



“Provenance refers to the source of origin or birthplace of a product. It delineates history of ownership, providing contextual evidence as to authenticity.” (Collins & Weiss, 2015)

Information about product origins, or *provenance* information, is increasingly being employed as a marketing strategy, especially in the food and beverage sectors. The motivation for this appears to come from both consumers – who seek authenticity and reassurance that products are safe and produced ethically – and producers – who can use provenance to demonstrate desirable product attributes and differentiate from other brands. In Figure 1 below, we outline how product provenance information is developed and communicated; highlighting four major elements.

Actual provenance

Provenance differs from branding in that it describes a process of product creation that exists in reality. In Figure 1 below, the actual provenance is represented by a question mark for a specific reason: to show that the representations of

provenance that are available to the consumer are always *interpretations* rather than *reproductions* of the actual provenance that are translated via the producer/ marketer. Even though the actual provenance is typically inaccessible to the consumer, it is an important element because it should inform the representation of that provenance.

Selection and interpretation of attributes by the producer/marketer

Product provenance when presented to the consumer is neither a perfect reproduction of the actual events, nor is it an entirely stylised or fictional story. Typically, a producer will select from among the actual events those that they feel will present their product in a positive light. Some common elements of a provenance representation are: 1) place of origin; 2) materials; 3) production methods; 4) producers; 5) final product. There is often additional information that is not about the product per se, but informs the consumer about the producers’ values and intentions. This additional information can be presented explicitly (e.g. ‘we value sustainability’) or implicitly via the content of the provenance representation.

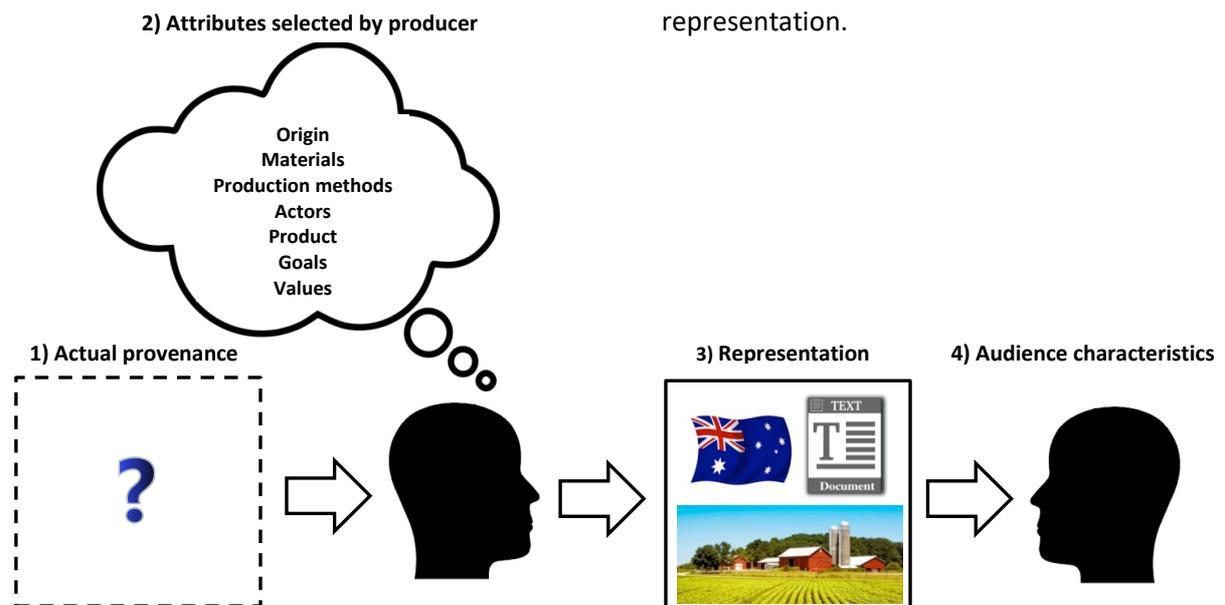


Figure 1. Provenance communication process

Representations of provenance

There are numerous formats in which attributes related to provenance can be communicated. One of these is via official requirements and certifications (e.g. Australian Made, Fair Trade, or Organic labelling). Another way is via packaging and imagery which can communicate a product's origins and/or the producer's goals and values. A third format is via a narrative of the production process.

Consumer and context

Once the provenance communication has been constructed by the producer, it is interpreted by the consumer within a cultural context which is perceptible to both the producer and consumer. Both parties will be aware of laws and regulations that govern what can be said by producers with regard to provenance, as well as broader cultural issues related to trends in society and prominent social issues (e.g. sustainability, fair trade). Producers will also likely be aware that a particular provenance story will a) only resonate with a particular segment of consumers, and b) be potentially reviewed and questioned by other bodies such as NGOs and consumer advocates. Consumers will likely be aware that alternative accounts of a product's provenance may be available from such bodies, or other sources such as online product reviews.

What do the data say?

A recent study of over 14,000 consumers from Australia and China assessed their preferences across a range of product categories and product attributes (this data has been compiled in a *Concept Database*).

In this flyer, we explore consumers' preferences regarding provenance-type product characteristics for five products; wine, chocolate, tea, cheese and ice-cream¹. In the dataset, the 'provenance' attribute had six levels that consumers could choose from

(these choices were interdependent, so the preferences ratings were relative). The attributes varied slightly between products, but as an example, this is what was presented for wine (the short label was not displayed):

- Modern facility: "Prepared in a modern clean facility"
- Traceable: "Authenticated, traceable back to the winery"
- Unique: "From a single winemaker using a unique recipe"
- Traditional: "Handcrafted using traditional methods"
- Expert design: "Made with an uncompromising attitude to design and creation from years of expert knowledge"
- Limited rare edition: "Limited rare edition, grapes are picked and squeezed in 24 hours from the moment of peak timing once a year, resulting in unique flavours from a special aging process"

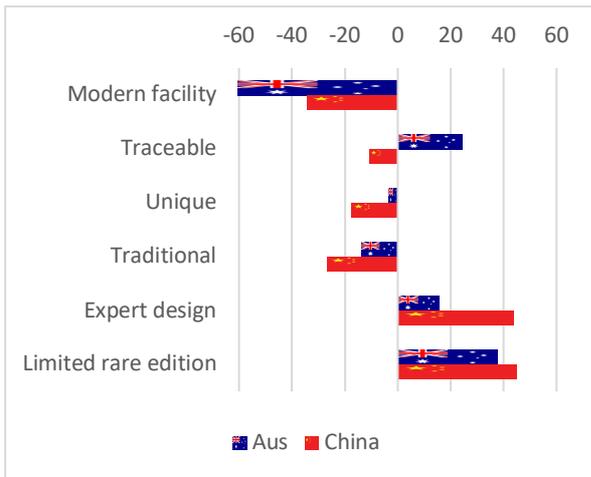
Relative importance of provenance

Overall, provenance was considered of relatively low importance when compared to other product attributes, such as the uniqueness of the product, type of packaging or the ingredients. For Australian consumers, the importance of provenance across the six products ranged from 3.57% (wine) to 14.16% (tea). For Chinese consumers, the importance of provenance across the six products ranged from to 11.49% (wine) to 18.36% (tea).

Provenance preferences for specific products

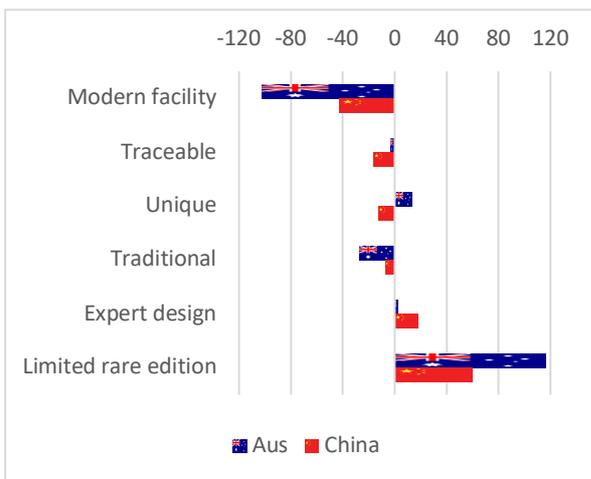
In the following figures, the right side of the figure represents a higher relative preference, and the left side represents a lower relative preference. For wine, both groups of consumers had a high relative preference for the limited rare edition feature. Australian consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for the traceability feature, whereas Chinese consumers had a higher relative preference for the expert design feature.

Figure 2. Relative preferences for wine



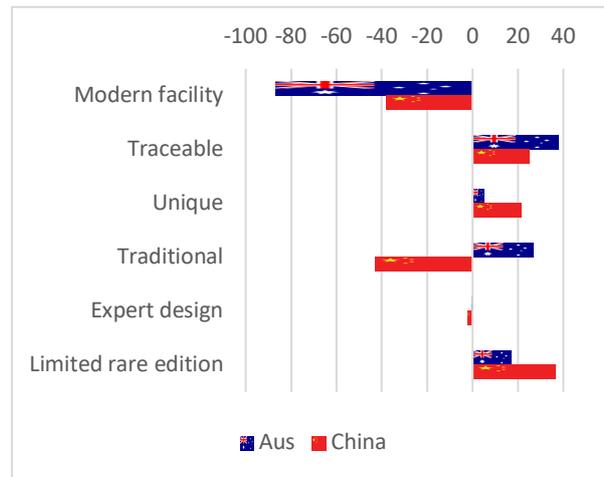
For tea, both groups had a high relative preference for the limited rare edition feature; however, this preference appeared to be stronger for the Australian consumers.

Figure 3. Relative preferences for tea



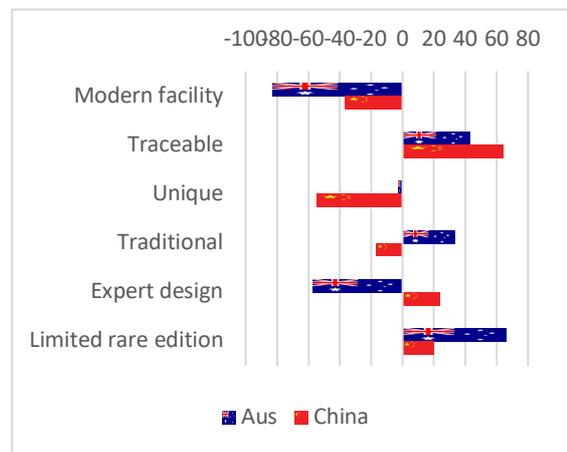
For chocolate, both groups had a high relative preference for the traceability feature. Australian consumers also had a comparatively higher relative preference for the traditional production (i.e. handcrafted) feature, whereas Chinese consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for the limited rare edition feature.

Figure 4. Relative preferences for chocolate



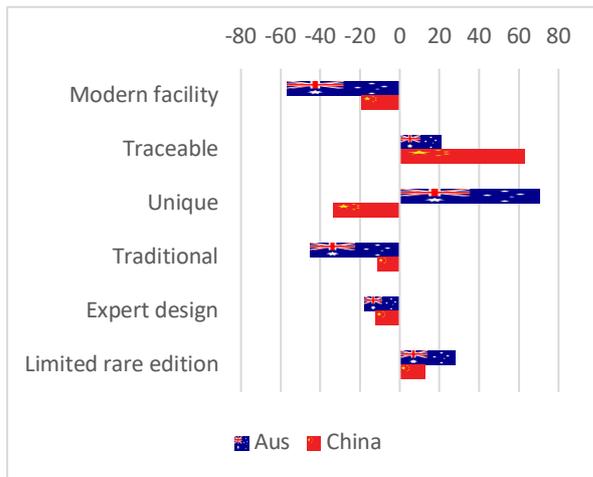
For cheese, both groups had a high relative preference for the traceability feature. Australian consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for the traditional production and limited rare edition features, whereas Chinese consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for the expert design feature.

Figure 5. Relative preferences for cheese



For ice-cream, Australian consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for the unique recipe feature, whereas Chinese consumers had a comparatively higher relative preference for traceability feature.

Figure 6. Relative preferences for ice-cream



Review of potential export opportunities

Segmentation strategy

- The findings from the conjoint data can be used to effectively identify and apply specific psychographic and behavioural variables as a basis of consumer segmentation, with implications for product positioning strategies.

Product development

- The findings show that different provenance features may carry different symbolic meanings and value across products and countries. There may be potential for innovative Australian products to emphasise the provenance features that are most desirable in China.
- In Australia, given the frequent lower relative preference for products

prepared in modern clean facility, it may not be necessary to emphasise this feature of the production process. In China, across several products, expert design and traceability were emphasised as desirable provenance features. Therefore, it may be useful to emphasise these features on packaging and in online product presentations.

Some important questions to ask when communicating provenance:

- Is the origin or production of your product a potentially attractive or important feature?
- What are the relevant elements of your product's provenance?
- How are those elements related to your values, goals etc. as a producer?
- Do you have a target consumer in mind? If so, what kinds of provenance elements might they be interested in, and how might this differ to your usual consumer segments?
- Are there any social trends or current issues that are relevant to your product's provenance (e.g. sustainability, ethical practices?)
- What other parties might be interested in telling (or critiquing) your provenance claims (e.g. NGOs, journalists, consumer reviews)?
- How would you like to present your provenance? Narrative? Certifications? Packaging elements?

ⁱ The dataset also contained the following products: coffee, yoghurt, milk drinks, baby formula, capsicum, pumpkin, tomato, banana, melon, grains, olive-oil, beef, pork. If you would like to find out more about the *Concept Database*, please contact Hollis Ashman (hollis.ashman@unimelb.edu.au), Evan Bittner (ebittner@student.unimelb.edu.au), or Colette

Day (colette.day@unimelb.edu.au). If you would like to find out more about this research in general, please contact Prof. Yoshi Kashima (ykashima@unimelb.edu.au), Prof. Angela Paladino (a.paladino@unimelb.edu.au), Dr Maddie Judge (maddie.judge@unimelb.edu.au) or Dr Julian Fernando (julianwf@unimelb.edu.au).