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# The Importance of Stereotypes about Teas in Consumers' Purchasing Decisions

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## ABSTRACT

As a common beverage, tea has accompanied consumers for hundreds of years. It used to perform only a medicinal function, while now its application is becoming wider and wider. These circumstances could lead to stereotypes about tea that may encourage or discourage from purchase. The purpose of the article is to identify the importance of stereotypes about teas in consumers' purchasing decisions. The article uses information from secondary sources, but original studies were also conducted. To this end the technique of individual in-depth interviews was used. The research covered eight people who declared that they consumed tea regularly (purposive sampling). In qualitative research the size of the sample and the impossibility of result generalisation are actually always a problem, but the undisputed advantage here is the presentation of the result of the research in a creative way, as the respondents talk about their personal experiences. The employed type of research may prompt the undertaking of quantitative research. Various opinions may often be heard about different types of teas, which leads to the assumption that some consumers may be guided by them. The subject of stereotypes about teas is rarely seen in literature. The identified research gap and professional experience of one of the authors prompted the undertaking of scientific considerations.

**Keywords:** stereotypes, tea market, purchasing decisions, consumer behaviour, preferences, qualitative research

**JEL Classification:** D12, D91

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## Introduction

Tea is one of the most common beverages in Poland, as well as all over the world (Moore et al., 2009, p. 1790). It is an infusion of leaves

harvested from the evergreen plant (Dmowski, Śmiechowska & Dąbrowska, 2015, p. 221) from the *Camellia* species which distinguishes two

basic varieties: *Camellia sinensis* growing in a temperate climate and *Camellia assamica* growing in a tropical climate (Parveen et al., 2023, p. 1). Initially, when tea came to Poland (this event dates back to 1662; History of Tea. 2024), it was treated exclusively as a medicinal product and only in the 19th century the custom of drinking tea became widespread (Zajczkowska, 1997, p. 75). The fact that tea used to be treated exclusively as a medicinal product may have caused the first stereotypes to arise even back then, as templates were created to simplify the ambiguous information coming from the surroundings (Nelson, 2003). As emphasised by Rybowska (2013a, p. 465), the use of stereotypes is a negative phenomenon, since the consumer may show prejudice against products or other people, or issue judgements that may often be harmful.

Stereotypes are hard to change and they are passed from one generation to the next (Rybowska, 2018, p. 56). However, stereotypes may not be treated as exclusively negative, as some of them may have a positive character and synthetically explain some circumstances, phenomena or behaviours of consumers, and they give the feeling of security due to their unmodified structure (Rybowska, 2018, p. 55). Furthermore, stereotypes are “established” and “reinforced” in the media messages (Rybowska, 2013b, p. 92) or in social media.

Even though the tea leaves are harvested from one species of the plant, with various production processes, e.g. wilting and/or oxidation, one may obtain various types of tea, that is black, green, red, white, turquoise (oolong) and yellow teas. Some properties are identical for each type of tea, while some vary due to differences in production. The diversity of types of tea may cause the consumer to create some sort of stereotype about a given

type in their own mind. An established “image” of tea may, in turn, affect their purchasing decisions, because they may be guided by the view that a given type of tea has a better effect on their health than any other.

In view of the determined research problems, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. What stereotypes about teas do the consumers know and why did they adopt these notions?

RQ2. How important are the stereotypes to the consumer?

RQ3. How do the stereotypes about teas affect purchasing decisions regarding these goods?

The main purpose of this academic study is to identify the importance of stereotypes about teas in the consumers’ purchasing decisions. The article is comprised of two parts. The first part is based on information from secondary sources where the scientific literature (compact and continuous works), industry reports on the tea market and websites were used. In this part the methods of critical analysis of the literature and logical deduction were employed. The second part presents the results of our own primary research which was conducted using the technique of individual in-depth interviews (IDI).

The reason for taking up the topic was, on the one hand, the desire to determine how stereotypes about tea shape purchasing decisions of the consumers, whereas, on the other hand, one of the authors used to work in a company selling various tea varieties. The author’s professional experience suggests that the clients often identified a given type of tea with specific stereotypes, however, the empirical verification of such assumptions is missing. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to fill

in this knowledge gap, as the previously available literature does not allow for the explanation of this phenomenon. What is more,

## Literature review

### *Definition and features of stereotypes*

In literature the notion of a stereotype is often presented in a similar fashion. There are many publications which refer to stereotypes about people but, as pointed out by Bartmiński (2011), there are no indications that one should limit oneself only to them. The stereotypes may also refer to objects, various phenomena and elements in the individual's closest surroundings (Szlachta, 2011). In order to properly define the notion of a stereotype in the context of tea, one could use the description by Rybowska (2013a, p. 465) who writes that a stereotype is a "common view functioning in society, which is not always consistent with the latest knowledge." Due to its various types and numerous properties, tea may often be treated stereotypically by the consumer, hence this description seems to be correct. However, it is worth taking note of other definitions presented in literature. Chattalas, Kramer & Takada (2008, p. 55) add that stereotypes represent cognitive associations and the expectations of individuals. Other researchers claim that it is a commonly held set of views or impressions (Augoustinos et al., 2014). Another important feature of stereotypes is discussed by Aaker, Vohs & Mogilner (2010, p. 225). They characterise this notion as a brief and general judgement which includes assessment ingredients. The above-mentioned descriptions show the vast semantic capacity of a stereotype, as it is possible to specify various factors characterising this notion. A stereotype is not

the subject of stereotypes is not discussed in the context of the tea itself.

difficult to understand and is not comprised of complex words. It is intended as a facilitation for the consumer, a kind of mental short-cut, to express his or her attitude more quickly (be it positive or negative) towards a given person, brand, situation or product, and enables interpersonal communication that is efficient and not intellectually demanding (Rybowska, 2018, p. 55). Although a stereotype sometimes is an oversimplification, it may contain a "grain of truth" which shows that some impressions have not appeared out of nowhere (Czapka, 2011). What is important is that the stereotypes are judgemental, which does not always have to be good. Quite the contrary, it is sometimes harmful. A stereotype that has once been established, introduced to a given environment and/or culture and considered as relatively valid is permanent and hard to modify. An interesting comparison was also used in the article by Diamantopoulos, Szócs, Florack, Kolbl & Egger (2021, p. 1145). These researchers claim that stereotypes are an *energy-saving appliance* which performs an important cognitive function of simplifying the processing of information and building responses.

At present, the consumer is surrounded by a large quantity of information, and thus is not able to absorb all the messages that reach them, and they may have doubts as to the quality of such information, depending on the source from which they received it (Dąbrowski, 2018, p. 93). It may, therefore, be stated that in

the situation when the consumer cannot make a decision on the basis of their knowledge, it is possible that they will use a functioning stereotype, because it will be an important factor facilitating the purchase (Solomon, 2006, p. 333) of foodstuffs.

### ***Stereotypes in food purchasing decisions***

Stereotypes play an important part in the perception of food by the consumer, including health aspects, nutritious values and calorie content. They also play a motivational, as well as demotivational, function with regard to the selection of foodstuffs (Rybowska, 2018, p. 60). Thanks to them, the consumer may be more inclined to purchase a given food product, or discouraged from it by making the goods disgusting to them and causing the purchase to be rejected. Rybowska (2018, p. 60) presents five component effects of stereotyping that affect the consumers' attitude and eating behaviours. These are generalisation, categorisation, automatic behaviour, imitation and communication.

Categorising and generalising too quickly can cause the consumer to make a premature, negative judgement about a given food product. Thus, at the very start, they will be somehow prejudiced, which will lead to categorisation (Devine, 1989, p. 5). Apart from that, if the stereotype is often used and is accompanied by certain circumstances, it becomes automatic (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996, p. 254) so the consumer who regularly buys a specific food product may not even reflect on the impact of its health properties on their organism. Therefore, they may buy a given product "because they always buy it," regardless of the health benefits of other goods.

Stereotypes also allow for building the semantic integration of a message, that is they

create a contextual background and constitute interpersonal communication (Grochowski, 2003, p. 57). They also have different sources of their origin (Rybowska, 2016, p. 46):

- cultural – arising from intergeneration transfers, resulting from folk knowledge,
- scientific – arising from empirical research results, although, in their case, they are innovative for a while, and later are confronted with new research results which correct the previous findings,
- mass media – understood as social media with a wide reach, such as television, radio, press, Internet and even books,
- social media – Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, etc.

At the stage of growing up, the consumer shapes their behaviours, attitudes and views and starts to carefully analyse them and value them in some way. This also applies to the purchase of foodstuffs. Those who are prejudiced against certain types of food are less willing to change their position. Whereas those who are not "closed" in various stereotypes will learn how to stifle them, and thus will prevent the automatic behaviour in perceiving certain types of food (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996, p. 255).

The last effect of the stereotypes is imitation, which is understood as following trends and a willingness to identify with major communities. Fashion, advertisements and environment impact are important factors shaping eating behaviours (Dąbrowska & Babicz-Zielińska, 2011, p. 41). It may seem that making decisions about purchasing specific foodstuffs is more individual, because every consumer likes something different and, in theory, they should choose food that is the tastiest or healthiest for them, but these are not the only aspects influencing the consumer, and many

other factors may affect their purchasing decisions.

In the case of tea, the right purchasing decision will also not be easy, because this product has many different types, and every tea variety has different properties. However, to discuss the stereotypes about tea, which is a common beverage in the whole world, it is worth characterising the global and domestic tea market, as well as individual types of teas.

### ***Tea market***

Tea is a beverage prevalent in almost every corner of the world. According to the data of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2024), 6.7 million tonnes of tea was produced globally in 2022, where more than 3 million tonnes was accounted for by black tea, and more than 2 million tonnes by green tea. This volume of production translates into the global consumption of tea. 6.5 million tonnes of tea was consumed in 2022, and it is estimated that the demand for tea will become even greater (Volume of tea consumption worldwide from 2012 to 2025). In 2022, the annual tea consumption per capita in Poland amounted to 0.47 kg, resulting in a consumption of nearly 18,000 tonnes on a national scale. Polish consumers per capita consume more dried tea than, for example, Germans, Czechs, French, Spanish or Italians (World Population Review, 2024). In 2021, a considerable part of Polish consumers bought bagged teas (85%) which are available in nearly all types of grocery stores. The advantages of the bagged teas definitely include the facts that they can be made much more quickly, the bags are disposable, so the consumer saves time by not washing the teapot or strainer which need to be cleaned when using tea leaves (which accounted for 11% in the structure of tea sales

in Poland in 2021 – MarketHub, 2022). The import of tea in 2022 amounted to more than USD 141.5 million (Statistics Poland [Polish abbreviation: GUS], 2023, p. 228), while the export amounted to USD 256 million (The Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC], 2024).

The infusion of tea leaves is so often drunk by consumers of various nationalities, because it has many ingredients that have an effect on people (e.g. polyphenols or caffeine – although in tea one can speak of theanine) and some minerals (Wierzejska, 2014, p. 595). However, the type of tea is also important in terms of the occurrence of some properties.

### ***Characteristics of various types of teas***

Tea is a fully natural product which does not contain aromas or artificial colourings. Its ingredients have a positive effect on reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases (Michalak-Majewska, 2011, p. 6), the polyphenols reduce the transfer of cholesterol to the blood stream and prevent the occurrence of blood clots. Tea is also rich in fluorine and vitamins A, B, C and P. Furthermore, the consumption of tea moisturises the skin, increases concentration (Piszcz et al., 2017, p. 37) and reduces blood pressure (Kudełka & Łobaza, 2007, p. 113). Each type of tea may have greater or lesser antioxidant properties and various compositions of polyphenol compounds (Fik & Zawisłak, 2004, p. 99). It is clear that the presented properties apply to all teas, but each type of tea has its own characteristic properties. Why are they so different then, if all the types of teas come from the same shrub species?

The answer may be found in the process of fermentation which has a vital impact on the colour and taste of tea, and they depend on the degree of oxidation of tea phenols (Alasalvar et



al., 2012, p. 6323). While making a basic classification of the types of teas, six types can be distinguished: black, green, red, white, turquoise (oolong) and yellow tea. These may be, in turn, divided into three groups in terms of the process of fermentation: fermented (black), partially fermented (red, turquoise and yellow) and unfermented (green and white) (Almajano et al., 2008, p. 56).

As the only fully fermented type, black tea has the darkest colour, and the infusion from its leaves has the most intense taste. This beverage is so common in Poland that it seems that the process of making a decision about the purchase of black tea is not complicated for the consumer. One may assume that this type of tea will always guarantee good taste and aroma, as many consumers have already gotten used to black tea. What is more, its preparation should not pose any problems for the consumer, because one only has to pour hot water over the black tea leaves and brew for about three minutes, although there certainly are some consumers who prefer the tea leaves to be constantly soaking in water and the tea becomes more intensive over time. However, apart from the fact that this type of tea has been “tried and tested” in Poland and may be bought “blindly,” in recent years more and more attention has been paid to the product’s ingredients. The polyphenol compounds included in black tea leaves and created as a result of the tea fermentation process, show strong anti-atherosclerosis, anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory and anti-bacteria properties, which play a vital part in the protection of the organism (Dmowski, Śmiechowska & Sagan, 2014, p. 207). In addition, they reduce blood pressure, the level of cholesterol and glucose in serum (Koch, 2016, p. 308).

Pu-Erh, that is red tea, is the most specific type of tea in terms of both its taste and aroma which may be described as earthy or spicy. This type is distinguished by its long ageing time. Some pu-erh teas are subject to this process for even 7 to 10 years, but the ageing is sometimes speeded up by the addition of external microorganisms (Gawron-Gzella et al., 2018, p. 61). It is said that the red tea has anti-atherosclerosis, hypolipidemic, anti-bacteria and anti-microbial properties, and neutralises free radicals. However, the most commonly named property of pu-erh is its effect in combating obesity (Lv et al., 2015, p. 194). What is important is that red tea may support slimming by the reduction of the glucose level in blood, but it is not a beverage that will on its own cause slimming.

The oolong tea undergoes many production stages, including: sun wilting and then wilting inside a building which is combined with turning leaves, enzyme deactivation, rolling and drying (Hu et al., 2018, p. 202). It has been proven that oolong has anti-cancer, anti-diabetes, anti-allergy and anti-obesity properties, and that is why this tea is recommended to diabetics. It also helps to prevent atherosclerosis, hypertension, heart diseases, and reduces oxidative stress (Weerawatanakorn et al., 2015, pp. 134-135). This type of tea is characterised by a fruity and flowery aroma, as well as a refreshing and mild taste (Wang et al., 2022). Contrary to its name, the turquoise tea has nothing to do with this colour. Its hue is rather closer to green tea. However, sometimes the turquoise tea has the addition of the leaves of *clitoria ternatea* (*Butterfly Pea Tea*) which give oolong its beautiful blue colour, and when you add some lemon, the infusion turns purple.

The least known type of tea is yellow tea. This is due to the fact that for many years its export from China was prohibited (Kozaczko, 2022). Thanks to some of its properties, yellow tea is most similar to green tea, with its mild taste and smell (Feng et al., 2023, p. 7836), as well as similar production stages, where the time of drying yellow tea is longer and it is only partially fermented. Yellow tea also has many properties, such as anti-cancer, anti-inflammatory properties, protecting the liver against damage, and reduction of the risk of obesity (Kozaczko, 2022). This type of tea also needs to be brewed at a lower temperature (70-85°C) and for the right amount of time (between three and five minutes).

The first references to the second type of unfermented tea date back to the 3rd century BC and point to a Chinese doctor who recommended this beverage as a product improving concentration and sharpness of mind (Sikora & Ogonowski, 2011, p. 968). Currently, green tea is the second most produced and consumed type of tea in the world. Its consumption has many positive aspects which affect the consumer's health. Green tea is associated with anti-virus and anti-cancer properties, cholesterol reduction and anti-fungal properties (Sinija & Mishra, 2008). It is often heard that green tea is bitter or astringent, and it is not fit to drink. It is obvious that its consumption depends on the individual preferences of the consumer, but what is very important in preparing green tea is the right water temperature (about 60-70°C) and how long it is brewed for (up to two minutes) (Cichoń et al., 2007, p. 69). When these are observed, green tea is delicate and has a pleasant taste. This type of tea is sometimes treated as a dietary supplement, but it is also applied in other areas, e.g. it is an

ingredient of care products, scented waters, shampoos or anti-ageing emulsions (Sikora & Ogonowski, 2011, p. 968).

White tea is the least processed type. In the production process its leaves are only subject to the process of wilting and drying. These teas are produced from unopened leaves and buds that are covered with a silver fluffy velvet (Plust et al., 2011, p. 47). Such production processes and young leaves bring out the most delicate taste and aroma of all the six types of tea. White tea is a source of vitamin C, and it is considered to be the "elixir of youth," as it contains many more anti-oxidants than green tea and they are conducive to the slowing-down of the ageing process of cells (Czajnikowy, White tea). While making it, it is important to keep the water temperature at about 80°C so as not to burn the leaves. One of the disadvantages of white teas certainly is the fact that they are relatively expensive in comparison to other types.

When choosing tea, the consumer is faced with the dilemma of which tea is best for them. This depends on various factors, such as the price, quality, innovativeness of the product or country of origin (Maciejewski et al., 2024). They may also be guided by the taste and properties of tea that vary for different types of tea. Taking into account that there are six types of tea, it is hard to remember all of their properties, so, to make the purchasing decision easier, the consumer needs some kind of simplified "picture" to give them directions which tea to choose. But the established and common opinions are not always true. Therefore, primary research was undertaken to identify if and to what extent stereotypes about teas matter when making purchasing decisions.

## Research methods

The original qualitative research was conducted in October 2024. By taking up the research problem, the authors wished to conduct an in-depth examination of the decision-making process when shopping for tea which may be conditioned by the presence of stereotypes about this beverage, and this type of research gives such opportunity (Czernek, 2014, p. 164), because it attempts to recreate the subjective reality presented by the respondent (Maciejewski, 2022, p. 37). The technique of individual in-depth interviews (IDI) was used. The research had eight respondents who declared that they regularly drank tea (purposive sampling). The research tool was a proprietary interview scenario which comprised of the introduction, the main body and the conclusion. At the beginning the respondent was acquainted with the issues of tea preferences and stereotypes.

The second part consisted of four thematic blocks:

1. The first one referred to the attitude of the respondents towards stereotypes and their impact on everyday life.
2. In the second block the respondents had to describe what they associated with individual types of tea.
3. The third one referred to their familiarity with the stereotypes about specific teas.
4. In the fourth block the respondents had to share the sources from which they drew information about the stereotypes they were familiar with, to what extent they were true and important to them, and they had to explain how they affected their tea shopping decisions.

The third part of the interview was a summary of the conversation. The characteristics of the respondents are shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents**

No.	Sex	Age	Place of residence	No. of persons in the household	Professional activity
1	Man	28	City with a population of over 100,000	1	Working
2	Woman	32		3	Working
3	Woman	26		1	Unemployed
4	Woman	34		2	Working
5	Woman	29		3	Working
6	Man	41		1	Working
7	Man	23		4	Working
8	Woman	30		3	Working

Source: Developed on the basis of own research.

The individual in-depth interviews were attended by five women and three men. The interviewed group was comprised of the representatives of generation Z and generation Y (four

respondents each). Every respondent lived in a city with a population of over 100,000, and most of them were employed.



## Research findings

### ***Consumer preferences with regard to tea***

First, the respondents were asked about their preferences with regard to drinking tea. The issues discussed included: frequency, types, quantity of consumed tea, reasons for choosing a specific type of tea or shopping outlets. All respondents stated that they drank tea every day with the quantity ranging from 250 ml to even 1 l a day, and they most often drank black tea. Green and white teas were also mentioned. The respondents acknowledged that they buy bagged teas, although some of them also buy loose leaf tea. These beverages are consumed with various additions, most often sugar, but the respondents also mentioned honey, lemon, raspberry juice, ginger or fruit or herbal additions. When the respondents were asked why they drank the type of tea they chose, they gave various statements, e.g. *mostly due to its taste and health properties; to warm myself up and for the taste; I drink tea while I have a sit down and a rest*. One may, therefore, say that tea performs various functions. It is not only a tasty beverage, but it may also lift one's mood, and the respondents also identify its health benefits. Given the prevalence of tea, respondents were asked whether there were tea-drinking customs in their families in the past, when they still formed a single household with their parents. Nearly all respondents stated that yes, e.g. *on Sunday morning or for breakfast and supper*. Tea is a beverage which has accompanied the respondents from a very young age, and evokes positive emotions in them. The respondents pointed out that it is *a warm, pleasant, warming beverage, good for health, [...] refreshing and energising, symbolising a moment to oneself*. [...] *Tea makes me*

*feel calmer*. One of the respondents said that *I like to savour tea and single out its individual flavours, slowly and pleasantly. I have positive associations with tea*. The respondents consider tea as something pleasant, allowing a moment of relaxation and the simple enjoyment of a tasty beverage.

After identifying the consumers' preferences with regard to the consumption of tea and its perception, the second part of the interview started.

### ***Respondents' attitudes towards stereotypes***

First, the respondents were asked if they believed in stereotypes at all. Here the responses were split. Four respondents expressed their negative attitude towards stereotypes, saying that *they are generalisations and rarely reflect reality*. Other respondents added that *stereotypes are harmful and never relate to the whole group*, and that *they are oversimplified, wrong convictions*. For some respondents the notion of a stereotype has a negative impression, since they *can lead to unfair assessments and prejudices*. The respondents pointed out that one could not apply common templates just to make it easier to assess people or products. One of the respondents actually expects some scientific explanations that will present the correct information. However, three respondents perceived stereotypes as something good, as *they help to simplify the reality that is sufficiently complicated as it is and they frequently prove to be correct*. It seems that, in the face of the vast amount of information that reaches the consumer, a stereotype facilitates the assessment of people or products, since, as

already quoted in this article, they have not appeared out of nowhere and contain a *grain of truth*.

Some respondents see nothing wrong with stereotypes. Therefore, the respondents were asked in what areas of life, particularly in the area of trade and services, they were accompanied with stereotypes. One of the respondents emphasised that they paid attention to *how the brands are perceived in society. I avoid those with negative connotations*. What is interesting is that the consumer may avoid the products of a given company not because they are defective, wear out quickly, etc., but because of the social “image” of such a company. When drawing information from the stereotypes known to them, the consumer may be prejudiced against the purchase of products of a given brand. Another respondent mentioned that the stereotypes *encourage one to buy products that are considered “healthy.”* Therefore, if the consumer is presented with the health benefits of tea, it may evoke their willingness to buy. One of the respondents who does not believe in stereotypes thinks that they affect purchasing choices, *e.g. some people may avoid certain products*. It is worth mentioning that despite the lack of belief in stereotypes, the consumer may involuntarily form their own opinion on their basis. Three respondents who declared they believed in stereotypes said that the source of a given stereotype was important to them. They were more willing to believe a relative, trusted social media portals or sometimes social media.

Then the respondents were asked about the reasons for the functioning of stereotypes about tea, and to what extent they could affect purchasing decisions. One of the respondents stated that the existence of stereotypes about tea *often arises from a lack of knowledge about*

*brewing a certain type of tea*. Another respondent noted another cause saying that *people draw information from similar sources, e.g. the Internet, they trust these sources without making any additional reconnaissance. Thanks to the easy access to such information, many people accept it and pass it on*. It is hard to identify all the properties and types of tea, so simplified opinions may often be used and repeated by the consumers, even though they do not have to be based on true information.

When tea first came to Poland, it was treated as a medicinal product from the very beginning. It currently does not perform only this function, but it is still attributed with numerous health benefits. The respondents defined various sources from which, in their opinion, such beliefs may come. They most often pointed to intergenerational transfers. One of the respondents presents it in an interesting way: *I think that, starting from older generations when people worked hard physically and in the times of our grandparents, people wanted to assign nearly medicinal properties to a regular tea after coming home from work*. One of the respondents associated the existence of such stereotypes with the countries where tea is produced, and the culture and customs there: *many cultures have been using tea for ages as a product beneficial to health, which affected its perception*. Another respondent adds that *tea is strongly associated with nature and history, e.g. traditional techniques of brewing tea from China and Japan. Additionally, the Asians live long and drink a lot of tea, which may strengthen the stereotype*. One of the respondents also noted that *contemporary research also frequently confirms the properties of some types of tea, which strengthens such beliefs in society*. The beliefs and opinions about teas seem to be strongly rooted at the source which, in this

case, is comprised of Asian countries and their culture, and may be still reinforced by *advertisements and the experiences of individuals*. In the past, medicine was not so well-developed and *the lack of specialist help [...] led to the development of simple methods of treatment, including various herb infusions*.

Tea has been known as a beverage for hundreds of years. Thanks to its origin, the old native peoples of Asia showed unique veneration to tea and care for its brewing. It was treated as a medicinal product and its positive effect on human health was proven. These traditions were passed on from one generation to the next, which helped to cultivate the customs and culture of drinking tea, as well as beliefs that might apply to individual types of tea.

### ***Respondents' knowledge of tea types***

Tea leaves undergo different production processes, which results in a different type of tea, and therefore a different taste, colour or properties. While the consumer is able to describe black or green tea, which are the most frequently consumed types, characterising the remaining four tea varieties seems to be more complicated. Respondents were asked to write down their associations related to each of the six types of tea. The results are presented in Figure 1.

The respondents had the most associations with black tea, which is their everyday drink.

Each of the respondents noticed that this infusion is strong and is supposed to stimulate. In addition, it goes well with other additives, such as sugar, honey and ginger, which makes the choice of this tea in the autumn and winter period fully justified.

Green tea is associated by the respondents as smooth, calming and healthy. As mentioned earlier in this article, green tea has other uses, hence the idea that it is cleansing. This type can often be associated with the ritual of ceremonial brewing during which its preparation is celebrated with great care. Perhaps because of this custom embedded in culture, it evoked associations in the respondents that it is a relaxing and calming tea.

The respondents found white tea the most delicate, pleasant and subtle. However, they also noticed that it is a luxury product that may accompany sublime and exceptional moments. One of the respondents emphasised that the subtlety of white tea is well emphasised by the addition of flowers, e.g. rose petals.

Oolong was defined as a tea which, in terms of its properties and taste, is somewhere between black and green tea. The respondents indicated that it is a tea with a rich taste. Turquoise tea is also sometimes flavoured with milk, which *gives it a unique taste and this milky aftertaste does not go with any other type, as it does with this one*.

**Figure 1. Respondents' associations with tea types**

<p><b>BLACK TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•tea after meal</li> <li>•bagged tea</li> <li>•everyday</li> <li>•full of taste</li> <li>•morning energy</li> <li>•invigorating</li> <li>•ordinary</li> <li>•related to British tradition</li> <li>•“winter tea”</li> <li>•strong</li> <li>•with a bitter taste</li> </ul>	<p><b>GREEN TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•relaxing</li> <li>•intensive</li> <li>•slimming</li> <li>•aromatic</li> <li>•fruit (raspberry, hibiscus)</li> <li>•good for the cardiovascular system</li> <li>•decaffeinated</li> <li>•recommended for little children</li> </ul>	<p><b>WHITE TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•smooth</li> <li>•luxury</li> <li>•for special occasions</li> <li>•perfect with flower additions</li> <li>•subtle</li> <li>•stimulating</li> <li>•pleasant</li> </ul>
<p><b>GREEN TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•smooth taste</li> <li>•cleansing</li> <li>•relaxing</li> <li>•bitter</li> <li>•calming</li> <li>•light</li> <li>•healthy</li> </ul>	<p><b>OOLONG TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•milky aftertaste</li> <li>•tasty</li> <li>•tastings</li> <li>•tea brewing ceremonies</li> <li>•bridge between green and black tea</li> <li>•rich flavour</li> </ul>	<p><b>YELLOW TEA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•rarity</li> <li>•hard to get</li> <li>•smooth</li> <li>•sweet note</li> <li>•nut aroma</li> </ul>

Source: Developed on the basis of own research.

Although many associations were made with the red tea, not all of them were correct. Pu-erh is certainly not decaffeinated, because this type, like all the others, contains this element. Red tea is sometimes confused with rooibos (made from the red bush), being a beverage that is formally not a tea, although it may resemble it very much in taste or colour. Rooibos is a beverage that is recommended for little children. Due to the colour of the infusion, red tea is very often obtained through fruit additives, especially those that contain red fruit or hibiscus which gives it an intense colour. Nevertheless, there was an association that red tea is slimming or has an intense flavour.

It was difficult for the respondents to determine their associations with yellow tea. Due to the fact that it is the rarest type of tea, this product was unknown to some respondents. One of the respondents emphasised that

it is a difficult tea to obtain, which makes it a certain rarity. A respondent who consumed yellow tea said that this type reminded her of a nutty aftertaste.

The associations mentioned by the respondents allow for a partial presentation of individual types of tea. In the next part of the interview, the respondents were presented with ten stereotypes about teas. The respondents' task was to indicate whether a given stereotype was familiar to them, as well as to decide whether it was true or false.

### ***Respondents' knowledge of stereotypes about teas***

When buying tea, regardless of whether it is intended for personal consumption or for another person, the consumer is guided by various factors, such as taste, aroma, type of tea, country of origin or health properties,

which may sometimes prove to be crucial in the decision-making process. However, in order to correctly identify the characteristics of a chosen type of tea, it is best to have such knowledge, although this is not always possible when shopping. The respondents were presented with the following ten stereotypes to which they had to respond:

1. **Black tea is good for children.** The respondents clearly indicate that the content of theine in tea may be harmful to children, although, as one of the respondents pointed out, *black tea is quite often given to children*. One of the respondents noted that *black tea may be too strong for children*. It is worth adding that the caffeine content in the infusion prepared from black tea leaves increases with the brewing time, although the caffeine level is still significantly lower than in the case of coffee (Jarosz et al., 2009).
2. **Drinking tea lowers blood pressure.** It may seem that, due to the caffeine content in tea, it is impossible for its consumption to contribute to lowering blood pressure. It should be clarified that the systematic consumption of green tea may provide such an effect, which is confirmed by studies, e.g. Stępień et al. (2011) or Turek et al. (2012). As for the opinions of the respondents, they were divided. Some respondents had not heard of such a stereotype at all, some claimed that *some teas can have a relaxing effect, which can help lower blood pressure, but this is not the rule*, and others claimed that they did not believe in the health benefits of tea.
3. **Green tea is an elixir of health and beauty.** The respondents declared that they had heard of this stereotype. They said that green tea *is rich in antioxidants, which may indeed have a beneficial effect on health and beauty, or that it is generally considered to be cleansing*. One of the respondents even added that she drank large amounts of such beverage and was healthy and beautiful, so it was certainly true. Due to its properties, this type of tea slows down the aging process (Musiał et al., 2020).
4. **White tea does not contain caffeine because it is very light in colour.** The respondents rightly noticed that white tea also contains caffeine. Its light colour does not mean that this element is missing (Hilal & Engelhardt, 2007). One of the respondents found white tea stimulating, although he indicated that the sensation was not as intense as in the case of black or green tea.
5. **Turquoise tea is blue in colour.** Interestingly, half of the respondents associated turquoise tea with the blue colour of the infusion. One respondent indicated that this was logical, because *turquoise is derived from blue*. In this case, unfortunately, this is not true, because – as written by another respondent – *oolong usually has a colour from gold to dark*.
6. **A warming tea is one that has spicy additives (cinnamon, cloves, anise, red pepper, etc.).** In the opinion of most respondents, such ingredients cause *a feeling of inner warmth which tea itself (even a hot one) will not provide*. This belief certainly results from the fact that tea with these or similar additives is drunk in the autumn and winter, when the outside temperatures are low. There-



fore, the consumer is looking for a way to somehow warm themselves up on cold days. In addition, the Christmas atmosphere may also be conducive to this belief. Moreover, in stores specialising in selling tea, in the autumn and winter period there is an intensification of sales of teas in general and those with spices in particular. However, some of the respondents noticed that basically every beverage that is served hot warms them up.

7. **Green tea is bitter and unpleasant in taste.** This is an oft-repeated stereotype. Its brewing method, which is quite different from black tea, is making a comeback. All the respondents have heard this stereotype and some of them agree with it. However, one of the respondents presented such a situation: *I happened to drink bitter green tea, but it was mainly due to poor brewing.* Well-brewed green tea has a pleasant, delicate taste. The respondent said that she even tried to dissuade others from their mistake, but her words *always fell on deaf ears.*
8. **Healthy tea is not tasty.** Healthy tea can be tasty. The very fact that each type of tea has special health properties means that it can also be *“seasoned” with various natural additives.* In fact, the key to success lies in its preparation.
9. **Each type of tea must be brewed at the same temperature and this does not affect its properties and taste.** All the respondents knew that the time and temperature of brewing tea depended on its type, because an incorrect brewing process might result in not obtaining the appropriate taste values. Why do many consumers not follow the recommended

methods? Perhaps it is *half due to ignorance and half due to the laziness of people preparing tea, which is why so many people choose black tea, because “you can't ruin it.”*

10. **Red Pu-Erh tea is a slimming tea.** Indeed, pu-erh has slimming properties, which was shown in the previous subsections of the article. Only some respondents rightly note that red tea has *properties that support slimming, but it seems that there is no single beverage that will solve the problem of weight on its own.* It is important to remember that it is not tea that will make us slimmer.

During the interviews, the respondents shared other stereotypes they had heard. This shows how many beliefs and opinions about teas function in society. Of the ten stereotypes listed, some were known to the consumers and some were not. So how do stereotypes help (or not) when making decisions about buying tea?

#### ***Making a decision to buy tea based on stereotypes***

From family, friends, influencers, social media and television, you can hear many different stereotypes about tea, some of which have a positive connotation and encourage you to buy it, and some are repulsive and stop you from doing that. Hence, buying tea may not be easy, because it may be difficult to assess which source of information will provide more reliable information about a given tea, and perhaps the stereotype will be helpful in making a decision.

The respondents had heard of various stereotypes about tea in their lives, e.g. *green tea cannot be drunk in winter because it cools the body; black tea is strong and invigorating; tea is healthier than coffee because coffee contains*



*caffeine and tea does not; red tea is good for digestive problems.* The respondents were asked what their reactions were to the stereotypes they had heard. One of the respondents replied: *at first I was sceptical, but I noticed that many people believe them. I do not believe in all stereotypes.* This statement shows that the respondent, when observing her surroundings, notices that stereotypes can shape the perception of tea. Perhaps the respondent deliberately said that she does not believe in all stereotypes, because there are some that she considers to be true. Another respondent said that the stereotypes about tea that he had come across during his life were true for him. He acknowledges that he has ingrained these stereotypes *quite strongly* in himself, because *for a long time I avoided drinking coffee, unaware that tea also contains caffeine, this only changed in adulthood.* Another respondent said that she still believed the stereotypes she had heard about 25 years ago. The reason for believing them is also given by another respondent, who emphasises that the stereotypes she learned about tea are true, because they were passed on to her by her grandparents and parents. It is hard to disagree that the opinions of parents and grandparents are important and valid for a child, whatever they might be. Learning about a stereotype about teas made another respondent curious and willing to familiarise herself with reliable information.

As the respondent notes, in the process of making decisions about buying tea, *I treat stereotypes rather as a starting point for the further exploration of the subject.* It can be said that the developed “images” about a given type of tea create a knowledge base about it. It is

worth emphasising that, when buying such products, almost all respondents try to “re-create” the functioning stereotypes. The respondents recall several situations from their lives:

- *Some stereotypes, such as the one about white tea being luxurious, made me feel uncertain whether I should try it, because I was afraid I wouldn't fully appreciate its taste.*
- *Health aspects convinced me to consume white tea, because it is a good substitute for coffee, even though I don't believe in stereotypes.*
- *Anti-cancer effects convinced me to drink not only black tea. At first it was green tea, later other teas.*
- *When I heard that green tea helps lose weight, I actually bought it.*
- *I replaced black tea with green tea, guided by its health aspects.*
- *The stereotype that green tea helps lose weight encouraged me to drink it regularly. I recognise that the health properties of tea are important, so this stereotype influenced my decision in some way.*

It can be said with full certainty that, when buying tea, these stereotypes are taken into account by the respondents. Although some of the respondents declare that they do not believe in stereotypes, because they may be unfair or untrue, they are helpful when buying tea. What is important is that the respondents indicate that they do not want to routinely repeat variously engrained stereotypes, but also emphasise that their knowledge of them has often accelerated their purchasing decision.

## Conclusions

Tea is an extremely complex product in terms of its properties and characteristics. It is difficult to remember all of its advantages and disadvantages, so the decision to buy the right type of tea does not have to be easy. However, for the decision-making process to be less complicated, stereotypes come to the rescue by creating a certain point of reference. The respondents declared that they were familiar with various stereotypes about tea which they had heard from friends, family, social media or the Internet. Some respondents assimilate and accept the functioning “images,” while others clearly disapprove of them, saying that they do not believe them at all. It is, therefore, difficult to unequivocally answer the question whether stereotypes are important to consumers. Interestingly, when buying tea, consumers involuntarily take these established beliefs into account, especially if, at the time, they do not have full information about a given type of tea. What

is more, the respondents clearly indicated that stereotypes accelerated their decision to buy tea, because they saw specific benefits in them. It was only after the purchase that there was a desire among some of the respondents to explore the subject of the properties of tea they had purchased. Stereotypes can be a good basis for acquiring the right information, but it should be remembered that they must be verified in reliable sources.

The research was carried out with some limitations. The interviews were conducted among representatives of Generation Z and Y. In order to delve deeper into the subject of stereotypes about tea, it would be necessary to include the perspective of Generation X and BB consumers in subsequent studies. Qualitative research can be an incentive to undertake quantitative research in order to better assess the scale of the identified phenomena.

### Author Contributions

Conceptualisation, M.J., P.L.; methodology, P.L.; software, P.L.; validation, M.J., P.L.; formal analysis, M.J., P.L.; investigation, P.L.; resources, P.L.; data curation, P.L.; writing—original draft preparation, P.L.; writing—review and editing, M.J.; visualisation, P.L.; supervision, M.J.; project administration, P.L.; funding acquisition, P.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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