

# The Power of Marketing Psychology on Chinese Consumers

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## Abstract

One of the key marketing factors for consumer psychological motivation is sensory experience and choice. However, what has been mentioned may not be sufficient enough for the most likely customers who like overseas products as well as those who are ethnocentric. In this research, we have divided the study into 2 parts, the first study, explored the psychology of Chinese consumers used the same method as the world rice contest (blind test) with price as a factor. In the second study, we increased the research procedure by enhancing the process of testing the real demand with the choice experiment method. The choice set consisted of various attributes; such as rice grain integrity, sweetness, aroma, softness, country of origin, and price. Included the experience of the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional factors. The results were analyzed with the ethnocentrism factor of the participants. The first experiment found that price was less important compared to the sensory perceptions, and the second experiment was found that the change in taste, attributes, standard certification, country of origin, and prices significantly increased consumers' utility and influenced their purchasing decisions. Thus, the results of this research could empirically reciprocate the real needs of consumers.

**Keyword:** Sensory perception, marketing factors, consumer behavior, fragrant rice, Chinese consumers

## Introduction

For those who have eaten fragrant rice and while eating it, are you satisfied with the sweetness and softness that accompany the scent? If the answer is "Yes.", then you have experience in sensory marketing with that fragrant rice. Thus, this can attract consumers, which includes you. In the current environment of intense competition, it is very important to consider marketing communications. For marketers and/or researchers to be able to reach real consumer behavior, it requires a lot of research to understand and reach a target audience because consumer behavior is a combination of psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, marketing, and economics,



especially behavioral economics with a focus on understanding the decision- making process of buyers.

Marketers and/or researchers know that psychological theory can explain the satisfaction of consumers. How is this linked to sensory perception, ethnography, marketing factors, and economics? As noted by Krishna (2010), sensory marketing is a process of attracting and persuading customers by using their senses; such as, touch, sight, taste, sound, and smell to associate it with emotional perception and consumption. Self-selling products must represent important non-verbal cues that must be seen, heard, tasted, felt, or smelled in order to reach the product's composition and satisfaction (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The sentiment model is also known as sensory marketing, or sensory-compelling marketing. It aims to create a sensory experience using sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Sensory marketing can be used to differentiate brands and products, help motivate consumers, increase value to the product, and enhance the customer experience, e.g., esthetics or excitement (Schmitt, 1999). Krishna (2012) further stated that "eating satisfaction may not be related to the sense of taste but it might largely depend on other senses." Furthermore, research shows that satisfaction depends on perception and not on the sense of taste. For this reason, the researchers used consumer satisfaction scores on a five-point hedonic scale (Scale: 1-dislike extremely; 2-dislike slightly; 3-neither like nor dislike; 4-like slightly; 5-like extremely) The hedonic scale is the most widely used scale to assess food preferences (Schutz and Cardello 2001).

## Lliterature Review

To compete and to ensure that they could survive in their business, most have begun to use sensory marketing in their businesses. As noted by Krishna (2010), marketers use their five human senses appropriately to differentiate their products from others. Marketing strategies to appeal to the five senses are called sensory or experiential marketing (Hulten et al., 2009).

Table 1. Sensors, sensations, and sensory expressions combined with marketing ideas.

Sensors	Sensations	Sensory expression combined with marketing ideas
Smell sensors	Atmospheric	Product congruence, intensity and sex. Atmosphere, advertency and theme. Scent brand and signature scent. Scents can evoke emotions causing a feeling of calmness and help stimulate memory or help relieve stress.
Sound sensors	Auditory	Jingle, voice, and music atmosphere, attentiveness, and theme. Signature sound and sound brand. Design, packaging and style. Creating an atmosphere with music contributes to the emotional well-being of the mind. Music can convey the identity of that



brand.		
Sight sensors	Visual	Images are the most important things that are conveyed to the target audience. They also influence the psychological and emotional responses of consumers. Product design, shape, and color make it familiar to be unique or a brand symbol.
Taste sensors	Gastronomic	It is an important factor of food-to-consumer communication. It is a specific tongue-sensing factor that indicates how it tastes; such as, sour, sweet and salty. It is an important tool for marketing in the food business.
Touch sensors	Tactile	Touch is an extremely important component of products and services, materials and textures, temperature, weight, and stability. Able to create good recognition per product. Consumers often use touch to determine product quality.

Source: Survey, 2021.

Moreover, a sensory experience is described as an individual's perception of goods or services or other essentials in a service process as an image that challenges the human mind and senses (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009). This also includes the differences between behavioral experience (eating) and intellectual experience (knowledge of rice) as well as emotional experiences (feelings). Thus, it can be concluded that such experiences have a direct and indirect influence on consumers.

In addition, sensory branding is a type of marketing, which appeals to all the senses in relation to the brand. It uses the senses to relate with customers at an emotional level. Brands can falsify emotional associations in the customers' minds by appealing to their senses. The criteria for measuring the quality and taste of rice was conducted from the format of the world-class rice contest "World's Best Rice", which was held on December, 2021. Thailand's Jasmin rice 105 was awarded the best-tasting rice in the world (The Rice Trader, 2021) based on the results of a contest organized by an organization called The Rice Trader. A world-recognized rice academy with experts in food from the United States' Association of Culinary Consultants and renowned chefs from various countries were the judging panel. Four main criteria were used: smell, taste, softness, and appearance using blind testing that would not let the judges know the country of the rice.

Table 2. Results of the World's Best Rice World Rice Contest.

Time	Year	Rice / Country
1	2009	Winner: Thai Jasmine Rice; Royal Umbrella 100%, Thailand.
2	2010	Winner: Thai Jasmine Rice; Red Ant Brand, Thailand.
3	2011	Winner: Paw Son Rice, Myanmar.

4	2012	Winner: Phaka Malis, Cambodia.
5	2013	Joint Winners: Cambodia Fragrant and California's Calrose, United States.
6	2014	Joint Winners: Thai Hom Mali, Thailand and Phka Romdul, Cambodia.
7	2015	Winner: California's Calrose rice, United States.
8	2016	Winner: Thai Hom Mali, Thailand.
9	2017	Winner: Thai Hom Mali, Thailand.
10	2018	Winner: Cambodia Jasmine Rice, Cambodia.
11	2019	Winner: Vietnamese fragrant rice ST24, Vietnam.
12	2020	Winner: Thai Hom Mali, Thailand.
13	2021	Winner: Thai Hom Mali 105 , Thailand.

Source: The Rice Trader, 2021.

### Method in experiment 1

For the roles of the senses and consumption experiences with the price factors. This section describes the studies designed to experiment with sensory perception using a simple choice set to realize actual satisfaction with prices for each choice set in conjunction with an experience questionnaire.

### Participants

The sample consisted of consumers from Guangzhou who were responsible or decided to purchase rice for consumption in their households. Six hundred and sixty-five people were selected using the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2006). The condition is that people with sensory problems would not be eligible to participate because the experimental tool was designed only for people with sensory perception integrity.

### Materials and experimental design



Figure. 1. Photos of fragrant rice A, B, C, and D to be tested.

Fragrant rice was identified as a specific product in this study because of its distinctive characteristics of both smell and taste. Consumers from Guangzhou, Peoples Republic of China were familiar with and had experienced consuming fragrant rice. The researchers surveyed the four countries that most widely distributed fragrant rice brands



in Guangzhou. The data were analyzed on the four sensory questions and also analyzed the patterns of decision-making on purchasing fragrant rice. A choice experiment with blind testing was conducted with sensory awareness of fragrant rice A, B, C, and D, which did not specify the country with price variables as a factor. When the participants entered the laboratory, the researchers thanked them and gave a brief introduction to the study. Participants were informed that it was a consumer behavior research study. They would be asked about their reaction to the four countries' fragrant rice, then the participants were asked to read the operating instructions carefully to encourage them to consider the information in an appropriate way. Participants were also instructed to focus on the sensory features and reflect upon the consumer experience; therefore, when they found fragrant rice in the market, the participants would be able to make a rational decision on which country or brand to purchase. This experimental process was the first step; thus, the choice set would be presented for the participants to decide on the fragrant rice that was available through the experiment of sensory perception. The participants would not know the country of origin of the fragrant rice (blind testing) with only the price factor being set. The results of the experiment revealed the satisfaction of the consumers, price correlation, and purchasing decisions after seeing, smelling, tasting and touching.

After that, the participants were given the four cups of fragrant rice A, B, C, and D from the different countries and one glass of water for rinsing their mouths. The experiment was initiated by allowing the participants to look, smell (with their nose close to the cup), taste, and feel while chewing the rice in their mouths. Then, the choice sets were selected to evaluate the senses of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product to confirm the sensory factors of consumption, price factor, and satisfaction factor. After completing the experiment, the researchers gave the participants a reward and thanked them.

Table 3. Choice Set 1 (actual satisfaction of rice consumers).

Choice Set 1	Rice A	Rice B	Rice C	Rice D
<b>Choice 1</b>	( _1_ ) <b>A1</b> 30 RMB	( _2_ ) <b>B1</b> 60 RMB	( _3_ ) <b>C1</b> 90 RMB	( _4_ ) <b>D1</b> 120 RMB
<b>Choice 2</b>	( _1_ ) <b>A2</b> 60 RMB	( _2_ ) <b>B2</b> 90 RMB	( _3_ ) <b>C2</b> 120 RMB	( _4_ ) <b>D2</b> 30 RMB
<b>Choice 3</b>	( _1_ ) <b>A3</b> 90 RMB	( _2_ ) <b>B3</b> 120 RMB	( _3_ ) <b>C3</b> 30 RMB	( _4_ ) <b>D3</b> 60 RMB
<b>Choice 4</b>	( _1_ ) <b>A4</b> 120 RMB	( _2_ ) <b>B4</b> 30 RMB	( _3_ ) <b>C4</b> 60 RMB	( _4_ ) <b>D4</b> 90 RMB

\* Note: The average price of 5 kg packaged fragrant rice in Guangzhou is 60 RMB (Date 20/01/2019).

\* The research team surveyed and summarized into 5 kg price choices as follows: 30, 60, 90, and 120 RMB.



Table 4. Consumer experience influencing the decision of fragrant rice.

Experience	Total / Average		Percentage	
	(person)			
	No (0)	Yes (1)	No (0)	Yes (1)
Cognitive (rice knowledge)	274	391	41.2	58.8
Behavioral (eating)	47	618	7.1	92.9
Emotional (feeling)	338	327	50.8	49.2

The experience was another key factor in the first study with the experience of the cognitive (rice knowledge), behavioral (eating), and emotional (feelings) factors analyzed with sensory perception. Table 4 shows that the majority purchasing decisions of 618 consumers were based on the behavioral experience (eating) in deciding to buy fragrant rice. followed by cognitive experience (rice knowledge) in deciding to buy fragrant rice (391 consumers) and using the emotional experience (feelings) in deciding to buy fragrant rice (327 consumers), respectively. From the consumption experience, even if the quality of the product was low, it could lead to positive satisfaction. On the other hand, high product quality may not lead to positive satisfaction if the consumer anticipated it.

Table 5. Satisfaction and willingness to purchase without the price options factor.

Satisfaction and Willingness to Purchase	Total / Average (person)	Percentage	Order
Rice A	186	28.0	2
Rice B	186	28.0	2
Rice C	55	8.3	3
Rice D	238	35.8	1
Do not choose any options.	0	0	
Total	665	100.0	-

Source: Survey 2019-2021.

The purchasing decisions and willingness to purchase fragrant rice through the choice set (Table 5) found that 238 consumers were satisfied and willing to buy rice D. Additionally, 186 consumers were satisfied and willing to buy rice A and rice B (equal), and the least satisfaction was rice C.



Table 6. Deciding on fragrant rice through sensory perception, and price but unknown origins. (Choice Set 2).

Choice Set 2	Total / average	Percentage	Order
Choice Set 1			
A1	180	27.1	1
B1	180	27.1	1
C1	176	26.5	2
D1	129	19.4	3
Total	665	100.0	
Choice Set 2			
A2	239	35.9	1
B2	147	22.1	3
C2	79	11.9	4
D2	200	30.1	2
Total	665	100.0	
Choice Set 3			
A3	56	8.4	3
B3	8	1.2	4
C3	197	29.6	2
D3	404	60.8	1
Total	665	100.0	
Choice Set 4			
A4	53	8.0	3
B4	258	38.8	1
C4	254	38.2	1
D4	100	15.0	2
Total	665	100.0	

Source: Survey, 2021

### Method in experiment 2

Influencing decision-making factors, such as, safety (standard certification), country of origin, and the price were added in the role of the senses and the experience in the satisfaction process, especially with Chinese consumers. Therefore, the purpose of the second experiment was to examine how consumer satisfaction arose, and how it influenced the decision to choose or switch brands.

### Participants

The participants were the same group of participants as the first experiment

### Materials and experimental design

In the second study, the characteristics of rice that were tested for the first round (blind testing) were still used. The concrete characteristics were adjusted by using



questionnaires indicating the degree of aroma, taste, softness, and appearance, which was measured in three levels. This study was more in-depth making it possible to find real factors. In addition, it could lead to more system processing according to the consumers' sentiment, especially the safety (standard certification) and country of origin factors. These were very sensitive factors and had a significant impact on Chinese consumers (Xie et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2014; Yu, 2012). Most of the Chinese were concerned about food safety as the most important factor, and consumers were more willing to buy organic food.

Fragrant rice was selected as the product to be tested again, which was the same rice that was used in the first experiment. The participants were informed of the additional factors and the country of origin of the fragrant rice in each cup before answering the questionnaire again.

Table 7. Answer (country of origin).

Rice A: Chinese rice	Rice B: Cambodian rice
Rice C: Vietnamese rice	Rice D: Thai rice

Source: Survey 2019-2021

The results of this experiment used different measurements with the first experiment to assess the greater factor structure from the second experiment's satisfaction-response test using the choice experiment (CE). There were five choice sets for the WTP of the fragrant rice in the second experiment.

### Estimation

The participants read the details on the questionnaire and took the choice experiment, which was different from the first experiment. The choice sets had the attributes factor, standard certification, country of origin, and price. Then, the participants chose one choice per one choice set (there were five choice sets in this experiment). The fragrant rice attributes influenced the consumers' purchasing decisions and WTP.

Table 8. Results of the analysis of utility functions from various attributes of rice

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	z	P> z
Taste	.8008	.0720	11.12	0.000
Fragrance	.6277	.0621	10.10	0.000
Softness	.4384	.0617	7.10	0.000
Integrity	.8168	.0635	12.85	0.000
Standard certification	.8183	.0660	12.39	0.000
COO - China	1.1788	.2189	5.38	0.000
COO - Cambodia	1.4164	.2124	6.67	0.000
COO - Vietnam	1.1936	.2166	5.51	0.000





COO - Thailand	2.2779	.2056	11.08	0.000
Price	-.0161	.0009	-16.40	0.000
Standard deviation				
Taste	.7095	.1136	6.24	0.000
Fragrance	.0581	.1110	0.52	0.601
Softness	.0931	.1454	0.64	0.522
Integrity	-.3548	.1490	-2.38	0.017
Standard certification	1.0173	.0918	11.08	0.000
COO - China	1.1579	.1155	10.02	0.000
COO - Cambodia	.5478	.1617	3.39	0.001
COO - Vietnam	-.1353	.1419	-0.95	0.340
COO - Thailand	.6264	.1162	5.39	0.000
Price	-.01337	.0012897	-10.37	0.000

Source: Survey 2019-2021.

Note: Number of obs166625; Log likelihood-3781.6969; LR chi2(10) 248.07; Prob > chi2 0.0000.

The results of the estimation of the utility functions according to the above equation are shown in Table 8. It was found that the change of the standard certification factor was the consumer factor in considering purchasing fragrant rice. Adding a standard certificate on the rice package increased the utility by 0.8183. The health of rice integrity increased the utility by 0.8168, and the sweetened rice increased the utility by 0.8008. The country of origin and aroma of fragrant rice increased the utility by 0.6277, thus significantly increasing consumer satisfaction. As for the softness factor, the coefficient of 0.4384 had the least effect on the utility and consumer decision; therefore, consumers statistically paid the least attention. Furthermore, previous research that factors of the country of origin also influenced Chinese consumers' decision to buy non-essential food in daily life; such as. red wine (Xu et al., 2014) and pistachios (Xu et al., 2012), but rice was a staple food that was essential in daily life, which was different from those non-essential foods. Previous results corresponded to the results of this current research that suggested consumers placed their priority on the country of origin of rice as well. The results of the utility function analysis from the various attributes of fragrant rice showed the WTP or the value analysis of various attributes of fragrant rice. When comparing the base variable, the coefficient and the interaction term variable divided by the price variable coefficient would receive the changing WTP when the independent variable changed by one unit. Statistical analysis was performed using the delta method to verify the statistical significance.

Table 9. Estimated value of willingness to pay for various attributes of fragrant rice.

Attributes (variable)	Value of the Willingness to Pay
Taste	49.73
Fragrance	38.98



Softness	27.22
Integrity	50.73
Standard certification seal	50.82
Country of origin - China.	73.21
Country of origin - Cambodia.	87.97
Country of origin - Vietnam.	74.13
Country of origin - Thailand.	141.48

Source: Survey 2019-2021.

Based on the estimate of the WTP in Table 9, the consumers were more willing to pay 49.73 RMB per bag for sweet fragrant rice, and 38.98 RMB more per bag for fragrant rice. If the integrity was intact, they would be willing to pay 50.73 RMB more per bag. If fragrant rice received the standard certification, the consumers would be willing to pay 50.82 RMB more per bag. In contrast, the softness attribute had the least effect on consumers' WTP at only 27.22 RMB. In terms of the country of origin attribute, Chinese consumers were willing to pay more if the rice was identified as originating from China at 73.21 RMB and were willing to pay more for fragrant rice identified as rice from Cambodia at 87.97 RMB. On the other hand, for fragrant rice identified as originating from Thailand, the consumers were willing to pay more at 141.48 RMB, which was higher than the fragrant rice of other countries.

Table 10. Estimates the value of fragrant rice that changed when it was identified with the origin and the standard seal.

Attributes	Change Value	Price (RMB/5 kg)	Percentage Change
Fragrant rice (status Quo: SQ)			
(No standard certification, no country of origin specified)	-	60	-
In the case of a standard certification, no COO is specified.	50.53	110.53	84.22
In case of specifying the COO - China, with the standard certification.	123.32	183.32	205.53
In case of specifying the COO – Cambodia with the standard certification.	137.99	197.99	229.98
In case of specifying the COO - Vietnam, with the standard certification.	124.23	184.23	207.05
In case of specifying the COO - Thailand, with the standard certification.	191.18	251.18	318.63

Source: Survey 2019-2021.

From the study results from Table 10, it could be concluded that the value of fragrant rice with the standard certification indicated on the packaging with no indication of the country of origin, when compared with regular fragrant rice packaging (status quo: SQ) resulted in an increase in the value of 50.53 RMB, and when the standard certification and the country of origin were identified that the fragrant rice came from China, Vietnam, Cambodia or Thailand, the value increased by 123.32



RMB, 124.23 RMB, 137.99 RMB, and 191.18 RMB, respectively. The value of the price per bag (5 kilograms) was increased from 60 RMB (status quo: SQ) to 110.53, 183.32, 184.23, 197.99, and 251.18 RMB, respectively and compared with the average price in the current rice market would be 55.26, 91.66, 92.11, 99 and 125.59 RMB per bag, respectively indicating that the rice that had standard certification and identified as rice that originated in Thailand also attracted a lot of attention from Chinese consumers.

If adding the attributes that affected the utility or resulted in higher consumer satisfaction as shown in Tables 8 and 9, it could be concluded that the value of sweet and fragrant rice increased 88.21 RMB. If fragrant rice was sweet, fragrant, and had a standard certification mark on the packaging, then it increased in value to 138.74 RMB. If the country of origin was identified as Thailand, its value increased to 279.39 RMB when compared to the current average market price of sweet, fragrant, and standard certified rice. The country of origin was identified at 139.70 RMB per bag with a 465.65% increase in price change. The value obtained from adding more than one attribute was calculated by combining the values from each attribute/ price coefficient.

The estimation of the utility functions in the second experiment showed that the changes in taste attributes, standard certification, country of origin, and prices significantly increased the utility or consumer satisfaction. These were the attributes that consumers were interested in and influenced their purchasing decisions. Consumers were willing to pay more for the certified standardized rice on the packaged bag. According to Drexler et al. (2018) and Wang and Mu (2014), one of the keyways to distinguish safe food or conventional food was by standard certification. especially in the present environment where consumers have access to adequate and useful information. Simultaneously, Yu (2012) found that organic certification had a positive effect on consumer confidence in organic food, especially consumers who were willing to pay higher prices for labeled organic food. Moreover, the country of origin greatly influenced the purchase intent of the consumer (Aichner et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2012). The results of the analysis indicated that for rice identified as originating from Thailand, consumers in Guangzhou were more satisfied and willing to pay when compared to rice that originated from other countries.

## Results and Discussion

Factors affecting Chinese consumers' decision to buy fragrant rice by interest level found that the standard certification factor affected the purchase considerations at the highest level. The results were highly consistent with previous findings compared to other factors affecting Chinese consumers. Standard certification was also very important and beneficial for marketing promotion because it helped consumers make purchasing decisions (Xie et al., 2015; Yu, 2012); for example, most consumers in Beijing, Shenzhen, Chengdu, and Shanghai believe that standard certification is one of the most important criteria in making purchase decisions, followed by the nutritional value and food quality (Chen et al., 2014). From the perspective of consumer attitudes, it was found to have a positive and statistically significant effect. The more safety



standards or having a very high nutritional value affected the selection of fragrant rice at the highest level followed by the taste factor that affected the consideration to buy at a high level as well corresponded to Judy et al. (2003), who found that taste was what motivated consumers to make a purchase. The majority of consumers also paid attention to the taste factor indicating that their perception of taste influenced the consumption behavior. Although Chinese consumers were previously found to be more sensitive to the price factor when purchasing food, the new trend appeared to be less important when compared to their sensory perceptions of their choice of food (Xu et al., 2012). Another important factor of this research in the sensory perception of fragrant rice was the odor factor because Chinese consumers were aware of the smell and quality of fragrant rice sold in the Chinese market that had been added to increase the aroma additives causing consumers to worry about the safety of fragrant rice products as well. Thus, most of the consumers in Guangzhou chose to buy rice at reliable distribution locations that had standard certification.

The research findings found the factors of decision-making to change the choice set. Overall, it was demonstrated that the standard certification factor influenced the consideration of purchasing fragrant rice among Chinese consumers at the highest level. The second was the taste factor, which corresponded to Hanis et al. (2012). Thus, it could be concluded that flavor was the second most important factor after the standard certification factor for Chinese consumers' purchasing choice. Xie et al. (2015) and Yang et al. (2014) also found that food safety (standard certification) was an important consideration in determining the WTP of Chinese consumers. The survey of the attitudes of Chinese consumers participating in the experiment on the country of origin found an interesting issue on the imported market of fragrant rice. This corresponded to Peterson and Jolibert (1995) on the reliability of the industry of that country, which was a consequence of the frequent food safety crises in China (Dawar and Lei, 2009). The perception of the country of origin factor greatly influenced the purchasing decisions of Chinese consumers (Aichner et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2012). However, Balabanis et al. (2017) found that ethnocentrism toward the country of origin had no effect on the decision to purchase a low-cost product. The Data Center for Thai Business in China in Kunming (2020) concluded the report. "Enhancing the consumption of Chinese people with the demand for imported products. Which group of Thai products have the opportunity?" Hence, this could be divided into three important topics as follows: 1) Demand for imported consumer products was high. 2) Consumers paid attention to standard certification, package design, and quality. 3) Consumers increased demand for imported products. Consequently, it could be concluded that the purchase of imported goods was part of the basic consumption of Chinese consumers. Therefore, quality foreign fragrant rice with standard certification; such as, safety standards, international organic standards along with the good taste, fragrant and soft would have the opportunity to enter the quality rice market in China.



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