

# 'Pick Me, Pick Me!'

## Standing Out in E-Commerce

Uncovering Insights Regarding Successful Methods for Brand Prominence Online

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Research (Marketing)

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# DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.

An abstract from this study, titled '*What Makes a Brand Stand Out Online?*', was peer reviewed and accepted for presentation at the ANZMAC 2022 Conference.

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# ABSTRACT

In today's cluttered shopping environments, brands must stand out from their competitors to be noticed (Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2021; Romaniuk, 2023; Vinitha et al., 2021). The use of visual design elements on packaging, such as colours, logos, and text, help to attract shopper attention (Mohebbi, 2014; Phillips et al., 2014a; Romaniuk & Caruso, 2018; Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Underwood et al., 2001; Walter & Gioglio, 2020). Visual elements are particularly valuable for consumer-packaged goods (CPG) brands, as shoppers make purchase decisions based on visual examination of the package (Clement, 2007).

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) is an online shopping environment which has seen exponential growth in recent years (Statista, 2023). Increasing competition online means little attention is afforded to individual brands (Hicks & Still, 2019; O'Connor, 2015). Brands have very little 'real estate' in e-commerce, adding to the difficulty that brands face in standing out (Romaniuk, 2018b). Advertisements, special offers, and notifications contribute to the clutter and draw shopper attention away from brands (Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2021). This reinforces the importance of visual elements in helping brands to be more visible in e-commerce.

Prior in-store studies identified colour as the most prominent visual element on shelf, through an intercept interview method (Gaillard, 2007; Piñero et al., 2010). Comparable e-commerce studies merely analyse individual elements or categorise elements into visual and verbal groups, for example, image versus text (Kim & Lennon, 2008; Townsend & Kahn, 2014). Whilst potentially useful for evaluation of a single element type, these studies do not allow for comparison across element types. Accordingly, this research extends prior in-store research (Gaillard, 2007; Piñero et al., 2010) to determine if the findings are generalisable to e-commerce.

The thesis investigates the relationship between visual elements and brand prominence, to understand which elements capture the most attention online. Two studies are conducted across 11 CPG categories. **Study 1** investigates eight product categories, tested across US and UK markets in 2020. **Study 2** covers three product categories in the US in 2021. The brands tested in Study 2 are local to the sample country, allowing for the

measurement of potential familiarity and usage effects. Brands of varying sizes, including both national and private label brands, are selected to measure the effect of brand size.

The thesis contributes three main discoveries to academia and practice. First, the thesis finds that **colour is the most prominent element** in e-commerce and in-store, extending prior in-store studies (Gaillard, 2007; Pinero De Plaza et al., 2015). Moreover, while colour should be prioritised in both shopping environments, its use is especially important in-store with the possibility of the colour blocking tactic, where multiple facings of a single brand create a substantial block of colour on shelf and effectively attract attention (Aglo, 2019; Kahn, 2017; Vermeulen, 2013; Young, 2003).

**Design is the second most prominent element** in e-commerce and in-store. This finding demonstrates the importance of the overall packaging aesthetic, including structural design features of shape and size. While the potential for structural design to draw attention is acknowledged, it should be noted that practicality and usability are important roles of packaging (Ambrose & Harris, 2011; Underwood, 2003). Therefore, modifications to packaging design may be detrimental if done at the expense of easy transportation, storage, and use (Rundh, 2009).

Finally, **larger brands are more prominent than smaller brands** in e-commerce and in-store. Moreover, **private label brands are less prominent than national brands** in both shopping environments, likely due to a lack of advertising (Baltas et al., 1997; Cunningham et al., 1982; Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2014). Nonetheless, **small brands have the opportunity to achieve the prominence of a large brand**, by building distinctive visual elements. Advertising is one way in which distinctive visual elements can be built, enhancing the prospects of standing out for both small and private label brands.

The main implication is that brand owners should prioritise the use of colour. Selecting colours the brand can own, rather than adhering to category colour prototypes (Velasco & Spence, 2019), is recommended to help the brand stand out in the cluttered shopping environment. Besides colour, an appealing package design can assist in drawing attention. Lastly, building distinctive visual elements is especially useful for achieving prominence (Romaniuk, 2018b). For both small and private label brands, the task of building and using distinctive visual elements is of increased importance.