

PRODUCT CATEGORY MANAGEMENT ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE LIPTON YELLOW LABEL BRAND

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to identify and assess the role of the Lipton Yellow Label brand in the Polish tea market. The article presents the theoretical foundations of product category management, the role of the anchor brand, and the specific nature of the tea market in Poland. The results of own research are also presented in the final part of the paper.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted by an online questionnaire developed by the Microsoft Forms platform. One hundred and one people participated, 96 of whom declared familiarity with the Lipton Yellow Label product. Only those respondents were included in the detailed analysis. The survey questionnaire included closed-ended single- and multiple-choice questions, as well as a set of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale.

Findings: In a theoretical context, the study demonstrated that effective category management relies on close cooperation between suppliers and retailers, strategic product positioning, and continuous analysis of consumer needs. Thanks to its consistent distribution strategy, iconic packaging, and competitive pricing, the Lipton brand has become an example of effective category management on a global scale. The results of own research indicate clear consumer trends, such as: increasing sensitivity to packaging, health-promoting expectations, and a noticeable segmentation of the market. In response to these trends, the article formulates recommendations for category managers, including optimizing pricing, developing premium offerings, packaging modernization, and educational initiatives to build loyalty to the Lipton brand.

Research limitations/implications: The study's main limitations were the non-random sampling and its focus on a single product (Lipton Yellow Label) within the tea category. Future research should expand the analysis to include comparisons with other anchor brands and incorporate qualitative methods to further explore consumer motivations and attitudes in the tea purchasing process.

Practical implications: The numerous conclusions drawn from the research are presented at the end of the article. They can provide a valuable starting point for category management practitioners, not only in the tea industry but also in other FMCG sectors.

Originality/value: This proprietary study was designed and conducted for the Lipton Yellow Label tea brand. This is the most important brand in the Polish tea market, serving as a benchmark for other brands in this segment. The results are significant for those who manage in practice food product categories.

Keywords: management, product category, Lipton brand, tea market, consumer behavior.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The dynamic growth of the tea market in Poland necessitates continuous refinement of product category management strategies and the ways brands communicate with consumers. The growing number of available teas, diverse consumer preferences, and intense competition mean that the mere presence of an attractive product on the market does not guarantee success. A key factor in determining competitive advantage is the ability to create a strong brand, maintain its recognition, and manage the category in a way that optimizes sales and consumer loyalty. This article draws on relevant literature, including industry reports and online sources, regarding brand management. In particular, it presents the results of own research, conducted on a sample of 96 respondents declaring familiarity with the Lipton brand. This research was conducted using a survey questionnaire, which included closed-ended single- and multiple-choice questions, as well as a set of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale.

2. The brand and its role in product category management

The greatest art of marketing is the ability to create, maintain, protect, and improve a brand (Kotler, 2005, p. 410). The process of brand management is a fundamental tool for building a competitive advantage for enterprises. A brand is a fundamental tool for communicating with customers, conveying information about the characteristics of the offer to buyers and guaranteeing the delivery of expected quality. Brand management is a marketing technique that involves introducing, further creating, and coordinating a brand to the market to maximize profits from the sale of its products, as well as all activities aimed at evoking brand associations with a given product among buyers and fostering a positive image (Garczarek-Bąk, 2022, p. 49). One of the most popular definitions of a brand in marketing literature, proposed by the American Marketing Association defines it as a “name, term, sign, symbol, or any other feature that serves to identify the products or services of one seller and distinguish them from those of other sellers (AMA, 2021). The primary function is therefore to positively distinguish a product from its competitors, which will encourage consumers to choose a product sold under a given brand. Although assigning a specific name, logo, or symbol to a product is sufficient to establish its brand (Keller, 2011, p. 20), its actual significance now extends far beyond its identification function. The concept of brand appears in marketing literature in many meanings. The basic ones are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.
Definitions of the term brand

Source	Definition
Ogilvy (1985, p. 32)	a composite symbol that consists of the intangible sum of a product's features, its name, packaging and price, as well as its history, reputation and the way it is advertised
Kall (2001, p. 12)	a combination of a physical product, brand name, packaging, advertising, distribution activities and pricing that serves to differentiate a marketer's offering from competitive offerings, while providing the consumer with distinctive functional and/or symbolic benefits
Szulce, Janiszewska (2006, p. 50)	a special value, which is a combination of the value of the product, service and a specific promise of the manufacturer
Polański (2008, p. 24)	a product information bank that contains data about the product and its history on the market
Jasińska (2010, p. 24)	a particular product line, product family or product range, as well as the entire product range
Badzińska (2011, p. 145)	the idea around which the community is formed
Staszyńska (2013, p. 31)	guarantee of repeatable quality (in the form of a set of repeatable benefits with every purchase)

Source: (Garczarek-Bąk, 2022, p. 50).

Brand positioning aims to create a lasting "imprint in consumers' memories" so that they can distinguish a given brand from competing brands, which will ultimately allow the brand to occupy an optimal position on the market perception map (Mróz-Gorgoń, Szymański, 2018). The positioning process should begin with market segmentation, which aims to divide the market into internally homogeneous consumer groups characterized by similar characteristics (Bielski, 2006, p. 70). The success of this process depends on the proper identification of preferred brand values, which constitute the benefits desired by the target brand recipient (Zboralski, 2000, p. 267). The essence of positioning, therefore, is to create points of differentiation, constituting brand attributes, that will distinguish the brand's offering from the competition and provide a convincing reason for consumers to choose it. As Keller (2011, p. 130) aptly notes, brand differentiation points have the potential to develop into strong, positive, and unique brand associations only when they meet attractiveness criteria (such as meaning, distinctiveness and credibility) and feasibility criteria (realism, understandability, and durability). Among the types of positioning, the following categories are listed (Entrepreneur's Guide, 2021):

- **Price** positioning – most often the lowest or highest; the most expensive products are associated with the best and most exclusive, while the cheapest ones are usually associated with "good and cheap".
- **Product origin** positioning – the country of origin of a given brand allows for a positive association.
- **Unique attribute** positioning – emphasizing unique, unparalleled features not shared by competitors.

- **Product category** positioning – a state in which a specific product/service becomes an association for the entire category of these products/services (often other products are misleadingly referred to by a given name).
- **Specialization** positioning – focusing on only one area to build the image of a specialist in that field.
- **User** positioning – for example, a well-known personality in an advertisement may suggest certain characteristics.
- **Gender** positioning – targeting a product to a specific audience, such as cosmetics or cigarettes for men.
- positioning **by use** – a given brand is associated with a specific occasion.
- positioning **by purpose** – showing the product in use.
- positioning towards the **competition** – through the prism of the leader.

Category management plays a key role in a company's marketing strategy, enabling retailers and manufacturers to effectively adapt their activities to consumer needs, optimize product ranges, and build long-term customer relationships. This concept was developed in the 1990's, with the intention of helping to organize product offerings based on customer needs. A prerequisite for achieving these goals is close cooperation between supply chain entities (producers and retailers), which involves the integration of business processes (production and sales) based on sales data obtained by the retailer. This data serves as the starting point for the entire concept, indicating which products, in what quantities, and over what timeframe are purchased by consumers (Borusiak, Stefanide, 2017, p. 7). There are many definitions of category management, but AC Nielsen most aptly defines it as "a strategy for managing product groups by channel partners, the goal of which is to maximize sales and profits by meeting customer needs" (ECR, 2007, p. 7). Category management has evolved from a simple process of managing product groups into a sophisticated strategic tool that integrates data analysis, collaboration between channel partners, and dynamic response to changing market trends. Modern category management isn't limited to improving the financial performance of individual categories. It adopts a holistic approach that focuses on providing customers with a comprehensive and coherent offering. By grouping products to meet specific customer needs, companies can build customer loyalty, a key element of marketing strategy. Category management allows for a radical shift in the approach to material flows, yielding significant improvements. The most frequently cited effects of product category management include: price optimization, reduced logistics costs, reduced risk of collaboration in the supply chain, increased profits, and increased company profitability (Kobyłt, 2006). Category management in today's dynamically changing market environment must consider numerous challenges stemming from both global trends and local conditions. Among the key aspects is the growing importance of modern communication channels, the evolution of social media, and adapting advertising to the latest trends. Tools that enable more direct and interactive contact with

consumers require companies to continuously monitor and engage audiences in the digital space, which in turn requires flexibility in product category management. Customers are increasingly engaging in active and open dialogue with sellers of goods and services, becoming active consumers – i.e. partners or so-called prosumers (Dobski, Mikołajczyk, 2023, p. 27). Demographic changes, such as the aging population in developed countries, pose another significant challenge to category management. This has a significant impact on category management strategies. Managers must tailor their offerings to the needs of older consumers, taking into account their preferences and limitations. As an increasingly important market segment, seniors have specific requirements that encompass both product functionality and presentation and accessibility. Above all, companies must consider their preferences for ease of use. Products for older consumers should feature ergonomic, easy-to-open packaging and legible labels with larger font sizes. Product selection must also be tailored to the health needs of this group, which means a greater emphasis on functional foods, dietary supplements, and products friendly to people with allergies and other conditions (Ankiel, 2021). Responding to growing environmental awareness and social expectations related to environmental protection is also a significant challenge for category management. Consumers are increasingly seeking eco-friendly products, forcing companies to implement more sustainable solutions in packaging, production, and distribution. Sustainable marketing involves promoting products or services while minimizing their impact on the environment and society. This requires integrating sustainability principles into every phase of a product's lifecycle, from design and production to distribution and disposal. When implementing sustainable marketing strategies, managers must sometimes prioritize stakeholder value over corporate profit (Mikołajczyk, 2012, p. 7). This means adopting a long-term approach to sustainability, which fosters a positive image and builds trust among customers. Various economic crises further impact consumer behavior, potentially shifting purchasing priorities in favor of lower-priced products with higher utility value. In such conditions, category management must focus on offering solutions tailored to customer budget constraints while maintaining customer loyalty and brand competitiveness. These challenges require companies to continually analyze and optimize category management processes to effectively respond to changing market needs.

3. Factors influencing consumer choices in the tea market

Tea is a beverage derived from evergreen shrubs belonging to the *Camellia* family. It comes in two main botanical varieties: the *Chinese Camellia sinensis* and the *Indian Camellia Assamica* (<https://www.kawa-herbata.com.pl/porada3.html>). Today, tea, alongside water and coffee, is one of the most widely consumed beverages in the world. It is produced in over 30 countries, on almost every continent. However, the most important are Asian countries,

which have specialized in its cultivation and processing for centuries. In 2021, the global tea cultivation area was approximately 4.5 million hectares, and total tea production averages 6.5 million tons per year (<https://www.herbata.info/najwieksi-producenci-herbaty-czyli-kto-rzadzi-herbacianym-swiatem>). Two-thirds of this production is accounted for by two countries: China and India. China accounts for approximately 30% of the global production, while India accounts for 26%. In addition to these two giants, the share of African countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe is also growing. Since 2013, the African continent has produced approximately 700,000 tons of tea annually, representing approximately 13% of the global market (<https://www.herbata.info/najwieksi-producenci-herbaty-czyli-kto-rzadzi-herbacianym-swiatem>). Black tea is the dominant type of tea worldwide, accounting for approximately 80% of total production. Turks are the world's largest tea drinkers. According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), Turks consume almost 4 kg of tea per capita annually. Ireland comes second (approximately 2.19 kg), and the British third (approximately 1.94 kg). Iran, Russia, Morocco, New Zealand, Chile, Egypt, and Poland also consume more than 1 kg of tea per capita per year. It's estimated that one kilogram of tea can brew approximately 400 cups. This is roughly how much the average Pole consumes each year (<https://www.herbata.info/najwieksi-producenci-herbaty-czyli-kto-rzadzi-herbacianym-swiatem/>). An analysis of global tea consumption reveals that there's much more to every cup than just individual taste preferences. Consumer decisions in the tea market are not random. They are shaped by both economic and non-economic factors. Economic factors include all factors directly related to the consumer's financial situation and market conditions. Non-economic factors refer to those elements that do not stem directly from financial circumstances, but from the broadly understood socio-cultural environment (Brzozowska-Woś, 2010, p. 34). It is their interplay that makes tea an everyday, luxury, or occasional choice, and consumer preferences change over time. The most important economic factor determining consumer choice is price. According to the law of demand, lowering the price of tea usually increases its sales, although the strength of this relationship depends on many factors. Tea, as an everyday product, is characterized by relatively low price elasticity – consumers rarely completely abandon a purchase, even if prices increase. The breadth and depth of the assortment available in stores also influences purchasing choices as an economic factor. The wider the selection of teas, the greater the opportunities to tailor purchases to individual preferences. Material characteristics of the product, such as aroma, infusion color, and packaging, are also important. In the case of tea, packaging also serves an informative role – it communicates not only the taste or type of blend but also its origin and quality. Product availability also remains a crucial economic factor. Massive presence in retail outlets builds trust and a sense of certainty about quality, and shapes purchasing habits. Consequently, availability not only facilitates tea purchases but also strengthens its importance in consumers' daily baskets. A brand remains a key element of economic influence on consumers. A trademark evokes associations with a specific standard of quality and image. Consumers are often guided

not only by taste or price but also by a brand's reputation, which influences their loyalty. Tea is a beverage deeply rooted in tradition. In Great Britain and Ireland, it is part of daily rituals, in Arab countries, it is a symbol of hospitality, and in Japan, it is an element of ceremonies with an almost spiritual dimension. Such cultural contexts influence purchasing choices even when substitutes such as coffee or soda are available. These are examples of non-economic factors. The social group to which the consumer belongs also plays a role. Family, friends, and co-workers can shape habits related to the type of tea chosen, the method of brewing it, and the frequency of consumption. The herd effect is making matcha and exotic herb teas fashionable, even if they were previously less popular. The influence of individual habits and customs cannot be ignored either. Long-time black tea drinkers rarely change their preferences, while younger generations are more likely to experiment with new flavors. In this sense, tea is a product with two faces: on the one hand, stable and rooted in tradition, and on the other, susceptible to trends and innovation.

Table 2.

The most important factors determining consumer choices

Economic	Non-economic
Price	Customs and rituals
Variety of assortment	The social group of a given consume
Availability	Habits
Brand	Trends, innovations

Source: own study.

One of the fundamental tasks of marketing is motivating consumers to purchase. To achieve this, it is essential to understand how buyer needs arise and what factors motivate them to act in the market. Marketing communication tools are used to achieve this, not only conveying information but also encouraging purchasing decisions (Wiktor, 2016). In practice, this means building brand recognition, shaping a positive product image, and strengthening consumer loyalty. This is particularly important for new products just entering the market, but also for existing ones. Manufacturers and sellers must ensure that the brand is easily recognizable – through packaging, logos, and appropriate advertising activities. The greater the intensity of these activities, the greater the chances of effectively reaching the customer. This is directly related to brand positioning, which is understood as "the act of designing a company's image in the minds of customers so that they can distinguish the brand from competing brands" (Garczarek-Bąk, 2022, p. 55). Targeting specific factors in marketing strategies can contribute to a brand's significant success. Lipton achieved this with its Yellow Label product, prioritizing broad product availability. This allowed them to create a somewhat unique product that has become a permanent fixture on store shelves. Lipton Yellow Label is a classic black tea considered its flagship product. Its distinctive, intense flavor and deep infusion color have made it a brand symbol and one of the most recognizable tea products in the world. Lipton Yellow Label is a prime example of a strategy aimed at mass consumers by maximizing availability and building a strong visual identity. Lipton Yellow Label's marketing strategy is based on

an intensive distribution model. The product is deliberately placed in the widest possible range of sales channels. It is available not only in supermarkets but also in small local shops, gas stations, kiosks, and food service outlets. This allows this tea to achieve very high numerical distribution (Mikołajczyk, 2022, p. 76). The goal of this intensive distribution strategy is to make Lipton products ubiquitous, accessible to everyone, anytime, anywhere. This widespread availability in retail directly supports the brand's image as a basic, everyday necessity. The packaging and colors of Lipton Yellow Label tea are virtually identical on every continent, allowing consumers to recognize the product even without speaking the local language. Thanks to this strategy, Lipton Yellow Label has become one of the best-selling teas in the world, a clear example of the triumph of mass marketing strategies and the psychological mere-exposure effect, where consumers prefer familiar things (Sharp, 2010).

4. Perceptions of the Lipton Yellow Label brand – results of our own research

The study was conducted using a Microsoft Forms (MF) online survey. Conducting a study using a MF online survey offers several advantages in terms of efficiency, data management, and accessibility. As a tool within the Microsoft 365 ecosystem, it streamlines the research process from creation to analysis. The questionnaire included closed-ended, single-and multiple-choice questions, as well as a set of statements rated on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents could also answer one open-ended question. 101 people completed the survey, 96 of whom declared familiarity with the Lipton Yellow Label brand. Further analysis considered only the responses of 96 people familiar with the Lipton brand. The gender breakdown among respondents was even, with slightly more men (48%) responding. Women constituted 47% of the sample. Some respondents (5%) did not wish to disclose their gender. In terms of age, young people aged 21-27 dominated (54%). The next largest group was those aged 28-39 (24%). Respondents aged 40-60 also constituted a significant group (20%). The smallest group were young people aged 16-20 (3%).

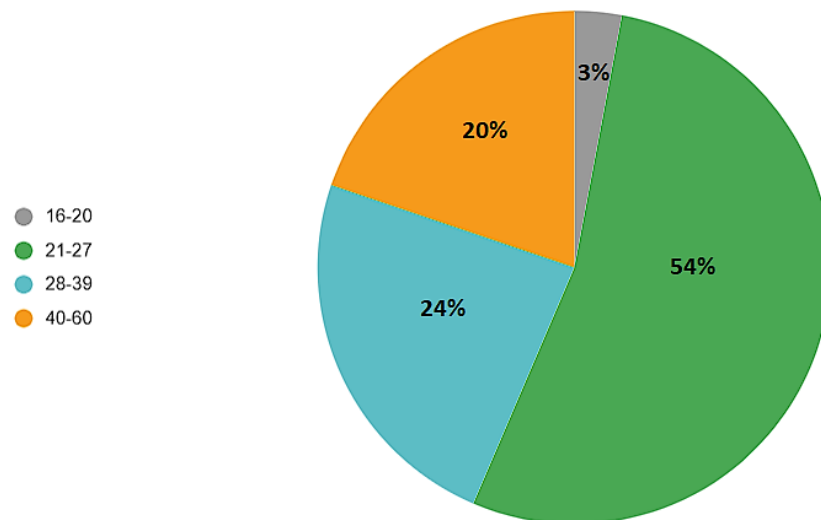


Figure 1. Age of respondents in years (%).

Source: own study based on personal research.

In terms of respondents' education level, higher education with a bachelor's or engineering degree clearly dominated (51%), followed by higher education with a master's degree (33%). The smallest group of respondents had secondary education (16%). In terms of place of residence, the respondents were dominated by cities with populations exceeding 500,000 (50%). One-third of the respondents were residents of medium-sized cities with populations ranging from 150,000 to 500,000. The smallest group of respondents turned out to be residents of small towns with populations of up to 50,000.

The introductory question in the survey questionnaire asked how often respondents consumed tea (Figure 2). Half of the respondents indicated that they consumed the beverage several times a week. The second largest group was those who drank tea daily (31%). Less frequently, i.e., once a week, 14% of respondents declared, and less than 5% of respondents said they drank tea once a month or less frequently. The popularity of tea among respondents allowed for more accurate results in the remaining part of the study.

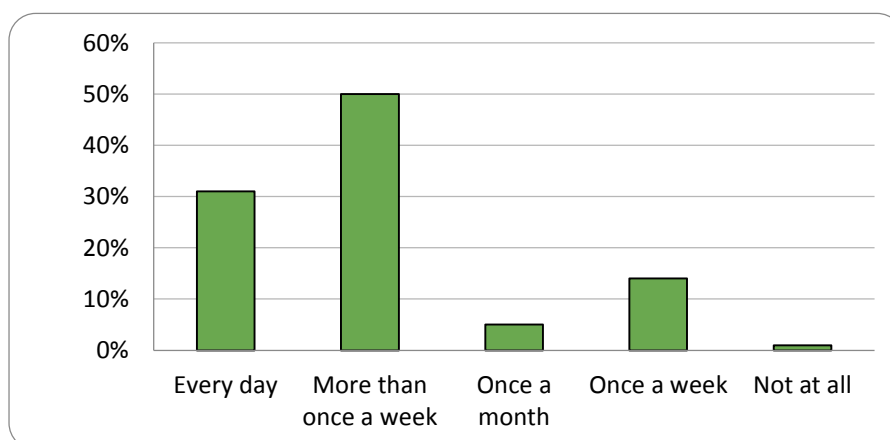


Figure 2. Frequency of tea drinking among respondents (%).

Source: own study based on personal research.

The next question was multiple-choice. It was designed to determine the type of tea most frequently chosen by respondents (Figure 3). Black tea was the clear leader in this section, chosen by a staggering 74% of respondents. Green tea came in second (54%), slightly ahead of herbal infusions (53%). Fruit teas were the next most popular (49%). Yerba mate proved very popular, with 32% of respondents choosing it. Matcha tea was chosen by 22% of respondents, and white tea by 19%. Oolong teas (12%) and iced teas (3%) were the least frequently chosen.

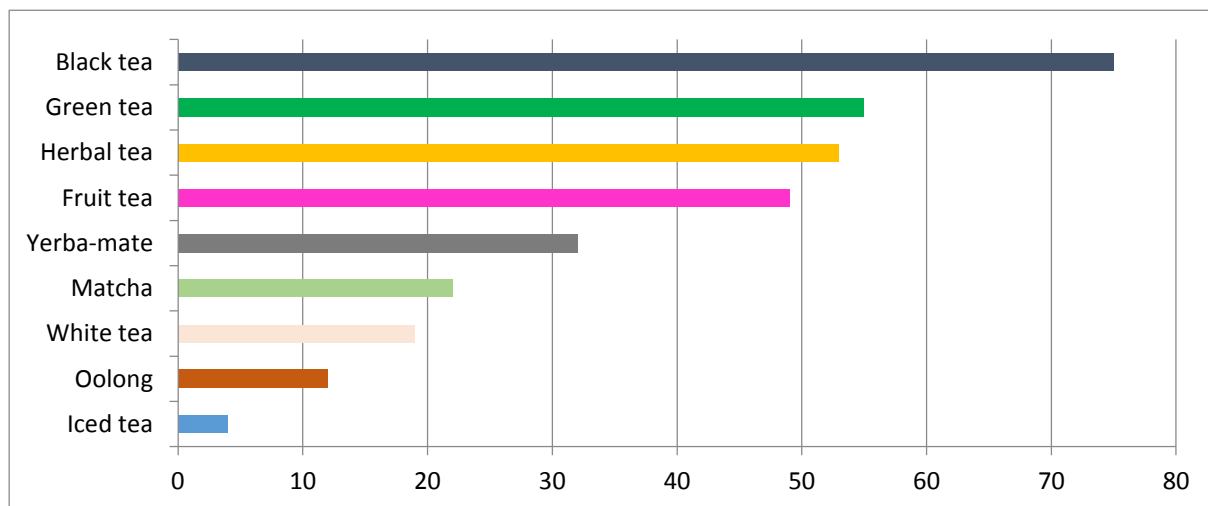


Figure 3. Selection of the type of tea consumed most often by respondents (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

The circumstances in which tea is consumed are a crucial element of this ritual. This was also explored in a multiple-choice survey question. Most respondents consume tea when sick or cold (81%). A significant portion of respondents (69%) enjoy relaxing in the evening with their favorite tea. Over 50% of respondents also indicated brewing tea during social gatherings. Respondents agree on drinking tea while working, studying, or watching movies (35%). In the morning, only 30% of respondents choose tea for breakfast, and tea is least frequently consumed while traveling (8%). The results are presented on Figure 4.

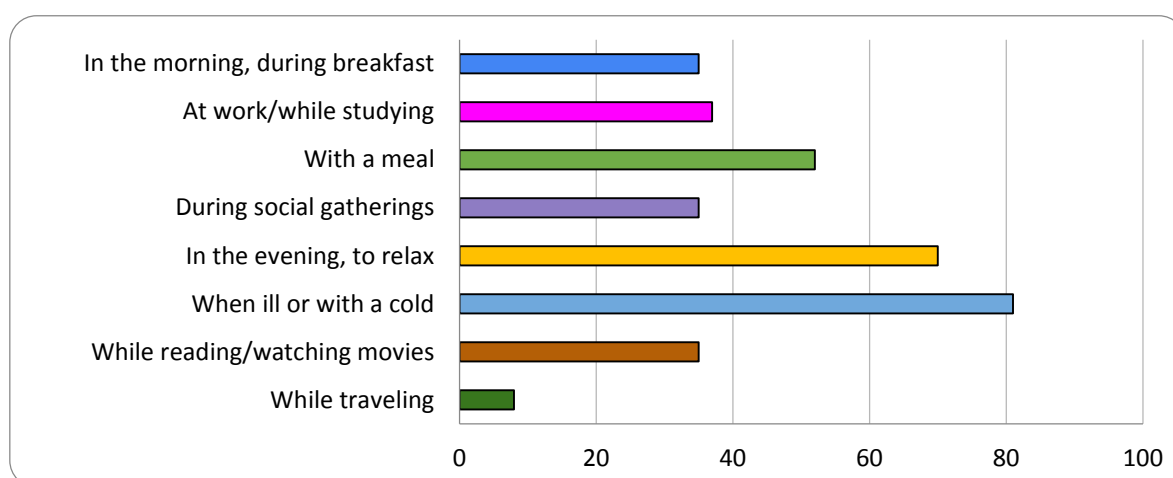


Figure 4. Circumstances of drinking tea among respondents (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

The next part of the study examined the key factors in choosing tea (Figure 5). Respondents were asked to rate their considerations when purchasing tea on a five-point scale. Taste and aroma proved to be the most important criteria, with the vast majority of respondents rating them highest. Health properties were similarly highly valued, which may indicate growing consumer awareness of the health-promoting properties of tea. Price is also important, although not the dominant factor. Most respondents considered it important, but not crucial. Store availability was also highly rated, demonstrating that ease of purchase remains an important factor in consumer decisions. Factors such as brewing speed, brand/producer, and recommendations from friends were rated lower. They are considered additional rather than decisive factors. Packaging and product aesthetics do not play a key role for most respondents, although some do pay attention to them. The origin of the tea and quality certificates were given the least importance. This may indicate that for most consumers, issues related to ethics and place of production are secondary to taste and health benefits.

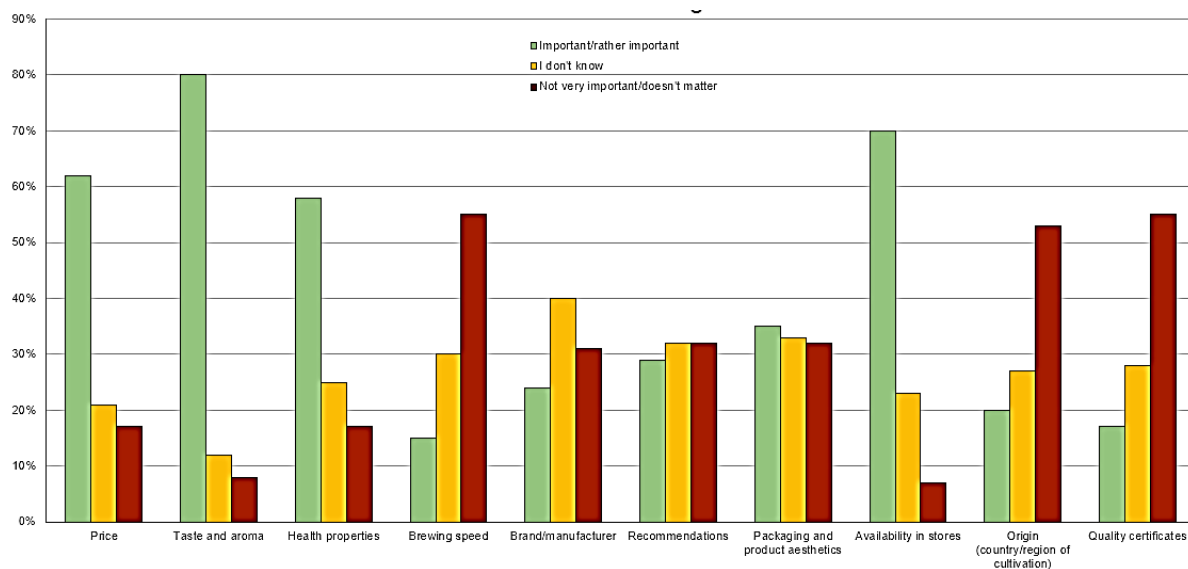


Figure 5. Main factors determining the choice of tea among respondents (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

Analysis of the results regarding tea brand recognition reveals significant variations in awareness of individual producers among respondents. Lipton was the most recognizable brand, cited by almost everyone. Saga (88%) came in second, followed by Herbol (75%). Dilmah (63%) and Loyd (62%) also enjoy high recognition. Brands such as Five o'Clock (52%) and Tetley (45%) achieved average recognition. Sir Adalbert (31%), Big-Active (26%), Richmond (23%), and Ahmad Tea (21%) are slightly less popular (Figure 6).

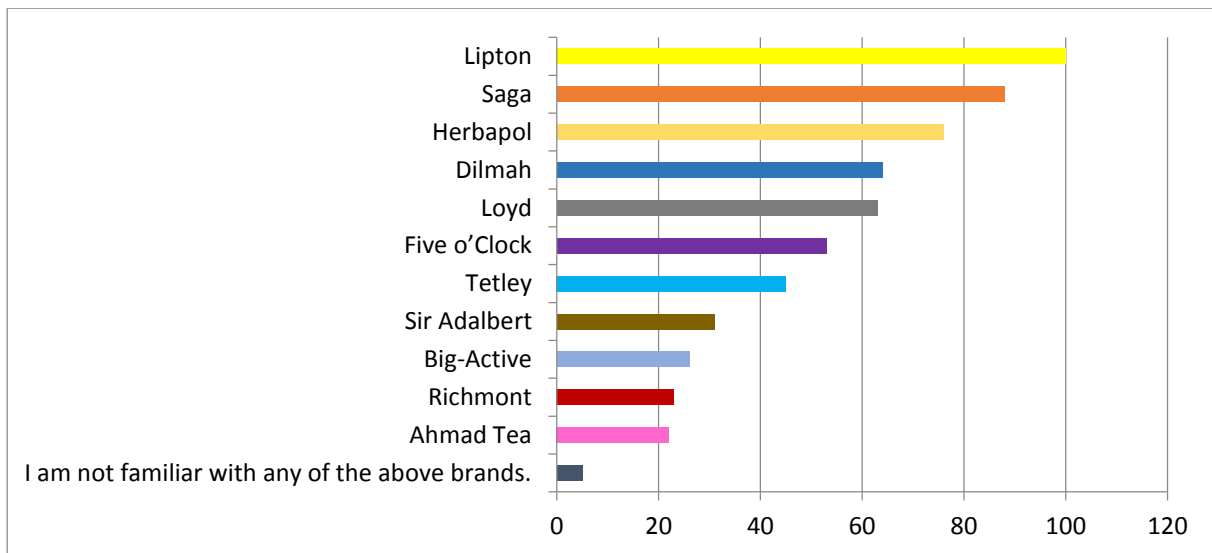


Figure 6. Recognition of selected tea brands (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

It's worth noting that only five respondents declared they were unfamiliar with any of the aforementioned brands. This indicates that the tea market is characterized by a high level of consumer awareness and high brand penetration. The high recognition score for the Lipton brand allowed for a 96% positive response rate in the next closed-ended question. This question asked whether the respondent was familiar with the Lipton Yellow Label tea brand (Figure 7). Answering "yes" allowed the survey to continue. Selecting "no" led to the metrics questions and the end of the survey. This allowed for the exclusion of respondents unfamiliar with the Lipton brand in later, more specific questions. This positively impacted the survey's credibility. Subsequent questions verified the respondents' perception of the Lipton Yellow Label product. The vast majority (over 75%) correctly identified the product as not a premium brand. Only 18% considered Lipton Yellow Label a high-end product. 5% of respondents were unable to determine whether they were more in favor or against it.

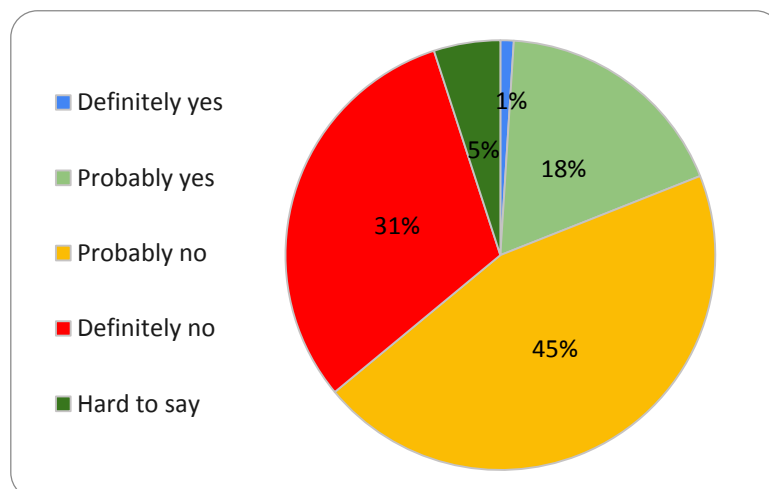


Figure 7. Rating Lipton Yellow Label tea as a premium brand.

Source: own study based on personal research.

In an open-ended question explaining why Lipton Yellow Label tea is or isn't a premium brand, respondents' answers were repetitive and formed several main groups of justifications, including:

- Widespread availability and mass appeal

The most frequently cited reason is that Lipton Yellow Label is "*a mass product, available in every store.*" Many respondents point to its "*too much popularity,*" which, in their opinion, contradicts the exclusivity typical of premium brands. To quote one response: "*It's not a premium brand because it's a mass product, available in almost every supermarket.*"

- Price and market segmentation

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the tea's moderate price – "*it's cheap,*" "*relatively low price,*" and "*optimal price.*" In the opinion of respondents, this positions Lipton Yellow Label in the economy segment, not the premium segment.

- Taste and Quality

Some respondents described the taste as average, unremarkable – "*it tastes quite average,*" "*nothing special,*" "*it doesn't stand out.*" Critical comments were also made, such as "*it's a sawdust chute, not tea*" or "*it tastes like someone poured lawnmower grass into a bag.*" At the same time, a certain group of respondents rated the product positively, citing "*good taste and aroma*" and "*easy brewing,*" though even these respondents didn't consider it premium.

- Packaging and Aesthetics

Several respondents noted that Lipton's packaging was *simple and functional, not exclusive.* The distinctive yellow color evoked mixed feelings – from neutral to negative, as in the response: *because it's a rude yellow.*

- Brand Image

Respondents often emphasized that Lipton reminds them of sweetened beverages rather than high-quality tea. Some also commented that such a large corporation couldn't create premium products on a mass scale. One respondent stated, *Good marketing ≠ premium product.*

The collected responses indicate that the Lipton Yellow Label brand is primarily perceived as an everyday tea, easily accessible and affordable, but lacking any exclusivity. A few opinions point to good quality and taste, but even these do not change the overall impression that the product belongs to the mainstream, not premium, segment.

In the next question (Figure 8), respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with specific statements about the Lipton Yellow Label brand. Responses were to be chosen on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – I completely disagree, to 5 – I completely agree). The statement that Lipton Yellow Label is "a readily available product that can be purchased in any store" received the highest level of support (over 80%). Respondents strongly associate the brand with easy availability and mass appeal. Significantly fewer agreed with the statement that they would miss the product if it were to disappear from the market (over 53%). This indicates that, while Lipton Yellow Label tea is recognizable, it doesn't build strong consumer loyalty. Some respondents positively assess the value for money, though neutral rather than enthusiastic

attitudes prevail. This means the product is accepted as "correct", but doesn't stand out for its added value. Lipton Yellow Label is, to some extent, perceived as an "icon of the tea category". Responses are very even within this category, but there's a slightly stronger indication that consumers consider Lipton Yellow Label tea a benchmark when comparing other brands, regardless of the fact that they don't consider it premium.

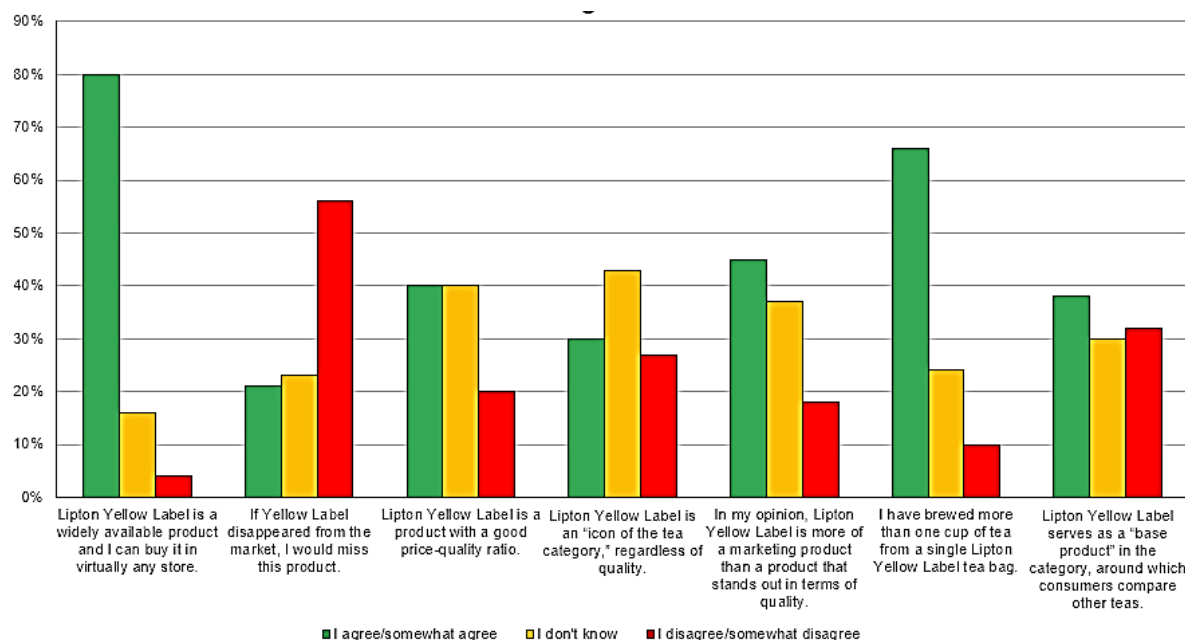


Figure 8. Assessment of compliance with the given statements regarding the Lipton Yellow Label brand (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

Many respondents agree that Lipton is more of a marketing product than a quality product (45%). This confirms that the brand's strength stems primarily from recognition, advertising, and mass distribution. When asked about brewing more than one tea bag, responses suggest that over half of consumers have used the product in this way, confirming its intense flavor. Respondents largely agree that Lipton Yellow Label serves as a "base product"—a benchmark for the entire tea category. This underscores its market importance, although it doesn't imply high quality or prestige.

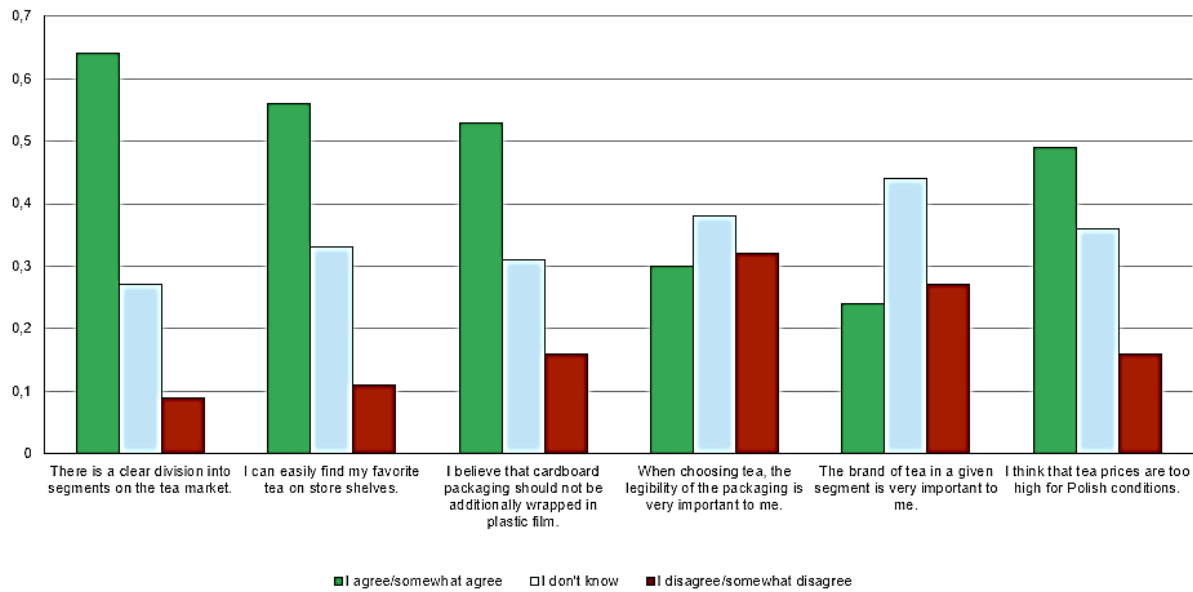


Figure 9. Assessment of compliance with the given statements regarding the tea market in Poland (in %).

Source: own study based on personal research.

The next question was similar to the previous one, but it concerned the tea market in general (Figure 9). Respondents also had to choose answers on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 – I completely disagree to 5 – I completely agree). Over 60% of respondents largely agreed with the statement that the tea market is clearly divided into segments. This indicates that consumers perceive differences in quality and price between individual products. When asked about the availability of their favorite tea, the majority of respondents indicated that they had no difficulty finding their favorite tea on store shelves (60%). This demonstrates the wide distribution and wide variety of brands present in the market. Over half of respondents agreed that cardboard packaging should not be additionally wrapped in plastic. This indicates growing consumer sensitivity to environmental issues and the excessive use of plastic in packaging. 31% of respondents considered packaging clarity important. Therefore, it can be concluded that visual elements such as clear labeling, ingredients, and presentation play an important role in purchasing decisions. When asked about the importance of brand in a given segment, responses were balanced. Some respondents attach great importance to it, while others consider it a secondary factor. This indicates that loyalty to specific producers is moderate. A significant group of respondents believe that tea prices are too high for Polish conditions. This indicates significant consumer price sensitivity and possible barriers to purchasing products from higher segments.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that tea is an important element of everyday consumer habits. Flavor, aroma, availability, and health benefits are key factors in choosing tea. Factors such as brand, packaging, and recommendations from friends play a secondary role. Brand recognition analysis shows that consumers are well-acquainted with the major brands – such as Lipton, Saga, Herbapol, and Dilmah – which serve as benchmarks in the category.

At the same time, Lipton Yellow Label, although highly recognizable, is not perceived as a premium product. Respondents emphasize its mass appeal, easy availability, and moderate price, while also citing its average taste and simple packaging. Many believe that Lipton serves as a basic product with strong marketing appeal, but lacking exclusivity. Consumers generally perceive the tea market as diverse and well-stocked, with increasing emphasis on environmental friendliness, accessibility, and packaging transparency, while also exhibiting a critical approach to pricing.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Consumer research confirms that tea serves as an everyday product. Most respondents drink it daily or several times a week, with taste, aroma, and health benefits being key selection criteria. The survey also reveals a clear market segmentation and growing consumer sensitivity to packaging (less foil) and the clarity of label information. In the context of category management, Lipton Yellow Label clearly functions as a "core product"—a strong, widely available, and frequently used benchmark in price-quality comparisons. High brand recognition creates an anchor effect on the shelf, but qualitative and open-source research indicates that consumers do not perceive Yellow Label as a premium product. The arguments include mass availability, moderate price, average taste, and simple packaging. This positioning determines its role in the product range. It is more of a penetration product than a luxury product. Based on the conducted research, several operational recommendations can be made, particularly for the category manager for Lipton Yellow Label:

- Maintaining the core product position – Lipton Yellow Label serves as a benchmark in the category – it is widely available, recognizable, and frequently chosen. The recommendation is to maintain a strong presence on store shelves and use appropriate planograms to emphasize its role as a mass-produced and rotating product.
- Pricing and promotional strategy – Due to its lack of premium product perception, Lipton Yellow Label should remain in the economy segment. The key will be the use of attractive promotions and a stable pricing policy, which will maintain its role in everyday purchases and attract consumers to the entire category.
- Development of premium and eco-friendly segments – the research reveals a lack of qualitative differentiators for Yellow Label. The introduction of limited editions to the portfolio will increase the category's value and meet the needs of more demanding customers.
- Packaging and consumer communication – Respondents emphasize the aesthetics and eco-friendliness of the packaging. Reducing the amount of foil, clearer labeling, and more attractive graphics can improve brand image and increase consumer loyalty.

Additionally, communication should emphasize taste and health benefits, which are key factors for customers when choosing Yellow Label.

- Building loyalty through education and marketing – the study results show that consumers do not have a strong emotional connection with Yellow Label. We recommend conducting educational and marketing activities, such as campaigns informing about the production process, the origin of the leaves, and its health benefits. This can strengthen brand relationships with customers and build long-term loyalty.

6. Summary

The aim of this article was to identify and assess the role of Lipton Yellow Label in the tea category. Specifically, the article considered the role of the Lipton brand as Unilever's core product. The survey confirmed that Lipton Yellow Label serves as a benchmark in the tea category, characterized by high brand recognition, widespread availability, and a strong position on store shelves. At the same time, respondents indicated that they do not perceive the Lipton brand as a premium product, which presents an opportunity for the development potential of organic and premium segments. Theoretically, the article demonstrated that effective category management relies on close collaboration between suppliers and retailers, strategic product positioning, and continuous analysis of consumer needs and behavior. Thanks to a consistent distribution strategy, iconic packaging, and competitive pricing, the Lipton brand has become an example of effective category management on a global scale. Our own research results indicate clear consumer trends: growing sensitivity to packaging, health-promoting expectations, and a noticeable segmentation of the market. In response to these trends, recommendations for category managers were formulated, including optimizing pricing policies, developing premium offerings, modernizing packaging, and implementing educational initiatives to build loyalty. The study's main limitations were the non-random sampling and focusing on a single product within the category. Future research should expand the analysis to include comparisons with other anchor brands and incorporate qualitative methods to more deeply explore consumer motivations and attitudes. Regarding the limitations of the research, it should be noted also that the sample size is relatively small. It would also be worthwhile to conduct in-depth qualitative research that could more precisely answer the question of why consumers choose a particular tea brand, by better understanding their quality motivations. Nevertheless, the study's conclusions can provide a valuable starting point for category management practitioners, not only in the tea industry but also in other FMCG sectors.

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