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THE EFFICACY OF TEA QUALITY FACTORS' IMPACT ON TEA CONSUMERS' SATISFACTION FROM THE EXPERTS' VIEWPOINT

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Abstract: Sensory attributes are central to how tea quality is judged along the value chain, yet their relationship with consumer satisfaction remains thinly documented in Iran. This study examines aroma, flavor, and infusion color from the perspective of tea industry experts in Lahijan, Guilan Province. A descriptive - analytical design was used. Of 90 questionnaires distributed, 89 usable responses were obtained; items used a five-point Likert-type format and were analyzed with one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in SPSS. Mean satisfaction differed significantly across the

four rating categories for aroma, $F(3, 85) = 7.810$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 \approx .216$; flavor, $F(3, 85) = 11.676$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 \approx .292$; and color, $F(3, 85) = 8.973$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 \approx .241$. Under the conventional benchmarks associated with Cohen (1988), all three estimates are large, with flavor the largest, followed by color and aroma. Because the three analyses are separate and the ratings come from experts rather than consumers, this ordering is descriptive and does not by itself show that the attributes differ in their effect on consumer satisfaction. The findings are discussed against recent consumer–sensory research showing that expert and consumer priorities can diverge, and the paper outlines practical measures for standardized sensory control, assessor training, and consumer-level testing in the Iranian tea industry, together with a design for a follow-up study capable of testing the attribute–satisfaction relationship directly.

Keywords: tea quality, sensory attributes, aroma, flavor, infusion color, consumer satisfaction, expert evaluation, Iranian tea industry, Lahijan

JEL code: Q11

Research aims: To examine the impact of the level of consumer satisfaction on the formation of quality-related factors within the tea production-consumption value chain.

Research novelty: Conceptual provisions have been proposed for establishing a quality control system within the tea production-consumption value chain.

Introduction

In competitive consumer markets, product quality shapes customer evaluation, perceived value, and market differentiation. Producers must therefore understand not only the technical characteristics of their products but also how those characteristics are perceived by intended buyers. Customer satisfaction is a core marketing construct, but it is conceptually distinct from objective quality and from perceived quality (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Fornell et al., 1996; Oliver, 1980; Zeithaml, 1988). The same product can satisfy one consumer and disappoint another because preferences, prior experience, and evaluation standards differ; improving a technical specification therefore does not automatically raise satisfaction.

These issues are especially pertinent for tea, an agricultural product whose sensory profile is shaped by cultivar, growing conditions, harvesting, processing, storage, and preparation. Recent reviews stress that tea quality is best understood by combining human sensory evaluation with chemical and instrumental analysis (Moreira et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2020). Among the sensory dimensions of tea, aroma, flavor, and infusion color are the most routinely assessed. Aroma reflects volatile compounds and processing history; flavor integrates taste, mouthfeel, and retro nasal aroma; and infusion color is the first visual cue consumers meet, which they may associate with strength, familiarity, or product identity. How desirable each attribute depends on tea type, preparation conditions, cultural context, and individual preference.

From a marketing standpoint, understanding these attributes can help producers define consistent specifications and align production decisions with target-market expectations. Nevertheless, sensory characteristics and consumer satisfaction are different constructs, and the strength of the link between them has to be established empirically rather than assumed.

Research problem and contribution

This study examines three sensory attributes - aroma, flavor, and infusion color - from the perspective of tea industry experts in Lahijan. Although these attributes are routinely used in quality assessment, their relative commercial importance cannot be presumed equal across markets. Consumers differ in their preferences for flavor intensity, aromatic character, appearance, price, and origin, and recent consumer-based studies show that attributes emphasized by experts are not always those that drive liking (Liou et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022). A study of Iranian consumers' acceptance of and satisfaction with Iranian tea has also been undertaken (Roofigari Haghighat et al., 2018), but expert-side evidence on specific sensory attributes remains scarce.

The analyses reported here compare mean satisfaction across four rating categories of each attribute (aroma, flavor, and color) and yield statistically significant ANOVA results for all three. Because the ratings are experts' judgments and the design is cross-sectional, the results are interpreted as evidence of association in expert assessments, not as direct evidence of causal effects of attributes on consumer satisfaction. The article contributes (a) a transparent report of effect sizes alongside significance tests, (b) a literature-anchored framework that separates expert, consumer,

and behavioral constructs, and (c) a methodological agenda for testing the attribute–satisfaction relationship properly.

Research question and hypotheses

RQ: How are aroma, flavor, and infusion color evaluated in relation to tea quality by tea industry experts in Lahijan, Guilan Province?

For statistical testing, each ANOVA is framed in terms of the groups defined in the analysis:

- ✓ **H0~1~:** Mean satisfaction does not differ across the rating categories of aroma. **H1~1~:** At least one group mean differs.
- ✓ **H0~2~:** Mean satisfaction does not differ across the rating categories of flavor. **H1~2~:** At least one group mean differs.
- ✓ **H0~3~:** Mean satisfaction does not differ across the rating categories of color. **H1~3~:** At least one group mean differs.

The further proposition that aroma, flavor, and color differ in their effects on consumer satisfaction is a separate comparative hypothesis. Testing it requires clearly defined measures and a model that estimates and compares the relationship of each attribute with satisfaction directly; it is treated here as a direction for future research.

Materials and Methods

Research design

A descriptive–analytical design was used to examine tea quality attributes from the perspective of industry experts. Questionnaire-based data collection was complemented by interviews and documentary research that provided context on production, quality assessment, and market requirements. The design is observational

rather than experimental; the results describe differences in reported outcomes and do not show that changes in aroma, flavor, or color cause changes in consumer satisfaction.

Population and sampling

The target population comprised tea specialists and experts working in tea factories, tea companies, and related tea-industry organizations in Guilan Province, Iran, with the sample drawn from Lahijan. Ninety questionnaires were distributed and 89 usable responses were retained for analysis. Convenience sampling was used because the expert population is small and difficult to access. This is a practical choice when respondents hold specialized knowledge, but it does not give every member of the population a known probability of selection, so the findings should not be generalized automatically to all experts, producers, or consumers in Iran (Cochran, 1977).

Instruments

The main quantitative instrument was a questionnaire with a five-point Likert-type response format (Likert, 1932; very low, low, medium, high, very high), in which experts rated the quality factors - aroma, flavor, and infusion color - and consumer satisfaction. The questionnaire was developed from exploratory research and interviews with tea-industry experts, and documentary research supported the theoretical grounding. Responses were analyzed in SPSS (Churchill, 1979).

Variables

- ✓ **Aroma:** perceived aromatic characteristics of the tea.
- ✓ **Flavor:** perceived taste and related flavor characteristics.

- ✓ **Infusion color:** visual characteristics of the prepared infusion.
- ✓ **Consumer satisfaction (conceptual):** an overall evaluation of product performance relative to expectations.

In each ANOVA, the grouping variable was the expert's rating of the corresponding attribute (aroma, flavor, or color), divided into four categories, and the dependent variable was the mean consumer-satisfaction score on the five-point scale.

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed in SPSS using one-way ANOVA at $\alpha = .05$. One-way ANOVA tests whether the means of independent groups differ by more than within-group variation would lead one to expect, assuming independent observations, approximately normal residuals, and - for the classical pooled test - homogeneous variances (Field, 2018). Because group sizes and variances are often unequal in applied data, Welch's *F* test has been recommended as a robust default (Delacre et al., 2019); Tests of homogeneity of variance were not reported; this is acknowledged as a limitation. Effect size was estimated as eta-squared from the reported sums of squares:

$$\eta^2 = SS_{between} / SS_{total}$$

Eta-squared is the share of observed total variation associated with group membership in a given analysis. It should not be read as the proportion of satisfaction explained by an attribute unless the outcome and grouping variable are defined accordingly. Conventional benchmarks associated with Cohen (1988) treat values near .01, .06, and .14 as small, medium, and large,

respectively, although practical importance also depends on measurement quality and context.

Research Results

Sample and analytical overview

Of 90 questionnaires distributed, 89 usable responses were analyzed. The total degrees of freedom (88) are consistent with 89 observations in each analysis. Each ANOVA has 3 between-group and 85 within-group degrees of freedom, corresponding to the four rating categories of each attribute.

Table 1. One-way ANOVA of satisfaction by aroma rating category
Source: *Authors' own work*

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*p*
Between groups	14.364	3	4.788	7.810	< .001
Within groups	52.108	85	0.613	—	—
Total	66.472	88	—	—	—

Note. Mean squares are rounded.

The aroma analysis is statistically significant, $F(3, 85) = 7.810$, $p < .001$, so the null hypothesis of equal group means is rejected. The effect size is $\eta^2 = 14.364 / 66.472 \approx .216$: about 21.6% of observed variation is associated with group membership, a large effect by the conventional benchmark. An omnibus ANOVA does not say which groups differ or in what direction; that requires group means, meaningful labels, and post hoc comparisons, and the result does not establish a causal link between aroma and satisfaction.

Table 2. One-way ANOVA of satisfaction by flavor rating category
Source: *Authors' own work*

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*p*
Between groups	14.618	3	4.873	11.676	< .001
Within groups	35.472	85	0.417	—	—
Total	50.090	88	—	—	—

The flavor analysis is significant, $F(3, 85) = 11.676$, $p < .001$, and the null hypothesis is rejected. The effect size is $\eta^2 = 14.618 / 50.090 \approx .292$, i.e., about 29.2% of observed variation is associated with group membership. This is the largest of the three estimates. It cannot, however, be read as evidence that flavor explains 29.2% of consumer satisfaction, nor, by itself, that flavor is statistically more influential than aroma or color.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA of satisfaction by Infusion color rating category
Source: *Authors' own work*

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	*F*	*p*
Between groups	19.809	3	6.603	8.973	< .001
Within groups	62.550	85	0.736	—	—
Total	82.360	88	—	—	—

The color analysis is significant, $F(3, 85) = 8.973$, $p < .001$, and the null hypothesis is rejected. The effect size is $\eta^2 = 19.809 / 82.360 \approx .241$: about 24.1% of observed variation is associated with

group membership. Group means are not reported here, so the analysis does not show which rating categories were associated with higher satisfaction.

Rounding note. The within-group (62.550) and between-group (19.809) sums of squares add to 82.359, one thousandth below the reported total (82.360). This is consistent with rounding of the SPSS output and does not affect the reported *F*, *p*, or η^2 values; the figures are reported as obtained.

Table 4. Comparative Summary of the ANOVA results
Source: *Authors' own work*

Attribute-related outcome	*F*(3, 85)	*p*	η^2	Descriptive rank
Aroma	7.810	< .001	.216	3
Flavor	11.676	< .001	.292	1
Color	8.973	< .001	.241	2

Flavor shows the largest estimate (.292), followed by color (.241) and aroma (.216). The ordering is descriptive: the estimates come from three separate analyses, and no test comparing them has been reported. Practical importance should be judged with reference to the constructs measured, measurement reliability, study design, and managerial consequences.

Summary of findings

1. **Statistical evidence:** all three ANOVA tests are significant at the .001 level.

2. **Descriptive comparison:** the largest eta-squared estimate is for flavor, then color, then aroma; all three exceed the conventional threshold for a large effect.
3. **Substantive interpretation:** post hoc comparisons are not reported, so the direction of group differences is not established, and the analyses cannot show the direct effect of any attribute on satisfaction or significant differences among the attributes' relative effects.

Discussion

Interpretation in light of previous research

All three analyses indicate systematic between-group differences, with large effect sizes. This is consistent with the literature's emphasis on aroma, flavor, and color as core dimensions of tea quality assessment (Moreira et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2025). Statistical significance, however, does not show that consumers prefer a particular sensory profile. The respondents were industry experts, and the outcomes cannot be equated with consumer acceptance. This matters because consumer-based studies repeatedly show that expert-emphasized attributes and consumer drivers of liking can diverge (Liou et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022). The findings are accordingly best treated as a map of where expert-perceived variation is concentrated, and so of where quality control and consumer research should look first.

Flavor as a priority for further investigation

Flavor's larger estimate makes it a sensible priority for further study and for closer attention within quality-management systems -

for example, documenting sensory specifications, monitoring batch-level variation, and investigating complaints about bitterness, astringency, or intensity, which are the characteristics most tightly linked to tea chemistry (Zhang et al., 2020). It does not justify allocating more resources to flavor than to aroma or color. A difference between groups is not a difference between the effects of predictors, so managers need to know what was measured, which groups were compared, and whether the differences matter for satisfaction before setting investment priorities.

Aroma and product identity

Aroma contributes to product identity and consumer expectations and varies with raw materials, processing, and storage, which makes consistent evaluation important for quality assurance. Producers can define reference profiles for each product line and compare batches against them, with trained assessors working alongside instrumental measurement to separate sensory variation from chemical variation (Moreira et al., 2024). ISO 13299:2016 and ISO 8586:2023 supply the methodological basis for such profiling and for assessor selection and training. Which aroma profile Iranian consumers prefer remains an open question that only consumer preference data can answer.

Infusion color and consistency

The color analysis supports closer examination of visual quality and consistency. The commercial meaning of infusion color is, however, context-dependent, so quality specifications should define acceptable color for each tea category instead of assuming that greater intensity signals higher quality. Evaluation must hold

brewing time, water temperature, water composition, and leaf-to-water ratio constant (ISO, 2019); otherwise, preparation differences can masquerade as product differences.

Implications for satisfaction and marketing strategy

Market-oriented tea businesses need to link quality decisions to consumer expectations, perceived value, and purchasing behavior. Technical indicators show whether a product meets specification; consumer research shows whether it delivers an experience customers value. Because perceived quality and perceived value are related but distinct (Zeithaml, 1988), improvements in sensory quality may produce no commercial benefit if consumers do not notice them or consider the price too high. For Iranian producers who compete with imports, this argues for pairing expert-based quality control with the consumer-acceptance work already begun in Iran (Roofigari Haghighat et al., 2018).

Contribution

The study offers an exploratory, locally grounded account of expert-perceived sensory variation in Lahijan, tied to a practical question for agricultural processing and marketing: which product characteristics deserve systematic assessment and improvement? Its contribution is preliminary rather than causal. It identifies aroma-, flavor-, and color-related outcomes as areas worth further examination, but it does not validate a model of consumer satisfaction or demonstrate that one attribute outweighs the others.

Recommendations

Establish a structured sensory quality-control system

Producers and processors should document sensory specifications for aroma, flavor, and infusion color for each product category, together with assessment procedures, reference samples, and acceptance criteria. Liquors should be prepared under standardized conditions (ISO, 2019), and sensory results should be complemented by instrumental measurement where appropriate.

Standardize assessment and train evaluators

Sensory data are more useful when assessors share terminology and procedures. Training should cover recognition of relevant characteristics, use of reference samples, scoring consistency, and documentation, following ISO 8586:2023 and the operating guidance for traditional evaluation and QDA described by Liu et al. (2025). Smaller producers can begin with a simple internal protocol and extend it as resources allow.

Incorporate direct consumer feedback

Expert knowledge should be supplemented with consumer evidence. Consumer surveys could measure satisfaction with aroma, flavor, and color separately, alongside perceived quality, price fairness, overall satisfaction, and purchase intention. Methods such as CATA with hedonic scales have been used successfully to identify drivers of liking for teas (Liou et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2022), and would directly address the central limitation of the present design.

Investigate market segments

Preferences should not be assumed uniform. Producers could test whether sensory preferences differ by age, consumption frequency, preparation habits, brand familiarity, or price sensitivity - young consumers in Taiwan, for instance, diverged from expert-defined standards (Liou et al., 2020) - and let empirically identified segments inform product specifications and communication.

Link quality investment to perceived value

Investment in processing, testing, and quality assurance should be assessed against the benefits consumers recognize relative to price. Managers should track quality indicators alongside satisfaction, complaints, repeat purchase, and perceived value to see whether quality initiatives improve market performance (Fornell et al., 1996; Zeithaml, 1988).

Implement a continuous-improvement cycle

- ✓ **Define:** set sensory specifications for each product category.
- ✓ **Measure:** evaluate samples under standardized preparation conditions.
- ✓ **Compare:** identify deviations and investigate production or storage causes.
- ✓ **Validate:** test improvements with trained assessors and, where appropriate, consumers.
- ✓ **Review:** track consistency, complaints, and consumer evaluations over time.

Conclusion

This study examined aroma, flavor, and infusion color as dimensions of tea quality from the perspective of tea industry experts in Lahijan, Guilan Province. Of 90 questionnaires

distributed, 89 usable responses were analyzed. The ANOVA results show statistically significant between-group differences for aroma, $F(3, 85) = 7.810$, $p < .001$; flavor, $F(3, 85) = 11.676$, $p < .001$; and color, $F(3, 85) = 8.973$, $p < .001$. Estimated eta-squared values are approximately .216, .292, and .241, respectively - large effects by conventional benchmarks - with flavor the largest, followed by color and aroma.

This ordering can guide further investigation but does not show that flavor has a statistically greater effect on consumer satisfaction than the other attributes. Sensory characteristics should be considered alongside expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value, and the recent consumer literature cautions that expert priorities and consumer preferences may differ. For tea businesses, a practical path is to combine standardized sensory quality control with direct consumer research and continuous market feedback.

The principal limitations are the convenience sample of experts, the fact that satisfaction was rated by experts rather than consumers, and the absence of reported post hoc comparisons, reliability coefficients, and homogeneity-of-variance tests. Subject to these limitations, the study provides an exploratory foundation for research on sensory quality management and consumer evaluation in the Iranian tea industry; a follow-up that integrates consumer-level data, standardized sensory assessment, and an appropriate multivariate model would provide stronger evidence for production planning, product differentiation, and marketing strategy.

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ՍՊԱՌՈՂՆԵՐԻ ԲԱՎԱՐԱՐՎԱԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՎՐԱ ԹԵՅԻ ՈՐԱԿԻ ԳՈՐԾՈՆՆԵՐԻ ԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԱՐԴՅՈՒՆԱՎԵՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ՝ ՄԱՍՆԱԳԵՏՆԵՐԻ ՏԵՍԱԿԵՏԻՑ

Ամիր Նեջադղանբար
Հայաստանի ազգային ագրարային համալսարան
ասպիրանտ

Տիգրան Մարտիրոսյան
Հայաստանի պետական տնտեսագիտական համալսարան
տնտեսագիտության դոկտոր, պրոֆեսոր

Բանալի բառեր - թեյի որակ, զգայական հատկանիշներ, բույր, համ, թեյի գույն, սպառողների գոհունակություն, փորձագիտական գնահատական, իրանական թեյի արդյունաբերություն, Լահիջան

Մրցակցային սպառողական շուկաներում ապրանքի որակը ձևավորվում է հաճախորդների գնահատմամբ: Հետևաբար, արտադրողները պետք է արձանագրեն ոչ միայն իրենց արտադրանքի տեխնիկական բնութագրերը, այլև գնահատեն, թե ինչպես են դրանք ընկալվում պոտենցիալ գնորդների կողմից: Նույն ապրանքը կարող է բավարարել մեկ սպառողին և հիասթափեցնել մյուսին, քանի որ նախասիրությունները, նախկին փորձը և գնահատման չափանիշները տարբերվում են:

Հետևաբար, տեխնիկական բնութագրի բարելավումը ինքնաբերաբար չի բարձրացնում գոհունակությունը: Այս հարցերը հատկապես արդիական են թեյի համար, որը գյուղատնտեսական արտադրանք է և որի զգայական պրոֆիլը

ձևավորվում է սորտի, աճեցման պայմանների, բերքահավաքի, մշակման, պահպանման և պատրաստման միջոցով: Թեյի զգայական չափորոշիչների շարքում բույրը, համը և թուրմի գույնը ամենից առավել հաճախ են գնահատվում: Յուրաքանչյուր հատկանիշի ցանկալի լինելը կախված է թեյի տեսակից, պատրաստման պայմաններից, մշակութային համատեքստից և անհատական նախասիրություններից: Այնուամենայնիվ, զգայական բնութագրերը և սպառողների գոհունակությունը տարբեր կառուցվածքներ են, և դրանց միջև կապի ուժը պետք է հաստատվի փորձարարական եղանակով:

Հետազոտության նպատակն է հանդիսացել բացահայտել սև թեյի որակի գործոնային ազդեցությունը սպառողների գոհունակության վրա: Փորձագետների շրջանում անցկացված սոցիալական հարցումների հիման վրա գնահատվել է թեյի սպառողների գոհունակության մակարդակը ըստ որակի գործոնների, ինչպիսիք են գույնը, համը, բույրը, փաթեթավորումը:

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