

# Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Working Paper:

## *Branding consistency across product portfolios in the wine industry*

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## **Branding consistency across product portfolios in the wine industry**

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### **Funding Source Declaration**

This research received financial support from the Wolf Blass Foundation.

# **Branding consistency across product portfolios in the wine industry**

## **Abstract**

### *Purpose*

The front label on wine bottles are important for identifying the brand and aiding purchase. Many brands are part of brand families, with the sub-brands linked to the overall brand family. This research provides an overview of how the front label varies across product portfolios of wine brands, noting the importance placed on branding elements and the level of consistency in their use across the brand portfolio.

### *Approach*

We propose and test a new method to measure branding consistency on labels from the same brand family. Two coding frameworks were created. The first recorded the incidence of brand elements and wine attributes. The second coded wine labels within a company's portfolio based on the consistency of various brand elements. A total of 3000 branding elements and wine attributes from 300 wine labels were examined across 60 wine brands from a list of Australian wineries.

### *Findings*

Grape variety, brand name, and region are used across >90% of wine labels. Branding is presented more prominently than wine attributes. Sub-brand, region, price, and variety did not influence branding consistency. Logo presence, logo image on label, and colour elements contribute to the greatest variation in branding consistency across a product portfolio.

### *Originality/value*

This study proposes and tests a novel method to measure branding consistency on wine labels and explores the extent to which consistent branding is used across product portfolios. Descriptive research is the first step to theory building. We provide industry norms for attribute use and a measure of branding consistency for product portfolios giving valuable descriptive knowledge.

*Keywords: branding; packaging; wine marketing; label; consistency; product portfolio; Australia*

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## Introduction

The Australian wine consumer has a plethora of brands available to purchase (Bruwer, 2002). There are over 2,000 wine producers (Winetitles Media, 2020), an estimated 10,000 wine brands (The Drinks Association, 2016) and over 60 regions across Australia with a multitude of varieties and blends available (Wine Australia, 2019). Anecdotally, product categories in supermarkets contain on average 10 brands, while wine can have over 700 brands on shelf (Lockshin and Hall, 2003). Such fragmentation in choice, and the ambiguous nature of wine, leaves consumers perceiving risk in their purchase decision (Bruwer *et al.*, 2013). Consumers can reduce risk by choosing brands they are familiar with, either through advertising or previous experience.

The front label is the first and often only source of information for consumers while shopping for wine (Barber *et al.*, 2008) and is the focus of this research. Elements such as the brand name, logo image, and colours (Hartnett *et al.*, 2016) can help consumers identify a brand on shelf (Romaniuk, 2018). Consistent use of brand elements across a brand's portfolio assists to build and reinforce memory structures in consumers' minds to aid brand identification.

Branding elements on the front wine label compete for attention with other attributes of wine that may affect recognition of the brand, such as region of origin (ROO), variety, country of origin (COO), vintage year, and awards. All elements influence the likelihood of purchasing a wine brand (Goodman, 2009; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015). However, these studies are primarily experimental and may not accurately represent the choice cues shown on labels in practice.

Brands are built through consistency in their brand identity (Romaniuk, 2018); and yet anecdotally, many wine brands appear to lack consistency in brand identities. In this research, we focus on the consistency of front label brand elements (direct and indirect) in the Australian wine industry. This research aims to document and quantify the degree to which Australian wine brands are consistent in their labelling across the product variants in their portfolio. It provides valuable insights needed for building theory from practice (Wilson and Ghingold, 1980). A new method to measure branding consistency is created, providing a foundation for marketers and researchers to understand how consistent wine labels are across brand portfolios.

## Literature review

A brand's identity comprises its name and other distinguishing elements (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) that can identify the brand's products from its competitors (Aaker, 1991). Romaniuk (2018) describes three roles of a brand: 1) to claim ownership, 2) to anchor branding associations in memory, and 3) to connect various marketing activities. Branding provides an aspect of familiarity (Coates *et al.*, 2006), which assists consumers to identify a brand on shelf (Harrison, 2013), and can reduce risk perception (Bruwer *et al.*, 2013).

Memory encompasses how we store, process, and remember information. A widely accepted set of memory theories are the Associative Network Theories (ANT) (Anderson and Bower, 1973). ANT state that people store concepts or information by creating nodes that represent what we have learnt. These nodes are stored in our memory with associated concepts (nodes). A link between two nodes is formed when concepts are presented together, creating associations (Anderson and Bower, 1973). Once encoded into long-term memory, external stimuli (e.g., a logo), can aid in retrieving the information (e.g., the brand name), into short-term memory.

Brand elements encompass the various attributes related to a brand e.g. brand name, colours, shapes, logos, images, slogans, and fonts (Zaichkowsky, 2010). Consistency across the brand and its elements aids retrieval in memory (Kohli *et al.*, 2002) and strengthens existing links in memory (Romaniuk, 2018). Given the short amount of time spent in store by consumers (Page *et al.*, 2018), brand elements are vital for quick brand recognition on shelf (Keller, 2005; Hoek and Gendall, 2010).

Brand identity can be categorised into 1) direct branding and 2) indirect branding (Hartnett *et al.*, 2016). Both are learnt associations strengthened through consistent co-presentation with the brand name (Ward *et al.*, 2024). Indirect branding refers to non-brand-name elements that are related to the brand. Non-brand-name elements can be colour, taglines, fonts, style, logos, package, characters, and audio cues, e.g., verbal, jingles, and music (Romaniuk, 2018; Hartnett *et al.*, 2016; Keller, 2005). Indirect branding can act as mental shortcuts to navigate a cluttered retail environment and find a brand on shelf (Keller, 1993). They provide a greater chance for a brand to be remembered, and not filtered out with all the competing brands in a retail environment (Romaniuk and Caruso, 2018).

### *Branding element types*

There are many different types of visual branding elements that can be used in front labels. A useful classification system groups into colours, word-based, story and shapes (Romaniuk, 2021). Our eyes identify colour before completely focusing on an image or scene (Wedel and Pieters, 2006). Consumers use colour to find brands on shelves (Van Der Lans *et al.*, 2008). An example is pink for Barbie.

The front label is the primary focus of this research, as it is an important source used by consumers to select wine and can include a variety of brand elements. Word-based elements include fonts, words, and taglines. Text displayed in a unique font or way of presenting it can help identify the brand. An example is Coca-Cola, which uses a unique script for its brand name (Zaichkowsky, 2010). Shapes include logos or symbols that help identify the brand on packaging. The label itself may have a unique shape or shapes that can be used within the front label. Faces are another visual identity choice and can include human faces or characters. Images can be processed by our peripheral attention, enabling faster processing among competing stimuli

(Childers *et al.*, 1986). They are also neurologically rich, as pictorial stimuli can have multiple sensory aspects e.g. colours, faces, and locations, thus expanding how the image is encoded into memory (Ward *et al.*, 2024). Images provide easier recognition and recall, unlike text-based stimuli which encode the meaning of the word (Quillian, 1982). This leads to the first research question:

*RQ1a: To what extent does the incidence of indirect and direct branding and wine attributes vary across all labels?*

#### *Branding prominence*

Prominence is the brand's ability to be identified on shelf (Nenycz-Thiel *et al.*, 2016). The visual elements that are eye catching to consumers e.g., colour, also act as a cue for consumers to recognise a brand in-store (Romaniuk and Caruso, 2018). For a brand to be noticed, it must be visible: the size of any brand element mediates the visual attention it receives (Pieters and Wedel, 2004). This leads to a further research question:

*RQ1b: To what extent do indirect and direct branding and wine attributes vary in prominence across all labels?*

#### *Context consideration*

The front label is important in consumers' decision-making process (Lockshin and Cohen, 2011), as it can act as a quality indicator by creating a link between label attractiveness and purchase intent (Boudreaux and Palmer, 2007; Verdu Jover *et al.*, 2004; Wolf, 2008). The major wine extrinsic cues that can compete with brand elements for consumer attention are listed below:

**Price** influences consumer choice (Jenster and Jenster, 1993) and is a strong indicator of wine quality (Quester and Smart, 1998).

**Region** of origin holds great importance as a factor in wine choice (Perrouy *et al.*, 2006; Lockshin *et al.*, 2006). In Australia, region is ranked highly among other choice cues throughout the literature (Tustin and Lockshin, 2001; Goodman, 2009; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015). Region on a label influences the assessment of the product and can assure wine quality (McCutcheon *et al.*, 2009; Bruwer and Johnson, 2010).

**Variety** indicates what the wine will taste like and is frequently used as a choice cue and it is consistently considered one of the top three extrinsic attributes in wine choice (Goodman *et al.*, 2007; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015).

There are also other attributes not directly related to branding, that are important attributes to document their prevalence on front labels:

**Year** on label, or the vintage, indicates when the grapes were harvested. The year has been shown to add significantly to the value of the front label as a source of information (Barber *et al.*, 2008; Barber and Almanza, 2006). This attribute also has a strong influence on how consumers evaluate the price of wine (Combris *et al.*, 1997; Combris *et al.*, 2000; Oczkowski, 2001).

**Awards** on labels are a form of third-party quality approval. The presence of an award on a wine label allows consumers to feel confident in their choice (Orth and Krška, 2001) and increases the likelihood of purchase (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006).

**Country of Origin (COO)** indicates where the wine was produced and can have a significant influence on the perceived quality of a product (Huber and McCann, 1982). COO must be present on Australian wine labels sold in the domestic market (Reeves, 2021).

In the Australian wine market some of the mentioned extrinsic cues are mandatory on the label of the product, some optional. According to most recent legislation, COO, name of food (e.g., wine), alcohol content, volume, number of standard drinks, lot identification, allergens, pregnancy warning, and name and address of the vendor, manufacturer, packer or importer, are mandatory to appear on the label of wine to be sold in the Australian market (Wine Australia, 2024). Other cues, such as brand name, geographical indication, variety and vintage are optional, but if claimed, there are subordinate legal requirements (e.g., minimum percentage shares).

#### Sub-brands

Consistency of branding across a brand family is important to capture when sub-brands are introduced under a parent brand. Wine brands often carry many sub-brands (Winetitles Media, 2020). For example, Hardy's produce *Hardy's Tintara* range of wines. For the purpose of this study, the proprietary brand is considered the parent brand, and any product portfolio functioning under that name are considered sub-brands or members of the brand family (Jarvis *et al.*, 2007)<sup>1</sup>. As the portfolio of products increases, the potential for inconsistency in brand identity elements shown on the front label will also increase if designers are unaware of the importance of a cohesive look and feel to aid brand prominence. This leads to two further research questions:

*RQ2a: To what extent does the variation in price, region, variety, and sub-brand influence branding consistency across sub-brand labels from the same brand family?*

*RQ2b: What brand elements (direct and indirect) drive branding consistency within sub-brand labels from the same brand family?*

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the primary goal of this study is not to delve into the differing branding strategies of wine companies but to provide a comprehensive understanding of what is present on wine labels.



## Method

### *Sampling frame*

A list of Australian wineries (Winetitles Media, 2020) was sorted and categorised by production quantity, and random selections were made from each category. The wineries were first categorised into small (5,000-19,999 cases produced), medium (20,000-99,999 cases produced) and, large (>100,000 cases produced) to ensure an equal distribution of firm sizes. Wineries that export >75% of their wines were excluded to ensure only wines available in Australia were sampled. Wines were sampled if they:

- were available at national retailers,
- had at least 3 price ranges <\$5-19.99, \$20-\$30, and >\$30 (similar to Azzuro *et al.*, 2017),
- had grape varieties in the top nine varieties planted in Australia, and
- were from one or more of the top ten Australian wine regions.

These criteria ensured that the wines selected had well-known regions, grape varieties, and price ranges. The total sample frame consisted of 271 small, medium, and large wineries that produced wine from the defined 13 regions and were sold in Australia. Once categorised into 29 large, 97 medium, and 145 small wineries, a random number was assigned to each winery using the RAND formula in Excel and sorted from smallest to largest by this number. A systematic probability sampling method was used to sample the wine brands from each stratum (firm size). This random sampling method reduced bias in the selection of brands and ensured equal representation of firm sizes. Sixty brands were included in the sample representing 22% of the sample frame. A skip interval was determined for each stratum by dividing 20 by the number of wineries in the stratum. The skip interval for large was 1.45 ( $n_{th}=29/20$ ), for medium wineries it was 4.85 ( $n_{th}=97/20$ ) and for small wineries 7.25 ( $n_{th}=145/20$ ). The sample included every 2nd large, 5th medium, and 8th small winery for the sample.

The final sample consisted of  $n=300$  bottle front labels from 20 small, 20 medium and 20 large wine brands with five product variants per brand. One variant from the low-price tier, three from the medium price tier, and one from the high price tier were randomly selected from medium and large brands. Two variants from the high price tier were sampled for small wine brands, and none from the low-price tier once it became clear that few small brands had variants in the low-price tier.<sup>2</sup>

### *Coding frameworks*

Quantitative data collection of online images provided data to answer the research questions. Two coding frameworks were developed to 1) document the incidence and prominence of brand elements and wine attributes on label, and 2) measure branding consistency within a

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<sup>2</sup> The sample does not represent the entire population of Australian wine brands.

portfolio. A total of 3000 branding elements and wine attributes were coded (5 branding elements and 5 wine attributes for each label). Details of the methods are available in the online supplementary material.

Three independent coders were used to validate the data collected. Inter-coder reliability measures were used to ensure the quality of interpretations and the reliability of the data collected. A robust measure that accounts for chance agreement is the Krippendorff Alpha (Krippendorff, 1970). Percentage Agreement and the Krippendorff Alpha were calculated for this research. All elements received a Percentage Agreement of above 80% and a Krippendorff Alpha of above .80 except 'other' image. 'Other' image received a Krippendorff Alpha of 0.51 for incidence and 0.60 for prominence. This is below the acceptable value of 0.67 (Krippendorff, 2004), hence the results drawn from any analysis involving the incidence and prominence of 'other' image should be viewed tentatively.

To answer RQ1a and RQ1b, each wine attribute and brand element were binary coded (0 = not present, and 1 = present) for their presence (incidence). The total number of pixels on the label, the number of pixels of each wine attribute and brand element were calculated using Adobe® Photoshop® software. From this, the proportion of each element on the label was calculated. SPSS statistical software was used to analyse the data.

The second coding framework answered RQ2a and RQ2b. Each brand element was coded across five product variants of each brand. A score out of five for consistency was calculated, e.g., if three labels used the logo image within a brand and two labels did not, then that brand would receive 3/5, or 60% consistency for logo presence. The brand element scores were averaged, producing an overall branding consistency score. Multiple regression was used to examine the influence of price, region, sub-brand, and variety on branding consistency (RQ2a). Finally, a principal component analysis (PCA) was run to test which brand elements contributed the greatest to the variation in the overall branding consistency scores (RQ2b).

## Results

*RQ1a: To what extent does the incidence of indirect and direct branding and wine attributes vary across all labels?*

Grape variety, direct branding, and region are used across more than 90% of labels. The most commonly used variables are 1) grape variety, 2) direct brand name, 3) region, 4) logo, and 5) sub-brand name (see Table 1). 'Other' image (i.e., other imagery besides the logo), year, COO, and awards are present on less than 50% of all front labels sampled. Three of the top five frequently used variables are brand elements. While grape variety and region are used across nearly all 300 bottles, we will examine their size on the label as further evidence of their relative importance compared to other label elements.

The frequency of showing the brand name was expected as it indicates ownership. 5% of labels used a sub-brand name instead of the parent brand. A sub-brand appears on 67% of all labels sampled, highlighting it is common to display multiple brands. The brand font, defined as the typeface used on the brand website, is present in 86% of all labels, with a logo present on 70%. 37% of labels did not have an ‘other’ image beside the logo present on the label.

Grape variety is used in 98% of cases, followed closely by region, which is present on 91% of labels. Year (27%), COO (18%), and awards (2%) are less frequently shown. Findings align with earlier research, as grape variety and region are important in consumer purchase decisions (Bruwer *et al.*, 2014; Bruwer *et al.*, 2017; Hirche and Bruwer, 2014; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015; Lockshin *et al.*, 2006). The incidence of awards is lower than expected, as awards increase purchase intent (Lockshin and Cohen, 2015) and likelihood of buying (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006). Although awards are presented as an option for consumers in an experimental design, they are less present on labels in a retail context. The reason could be that the effectiveness of awards is their temporal nature. The absence of year may be an artefact of sourcing images online, as the year was present on the retailer's website in 96% of cases. The lack of presence of COO on the front label could be due to the focus on domestic Australian wines.

**Table 1. Presence and Prominence of Brand Elements and Wine Attributes on Label**

Variables	Presence (%)	Variables	Prominence (%)
Variety	98	'Other' image	27
Direct branding	95	Awards	9
Region	91	Logo image	7
Logo image	70	Direct branding	5
Sub-brand	67	Sub-brand	5
'Other' image	37	Region	3
Year	27	Variety	2
COO	18	Year	1
Awards	2	COO	1

*RQ1b: To what extent do indirect and direct branding and wine attributes vary across all labels in prominence?*

The high incidence of brand elements and the greater proportion of the label they cover indicates that branding holds greater importance to label designers than wine attributes. Using pixel measurements, the proportion of brand elements shown was examined (see Table 1). ‘Other image’, while not frequently used, is the largest element type when present (averages 27% of the label). Direct branding, logo image, and sub-brand are more frequently used on labels, but on average are 4-5 times smaller than ‘other image’.

The analysis finds uniformity in the average size of variety, region, year, and COO. Awards, although not frequently used, average 9% of the label when present, taking up the largest proportion of labels across the wine attributes. This aligns with previous findings on the importance of awards on purchase intent (Lockshin and Cohen, 2015) and the likelihood of buying (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006). But as stated previously due to their temporal effect, once it wanes awards are less important as shown in their low presence (2%).

*RQ2a: To what extent does the variation in price, region, variety, and sub-brand influence branding consistency?*

The use of multiple sub-brands, varieties, and regions across a product portfolio and a large price range across a brand’s product offerings (when expressed as a percentage) are not statistically related with the variance in branding consistency. Within the scope of the sample and model, branding consistency is not associated with these descriptive variables. No single descriptive wine element makes a significant unique contribution to the variation in branding consistency (Table 2).

**Table 2. Descriptive Variables Contribution to Branding Consistency**

Descriptive Variable	Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
Sub brand range	0.067	0.68
Price range	0.028	0.84
Variety range	0.089	0.55
Region range	0.141	0.34

*RQ2b: What brand elements (direct and indirect) drive branding consistency within a brand product portfolio?*

A principal component analysis (PCA) was used to investigate which variables made the strongest contribution to the variance in the latent overall branding consistency. The linear combinations of the variables are ordered by the amount of variance they explain in the data. Table 3 presents all 15 original variables measuring brand element consistencies in decreasing order of their mean. Hence, we gain some initial insights into the brand elements which have highest to lowest part consistencies across all brands investigated. Brand name presence, logo presence, logo image on label, and logo font on label are most consistent across all brand portfolios. We also explore PCA loadings for an initial overview. In addition, a correlation analysis of the original 15 variables coded in the overall consistency score was conducted. The matrix revealed a high correlation (>0.7) between logo image position on label and logo presence, ‘other’ image on label and ‘other’ image colour, cap logo font and cap brand name presence, and cap logo image and cap logo presence. Logo image position, ‘other’ image on label, cap logo font, and cap logo image were removed in subsequent analyses.

**Table 3. Consistency Variable Descriptive Statistics and PCA Loadings**

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Loadings
Brand name presence	0.95	0.09	0.45
Logo presence	0.86	0.21	0.87
Logo image on label	0.83	0.22	0.81
Logo font on label	0.78	0.22	0.34
Logo image position on label (rem)	0.77	0.24	0.81
Cap brand name presence	0.76	0.27	0.60
Cap logo font (rem)	0.76	0.27	0.56
Logo font colour	0.74	0.18	0.41
Label main colour	0.73	0.21	0.13
Logo image colour	0.69	0.27	0.62
Cap logo image (rem)	0.64	0.34	0.30
Cap logo presence	0.64	0.34	0.30
'Other' image presence	0.59	0.33	0.13
'Other' image on label (rem)	0.40	0.22	0.26
'Other' image colour	0.39	0.22	0.19

Note: PCA required that missing values in the data, for example where branding elements were not present on the label, had to take the value of the series mean (rem) = removed in further analysis due to high intercorrelation

A PCA on the remaining 11 brand element consistency variables identified how much each of the independent variables (brand element part consistencies) contribute to the variance of the latent principal component (overall branding consistency). We split the data by firm size to explore any potential differences. Logo presence and logo image on label have the strongest contribution to overall branding consistency regardless of firm size (Table 4). Brand name presence on label and cap are particularly relevant for brand portfolios of medium and large firms. Also, logo image and logo font colour contribute to branding consistency, while the consistency of logo image colour is highest (mean = 0.822,  $p < 0.01$ ) for large firms compared to other firm sizes. These findings support the results where logo presence and logo image are the largest of the brand elements and help to explain their influence on the consistency and design of the label.

**Table 4. Top 5 PCA Loadings of Branding Variables on Branding Consistency by Firm Size**

Firm size Rank	Small		Medium		Large	
	Variable	Loading (mean)	Variable	Loading (mean)	Variable	Loading (mean)
1	Logo presence	0.930 (0.800)	Logo image on label	0.748 (0.835)	Logo presence	0.879 (0.929)
2	Logo image on label	0.921 (0.813)	Logo presence	0.747 (0.835)	Logo image on label	0.815 (0.844)
3	Logo image colour	0.707 (0.688*)	Cap brand name presence	0.719 (0.729)	Brand name presence	0.680 (0.960)
4	Label main colour	0.498 (0.740)	Brand name presence	0.705 (0.950)	Logo font colour	0.653 (0.730)
5	Cap logo presence	0.490 (0.680)	Logo font colour	0.631 (0.770)	Logo image colour	0.572 (0.822*)

Note: PCA required that missing values in the data, for example where branding elements were not present on the label, had to take the value of the series mean

\*Statistically significantly different mean between groups at the  $p \leq 0.01$  level

The relationship between variation in branding size and branding consistency is conceptually important for maintaining a coherent brand image and building brand equity. Practically, ensuring uniformity in branding size across product variants facilitates consumer recognition, supports effective marketing communication, and can provide a competitive advantage in the marketplace. We therefore explore the relationship between the variation in branding size and branding consistency. The standard deviation of the proportion of brand elements was averaged to provide an overall branding size variation score for each brand. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted on branding size variance (IV) and branding consistency score (DV).

There is a medium negative correlation between the consistent size of branding (as measured by the average standard deviation across the proportion of the label covered by brand elements) and overall consistency (as measured by the consistency coding framework),  $r = -.370, p = <0.01$  (Cohen, 1988). Greater inconsistency in the size of elements across product variants is associated with lower branding consistency scores. When brand elements are present on only some product variants, it negatively impacts the overall branding consistency.

## Discussion

Wine variety appears most frequently on labels (i.e., presence). This finding aligns with choice cue research, consistently ranking variety as the most important element (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015; Goodman, 2009; Johnson and Bruwer, 2007). Direct branding and region follow closely behind. On average, the brand elements ‘other’ image, logo image, direct branding, and sub-brand are presented larger than wine attributes. Approximately every fourth (27%) front label shows the vintage year<sup>3</sup>. Awards are rarely shown (2%), indicating they are less important than previously suggested (Lockshin *et al.*, 2006; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015; Tustin and Lockshin, 2001). The experimental design of choice cue research compared to the descriptive design of this study may explain the difference in findings. When used, awards are prominent (9%) on front labels.

All other wine attributes tested (region, variety, COO, and year) took up, on average, less than 3% of the label. The uniformity in size of the wine attributes suggests that there may be category norms related to how these attributes are used on a label. The decision to put COO on the back label may not extend to export market labels, with further research required for export markets.

The influence of logo presence and logo image on label on consistency scores warrants discussion, as does the importance of logo image colour, logo main colour, and logo font colour. Colour is attention-grabbing and is an important identification tool for consumers (Van Der Lans *et al.*, 2008), and logo image is a valuable brand asset that is easily owned by one brand (Ward *et al.*, 2020). The finding suggests their importance in delivering a cohesive brand identity and were also the two most prominent brand elements recorded on a label. We find that logo presence and logo image on labels contribute most to overall branding consistency across all firm sizes, followed by colour elements (i.e., logo main colour, logo image colour and logo font colour). The presence of the brand name on labels and caps strongly contributes to consistency for medium and large firms. Logo image consistency is highest in larger firms. These findings can be explained through a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. The importance of these brand elements across different firm sizes can be attributed to their fundamental role in establishing a recognizable and cohesive brand identity, enhancing brand equity, and ensuring effective market positioning and differentiation. For medium and large firms, the focus on specific elements like brand name presence and logo image colour consistency reflects their need to manage more extensive brand portfolios and maintain brand integrity across broader markets and more diverse consumer bases. Small firms on the other hand may still need to develop a

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<sup>3</sup> Note that we examined only the front label in this research, for stated reasons. Vintage year and award could be slightly underrepresented because these attributes may potentially either appear on the back label, or they are intentionally removed so that product images can be used in multiple years, or awards may be received with delay after the image was produced. However, we believe that these assumptions and potential biases are minimal and do not substantially influence the branding-related findings in this research.

strong, consistent brand identity. By focusing on key brand elements that are universally important—such as logo presence and imagery—and preparing for the evolving importance of other elements as they grow, small firms can effectively use branding consistency to compete effectively and facilitate future growth.

Sub-brand, variety, and region did not have a significant influence on branding consistency, and each had very low prominence (5% or less). Finally, as variation in the size of brand elements on the front label increases, the branding consistency score decreases. This analysis warrants further exploration into why this is occurring.

## **Implications, limitations, and future research**

### *Research implications*

Our research contributes new knowledge and provides descriptive analysis on the use of wine attributes and branding elements on front wine labels. The measure of branding consistency across product portfolios was a novel approach. This research is the first of its kind to explore branding consistency in the wine industry. For consumers to easily identify a brand across multiple positions and price points in-store, they must cue established memory structures via consistent branding. Establishing a method to measure package branding consistency allows for this method to be extended across more brands in the wine industry but also to other product categories.

Our finding that brand elements took up more space on the label than wine attributes was interesting, as choice cue literature primarily focuses on the wine attributes and direct branding (Lockshin and Cohen, 2015; Goodman, 2009). The frequent use of variety, brand name, and region supports choice modelling findings (Lockshin and Cohen, 2015; Goodman, 2009; McCutcheon *et al.*, 2009). While frequently used, variation of using different varieties, sub-brand names and region names within a brand range does not affect overall branding consistency. This finding suggests that a sub-brand's use of a distinct name has little effect on the parent brand's consistency. When wishing to distinguish sub-brands, adding a new name is preferred over creating a new logo image. The exploration of the presence and prominence of brand elements (direct and indirect) contributes new knowledge to the wine industry and branding literature. Benchmarking common brand elements provides insight into the branding practices of the Australian wine industry. Brand elements, such as the brand name, fonts, and logo image are dominant on labels.

Finally, a primary contribution of this research is the method of measurement used. A novel method coded wine labels for incidence and prominence of brand elements and wine attributes using Adobe® Photoshop® software. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to measure the relative size of brand elements and wine attributes using pixel counting. By using this method, robust data was collected whereas other methods (e.g., subjective categorisation of



the size of elements like 0-5%, 5-10%) would not have captured the detail of the variables recorded. By using Adobe® Photoshop® software, elements that took up less than 1% were able to be documented accurately.

### *Practical implications*

Brand elements are prominent on the label, suggesting that while wine attributes remain a small proportion of the label, branding can and is being presented as the main cue on a label. Logo presence, logo image on label, and colour elements underpin the branding consistency score. These elements are among the largest brand elements on a label and help create a cohesive brand identity. Inconsistent use or making changes to these will likely impact brand prominence and purchase. Keeping the colour consistent across products can enhance brand identification (Gaillard *et al.*, 2006) amongst the clutter (Wedel and Pieters, 2006). Keeping the logo consistent reinforces existing memory structures for the brand (Ward *et al.*, 2020). Consideration of the potential negative effects is important to label designers before making changes to branding elements.

The uniformity in how wine attributes are displayed on a label indicates that wine brands do not need to use a large proportion of space on a label for them to be useful. When making managerial decisions about how to design the wine label, this is a useful benchmark for designers.

### *Limitations and future research*

The 60 Australian wine brands sampled are only a small proportion of the potential 700 brands on shelf at retail at any one wine store (Lockshin and Hall, 2003). Five products from the portfolio were selected, but replication is needed to confirm findings are representative of the Australian domestic wine labels. This research assumed the parent brand was the most salient brand to consumers. However, sub-brands may be better known, and this would affect how consumers view branding consistency and the measurement expressed in this research. The scope of the sample was restricted to Australian bottled wine labels in the domestic market.

When calculating the branding consistency scores, each element was used equally. However, research suggests that not all brand elements are equal. Visual elements such as colour, although a highly competitive brand element (Ward *et al.*, 2020), when successfully associated with a brand, is more useful as a brand identification tool than other elements, e.g. font (Gaillard *et al.*, 2006). Using each element with the same importance may limit the accuracy of these findings.

Further research is required to confirm why COO, year, and awards were not frequently found on front labels. The back label may show COO information in Australia, with different design choices used for export markets. The lack of presence of year is likely an artefact of using online images as the removal of the year allows image re-use, with the year listed online across 97% of the 300 labels.

Future research into wine attributes and branding to non-traditional wine packaging formats is recommended as consumers respond to wine labels on non-traditional formats differently to traditional formats (Orlowski *et al.*, 2022). It may be beneficial to further explore the nuances of branding dynamics to understand managerial design decisions by incorporating additional variables or considering alternative methodological approaches to address potential complexities not captured in the current analysis. Replication for export markets and other countries is important prior to the generalisation of results beyond Australia. Cross-country data would enable comparisons to be made between wine producing countries as there are noted differences in consumer choice cue preferences (Goodman, 2009; Lockshin and Cohen, 2015). A recent study by Ward *et al.* (2024) shows that branding consistency positively affects consumer recall. Future research could extend this study to the wine industry to test the effect of branding consistency on consumer recall of wine brands as well as other outcome variables such as consumer choice and consideration of wine brands.

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