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# Semiotics of RedBull

This essay will present a semiotic analysis of a famous energy drink brand known worldwide as *RedBull*. Semiotics are commonly used in daily life, but often go unnoticed. Many of these real world applications occur in the fields of advertising and marketing, and this writing will speak specifically about those applications. RedBull is an Iconic brand that has made headlines across the world as an energy drink that will “give you wings”. It is important to look into the semiotics of marketing and advertising, because it can persuade consumers to act a certain way as well as shifting public interest. RedBull is the perfect brand to research, seeing how much of its advertising and marketing includes semiotics such as color and slogans that draw attention. The following paragraphs will go into further detail about the semiotics of the logo, the slogan, the marketing, and the reasoning behind the great success of the brand itself. RedBull has become a dominating corporation over the years due to successful marketing and advertising and will continue to do so, using semiotics to subconsciously persuade consumers to purchase their products.

# The History of Energy Drinks

Throughout history, humans have employed a variety of beverages to boost their energy levels. Trends have shifted from tea to coffee to soft drinks and back again during that time. However, just as individuals have sought out more potent medications than coffee throughout history, they are also seeking soft drinks with extra energy-boosting ingredients. When it was initially introduced in 1886, Coke was the first "energy" drink since it included both caffeine and another stimulant, cocaine. The soft drink's name is derived from the ingredients: the coca plant, which produces cocaine, and the kola nut, which contains caffeine. Coca-original Cola's formula called for five ounces of coca leaf per gallon of syrup, while later recipes called for just a tenth of that. In 1903, Coke's cocaine was eliminated. Dr. ENUF was created in 1949 by Chicago businessman William Mark Swartz, who was charged with creating a vitamin-rich soft drink to compete with sugared sodas laden with nothing but empty calories. As a consequence, a "energy booster" comprising B vitamins, caffeine, and cane sugar—ingredients found in many energy drinks today—was created. To make and sell Dr. ENUF, Swartz worked with Tri-Cities Beverage, a Tennessee bottler that also made Mountain Dew at the time. Another well-known energy drink in Southeast Asia is dubbed "Thai Red Bull." Krating Daeng was introduced to Thailand in 1976 and is now found throughout Europe, Oceania, and North America. Caffeine, taurine, and B vitamins are included in the sweet, non-carbonated drink. It was called after the gaur, a huge, wild cow cousin found in Southeast Asia. Red Bull was inspired by Krating Dong, however the Asian beverage made its imprint first with tremendous sales throughout Asia in the 1980s.

# Who Made that Drink?

The origins of the energy drink as we know it may be traced back to Japan. Amphetamines were immensely popular in the postwar period, until legislation were implemented in the 1950s to restrict their usage. This type of stimulation in a can took a bit to catch on in the United States.

Coca-Cola once included cocaine, but it was quickly removed. Dr. Enuf, a caffeinated soft drink with vitamins, was devised by a Chicago chemist in 1949. When Mateschitz, the creator of Red Bull launched his product to the United States in 1997, the energy drink business exploded.

According to Gary Hemphill, head of research for the Beverage Marketing Corporation, annual growth is still in the double digits. Retail sales in this category totaled \$11 billion last year.

Despite the fact that the major brands — Red Bull, Monster, and Rockstar — are essentially the same as the ordinary colas that have been on the market for decades. The marketing, according to Hemphill, is what actually sets them apart: "It's a product category that's been established on a premium price." There are a lot of parallels in terms of ingredients." Noting the history of popular drinks brings up the conversation on how previously they were substitutes for things such as amphetamines.

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## RedBull Domination

Growing up, redbull was always taught to me that it was bad for me. All the cool kids at school would always drink them and brag about how it was their favorite drink. It's the most well known energy drink on the market, but why and how? As part of its 32-year history, Red Bull

has advertised, organized events (Red Bull BC One, Red Bull Flugtag, Red Bull Rampage), produced music (Red Bull Music Academy), and owned sports teams (Infiniti Red Bull Racing, New York Red Bulls, FC Red Bull Salzburg, Team OG). Red Bull can continue to create meaningful content that builds brand value, with the use of sponsor teams, athletes, and continuously innovating and conducting high-profile events. This will ultimately enable Red Bull to dominate the energy drink market for years to come. Red Bull has also done well by generating a favorable image. This favorable image is shaped by their environmental sensitivity, as seen by their emphasis on 100 percent recyclable aluminum cans. The fact that it's clearly placed alongside important corporate information, such as the firm's history and product, on their main website demonstrates their concern for the environment. It produces the second layer of the Brand Equity Model, including the Performance and Imagery blocks, in this way. The weight of the can is reduced in the Performance block by using 100 percent recyclable aluminum cans.

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## Evolution of the Bulls

Many Asian companies have failed to get into the European market. Red Bull, on the other hand, is the brainchild of professional marketer and entrepreneur Dietrich Mateschitz. That could be the explanation for the company's success in competing with Coca-Cola and Pepsi on the market. It is very simple to deduce the meaning of a logo. Originally, the beverage was intended for Muay Thai fighters. Thailand is known for having a logo with two red bulls ready to battle. As a result, bulls represent power, crimson represents endurance, and a bright yellow sun rises behind them. And Dietrich utilized his best judgment in meticulously incorporating all of the distinct cultural identification elements into the Red Bull emblem. The semiotics of this brand is probably

the most important piece since it's one of the first things people see. The careful choosing of the colors and images of a brand is not a choice made overnight and is made with extreme careful consideration. The goal was difficult to achieve since the design was excessively bright. Kastner used a blue and silver background to draw attention to the Red Bull emblem. A focus group, on the other hand, deemed the design a failure. Mateschitz, on the other hand, believed the concept was a winner and continued to improve it. He was able to make the drink highly popular because to a well-thought-out marketing approach.

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## RedBull: The Culture

To take a deeper dive into the famous energizer, it's significant to understand their target audience, the strategies used to attract them, and how it's creator got this amount of success. To give more background on the creator, Thai tycoon and Austrian-born Dietrich Mateschitz co-founded Red Bull GmbH after visiting Thailand in the 1980s. Padre Yoovidhya developed Krating Daeng, which he renamed Red Bull. They sold their very first can of Red Bull on April 1, 1987, in its home market of Austria. It was the first brand by Mateschitz launched in Austria. Mateschitz was the type to think carefully in order to preserve the iconography of the brand, for instance, the bulls on the can were almost untouched. For an energy drink brand, he probably recognized the merits of 'foreign', 'exotic', and 'quirk' associations as positive attributes. Icons aren't created overnight, and understanding when not to change them is imperative.

It was found in the study of semiotics that there is value in studying the messages and techniques with theoretical tools. Roland Barthes (1915- 1980), a French semiotician, focused on how

advertising generates meanings and generates narratives. He found that the constant change in advertising styles, techniques, and modes of delivery tended to create a craving for the latest goods. After understanding this, it's time to apply it to Red Bull and its consumers. Young urban males who live on the edge or aspire to live on the edge are Red Bull's target demographic.

Extreme sports and rigorous recreational activities are also popular among them.

Red Bull's positioning demonstrates that it has a good understanding of its target demographic, as it has made its brand aspirational through the different events it has arranged, as detailed above. As a result, Red Bull is able to connect strongly with its target market, resulting in effective positioning. They've maintained consistency by repeating the value proposition "Red Bull gives you wings," which describes how Red Bull can elevate your cognitive and physical performance, as this is what the target market wants. The message is especially clear because they've used the same tagline, since the beginning and built their advertising campaigns around it.

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## The Bulls Real Target

After reading that last section, it's evident that Red Bull has a target audience that they want the public to believe they cater to fully, but their unlying intentions have slipped through the cracks at times. After an advertisement was sent out that actually exposed the deep secret of Red Bull's obvious neglect of their own customers' wellbeing. In 2015, an advertisement at the University of Michigan stated "**Nobody ever wishes they'd slept more in college.**" Red Bull does a lot of research when it comes to their target audiences and college students seem to be the victims of

their capitalist feast fest. With their work-load and draining days college students have become the lambs to the slaughter with poor sleep habits affecting their physical health in several ways.

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## RedBull Gives you Wings?

Red Bull pioneered the now-thriving energy drink category by identifying human 'energy' as something that can be transmitted and replenished in the same way that machines can, drawing inspiration from the Battery sector. If it's looked at from a semiotic narrative angle, we can see that it follows a transformation story — the heroine (the drinker) is hampered by exhaustion and is helped by the partner (the energy drink) to restore their full powers to defeat the enemy (fatigue and the task at hand). Energy drinks was more institutional, pharmacological, and medical use. It's now more relaxed, self-administrative, and, actually enjoyable. This move has mostly been attributed to Red Bull. It nearly single-handedly altered our communal expectations and connections with energy drinks by reinventing the category and carving out a distinct niche for itself.

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## Color the Bulls

Semiotics can be incorporated into logos in a variety of ways. The first step in ensuring you're targeting the proper demographic is to consider the color of your brand logo. Despite its

distinctive logo consisting of two red bulls with yellow highlights next to the bold red words "Red Bull," the brand's flagship product, the blue-silver Red Bull Energy Drink, is easy to recognize. The Red Bull logo, which incorporates two red bulls charging against each other in front of a gold spot, has become one of the most recognizable and popular logos in the beverage industry. It represents speed, power, danger, and aggression. As evident from the bulls in the foreground, the silver and blue parts in the background symbolize intelligence. Red on the other hand, and yellowish gold on the other, are elements that represent emotion. It is a slightly modified version of the Future typeface used in the Red Bull logo. The Red Bull brand has grown so widely recognized that simply seeing its logo and colors can "trigger identity-consistent thoughts and behavior in customers."

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## Branding the Bull

Now to really explain the semiotics and how it relates to Red Bull. The scientific study of signs and symbols in a culture is referred to as semiotics. A plethora of signs and meanings are engrained in everyday life, and these aid in the connection of individuals to organizations. Semiotics and language as a cultural system can assist in determining how humans naturally form connections and extract meaning from their surroundings. Semiotics, when incorporated into a brand's architecture, creates layers of meaning through the use of linked symbols, colors, and language. Brands transmit traits that audiences identify with, and this can affect whether or not people buy items or services. The Red Bull design is associated with speed, power, risk-taking, and aggression, and focuses around the consumption of Red Bull cans. The logo's strength as a visual indicator is what makes it such an important component of product



recognition. It discovered that Red Bull has achieved this by building a brand identity centered on creativity, non-conformism, energy, speed, risk-taking, and euphoria. The corporation uses a variety of advertising to elicit emotional responses from its customers. They used a video game with functionally identical cars with different branded paint treatments and discovered that the Red Bull branded car drove players to follow a fast, aggressive racing style, consistent with the brand's personality, without even realizing it.

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In this paper, I did my best to relate some ideas of significance from the realm of semiotics to a relatively small number of phenomena that are associated with the popular energy drink Red Bull. The particular semiotic concepts appropriated for the purpose of marketing and success in business can be seen in the following; such as targeting audiences and certain markets with advertising and branding. Advertisements were often used to appeal to today's modern generations and progressives. For example, certain strategies such as more eco-friendly products were used and ended up raising public approval of the brand which led to more sales and more profits. Culture. The culture surrounding RedBull is very unique and distinguishable from other products and cultures. Red Bull appeals to people who want to “live on the edge” or people like college students who need energy throughout the day to complete their many assignments. RedBull is basically a remedy to these problems for college students and appeals to “adrenaline-junkies” through the extreme advertising and presence on the internet and social media. The colors involved with marketing RedBull. Bright colors like red and yellow are used in Red Bulls branding. These colors are scientifically proven to make people more energetic and

excited about the things that they are doing, and because they are used in the branding of RedBull, it is used to associate the brand with energy and excitement. The RedBull logo. The bulls are used to represent power and strength which subconsciously makes the consumer feel like RedBull will give them strength and make them more powerful. Strength and power are also correlated with energy which is what the drink provides for its consumers. The evolution of RedBull. Over the years you can see how the logo and brand changes with the times, and as time goes on, the brand becomes more progressive and the culture surrounding it grows. As the brand grows over time, you can see the semiotic characteristics develop and grow. One of the strongest forms of advertising for RedBull are their sponsors and athletes. There are so many athletes around the world who place the RedBull logo on their equipment or drink Red Bull in order to spread the word that they are being “powered” or “fueled” by it, which influences consumers to buy it because celebrities, athletes, and talented people from all around the world are drinking it.