

Title

Packaging, Persuasion, Caregiver and the Child Consumer

A Content and Discourse Analysis of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'

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Submitted to Auckland University of Technology as part of Academic requirements for Master of Communication Studies (MSC)

2025

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative intelligence tools (unless it is clearly mentioned, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Guru Naga Goutam Bokkasam

25 Nov 2025

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I thank my supervisor, Thomas Watts. He is a person with at most patience, brilliant, kind, and incredibly knowledgeable. His regular feedback on my work for this research made this study both interesting and a new learning experience. His support and guidance have been unmeasurable; with the confidence he has given me through this learning to complete the project. I feel grateful to work on this project with his help and support.

I would like to thank Rosser, who has shared knowledgeable information to complete my project, coming in to guide for giving a second opinion.

I would like to thank my family for all the support they gave, through difficult times when away and helping me financially in pursuing my Masters.

Table of Contents

Title.....	1
Attestation of Authorship	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	8
1.0 Background and Rationale	8
1.1 Research Question and Objectives.....	12
1.1.1 The central research question guiding this study is.....	13
1.1.2 Research Objectives	13
1.2 Methodological Overview	14
1.3 Situating the Researcher	15
Chapter 2. Literature Review	17
2.0 Introduction.....	17
2.0.1 Food marketing exposure in Aotearoa New Zealand	19
2.1 Packaging as a Persuasive Medium	22
2.1.1. Packaging’s Role in Shaping Children’s Food Preferences	24
2.1.2. Packaging as Social and Cultural Signal	25
2.2. Packaging in The Marketing Ecosystem	27
2.2.1 Integration with Digital and Transmedia Strategies	28
2.2.2 Packaging a Persistent Marketing Channel	30
2.2.3 Retail Environments and Spatial Concerns.....	31
2.3 Policy Context and Regulatory Environment.....	33
2.3.1 Structural Weaknesses of the New Zealand Policy Framework.....	34
2.3.2 International Evidence for Comprehensive Regulation	36
2.3.3 Gender Aspect in Child-Targeted Food Packaging	38
2.4 Summary.....	39

Chapter 3. Methodology	41
3.0 Introduction.....	41
3.1 Research Question	42
3.2 Methodological Approach: Content and Discourse Analysis	43
3.2.1. Content Analysis	44
3.3 Analytical Framework Application	46
3.3.1 Discourse Analysis	49
3.3.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection for Discourse Analysis	51
3.4 The Strengths and Weaknesses of The Integrated Analysis	52
3.4.1 Strengths.....	52
3.4.2 Limitations.....	54
3.5 Summary.....	54
Chapter 4: Content Analysis	56
4.0 Introduction.....	56
4.1 Visual Theme Presence	57
4.1.1 Coding Colour Scheme.....	58
4.1.2 Coding Layout Style	60
4.1.3 Coding Visual Motif Type.....	62
4.2 Character and Fantasy Elements.....	64
4.2.1 Coding Character Type	65
4.2.2 Coding Fantasy Motif Presence	66
4.3 Health and Nutritional Claims	68
4.3.1 Coding Health Claim Type.....	69
4.3.2 Coding Claim Placement	70
4.3.3 Coding Symbol Use.....	71
4.4 Product Naming and Language.....	73
4.4.1 Coding Product Name Type.....	74
4.4.2 Coding Descriptive Language Framing	75
4.4.3 Coding Emotional Appeal Language	77
4.4.4 Gender Analysis	79
4.5 Summary.....	80
Chapter 5: Discourse Analysis	83
5.0 Introduction.....	83

5.1 Discourse Analysis – ‘Fruit Blocks’.....	84
5.1.1 Basic Entities Recognised	84
5.1.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships	87
5.1.3 Agents and Their Motives	89
5.1.4 Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices	90
5.2 Discourse Analysis – ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’	91
5.2.1 Basic Entities Recognised	91
5.2.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships	93
5.2.3 Agents and Their Motives	95
5.2.4 Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices	96
5.3 Comparative Insights and Summary	98
5.3.1 Basic Entities Recognised	99
5.3.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships	100
5.3.3 Agents and Their Motives	101
5.3.4 Key Metaphors and Rhetorical Devices	102
5.4 Summary and Transition	103
Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion.....	104
6.0 Discussion	104
6.0.1 Packaging as a System of Signification.....	105
6.0.2 Discourse, Childhood, and Identity.....	106
6.0.3 The Health Halo.....	107
6.0.4 Compatibility with Aotearoa New Zealand's Food Environment	108
6.1 Implications	109
6.1.1 Implications for Regulations and Policies	109
6.1.2 Impacts on Media Literacy and Education	110
6.2 Constraints of the Research	110
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research.....	112
6.4 Conclusion.....	113
Chapter 7: References.....	115
Chapter 8: Appendix	125
8.1 Indicators in Child Targeted Packaging	125
8.2 Gender Coding.....	125
8.3 Image of ‘Fruit Blocks’ front of the Package.....	126

8.4 Image of 'Fruit Blocks' Rear of the Package	126
8.5 Image of 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' Front of the Package	127
8.6 Image of 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' Rear of the Package	128

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Background and Rationale

It is important to first consider what food packaging is and its specific relationship to children's food products before exploring the complexities of the topic. "As the old saying goes, first impressions count, which is true regarding product packaging. Customers look at the outer display of the package, which is when and where perceptions and judgements are shaped (AA Labels, 2025).

The design of food packaging has become a key component of a firm's marketing mix, ensuring the long-term existence of its products and communicating the distinct attributes that set them apart from competitors (Ares et al., 2022). Food packaging has been demonstrated to influence young children's taste preferences and product choices, as evidenced by studies examining the effects of food marketing on children's diets (Elliott & Truman, 2020). Children respond to 'visual cues', so marketers particularly use that, for example, cartoon characters, colour, graphics and premiums. In this way, they take advantage of children's visual and associative memory to sell products (Mehta et al., 2012).

While the fundamental purpose of good packaging is to protect the product, it also serves as an important point of communication between the brand and consumer. In fact, marketing teams use psychological principles in packaging design to draw consumers to their product in busy retail spaces. Subtle cues like design, colour, shape and even typography could mean the difference between products collecting dust on a shelf and flying off the shelf (Mills Display, 2024).

Despite its extensive role, packaging remains largely unregulated under New Zealand's voluntary advertising codes. The ASA (2025) explicitly excludes product packaging from its scope, creating a significant policy gap. This exclusion persists even as international jurisdictions, such as Chile, Mexico, and Brazil, have introduced mandatory front-of-pack warning labels and restrictions on child-directed imagery to reduce the promotional appeal of unhealthy packaged foods (Crosbie et al., 2023; Taillie et al., 2020). In contrast, New Zealand's reliance on industry-led self-regulation has failed to meaningfully reduce children's exposure to persuasive food marketing, particularly in retail environments where packaging is most visible (Frost et al., 2025).

This thesis addresses these concerns by examining how packaging acts as a persuasive tool in child-targeted food marketing. It focuses on two products

from Nice & Natural's fruit oddities range from the six. 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' (Image 1.0: The front of 'Fruit Blocks', & Image 1.1: The front of 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' shown below), which were selected for their prominent use of child-directed design features and their availability in New Zealand supermarkets. These products offer a rich site for analysis, combining playful aesthetics, character-based narratives, and health-oriented claims to appeal to both children and caregivers.





A family-run company, 'Nice & Natural' is a New Zealand snack brand founded in 1985. In the early 2000s, the business expanded to become a market leader in healthy snacks (Ward, 2007). Nut bars, Protein bars, Cereal bars, and fruit-based snack products are among its offerings. The products are widely sold in supermarkets and convenience stores in New Zealand (Nice & Natural's - Griffin's Snacks, 2025).

Griffin's Foods, a New Zealand food manufacturer best known for its biscuit lines, purchased 'Nice & Natural' in 2007. By incorporating 'Nice & Natural' into its larger production and distribution network, the acquisition allowed Griffin's to diversify into the health snack market. This change in the company

put Nice & Natural in a bigger business context. The brand still goes by its original name, though, and it has a unique look within Griffin's portfolio (Griffins Biscuits, 2014).

By treating packaging as a discursive site, this research aims to uncover how visual and linguistic elements construct meaning and shape consumer behaviour. It draws on content coding and discourse theory to interpret how packaging communicates ideas about health, fun, identity, and trust. In doing so, the thesis contributes to broader discussions about ethical branding, public health communication, and the regulation of child-targeted food environments in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.1 Research Question and Objectives

This thesis studies how visual and linguistic design in child-targeted food packaging creates meaning. It highlights 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' from Nice & Natural's fruit-based novelty range, both featuring child-directed features and widely available in New Zealand supermarkets. Playful aesthetics, character-based narratives, and health-focused claims that appeal to children and caregivers make these packages rich for analysis. The study examines how these elements interact to reveal how packaging conveys

layered messages that normalise processed snack foods as fun and nutritious. It examines how packaging mediates cultural assumptions about childhood, health, and parental responsibility in everyday food environments in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.1.1 The central research question guiding this study is

“How do Nice and Natural’s 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' construct meaning through packaging design and on-pack language directed towards children?”

Packaging conveys health, fun, identity, and trust. It influences visual, textual, cultural, and ideological domains through design choices and marketing ecosystems. The research question allows us to construct childhood, health and consumption by positioning packaging as both a marketing tool and a discursive medium.

1.1.2 Research Objectives

To answer this question, the thesis pursues the following objectives:

The thesis uses content and discourse analysis to examine the formal and cultural meanings of packaging. It first classifies visual and textual strategies, such as colour schemes, character imagery, layout styles, health claims, and emotional language, that appeal to young consumers in food products. Based on this descriptive base, the study examines how these strategies create layered meanings that appeal to children and caregivers, making processed snacks fun and nutritious. These findings are then placed within ideological frameworks to examine how packaging reinforces assumptions about childhood, health, and parental responsibility.

1.2 Methodological Overview

This thesis uses content and discourse analysis to examine how child-targeted food packaging constructs or creates meaning through visual and linguistic design across 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' from the 'Nice & Natural's. This method allows for systematic packaging description and cultural and ideological interpretation. The intention is not to generalise across all child-targeted food packaging, but rather to provide an in-depth analysis of how meaning is constructed in the two selected artefacts.

1.3 Situating the Researcher

As the researcher, I acknowledge that the focus and framing of this thesis are shaped by my personal background, academic training, and ethical commitments. The significance I assign to themes, such as ethical communication, public health advocacy, and cultural sensitivity, is informed by what I consider meaningful within the context of this project. I approach this research with a commitment to transparency, reflexivity, and critical engagement, recognising that my perspective is partial but purposeful.

I am from India, currently living in Aotearoa, New Zealand, pursuing a Master's in Communication Studies at AUT. I engage with this place as a respectful outsider, learning from its cultural complexity while critically examining its media and public health landscape. My understanding of society is shaped by my lived experience, my academic grounding in communication studies, and a deep respect for Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty. While I do not claim cultural belonging within Māori or Pasifika communities, I aim to honour their perspectives by foregrounding issues of representation, equity, and structural disadvantage.

My pre-digital media upbringing and “old school” values of ethical clarity, analytical rigour, and structural coherence shape my millennial perspective.

Academic research and reflective distance from immersive digital cultures inform my branding strategies. This position lets me critique how marketing uses visual storytelling, emotional design, and symbolic messaging to reach children. As a parent, this perspective motivates me to critically examine how marketing shapes children's food understanding and ensure my kids, as well, navigate these persuasive environments safely and consciously.

This thesis is shaped by my international background, generational identity, and scholarly orientation. They influence my questions, methods, and interpretations. I acknowledge that my analysis may differ from that of researchers with different cultural or disciplinary perspectives and strive to be reflective about my assumptions.

Throughout this thesis, I honour the subject's complexity while maintaining analytical precision and cultural relevance. I want to critique persuasive packaging and contribute to discussions on ethical branding, media literacy, and child health protection in New Zealand.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter surveys the research landscape surrounding child-oriented food packaging in Aotearoa New Zealand and places it within broader discussions of food marketing, children's exposure, and regulatory frameworks. Drawing on both New Zealand and international literature, the chapter examines how front-of-pack design functions within a wider marketing environment in which children encounter food promotion across multiple settings. It integrates work on the persuasive elements of packaging, its relationship to the broader marketing ecosystem, and the policy context that governs these practices. Together, these themes establish the conceptual foundation for analysing child-targeted packaging of the discussed artefacts in the New Zealand context.

The first section, 'Packaging as a persuasive medium,' examines front-of-pack design in relation to theories of persuasion and information processing. It reviews evidence that packaging conveys marketing messages through colour, imagery, characters, shapes, and on-pack claims, and describes how these visual and textual cues can influence attention, preferences, and perceptions of healthiness. This section also references research that explores how children

interpret such cues and how these interactions shape their responses to packaged foods.

The second section, 'Packaging in the marketing ecosystem,' situates packaging within the broader promotional environments targeting children in Aotearoa New Zealand. It reviews research on outdoor advertising, retail placement, shelf design, and digital brand activity, demonstrating the various channels through which commercial food messages are conveyed. This section examines how packaging interacts with these settings, especially at points of sale and in everyday environments where purchasing decisions are often made.

The third section, 'Policy context and regulatory settings,' describes the current frameworks that govern food marketing in New Zealand, with a particular focus on the role and scope of the Advertising Standards Authority and its Codes. It summarises research on how the system functions in practice and highlights areas where packaging falls within or outside existing regulatory boundaries. Comparative examples from international regulatory developments are also presented to provide context for the New Zealand situation.

Taken together, these sections for this study provide the conceptual, empirical, and policy background necessary to understand why examining a specific example of child-oriented packaging, which is also understood as packaging as

a strategic tool in an integrated marketing communication system, offers a useful perspective on how these dynamics function in practice (Dillon, 2021).

2.0.1 Food marketing exposure in Aotearoa New Zealand

Several studies have examined exposure to food marketing aimed at children in Aotearoa. One of the most comprehensive analyses is Frost et al.'s (2025) systematic narrative review of 45 New Zealand studies, which shows that children are exposed to unhealthy food and drink advertisements many times in various forms, with clear links to their dietary preferences and consumption patterns. They note that New Zealand “does not meet its own health targets nor international obligations to protect the rights of children” because it currently relies on industry self-regulation (Frost et al., 2025, p. 1). Within this broader context of food marketing, packaging stands out as a particularly important and avoidable source of exposure, with Frost et al. (2025) stating that “food packaging is what makes homes one of the most preventable places for unhealthy food and drink marketing” (p. 5).

Based on evidence from around the world, packaging is not just a neutral container but a key marketing channel. Elliott and Truman's (2020) review of 57 studies states that “food packaging matters when it comes to marketing

food to children” (p. 11) and that “food packages are portable advertisements that send strong messages to children” (p. 13). Different methods of persuasion are employed in child-targeted packaging, such as cartoon figures, incentives, bright colours, and product shape (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

13 studies examined how cartoon characters influence children's thoughts and actions. Nine studies found that kids like cartoon characters on the packaging and desire the product. However, five of the nine studies involving children aged 3-10 found no effect of cartoon figures on packaging (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

Frost et al. (2025) state in their article that marketing involves the direct and indirect persuasion of individuals to purchase a product, which can happen anywhere and through any means, with the aim of influencing people’s behaviour and choices.

Children in Wellington see 27.3 advertisements for unhealthy food and drinks each day, but only 12.3 advertisements for healthy options daily (Frost et al., 2025).

Signal et al. (2017) conducted a Kids Cam study involving 168 children, aged 11–13 years, over four consecutive days (Thursday to Sunday). They asked the children to wear a camera around their neck from waking up in the morning

until bedtime. The study found that children saw an average of 8.3 food advertisements every hour when in public. Similarly, 83.1% of marketing ads within a 500-metre radius around schools in Auckland were for unhealthy food and drinks.

Because of this, the front-of-pack (FOP) design has become a key area where imagery and text claims influence both children's desires and parents' purchasing decisions (Ares et al., 2022). A study by Ares et al. (2022) demonstrates how colours, characters, health cues, and claims can all work together to attract attention and automatically evoke thoughts of fun or health. Another study by Dixon et al. (2025) indicates that parents are significantly more likely to buy ultra-processed, child-oriented snacks if they see photorealistic images of fruit and vegetables on the packaging.

Studies by various authors show that children in Aotearoa New Zealand are exposed to food marketing across multiple environments, with packaging a particularly persistent and hard-to-regulate channel. Few of the studies mentioned above explain advertising, and few highlight the persuasive power embedded in packaging design. This suggests that both exposure and content should be considered together, forming an integrated marketing communication system encompassing many ways of marketing food to children.

2.1 Packaging as a Persuasive Medium

This section critically examines packaging as a persuasive communication medium, focusing not only on how it influences children but also on the theoretical frameworks used to explain this influence.

According to Ares et al. (2022), packaging today is more than just a container, it is also a highly designed way to communicate as packaging changed from “containment, protection, and convenience” to “a key component of the marketing mix” that is used to get people’s attention, making it set out, and build loyalty as time passes (p. 2).

Elliott and Truman (2020), say that the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations’ specialized wing for worldwide public health as per Eurostat (2025), indicates that the effectiveness of food marketing messages depends on their ‘exposure’ and ‘power’ but, only two of the studies that were looked at (both content analysis) cite and quickly talk about the WHO’s idea of persuasive power. Elliott and Truman (2020) explain that this is vital since ‘power’ relates to the creative content, design, and execution of marketing messages that make them especially attractive and persuasive to children. However, this theoretical framework is not consistently applied across

empirical studies, limiting its ability to explain how packaging functions as a persuasive medium in practice.

How people pay attention to and respond to communications depends on their motivation and their ability to process information (Petty & Priester, 1994).

As per Dixon et al. (2025), product names and text-based claims that highlight a food product's benefits can give it a "health halo," leading people to think it is healthy overall, even if it isn't, based solely on those claims (p. 3).

Dixon et al. (2025) think that the kinds of food pictures that are on boxed snacks for kids might affect how healthy people think the snacks are. Some kids' snacks have text claims that say whether they contain a certain nutrient or ingredient (like "sweetened with real fruit") or not (like "preservative free"), or whether the product is good for kids (like "lunchbox friendly").

Dixon et al (2025) indicate that front-of-pack imagery depicting fruits or vegetables can function similarly to written nutrient or ingredient claims, shaping consumers' perceptions of a product's 'healthfulness'. This imagery contributes to a 'health halo' - and as a result, they are encouraging further research into how consumers interpret and respond to food-on-food imagery, which can clarify the extent to which packaging may communicate misleading impressions about a product's nutritional quality.

Based on the above theories, packaging is a persuasive medium within the integrated marketing communications framework, functioning alongside advertising, retail environments, and digital media as a continuous brand communication channel. Unlike traditional advertising, which is episodic, packaging remains consistently visible within everyday consumer settings.

2.1.1. Packaging's Role in Shaping Children's Food Preferences

According to Elliott and Truman (2020), Cartoon characters, colour, graphics, and rewards are among the visual elements marketers use to capture children's interest. By doing so, they promote things by appealing to children's visual and associative memory (Mehta et al., 2024).

Letona et al. (2014) reported that there was also a wide range in preferred packing; three of the most popular products were Soda (6.2%), Potato Chips (7.9%), and Juice drinks (18.9%). Their packaging featured visuals used in marketing strategies to target children, with no nutritional information. It was expected that children would choose based on visual aspects as they were asked to describe their favourite packaging. Some said they were drawn to it because of the characters or the graphics (such as a Mermaid). Some people said that the colour scheme was the main thing that drew them in. Grades 5

and 6 students with an age range from 7 – 12 were the only ones to bring up the package's design and typography as a factor in choosing their preferred packaging; students in grades 1 and 2 with the same age range were more concerned with the product's flavour than its aesthetics (Letona et al., 2014).

According to a systematic assessment, businesses employ product personalities to help youngsters form an emotional connection with those items. Children are more vulnerable and reactive to advertising messages due to a lack of maturity. It's possible that advertisements spanning various methods could enhance these effects. Advertising to children has a history of affecting product recognition, demand, and purchasing choices, regardless of a product's nutritional value (Enax et al., 2015).

These findings suggest that children's responses to packaging are shaped by a combination of visual appeal and developmental factors, with young children responding more strongly to imagery and older children showing greater awareness of design elements such as typography and layout.

2.1.2. Packaging as Social and Cultural Signal

Watkins (2025) specifies that there is significantly more to advertising to youngsters than just selling the products to them. Their behavioural, social,

and intellectual growth are all significantly impacted. According to research, it can cause conflict between parents and children because they want things right away. Additionally, it has the potential to shape more generalised needs and ideals related to consumption. Items with lower self-esteem, reduced well-being, and weaker social relations have been linked to materialism (Watkins, 2025).

A study conducted by Brien et al. (2022), to systematically analyse advertising on the outside of convenience stores in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, also worked on highlighting the opportunities for policies to promote healthy food environments near primary schools, observed that an average of 12.5 ads per business was found among the 3693 total ads gathered from 296 locations. Nearly half of the ads were linked to schools in the lower decile. Urban areas accounted for 51.3% of ads and suburban areas for 43.2%. Brien et al. (2002) found that half of the advertising is for unhealthy products, targeting children in neighbourhoods of lower socioeconomic status than those in wealthier neighbourhoods.

Spence and Van Doorn (2022) investigated culturally diverse audiences, including monolingual English speakers, bilingual Chinese and English speakers, and monolingual Chinese speakers, to determine the associations each group forms between words and colour patches on product packaging. Their findings

showed that across all three categories, white represented innocence, blue represented the sky and water, green represented health, purple represented royalty, and pink represented femininity. In addition, red signifies appeal in English, and orange and red relate to enthusiasm in Chinese. They indicate that different cultures appear to have different conceptual associations with colours and their terminology. They therefore say that the interpretation of packaging appears to be market specific.

2.2. Packaging in The Marketing Ecosystem

This section situates packaging within a broader marketing ecosystem, critically considering how exposure across multiple environments amplifies its persuasive effects.

Packaging operates within a broader marketing ecosystem (Ares et al., 2022), where its persuasive effects are reinforced through retail environments, digital platforms, and spatial exposure (Signal et al., 2017). According to the food packaging industry in New Zealand, the emotions generated by product packaging account for more than half of all sales. Things that are visually appealing and display well on store shelves usually sell out far more quickly

than those that do not. An increase in sales is one of the many benefits of well-designed food packaging (LDNZ, 2022).

It should be noted that the visual design of product packaging can influence both customer expectations and their actual experience with the product.

Researchers in this field frequently begin by attempting to nail down consumers' expectations before presenting them with any package design (Spence & Van Doorn, 2022).

According to a study by Mehta et al. (2024), the product's shelf placement and package material are likely to have a significant impact on consumers' attention and appraisal. Consumers' focus and attention patterns were also considerably influenced by the various features of the packaging design. The packaging's emotional signals also influenced how customers felt about and interacted with the product. To promote and upsell their products, marketers may benefit from understanding which features capture the eye and evoke a certain feeling.

2.2.1 Integration with Digital and Transmedia Strategies

The digital marketing domain has become increasingly significant for food businesses targeting children. From 2019 to 2021, Garton et al. (2022) in New Zealand analysed the content of 64 corporate websites, 32 Facebook pages, and 15 YouTube channels belonging to the most popular food and beverage brands. Multiple statistics were used to pick the brands, including market share, online traffic analysis, and consumer involvement as measured by Facebook page 'Likes' and YouTube page views. The study examined the quantity and variety of food-related posts and videos, the audience engagement rate, the nutritional value of the items shown (using two different nutrient profile models), and the marketing techniques used. “Digital marketing is also difficult to monitor, as the landscape is rapidly changing, with new platforms constantly emerging, and also because targeted online advertising means exposure is different for each individual” (Garton et al., 2022, p. 16).

Northcott et al. (2025) note the WHO have said that “online food marketing has become a problematic feature of modern ‘digital food environments’, ‘the online settings through which flows of services and information that influence people’s food and nutrition choices and behaviour are directed” (p. 1). Brand logos, cartoon characters, bright packaging, contests, freebies, and hashtags are some of the ways digital marketing for unhealthy foods reaches the most

influential age groups, such as children and teenagers, according to previous studies (Northcott et al., 2025).

Wang (2022) suggests that the food packaging sector has benefited from digital media technology, enabling designers to strategically utilize visual impact elements such as text, graphics, and colour to achieve a wide range of performance effects. Creative food packaging design in the digital age is on the rise, not only catering to customers' aesthetic demands but also fostering stronger ties with the public, generating fresh ideas, and advancing the trend.

2.2.2 Packaging a Persistent Marketing Channel

Lavriša and Pravst (2019) point out that food for children is pervasive in the food chain, appearing on product packaging and in many forms of media. The packaging of food has a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, as many food selections are made at the point of sale. With less money going toward food ads in newspapers and magazines, clever packaging has become an increasingly important marketing strategy. To draw children's interest, package designs for children's products often feature vibrant colours, whimsical fonts, cartoon characters, images of famous people or athletes, and references to play and entertainment. Brand associations and taste

preferences are profoundly influenced by these kid-friendly items, which cause youngsters to believe these products are better, tastier, and more entertaining. Consequently, kids are more inclined to choose these kinds of food than the regular version (Lavriša & Pravst, 2019).

According to Castles (2021), food corporations see children as a lucrative market. Not only do children have "pester power" on their parents' purchasing habits, but businesses also rely on consumers continuing to use the same purchasing strategies they used when they were younger. Research found that 78% of adults think kids see far too many junk food and soda commercials. A large majority of respondents were deeply concerned about food marketing, with 6 out of 10 people expressing concern. Of those, product packaging (38%), web marketing (58%), sponsorship (42%), and television commercials (79%) were the most concerning (Castles, 2021). Unlike traditional advertising, which is encountered intermittently through media channels, packaging provides continuous exposure at the point of purchase and within everyday environments. This makes it a uniquely persistent form of marketing communication.

2.2.3 Retail Environments and Spatial Concerns

Pauuvale et al. (2022) demonstrate how food environments around schools create consistent exposure to children. When young people participate in researching local evidence related to social issues, they are more likely to apply what they learn. The available research on the potential correlations between the proximity of food retail establishments to educational institutions and the incidence of overweight and obese students has shown conflicting results. The general opinion is that further longitudinal studies are necessary. Fast-food locations, takeout restaurants, and convenience stores are more prevalent in regions with high rates of economic disadvantage, according to a New Zealand map of the retail food environment around schools. A larger proportion of low-income New Zealand adolescents (12–17 years old) than their non-poor classmates buy school lunches and have extra money for snacks before and after school (Pauuvale et al., 2022).

Research by Kneller et al. (2024) found that there were more than three times as many unhealthy food and drink advertisements around schools in Auckland as there were healthy ones. The study used Google Street View (GSV) to document outdoor advertising in school areas across New Zealand, including billboards, signs, flags, banners, neon signs, stickers, and bus shelter advertisements. Advertising on bus shelters and convenience store fronts has been the focus of subsequent GSV-based studies. Within 500 metres of

primary and secondary schools, 12.8% of the promoted products were "non-core" meals and beverages, which are known to be harmful. Ads promoting unhealthy foods and drinks accounted for over half of the displays at convenience stores near primary schools (50.5% compared to 9.4% for healthier options). A majority (78.2%) were clearly aimed at children.

2.3 Policy Context and Regulatory Environment

This final section evaluates the regulatory context, assessing the extent to which current policy frameworks address the influence of child-targeted packaging.

In New Zealand, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) primarily regulates food marketing; the Children's Advertising Code also governs advertisements targeted at children (ASA, 2025). It's a group that receives funding from businesses and uses it to develop voluntary standards of conduct and to investigate advertising complaints. The Children and Young People's Advertising Code, adopted in 2017 as part of the ASA's code updates, places restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks to those under 14. However, some argue that it falls short in key areas (Castles, 2021).

The Advertising Standards Authority separately defines “Advertising and Advertisement(s) means any message, the content of which is controlled directly or indirectly by the advertiser, expressed in any language and communicated in any medium with the intent to influence the choice, opinion or behaviour of Children and this Code does not apply to product labels or packaging, bona fide news, annual reports, reviews, editorial or broadcast programmes, including programme promotions” (ASA, 2025). The ASA (2025) code focuses on broadcast, print and digital advertising but does not address the on-pack persuasive elements used by manufacturers. While television ads for unhealthy foods are restricted to certain times, the same product can also be used outside, around children’s schools.

2.3.1 Structural Weaknesses of the New Zealand Policy Framework

Sing et al. (2020) conducted a study to figure out how the Codes were applied. They first looked at the applicable New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Codes, including the judgments of the ASA Complaints Board and Appeals Board from 2017 to 2019. They adapted the self-regulation system to the principles of public health law as a second step. Under the Children and Young People's Advertising Code (CYPA Code), just one of sixteen

complaints was upheld, while twelve were dismissed. The Advertising Standards Code (ASC) upheld three complaints; the CYPA Code was not. The Codes and the Complaints Board's interpretation of them failed to address certain aspects of the public health legal framework (p.1).

Barry (2016) says the advertising "codes" have several serious issues. The codes depend on industry self-regulation and are thus voluntary. The research in this area suggests that pervasive advertising of unhealthy foods contributes to childhood obesity, and self-regulation can protect consumers from marketing that clearly misleads or harms them, but it won't stop the widespread promotion of products to children that runs counter to public health messages. It is more likely that self-regulation has been successful when there are few complaints, which will help block the spread of visibly harmful or offensive advertisements, but may not protect youngsters from the persuasive power of these ads (Barry, 2016).

Research has repeatedly shown that industry self-regulation does not protect children and teenagers from harmful food marketing. This is because the industry has several interests in maintaining the status quo. Preserving the Advertising Standards Authority's present voluntary restrictions on the sale of unhealthy foods to children in their current form is not a viable option for

safeguarding children, as they are limited, weak, and ineffective (Vandevijvere & Swinburn, 2015).

2.3.2 International Evidence for Comprehensive Regulation

According to Taillie et al. (2020), global consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) has increased over the past few decades. High SSB intake is linked to many health issues. Public policies introduced mandatory front-of-the-package labels and taxes on high-SSB products in over 42 countries, and in US cities, were used as strategies to reduce SSB intake. Similarly, Chile, as part of the Law of Food Labelling and Advertising, introduced the first nationwide system of required FOP warning labels for sugar-sweetened drinks and energy-dense, non-essential meals in June 2016. Chile's food labelling and advertising law imposes stringent restrictions on the marketing of sugary drinks and other energy-dense products to children under 14, as well as on their sale and promotion in educational institutions. There is a lack of data on how consumers' use of sugar-sweetened beverages changed after warning labels were introduced, despite widespread support for such measures worldwide (Taillie et al., 2020).

For items with one or more nutrition warning labels on the front of the package, Mexico has proposed a ban on advertising featuring cartoon characters or themes aimed at children. In response, opponents of the ban threatened that it would violate both domestic and international agreements and laws. Stakeholder support for the clause facilitated its political acceptance and provided clear evidence that it complied with international trade rules. The Mexican Ministry of Education responded by recognising that these characters and advertising features promote practices harmful to children's health, which is why it secured this ban (Crosbie, Gomes, et al., 2023).

Similarly, Vinícius et al. (2024) investigated, after the rule requiring front-of-package labelling in Brazil was implemented in 2022, whether large Brazilian retailers had placed such labels on their food products. The study, which spanned from May to October of 2023, examined 2,145 items from five different Brazilian businesses. There were 541 goods that had warnings printed on the front of the package. Various categories adhered to different standards for front-of-package labelling, though many products included multiple warnings, such as "high in added sugar" and "high in saturated fat," on sugary cookies and candies. Results showed that 15% had a lot of sugar, 13% had a lot of sugar and fat, 23.47% had a lot of added sugar, 31.43% had a lot of saturated fat and sugar, 15.71% had a lot of saturated fat and added sugar, and

just 0.5% had a lot of sugar. The other items were not eligible for front-of-package labelling.

2.3.3 Gender Aspect in Child-Targeted Food Packaging

Research has recognised that food packaging promotes gender stereotypes and influences children's consumption behaviours. Elliott and Truman (2020) observe that packaging design generally uses gendered marketing strategies through several colour schemes and cartoon character choices. This gendered approach is evident in Nice & Natural's "Fruit Blocks" and "Fruit Unicorns & Friends". Pink and purple colour schemes, often associated with femininity, are used alongside fantasy characters such as mermaids and unicorns. While blue and green colours are associated with boys, they are linked to action heroes, vehicles, adventure animals, and construction machine creations.

A global scoping review conducted by Castronuovo et al. (2021) included 37 articles (39 studies); 17 were experimental, and 22 had descriptive, cross-sectional designs. A total of 23 studies among children and adolescents found gender-based differences; one of the key aspects in these studies was in various categories, including gendered marketing content. The author notes that, for gender targeted packaging marketing strategies, use colour schemes,

realistic images, toys, etc., to attract children. Products targeting boys emphasise themes of strength, action, competition, and sport, while packaging for girls uses several emotional associations, beauty imagery, and other elements. The evidence was not conclusive in any dimension.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has gathered information from several articles written by various authors in relation to food packaging and constructed its relation to the chosen Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns' products' packaging targeted at children in New Zealand's marketing framework. Research indicates that packaging functions through complex psychological mechanisms, utilising cartoon characters and bright, vibrant colours to create an emotional connection to the product, along with the strategic implementation of health halos via fruit imagery and nutritional claims that persuade both the children and their caregivers or parents. The New Zealand marketing environment, as described by Frost et al. (2025), and the revolutionary Kids Cam study conducted by Signal et al. (2017) reveal that children encounter limitless exposure to unhealthy food marketing, with packaging serving as a significant medium that accompanies them from retail stores into homes and schools.

The regulatory framework in New Zealand is unable to address these concerns. The negligence of regulatory frameworks in persuading packaging targeting children from the Advertising Standards Authority creates a major gap that enables the uncontrolled application of child-attractive marketing strategies on product packaging, despite greater restrictions on television advertising formats. Examples of regulations on packaging for kids through on-package labelling in Chile, Brazil, and Mexico stood out as an essential way to safeguard children's health. The examination of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' highlights the exploitation of regulatory inadequacies using multiple communication strategies that appeal to children's desire for fun and imagination while offering parents health-signalling visuals.

This chapter has presented the conceptual and factual foundation for a deeper analysis of instances of child-targeted packaging within this broader communication system, which connects with digital marketing, retail stores, social & cultural signals, and gender standards. All these are essential to developing evidence-based regulations that can effectively safeguard children from the persuasive influence of unhealthy food marketing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to examine child-targeted packaging through the analysis of two products from Nice & Natural: 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. A qualitative approach was adopted, combining content and discourse analysis to examine how product packaging's visual and text language constructs meaning for child consumers.

The chapter begins by presenting the research question and framing packaging as a marketing communication strategy that influences children's food preferences and caregivers' purchasing decisions. The chapter then demonstrates how content analysis and discourse analysis complement each other in examining the chosen artefacts with respect to their visual and textual

elements. Following this, the study adapted Neuendorf's qualitative content analysis methodology and applied Dryzek's discourse structure to organise my discourse analysis of the chosen case study.

The study then defined the sample and data boundaries and included my researcher perspective within New Zealand's food ecosystem. To complete this chapter, the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis were explored. The methods of analysis were used to show how child-targeted food packaging of the discussed artefacts was involved within broader cultural and consumer contexts.

3.1 Research Question

As per the case study in the context of Nice and Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends', my research question is:

“How do Nice and Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' construct meaning through packaging design and on-pack language directed towards children?”

The study treats packaging as both a visual and textual communication medium through which meaning is constructed. The analysis focuses on elements such as colour, text, figurines, and design.

3.2 Methodological Approach: Content and Discourse Analysis

A qualitative methodology was used, incorporating content and discourse analysis. The two approaches offered different analytical perspectives, but together they provided a complementary way to examine child-focused food packaging.

In the following sections, the study explored how Nice and Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' incorporated all these methods. The chosen products demonstrated that this integrated approach was effective, particularly for products featuring animated characters, imaginative imagery, gender-related visual elements, and well-being claims (Elliott & Truman, 2020; Signal et al., 2017).

Content analysis laid the groundwork for the subsequent phase, a discourse analysis of how language, images, and broader societal narratives shape meaning.

3.2.1. Content Analysis

The research started by analysing the qualitative content of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. It adopted a systematic approach to studying the importance of visual and linguistic design in product packaging communication. Neuendorf (2017) describes content analysis as a systematic, objective, and 'quantitative analysis' of message features. Neuendorf's content analysis has been applied to many types of texts, with a scope broader than just words. However, according to Drisko & Maschi (2016), "Interpretive content analysis" and "qualitative content analysis" are two methods researchers use that exclude statistical analyses from content analysis (p. 1). Drisko & Maschi (2016) note that additional approaches, such as "interpretive content analysis" and "qualitative content analysis," involve content analysis but avoid statistical methods. In these two methods, researchers rely on narrative descriptions of communication meanings in specific contexts rather than quantitative word counts.

There are some shared features and notable differences among these three content analysis methods. Researchers use various approaches to data collection, processing, and analysis, as well as different ways of conceptualising

the material (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The unit of analysis was the front-of-pack design of each chosen product. Coding units included individual visual and textual elements such as colour, characters, layout, and written claims.

"Content analysis is a method for inquiring into social reality that consists of inferring features of a nonmanifest context from features of a manifest text " (Krippendorff, 2004, p.25). The combination of child-friendly design elements and a visual narrative drew me to these products. Krippendorff's distinction between manifest and latent content is useful for understanding how packaging communicates through both its visible elements and the meanings audiences infer from them. In the context of child-oriented food packaging, manifest features such as imagery, colour and written claims can contribute to latent interpretations that shape how children perceive the product.

In their 2004 definition of content analysis, Krippendorff stresses that relevance is always understood through situational factors and states that it is a research method for obtaining reproducible and valid conclusions from documents or other relevant material regarding its contextual uses.

Content analysis is defined by Neuendorf (2017) as a statistically based, methodical, and objective assessment of communication qualities in quantitative research. However, it may also be utilised in qualitative and interpretative settings (Neuendorf, 2017; Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Content

analysis in this study was employed to systematically identify and categorise visual and textual features present on the packaging.

3.3 Analytical Framework Application

This section outlines the steps undertaken when applying the combined analytical framework, drawing on Neuendorf's methodology for content analysis, enhancing my classification framework with different coding features, and then applying Dryzek's discourse structure to the case study. From data collection and organisation to interpretation, this integrated framework laid out a clear course of action.

First, content analysis was conducted to identify and categorise visual and textual features. Second, these coded elements were analysed using discourse analysis to examine how meaning was constructed in relation to childhood, health, and consumption, thereby ensuring a clear progression from description to interpretation.

3.3.1 Applied Methods for Content Analysis

To achieve qualitative and interpretive goals, Neuendorf's (2017) content

analysis method was adapted. A typical nine-step process explained by Neuendorf is listed in Table 3.1 below (Neuendorf, 2017):

Table 3.1 – A Nine-Step Process of Content Analysis Research (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 41)

Typical Process Content Analysis Research

1. Theory and Rationale
2. Conceptualisation
3. Operationalisation
4. Coding Schemes with
 - a. Codebook and coding form
 - b. Computer-Aided Text Analysis
5. Sampling
6. Training and Pilot Readability
7. Coding
 - a. Establish intercoder reliability
 - b. Generate sample text per unit
8. Final Readability
9. Tabulation and Reporting

Neuendorf suggests that at least two coders are necessary to conduct content analysis to improve the reliability of the research. This study was carried out by a single coder. To boost credibility, reflexive memoing was employed to record interpretive decisions, and an audit trail was maintained to ensure coding consistency and stabilise interpretation across both products. The study adapted the content analysis method to suit the research project's parameters. Therefore, stages 6 and 8 will not be carried out in the content analysis for this project.

Analysis considered the visual aspects of the pack, such as colour schemes, their intensity, figure graphics, fruit symbols, presentation themes, and their organisation towards targeting children. Textual components, including product names, slogans, explanations, queries, and remarks on nutrition or health. Headings discussing entertainment, originality, fresh concepts, family, diet, and "authenticity."

These coding categories were developed deductively from existing literature on child-targeted packaging and persuasive design and refined inductively through iterative analysis of the packaging samples.

As described by Elliott and Truman (2020), when the food package was examined, analytical components were identified that were well-suited to attract children, such as cartoon characters, creative features, and legible

fonts. Subsequently, these elements were arranged on the front, rear, and sides of the package to emphasise their visibility when present and their distinct roles within the overall design.

This method aligns with interpretive content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016), which goes beyond generating numerical counts by using qualitative categorisation to develop theoretically informed categories that enable deeper inferences about context and significance.

Rather than concentrating solely on quantitative relevance, this revised method aligns with qualitative content analysis approaches that value openness, theoretical understanding, and in-depth interpretation.

3.3.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was used to investigate the role of packaging as a communication medium that influences children's views, choices, and understanding of the package and its nutrition through visuals. The study then moves from analysing the presence of features to investigating how those features impact ideas about children, health, and consumer responsibility using discourse analysis.

Dryzek's Discourse Analysis framework facilitated the extraction of significant insights from the sample texts. While Dryzek's study focuses on environmental culture as an analytical framework, it was used as an effective tool to deconstruct texts and reveal their complex contents. Dryzek's framework operates through four interrelated stages, as defined in his 'checklist of components for the study of discourses' (Dryzek, 1997). These elements are listed in Table 3.3

Table 3.3 Checklist of Elements Discourse Analysis

Checklist of Elements for the Analysis of Discourses

1. Basic Entities Recognised or Constructed
2. Assumptions about the Natural Relationship
3. Agents and their Motives
4. Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices

The four interacting stages of Dryzek's (1997) framework of discourse analysis provided insights that gave meaning to text or language. The first stage, 'Basic Entities Recognised or Constructed', recognised the elements that are present in the text and how they interact in the construction of it. These elements provided the foundation for analysing the text's intention.

The second stage, 'Assumptions about the Natural Relationships', situated the elements in the text within the discourse and acknowledged connections between the elements and the audience's assumed perception of them.

The third stage, Agents and their Motives, aims to understand the content, form, and distribution channels of the text used by exploring the agent's motives in constructing the media text, given an understanding of the elements within the discourse. This stage established the connections between the elements to understand the construction's motivations.

The final stage of the analysis focused on Key Metaphors and other rhetorical devices, which yielded insights into how the agent's motives and the construction of the media text were used to persuade the audience. This stage aimed to understand how the tools in the text's construction aid in achieving the agent's intention, and how these motives were situated within the broader understanding of the text's communication.

3.3.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection for Discourse Analysis

The sample (Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends') were selected purposively to allow in-depth qualitative analysis of the package and their visibility in the supermarkets. Packaging was treated as a communicative

medium throughout this study. All visual elements on the pack were analysed to ensure comprehensive interpretation.

The data collected includes the following:

All front-of-pack design elements are specifically targeted at children, including visual and textual features designed to capture their attention.

Multiple packaging elements were visible on the front of the pack, including the product name, background design, construction-block imagery, photographic fruit representations, health-related claims, fantasy-based characters (e.g., a unicorn), pastel colours, fonts, and illustrated cartoon figures.

Online features such as QR codes and social media were omitted because the package's content provided abundant information.

By collecting this data, the analysis was conducted while acknowledging that packaging is also a marketing communication channel.

3.4 The Strengths and Weaknesses of The Integrated Analysis

3.4.1 Strengths

The combined approach of content and discourse analysis had several methodological advantages for analysing child-targeted packaging. Content analysis of Neuendorf's (2017) adapted seven-step process offered a systematic framework for examining and documenting the visual and textual elements on Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' products packaging, allowing a thorough examination of colours, characters, fonts, and health claims specifically targeted at children. This reach has not left a single packaging element neglected. The procedural coding scheme has enabled a sensible analysis of both the products, one with a construction theme and the other with a fantasy theme, with precision.

Discourse, guided by Dryzek's (1997) four-stage framework, goes a step further by examining how the visuals on the package generated meaning and communicated with child consumers. This analysis explains how packaging works as a socially embedded text, uncovering the hidden persuasive messages communicated to children's imaginative world and, at the same time, addressing parental concerns towards nutrition (Goddard & Carey, 2017). The level of detail this analysis delves into is crucial to understanding the role of packaging within the marketing ecosystem and to working effectively to target children (Omoruyi & Durojaye, 2025).

3.4.2 Limitations

The study was conducted by a single coder, which may limit interpretive diversity (Neuendorf, 2017). The small sample size of two products may not represent the complete range of packaging solutions utilised in the New Zealand or global market. Focusing solely on the box language does not account for broader marketing context, such as advertising campaigns, that Signal et al. (2017) recognise as crucial to marketing strategies targeted at children, which can involve kids and gather observational data.

Applying Dryzek's (1997) environmental discourse framework to the research, although beneficial, may neglect discourse-analytical tools specifically designed for communication or children's studies. Similarly, the qualitative modification of Neuendorf's (2017), which is mainly a 'quantitative content analysis' approach, may compromise some systematic accuracy for the purpose of conceptual depth (p. 13).

3.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the qualitative methodology used to analyse child-targeted packaging through a combination of content and discourse analysis.

The approach enabled systematic identification of visual and textual features, followed by interpretation of how these elements construct meaning. The next chapters apply this framework to the selected case studies.

Chapter 4: Content Analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter explores content analysis of Nice & Natural’s ‘Fruit Blocks’ and ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ packaging to answer the research question:

“How do Nice and Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' construct meaning through packaging design and on-pack language directed towards children?”

The findings are based on the coding framework outlined in Chapter 3, where visual and textual elements were systematically identified and categorised, allowing patterns to emerge across the two products.

The analysis implemented the adapted seven-step process from Neuendorf’s (2017) content analysis framework as outlined in the methodology chapter (section 3.3.1) and as described in Table 4.1 below

Adapted Neuendorf’s (2017) content analysis framework

1. Theory and Rationale
2. Conceptualisation
3. Operationalisation

4. Coding Schemes with
 - a. Codebook and coding form
 - b. Computer-Aided Text Analysis
5. Sampling
6. Coding - Generate sample text per unit
7. Final Readability
8. Tabulation and Reporting

The analysis is grounded in a qualitative content analysis approach, drawing on the methodological frameworks of Neuendorf (2017), Krippendorff (2004), and Drisko and Maschi (2016), and informed by Elliott's (2008) work on "fun foods" and supermarket semiotics. The coding outcomes were presented in frequency tables and thematic summaries, with interpretive commentary supported by relevant scholarship to link observed features with established research on child-targeted marketing and packaging of the discussed artefacts.

4.1 Visual Theme Presence

This section presents the results of the content analysis related to the visual design features of the two Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns &

Friends'. The aim is to identify how visual elements such as colour, layout, and design motifs are used to create meaning and attract a child audience. These features were coded using a functional schema developed for this project, based on Elliott's (2008) analysis of "fun food" packaging and supported by content analysis frameworks from Neuendorf (2017), Weber (1990), and Krippendorff (2004). The coding results in this section are based on three key variables:

- Dominant Colour Scheme
- Design Layout Style
- Visual Motif Type

Coding decisions were made iteratively, with categories refined through repeated examination of the packaging to ensure consistency across both products.

4.1.1 Coding Colour Scheme

This subsection outlines the coding outcomes for the dominant colour schemes used on the front-facing panels of the two packages. Colour is a vital semiotic resource in marketing aimed at children, often used to convey fun, flavour, or healthiness (Elliott, 2008). The coding categories were devised based on previous research into colour psychology and children's media preferences.

Table 4.2 - Coding Colour Scheme

Code	Definition
Bright Primary	Dominated by saturated red, blue, or yellow tones
Pastel/Fantasy	Dominated by soft pinks, purples, or light blues, evokes whimsy or magic
Mixed/Multicolour	No single dominant palette; uses a wide range of bright, contrasting hues

Given the small sample size (n=2), these tables indicate the presence of features rather than statistical frequency.

Table 4.3 - Colour Scheme Frequency

Product	Bright Primary	Pastel/Fantasy	Mixed/Multicolour
Fruit Blocks	✓		✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends		✓	✓

Both products employ mixed or multicoloured palettes, aligning with Elliott's (2008) findings that bright, varied colour schemes increase visual salience, attract children and evoke excitement. 'Fruit Blocks' combine bright primary colours with genuine tones, such as green and brown, to suggest both fun and

health. In contrast, ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ relies heavily on pastel or fantasy hues to evoke magic, sweetness, pink and purple colour schemes commonly associated with gendered marketing strategies targeting young girls, reinforcing socially constructed preferences through visual design (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

4.1.2 Coding Layout Style

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the packaging layout style.

Layout refers to the spatial arrangement of visual and textual elements, including the placement of characters, logos, product images, and claims.

Layout is a key component of visual storytelling and can influence how children process and prioritise information (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Table 4.4 - Coding Layout Style

Code	Definition
Central Character Focus	A character or mascot is the focal point of the design
Product Centric	The food product itself is the visual focus, often enlarged or spotlighted
Balanced Split	Equal emphasis on character and product imagery

Text Dominant	Textual elements (e.g., claims, slogans) dominate the visual field
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Table 4.5 - Layout Style Frequency

Product	Central Character Focus	Product-Centric	Balanced Split	Text-Dominant
Fruit Blocks		✓	✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓		✓	✓

Both products use a Balanced Split layout, combining character imagery with prominent product visuals. The 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' leans more heavily on a Central Character Focus, with a unicorn, mermaid, butterfly and mixed mascot characters occupying most of the front panel. This aligns with Elliott's (2008) observation that anthropomorphic characters are often used to create emotional connection and brand loyalty among children. This reflects broader outcomes that character-centred layouts are used to increase emotional engagement and brand recall among children (Elliott, 2008; Johnson et al., 2019). By making the character the focal point, packaging shifts the child's

attention away from the nutritional product and towards a parasocial relationship with the mascot, suggesting an attempt to humanise the brand. ‘Fruit Blocks’ places greater emphasis on the product itself, using a product-centric layout that showcases the snack’s variety of shapes and textures. This may serve to reassure caregivers about the product’s recognisability and appeal. Product-focused layouts may also function to signal transparency and recognisability, which are important factors in caregiver decision-making (Ares et al., 2022).

4.1.3 Coding Visual Motif Type

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the dominant visual motifs used on the packaging. Motifs are recurring symbolic elements, such as stars, sparkles, fruit icons, or nature imagery, that contribute to the product's overall narrative and emotional tone.

Table 4.6 - Coding Visual Motif Type

Code	Definition
Fantasy/Magic	Includes stars, sparkles, or mythical creatures
Play/Adventure	Includes action or playful settings

Abstract/Geometric	Includes shapes, patterns, or representational design elements
Genuineness Tone	Includes real fruit images

Table 4.7 – Visual Motif Frequency

Product	Fantasy/Magic	Play/Adventure	Abstract/Geometric	Genuineness Tone
Fruit Blocks	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓

‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ relies heavily on Fantasy/Magic motifs, including unicorn, feminine-coded characters, butterfly and mixed mascot characters.

‘Fruit Blocks’, on the other hand, incorporates a variety of snack shapes and textures, such as fruit illustrations and real colours, alongside Play/Adventure and Abstract/Geometric elements. This hybrid strategy indicates the presence of both fun and health-oriented visual elements, a tactic noted by Elliott (2008) as common in “better for you” snack branding. This dual strategy reflects the

common marketing appeal to both children and caregivers (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

4.2 Character and Fantasy Elements

This section presents the outcomes of the content analysis related to the use of characters and fantasy motifs on the packaging of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. Characters, especially anthropomorphised animals or mythical figures, are a common strategy in child-targeted marketing, used to create emotional connection, brand familiarity, and imaginative appeal (Elliott, 2008; Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2019).

The use of characters and fantasy elements is widely recognised as a persuasive strategy in child-targeted marketing, designed to attract attention and create emotional attachment to products (Dixon et al., 2014; Elliott & Truman, 2020). This section also examines how fantasy elements such as magical creatures, sparkles, and adventure themes are used to construct narrative meaning and position the product within a child's symbolic world.

The coding outcomes for this section are based on two key variables:

- Character Type

- Fantasy Motif Presence

Each variable was defined using the functional categories outlined below.

4.2.1 Coding Character Type

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the type of character featured on the packaging. Characters were coded based on their visual form and symbolic function, drawing on Elliott’s (2008) typology of “fun food” mascots and Johnson et al.’s (2019) framework for visual storytelling in children’s media.

Table 4.8 - Coding Character Type

Code	Definition
Anthropomorphic Animal/Fruits	Non-human figures with human-like characteristics (e.g., smiling, expressive, animated fruit or animal forms)
Mythical Creature	A fantasy figure such as a unicorn, butterfly, fish, fairy or a mix of any two
Human Child	An illustrated child figure

Table 4.9 - Character Type Frequency

Product	Anthropomorphic Animal/Fruits	Mythical Creature	Human Child
Fruit Blocks	✓		
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓

Each product features a distinct character type aligned with its thematic positioning. ‘Fruit Blocks’ use an Anthropomorphic Animal, Fruits to signal friendliness, playfulness, and trust. This aligns with Elliott’s (2008) observation that animal mascots are often used to create emotional resonance and brand loyalty among children. ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’, as the name suggests, features a Mythical Creature, a unicorn with sparkles, a baby girl, a fairy, a butterfly, a fish and real fruit images designed to evoke fantasy, magic, and gendered appeal.

4.2.2 Coding Fantasy Motif Presence

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the presence and type of fantasy motifs used on the packaging. Fantasy motifs were coded based on visual elements that suggest magic, adventure, or imaginative play.

Table 4.10 - Coding Fantasy Motif

Code	Definition
Sparkles/Fairy	Includes glitter effects, magical sparkles and 'Fruit Blocks' background
Creative Symbols	Includes stars, action cues
Attractive Text	Includes the fancy titles themselves

Table 4.11 – Fantasy Motif Frequency

Product	Sparkles	Creative Symbols	Magical Text
Fruit Blocks		✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓

'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' uses a full suite of fantasy motifs, including Sparkles/Fairy, Creative Symbols such as Butterfly, Fish, Fairy, and Magical Text. These elements work together to construct a fantasy narrative that positions the product within a magical world. Johnson et al.'s (2019) approach aligns with their observation that fantasy motifs in children's media are often used to evoke wonder, imagination, and emotional engagement. 'Fruit Blocks' include creative animal symbols such as a snake, a duck, a turtle, a jet and a

windmill, suggesting playfulness and imagination. The use of fantasy motifs in both products reflects a broader trend in child-targeted packaging to embed products within imaginative story worlds that extend beyond the food itself.

4.3 Health and Nutritional Claims

This section presents the outcomes of the content analysis related to health and nutritional claims on the packaging of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. Health claims are a common feature in child-targeted food marketing, often used to reassure caregivers about product quality while simultaneously appealing to children through indirect associations with energy and growth (Elliott, 2008; University of Auckland, 2025). This section examines how such claims are framed, what language is used, and how they interact with visual design to construct meaning.

The coding outcomes for this section are based on three key variables:

- Type of Health Claim
- Claim Placement
- Claim Symbol Use

Each variable was defined using functional categories, outlined below.

4.3.1 Coding Health Claim Type

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the type of health-related claims made on the packaging. Claims were coded based on their linguistic framing and implied benefits, drawing on definitions from Neuendorf (2017) and Elliott (2008).

Table 4.12 - Coding Health Claim Type

Code	Definition
Nutrient-Specific	Mentions a specific nutrient (e.g., “No artificial colours or flavours”)
Genuineness Claim	Uses terms like “Contains real fruit juice”
Health Claim	Uses “Gluten Free”

Table 4.13 - Health Claim Frequency

Product	Nutrient-Specific	Genuineness Claim	Health Claim
Fruit Blocks	✓	✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓

Both products use Genuineness Claims, Nutrient-Specific Claims, and Health Claims, suggesting a strategic effort to appeal to caregivers’ desire for healthier options. Such claims contribute to a “health halo” effect, where products are perceived as healthier due to specific marketing cues (Ares et al. 2022; Dixon et al. 2025).

4.3.2 Coding Claim Placement

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for where health claims are placed on the packaging. Placement affects visibility and perceived importance, with front-of-pack claims typically interpreted as core product attributes (Krippendorff, 2004).

Table 4.14 - Coding Claim Placement

Code	Definition
Front Panel	The claim appears on the front of the package
Side Panel	Ingredients and nutrition on one side, and Package Regulatory information on the other side
Back Panel	The claim appears on the back panel of the package

Table 4.15 – Claim Placement Frequency

Product	Front Panel	Side Panel	Back Panel
Fruit Blocks	✓		✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓		✓

Both products place health claims on the Front Panel, ensuring immediate visibility to caregivers and reinforcing the product’s health positioning. Both product packaging includes additional nutritional information on the Side Panel, describing the content and ingredient breakdown. This placement strategy suggests an effort to balance child-directed design with caregiver reassurance. This reflects a dual-audience strategy commonly observed in food marketing, in which packaging appeals to children’s emotional engagement while simultaneously addressing caregivers’ rational concerns about health and quality (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

4.3.3 Coding Symbol Use

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the use of visual symbols to reinforce health claims. Symbols, such as check marks, fruit icons, and “smart

choice” claims, can enhance perceived credibility and simplify message processing (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Table 4.16 - Coding Symbol Uses

Code	Definition
Smart Choice	Includes various health claims with a different background
Fruit Icon	Uses fruit imagery to imply real or freshness
Check Mark	Uses a check mark to signal approval or healthfulness

Table 4.17 - Symbol Use Frequency

Product	Smart Choice	Fruit Icon	Check Mark
Fruit Blocks	✓	✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓

Both products prominently use Fruit Icons, reinforcing their claims of authenticity and suggesting freshness. Check marks appear next to claims such as “Contains real fruit juice”, “No artificial colours or flavours”, and “Gluten Free”, functioning as visual cues of approval. Simplified visual symbols can enhance message processing and increase perceived credibility, particularly in low-attention decision contexts (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Neither product uses formal Health Badges, such as government-endorsed seals or logos, which may reflect the voluntary nature of packaging regulation in Aotearoa New Zealand (ASA, 2025). The reliance on informal symbols suggests a marketing strategy that prioritises visual persuasion over regulatory compliance.

4.4 Product Naming and Language

This section presents the outcomes of the content analysis related to the linguistic framing of product identity on the packaging of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. Language plays a central role in shaping consumer perception, especially in child-targeted marketing, where word choice can evoke fun, fantasy, health, or emotional connection (Elliott, 2008; Neuendorf, 2017). This section examines how product names, slogans, and descriptive phrases are used to construct meaning and position the product within broader cultural narratives. Language in child-targeted packaging often combines emotional appeal with functional messaging to influence both children's preferences and parental purchasing decisions (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

The coding outcomes for this section are based on three key variables:

- Product Name Type
- Descriptive Language Framing
- Emotional Appeal Language

Each variable was defined using functional categories, outlined below.

4.4.1 Coding Product Name Type

This sub-section presents the coding outcomes for the type of product name used. Product names were coded based on their linguistic structure and symbolic associations, drawing on Elliott’s (2008) analysis of “fun food” naming conventions and Krippendorff’s (2004) framework for symbolic meaning.

Table 4.18 - Coding Product Name Type

Code	Definition
Fantasy Based	Uses imaginative or magical terms (e.g., “What characters can you create?”)
Action Based	Uses verbs or movement-related terms (e.g., “How many characters can you create?”)
Descriptive/Neutral	Uses literal or straightforward terms (e.g., ‘Fruit Blocks’ and ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’)

Hybrid	Combines fantasy or action with descriptive elements
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Table 4.19 - Product Name Frequency

Product	Fantasy-Based	Action-Based	Descriptive/Neutral	Hybrid
Blocks	✓		✓	
Unicorns & Friends	✓		✓	

The product names ‘Fruit Blocks’ and ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ are clearly both Action and Fantasy-Based, invoking magical creatures and social play. This aligns with Elliott’s (2008) observation that fantasy naming is often used to construct imaginative narratives that appeal to children’s sense of wonder. The two names reflect branding strategies such as fantasy, emotional engagement, clarity and familiarity. Such naming strategies are designed to evoke curiosity and engagement, reinforcing the product's identity in a playful, imaginative context (Elliott, 2008).

4.4.2 Coding Descriptive Language Framing

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for the descriptive language used on the packaging to frame product attributes. Descriptive language includes phrases that highlight flavour, texture, or ingredients, and may be used to construct sensory appeal or healthfulness.

Table 4.20 - Coding Descriptive Language

Code	Definition
Sensory Appeal	Describing taste, texture, or mouthfeel (e.g., “Gummy,” “Fruit,” “Health Claims”)
Ingredient Highlight	Emphasises specific ingredients (e.g., “Contains real fruit juice”)
Shape/Texture Focus	Describes the physical form of the product (e.g., “blocks,” “unicorns”)
Descriptive Language	“What characters can you create?”, “How many characters can you create?”

Table 4.21 - Descriptive Language Frequency

Product	Sensory Appeal	Ingredient Highlight	Shape/Texture Focus	Descriptive Language
Blocks	✓	✓	✓	✓

Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓	✓
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Both products use Sensory Appeal and Ingredient Highlight language to contribute to perceptions of desirability and product quality. Phrases like “Contains real fruit juice” are common across both packages, reflecting a dual strategy of emotional and nutritional persuasion. This aligns with Elliott’s (2008) finding that unconventional shapes are often used to signal fun and differentiate products in the child snack category.

4.4.3 Coding Emotional Appeal Language

This subsection presents the coding outcomes for language that evokes emotional or social connection. Emotional appeal language includes words or phrases that suggest fun, friendship, family, or adventure, and is often used to position products within relational or lifestyle narratives (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Table 4.22 - Coding Emotional Appeal Language

Code	Definition
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Fun/Play Language	Uses pictorial words of different shapes and phrases like “What characters can you create?”
Friendship/Belonging	One of the packs titles is “Unicorns & friends”
Family-Oriented	The pictography combines the family to open the package and play together

Table 4.23 - Emotional Language Frequency

Product	Fun/Play Language	Friendship/Belonging	Family-Oriented
Fruit Blocks	✓	✓	✓
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓	✓

Both products use Fun/Play Language to construct excitement and engagement. Emotional appeal language plays a key role in shaping children’s responses by associating products with fun, friendship, and positive experiences (Elliott & Truman, 2020).

‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ also includes Friendship/Belonging language, positioning the product as part of a social experience (“& Friends”) that encourages sharing and connection. Both products also include family-oriented

cues, referencing shared consumption contexts such as lunchboxes and caregiver approval. This dual targeting strategy appeals to children through fun and to caregivers through family.

4.4.4 Gender Analysis

Table 4.24 – Gender Analysis

Product	Gender Neutral	Feminine Coding
Fruit Blocks	✓	
Fruit Unicorns & Friends	✓	✓

Both products are gender neutral. However, the ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ concentrates more towards the use of pink and purple colour schemes, along with fantasy characters such as unicorns and mermaids, which reflects gendered marketing strategies that target young girls by emphasising themes of imagination, friendship and emotional engagement. This aligns with research indicating that gendered design elements are frequently used in child-targeted marketing to reinforce socially constructed preferences (Elliott & Truman, 2020)

4.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of a qualitative content analysis of two child-targeted food products from Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. The analysis was structured around four key coding categories: visual theme presence, character and fantasy elements, health and nutritional claims, product naming and language. Each category was examined using functional definitions and coding outcomes adapted from established content analysis frameworks (Neuendorf, 2017; Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1990; Drisko & Maschi, 2016) and grounded in the context of child-directed marketing (Elliott, 2008).

Across both products, several key patterns emerged:

1. Visual design plays a central role in constructing appeal. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' relies on pastel colours, fantasy motifs, and a central unicorn character to evoke magic and imagination, while 'Fruit Blocks' uses a more grounded palette and product-centric layout to balance fun with health cues.
2. Characters and fantasy elements are used strategically to engage children. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' constructs a whimsical narrative

through its unicorn mascot and magical motifs, while 'Fruit Blocks' uses an anthropomorphic animal to signal playfulness and trust.

3. Health and nutritional claims are present on both packages, often accompanied by check mark symbols, suggesting a stronger appeal to caregiver concerns.
4. Linguistic framing is used to construct both product identity and emotional resonance. Both 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' use fantasy-based naming and friendship language to position the product within a social and imaginative world appealing to both children and caregivers.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Nice & Natural employs differentiated strategies across its child-targeted product range. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' emphasises fantasy elements and emotional storytelling. 'Fruit Blocks', while still playful, integrates more health-oriented cues and caregiver-friendly language, suggesting a dual-audience strategy.

These outcomes provided a descriptive foundation for the subsequent discourse analysis, which further explores how these features contribute to broader meaning-making processes.

Overall, the analysis aligns with existing research on child-targeted food marketing, reinforcing the role of packaging as a persuasive communication medium within broader marketing ecosystems.

Chapter 5: Discourse Analysis

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to apply discourse analysis to the packaging of two child-targeted food products from Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends'. This chapter addresses the second component of the research question: "How do Nice & Natural's Blocks and Unicorns & Friends construct meaning through packaging design and on-pack language targeted at children?"

While Chapter 4 used content analysis to identify and categorise visual and textual features, this chapter uses discourse analysis to interpret how those features function within broader cultural, ideological, and relational frameworks. The analysis is grounded in John Dryzek's (1997) four-part framework for discourse analysis, which defines discourses as "shared ways of apprehending the world" and offers a structured method for examining how meaning is constructed through media and communication.

Dryzek's framework includes four analytical components:

1. Basic Entities Recognised - What elements are foregrounded or constructed in the text?

2. Assumptions about Natural Relationships - What relationships are implied or normalised?
3. Agents and Their Motives – Identifying the communicative actors and their underlying strategic objective.
4. Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices - What symbolic tools are used to shape meaning?

This chapter applies Dryzek’s framework to each product individually, beginning with Blocks (Section 5.1) and followed by Unicorns & Friends (Section 5.2). Section 5.3 offers comparative insights and a thematic synthesis of the discourses identified.

5.1 Discourse Analysis – ‘Fruit Blocks’

5.1.1 Basic Entities Recognised

Entity One - Text and Typography

The front panel of ‘Fruit Blocks’ features the Nice & Natural’s brand name in bold, sans-serif font, positioned prominently at the top of the package, stretching from left to right. The product name ‘Fruit Blocks’ is rendered in a

playful, chunky typeface that mimics the shape of toy blocks, reinforcing the product's child-oriented appeal. The text is multicoloured, with each letter in a different hue: red, yellow, green, and blue, evoking a sense of fun, diversity, and visual stimulation. Just above the letters L and O, there is the word 'fruit' in red colour (Nice & Natural's, 2025).

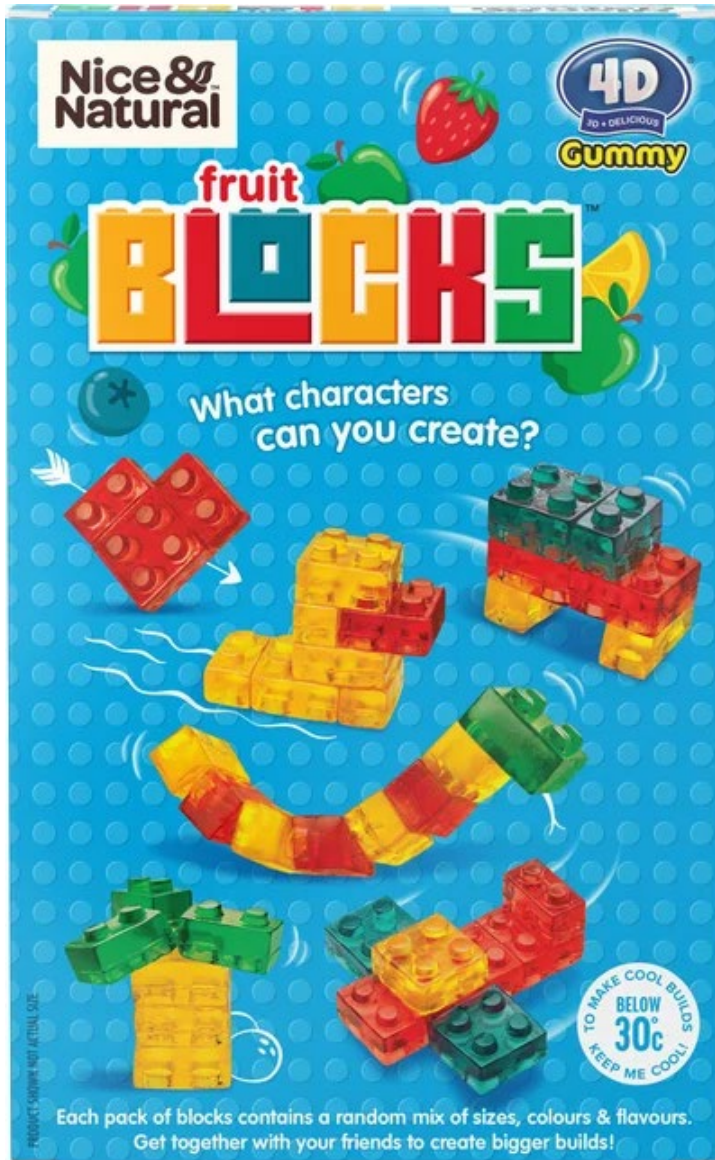
Supporting text includes phrases such as "Contains real fruit juice" and "No Artificial Colours or Flavours," printed in smaller, clean fonts that contrast with the playful product name at the bottom right corner of the front panel. These textual elements are arranged in a balanced layout, with health claims and brand identity flanking the central area, which features several fruit names (apple, strawberry, lemon, and blueberry flavours) (Nice & Natural's, 2025).

Entity Two - Visual Imagery

The central visual focus of the packaging is pictures of the blocks built as a giraffe, and surrounding it are fruit chews in vibrant colours, arranged in a scattered, dynamic layout. The 'Fruit Blocks' in various shapes adjacent to fruits with matching colours are scattered (e.g., apples, strawberries, grapes and Blocks adjacent to each fruit colour), which serve both as flavour indicators and as attractive visual cues. These anthropomorphic figures are clearly designed to appeal to young children, serving as friendly guides or mascots.

Entity Three - Background and Colour Palette

The background of the packaging is a children's toy blocks pattern covering the whole box with sky blue colour, suggesting coolness and a connection to a fresh, breezy landscape. The use of sky blue evokes an air of innocence, quite literally having its head in the clouds. It is a wonderful colour for relaxing mid-afternoon, halfway between creation and reflection (Matthews, 2022). The overall colour scheme is bright but not overwhelming, balancing child-friendly vibrancy with caregiver-oriented cues of wholesomeness.



5.1.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships

Assumption One - Food and Health

Through the packaging of Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends', children might assume a natural relationship between fruit-based snacks and healthfulness. The phrase "Contains real fruit juice" and the absence of artificial additives are presented as self-evident indicators of

nutritional value. This reflects what Dryzek (1997) would describe as a reformist and prosaic discourse, one that accepts the industrial food system but seeks to improve it through incremental adjustments, such as cleaner ingredients and clearer labelling.

Assumption Two - Children and Play

The design assumes that children are naturally drawn to bright colours, playful fonts, and friendly characters. The anthropomorphic giraffe and block shaped snacks suggest that food is not merely nourishment but also a source of entertainment and engagement. This reflects a discourse of childhood as a space of imagination and play, where consumption is intertwined with identity formation and emotional experience.

Assumption Three - Parents and Responsibility

The inclusion of health claims and naturalness indicators assumes that caregivers are concerned about nutrition and ingredient quality. The packaging constructs a discourse of responsible parenting, framing choosing “real fruit” snacks as a morally sound decision. This aligns with Elliott’s (2008) observation that food packaging often targets dual audiences, children and their caregivers, by combining playful aesthetics with health-oriented messaging.

5.1.3 Agents and Their Motives

Agent One - The Brand (Nice & Natural's)

Nice & Natural's is positioned in the top-left corner of the pack as a caring agent that understands the needs of both children and caregivers. Through its packaging, the brand constructs itself as a provider of fun, healthy snacks that support children's development and parental values. The use of the giraffe mascot suggests a desire to build brand loyalty through emotional connection, while the health claims signal transparency and trustworthiness.

Agent Two - The Child Consumer

Packaging engages children by using bright colours, playful characters, and distinctive shapes to spark their imagination. It also assumes that children will respond positively to the product's visual and tactile appeal and that their preferences can influence purchasing decisions.

Agent Three - The Caregiver

Caregivers are portrayed as rational, health-conscious decision-makers looking for products that align with their values. The packaging appeals to their desire to provide nutritious options without sacrificing their child's enjoyment. This dual appeal reflects what Dryzek (1997) describes as a discourse of

“democratic pragmatism,” in which consumer choice is framed as a site of ethical negotiation among competing values: health, convenience, and child happiness.

5.1.4 Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices

Metaphor One - Food as Play

The product name ‘Fruit Block’ functions as a metaphor that equates food with toys. This metaphor is reinforced by the snack's shape, the multicoloured typography, and the presence of a cartoon giraffe in blocks. The metaphor positions the snack as part of a child’s imaginative world, where eating is not just a biological act but a form of play.

Metaphor Two - Nature as Nurture

The use of fruit imagery, real fruit images adjacent to blocks, and phrases like “real fruit” construct a metaphor of nature as a nurturing force. This metaphor appeals to caregivers by suggesting that the product is aligned with genuine goodness and health.

Rhetorical Device - Colour as Semiotic Code

The strategic use of colour functions as a rhetorical device that encodes meaning. Bright primary colours signal fun and child friendliness, while green and yellow suggest health and vitality. The contrast between the playful product name and the clean, minimalist health claims reflects a deliberate attempt to speak to multiple audiences simultaneously.

5.2 Discourse Analysis – ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’

5.2.1 Basic Entities Recognised

Entity One - Text and Typography

The product name ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ is rendered in a whimsical, sparkly, and flourished, evoking fantasy and playfulness. The text is predominantly pink and purple, with white accents and glow effects that create a magical, dreamlike aesthetic. The Nice & Natural’s brand name appears in a smaller, more neutral font, subordinated to the product’s fantasy-driven identity. Supporting text includes health claims such as “Contains real fruit juice”, “No Artificial Colours or flavours”, “Gluten Free” printed in three lines one after the other, separating from the rest of the pack at the bottom

right corner, clean, friendly fonts that maintain the overall tone of softness and approachability.

Entity Two - Visual Imagery

The central visual focus is on the swaying image of real fruit, from under the middle of the title to the bottom-left corner. On the right is an image of the unicorn, surrounded by different fruit names and health claims. Each rendered in dark to fading tones. These visual elements are not merely decorative but serve as narrative agents, inviting children into a world of friendship and togetherness. A magical splash of stars with a fading-coloured tone integrated into the fantasy environment, blurring the line between food and fiction.

Entity Three - Background and Colour Palette

The background consists of a gradient of pink, lavender, and purple, overlaid with sparkles and stars. This palette constructs a soft, emotionally warm atmosphere, aligning with cultural associations of femininity, sweetness, and belonging. The presence of realistic product textures or photographic elements reinforces the product's positioning within an imaginative, child-centric world.

As Goddard and Carey (2017) note, discourse is not limited to language but includes all semiotic resources, images, colours, and layout that contribute to interpretation. In this case, the entire visual field functions as a discursive

space that constructs childhood as magical, emotionally rich, and socially connected.



5.2.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships

Assumption One - Childhood and Fantasy

The packaging assumes that children are naturally drawn to fantasy narratives and magical creatures. The unicorn character and a girly colour palette construct a discourse of childhood as a space of wonder, imagination, and emotional connection. This reflects what Dryzek (1997) might describe as an imaginative discourse, one that redefines the symbolic “chessboard” of consumer culture by embedding products within story worlds rather than nutritional logic.

Assumption Two - Health and Wholesomeness

With fantastic design, the packaging includes health claims such as “Contains real fruit juice”, “No Artificial Colours or flavours”, “Gluten Free” suggesting an overwhelming assumption that the caregivers next first supermarkets snack for their kids “to bring list” will be ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’. The juxtaposition of fantasy and health messaging suggests that indulgence and responsibility can coexist, a theme consistent with Elliott’s (2008) analysis of “fun food” marketing.

Assumption Three - Brand and Accessibility

The use of cartoon characters and friendly language assumes that the brand is approachable and child friendly. The presence of photographic realism and the use of soft, rounded design elements construct a discourse of emotional

accessibility, where the product is positioned as a companion rather than a commodity. This aligns with Jones's (2024) emphasis on how discourse constructs identities and relationships, particularly in consumer contexts where brands seek to become "friends" rather than mere producers.

5.2.3 Agents and Their Motives

Agent One - The Brand (Nice & Natural's)

Nice & Natural's is constructed as a playful, imaginative agent that understands children's emotional and symbolic worlds. Through its packaging, the brand positions itself as a storyteller, using characters and fantasy motifs to build a narrative around the product. The inclusion of health claims suggests that the brand also seeks to reassure caregivers, positioning itself as a responsible provider of child-friendly snacks. The brand's motive appears to be market differentiation through emotional storytelling and dual-audience appeal.

Agent Two - The Child Consumer

Children are often regarded as natural dreamers, irresistibly drawn to products that open doors to magical worlds and unforgettable characters. The

packaging assumes that children will form para-social relationships with the unicorn and its companions, treating them as friends or playmates. This reflects a discourse of empowered childhood, where consumption is not just about taste but about identity, emotion, and imaginative play.

Agent Three - The Caregiver

Caregivers are portrayed as gatekeepers seeking products that balance fun and health. The packaging appeals to their desire for clean ingredients and the health claims, while also offering emotional value for their children. This dual appeal reflects a discourse of democratic pragmatism (Dryzek, 1997), where consumer decisions are framed as negotiations between competing values - nutrition, joy, and emotional connection.

Foucault's (2002) concept of discourse as a system of knowledge and power is also relevant here. The packaging participates in a regime of truth that defines what counts as "Real fruit juice," "No artificial flavours," and "Gluten Free" for children. By aligning itself with these norms, the brand legitimises its presence in the domestic food environment and positions itself as a trustworthy authority.

5.2.4 Key Metaphors and Other Rhetorical Devices

Metaphor One - Food as Friendship

The product name 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' functions as a metaphor that equates food with social connection. The characters are not just mascots but companions, suggesting that eating the snack is related to joining a magical friendship circle. This metaphor constructs a discourse of relational consumption, in which products are embedded in emotional and social narratives.

Metaphor Two - Magic as Nourishment

The use of sparkles, fading colours, and fantasy creatures constructs a metaphor of magic as a nourishing force. The implication is that the product offers more than physical sustenance; it provides emotional uplift, imaginative engagement, and symbolic meaning. This reflects an imaginative discourse that redefines the purpose of food within children's lives, positioning it as a source of joy and wonder.

Rhetorical Device - Colour as Emotional Code

The colour palette functions as a rhetorical device that conveys emotional softness, sweetness, and a sense of belonging. Pink and purple are traditionally associated with femininity and fantasy, while lavender evokes calm and serenity. The colour scheme reinforces the product's positioning within a

discourse of emotional accessibility, framing consumption as a comforting and joyful experience.

Rhetorical Device - Character as Proxy

The unicorn character functions as a proxy for the brand, embodying its values and emotional tone. This rhetorical device allows the brand to communicate indirectly with children, using the character as a relational bridge. The character's expressive face, dynamic pose, and big-eyed, friendly gaze create a sense of intimacy and trust, reinforcing the para-social relationship between the child and the product.

According to Jones (2024), discourse encompasses not only the content of communication but also the participants, the manner of expression, and the intended audience. In this case, the unicorn "speaks" on behalf of the brand, translating its commercial motives into emotionally resonant messages that are more likely to resonate with young audiences.

5.3 Comparative Insights and Summary

This chapter has applied Dryzek's (1997) four-part framework for discourse analysis to two child-targeted food products from Nice & Natural's 'fruit

Blocks’ and ‘fruit Unicorns & Friends’. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that each product constructs meaning through distinct discursive strategies, reflecting different assumptions about childhood, health, branding, and consumer identity.

5.3.1 Basic Entities Recognised

‘Fruit Blocks’ foreground image of blocks-built giraffe, using photographic realism and product-centric layout to emphasise shape, texture, and recognisability. The Snake picture of a block-built structure is on the back of the panel, reinforcing the product’s identity as a tangible, edible object. In contrast, ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ foregrounds character and fantasy, using stylised illustrations and colourful gradients to construct an imaginative world. The snack is not visually central; instead, the characters and narrative dominate, positioning the product as part of a symbolic experience.

This difference reflects a broader tension between materiality and imagination. Blocks operate within a discourse of tangible consumption, food as a physical object with nutritional and sensory attributes. Unicorns & Friends operates within a discourse of symbolic consumption, food as a vehicle for emotional and imaginative engagement.

5.3.2 Assumptions about Natural Relationships

Both products assume that children are drawn to fun and fantasy, and that caregivers seek reassurance about healthfulness. However, the way these assumptions are constructed differs. 'Fruit Blocks' assumes a natural relationship between fruit-based snacks and health, embedding the product within a reformist and prosaic discourse (Dryzek, 1997) that seeks incremental improvements within the industrial food system. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends', assumes a natural relationship between fantasy and emotional nourishment, engaging imaginative discourses that redefine the symbolic terrain of consumption.

In Dryzek's taxonomy, 'Fruit Blocks' aligns with democratic pragmatism and ecological modernisation, where health and environmental values are integrated into existing consumer structures. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' leans toward purple romanticism, where emotional connection and aesthetic experience are prioritised over rational nutrition. While neither product is radical in the environmental sense, 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' exhibits imaginative departures from conventional food discourse, positioning itself within a symbolic ecology of childhood.

5.3.3 Agents and Their Motives

In 'Fruit Blocks', the brand acts as a responsible provider, balancing fun for children with reassurance for caregivers. The child is positioned as a playful consumer, and the caregiver as a rational gatekeeper. This reflects a discourse of responsible indulgence, where consumption is framed as a negotiation between pleasure and health.

In 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends', the brand acts as a storyteller and emotional companion. The child is positioned as an imaginative agent forming para-social relationships with characters, while the caregiver is addressed indirectly through health claims and aesthetic cues. This reflects a discourse of relational consumption, in which products are embedded in emotional and social narratives.

These differences suggest that Nice & Natural's is employing dual discursive strategies across its product range. 'Fruit Blocks' appeal to traditional values of nutrition and recognisability, while 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' seeks to expand brand engagement through emotional storytelling and digital interactivity.

5.3.4 Key Metaphors and Rhetorical Devices

‘Fruit Blocks’ use metaphors of food as play and nature as nurture, supported by colour coding and shape symbolism. The giraffe blocks function as a friendly guide, but the product remains central. ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ uses metaphors of food as friendship and magic as nourishment, supported by sparkles, fantasy language, and character proxies. The unicorn is not just a mascot; it is the emotional core of the product’s identity.

These rhetorical devices reflect broader cultural narratives in Aotearoa New Zealand. ‘Fruit Blocks’ align with discourses of naturalness, outdoor vitality, and parental responsibility, while ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’ taps into discourses of imagination, emotional accessibility, and gendered fantasy. The use of girly colours, sparkles, and friendship language in Unicorns & Friends reflects a gendered marketing strategy that constructs femininity as magical, social, and emotionally expressive.

As Foucault (2002) argues, discourse is not merely descriptive; it is productive. These packaging designs do not just reflect cultural norms; they help constitute them. By embedding food within narratives of play, health, and emotional connection, Nice & Natural’s participates in the construction of childhood itself as a discursive category.

5.4 Summary and Transition

Dryzek's framework has enabled a nuanced interpretation of how packaging constructs meaning beyond its surface features. While content analysis in Chapter 4 identified the presence of visual and textual elements, discourse analysis in Chapter 5 has revealed how those elements function within broader ideological systems.

The findings suggest that child-targeted food packaging of the discussed artefacts is not neutral; it is a site of ideological negotiation, where meanings are constructed, contested, and consumed. The use of fantasy, health claims, and character-based narratives reflects competing discourses about what childhood should be, what food should do, and how brands should behave.

These insights provide a foundation for Chapter 6, which will explore the implications of these discourses for public health communication, ethical marketing, and the regulation of child-targeted food environments. While this chapter has focused on meaning construction, the next chapter will examine the consequences of meaning, how these discourses shape behaviour, policy, and cultural norms.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Conclusion

6.0 Discussion

This thesis examined the creation of meaning and appeal through visual and linguistic elements on snack packaging targeted at children, using Nice & Natural's 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' as case studies within the food marketing framework of Aotearoa New Zealand. The results, obtained via the integration of qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis, demonstrate that packaging operates not just as a passive vessel but as an active communication mechanism that influences perceptions of childhood, health, and consumer behaviour.

The outcomes were based on a qualitative analysis of two packaging case study examples and should therefore be interpreted within the scope of this methodological approach. These results reflect patterns identified through systematic coding of visual and textual elements, as outlined in the methodology.

These findings demonstrate that packaging functions not merely as a marketing tool, but as a communicative system that shapes consumer

perceptions and influences how food is evaluated within everyday consumer environments.

6.0.1 Packaging as a System of Signification

The content analysis indicated that visual and verbal strategies were systematically employed to construct cohesive narratives for each product. The use of vivid colours, fantasy motifs, playful fonts, and character illustrations situates the products within imaginative narratives, thereby enhancing their visual appeal and perceived desirability.

Simultaneously, health-related words such as "contains real fruit juice," "no artificial colours or flavours," and "gluten-free" initiated a secondary discourse around duty and reassurance, particularly for caregivers.

This dual-layer design aligns with broader concepts of persuasive communication, in which emotional appeal and logical reasoning coexist (Petty & Priester, 1994). The packaging, therefore, reconciles want and restraint: it entices children into a realm of enjoyment and imagination while simultaneously reassuring parents with indicators of authenticity, purity, and nutritional consideration. This supports Elliott & Truman's (2020) literature

claim, as in this research, that contemporary food packaging simultaneously targets several audiences, including children's pleasure within ethical frameworks of responsible parenting.

These outcomes demonstrate how the visual features identified through content analysis function discursively to construct meaning within broader marketing and cultural contexts.

6.0.2 Discourse, Childhood, and Identity

The results illustrate how packaging influences the construction of specific images of childhood. 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' explores themes of enchanting femininity, imagination, and emotion, while 'Fruit Blocks' engages children in creativity, construction, and playful experimentation. They reinforce gendered notions put forward by Castronuovo et al. (2021) regarding children's behaviour, dietary choices, recreational activities, and self-perception.

Both products facilitate the integration of commercial goods with social and emotional experiences. Food exceeds nutrition; it serves as a companion, a plaything, and a medium for imaginative expression. The packaging does this by integrating consumption into children's everyday emotional experiences,

positioning branded food as essential to happiness, belonging, and creative exploration. This suggests that packaging not only reflects cultural values but also contributes to their construction and normalisation.

6.0.3 The Health Halo

A primary issue emphasised in this study is the contrast between health claims and cheerful, child-focused imagery. The intentional employment of expressions such as "real fruit juice" and imagery of fruit contributes to the phenomenon known as the 'health halo' effect, when products appear more beneficial than they are (Dixon et al., 2025).

This thesis also presents ethical challenges, particularly because children often lack critical thinking skills and caretakers rely on visual cues during high-pressure purchase scenarios. The persuasive power of packaging operates in a domain between conveying information and influencing individuals, wherein marketing tactics are perceived as nutritional guidance. This redistributes responsibility across families, industry, and regulators, demonstrating how marketing practices can blur the boundary between information and persuasion.

6.0.4 Compatibility with Aotearoa New Zealand's Food Environment

This study is situated within the broader food marketing ecosystem of Aotearoa New Zealand, where children are exposed to continuous and highly visible marketing in everyday environments. By focusing on two readily available supermarket products— ‘Fruit Blocks’ and ‘Fruit Unicorns & Friends’—this research demonstrates that packaging is among the most prevalent yet least regulated forms of marketing, accompanying children from retail spaces into homes and educational institutions (ASA, 2025).

Consequently, the findings reinforce the need to examine packaging as a primary mechanism for shaping children's food norms and consumer identities.

Beyond its applied implications, this research contributes an interdisciplinary understanding of how packaging functions as an integrated communication system that extends beyond traditional advertising.

In relation to persuasion theory, the study illustrates how visual and textual cues—such as colour, characters, and health claims—act as heuristic signals that influence perception and decision-making.

Furthermore, from a discourse perspective, the analysis highlights how packaging constructs meanings of childhood by positioning children as

imaginative, emotionally driven consumers while simultaneously addressing caregivers through rational, health-oriented messaging.

6.1 Implications

6.1.1 Implications for Regulations and Policies

This thesis highlights a significant gap in New Zealand's current regulatory framework towards food packaging targeted at children. The Children and Young People's Advertising Code excludes packaging, indicating that a highly effective and prominent marketing channel may largely self-regulate (ASA, 2025). Global instances from preceding chapters demonstrate that more stringent regulations, such as prominent warning labels on packaging and restrictions on imagery appealing to children, are not only feasible but increasingly essential (Taillie et al., 2020; Crosbie et al., 2023).

This highlights the importance of recognising packaging as a key site of regulation and as a central component of child-directed marketing rather than a peripheral element.

6.1.2 Impacts on Media Literacy and Education

In addition to legislation, the paper emphasises the significance of media literacy. This research clarifies the creation of meaning through packaging, providing a basis for educational interventions that teach children and caregivers to critically analyse packaging. Families may enhance their food choices by recognising emotional appeals, assessing health claims, and comprehending how visual cues can be persuasive.

These programs must exhibit cultural awareness and recognise disparities in financial resources to ensure that critical literacy is not an exclusive privilege for certain populations.

These implications also reinforce the role of packaging as a key communication medium within contemporary marketing systems, extending beyond its functional role as a product container.

6.2 Constraints of the Research

This research provides extensive insights into child-targeted packaging, yet certain limitations must be acknowledged. By examining only two products

from one brand, the research draws a narrow lens, making it difficult to apply the findings to a broader range of cases. A larger sample may reveal greater variance in design decisions and discursive techniques.

The study relied on textual and visual analysis rather than on seeing children's reactions. The study examines meaning construction critically, but it does not evaluate the actual behavioural effects or reception among child audiences.

This suggests that the findings relate more to potential influence than to confirmed behavioural outcomes. The absence of consumer response data limits the ability to determine how these packaging strategies are interpreted in practice, particularly by children and caregivers.

Ultimately, the study omitted interviews with caregivers, children, or industry professionals, which may have provided valuable insights into lived experiences and decision-making processes. As a qualitative study with a small sample size, the conclusions are not intended to be generalisable, but rather to provide in-depth insights into specific packaging examples.

In addition, this study does not account for how packaging interacts with other marketing channels such as digital media, advertising, and in-store promotions. Future research could examine how these channels work together to influence children's perceptions and behaviour.

Furthermore, while the study identifies persuasive strategies within packaging, it does not measure actual behavioural outcomes. This limits the ability to determine the extent to which these strategies directly influence children's food choices, highlighting the need for empirical audience-based research.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Subsequent research may improve this work in other critical dimensions. A comprehensive analysis across various brands and product categories would provide deeper insight into child-targeted packaging strategies in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Comparative studies among nations would enhance the understanding of cultural variation and regulatory impact.

Future research could integrate children's perspectives through approaches such as interviews, focus groups, or participatory visual analysis to deepen understanding of how children comprehend and emotionally engage with packaging. Caregivers' decision-making processes may be analysed to understand how health claims and visual cues influence purchasing behaviour.

Longitudinal studies would be beneficial for examining the impact of prolonged exposure to branded packaging on children's food preferences, identity development, and enduring health practices. Incorporating digital package

extensions and internet branding would more effectively illustrate the evolving media landscape for children.

6.4 Conclusion

This thesis asserts that food packaging targeted at children serves as a crucial semiotic and ideological medium that constructs meaning, shapes identity, and influences behaviour. The research demonstrates, through the case studies of 'Fruit Blocks' and 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends', how packaging integrates fantasy, health narratives, and emotional storytelling to captivate children while offering reassurance to parents via markers of authenticity and well-being.

These strategies extend beyond aesthetics; they are integral to broader cultural, ethical, and political paradigms that influence our perceptions of children and consumerism. The findings indicate a need to reevaluate the role of packaging within regulatory frameworks and to recognise it as a pivotal aspect of marketing impact.

This thesis underscores packaging as a critical area of study, explaining how everyday design practices influence children's engagement with food, identity, and consumer culture. To enhance the protection of children in increasingly

marketed food environments, collaboration on regulation, education, and research is essential. For scholars, this study offers a framework for analysing packaging as a discursive and persuasive medium, extending existing approaches in food marketing and communication research.

In doing so, the study highlights the importance of critically examining everyday marketing practices that shape children's food environments and consumer identities. While the study provides significant insights into the persuasive strategies of child-targeted packaging, these conclusions should be interpreted within the specific methodological scope and inherent limitations of the research design.

Chapter 7: References

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Chapter 8: Appendix

8.1 Indicators in Child Targeted Packaging

Cartoon characters and Fancy figurines

Several bright and pastel colours (Pink, Purple, Blue, Green, Red, Yellow)

Play and fun Imagination

Creative and rounded fonts

Fruit images

Health claims such as 'Real fruit juice' and 'No artificial colours or flavours.'

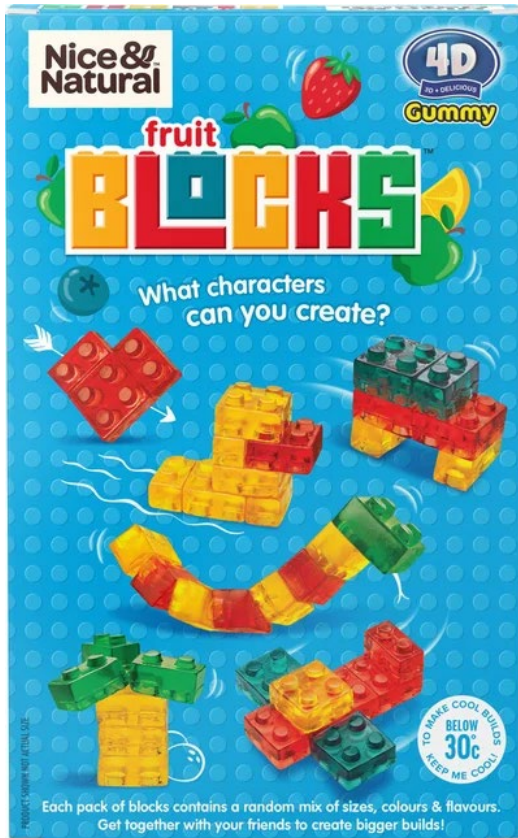
8.2 Gender Coding

Visual Cue	Associated Gender
Pink, Purple, Glitter	Feminine
Blue, Green, Block Shapes	Masculine
Unicorns & Mermaids	Emotion and imagination
Building blocks	Logic and activities

8.3 Image of 'Fruit Blocks' front of the Package



8.4 Image of 'Fruit Blocks' Rear of the Package



8.5 Image of 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' Front of the Package



8.6 Image of 'Fruit Unicorns & Friends' Rear of the Package

Nice & Natural

fruit Unicorns & friends

STORE ME
BELOW
30°C

How many
characters
can you create?
Here are some ideas...



PRODUCT SHOWN NOT ACTUAL SIZE