars (such as that depicted in Figure 4.19), and gets beautiful women.

Amazonian women can be defined as any female character who is tall, strong and athletic (Oxford University Press 2019). In popular culture, the most recognisable Amazonian is DC Comics’ heroine Wonder Woman (Figure 4.20; Robinson 2004) first created by psychologist William Moulton Marston in 1941.
Figure 4.20. DC Comics’ Wonder Woman.

Source: Official Merchandise (2019)

Marston et al. (1972) based this character on a retelling of the mythology of Amazonian warriors, who can be traced back to Ancient Greece where strong female characters lived in a utopian society built upon collectivism, gender equality and democracy (Gallardo and Smith 2004). The critical aspect of the Amazonians is that they were perceived as equals to men in a male-dominated world, and not a mere female imitation of man. This is the style of imagery that is observed in Red Bull’s portrayal of women in both the aforementioned Figure 3.2 as well as Figure 4.21.

Figure 4.21. Girl jumping over hurdle.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

What Figures 3.2 and 4.21 present are female subjects engaged in positive and empowering contexts, much like Wonder Woman in the DC universe, who exists as an equal to her contemporaries in Superman or Batman. Likewise, Red Bull’s female subjects actively participate in traditionally male-dominated fields including motorsports or athletics.

The female participants in the study also believed that Red Bull’s depiction of strong and confident women created positive role models to whom they could aspire. When discussing Figure 4.21, MR said that she ‘can strive to be like her; however, in school
[she] couldn’t do hurdles’. Participant MR also regarded images of fitness and maintaining a healthy lifestyle really appealing, hence, why she chose it.

A recent increase in the popularity of women’s sports in Australia means these images can be viewed as culturally relevant within a modern context, as they promote a positive gender equality message through female empowerment. Many female participants in the study also uncovered this theme, particularly in relation to Figure 3.2, in which female racing driver Doreen Wicke is pictured. For example, Participant VL said in comparison to another brand’s representation of women, ‘well, Monster won’t show that; they won’t see that she races. They just want to show the men [who race] and [that] it is a man’s sport’.

Another female Participant (MH), commenting on Figure 4.22, explained that she:

also like[s] this one because this lady here is doing what she loves. She likes surfing but is not doing it in a bikini or anything. She is herself, and this is how in this day and age … women should be.

On the overt sexualisation of women, MH went on to say that she also liked this image ‘because it features women and they are not dressed provocatively’. Evidently, the subject in Figure 4.22 is dressed appropriately for professional surfing and is being her natural self, which, if anything, demonstrates that Red Bull’s understanding of gender and sexuality is both contemporary and contextually relevant.

This image has been removed for copyright purposes.

Figure 4.22. Woman Surfer

Source: Red Bull (2019b)
4.2.1.10 Sports and Fitness

Healthy living is another theme Red Bull uses to sell its product. The brand is adamant that Red Bull is beneficial for active people, despite all of the warnings from the medical community. When talking through Red Bull’s health and fitness images on Pinterest, one participant said, ‘I am drawn to fitness because I started going to the gym a couple of months ago’ (MR on selecting Figure 4.23).

**Figure 4.23. Working out in a gym**

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

There are two facets to the ‘Fitness and Health’ board on Red Bull’s Pinterest: maintaining a healthy lifestyle through diet and trying new things. Figure 4.24 is an example of both facets. Visually, there is plenty of evidence to support the brand’s push towards those who are active and its association with healthy food and dietary wellness, all of which plays into Red Bull’s suggestions that it too is somewhat beneficial.

**Figure 4.24. Muesli bars**

Source: Red Bull (2019c)
4.2.1.11 Stepping Out of Your Comfort Zone

Figure 4.25 encapsulates Red Bull’s push for consumers to ‘step out’ of their comfort zone. As shown, the image sees former Red Bull Formula 1 driver Daniel Ricciardo attempt sumo wrestling in what might be Japan. Indeed, the visual may be an attempt at cultural humour, but it also suggests that those who lead an active lifestyle (such as Ricciardo) are willing to step out of their comfort zone and try new things.

Figure 4.25. Daniel Ricciardo trying Sumo Wrestling.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

4.2.2 Summarising the Red Bull Themes

Based on the themes discussed by participants and the imagery provided, brand meaning for Red Bull means pursuing individual excellence and reaching a stage of self-actualisation (in Maslow’s terms). Every subject depicted is pictured performing at or above their peak and often with superhuman powers that defy the laws of nature; they all tell the viewer that anything is achievable if they consume Red Bull. Yet, realistically, the average person would rather be a spectator than a partaker, according to the study sample. This raises some questions for Red Bull: are they an aspirational brand or simply portrayers of fantasy?

4.2.3 Implications

4.2.3.1 Positive

One positive implication that can be surmised from Red Bull’s imagery is that the brand wholly encourages consumers to pursue active lifestyles. Through a healthy diet and regular exercise, Red Bull wants to demonstrate that its product can complement active and busy people.
Another positive implication is that Red Bull provides aspirational viewing. By depicting elite people performing high-risk activities, the brand is sending a message to viewers that anything is possible with proper motivation and dedication.

4.2.3.2 Negative

The negative implication behind Red Bull’s visual content also regards its association with a healthy lifestyle, which can be misleading. In Chapter 1 energy drinks were framed as potentially dangerous products because they have addictive qualities and can lead to ill health, including sudden cardiac arrhythmia in young adults. Posting images associated with wellness in combination with a lack of warning labels, it appears that the risks of consuming Red Bull are glossed over to sell more products.

The brand also promotes its product as a performance enhancer through depictions of stunts and extreme acts, which function as intense metaphors of what can be achieved after consumption. How caffeine (which constitutes part of Red Bull’s ingredients) works is that it tricks the body into producing more adrenaline to fight off fatigue. Indeed, individuals may not feel the need to jump off a cliff after consumption but they may feel a short-term boost of energy during that period, particularly when engaged in tiresome activities such as travel or study.

Through this, Red Bull is creating a need for viewers to become the perfect version of themselves, at all times and immediately. With no regard for effort or hard work, the ethos they promote is but a fantasy in which failure does not exist. Instead of learning from one’s mistakes to achieve self-improvement, Red Bull asserts that there is simply no time for that. In this sense, the brand’s push for greatness likewise serves as a reflection of modern society, wherein there exists a constant push for people to be at their best at all times.

Red Bull also normalises risk-taking behaviour in depicting subjects engaged in dangerous activities. There are no consequences in the Red Bull ‘universe’, and natural laws such as gravity are dismissed as mere barriers to overcome. The participants in this study had no desire to emulate these feats, but what is stopping other people who do?
4.3 Monster Energy

Of the eight participants interviewed three chose Monster Energy as their first brand of choice. All participants, including those who nominated other brands initially, were asked to select images from Monster’s Instagram and Pinterest feeds. From this, 44 individual images were collected, of which 29 were sourced from Instagram and 15 from Pinterest.

Across the 44 images for Monster Energy the use of black, metallic greys and dark green colours and tones tended to dominate, which gave the impression that the brand is somewhat dark and edgy (e.g., Figure 4.26). This may suggest to viewers that the world is indeed a scary or threatening place and that Monster Energy is a form of liquid courage with which to overcome this fear. Interestingly, a few of the participants commented on how enticing this world looks from the outside in. For example, one female participant explained in relation to Monster Energy’s logo how she ‘like[d] the background; it is more enticing, it is more engaging’ (MH).

![Image](source: Monster Energy (2019b))

Figure 4.26. Gritty urban landscapess from Monster Energy.

Images in Figure 4.26 are the exemplars for Monster Energy imagery. With these images, the viewer’s eyes are drawn to the concrete and metallic colourings of the manmade objects. The urban landscape is presented as a much dirtier and darker place than the natural environment, which in turn, symbolises a world that is cold and unfriendly.

Participant MH also mentioned when describing Monster Energy’s Instagram as a whole that it ‘is very male dominated; everything is about the male and not the female’. This remark suggests that Monster presents itself as a primarily male-centred brand
through its depictions of people and activities that only a typical young man may find attractive—that is, scantily clothed women, fast cars, fast bikes and UFC cage fighting (Miller 2008; Owens 2014).

From within these activity microcosms Monster Energy has its own influencers who carry the brand message on various social media. For example, the participants had no difficulty recognising UFC fighter and brand ambassador Conor McGregor, pictured in Figure 4.27.

![Figure 4.27. UFC fighter Conor McGregor endorsing Monster Energy.](source: Monster Energy (2019b))

Monster Energy also appears to make greater use of user-generated content, particularly with respect to fan art on Pinterest (see Figure 4.28). The brand is comfortable in allowing consumers to use its logo, colours and other brand components for creative ends. Not only do these efforts reflect to them consumers’ perceptions of and interactions with the brand, but it also helps Monster establish an online community that actively engages with the brand in unique ways.

![Figure 4.28. Monster Energy fan art.](source: Monster Energy (2019c))

### 4.3.1 Monster Energy Themes

Twelve key themes were unearthed from reviewing Monster Energy’s social media content. These were defined as measured rebellion, having an underground movement,
wearing merchandise to fit in, fan art, antisocial behaviour, male aggression, embracing the dark side, appealing to ‘bogan’ subculture, appealing to the working class, alpha males, spokespeople, females as play objects, urban environments and conquering nature. Each of these themes are discussed in detail from Sections 4.3.1.1 to 4.3.1.14.

4.3.1.1 Measured Rebellion

For Monster Energy ‘cool’ is defined in terms of measured rebellion (Thomassen 2018). This can be summarised through three elements: first, there is evidence of a status quo that requires a level of conformity; second, there needs to be some marginal behaviour that strays from conformity; and third, there needs to be some divergence from what is considered the ‘norm’ (Thomson 2018). For example, if a uniform requires all team members to wear baseball caps and one individual decides to wear it backwards, this is a form of measured rebellion and, hence, may be considered ‘cool’. Indeed, this sentiment is reflected in Participant SK’s claim in the pilot study that ‘much the same as Red Bull, [Monster] do[es] get the same message across but marginally different’.

Monster Energy likes to do things ‘marginally different’, and for this the brand can be considered as engaging in measured rebellion. For example, Monster was the first energy drink brand to introduce the larger 550 mL can (see Figures 4.29 and 4.30) rather than follow the industry norm, which is set at 250 mL.

Figure 4.29. Monster Energy can size.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)
Figure 4.30. Three 250 mL cans of different energy drink brands.


Further, Monster is a name sponsor of the Mercedes Benz Formula 1 team. Unlike other energy drink brands Monster promotes images of the drivers themselves pictured wearing or surrounded by the logo (see Lewis Hamilton in Figure 4.31), not the cars themselves (which still feature the brand’s logo).

Figure 4.31. Lewis Hamilton.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

A further example of Monster’s measured rebellion is that while other energy drink brands promote stunt drivers in luxury supercars, Monster tends to show individuals in cars that ordinary people might drive, such as a Ford (see Figure 4.32).

Figure 4.32. Ford Mustang drifting.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)
The research participants noted that while Monster Energy’s visual content shared some similarities with other energy drink brands (i.e., the status quo or the norm), the brand also did certain things a little differently, such as using images that focused primarily on motorbikes (or, according to Participant SK, ‘motorsport, motorsport and more motorsport’) and cars, but very little else. This may be considered ‘cool’ in terms of Monster exhibiting a form of measured rebellion against marketing or industry norms. Hence, the following quotation reflects this sentiment:

Immediately similar to Red Bull, but more motorcycles and bikies. Cars, a lot more wheel focus. Red Bull had wheels and stuff but it is a lot more to do experiences and features things like wakeboarding and not concentrating on one thing. (EC)

In popular youth culture particularly throughout the post war period, motorbikes, cars and other vehicles symbolised freedom through mobility (Delbosc and Currie 2014; Grushkin 2006). They provided the rider or driver increased self-reliance and independence from the status quo—again, another form of measured rebellion, particularly powerful for young people who are typically driven around by their parents or older family members. Hence, when participants were asked to describe Monster Energy as a real-life person, WM stated that the brand is ‘probably like a greaser outlaw straight out of 1950s America’. Perhaps it is without coincidence that Monster’s imagery online links the brand with bikers and motorcycle culture, and, to some extent, the ‘outlaw’ archetype—all of which ally this rebellious ideal. Stereotypically, outlaw bikers are, as the James Dean film dictates, ‘rebels without a cause’, who associate with other misfits by forming gangs. Indeed, some might consider this ‘cool’. Figure 4.33 of Marlon Brando’s character in the 1953 film The Wild One personifies this rebellious ideal and WM’s perception of Monster Energy as a cool, ‘rock-and-roll’ label or persona. More specifically in the subgenres of hard rock or even heavy metal, it is neither mainstream nor is it unfashionable to be a rebel; rather, the dark side is celebrated, and hyper masculinity and ‘sticking it to the man’ is encouraged—much like on Monster Energy’s Instagram.
Further, Monster Energy (2019a) states on its website that anyone is able to use its brand for self-promotion and includes any aspirant in their featured activities such as rally driving or mixed martial arts. This is unlike many other brands, which are often more protective of their brand, logo and intellectual property, again illustrating Monster Energy’s supposed deviation from the ‘norm’. Instead, the brand encourages consumers to wear or use the logo freely as a marker of their lifestyle, and this, in turn, awards Monster a sense of countercultural credibility. In fact, car brand Volkswagen employed a similar strategy when attempting to establish itself in the North American market during the post war period (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Overall, allowing and encouraging consumers to use, adapt and modify the Monster brand and its symbols is an example of user-generated content and bottom-up branding akin to countercultural defiance. This can be further broken down into two subsections: merchandise and fan art.

4.3.1.2 Wearing Branded Merchandise to Fit in

Monster’s trademark claw symbol can be found on various apparel items. According to the brand’s website, anyone, not just those who are on their payroll, can wear the claw mark. Participants in this study also acknowledged the distinct nature of Monster’s merchandise (see Figure 4.34):

You won’t find any other energy drink company with this type of range [of clothing]. It looks like something someone would wear if they have a sponsorship. It’s, like, put it on, promote our stuff. They do it because the others have T-shirts or hats, not jumpers or shoes. (PS)
Interestingly, this style of self-promotion was also identified by Participant MR, who personally knew someone with a Monster Energy sponsorship:

My friend does all these types of things with rallying, motorbikes and stunts. And he has got like Monster everywhere; it looks really difficult [to perform], and [he] even got the coloured clothes. (MR)

One male participant found the branded apparel aspirational and wanted a pair of the Monster-branded Nike shoes for himself, seen in Figure 4.34:

I dig those shoes, not because they are Nike and number one in the US, but [because] those shoes are pretty cool. They are like advertising themselves. Those shoes are trying to tell the rest of the world all about you, and if you wear them, you are set. (WM)

WM’s assertions suggest that Monster is not trying to act like a brand when it encourages people to wear its apparel. Instead, they want to ignite a sense of camaraderie among consumers, as though they are part of a wider movement. Hence, Monster’s (2019a) website expresses that ‘we are all about our fans rocking our Monster logo anyway they want’. In this sense, the brand encourages the notion that anyone who wears its logo will feel as if they are a part of the ‘gang’ and accepted into some form of insider sanctuary away from the outside world. Essentially, the brand makes consumers want to wear the Monster logo because its brand values are tantamount to their own personal brand values, which helps them feel accepted by other ‘insiders’ who also wear the famed green claw.
4.3.1.3 Fan Art

When talking through Monster Energy’s Pinterest, the participants also found the fan art engaging. One male participant liked the custom gumball machine in Figure 4.35, stating he ‘could probably eat the whole lot if it was full’ (WM); he then remarked, ‘did someone [make] that in craft? Holy crap!’ upon viewing about the claw marks in Figure 4.36. With craft often likened to a school subject, the claw marks along with the gumball machine and the faux birthday cake in Figure 4.37 suggest ‘youth’ is a dominant theme on Monster’s Pinterest, perhaps as these activities accurately reflect its young target market.

The sharing of fan art through Pinterest is another example of the type of bottom-up branding strategy Monster employs, in that all five of these items depicted in Figures 4.36 to 4.38 were made by different artists, and are not official Monster Energy merchandise (despite carrying the brand’s logo). Apart from the birthday cake in Figure 4.37, all of these items are available to purchase on the craft trading website Etsy.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)

Figure 4.36. Fan-made Monster Energy claw wall ornament.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)

Figure 4.37. Monster-inspired birthday cake.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)
Indeed, other brands may feature fan art on Pinterest, but they were as not as easily sourced during the initial search for the study. Perhaps this is because promoting and displaying fan art diverges from what is considered normal practice for an energy drink brand. Nonetheless, this only plays into Monster’s liberal, bottom-up approach that incites consumers’ creative freedom.

4.3.1.4 Antisocial Behaviour

Participants noted that many of the activities depicted on Monster Energy’s Instagram and Pinterest pages reflected antisocial behaviour, with subjects often appearing to be part of an outlawed or unfavourable gang. For example, WM explained that Monster is not part of the mainstream and that ‘they don’t like society, but they are into cars and fights’. Others expressed similar views, finding such imagery is ‘all about burning rubber—pardon the pun—and having a good time doing so’ (PS). Many of the activities represented in these images also seem to be borderline illegal and intended to push societal boundaries, whether by using firearms or doing burnouts (e.g., see Figures 4.26 and 4.39). One female participant, whose partner engages in the latter, found this image to be particularly appealing, stating, ‘I like doing it; my partner has a burnout car, and we do a lot of it’ (VL). However, in celebrating such forms of antisocial behaviour Monster Energy runs the risk of normalising it to a point at which, in the case of Participant VL, it becomes acceptable to be a ‘hoon’ for the sake of self-expression or to relieve boredom.
4.3.1.5 Male Aggression

Antisocial behaviour on Monster’s socials was not only limited to cars but also physical fights. Indeed, Monster Energy is a significant sponsor of cage fighting, most notably the UFC. The brand routinely posts images on its Instagram account of cage fighters, to which most of the participants were drawn, with several admitting to watching the sport and choosing these images because the scenes were familiar to them. To quote CH when selecting Figure 4.40, ‘I don’t mind watching the UFC, so I didn’t realise that they sponsored it. That is more what I am interested in’. Similarly, in relation to Figure 4.40, MR explained that ‘they haven’t whitewashed it, and I love the UFC and can see it is part of their culture’.

Images of UFC fighting such as those in Figure 4.40 proved popular among the participants and were selected on four different occasions. Such depictions all feature overt themes of male aggression, which Monster-endorsed fighter Conor McGregor exemplifies in Figure 4.41.
Figure 4.41. UFC fighter Conor McGregor embodies male aggression.


As with hoon driving, cage fighting (or mixed martial arts) is controversial and its legality is sometimes questionable, depending on the location of a fight, of course. Safety is another concern, due to the high occurrence of head trauma in those who participate (Lockwood et al 2018). Much like burnouts, images of UFC fighting on Monster’s social media have the potential of normalising aggression beyond the octagon where fighters compete. In recent years, several high-profile cases in Australia have dealt with one-punch deaths in young males who think the only way to solve a problem is through aggression and violence (Lockwood et al 2018). Hence, posting such hyper-aggressive imagery risks permitting this type of behaviour, not solely by implication but as reflected in the participants’ fondness for them without apprehension. This is a real concern from a social marketing perspective.

4.3.1.6 Embracing the Dark Side

As the name suggests, Monster Energy projects images that are associated with darkness and the occult, a sentiment too expressed in most participants’ responses. The ‘dark side’ has a multifaceted narrative, which can be understood through the study themes—of being compelled by a force, meeting its inhabitant(s) and adhering to one’s surroundings. For example, the cat in Figure 4.42 can be viewed as an entity succumbed to the ‘dark side’, as conveyed through the brooding contrasts and colouring, and the cat’s eye having turned a sinister shade of green, reflecting the Monster Energy claw.
Figure 4.42. Cat with evil eye represented by Monster Energy branding.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)

In fact, the brand’s name itself, Monster, also suggests that something sinister is lurking from within. Figure 4.42 exemplifies this notion, and captured Participant MH’s attention for ‘the background’, as ‘it is more enticing’. To this, MR also noted that ‘it looks like an animal is trying to get out’. These comments suggest that the ‘dark side’ wherein Monster Energy resides is actually in consumers’ minds, and the brand merely invites you to enter (or awaken) the darkness.

Participant MR also stated in relation to Figure 4.42, ‘I think this one has more of a Halloween feel to it’, which is a holiday renowned for celebrating all things dark and horrific. MR went on to say after selecting the image that ‘it is more, like, freak out and drink monster then go around like the walking dead’. What this implies is that Monster Energy, or, more precisely, its fans, are using darkness creatively to play with popular culture. For example, the famous ‘keep calm and carry on’ signs of Second World War Britain experienced a pop culture revival in the early 2010s, of which Monster Energy took part (see Figure 4.43).

Figure 4.43. Keep Calm and Drink Monster

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)

Hence, Participant MR’s mention of the ‘walking dead’ is merely another pop culture reference to the cult television program of the same name. This may suggest that
zombies and other mythical monsters can be a source of humour as well as a source of darkness and horror.

Other participants found that the ‘dark side’ of Monster Energy features in every image posted in relation to and from the brand online. Encapsulated by CH, ‘not as many pristine places [are] on display’ on Monster’s socials. Unlike other energy drink brands on Instagram, which otherwise promote beautiful natural settings, Monster Energy has gone for a darker, grittier look.

4.3.1.7 Appealing to the ‘Bogan’ Subculture

The Australian colloquial term ‘bogan’, meaning someone who is uncultured or from a working-class background, is similar to the British ‘chav’, or the ‘redneck’ or ‘white trash’ label in the US. Overwhelmingly, each of these terms were used in participants’ descriptions of Monster’s target market. The brand’s appeal to ‘bogan’ subculture is perhaps best reflected in its obsession with motocross and drifting, as seen in Figure 4.44.

Figure 4.44. Trucks with Monster Energy livery jumping.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b, 2019c)

When asked to described Monster Energy as a person, some participants conveyed this ‘bogan’ sentiment quite explicitly:

I’d say they are into speed, a lot of … motorbikes and cars, and testing the limits of what a car could do, like a mechanic.

This is more of a ‘bogan-y’ person than the Instagram page, if that makes sense.

The others [energy drink pages] had more of a wider audience, and this one is more specific: narrower, working-class bogan type. (CH)
I think personally [it] is much the same: outgoing, energetic, like more harder than V; in New Zealand we call these characters boy racers. (EC)

Monster, on the other hand, is for people who are a bit bogan; people who are compelled to look at others superficially. (MH)

Importantly, participants who described Monster as ‘bogan’ listed Red Bull as their preferred brand. This may indicate that there is some form of class disparity among this age or industry cohort.

4.3.1.8 Appealing to the Working Class

For the participants who preferred Monster there was noted pride in the brand and its association with the working class. Participants were compelled to choose images that favoured working classes, evidenced, for example, in one female participant’s choice of a Ford Mustang (e.g., see Figures 3.7 and 4.32), which has longstanding appeal as the archetypal ‘working-class’ car (Mark and Pearson 2001).

In selecting Figure 3.7, Participant VL stated ‘the Mustang … is a trick car’, her dream car and one she aspires to drive. She also went on to personify Monster as a working class type with ‘a good brain for activities. They get the job done and do they do their job well’ (VL). Clearly, to Participant VL being part of this social class is neither harmful nor degrading.

4.3.1.9 Alpha Males

An alpha male can be defined as a man who assumes a dominant or domineering role in social or professional situations. They can be recognised by their antagonism or intimidation over other subjects, as shown in Figure 4.45. The reason for this aggression is to prove to viewers that they too can reach their physical peak by dominating the competition. Monster actively decides to promote a pathway to becoming an alpha male through testosterone-fuelled aggression. However, in posting these images the brand is empowering and enabling similar forms of destructive behaviour.
In this sense, Monster Energy makes an effort to promote itself as a male-dominated brand and by doing so positions all of its male subjects as tough alpha males. As one female participant noted, ‘it is all about the male and nothing about the female’ (MH).

4.3.1.10 Spokespeople

Not only are the men pictured in Monster Energy’s socials tough alphas, but also they are recognisable celebrities. Having familiar spokespeople represent the brand may suggest that Monster uses a top-down branding approach to draw fans into its appeal. Indeed, the brand’s Instagram page makes it easy to follow the narratives behind endorsers Ken Block or Conor McGregor, as its features regular posts about the two. Repetition breeds familiarity, so for those who aspire to be like these celebrities such posts may provide a path they can follow—an option that is not as clearly available on other energy drink brands’ social media.

This is particularly true for the brand’s main celebrity endorsers Block (Figure 4.46) and McGregor (Figure 4.41), who are both male and constitute the bulk of the content posted by Monster Energy on social media. Evidently, this tactic has proven successful in that participants seemed to recognise them instantly. For example, CH stated that he liked ‘Connor McGregor [because] he is a laugh’, and that ‘one right there, Ken Block. He is just awesome, man’ (WM).
Figure 4.46. Brand ambassador and rally driver Ken Block.

Source: Ungersbock (2015)

4.3.1.11 Females as Play Objects

The females depicted on Monster’s socials are often a side thought to the main attraction: the stunt man. Here, women are objectified and reduced to extras. The brand even has a separate Instagram page dedicated to ‘Monster Girls’, where they are pictured on the sidelines in stunt videos, acting like brand cheerleaders (Figure 4.47). In almost every post featuring women they are scantily clad in bikinis or low-cut tops for added sex appeal. Monster Energy appears to make no apology for objectifying women and using them to attract the brand’s primary target audience, notably young adult males in their teens or early 20s.

Figure 4.47. Monster Energy’s stereotypical depiction of women.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b); Monster Energy Girls (2019)

In reference to Monster’s portrayal of women, one female participant was offended, stating ‘it is so, like, 20 years ago’ (MH). She also acknowledged that Red Bull ‘also use[s] promo girls but not in this way’, admitting that Monster’s strategy is ‘very male dominated. Everything is about the male and not the female’ (MH).
4.3.1.12 The Portrayal of Women Shadow Theme

Despite the negativity there is some evidence that Monster employs a more modern approach to women, which portrays them as positive role models for young audiences. Much like Red Bull, the brand offers depictions of women engaged in traditionally male-dominated pursuits such as surfing (Figure 4.48).

Figure 4.48. Positive female role models.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

When describing Figure 4.48 Participant MH said:

I also like this one because this lady here is doing what she loves, she is surfing but is not doing it in a bikini or anything like that. She is herself, and in this day and age, this is how women should be.

4.3.1.13 Urban Environment

Overall, the majority of Monster Energy’s social media images have a dark, gritty and industrial feel. This is usually because, as seen in the aforementioned Figure 4.26, subjects are depicted in built rather than natural environments. Here, the image suggests that rather than posting images taken in natural environments, with bright colours and cinematic qualities, Monster Energy attempts to bring a sense of reality to its brand by showing the world as it is. It can be mean and cold, and a darker side (all of which are characteristic of the Monster Energy world) exists. These factors are further emphasised with the use of dark grey concrete that contrasts the cloudy sky above in Figure 4.26. It is not a pretty place; however, it is a familiar scene for youths in most cities.
4.3.1.14 Conquering Nature

There are some exceptions to the urban environment theme. Some participants did select Monster Energy images that displayed natural settings such as those in Figure 4.49. Although featuring some elements of nature, these depictions also show the natural environment as something to be conquered, not complemented. For example, in Figure 4.49 the 4x4 is attempting to drive over a canyon, while another subject bids to mountain bike down a sloping tree.

![Image](image-reference)

**Figure 4.49. Monster Energy conquering natural environment**

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

In reference to Figure 4.49 Participant MR stated that ‘this photo has scenery that has to look like that it has been conquered by Monster’. This implies that the men in Monster Energy posts are not there to compete against each other, but that they also view the natural world as another adversary to conquer. The word itself ‘conquer’ further suggests that these men (and especially those in Figure 4.49) have the right to hold dominion over the land, unlike those in Red Bull’s depictions, which show man as a counterpart to the world.

4.3.2 Summarising the Monster Energy Themes

Brand meaning for Monster Energy seems to be generated in a bottom-up rather than top-down manner. The participants in the study found comparatively fewer activities depicted on Monster’s social media (especially Pinterest) to other energy drink brands. Instead, Monster emphasises community and that anyone (including fans) can wear its logo. In fact, the brand’s Pinterest board has sections dedicated to fan art and other merchandise. In this sense, Monster implies that anyone who feels rejected should form their own tribe in an act of ‘measured rebellion’. They, like the brand, do not
need to behave like the others and should follow their own rules, even if their actions are outdated or against modern society’s expectations and norms.

4.3.3 Monster Energy Themes Implications

4.3.3.1 Positive

Through its co-created messages and enabling of outsiders to use its logo, Monster Energy has empowered those who are on the fringe to engage in a movement hinged on belonging. In this sense, the brand’s strategy appeals to the human need to seek others with like minds.

Further, sharing the logo also affords consumers some form of credibility, especially if one aspires to be the next Ken Block or Conor McGregor. For this, Monster attempts to legitimise the average person’s journey to reach their own potential. One could then perceive the recurring theme of aggression as a mere display of natural human emotion, much like joy or sadness. By dealing with anger in a constructive manner rather than allowing it to bottle up is a form of catharsis that is positive to an individual’s mental health.

4.3.3.2 Negative

Actively encouraging antisocialism runs the risk of normalising destructive behaviour. Individuals may become desensitised into thinking that petty criminal acts such as performing burnouts in cars or vandalising property is acceptable, as there is no direct victim involved. In a social setting, these types of activities may also encourage gang cultures.

Much like Red Bull, Monster Energy also spruiks performance-enhancement messages, but more so by using anger constructively to forge positive ends. However, this too risks normalising destructive behaviour such as engaging in fights and permitting young audiences that the only way to express their anger is through physical violence. Indeed, this has wider implications, especially in an Australian context where the infamous coward punch is rife among young males.

Further, depicting women as marginal to man and forever dressed in little clothing may also normalise the objectification of women among younger men. This may have been
acceptable in previous decades, but increasingly (especially amid the backdrop of the #metoo movement) this appears to be an antiquated remnant of a bygone era.

Targeting subordinated social classes may also be appealing to blue-collar workers, but it can emphasise a form of class disparity among those who identify as middle or lower class. As a result, Monster Energy runs the risk of being disparaged by different sections of society.

4.4 V Energy

Of the eight participants, two chose V Energy as their first choice of energy drink brand. Participants only selected six images from a social media page that had a limited number of posts and no new content posted since 2015. At the time of data collection V Energy had no presence on Pinterest, unlike Red Bull and Monster Energy. For this reason, the brand was not included originally in this study. If it had a greater presence on Pinterest, the same six participants who selected V Energy would have also undergone the same process as the other two brands’ samples.

Nevertheless, V Energy was vital to include because it captured another side to the energy drink market that is remarkably different from other brands. The themes uncovered in the study showed its comparatively ‘uncool’ image intended to target a niche ‘nerd’ subculture through humour and indifference.

![Figure 4.50](image-url)  
**Figure 4.50 Example of V Energy Humour Appeal**

Source V Energy (US) 2019

Figure 4.50 is the exemplar of V Energy imagery. First, relative to both Red Bull and Monster, V Energy branding is more ubiquitous in all of their Instagram posts and appears as a standard in the bottom left hand corner of the posts. Second, the use of brand colours is a lot more pronounced compared to either Red Bull or Monster
Energy, with V Energy using the colour green, which has connotations of health and well-being (Singh 2006). Third, in using a humourous appeal in their images, as shown with the dog “playing dead” in Figure 4.50, it suggests that V Energy does not take itself too seriously and portrays the idea of consumers being low energy in a “light-hearted” manner.

4.4.1 Uncool

The term ‘uncool’ relates to remaining true to oneself and not trying to project a persona based on social niceties (UnCool Elisa 2011). This definition characterises the images posted on V Energy’s Instagram page (see Figure 4.50), which are wholly unlike the other energy drink brands’ content that instead promote action and exhilaration. The two participants who initially chose V Energy as their preferred brand did not describe any of its posts as cool or another variation of the term.

Figure 4.51 A selection of images posted on V Energy Australia’s Instagram page.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

If being ‘uncool’ means being true to oneself, using ordinary people as subject matter in V Energy’s posts makes the brand wholly ‘uncool’. They are neither achieving great feats under pressure nor stirring up a rebellion, unlike Red Bull and Monster. Instead, V Energy promotes common, everyday situations that, in turn, make the brand seem more relatable to the average consumer.

4.4.2 Nerd Culture

V Energy’s social imagery directly targets nerd subculture, in that the brand’s Instagram routinely incorporates comic book heroes and video games synonymous with ‘nerds’ (see Figure 4.51). Part of being considered a ‘nerd’ is living out of want and not living as others want, solely to fit in with greater subsections of society (McArthur 2008).
Figure 4.51. V Energy images depicting nerd subculture

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

More examples of nerd culture can be seen in Figure 4.52. In the first image V Energy is seen promoting a competition followers can enter to win a prize pack for the superhero film *X Men Apocalypse*. The second is a cross-promotion for Marvel’s *Deadpool*.

Figure 4.52. V Energy Marvel Superhero films cross promotion.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

Again, V posted a series of cross-promotions for *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, another Marvel-based superhero movie (Figure 4.53).

Figure 4.53. V Energy Marvel Avengers cross promotion.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)
This is not to say that other energy drink brands have not targeted nerd subculture through video games or superhero film cross-promotions. However, it is to say that V Energy is comparatively more prolific in their attempts to its product as such.

4.4.3 ‘Going Mainstream’

By definition, the colloquial term ‘sellout’ means betraying a cause for personal advancement. This typically applies to musicians who attempt to appeal to a broader audience by producing commercial music and going ‘mainstream’.

This approach is unique to V Energy, in that other energy drink brands use extreme sports and celebrity athletes with little product placement involved—thus, making them look ‘cool’. Comparatively, neither Red Bull nor Monster overtly feature their products online or inform followers where to purchase either drink. Conversely, V Energy, an ‘uncool’ brand, uses ‘selling out’ to its advantage. The three participants who initially chose V had found almost all of the brand’s Instagram posts to be pure advertising and that they acted more like a traditional brand. For example, posts directly targeted sectors (i.e., the North American market), while others laid claim as the ‘#1 energy drink in Australia’, which is available for purchase at 7-Eleven (see Figure 4.54).

Figure 4.54. V Energy humour appeal examples.


This sentiment was also reflected by various participants’ who chose V as their preferred brand:

It’s a bit hard to say really; they like to heavily advertise their product. (EC)

It is very hard to tell their personality because it just seems to be branded messages they are portraying. (SK)
We were in Hawaii a couple of years ago, and they were selling V as the Australian energy drink. (PS)

As the brand appears to be a total ‘sellout’ and relatively ‘uncool’, V Energy may presumably be detached from the youth market. However, the strategy and thinking behind the brand’s Instagram page is quite the opposite, and is instead geared towards making the brand more relatable to this very sector. This is achieved through V’s posts that directly reflect young consumers’ habits (e.g., emphasising the drink’s ability to help students endure all-night study sessions).

4.4.4 The Mundane

One of the main themes V Energy employs in its imagery is the mundane. This facet seemed to resonate with Participant EC, who stated that they ‘used to drink V a lot and at the last minute like to get things done. It looks like personally something I can relate to’. For busy people like EC and the average office worker, a messy environment might not be exciting, but it is a realistic representation of a typical V drinker’s everyday setting (see Figure 4.55).

Figure 4.55. Cluttered desk.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

Even V’s associations with sport are comparatively dull. For example, in reference to Figure 4.56 Participant EC exclaimed it is simply ‘V getting into the golf hole’. Much like the sport itself, golf is just that, relatively ‘boring’ compared to other brands’ depictions of motorbikes and skydiving. However, golf serves another symbolic purpose, in that by drinking V one can get ahead of the task at hand.
4.4.5 Use of Humour

Another theme unique to V is its use of humour. At first glance, the brand does not take itself or the audience too seriously, and that made its content, such as that in Figure 4.57, far more engaging to the study sample. However, humour in every image also works with one consistent punchline: the viewer is ‘low’ on ‘V’; here, ‘V’ might be a friendly and familiar pick-me-up such as a fitness band or a dog. In all, V is that one vivacious friend who brightens up everyone’s mood. For this reason both Participants PS and EC personified V as ‘someone who is fun to be around’ or ‘someone who is quirky’.

4.4.6 Normalising Performance Enhancements

Posting images to which audiences can relate means that V Energy can push the theme of performance enhancements because the drink is supposedly elevating them to a greater level. On reasoning his image selection Participant EC summarised that V ‘is mainly about the product and how [it] gets you through the day. I quite like that
because that’s how I drink V’. However, the risk is that consuming energy drinks becomes second nature, and they begin function as a source of energy in the morning or mid-afternoon, no different to tea or coffee, to get consumers through their day. This sentiment was echoed by Participant PS who also drank ‘V a lot because it keeps me going’.

The advert in Figure 4.58 captures this energy ‘boost’ V promises to its consumers, and clarifies just how one feels before and after consumption. Evidently, the dog conveys this same desire for the product’s performance-enhancing quality.

Figure 4.58. V Energy doge image.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

One might garner the response that V is pushing the message that it is socially acceptable for ordinary people to take performance-enhancement substances (under which energy drinks can be classified) due to a modern desire to constantly be at your best.

4.4.7 Summarising the V Energy Themes

Brand meaning for V Energy means tapping into more mainstream trends, evidenced by the traditional nature of its advertising on Instagram. The brand’s product and logo are mentioned in almost every post, which starkly contrasts both Red Bull and Monster Energy. V has also created a niche market for itself by targeting nerd subculture through cross-promotions for video games and comic books. The brand also uses humour in everyday situations, a characteristic participants noted as likeable. Indeed, these same factors also help frame V as ‘uncool’; however, this has actually positioned them as the ‘guy’ or ‘girl’ next door, who is more relatable than both Red Bull and
Monster combined. Indeed, this comes at a cost, in that relatability also means V can more easily push a performance-enhancement narrative across to consumers.

4.4.8 Positive Implications

Most importantly, V Energy’s imagery is relatable to ordinary young people. In portraying everyday situations, the brand presents itself as an equal to the average consumer. Combining this approach with humour on Instagram only further demonstrates the brand’s lighter side, therefore, increasing its likeability.

4.4.9 Negative Implications

V’s supposed ability to cure fatigue normalises performance enhancements. Its posts are hinged on the promise that the product offers energy for consumers to be at peak at all times. In turn, some can interpret this in response to the societal burden that begs constant perfection and non-stop productivity. V disregards the importance of rest or relaxation, which is vital to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Aesthetically speaking, the brand’s token green backgrounds are traditionally associated with health and nature, thus, risking the implication that V Energy is a beneficial and wholesome product.

4.5 Conclusion

First, the Red Bull analysis revealed that the brand is more concerned with reaching a broader audience through extraordinary individual feats that challenge or defy nature. The brand’s core themes regard solitary pursuits to ‘find’ oneself, total self-expression and reaching a level of self-actualisation. The subjects in Red Bull’s visuals often exhibit elitist behaviour, with men portrayed as living playboy lifestyles who drive expensive cars, sail yachts or ski in the Alps, and women as empowered beings who rival men in traditionally male pursuits, such as sport.

Second, Monster Energy projects more of an underground or dark persona. Unlike other brands, Monster encourages outsiders and novices to borrow its token claw mark logo and use it to represent who they are. Through this, there is more evidence of user-generated content on its social media channels compared to the other brands.

As the name suggests, Monster’s visuals are always dark, and participants in the study found this aspect particularly enticing. The brand also exudes a working-class appeal,
as it features cars doing burnout and UFC fights, both of which could be perceived as lowbrow activities. Monster’s celebrity endorsers are also immediately recognisable figures who are often depicted as tough, alpha males (hence, the frequent displays of male aggression on both Pinterest and Instagram). Naturally, the females in these images are designated as a side act and often objectified, both of which the participants found to be somewhat offensive.

Finally, V Energy was framed as comparatively uncool sellouts, as evidenced by the traditional nature of the brand’s digital advertising. Its images were wholly based on nerd subculture, with frequent reference to comics and gaming. Nevertheless of the three brands V Energy proved more relatable among participants, as it routinely featured ordinary people in everyday situations.

Overall, these VINE stories formed the basis from which to build concrete themes in the study. As such, Chapter 5 takes these concepts and constructs more abstract themes, while the collected visual data become subject to the five A analysis.
Chapter 5: Five ‘A’ Findings

5.1 Introduction

In this section, the five ‘As’ (aura, arcadia, allegory, antimony and archetype) conceptualised in the literature review have been applied to the visual data collected, using the researcher’s own interpretations. Section 5.2 first explores aura and establishes and compares each brand’s essence by asking what each of the images on each label’s social media stand for and what their authentic meanings are. Section 5.3 next regards arcadia and discusses the three brands’ communities (i.e., how is the ideal brand community defined, what does it look like and who is the target audience?). Allegory is explored in Section 5.4 to gauge each brand’s ‘story’ (i.e., how do the visuals tell a story and are there consistent tropes?). Relevant and available historical information about each energy drink brand is also incorporated in this discussion. Section 5.5 is antimony or the brand paradox, which looks at any contradictions or shadow effects present in the visual data, while Section 5.6 compares each brand’s personality (or archetypes) and asks, what type of persona do they represent? Are they the same for each brand or completely different? In this section the criteria were derived from Mark and Pearson’s (2001) study. Additionally, social media comparisons to other brands that do not sell energy drinks, but that share the same archetypes, are made.

5.2 Aura: The Brand’s Essence

Aura refers to a brand’s essence, which is the meaning behind its message, what it stands for and what it represents. This includes how a brand wants its consumers to perceive it (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

5.2.1 Red Bull

From the preliminary visual analysis, it appears that Red Bull’s aura is about seizing the day and rising to any challenge that awaits. This notion constitutes the basic makeup of a typical Red Bull social media post: bright, and full of lively colours and contrast, as demonstrated in Figure 5.1.
Figure 5.1. Red Bull seizing the day.

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Red Bull’s well-known tagline ‘it gives you wings’ is also clearly present in its aura, as many of its images feature elements of flying (see Figure 4.16) or freefalling (see Figures 4.4 and 4.15). Using such imagery that closely reflects the tagline and central brand theme provides Red Bull a level of authenticity, which is the first essential element in understanding its aura.

Having something sacred is the second key element of one’s ‘aura’. In the images examined the protagonists appear to be ethereal, as though they are all floating in midair, making them and their actions appear otherworldly and defiant of nature itself. This is related to the more traditional meaning of aura (Brown Kozinets and Sherry 2003) derived from Walter Benjamin’s (1999) work on artwork depicting saints and other religious figures painted in church settings (Boyne 2017). Essentially, most if not all depictions give the effect that such icons are not intended to be earthbound (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

The third key element of Red Bull’s aura concerns its protagonists seemingly always embarking on some form of a journey into the unknown. Blue skies and wide-open spaces dominate the images, as though perpetually set south-west in the US (e.g., Figure 4.4). Further, not only are these figures presented as ethereal beings, but they are also on a sacred quest set to face a daunting challenge ahead. In this sense, Red Bull wants to insinuate to consumers that the energy boost its drink contains gives them the power to accomplish anything.

Across both Instagram and Pinterest Red Bull has clearly established an aura from which the research participants could derive great meaning. They were often drawn to
images to which they could relate, either from past experiences such as family holidays or through personal aspirations such as fulfilling items on their bucket list (e.g., skiing or hiking, which both feature heavily on Red Bull’s social media). For example, one male participant found the aurora borealis in Figure 5.2 from Red Bull’s ‘Travel and Bucket List’ board on Pinterest inspiring, as he had ‘a bucket list of [his] own’ (CH). Similarly, in relation to Figure 5.3 another female participant explained:

I have a connection with the ski slopes because my family was originally from New Zealand. It reminds of times we go on family holidays there and we go skiing. (MH)

Figure 5.2. An aurora borealis.
Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Figure 5.3. An freestyle skier.
Source: Red Bull (2019c)

5.2.2 Monster Energy

From a visual analysis perspective (and as the brand name suggests), Monster Energy has a dark aura, as though a shadowy being lurking in the background. It also projects an element of aggression like a beast waiting to pounce, its ever-present green claw the marked feature in the backdrop of almost every social media post the brand
produces. Unsurprisingly, Monster Energy’s tagline according to its website is ‘unleash the beast’ (Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4. Monster Energy’s tagline, ‘unleash the beast’.

Source: Monster Energy (2019a)

This darkness is a prominent feature of Monster’s brand aura. It is brooding and sometimes cold, and the visuals are frequently dim, with contrasting greys and metallics, and mostly industrialised settings. These types of gothic-inspired visual landscapes (e.g., see Figure 4.26) speak directly to individuals who feel alienated by mainstream society, such as young adults, or those ensconced within a street subculture. In this sense, Monster’s aura conveys a sense of outsider authenticity to which outcasts can relate.

There is nothing sacred about the brand’s aura; in many ways it feels almost profane because it deals directly with the ‘dark side’ of life. Yet, like most things the darkness is very alluring; it draws viewers in and wants them to give in to temptation. For example, in Figure 5.5 the Monster can emits a bright, green aura against a black backdrop, and appears as if to say, ‘come and drink me if you dare’.

Figure 5.5. An alluring can of Monster Energy.
This temptation is what Monster Energy’s aura best represents. Its comparatively larger sized cans almost dare one into consumption, but its neon insignia is so alluring that consumers would probably drink it anyway.

5.2.3 V Energy

From a visual analysis perspective, one’s first reaction to V Energy’s aura is likely sparked by its equally fluorescent trademark green. This colour is generally associated with good health and medicine, and may initially indicate that V tries to position itself as a healthy beverage. Here, the colour green is framed markedly different to the demonic nature of Monster’s more sinister green.

This becomes more apparent when considering V Energy’s tagline ‘a massive hit that improves you a bit’. The connotation is that V is a beneficial product, but the images tell a different story. The brand does not make bold claims to their consumers that through V they will suddenly reach elite levels of performance. Instead, the product is positioned as an alternative to traditional caffeine drinks such as tea or coffee, and as a beverage that will get you through the day.

Evidently, V Energy does not feature people jumping off cliffs or performing burnouts in cars, but instead show everyday people working in ordinary settings, such as offices (Figure 5.6). Therefore, the brand projects an aura or presence of ordinariness, and of people trying to go about their daily lives. The cluttered desk in Figure 4.55 and the student cramming for school are excellent examples of this mundane quality that is equally familiar to consumers and relatable on a personal level.

Figure 5.6. V Energy all night study crammer.

However, the key words in V’s tagline ‘improves you a bit’ shows another side of the brand’s aura. V Energy does not take itself too seriously; it has the presence of an ordinary person, and if placed in a social situation it would likely be that happy-go-lucky friend who always attempt to brighten the mood, not be the centre of attention. In other words, V is the ‘lovable loser’ who would not force greatness, but just ‘improve you a bit’ (e.g., see Figures 4.50 and 4.57).

![Figure 5.7. V Energy “Brady Bunch” parody advert.](image)

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

V Energy’s aura is clearly and consistently evident, but it must be noted that the limited amount of images available for analysis proved a drawback. In this sense, the brand’s presence may be in danger. Benjamin’s (1936) argument that replicating art for commercial purposes, such as reprinting known images on postcards, makes original artworks lose their authenticity (and, thus, their aura) (Boyne 2017). Of the three brands examined, V Energy had the most product placements in their Instagram posts, which made the brand’s imagery feel less like a visual story and more like pure advertising. Comparatively, this made V appear less authentic because it clearly uses Instagram as a commercial mechanism rather than to convey a brand story. This was reflected in many of the participants’ responses:

I don’t know if their advertising is intended for here or the US. (PS)

It is mainly about the product. (EC)

It is very hard to tell you about their personality, because it is just branded messages they are portraying. (SK)
Overall, a brand’s ‘aura’ constitutes the underlying vibe its exudes to the world. To further understand brand meaning, Section 5.3 discusses the community (or arcadia) that surrounds a brand.

### 5.3 Arcadia: The Ideal Community

Arcadia refers to an idealised place, or in a marketing sense, the consumer communities (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In this context, ‘arcadia’ captures how energy drink brands visually project their ideal community and its members on social media.

#### 5.3.1 Red Bull

Red Bull’s arcadia reflects being part of a collective group of elite individuals who push the boundaries of what is physically possible. To gain entry, be accepted and maintain membership one must be on top of their game and constantly achieving great feats. Yet, there is not one specialised skill that is favoured over another. Red Bull accepts an eclectic group of people, from artists to musicians, from skydivers to pilots and Formula 1 drivers (Red Bull 2019a), the possibilities are endless. As a brand, this helps broaden the appeal of Red Bull to many different communities within its arcadia. Further, across the brand’s various social media accounts are additional, fragmented Facebook and Instagram pages that are dedicated to different audiences within Red Bull, including Red Bull Games and the Red Bull Music Academy on Twitter, among others.

Being surrounded by fellow elites and engaging with expensive toys and in hobbies, such as flying airplanes and racing supercars (see Figure 5.8), presents Red Bull’s arcadia as a millionaire playboy’s club. Members of this community have no desire to rule once they have reached the highest level of their chosen field. Instead, they refuse to grow up, and engage in extreme and childish acts for fun, such as that depicted in Figure 5.9.
Figure 5.8. Plane and car racing on beach.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

Figure 5.9. Travis Pastrana riding down a roller coaster.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

The original still taken identifies the subject in Figure 5.9 as legendary motocross rider Travis Pastrana. Rather than have him ride on a track Red Bull had him perform an outlandish stunt in a theme park, which, of course, begs associations with youth and childhood experiences, or perhaps with family and past vacations.

On the surface, Red Bull’s community members may appear to have sophisticated tastes, but they still act as if the world is their playground. An example of this is the Red Bull Flying Steps tour advertised in Bratislava, Slovakia in September 2016 (see Figure 3.3). Here, Red Bull organised an artistic experience based around classical music, but instead of allowing an orchestra to play and the patrons to watch, they took a traditional concept and had live performers breakdance to classical music.

Flying Steps and other events such as the Red Bull Air Race represent another aspect of arcadia, in that ‘elite’ community members have the opportunity to pay to witness their heroes in action. Spectators are not at these gatherings to partake but to watch in awe at what these true ‘elites’ can achieve (e.g., Felix Baumgartner’s Red Bull-sponsored space jump in 2012; see Figure 4.14). In a way, the brand allots consumers
within this same group of elites, upon a pedestal above the general population, when they buy into the Red Bull club because they, like their heroes, are on the path to greatness.

There are also ‘hero shrines’ dedicated to Red Bull. Three of the football (soccer) clubs that Red Bull owns (New York Red Bulls FC (US), FC Red Bull Salzburg (Austria) and RB Leipzig (Germany)) all play at stadiums rebranded as ‘Red Bull Arena’. In Austria, there is the Red Bull Hangar-7 (see Figure 3.3) located next to Salzburg Airport. This is a free exhibit where the general public can observe various aircraft, Formula 1 cars and other vehicles owned by Red Bull. This directly helps in building the brand’s arcadia and assigning aspirational meaning to it. This helps assert to the general public that they too can join the elites if they consume Red Bull; anything is possible.

5.3.2 Monster Energy

Through the images selected by the research participants and other features from Monster’s website, Monster Energy’s arcadia feels more like an underground resistance movement. The brand appears to have a laissez faire attitude to its branding and logo, in that anyone can use it. This suggests that Monster’s arcadia is more faithful to the original ‘ideal community’ concept, as the brand is open to all.

![Figure 5.10. Monster Girls in concert.](Source: Monster Energy Girls (2019)

Yet, Monster maintains its underground appeal due to its association with the ‘darker’ side of life. The brand’s arcadia acts as a form of refuge for those who feel alienated, and this is most evident in its members taking part in or following activities that are considered fringe for mainstream appeal (e.g., UFC fighting, motocross and monster trucks; see Figures 4.40, 4.44 and 5.11).
In all, Monster Energy creates a sense of purpose and brings like-minded people together. The brand creates a better example of collective experience because community members are spectating or participating in events together. There is no elitism or bragging at what one can independently achieve, but solidarity in celebrating each other’s success.

Another aspect of Monster’s arcadia is the permitted use and sharing of fan art on Pinterest. Whether customised on a hot rod or constructed as a face mask from old Monster cans (see Figure 4.28), anything is permissible within the Monster community due to the liberal attitude of its branding. Fan creations also reflect how the brand gives to its members and they reciprocate in appreciation. This is not brand-generated content but rather user-generated content, and constitutes an example of bottom-up meaning co-creation.

The fan art on Pinterest is also shared among other fans within the Monster community. Most creations can be purchased directly from the artists through a link that accompanies each image, which redirects consumers to their respective page on Etsy. Evidently, Monster has little artistic control over these artworks and engages in share-alike with due attribution. This offers followers more enhanced experiences and more wholesome brand meaning, as Monster becomes directed by those who actually consume the product rather than those who market it.

This community is still not open to all. Indeed, the majority of its visual content depicts typically masculine activities primarily targeted to young males aged between 16 and 25. Men remain the main protagonists and still exhibit significant machismo, while women are often decorative objects dressed in bikinis.
5.3.3 V Energy

V Energy’s arcadia is primarily centred on a circle of friends working in an office or studying on a university campus. There is nothing elaborate or aspirational in this vision, as most of the images are meant to reflect everyday living (e.g., Figure 5.12).

Figure 5.12. Office worker at desk.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

The level of engagement within this community is more about having jovial social connections, sharing jokes with friends and not taking yourself or anyone else too seriously. Evidently, it is intended to reach out to consumers at their level, not above.

In reviewing each brand’s arcadia (or sense of community), it is important to subsequently recognise that within every brand community it is essential to identify the tropes and stories that play out among community members. Hence, Section 5.4 examines the use of allegory in relation to each of the three brands’ visual content.

5.4 Allegory

Let the pictures tell the story. Allegory refers to the mythology behind a brand (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003), and, from a marketing perspective, encapsulates a brand’s story, how it is co-created within and contributes to a community, and how it is played out through visual content.

5.4.1 Red Bull

Red Bull’s tagline ‘it gives you wings’ (see Figure 5.13) is reflective of the story behind the brand itself and the visual message central to its Instagram. With the majority of its content featuring aviation or free flight, the participants in the study
also found that flight was an important recurring theme throughout Red Bull’s visual strategy (e.g., ‘I think he or she might be a fighter pilot’ (EC)). Hence, the symbolism behind gaining ‘wings’ is borrowed from the armed forces, in which a pilot earns wings once qualified to fly specific aircrafts.

**Figure 5.13. Red Bull’s famous tagline.**

Source: Red Bull (n.d.)

The brand’s backstory according to its official website explains how Red Bull (2019a) launched its energy drink in 1987 after its founder, former Austrian pharmaceutical salesperson Dietrich Mateschitz, discovered the Thai beverage Katang Daeng, which supposedly cured his jet lag following a business trip to Bangkok. Subsequently, Mateschitz offered a partnership deal to the Thai family that owned Katang Daeng and reformulated the product to suit European tastes (Red Bull 2019a).

As a supposed cure for jet lag, the tagline ‘it gives you wings’ not only makes logical sense, but also serves as an effective allegory for the brand’s central purpose. It allows its fictional protagonists the strength to face any challenge, obstacle or adversary through the sheer power of Red Bull: the cure.

**5.4.1.1 Red Bull Allegory 1: A Hero’s Journey**

Red Bull uses a familiar formula to tell its story, the very same one Joseph Campbell (2003) identified in *The Hero’s Journey*. First, we have an ordinary person who receives a call to adventure. Take the girl in Figure 5.14, who, armed with a can of Red Bull, faces the city through which she is set to journey on an urban adventure into the unknown.
Figure 5.14. The ‘protagonist’ awaits her journey.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

The protagonist might venture to an Armenian monastery in Figure 5.15, for example. In reference to this image, Participant MH expressed how ‘it looks like an adventure to get there’. Located on the ‘Adventure’ board on Red Bull’s Pinterest (which features many examples of exotic locations), this image—the ‘destination’ of our protagonist—is meant to inspire the viewer to embark on their own independent travels and live out the same ‘hero’s journey’.

Figure 5.15. A monastery in Armenia.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

This hero seeks assistance from someone wise; in this case Red Bull provides the liquid courage that guides the journey. Much like the tandem skydive in Figure 5.16, in which a novice skydiver is strapped to an experienced instructor, the expert (notice the Red Bull branding on his helmet) controls the parachute and, therefore, is assisting the novice on his or her adventure. Only then does the wise character point the protagonist towards some form of treasure guarded by a formidable adversary (Figure 5.17).
Figure 5.16. Tandem skydive.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

Figure 5.17. Craggy mountain.

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Here, in Figure 5.17, the mountain represents a formidable ‘enemy’ due to the sheer size difference between itself and the two hikers pictured at its base. Its steep gradient would require an experienced climber to scale, not to mention the mist near the top, which may indicate that the mountain has its own microclimate where the weather is unpredictable. Like a novel or epic blockbuster, its grandiosity is reminiscent of the mountains in *The Lord of the Rings’* Middle Earth.

The protagonist must face the adversary alone and in the process endures some form of trial or crisis (Figure 5.18). Therein, a ‘monster’ in the depths needs defeating (McParland 2018). In this instance, the creature is represented by a spelunker descending into a deep cave, with red and orange lights shining on the stalagmites resembling the protagonist’s descent into the underworld.
The protagonist then defeats the adversary, secures the treasure and comes back a stronger person. In the aforementioned Figure 4.3, a surfer reappears above the waves, as if to have survived a wipe-out. He then locates the treasure, represented by the can of Red Bull in Figure 5.19, which seems to possess some magical properties by floating unaided in mid air.

The reason for this familiar narrative pattern is to sell Red Bull as some form of transformative agent. The product itself in this story becomes the source of strength for the protagonist, much like Clark Kent’s phone booth, Popeye’s spinach or Scooby Doo’s Scooby Snacks. Red Bull presents a familiar trope evident in many stories within popular culture positioned among a modern backdrop, with numerous challenges and obstacles people face from within their busy lives. Hence, this visual story also plays into the need for a performance enhancement that will help people to reach their peak and gain the hero’s ‘strength’—not only to live life their best life but also to overcome even the most adverse challenges.
5.4.1.2 Red Bull Allegory 2: The Fountain of Youth

Another allegory presented in Red Bull’s visual content is youth and having excess energy. Presumably, those who consume the drink magically transform into a younger and, therefore, better version of themselves. There is deep-rooted insecurity in the human psyche about aging and getting old, so Red Bull’s story builds directly on this fear and offers consumers the ‘cure’. Finding the fountain of youth or the antidote for old age is an ancient allegory, which has inspired artists and explorers for millennia (Olshansky 2017). For example, sixteenth-century explorer Juan Ponce de Leon discovered the fountain of youth in Florida while traversing the new world (Olshansky 2017). There are also countless stories of heroes on crusades to find the Holy Grail, which bestows one the gift of eternal life.

For example, in Figure 5.20 the street art image of a child wearing an ‘I love life’ singlet and poking his tongue out in jest can be interpreted as the cheeky and playful quality of any healthy child. The fact that Red Bull specifically pinned this image on its Pinterest ‘Art’ board suggests that being youthful is a vital part of the brand meaning and to life itself.

Figure 5.20. Street Art taken in Athens, Greece.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

This youthfulness is also expressed in terms of being carefree. Take the aforementioned Figure 4.13, in which the subject is swinging off a hot air balloon like a child on a playground (albeit in extreme circumstances), as if he never grew up.

Indeed, such imagery also helps to convey the running theme of defying nature. Both aging and decay is part of the same natural process, so those who drink from the fountain of youth (i.e., Red Bull) avoid this path for as long as possible. In this case,
gravity like other natural forces does not apply to those who consume the drink, as they are merely obstacles in the way of achieving youthful, energetic bliss.

Evident from Figure 5.21 (taken from the separate Red Bull Cliff Diving Instagram account), achieving this bliss can also bring hedonistic fun. The diver is jumping into a harbour populated by colourful watercraft, which together suggests that some form of party or celebration awaits the man’s descent. It is as though the image takes place in a massive backyard swimming pool.

![Figure 5.21. High dive.](image)

Source: Red Bull Cliff Diving (2019)

This party theme also extends to the brand’s Pinterest, as evidenced in Figure 5.22. Here, the image depicts a scene filled with beautiful young people, and wholly suggests that Red Bull (as the fountain of youth) can transform consumers into more sociable, vibrant, confident and better-looking versions of themselves.

![Figure 5.22. Red Bull at a party.](image)

Source: Red Bull (2019c)
5.4.2 Monster Energy

There is no clear backstory or legend for Monster Energy, apart from the brand being a later entrant into the market. Launched in 2002, it has since built up its name to become the second most recognisable energy drink in the world (Euromonitor 2016). Monster’s rise can be attributed primarily to its guerrilla tactics such as subtle branding and free product sampling at events involving young people (DeNoon 2012).

5.4.2.1 Monster Energy Allegory 1: Come Into My Lair

A closer look at the Monster Energy logo, with its pitch-black background and bright green claw marks, suggests that something lurks within the shadows. Some of these visions attempt to appeal to consumers’ collective and unconscious thought patterns, perhaps best symbolised through the aforementioned cat and evil eye allegory in Figure 4.42. This image shows the aftermath once the feline gives into temptation and consumes Monster Energy, thus, falling under a dark and sinister spell.

Popular culture is filled with this temptation trope. Notably, in Greek mythology the Sirens in Homer’s Odyssey lure unsuspecting sailors to their doom through sweet music. In the Brothers Grimm, Hansel and Gretel are enticed by a wicked witch living in a gingerbread house, while in Lewis Carrol’s Alice in Wonderland, Alice follows the White Rabbit down the rabbit hole. Again, in the Star Wars saga Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker gives into the dark side to become Sith Lord Darth Vader.

5.4.2.2 Monster Energy Allegory 2: Welcome to the Resistance

The setting for this allegory suggests that there is something vehemently wrong with the world and young people having to conform to society’s expectations. To directly quote Monster Energy (2019a), ‘what kid dreams about landing a 9 to 5 job?’ Here, the brand acknowledges that the standard concept of life is inherently wrong and that youth should fight back against this injustice. Indeed, this allegory forms the foundations of a typical rebel backstory, in which the protagonist feels threatened by the status quo. Suggesting they ‘keep calm and drink Monster’ (see Figure 4.43), for example, can be interpreted as the brand’s acknowledgment that, yes, life is tough, but Monster can help.
Naturally, the oppressed then reach out to others who feel the same way, hence, building on the communal nature of the brand. This sentiment was only strengthened with the creation of ‘The Monster Army’, which was designed to help those in their teens and 20s (see Figure 5.23). By calling the community an army (with no attachment to any national government), Monster makes members feel part of a revolutionary underground movement.

**Figure 5.23. The Monster Army.**

Source: Monster Army (2019)

Images also depict the mobilising of troops. Notably, Figure 5.24 shows UFC fighter Paige Vanzant training for her next bout. This scene is reminiscent of any standard training montage in an action film wherein the protagonist, initially unprepared to fight, trains and becomes unstoppable.

**Figure 5.24. Paige Vanzant training for her next bout.**

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

The opponents in Figure 5.25 now capture judgement day. About to face each other in the octagon, their intimate body language and stare down suggest a physical confrontation could occur at any moment.
Figure 5.25. Two UFC opponents stare each other down.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

These depictions of resistance and fighting back are common in popular culture, particularly in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century dystopian fiction. Dystopia is merely a nightmare world, typically set in a post-apocalyptic future under an oppressive regime (Lenoff 2017). Examples in popular culture include George Orwell’s 1984, The Hunger Games series and James Cameron’s Terminator films.

This dystopian allegory fits Monster Energy’s brand well because it acknowledges the dark side of the human psyche (Lenoff 2017). Yet, the story always plays out with a degree of hope, as many protagonists eventually channel their anger in a constructive manner and fight back against the oppressor.

This allegory has been used in past marketing tactics (Podosehen et al. 2014), perhaps most notably during the 1984 Super Bowl. Apple Macintosh launched its famous ‘1984 commercial’ in which a protagonist defies conformity by physically smashing a large screen splaying an Orwellian ‘Big Brother’ figure addressing an oppressed crowd (Figure 5.26) (Scott 2012).

Figure 5.26. Apple’s famous 1984 commercial.

Source: Mac History (2012)
Interestingly, Apple and Monster Energy share a commonality, in that both are (or were at the time of the 1984 advert) the second most popular brand in their respective industry. In 1984, Apple was up against IBM, while Red Bull remains Monster’s chief adversary (Euromonitor 2016; Scott 1991). Maintaining a dark dystopian storyline in marketing makes sense for both products in this position because they are the underdog and the rebel. Like Apple’s 1984-inspired ad, Monster Energy’s 550 mL can most closely reflects the same defiance to societal expectations.

5.4.3 V Energy

Launched in Australia in 1998, V Energy is among the most favoured energy drink on the national market (Euromonitor 2016). However, this is not the case overseas. Perhaps the humble and jovial angle on which V relies in marketing the brand appeals most to the mindset and easy going nature of the Australasian market. As shown in Figure 5.27, V’s comical attempt to enter the US market (despite being a US brand) using an Australian cultural narrative actually helps to strengthen its position away from the competition and reinforce its title as the nation’s most popular energy drink.

![Figure 5.27. G’day America, V Energy advert.](source: V Energy US (2019)]

5.4.3.1 V Energy Allegory: Not Being the Tall Poppy

The first part of V’s overall allegory projects an anti-aspirational message, which suggests that success is good but overachieving is not. This is commonly known as tall poppy syndrome in Australia and New Zealand (Pierce et al. 2017), which describes a desire to diminish those with good fortune. All of the protagonists in V’s images are everyday folk, and the general plot never involves them becoming elite beings, just a marginally better-adjusted version of them self. Notably, the aforementioned dog
example in Figure 4.54 does not see it magically transform into a pedigree breed following consumption; instead, it simply experiences temporary relief.

The second part of the allegory is admitting to one’s own faults without the desire to change. Featuring characters that admit to imperfection in a tall poppy situation is much easier to relate to, so why challenge the status quo when everyone in an everyday situation is in this together?

Third is being comfortable with normality, but also having a go at life. This allows the protagonist (or consumer) a great deal of humility, but at the same time awards them some admiration and respect because they have shown bravery and initiative. Just like the golf ball in Figure 4.56, it might not be in the hole, but it is the closest to it.

The way V Energy conveys its ‘regular Joe’ allegory is quite common in popular culture. For example, the 1993 film Cool Runnings tells the story of a Jamaican bobsled team facing many foes and challenges from the very start of their journey. The audience knows that the likelihood of such an inexperienced team being Olympic medallists is low, but the team still triumphs just by finishing the race. Other examples in Olympic history include British ski jumper Eddie the Eagle (who, interestingly, took part in the same Winter Olympics as the protagonists in Cool Runnings) and the Equatorial Guinean swimmer Eric the Eel, who became a minor celebrity during the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Australians have a phrase for this type of allegory: the ‘Aussie battler’—or, put simply, a gracious loser (Whitman 2013). Hence, claiming title as Australia’s leading energy drink captures this essence of the underdog’s victory, even if not on a grand scale.

5.5 Antimony

Brand stories can be interpreted in different ways by different people, and this is where two (or sometimes more) versions may emerge. These can form paradoxes, which further advise brand meaning on a deeper level.

5.5.1 Red Bull Paradoxes

Several paradoxes are evident in Red Bull’s brand and its associated story. Each antimony is discussed between Sections 5.5.1.1 and 5.5.1.4.
5.5.1.1 Red Bull Antimony 1: Healthy, Unhealthy

Notably, the aforementioned Figures 4.23 and 4.24 reveal the first paradox: Red Bull is a ‘healthy’ product. As a brand, Red Bull promotes itself with health benefits, yet independent testing has proved this to be untrue. By associating the brand with aspects of wellbeing, such as diet and exercise, Red Bull aims to falsely position itself within the health market. In fact, the opposite is the case, in that short-term harm has been proven to arise following consumption (Sather et al. 2016).

5.5.1.2 Red Bull Antimony 2: Mature and Immature

Red Bull features elite celebrity spokespeople who have reached personal and professional pinnacles. For example, in Figure 5.28 US Winter Olympics gold medallist skier Lindsey Vonn and Australian champion surfer Mick Fanning are both highly regarded sportspeople and ambassadors for Red Bull.

Figure 5.28. Sports champions and Red Bull spokespeople Lindsey Vonn and Mick Fanning.

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

The seriousness of both subjects in Figure 5.28 starkly contrasts that of Daniel Ricciardo in Figure 4.25, whose playful nature among the sumo wrestlers depicts a scene in which an elite acts like a child. In this example, Ricciardo is not on the track setting lap records; he is in a Japanese dojo jokingly trying his hand at sumo wrestling.

Indeed, there is good reason for this contrast. Both images symbolise the body and mind of Red Bull’s target audience. On average, the human brain does not fully develop until someone has reached their mid-20s, so within this split situation between immaturity and maturity is a subject who might be physically developed but remains a child at heart.
5.5.1.3 Red Bull Antimony 3: Pushing the Limits to Find Peace

Red Bull’s social brand further suggests that individuals should go to extreme lengths to find peace. Only by pushing the boundaries of one’s own physical and mental capabilities can individuals find some form of spiritual solitude. This is reflected in the body language of its many visual subjects, who, like those in Figure 5.29, are not stressed, worried, anxious or concerned in extreme situations, but instead sit comfortably with themselves and their surroundings.

Figure 5.29. Relaxing off a cliff face.

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

5.5.1.4 Red Bull Antimony 4: A Community of Individuals

Red Bull appeals to a broad audience, from artists to video gamers and motorsport fans (see Figure 5.30). Yet, there remains a lack of group- or team-based activities represented in the brand’s overall social media presence.

Figure 5.30. Red Bull Esports, Red Bull Formula One Racing Team Logo, Red Bull FC player.

Source: Red Bull (2019c); Kresse (2016); Garriot (2015)
5.5.2 Monster Energy Paradoxes

5.5.2.1 Monster Energy Antimony 1: Monster Energy is the Light in a Dark World

While Monster reflects the dark side of society, for those who embrace this lifestyle the brand can have a positive effect, as it offers them a sense of purpose and belonging. This directly relates to the utopian society mentioned in Section 5.3.2 and the dystopian narrative in Section 5.4.2. Monster presents a dark world, which at first does not appear pleasant, but for those particularly on the fringes it provides them a sense of community with positive effect.

Figure 5.31. Tracks left behind on a sand dune.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

5.5.2.2 Monster Energy Antimony 2: Expressing Individualism in a Collectivist Manner

Monster often depicts individuals competing against one another, either on a racetrack or in the octagon. Yet, in the majority of its images, these figures are not alone but surrounded by spectators en masse (Figure 5.32).

Figure 5.32. Driving around an aeroplane and entertaining the crowd with motocross jump.
Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

5.5.2.3 Monster Energy Antimony 3: Bright Solo Images v. Stunt Images in Darker Settings

There is some evidence to suggest that Monster Energy depicts self-discovery. For example at first glance, Figure 5.31 resembles an image poached from Red Bull’s Instagram. Indeed, when revisiting these visuals for analysis they starkly contrast the gothic or industrial tone Monster typically sets across its various socials, and instead boast nature and general positivity.

5.5.2.4 Monster Energy Antimony 4: Limited Female Empowerment v. Objectification

Monster predominately portray women in an exploitive manner, yet disprove objectification by posting positive female role models (e.g., the champion surfers in the aforementioned Figure 4.48). Evidently, Monster Energy primarily targets young males, hence, why women are often presented with little substance. Indeed, the two surfers in Figure 4.48 challenge this notion and position women at the forefront. Further, too, examples including female UFC fighters, evident in Figure 5.33, have since appeared on Monster’s Instagram; however, like those in Figure 4.48, each partake in typically male-dominated sports such as surfing or fighting. Unfortunately, it is unsurprising that both Instagram images were selected only by female participants in the study sample.

Figure 5.33. Female UFC Fighter.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)
5.5.3 V Energy

5.5.3.1 V Energy Paradox: Championing the Mundane

Usually, a round of golf or a messy work desk are not celebrated factors but ordinary components of daily life. Yet, V Energy through its appeal to humour has made each a feature on its Instagram in what appears an attempt to reach out and relate to the average person. Perhaps this allows them a glimpse into their own world, or a pathway to short-term relief to get them through their day.

5.6 Archetype

Brand meanings have a thousand faces. A sound and literate way of unravelling meaning and brand mythology though visuals is through archetypal analysis (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010; Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008). Indeed, the concept itself is based on the work of psychoanalyst Carl Jung (2014), who surmised that our subconscious is built on having universal root characters.

5.6.1 Red Bull

Red Bull embraces the hero archetype, with two shadow effects identified as that of the arrogant playboy and the fallen hero. Within are two sub-archetypes known as the ‘explorer’ and the ‘magician’.

5.6.1.1 Dominant Archetype: Hero

In popular culture there are countless stories of heroes who save the day and defeat evil or overcome adversity (Mark and Pearson 2001). The hero, such as the brave knight in Figure 5.34, strives to make the world a better place by channelling their anger for good. Any brand assuming this prototype possesses similar qualities to those in popular culture, in that all strive to overcome obstacles and make others (in this case consumers) feel better about themselves (Mark and Pearson 2001).
Table 5.1 demonstrates the criteria required to identify the hero archetype. These were formulated by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001), with non-energy drink brands tested first, before moving onto the images gathered from Red Bull’s Instagram and Pinterest. The purpose was to test whether the ‘hero’ label made sense relative to the brand’s visual content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘Where there is a will there is a way’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Greatness, force, courage, pushing the limits, no boundaries, challenge, inspiring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To win; to improve the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Becoming strong, competent and powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Arrogance, creating enemies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Red, white, blue, yellow, black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero archetype in popular culture</td>
<td>Superman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Luke Skywalker, James Bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known hero-archetype brands</td>
<td>Nike, Australian Defence Force, Australian Red Cross, Fitness First; any professional sporting team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table adapted from Mark and Pearson (2001)

In establishing a case for the hero archetype, themes of courage and stoicism (consistent across Red Bull’s social media imagery) provided positive correlation. Overall, the subjects featured on both Instagram and Pinterest feeds always possessed superhuman qualities, either defying gravity or other natural forces against which mere mortals would struggle (e.g., see Figure 5.35).
Figure 5.35. Surfing a tube.

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Transformation was another running theme throughout the brand’s digital storyline, in that ordinary people can consume Red Bull to gain fantastical powers. For example, fans can visit ‘hero shrines’ abroad (see Section 5.3.1) or support the brand’s various sporting teams, including two Formula 1 teams (Red Bull and Toro Rosso), a V8 supercar team (Red Bull Holden), three soccer clubs and even one ice hockey team (EC Red Bull Salzburg). According to Mark and Pearson (2001), sporting teams are synonymous with the hero archetype in the way that they can overcome hardship and inspire feats of greatness. Aesthetically speaking, Red Bull’s brand is characterised by the colours red, white, blue and yellow, all of which feature on the costumes of many superheroes across the DC and Marvel universes.

5.6.1.2 Red Bull Shadow Effect 1: Becoming an Arrogant Playboy

To date, most of the literature on archetypes in marketing talk about utilising the concept’s positive aspects to build better brands (Xara-Brasil, Hamza and Marquina 2018). However, the literature within psychology instead focuses on shadow effects or the negative sides to different archetypes, first defined by Jung (2014) as the opposite of one’s outward persona’, or ‘the face he or she represents to the world’ (Mark and Pearson 2001, 81). As this study operates within a social marketing context the shadow effects have been applied to explore each brand archetype.

With great power comes great responsibility, according to Red Bull. Seemingly endowed with superpowers the brand simultaneously refuses to grow up and instead play with expensive toys (e.g., Figure 5.36), rather than use its power to make the world a better place. This shadow effect makes a case for the superhero–alter ego archetype to which many heroes in popular culture adhere: playboy by day, hero by
night. For example, in the DC universe Batman is billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne; in the Marvel universe Iron Man is billionaire playboy Tony Stark.

Figure 5.36. Car with Red Bull livery drifting.
Source: Red Bull (2019c)

5.6.1.3 Red Bull Shadow Effect 2: Becoming a Fallen Hero

In almost every hero’s storyline there comes a time at which he or she cannot save the world, so doubt starts to play on their conscience. This creates detractors, and if the hero is not careful this creates enemies. In reality, Germany is home to many fans from different Bundesliga (football, or soccer, league) clubs who actively voice their resentment over the Red Bull Leipzig team. They have accused Red Bull of corporate exploitation in the league, whereas other clubs are majority run by their own community members. Essentially, fans are fearful that Red Bull’s stake in the league sets a precedent for allowing foreign-owned clubs to participate, much like clubs in the English Premier League (COPA90 2016). The clubs bought by Red Bull were rebranded and had their histories whitewashed. This can ultimately alienate fans who want to see less corporate culture creep into their beloved game (COPA90 US 2016).

A visual example of this fallen hero archetype is captured in Figure 5.37. Created by a user on the artwork-sharing website DeviantArt, this image plays on the ‘it gives you wings’ tagline, but with a twist. Here, the subject has black wings, suggesting he is a fallen angel. The background is also dark and contrasts the natural light and, by association, the natural aesthetic Red Bull typically promotes. Instead, the angel’s coat is dirty and his necktie is undone, implying that this time the hero has fallen or is in crisis, as framed in Campbell’s A Hero’s Journey (TED-Ed 2012).
Figure 5.37. The fallen hero archetype, as told through Red Bull.

Source: castiel7

Figure 5.38 provides another visual example of the fallen hero. Evidently, the post on Red Bull’s Instagram is a nod to *Star Wars* and a direct reference to the character Darth Vader (see Appendix 5.1 for the original). In the franchise, Vader curls his finger and uses the force to choke his victims when incensed. What follows is the famous line, ‘I find your lack of faith disturbing’. Here, the character provides an example of the shadow archetypal fallen hero. In the prequel trilogy, Darth Vader is the protagonist Anakin Skywalker before he was tempted and turned into the main antagonist in the original films. To then save his son Luke Skywalker from the same fate he reclaims his goodness by defeating the evil that is Emperor Palpatine. However, along that journey Vader endures a prolonged period of doubt.

Figure 5.38. We find your lack of energy disturbing.

Source: Red Bull (2019b)

As shown, the subject is supposedly using ‘the force’ to crush the can in mid-air, as though to say ‘we find your lack of energy disturbing’. Evidently, lacking faith here is symbolised as feeling fatigued, and with fatigue one cannot gain enough focus to become a Jedi Knight or a Sith Lord.
5.6.1.4 Red Bull Sub-archetype 1: Explorer

The ‘explorer’ archetype is about experiencing new things and venturing to new places (Mark and Pearson 2001). Explorer archetypes are restless souls who seek inner peace by constantly embarking on new journeys (Figure 5.39).

Figure 5.39. The ‘explorer’ archetype

Source: Aamplify (2017)

Table 5.2 demonstrates the criteria required to identify the ‘explorer’ sub-archetype for Red Bull. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001), with non-energy drink brands tested first, before moving on to focus on the images gathered from Red Bull’s Instagram and Pinterest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘Don’t fence me in’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Travels, adventures, great outdoors, no boundaries, open road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Fulfilment through leading a more authentic life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Seek things out, escaping the ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Aimless wondering, becoming a misfit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Natural colours, outdoor scenery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explorer archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Indiana Jones, Bilbo Baggins, Allan Quatermain, Bear Grylls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known explorer-brand archetypes</td>
<td>Starbucks, Jeep, Kathmandu, The Body Shop, BCF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)
5.6.1.5 Case for the Explorer Archetype

Red Bull loves the great outdoors and pushing boundaries of what is humanly possible. The brand’s images are bright, natural and optimistic, and its subjects are always on the move or venturing on some form of journey. For example, the man hiking in Figure 5.40 captures this spirit.

![Image of a man hiking](http://example.com/image)

**Figure 5.40. Hiking up a mountain.**

Source: Red Bull (2019c)

Like all archetypal explorers, the individual is on a quest to find something (e.g., the fountain of youth) (Olshansky 2017). The explorer archetype is advertently linked to gap years and other adventures one experiences, particularly during their later teenage years or in their 20s (Mark and Pearson 2001).

One female participant in the study described Red Bull as someone who ‘travels a lot and [is] quite adventurous’ because ‘they want to try new things’ (MR). Here, participants acknowledged that pushing the boundaries constituted one of the main themes from Red Bull’s Pinterest account. However, the brand interprets this archetype abstractly, in that one might not be an explorer in nature, but an explorer by nature. Rather than confining the feeds to images of sports, Red Bull promotes adventure through *being adventurous*—that is, trying new activities such as art or cooking (see Figures 2.4 and 5.41). Like all explorer brand archetypes, Red Bull likes to experiment with new ideas and try a variety of experiences, hence, why fellow brands as varied as The Body Shop and Starbucks both share the ‘explorer’ label (Mark and Pearson 2001).
Participants in the study found many of the topics and boards on Red Bull’s Pinterest fascinating. For example, Participant MR stated that although ‘they are not into sports stuff’ they ‘like to try new things’, while Participant VL when describing Red Bull’s Pinterest as a whole mentioned ‘there is a lot to this, you would think they do all of these types of things’. Meanwhile, Participant SK described the feed as ‘appealing to a wider audience and not just focusing on motorsport’, while Participant EC echoed this sentiment, stating the brand’s Pinterest ‘looks a lot more busy [and] motivational; they show more adventure stuff that probably appeals to a different audience’.

Together, these quotations demonstrate that like all archetypal explorers Red Bull does not like to be confined to one area (Mark and Pearson 2001). Instead, the brand dabbles in a variety of fields, much like a young adult on their gap year who leaves the confines of their home to ‘find themselves’.

5.6.1.6 Red Bull Sub-archetype 2: Magician

The ‘magician’ archetype can take on many forms, including a shaman, an alchemist or a wizard (Figure 5.42). What these characters have in common is a fundamental understanding of the universe, and coming up with solutions or concoctions to solve problems (Mark and Pearson 2001).
Figure 5.42. The ‘magician’ archetype.

Source: Isengard (2015)

Table 5.3 presents the criteria required to identify the ‘magician’ as the second sub-archetype for Red Bull. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001), with non-energy drink brands tested first, before moving on to the images gathered from the brand’s Instagram and Pinterest.

Table 5.3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘It can happen’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Potions, change, wonder, awe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Make dreams come true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Develop a vision and live it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Purples, blues and yellows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magician archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Merlin, Gandalf the Grey, Obi wan Kenobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known magician-archetype brands</td>
<td>Lotterywest, Apple, Telstra, Sony, Mastercard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)

5.6.1.7 Case for the Magician Archetype

In the hero’s journey allegory, before the ordinary person embarks on an adventure he or she will meet someone wise who assists them along the way. Often, this wise person is the magician archetype.

Recall the levitating can in Figure 5.19, which hovers above the subject’s hand. This image was posted on Red Bull’s Instagram to promote a sugar-free version of the drink, likely to demonstrate how much lighter the beverage is to the original Red Bull. However, it can also be interpreted relative to the ‘gives you wings’ tagline, in that its contents contain magical properties that can transform the protagonist into his or her
ultimate self. (Hence, this draws further parallels to the second allegory regarding the elixir of youth.) Within the context of the magician archetype, and as echoed in popular culture, it is often the wise magician who creates a concoction that assists the protagonist to face evil (Hirschman 2000).

5.6.2 Monster Energy

Monster Energy assumes a completely different dominant archetype: the outlaw. This character’s shadow effect is borderline criminal behaviour, while its one sub-archetype is identified as the ‘creator’.

5.6.2.1 Dominant Archetype: Outlaw

Within every generation of young adults are those attracted to the outlaw persona (Mark and Pearson 2001). They represent the disruptors who pay no attention to the established order and do things their own way. The outlaw is dangerous but also a romantic, like many characters in popular culture including gangsters, pirates and gunslingers. Essentially, they are vehicles of defiance to an unjust societal order (Mark and Pearson 2001), much like Clint Eastwood’s ‘Josey Wales’ character in Figure 5.43.

Figure 5.43. Josey Wales encapsulates the ‘outlaw’ archetype.


Table 5.4 provides the criteria required to identify the outlaw as the dominant archetype for Monster Energy. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001), first with non-energy drink brands, before moving on to the images gathered from the brand’s Instagram and Pinterest feeds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘Rules are meant to be broken’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Anti-establishment, us v. them, freedom, causes, fights, motorcycles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To disrupt or destroy what is not worthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>To shock the establishment, achieve revenge or start a revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Fall deeper into the dark side, criminality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Black, dark shades of other colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlaw archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Robin Hood, Ned Kelly, Jesse James, Captain Jack Sparrow, Snake Jailbird (The Simpsons); any bandit, pirate, highwayman, bushranger, gangster or bikie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known outlaw-brand archetypes</td>
<td>Harley-Davidson, Rolling Stone Magazine, Uber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)

5.6.2.2 Case for the Outlaw Archetype

An apt characterisation of Monster Energy would be a rebel without a cause. Much like James Dean’s character in the titular 1955 film, everything about the rebel outlaw is rock-and-roll, bikes, fights, cars and girls (see Figure 5.44). As Rebel Without a Cause typifies teenage rebellion, the outlaw as an energy drink brand archetype is relatable in that teenagers love it and parents hate it (Mark and Pearson 2001). This exact sentiment was even quoted by Participant WM who in reference to Monster said ‘they are a greaser outlaw straight out of the 1950s’.

Figure 5.44. James Dean’s rebel persona captures the ‘outlaw’ archetype.

Source: The Ovi Team (2018)
Like all rebels without causes, the outlaw brand archetype neither cares about society’s expectations nor do they try to conform in any way. They are more concerned with their own self and their gang, and trying to create their own personal subculture, much like the UFC (Figure 5.45).

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 5.45. UFC fight.**

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

Monster Energy is about testosterone-fuelled rebellion (McParland 2018) and giving the finger to society, because political correctness is both predictable and an act of conformity—both of which archetypal outlaws dread the most. Recall the man firing a gun, clearly marked with Monster Energy branding on his clothing, in Figure 4.39. Again, the brand is openly flouting the law in a bid to demonstrate its lack of care for societal niceties. This particular image was taken from a promotional video posted on Monster’s Instagram, which was filmed in Texas in 2017. Given the context that gun control is a contentious issue in the US, the act depicted in such a setting risks trivialising and normalising violent behaviour.

Similarly, motorcycles—another form of disruptive rebellion—feature heavily in Monster’s approach. Images such as those in Figure 5.46 were among the most commonly chosen by the participants. Making links between the brand and motorcycles draw clear parallels to other outlaw brands such as Harley-Davidson, which is visibly used to perform a burnout in Figure 5.46. It also helps convey a sense of danger to consumers about the vehicle and the brand itself.
Recall Figure 4.28, an fan–artisan’s masks fashioned from old Monster Energy cans. This creation provides an essential symbolic link to the outlaw archetype, as masks in popular culture are routinely used to hide one’s identity when evading authorities (Thommassen 2018). Again, this has antisocial, anti-establishment connotations that provide the brand a sense of empowerment through anonymity and disregard for authority.

Similarly, the brand’s decision to introduce larger 550 mL cans, as opposed to the industry standard 250 mL cans (set by Red Bull), provides yet another example of Monster’s rebellious and disruptive outlaw archetype. The drawback of this move is that it famously sparked a YouTube phenomenon known as the ‘Monster Chug’. Here, young men, in particular, challenged each other to down two cans of Monster Energy in under a minute (which, evidently, could be described as risk-taking behaviour). Due to the large size of the can, a successful ‘chug’ became a means to gain bravado. However, numerous unrelated cases of young adults being hospitalised or even dying prematurely from such attempts, even by drinking a standard can of Monster Energy (some as a result of sampling the product at a teen-targeted event), have unfortunately arisen in result (DeNoon 2012).

5.6.2.3 Monster Energy Shadow Effect: Borderline Criminal Behaviour

There is a fine line between antisocial behaviour and villainy. If rules are meant to be broken, then in some cases the outlaw will eventually disobey the law. Such disorderly displays have positioned Monster Energy in a legal grey area, in that many of its
depictions of cars doing burnouts (e.g., Figure 5.47) are, indeed, taken using stunt professionals in controlled environments. However, nothing is enforced to stop the brand’s social media followers from replicating these acts. In fact, one participants (VL) in the study openly admitted that their partner loves to do burnouts in his car, and there is no doubt that there are many others like him.

Figure 5.47. Car drifting up a mountain.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b)

5.6.2.4 Monster Energy Sub-archetype: Creator

Like outlaw brands, creators are nonconformist entities (Mark and Pearson 2001). This brand archetype is all about self-expression and creating something for the public, which they can call their own (Mark and Pearson 2001). Creator archetypes can take on such personas as the artist (e.g., see Figure 5.48), writer, innovator or entrepreneur.

Figure 5.48. Street artist at work.

Source: Fresh Paint (2018)

Table 5.5 provides the criteria required to identify the creator sub-archetype for Monster Energy. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and
Pearson (2001), with non-energy drink brands tested first, before moving on to the images gathered from the brand’s Instagram and Pinterest.

Table 5.5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘If it can be imagined it can be created’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Art, culture, inspiration, exhibition, excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Give form to a vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Develop artistic control and skill; contribute back to culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Perfectionism, miscreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Black, red and other bold colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Banksy, Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol; other artists and musicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known creator-brand archetypes</td>
<td>Lego, Tate Modern and DreamWorks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)

5.6.2.5 Case for the Creator Archetype

Monster Energy has created its own subculture. More than any other energy drink brand it has encouraged user-generated content through the sharing and celebration of fan art, such as that pictured in Figure 5.49 and previously presented in Figures 4.35 to 4.38.

Figure 5.49. Xbox in Monster Energy colours.

Source: Monster Energy (2019c)
Like most creators, being on the fringes of society provides a source of inspiration. This sense of alienation leads a typical creator to branch out from the mainstream and create something more meaningful and authentic. For Monster Energy this is about building a whole new lifestyle brand that appeals to those who feel like outcasts, and letting others and outsiders to use their logo. This provides consumers a sense of ownership and allows them co-create the brand’s mythology.

There are many visual similarities between Monster Energy’s social media posts and those found in other youth cultures such as heavy metal (McParland 2018). This is evident in Figure 5.50.

**Figure 5.50. Parallel between heavy metal imagery with Monster Energy imagery.**

Source: Metalship (n.d.); Monster Energy (2019c)

To the left is a generic heavy metal image collected from a simple Google search, while on the right is a Monster-inspired image pinned on the brand’s Pinterest. Evidently, the Monster image draws inspiration from the same source of darkness to create its own brand-specific myths, which simultaneously informs brand meaning while sticking to the straight-off-a-heavy-metal-cover aesthetic.

This dark mythology can also be extended into hip hop because like Monster Energy this subculture is inextricably bound to the streets and urban decay (McParland 2018). As demonstrated in Figure 5.51, the break-dancer posted on Monster’s Instagram is undeniably comparable to your standard hip-hop inspired graphic found on CanStock.
Figure 5.51. Parallel between hip hop subculture and Monster’s urban ethos.

Source: Monster Energy (2019b); CanStock (2019)

Again, in assuming the creator archetype Monster Energy finds outlets to create a new identity for itself, which is both authentic and beyond the mainstream (and essential for attracting various youth markets). Young adults desire brands that do not act like brands, and defy all of the perceived negative connotations that commercialism embraces. They detest sellouts and follow brands that look cool but also feel genuine and original—hence, the central draw of the creator archetype (Mark and Pearson 2001).

5.6.3 V Energy

V Energy adopts the jester archetype whose shadow effect is taking a joke perhaps too far. Within is the ‘guy or girl next door’ sub-archetype.

5.6.3.1 Dominant Archetype: Jester

The jester archetype likes to constantly play and make jokes (Mark and Pearson 2001). They emphasise fun and share laughs with their peers in a bid to focus solely on the good things in life (Figure 5.52).
Figure 5.52. The jester archetype.


Table 5.6 provides the criteria required to identify the jester as V’s dominant archetype. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001) with non-energy drink brands first, before moving on to examine the images gathered from the brand’s Instagram.

Table 5.6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘If I can’t dance I want no part in your revolution’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Good times, fun, laughter, amusement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To have a good time and brighten up the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Play with friends, make jokes and just be funny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Not taking life too serious to a point at which they feel their life has been wasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Orange, purple and bright shades of other colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jester archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Fozzie Bear, Krusty the Clown, Patch Adams, Ronald McDonald, Beetlejuice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known jester-brand archetypes</td>
<td>Fanta, Cadbury, Irn-Bru, Pepsi, Jester’s Pies, Ben and Jerry’s, Sportsbet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)
5.6.3.2 Case for the Jester Archetype

Although V Energy’s brand colour is bright green, its secondary colours include yellow, purple and orange, which are all associated with the jester archetype (see Figure 5.23). In a Western context, orange, in particular, is associated with happiness.

Figure 5.53. V Energy packaging in jester archetype colours.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

In addition, the use of humour dominates V’s visual storytelling. Its nonchalant attitude to itself and others is best captured by the consistent use of people low in energy carrying the brunt of the brand’s jokes. Here, the jester archetype is supposedly acting like someone who is always trying to cheer everyone up, perhaps by poking fun at them or pulling a funny face, much like the floating head in Figure 5.54).

Figure 5.54. Head suspended in space.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)
V Energy fears boredom the most. To a jester, being low on energy is tantamount to being bored. Hence, V likes to believe that it is the cure or the pick-me-up, similar to a fitness band alerting ones depleting energy levels (see Figure 4.54).

Of the three brands, V Energy’s posts mostly closely resemble traditional advertising for soft drinks, which regularly assume jester brand archetypes themselves. In this case, V plays this role to convey the message that consumers’ thirst constitutes the main punchline of every joke. This is best demonstrated in Figure 5.55, which offers a collection of ads, the first of which is a typical V Energy post featuring tennis player Bernard Tomic, compared to an Instagram post for Scottish regional soft drink Irn-Bru and soft drink giant Fanta. Evidently, the three follow the same basic principle of incorporating humour and innuendo relative to quenching thirst.

**Figure 5.55. Use of humour relative to thirst in V, Irn-Bru and Fanta ads.**

Source: V Energy Australia (2019); Irn-Bru (2019); Ogilvy (2013)

Further, using domesticated animals as part of the jester’s appeal is another similarity V Energy shares with other soft drinks. In the Irn-Bru example in Figure 5.56 the ferret elicits the same sentiment as V’s bulldog (see Figure 4.54), notably because both incorporate relatively common household pets to convey humorous appeals through puns comparative to brand meaning.
Figure 5.56. Irn Bru ferret advert.

Source: Sandstone Castles (2019)

5.6.3.3 Shadow Effect: Jokes That Go Too Far

With humour, there is always a risk of posting something supposedly light-hearted but unintentionally causing offence, especially if the timing is wrong (e.g., during periods of global catastrophe or mourning). The image of Tomic in Figure 5.55 is one example of a joke potentially being misinterpreted, particularly as sexual innuendo treads the line between funny and offensive. Alternatively, one could also perceive the dog playing dead due to a lack of energy in Figure 4.54 as animal cruelty.

5.6.3.4 V Energy Sub-archetype: The Guy/Girl Next Door

V Energy’s sub-archetype is the guy or girl next door. According to Mark and Pearson (2001, 165), this demonstrates the virtues of simply being an ordinary person. Essentially, this character is non-threatening and approachable (Figure 5.57), and has the desire to reach out to everyday folk.
Figure 5.57. The “guy next door” archetype.

Source: Goldman (2012)

Table 5.7 provides the criteria required to identify the guy or girl next door sub-archetype for V Energy. This was achieved by running a mental exercise set out in Mark and Pearson (2001) with non-energy drink brands first, before moving on to examine V Energy’s Instagram to forge potential archetypal parallels.

Table 5.7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key phrase</th>
<th>‘All men and women are created equal’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key words</td>
<td>Ordinary, we, affable, follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To fit in and belong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>To develop the common touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trap</td>
<td>Lack of individualism to blend in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media colouring</td>
<td>Simplistic and inoffensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guy/girl next door archetypes in popular culture</td>
<td>Ned Flanders (<em>The Simpsons</em>), Samwise Gamgee (<em>Lord of the Rings</em>), Lilo (<em>Disney’s Lilo and Stich</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known guy/girl next door brand archetypes</td>
<td>Ford, Holden, IGA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mark and Pearson (2001)

5.6.3.5 Case for Guy/Girl Next Door Sub-archetype

V Energy acts as if it wants to be friends with all of its social media followers. Evident in Figure 5.58, V is seemingly down to earth, friendly and non-threatening, and exists on the same level as consumers, not above.
Figure 5.58. V Energy acting as the guy/girl next door archetype.

Source: V Energy Australia (2019)

V does not want to brag about achievements or success but rather position its product as a means of support for consumers. To them, the community is essential to its nature, just like a guy or girl next door.

Overall, the three brands assume three very different brand identities: Red Bull is the hero, Monster Energy is the outlaw and V is the jester. Each of these archetypes have their own individual implications because all are common in popular culture with which most audiences would be familiar (Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008). By having energy drink brands either intentionally or unintentionally use these brand archetypes shows that there are deeply ingrained cognitive drivers at work in building brand meaning, especially on visual-based platforms like Instagram and Pinterest.

5.7 Conclusion

Chapter 5 applied the five A framework to uncover various abstract themes that inform layer by layer different brands’ meanings. These five layers can enrich and even help describe the complexities that go into building brand meaning, especially for those that deeply resonate with the public. Hence, in Chapter 6 the findings from study and the themes abstracted will be summarised and the implications discussed.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Young adults aged between 18 and 30 have immersed themselves into visually rich subcultures (Salomon 2013). With the advent of image-based social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest, this population shares visually within its multiple subsectors every aspect of their lives, often for gratification and approval (Murray 2015). Evident from this study, the marketers behind energy drink brands have recognised that visual social media is the medium of choice for this age cohort. As such, many are actively targeting them on Instagram and Pinterest.

The findings of this study showed that energy drink brands are creating content that young adults find engaging using strategies tailored specifically to speak to them at even the most subconscious level. Through a visual netnographic analysis this study has unearthed enriched brand meanings behind different energy drinks’ social media posts, which would have otherwise been overlooked if subjected to narrative analysis. With imagery, the branded message presents multiple complex meanings because interpretation is boundless (Pink 2013).

This chapter summarises the key findings in relation to the research question and objectives posed for study. First, Section 6.2 explores the importance of visual analysis in marketing. This is highlighted by drawing out the various implications gained from the VINE analysis and the five A framework. Next, Section 6.3 explores the harmful implications behind each energy drink brands’ visual interpretations. In Section 6.4 the theoretical, methodological and managerial implications are outlined, while Section 6.5 concludes with a discussion of the study limitations and possible directions for future research.

6.2 VINE Stories Summary

The purpose of analysing the VINE stories was to identify and compare the meanings associated with images found on different energy drink brands’ social media. By using Hinthorne’s (2012) VINE approach to examine these visual stories, this study has contributed to understanding brand meaning relative to energy drink advertising
online. This was achieved by deconstructing various images collected from Instagram and Pinterest, and rebuilding them under concrete themes.

The VINE stories also enabled a comparison of the similarities and differences between Red Bull, Monster Energy and V Energy. The main thematic clusters that emerged from the analysis stage were cool v. uncool, light v. dark, collectivism v. individualism, working class v. middle class and the portrayal of gender roles. The thematic clusters emerged by grouping together the individual themes and subsequently representing broader understandings of what these themes symbolise.

6.2.1 Cool v. Uncool

One of the many words participants in the study sample used to describes images found on Red Bull and Monster Energy was ‘cool’. Understanding precisely what is considered ‘cool’ or ‘uncool’ proved essential when examining products advertised to youth markets (Mohiuddin et al. 2016), as there is an ever-present desire to appear authentic and avoid overt commercialism.

Producing images that are perceived as cool or uncool by this age cohort enables energy drink brands (among others) to produce content on Instagram and Pinterest that users will feel compelled to ‘like’ or share within their peer groups. This helps encourage brand engagement and perpetuates the circulation of brand meaning among this cohort.

As discovered, the term ‘cool’ can be defined by one’s grace under pressure (Mohiuddin et al. 2016). This theme was prominent in Red Bull’s content, which most often featured subjects remaining stoic in the face of adversity. This was especially true if that foe was an extreme natural force one could battle against and, obviously, succeed using the power of Red Bull.

Alternatively, ‘cool’ can also be defined as measured rebellion, which is a definition found mostly in sociology (Thomassen 2018). This theme was unearthed for Monster Energy, whose imagery mostly portrayed situations and behaviours that, to varying extents, deviated from what is considered the ‘norm’.

Conversely, being ‘uncool’ was characterised as being yourself. This theme was attributed to V Energy, as participants found the brand’s Instagram posts related more
to being a loser rather than a champion, unlike the subjects in both Red Bull’s and Monster Energy’s socials. None of the participants mentioned that V’s posts looked ‘cool’, and, by comparison, the brand was also perceived as ‘sellouts’ because its messages appeared purely commercial in nature. This was perhaps the case because V’s Instagram resembles a traditional advertising feed compared to both Red Bull and Monster. V Energy’s images therein were also largely based on nerd subculture and references to comic books and video games. Nevertheless, of the three brands V Energy proved more relatable, as it also promoted ordinary people in everyday situations, such as working in an office or studying for an exam.

6.2.2 Light v. Dark

One of the most striking differences between the brands regarded the use of colour, contrast and tone. Red Bull featured bright colouring and contrast set among natural backgrounds. The majority of the subjects featured were frequently pictured flying or freefalling, as to defy gravity and appear otherworldly. This provides viewers a source of inspiration to also go beyond the ‘peak of their powers’, and achieve incredible feats.

In comparison, Monster Energy used dark, gritty colours and predominantly industrial settings. The majority of its subjects exhibited aggression, and were pictured either fighting an opponent or performing stunts in vehicles. This gives viewers an impression that Monster is nominally a male-orientated brand, fuelled by testosterone and vehement to vanquish the competition. However, the brand also appears more in touch with reality than Red Bull, in that its subjects seemed to be comparatively more street-smart individuals who maintain their cool, as they come from a less-privileged part of town.

6.2.3 Individualism v. Collectivism

Another theme that emerged from the Instagram and Pinterest analysis is the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. Individualism can be defined as the habit or principle of being independent and self-reliant. Both Red Bull and V Energy employed this concept more than Monster, which instead favoured collectivism, or the practice or principle of giving the group priority over the
individual. Most of Monster’s posts reflected this notion, either through depictions of spectator sports, such as UFC fighting, or through encouraging and reposting fan art.

For Red Bull, brand meaning may appeal to a broader audience, as it centred mostly on celebrating extraordinary individual feats. The other core themes that emerged related to solitary pursuits in which individuals strive to find oneself, express oneself and attain self-actualisation. Such activities reflect a more individualistic orientation associated with Red Bull, which contrasts (or perhaps discourages) collective achievements.

Conversely, Monster Energy portrayed itself as an underground movement. Unlike other brands, Monster encourages consumers, who might be outsiders or outcasts, to call upon them (i.e., borrow their claw mark logo or any other of its brand elements) to help represent who they are. For this, Monster relied on user-generated content to build brand meaning.

For most participants, V Energy was relatively more inclusive than Red Bull and not as threatening as Monster. V has an individualist feel to its imagery, in that singular subjects often feature as the focal post of any given post, but the setting is always familiar to its target audience (e.g., a university or an office). Hence, V’s brand meaning can be interpreted as having a collectivist attitude with an individualist approach.

6.2.4 Class Depictions

Some participants noted a class difference when comparing Red Bull and Monster Energy, but no such associations with V. This is surprising within an Australian context, given the nation is egalitarian in nature (Pierce et al. 2017). Likewise, this trend might also explain V’s popularity in Australia, particularly as it actively chooses not to promote any form of class association.

Red Bull promotes an upper–middle class lifestyle on its Instagram and Pinterest feeds, which both regularly feature elitist activities most commonly associated with wealth. These include racing sports cars, skiing, skydiving and yachting, and flying various aircrafts. In this context, Red Bull resembles something of a millionaire playboy’s club intended only for a small percentage of the population.
Conversely, Monster Energy appeals to a working-class band of society in two key ways. First, according to the participants who preferred Red Bull, Monster represents ‘bogans’ or uncultured and typically lower-class individuals. Second, Monster Energy fans view the brand as a working-class hero type that promotes respectable blue-collar activities. Both facets are evident in the brand’s promotion of cars and violence sports, and through its recognisable celebrity spokespeople, including UFC fighters and racers—essentially, role models that appeal directly to the young, male audience for which its product is intended.

6.2.5 Gender Roles

As with class distinction, some participants found different representations of gender when comparing Red Bull and Monster Energy. For both brands, there were distinct character traits assigned for both male and female subjects, some of which reinforced either positive or negative stereotypes. Most notably, men were expected to be alpha males (particularly according to Monster) and women were their subordinates. Again, V Energy depicted no such distinction.

The male subjects in Red Bull’s imagery mostly behaved like playboys who reinforce the stereotype of the wealthy man who pursues purely pleasure-based activities. Their behaviour is characteristically childish and they often appear unfazed by the world. Figure 5.29, in which a man lazily reclines in a hammock overlooking a cliff, provides perhaps the best example of this lax attitude.

Conversely, women according to Red Bull were framed as Amazonian-type warriors who are fully empowered equals to men. Much like the men featured in Red Bull’s content, women were succeeding in their chosen fields. However, most interestingly, many of whom were pictured participating in traditionally male-dominated spheres such as racing or surfing. Evidently, Red Bull inspires parallels between successful women and Wonder Woman, who instead of fighting crime alongside Batman and Superman, defies stereotypes and prevails on equal ground.

The females depicted on Monster Energy’s Instagram were comparatively less progressive and firmly anchored in objectification—a facet most research participants found a little old fashioned. However, stereotypical gender roles for Monster were not
just confined to females. Instead, men were always shown to behave like tough alpha males characterised by aggression and violence.

6.2.6 To Defy or Conquer the Natural Environment

Overall, Red Bull’s imagery online encourages viewers to believe that by consuming its product one can push or even break the laws of nature and become superhuman. Here, nature is not harmed, but is instead complemented. The backdrop of any Red Bull post is most often grounded in nature, which, in turn, makes the subjects within appear otherworldly and ethereal, as though to evoke a sense of awe and serenity.

In comparison, Monster Energy wants to leave its mark on nature, which falls casualty to the masculinity of the brand. In this sense, Monster views the natural environment as another adversary to defeat and see the world in animalistic terms. This is not a balanced relationship, but rather one characterised by constant aggression. As such, consumers are encouraged to leave their personal mark behind so that others who follow know they were there first.

Overall, the VINE analysis highlighted concrete themes including cool v. uncool, light v. dark, individualism v. collectivism, various class differences, different gender roles, and the need to defy or conquer the environment. To elaborate, the five A framework was applied to draw out the more abstract themes that lay within each dichotomy. This analysis helped to unpack each energy drink brands’ key meanings through different layers of aura (essence), arcadia (community), allegory (story), antimony (paradox) and archetype (character). Section 6.3 explores the result of this analysis. In summary, the five ‘As’ provided a multi-level understanding of brand meaning that enriched each brand’s respective approach.

6.3 Five A Analysis Summary

The purpose of introducing the five A framework was to gain a better understanding of how energy drink brands perpetuate archetypes associated with risk-taking, performance enhancements and health. Essentially, the framework unpacks deeper themes associated with brand meaning, as communicated through visual stimuli.
To date, much of the literature on brand meaning has focused on unidimensional approaches that study individuals’ interpretations of a brand (Brodie et al. 2011). However, the five ‘As’ explicate that the concept of brand meaning is more complex and can be interpreted and understood within different dimensions, notably through aura, arcadia, allegory, antimony and archetype.

These five A themes encapsulate the social media ecosystem and its many intricate layers (Hanna, Rohm and Crittenden 2011). Social media followers want to feel like they are part of a community that surrounds a brand, engaging with the brand and contributing back to its meaning, in turn. In applying each ‘A’ concept, this study demonstrated the very complexity vested in how brand meaning is derived through various social media channels.

6.3.1 Aura

Aura is an established concept within visual culture (Rose 2016). In this context, it refers to the presence and vibe of branded messages on social media and the level of authenticity maintained therein (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Aura is foremost about a brand’s essence (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003): what does it stand for and what is the meaning behind the message? It is essential to obtain the feel of a brand and to gauge what sets it apart from the competition. In a brand-meaning context, this means identifying the bare basics of how a message is shaped and understood within consumers’ minds (Napoli et al. 2016). What aura comes down to, then, is realising what constitutes a brand’s core values and the messages it considers to be true and authentic (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

Brand authenticity is the most critical factor to consider when drawing out brand aura (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In Benjamin’s (1999) Arcades Project, church paintings are said to maintain their ‘aura’ while the postcards that replicate these images endanger their very essence (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003).

It is important to note, as with energy drinks or any product aimed at youth markets, that one’s ‘aura’ must be perceived as authentic and not overly commercial in nature (Botterill 2007). Young people have an inherent desire to break free from what is considered mainstream (Jenss 2016), so anything remotely genuine inspires their support and, perhaps most importantly, helps break their ties to past generations.
Overall, this study concurred with previous research examining authenticity in the youth market. Generally, the work highlighted that two of the three brands under investigation are ‘authentic’, whereas the third is comparatively less genuine.

The auras associated with the three energy drink brands examined are as follows. First, Red Bull’s aura reflects the notion of seizing the day and facing up to the challenges that life can bring. It is optimistic and at peace with nature, as demonstrated through its brightly coloured and nature-based imagery. Red Bull’s aura is generally considered authentic, as its Instagram and Pinterest content features limited (or less apparent) branding.

Second, Monster Energy’s aura is sinister and alluring, and tempts consumers to join the ‘dark side’. There is subtle branding evident throughout Monster’s social media content, so they too feel less like outlets solely intended for advertising.

Finally, V Energy’s aura conveys the presence of an ordinary person in ordinary settings. This tactic is meant to frame the brand as more relatable to consumers. However, in doing so V’s social media posts resemble more closely traditional advertising, which is comparatively less subtle in nature. By Benjamin’s (1935) standards, images used for commercial purposes lose their aura (Boyne 2011). In this sense, V’s brand essence is in danger of becoming lost to viewers.

### 6.3.2 Arcadia

According to Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003), arcadia represents a brand’s ideal community. To gain a better understanding of how consumers shape brand meaning, it is essential to gauge how it becomes galvanised through brand communities (Boorstin 1974). Invisible consumption communities can draw together like-minded individuals who are all fans of a particular brand, notably to create their own society with a sense of purpose (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Like geographical communities, brand communities have their own rituals, traditions and shared consciousness, with the key difference being active consumption and a likeness that draws certain people together (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001).
Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) acknowledge that traditional mass media such as film, television and print is a driving force through which brand communities are created. However, within a twenty-first century context, examining arcadias (or brand communities) requires primary focus on social media interests and/or posts to understand how people find and engage within different brand communities.

Arcadia evokes a utopian ideal (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). Within, there is a conceptual link between consumer community, brand meaning and an idealised society (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). In previous literature, this meant mapping out what the arcadia or brand community looks like and who is in it (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). Within the context of this study, ‘arcadia’ was represented by social media content and what each brand’s idealised community actually looks like (according to whoever posts the images online), including how said representations appeal to the target audience.

In a sense, arcadia is a projection of one’s values and what it means to be members of an ideal community. These might be rich playboys (Red Bull), tattooed working-class heroes on motorcycles (Monster Energy) or your average office worker (V Energy). It is up to social media followers to make up their own minds to determine where they fit and through whom their realities and aspirations are best complemented.

By examining a plethora of visual content, arcadia can be more readily defined relative to each brand under study. First, Red Bull’s arcadia is characterised as a club for high achievers or a collective group of individuals set out to push the boundaries of what is possible. These members have sophisticated tastes and participate exclusively in activities typically reserved for the wealthy, including flying planes, racing expensive cars and skiing in the Alps. Essentially, Red Bull members portray themselves as ‘playboys’.

Monster Energy’s arcadia functions more as an underground resistance movement. The brand has a blasé attitude to its branding and makes it known that anyone in any circumstance (from novices to experts) can use its logo, regardless of the intended gain (or otherwise). By doing so, the Monster movement reaches out and appeals to those on the fringe, providing them a sense of meaning. Within Monster’s arcadia, sharing is key. For example, the celebration of fan art on Pinterest captures how Monster
promotes brand morphing to ensure its meaning fits with and communicates to
different community members (Kates and Goh 2003). In this context, brand morphing
occurs with and through different artefacts; from creating masks using old Monster
cans, to customising hot rods with branded decals, Monster’s arcadia embraces
difference and acceptance without judgement. Foremost, this study illustrates how
social media content can also spur change, and that brand morphing is not simply
limited to and dictated by traditional print advertising (Kates and Goh 2003).

Instead, fan art is an important vehicle through which this study makes a significant
contribution to the literature—and with additional room to grow. It is one way
consumers display their true dedication to and membership within certain branded
communities. In this sense, the study findings also make an exciting contribution to
understanding the arts in marketing, and how modern individuals’ convey their love
and appreciation for a brand by manufacturing makeshift art, much like Andy Warhol
once did (Kerrigan et al. 2013). Through these artefacts, individual artisans have the
opportunity to create and contribute back to popular culture, and to their respective
brand community.

Conversely, V Energy’s arcadia represents a setting in which ordinary people meet,
such as a school, university or office. Importantly, this sense of community was based
on a relatively limited amount of images collated from the brand’s official Instagram.
This should not be seen as a total representation of V’s arcadia, but rather a glimpse
into what its membership might entail.

6.3.3 Allegory

Allegories are simply symbolic stories, narratives or metaphors for a branded
community (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry 2003). They should convey a moral for
consumers and change with the times to reflect popular culture (Brown, Kozinets and
Sherry 2003).

As marketing forms an integral part through which to visually represent time, its
imagery should be interpreted as a form of storytelling (Holt 2003). This is an
important concept to understand, as people tend to think narratively and not purely
analytically (Woodside and Megehee 2009). Visual storytelling is linked to framing
theory (Chong and Druckman 2007), which, in simplified terms, describes how people
make sense of a narrative presented in visual form (Chong and Druckman 2007). Here, framing theory can be described as how marketing messages on social media can also perpetuate specific narratives through visual-based mediums such as Instagram or Pinterest. These coexist alongside more traditional sources for visual interpretation, such as art, photography and even news footage (Vliegenthart 2012).

By reconstructing allegories using social media, this study has made a significant contribution to understanding the complexities of visual storytelling. To date, most of the literature relied upon traditional print advertising to gauge its many intricacies (Schroeder 2006). However, the rapid rise of social media has introduced an entirely new angle to visual storytelling and far greater audience reach. As such, the concept is no longer dictated top down but is open to different interpretations across different cultural contexts. Hence, a broader range of visual stories can be gathered from newfound data.

This information can be used in a social marketing context to demonstrate the effect that social media culture has on the lives of a technologically savvy new generation, which makes extensive use of visual-based platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest (Payne 2016). Hence, understanding allegory provides an opportunity to reach out and influence this behaviour through powerful visual messages and stories that can be more easily interpreted.

In terms of the three energy drinks under study, Red Bull (2019a) grounded its brand meaning, or backstory, in its ability to ‘cure’ jet lag. Unsurprisingly, this foundation influenced the two allegories central to its brand that subsequently emerged from within this study: the ‘hero’s journey’ and the ‘elixir of youth’.

The first allegory is a retelling of Joseph Campbell’s (2003) The Hero’s Journey. In it, an ordinary person is transformed into an extraordinary hero who overcomes great adversity and vanquishes their foes. Here, the product (Red Bull) acts as the transformative agent through which the hero gains his or her strength to overcome an obstacle. For consumers, these obstacles act as a metaphor for lethargy and fatigue.

The second allegory is the elixir of youth, wherein the protagonist drinks Red Bull and reclaims their youth. Here, the brand’s claim to ‘revitalise body and mind’ finds it
relevance and reinforces the drink’s supposed transformative properties once more (Red Bull 2019a).

Indeed, these allegories depict Red Bull as an aspirational brand that encourages young adults to achieve anything they set their minds to, and that fatigue is merely a hurdle. However, Red Bull also endorses a need to enhance performance through any means by insisting that people be at their best all the time.

Monster Energy, unlike Red Bull, has no real backstory, being a late entrant to the energy drink market; thus, it built its brand through guerrilla tactics and other non-traditional means. Through this, the brand maintains three very distinct allegories. First, its token green claw mark suggests a desire to entice consumers into its ‘lair’ wherein a monster resides (McParland 2018). Here, the monster also represents the dark side of the human psyche. The second allegory is about gladiatorial combat, conveyed through Monster’s constant depictions of tough, alpha males competing against one another. Importantly, these contests exist for the entertainment of others. The third allegory is that there is something vehemently wrong with the world, and that Monster is here as a means to resist. The brand wants to be different from the mainstream and it thrives on acting like a beacon in an impossibly dark world. This, in turn, makes the brand appealing to those living on the fringe and who feel alienated. This type of allegory is quite common for brands that are second in a product category, as it gives them a point of difference from the status quo. Together, these three allegories make Monster Energy unique and provide them leverage to embrace the misfits and allow them meaning in their lives. Conversely, these allegories are antisocial in nature and promote messages that normalise disruptive behaviour. As such, the brand risks encouraging criminal acts such as assault or hoon driving.

V Energy as a brand closely tied to Australia promotes one allegory: remain humble and do not become the ‘tall poppy’—a common antipodean cultural trait. This allegory involves being a lovable loser that does not challenge the status quo, but instead has a ‘go’. Indeed, this makes V Energy highly relatable to its audience, as the brand appears just as ordinary as they are. Conversely, by speaking to the audience on their level, this means the brand can more straightforwardly push an agenda across, including that of performance enhancement.
6.3.4 Antimony

From these allegories, several contradictory truths have emerged. The purpose of pinpointing antimony is to demonstrate that it is acceptable for brands to have flaws, as duality and imperfection make brands appear more human (Burton, Farrelly and Quester 2001).

Understanding antimony is essential because it provides a clear means through which to demonstrate the complexity of brand meaning by highlighting two or more interpretations of the same story. It is a step forward from the conventional understanding that brand meaning is a simple construct.

The antimonies found within each brand are as follows. First, Red Bull had four antimonies:

1. The brand markets itself as a healthy product by association. Despite the health concerns that energy drinks are addictive, Red Bull associates its product with healthy lifestyle ideals in an attempt to position itself as somewhat beneficial.

2. The brand is serious enough to play. Red Bull seldom depicts its elite spokespeople competing or even victorious. Instead, subjects are often depicted pursuing leisurely or fun activities. This could be a deliberate attempt to reach out to its youth market by subconsciously imitating their own actions. That is, people up to the age of 25 often have a mature body but an immature mind.

3. One must battle nature to find tranquillity and push both mental and physical boundaries to find solitude. Often, the subjects within Red Bull’s imagery face extreme conditions, yet their body language suggests that they are at peace with the situation, and the conditions do not faze them.

4. The brand builds a community of individuals. Across Red Bull’s themes remains a common thread of heroism and aspiration, despite the setting. Here, regardless of the backdrop, the brand can appeal to a multitude of different audiences, from Formula 1 fans to gamers. Despite this sense of collectivism, the majority of Red Bull’s images depict and support solo pursuits.
Likewise, Monster Energy also had four antimonies:

1. Monster supports popular yet antisocial forms of entertainment. This sentiment is primarily conveyed through the brand’s inextricable tie with the UFC. The sport is not entirely mainstream; it has its detractors who accuse the sport of normalising violence and voice concern over the frequent incidences of head trauma. Yet, UFC remains popular among young adults, especially those who identify with the Monster Energy subculture and who view the sport purely as a form of entertainment.

2. Monster is a light in a dark world. Representing the darker side of humanity endows the brand definitive meaning, particularly to outcast sectors of society. Paradoxically, reaching out to the outsiders provides them a sense of hope by allowing them to join an alternative society filled with other misfits.

3. Monster leaves a mark on both natural and built environments. Visually, the majority of its visuals are situated in industrial, urban settings. However, some images do depict natural scenes, similar to those for Red Bull.

4. Women are both protagonists and objects. Monster is a masculine brand that appeals primarily to young males in their teens and early 20s. As such, women are regularly depicted in little dress, such as a bikini, and as decoration. However, Monster does increasingly feature images of female success, but usually within typically male-dominated fields such as surfing.

Finally, V Energy had one antimony:

1. Champion the mundane. Most notably, the brand highlights all things ordinary. Whether by depicting an uneventful round of golf or a messy workspace, V makes no big deal out of high achievers. However, the brand does often place the ‘ordinary’ on a pedestal.

Highlighting each of these brands’ antimonies is critical, as they provide a fuller understanding of brand meaning, and of who and what each energy drink brand is. Building on the fourth ‘A’ is ‘archetype’, which was introduced for added dimension.
6.3.5 Archetype

Archetype concerns a brand’s character, and represents a sound way of framing brand meaning and the mythology behind its visuals. This was done by mapping out the persona of each energy drink brand under study, based on the brand-generated content each produces.

This component was broken down into three parts, the first of which was intended to identify each brands’ dominant archetype, or the most explicit archetype after running the analysis. Next, the ‘shadow effect’, or the negative side of that dominant archetype as well as the implications or that character, was identified, followed by the sub-archetype(s), which regard the minor details (or characters) of the dominant archetype. Essentially, sub-archetypes are the sum of the visual patterns relative to one’s collective unconscious (Caldwell, Henry and Alman 2010).

For Red Bull, the dominant archetype was the ‘hero’; for Monster Energy it was the ‘outlaw’; finally, the ‘jester’ characterised V. All three of these archetypes are common in popular culture, which makes them familiar and recognisable to the target audience.

First, Red Bull’s dominant hero archetype was characterised by its penchant to help consumers overcome obstacles and be their best. Like all heroes, Red Bull has a positive outlook on life and a degree of aspiration behind its storytelling. However, the shadow effect of being the hero archetype is becoming an arrogant playboy, as is the case for many famous heroes in pop culture. Notably, too, another effect is achieving greatness but refusing to grow up. The second shadow effect of this archetype is becoming the fallen hero. There comes a moment of doubt in every hero’s story in which they cannot save everyone, and this plays out on one’s conscious. If the hero is not careful, this can create detractors and even enemies. Nevertheless, Red Bull had two brand sub-archetypes, the first being the ‘explorer’, who likes to push boundaries and try new things. This was particularly true for the brand’s strategy on Pinterest, as it featured a variety of activities (from art, to travel and even cooking) rather than solely promote expensive cars and extreme sports. The second sub-archetype for Red Bull was that of the ‘magician’, as the product itself is marketed with transformative qualities. Key to understanding this sub-archetype is in Red Bull’s tagline, ‘it gives
you wings’, which invests some form of magical potency in the product to improve individuals and deliver everlasting life.

Second, Monster Energy’s dominant outlaw archetype derived from the brand’s proclivity to shun conformity and display an aversion to the status quo. Like all outlaws, it hides away in the darkness and craves power through fear, not admiration. The shadow effect of this archetype is borderline criminal behaviour. Essentially, outlaws love disruption and breaking the rules. However, with this comes a risk of overstepping the boundaries and actually breaking the law, especially evident in Monster’s depictions of hoon driving and violence. Monster Energy’s ‘creator’ sub-archetype came from its vast amount of fan art on Pinterest, which helped to establish a unique subculture for the brand, rather than appeal to the masses or a mainstream audience. They also liked to mimic other youth subcultures associated with the creator archetype, such as heavy metal and hip hop.

Finally, V Energy’s dominant ‘jester’ archetype derived from its desire to have a good time and share a laugh with friends. The brand also incorporated similar visual strategies to that of other noted jester archetypes, such as soft drink brands. V’s sub-archetype was being the guy or girl next door, and refraining from challenging the status quo. Instead, the sub-archetype prefers to spend time with friends. The shadow effect of the jester archetype is potentially taking jokes too far. Evidently, the common punchline throughout V Energy’s socials was that low energy equates to boredom, and that being boring is, well, boring. If repeated too often, this joke does risk promoting or normalising the need to enhance oneself in fear of the mundane.

Overall, the five ‘As’ helped to demonstrate how brand meaning can be enriched. Essentially, it better defined and described the many elements within brand meaning. As this was achieved purely through visuals analysis, comparatively more complexities (which go into creating a visual, especially within a social media context) were unearthed. Of course, enriched brand meanings can be harmful in the hands of potentially unsafe products such as energy drinks, whose consequences are outlined in Section 6.4.
6.4 Implications Behind the Energy Drink Images

The social media images collected from the three energy drink brands perpetuate a wide range of behaviours that can have negative implications for consumers. These include encouraging risk-taking behaviour, being aggressive, promoting common health misconceptions and supporting the use of performance-enhancing substances. Further, these brands also routinely promote negative gender stereotypes for both men and women.

6.4.1 Risk-taking Behaviour

Many of the images presented on each brands’ Instagram accounts depicted dangerous and extremist displays of human endurance; these can be interpreted as encouraging risk-taking behaviour. By depicting protagonists as calm and composed in light of potential disaster, these brands dilute the danger associated with risky actions that otherwise appear possible to anyone who consumes a can of energy drink. However, to most participants these depictions were merely exaggerations of fantasy. None had the desire to emulate the stunts themselves. Nonetheless, what is there to stop more impressionable consumers from pushing their own capabilities upon viewing these images? Energy drink companies have in the past and continue to reason risk-taking, regardless of the consequence.

6.4.2 Aggressive Behaviours

Images that depict violence can have both positive and negative effects on viewers. Showing aggression in a constructive manner such as martial arts has its benefits because it may offer a legitimate outlet by which consumers can express their anger or vent their frustrations. Here, anger is not bottled up, and it makes people more emotionally stable. However, if the message is intended in a destructive manner, either as a street fight or supportive of antisocial behaviour, this gives consumers the impression that the only way to solve one’s problems is through unnecessary violence, which has severe implications for broader society. This is especially pertinent in an Australian context, where young males within the same age energy-drink cohort resort to ‘coward punches’ as a means to vent their anger (Levy Riddell 2018).
6.4.3 Normalising Performance Enhancements and Drug-taking Culture

Each of the three brands spruik the message that people need to be at their peak at all times within contemporary settings. Energy drink marketing insists that fatigue, rest and lethargy are not beneficial but rather mere obstacles to overcome.

This is an ongoing concern, especially as there have been countless instances in which professional athletes (some of whom are endorsed by energy drink companies) are caught cheating and using performance-enhancing drugs (Thorpe 2012). This captures the top-down nature of marketing, which, in this case, wholly encourages those who aspire to reach elite status to ‘cheat’ as a means of improvement.

6.4.4 Faux Health Messages

Associating oneself with a healthy lifestyle (which is typically based on a good diet and regular exercise) and promising the benefits of essential vitamins certainly gives the impression that energy drinks are somewhat beneficial. Yet, this is not the case, as they have been proven to be addictive and especially harmful to anyone with a pre-existing heart condition.

6.4.5 Aspirational Messages

Energy drink brands on social media tell young people to go out and experience life to the fullest; enjoy what the world has to offer and be the best person they can be—and then some. This is a compelling message because it is full of optimism; however, it can also evoke negative connotations, as many of the scenes depicted are somewhat fantastical and not within reach of the average social media follower (e.g., Red Bull’s 2012 stream of Felix Baumgartner’s jump from space; see Figure 4.14).

6.4.6 Enforcing Stereotypes

Such brands are promoting stereotypical behaviours, in that men are expected to be tough, whereas women are helpless side acts who expect to be rescued. These are antiquated stereotypes reinforced throughout popular culture, yet are not necessarily reflective of modern values and expectations of gender.
6.5 Implications

6.5.1 Theoretical Implications

Through the use of visual analysis, this study contributes to better understanding brand meaning by showing its multidimensional nature and inherent complexity (neither of which have been noted in previous studies). The five A framework was integral to unlocking each individual layer of brand meaning in detail, drawing comparisons to popular culture and explaining how each level was formed.

First, aura concerned the level of authenticity behind each image’s message (Boyne 2017). As such, through the concept this study demonstrated that it is possible to maintain aura in brand-generated content. Both Red Bull and Monster Energy employed sincerity in their content strategies, thus, ensuring their social media feeds were not overly commercial in nature. In turn, the audience were made to care enough about the brand to find their visual posts engaging without hindrance.

Next, the concept of arcadia contributed to understanding brand community. It provided means in the study to visualise and map out the ideal brand communities that surround each of the three energy drink brands; it also explained how best to draw in new members. Further, arcadia contributed to understanding brand morphing relative to each brands’ visual social media accounts (Kates and Goh 2003). This was particularly the case for Monster Energy and the liberal use of its branded logo and sharing of fan art on Pinterest. By doing so Monster’s arcadia reached a new level of commitment to and for its members, which has perhaps been overlooked in past literature.

The concept of allegory in this study enriches the literature on visual storytelling, as it drew comparisons between social media posts and popular culture. This makes visual storytelling more familiar to the intended audience and, if used correctly, more relatable, as people are drawn to images and concepts that are familiar. Primarily, each brand achieved this by incorporating specific tropes, plots and narratives in their digital content. Thus, the use of allegory in this study enabled both good and bad interpretations to emerge, and highlighted both positive and negative implications, in turn.
The concept of antimony in this study contributes to the literature on brand meaning, chiefly by demonstrating that when two contradictory truths emerge brand meaning can no longer be considered a singular entity. This dichotomy highlights that there is both a ‘light’ and a ‘dark’ side to brand meaning, which must be equally addressed to understand its full complexity. Antimony as a concept also demonstrates that it is acceptable for a brand to have flaws. Essentially, research and use of the concept herein can lay the foundation for further work in the literature relative to brand forgiveness.

This study has made significant contributions to the theoretical application of what is known about brand archetypes. It has avoided the pitfall outlined in Caldwell, Henry and Alman (2010) by incorporating Jungian thought processes. As Caldwell, Henry and Alman (2010) pointed out, marketers in the past have generalised archetypes the same way they would have with stereotypes. In this study, the total persona behind the brand is outlined, with both the positives and the negatives (shadow effects) highlighted for each archetype. Likewise, it also acknowledged any potential sub-archetypes found in the visual patterns.

6.5.2 Managerial Implications

This study has several managerial implications for brand managers, policymakers and social marketers alike. These are individually outlined from Sections 6.5.2.1 to 6.5.2.3.

6.5.2.1 For Brand Managers

From a managerial perspective, this study offers a deeper understanding of how brand meaning is conveyed through social media, moving beyond traditional text-based platforms such as Facebook and Twitter towards more niche, visually based platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram. For brand managers, having a robust understanding of visual content and archetype can offer a powerful means through which to deliver engaging content on social media, and build better brands that transcend both language and cultural barriers.

Visual storytelling plays a critical role in the overall social media strategy for many energy drink brands (Benmiloud 2016). By referencing or evoking some of the strategies behind the most successful global brands, brand managers can gain
inspiration and create equally effective visual content for their own social media channels and followers.

However, when creating a content strategy brand managers may need to be mindful of any potentially harmful brand meanings that can be derived from what they post on Instagram and Pinterest. Learning from the energy drink brands under study, they can avoid mishaps with misinterpretation (i.e., posting potentially damaging images suggestive of dangerous or lewd behaviour), or with selling harmful messages that promote risk-taking and performance enhancement.

Further, brand managers must be mindful within an era of #metoo that archaic depictions of gender may not bode well with modern audiences, or that messages could be misconstrued and carry dual meaning. Perhaps more variety in terms of gender representation and empowerment is required to set a good example for younger audiences.

### 6.5.2.2 For Social Marketers

This study has helped to reveal the harmful effects associated with marketing energy drinks on social media, especially in relation to young adults. It demonstrated that more stringent advertising regulations may be required within digital marketing, including the introduction of guidelines that define what is acceptable content (especially in terms of health and wellbeing) and set age restrictions regarding to whom energy drink companies can post. At the moment, users are expected to self-regulate, so there is no guarantee that these brands’ social media posts evade underage audiences.

Using visual content analysis together with the five A framework can and did offer an alternative to standard theory-based research. Overall, this study’s approach uncovered the various layers that constitute brand meaning, both in terms of energy drink advertising and other harmful industries’ marketing. In turn, the analysis revealed the cognitive drivers at work that help inform the relationship between consumers and any dubious products on the market.

Examining visual content offered new approaches to understanding such products’ digital marketing ethos. First, the walk-through interviews provided a non-invasive
A qualitative method that enabled participants to guide the researcher through images they found personally engaging. This was important to understand because it provided first-hand indication of the types of images that young people find most attractive.

However, this may enable marketers to sabotage brand meaning. In particular, the archetypal analysis may inform social marketers of the shadow effects that highlight vulnerabilities within a brand’s meaning. Therefore, from a strategic perspective one can actively counteract the branded messages certain harmful brands within the industry promote.

Further, this study demonstrated how energy drink brands directly market to young consumers on social media by posting content that is considered ‘cool’ to the 18–30 market. As such, an awareness campaign or regulatory guidelines must be enforced to counteract and oversee these messages.

Future studies should also consider applying the five A framework in relation to other harmful product research (including alcohol, junk food, tobacco and gambling) to unearth and substantiate the influence of social media. This study found parallels in the marketing of energy drinks compared to the marketing of other harmful products (such as soft drinks and alcoholic beverages) with similar themes (e.g., being overly jovial and exhibiting similar qualities characteristic of V Energy’s jester archetype).

Indeed, the 18 to 30 market is also overlooked when considering younger age cohorts. Marketers must realise the importance of understanding the types of social media that young adults find appealing, particularly in relation to those within this age range, as they have been exposed to social media over a more extended and intense period of time compared to under 18s.

**6.5.2.3 For Policymakers**

At least one brand (Red Bull) was found to push faux health messages. There needs to be more public awareness of these claims and more stringent policies in place to recognise their presence online (e.g., using large warning labels and imposing age restrictions for purchases). Indeed, many of these tactics are found in other countries such as Lithuania and the UAE, but only industry self-regulation is expected in Australia (Masudi 2014; RT News 2014).
6.5.3 Methodological Implications

To date, online visual data have been overlooked in previous netnographic studies. Taking into account the ascendency of image-based social media in today’s media landscape, this study demonstrates how netnography can evolve as a methodology that accurately reflects internet usage through visual analysis.

In particular, the web-based walk-through interviews provided an effective qualitative research technique and an alternative to focus groups. This helped to eliminate groupthink, in which an individual or a small group of individuals dominate a discussion. What this project presents is a non-invasive method of interviewing participants, which was both fun and engaging for all involved.

Future studies can build upon this research by taking the web-based walk-through interviews and applying them in a phenomenological study. For this context, the researcher can apply the methodology by letting regular to heavy consumers of energy drinks talk through their daily experiences of consumption. By allowing a phenomenological approach to be applied, future research can contribute to the sociological literature tradition, which can be traced back as early as Garfinkel (1973).

Furthermore, future studies could examine the ever evolving video content consumption habits of the 18-30 age cohort. Since the collection of data in 2016, other visual social media platforms such as Tik Tok have entered the market and are popular with millennials and members of Generation Z.

Further, the five A framework extended what is known from Brown, Kozinets and Sherry (2003) by building brand meaning into retro marketing. Traditionally, examination was reserved for discourse and the spoken word. This formed the original basis for aura, allegory, antimony and arcadia within the framework. However, this study’s focus prompted the need for a fifth A (archetype) to better grasp the meaning elicited from visual content. As such, the use of archetypes and their analysis in marketing have been enhanced through this study. Previously, archetypes were simple outcomes to justify a brand’s position; however, in this dissertation archetypal analysis followed a Jungian approach, with both sub-archetypes and their shadow effects also explored.
6.6 Limitations and Future Research

The 18 to 30 span selected for study was segmented further into 18–24 and 25–30 subgroups, representing different life stages for young adults. The sample was comprised of eight Australian residents of Anglo-Celtic background; however, the results may differ with participants of different ethnicity.

Only two participants had chosen V as their preferred energy drink brand. As of July 2018, V had no official Pinterest account and only a fragmented presence on Instagram, which featured only 24 posts and no new content published since February 2015. For these reasons, V Energy was not initially targeted for study. This meant, for the most part, that any additional Instagram images had to be imported by the researcher from another US-based Instagram account belonging to V Energy. This helped gain a more robust understanding of the brand’s visual story.

Increasingly, other social media platforms have introduced algorithms that favour visual content, including Facebook and Twitter. As the push for more visual stimuli continues there will come a time when the five A framework will be applied in more studies and in relation to more social media platforms. This study focused purely on visuals, but future efforts could look at different levels of engagement (e.g., likes and number of comments generated) with imagery, and analyse other forms of visual content including comments, gifs and emojis users post as responses.

One current industry trend predicted for 2019 is the further use of dark social media (i.e., brands running Facebook and WhatsApp messenger campaigns using artificial intelligence to target specific followers, as well as secret and closed groups on Facebook (Parker 2017). The five A analysis can also be applied within this area in future netnography studies, as digital audiences are both highly specific and have already established deep connections with brands online.

Importantly, other image-based social media platforms such as Snapchat were discounted from the study due to the short-lived nature of the data posted. This made the prospect of data collection difficult, as the researcher had to be active at the right time to capture each post. With technological progress, this difficulty may be overcome.
For future research, there is a possibility that additional dimensions of brand meaning may be revealed if more user-generated content is examined. Possible methodologies to collect this include drawing elicitation and photo elicitation, wherein researchers may ask participants to devise images that represent their relationships with energy drink brands, and how they would visualise their respective archetype if they were a real person. Further, since the time of data collection, Instagram has allowed users to post images and video stories up to 15 seconds in length, which expire after 24 hours. This is another source of rich visual data that could be examined in future studies.

Nonetheless, this framework can be used for future research into visual analysis to examine the marketing tactics of other harmful brands such as junk food and alcohol. These may also be relative to other aspects of marketing including consumer engagement, tourism and luxury branding. Indeed, there are also many other image-based social media sites such as DeviantArt (which primarily features user-generated content) that can be researched. Additionally, sites such as Etsy (where users can buy branded artefacts made by other users) would provide an interesting angle for researching user-generated brand content online. In addition, further research into shadow archetypes in social marketing can be used to explore negative brand images for other brands and products. For example, these could measure the effect of tourism in particular destinations or the environmental effect of fast-moving consumer goods.
References

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54472adbe4b0671f7c97d1fa/t/56147ad7e4b0c5764cd6ba13/1444182745589/Archetype_card_front_explorer.jpg.


Adams, Jill “More kids are drinking coffee is caffeine safe for them” The Washington Post August 3rd 2015. 
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/more-kids-are-drinking-coffee-caffeine-safe-for-them/2015/07/31/caea657e-3478-11e5-8e66-07b4603ec92a_story.


https://www.afgc.org.au/?s=Responsible+Children%E2%80%99s+Marketing+Initiative+&x=0&y=0.


188


Content Author 2019 3d Monster Can http://farm2.staticflickr.com/1031/4729657057_24bb73c9f3_z.jpg Published on Flickr accessed 2/2/19.


“CWA Calls for Energy Drink Ban.” The Land, March 27, 2014. 

https://blog.hootsuite.com/tips-creating-successful-instagram-campaigns/


Dixon Hayley “Jamie Oliver admits that he would let his kids eat at McDonalds” The Telegraph (UK) April 15th 2018. 


Payne


Special Broadcast Services Australia “Lithuania Bans Energy Drinks to Minors” SBS World News 15/05/2014.


Stoycheff, Elizabeth, Juan Liu, Kunto A. Wibowo, and Dominic P. Nanni. 2017. “What Have We Learned About Social Media by Studying Facebook? A


Wiggers, Danielle, Mark Asbridge, N. Bruce Baskerville, Jessica L. Reid, and David Hammond. "Exposure to caffeinated energy drink marketing and educational messages among youth and young adults in Canada." International journal of environmental research and public health 16, no. 4 (2019): 642.


Legal Authorities


Appendices.

Red Bull Image Catalogue

This image has been removed for copyright purposes.
This image has been removed for copyright purposes.

3.2
Monster Energy Images Catalogue
This image has been removed for copyright purposes.

3.3
V Energy Images Catalogue
5.1
Red Bull Star Wars Darth Vader Reference.

This image has been removed for copyright purposes.
This image has been removed for copyright purposes.