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CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF SPORTS EQUIPMENT IN SERBIA

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Abstract: Sports equipment plays an important role in the daily life of modern society. This paper analyzes the factors that influence the purchase and choice of sports equipment among consumers in Serbia. Through the conducted research, the demographic characteristics of consumers, purchasing preferences, the most important criteria when choosing equipment, as well as the perception of brands and materials were covered. The results show that the key factor when buying is quality, while design and fashion play a secondary role. Also, the need for better education of consumers about the types of materials and their characteristics, as well as adapting the offer to the elderly population, was highlighted. The research was conducted on a sample of 102 respondents, which obtained relevant data on consumer preferences and purchase factors. This study can serve as a basis for making strategies in the field of marketing and product development in the sports equipment industry in Serbia.

Keywords: sports equipment, consumers, choice, materials, brands, marketing

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Introduction

In the contemporary era, consumer expectations are continuously rising. Beyond seeking products with excellent functionality, visual appeal has become equally important. Fashion trends are in constant flux and evolution, spanning various segments from clothing and footwear to mobile phone cases. Sports equipment is no exception - products from head to toe are now available in diverse designs and types to meet the demands of the market (Nizar Ganim et al., 2021). For some individuals, fashion represents a way of life and an integral part of their daily routine. It encompasses a wide range of elements, including garments, jackets, trousers, footwear, and socks, and its influence has extended into the sports equipment industry. One of the most important decisions an athlete makes is the choice of sports gear that best suits their needs. With the growing popularity of sports equipment, the market now offers a wide variety of brands that aim to enhance athletic performance. In Indonesia, as well as globally, numerous companies provide sports footwear, offering athletes a broad selection when choosing a suitable brand. The increasing number of sports equipment manufacturers has led to intensified competition within the industry. This competition is exceptionally fierce, as each company strives to deliver high-quality products. According to the cybersecurity analysis agency The Top Tens, some of the world's most renowned sports brands - such as Adidas, Nike, Puma, and Reebok - are engaged in a vigorous race within the industry. Product quality is a critical factor for athletes and may serve as a strategic advantage over competitors. Companies seek to offer greater value through their products compared to rival brands, focusing on innovation and quality improvement to gain a competitive edge (Herlambang & Komara, 2021). Until the late 1980s, the concept of branding was not regarded as a fundamental element in marketing literature. Only in recent decades has it emerged as a key area of academic inquiry (Aaker, 1991; de Lencastre & Côte-Real, 2010). In today's global economy, marked by dynamic market fluctuations and increasingly intense competition, the role of brands has never been more significant. Brand management has become a central area of research, as it not only enhances recognition but also strengthens consumer loyalty and increases corporate visibility. A brand represents a valuable asset, enabling products to stand out and differentiate themselves from competitors. Contemporary global markets create new business opportunities and stimulate innovation, encouraging companies to shift their focus from domestic to international markets. The process of internationalization - frequently the subject of scholarly inquiry - often entails exploring new markets and developing new brands in order to ensure successful positioning. Although internationalization incurs certain costs, it significantly contributes to overall corporate value. Globalization has introduced profound changes to

the operational strategies of traditional corporations, compelling them to restructure in order to compete as global players. To succeed in markets such as Brazil, Russia, China, or India, companies must devise optimal market entry strategies that allow for expansion and enhancement of competitive positioning (Morales, 2016). In the current economic climate, characterized by volatile market dynamics and intensifying rivalry, branding has become indispensable. Effective brand management facilitates product recognition, fosters customer loyalty, and increases brand visibility. A brand serves as a strategic resource, enabling companies to distinguish their products in saturated markets. The brand image of a product is the aggregate perception formed through information and past consumer experiences. This image plays a critical role in shaping beliefs and preferences, particularly among athletes selecting performance-related products. Indeed, brand image is a decisive factor in influencing purchasing decisions. Another key element in boosting sales performance is the implementation of effective promotional strategies. Companies that engage in high levels of promotion gain the opportunity to improve their sales trajectory. However, even a high-quality product or service may struggle in the market if only a few consumers are aware of it. In such cases, consumer skepticism may prevail, resulting in limited or nonexistent sales (Kurniawan, 2018).

Literature Review

Globalization has created new challenges and opportunities for international marketers, resulting in a significant increase in the availability of foreign product options (Diamantopoulos et al., 2025). The global transition to a knowledge-driven economy is forcing various industries to undergo structural adjustments, and the sports industry, as a strategic area that integrates economic vitality, technological innovation, and social well-being, has attracted much attention in terms of its upgrading path (Kang, 2025). According to Vidoni (2020), many marketing experts have examined the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behavior. Their findings generally indicate that consumers are more likely to pay attention to and develop a favorable attitude toward a brand if they perceive the celebrity endorser as credible. This is based on the assumption that individuals are more inclined to accept information when it originates from a trustworthy source. In today's business environment, increasing competition and the emergence of new rivals across various sectors have provided consumers with a wider array of choices when it comes to purchasing products and goods (Firdaus & Budiman, 2021). The reason for this is the global popularity of sports and the possibility of reaching new markets (Ratković, 2023). This heightened market competition has led to an expanded range of

alternatives, which may affect customer loyalty toward specific brands and gradually reduce their customer base. As a result, analyzing consumer behavior in the context of brand switching or brand loyalty retention is of critical importance. Consumer behavior encompasses the psychological processes through which clients identify their needs, explore ways to satisfy them, and make appropriate purchasing decisions (Firdaus & Budiman, 2021). Therefore, the decision-making process involves selecting the most desirable product among several available options (Mourina & Mulyadi, 2020). Consumer choices are driven by a range of motives and impulses, with buyers seeking to fulfill both their needs and desires (Senggetang et al., 2019). Brands represent visions and beliefs embedded in consumers' minds, reflecting associations that remain in their memory. On the other hand, according to Wijayanto and Iriani (2013), brand image refers to the perception and belief that consumers form based on a set of associations linked to a given brand. A brand is defined as "a distinctive name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Ghodeswar, 2008). According to Weilbacher (1995), the brand provides a foundation upon which consumers can identify with and relate to a product, service, or group of products and services. Brands act as a guide for purchasing behavior, and when managed effectively, they often generate significant value for their owners (Anholt, 2005). Brands are "not just signs. Brands are not merely elements that position products and companies. For many years, brands have been seen as a connection between products/companies and their customers" (Brito, 2010, p. 49). Brand identity is grounded in a deep understanding of the company's customers, competitors, and business environment (macro, specific, and micro environment). It should reflect the company's strategic direction and its commitment to investing in programs that enable the brand to fulfill its promise to customers. To be effective, brand identity must resonate with consumers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and represent what the organization can reliably offer both now and in the future (Ghodeswar, 2008; Sousa & Vieira, 2018). So, for instance, brand ambassadors are consumers who are recruited by a firm and considered an authentic representation of the brand's target segment (Hassler et al., 2024). It is interesting that LS is becoming habitual for an increasing number of consumers who value seeing novel products through LS, and even consulting about product details in live interactions, finding convenience, information, and price value (Wang et al., 2025). Therefore, strong brands do not only lead to the creation of awareness, but they actually expose to the public court the spirit of the corporation and the promise offered by a brand (Dašić & Jeličić, 2016).

Research Methodology

The subject of this research is the analysis of consumer behavior when selecting and purchasing sports equipment in Serbia, as well as the identification of factors that influence purchasing decisions.

Hypotheses

- 1. When purchasing sports equipment, consumers in Serbia prioritize product quality, while price and brand are secondary factors.
- 2. The older population in Serbia purchases sports equipment less frequently than younger generations, indicating the need for specialized marketing strategies.
- 3. Consumers who gather information through the internet and recommendations from friends make better decisions regarding sports equipment selection.
- 4. The majority of consumers in Serbia are not sufficiently educated about the materials used in sports equipment, which affects their perception of product quality.
- 5. Consumers willing to pay a higher price for sports equipment are more likely to prefer products with longer warranties and additional maintenance services.

Primary Goal

The primary goal of this paper is to identify the key factors influencing consumer decisions when purchasing sports equipment, with particular focus on attitudes toward quality, price, brand, and materials.

Secondary Goals

- 1. To analyze the demographic characteristics of sports equipment consumers in Serbia.
- 2. To examine consumer attitudes toward brands and prices of sports equipment.
- 3. To determine how informed consumers are about material types and their role in the quality of sports equipment.
- 4. To propose strategies that could increase the interest of the older population in purchasing sports equipment.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Sample structure in relation to respondents' gender

Gender	f	%
Male	53	52%
Female	49	48%
Total (Σ)	102	100%

The analysis of the gender structure reveals that the sample is balanced, with a slight predominance of male respondents (52%), while females make up 48% of the total number of participants. This distribution enables a comparative analysis of attitudes and responses by gender, and also contributes to the validity and reliability of the results, given that neither gender group is significantly overrepresented or underrepresented. The results show that the majority of the sample consists of respondents with completed secondary education (64%), while respondents with higher education or a college degree make up 19%, and those with a university degree account for 18%. This distribution indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals with secondary education, which may influence the interpretation of certain results, especially when analyzing attitudes toward topics that are correlated with the level of formal education (e.g., digital literacy, trust in institutions, awareness of specific issues, etc.). Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents according to their employment status. The sample includes both economically active individuals, as well as students and unemployed persons, which contributes to the diversity of the sample and enables the analysis of potential differences in perceptions and attitudes depending on professional engagement.

Table 2. Sample structure in relation to respondents' gender

Employment Status	F	%
Employed	71	70%
Student	26	25%
Unemployed	5	5%

According to the data presented in the table, the majority of respondents are employed (70%), while students account for a quarter of the sample (25%), and unemployed individuals are the least represented (5%). This structure indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals who are currently active in the labor market, which may influence the research results - particularly when analyzing attitudes toward economic issues, consumer behavior, or time management. The inclusion of students (25%) provides additional insight into the perceptions of the younger population, while, although less numerous, data on unemployed individuals (5%) may also be relevant for identifying the needs and challenges faced by this category of respondents. The distribution of respondents by type of settlement is shown in Table 3. This variable is important as it enables the analysis of differences in attitudes and behaviors of individuals living in different spatial and social environments, namely urban and rural areas.

According to the obtained data, the majority of respondents live in urban areas (67%), while one-third reside in rural areas (33%). This sample structure indicates a higher representation of urban residents, which is a common characteristic of many contemporary surveys, given the greater availability and engagement of urban participants in questionnaire-based research. However, the fact that more than one-third of participants come from rural areas allows for a meaningful comparative analysis between rural and urban populations. This is particularly important when examining factors such as access to information, digital habits, educational resources, consumer behavior, attitudes toward sustainability, health, and public services. Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to their monthly income. This variable is of particular importance, as income often has a direct or indirect influence on respondents' attitudes, habits, and opportunities - especially in the context of consumer behavior, access to technology, use of services, and social inclusion.

Table 3. Monthly Income of Respondents

Monthly Income	F	%
Up to 60,000 RSD	11	11%
From 60,001 to 120,000 RSD	27	26%
Over 120,001 RSD	49	48%
Prefer not to say	15	15%

According to the obtained results, the largest proportion of respondents (48%) report a monthly income above 120,000 RSD, while 26% fall within the middle-income range (60,001–120,000 RSD). A lower income (up to 60,000 RSD) was reported by 11% of respondents, and 15% chose not to disclose their income, which is common in surveys involving personal financial information. This distribution indicates that a significant portion of the sample is economically active and financially stable, which may influence the research results, particularly in relation to topics such as: access to modern technologies, educational and cultural habits, consumer preferences and willingness to invest or adopt new services.

Table 4. Types of Sports Equipment Used by Respondents

What type of sports equipment do you use	F	%
Running (running shoes, sweatshirt, running shirt, sunglasses)	46	45%
Football (cleats, jersey, protective gear)	30	29%
Indoor exercise (resistance bands, weights, mats, boxing equipment, etc.)	26	25%

At the same time, the inclusion of individuals with lower incomes and those who preferred not to answer provides a broader picture of socio-economic differences and their influence on behavior and attitudes. Caution is advised when interpreting the data due to the proportion of non-disclosed responses, though this also highlights the sensitivity of income-related topics in survey contexts. Table 4 presents the distribution of respondents according to the type of sports equipment they use, which also reflects their sports activities and physical recreation styles. This variable is important for understanding physical activity habits as well as preferences regarding types of sports and the conditions in which they are practiced.

The results show that running is the most common activity, with 45% of respondents using running equipment. This indicates its accessibility, low cost, and flexibility (the possibility of exercising without the need for specialized infrastructure). Football equipment is used by 29% of respondents, reflecting the popularity of this sport, especially among younger male populations, and confirming its significance as a dominant group activity in the region. Indoor exercise, including equipment such as weights, resistance bands, and mats, is utilized by 25% of respondents, which may indicate the growing popularity of individual and functional training in home or gym settings.

The results show that the largest proportion of respondents (39%) use sports equipment only on special occasions, indicating a low level of regular physical activity among a significant part of the sample. One-third of respondents (33%) use equipment several times a week, which may be a sign of regular exercise and physical engagement. A smaller percentage of respondents use sports equipment once a week (21%), while only 7% exercise daily, suggesting that intensive physical activity is not a dominant habit within the sample. It is also noteworthy that no respondent reported not using sports equipment at all, which implies that at least occasional physical activity exists among all participants in the study.

Table 5 presents respondents' answers to the question of whether and how often they visit sports equipment stores. This variable provides insight into consumer habits and interest in purchasing sports equipment, which can be valuable for market analysis, marketing strategies, and understanding attitudes toward physical activity. According to the presented data, only 17% of respondents regularly visit sports equipment stores, while the majority (55%) do so rarely, and over a quarter (28%) do not visit such stores at all.

These findings indicate a relatively low level of consumer engagement when it comes to purchasing sports equipment. Although most respondents occasionally use sports equipment (see previous analysis), the results suggest that their needs are

often met through infrequent or occasional purchases, that the equipment is used for extended periods without frequent replacement, or that there is limited purchasing power for such products. It is also possible that some respondents rely on alternative purchasing channels (online stores, second-hand markets, gifts, etc.), which could be a subject of further research. Table 5 presents the distribution of responses to the question regarding the maximum price respondents are willing to pay for sports equipment. This variable provides insight into price sensitivity and purchasing power, which is important for market segmentation and product pricing strategies in the sports industry.

Table 5. Frequency of Visiting Sports Equipment Stores

Do you visit sports equipment stores?	f	%
Yes, regularly	17	17%
Rarely	56	55%
No	29	28%

The obtained data show that the most acceptable price ranges for sports equipment are up to 5,000 and up to 20,000 RSD. For 45% of respondents, spending up to 5,000 RSD is acceptable, while 44% are willing to pay up to 20,000 RSD. A significantly smaller proportion of respondents are prepared to spend more than 20,000 RSD (8%), and only 3% would pay up to 10,000 RSD. This reflects clearly polarized preferences: most respondents gravitate toward either the lowest or moderately affordable price category. This distribution indicates that the majority of consumers are price-sensitive, and their spending is generally confined to lower and mid-range categories. This may result from the overall economic context, the low to moderate income levels of the respondents, or the perception of sports equipment as a secondary (non-priority) expense within the personal budget. The small percentage of respondents willing to spend more than 20,000 RSD may suggest the presence of a limited premium segment, which could be a target group for high-end branded or specialized products. The results suggest that manufacturers and retailers of sports equipment should tailor their offerings primarily to the lower and middle price ranges, with clearly defined value propositions and benefits for consumers with limited budgets.

29% of respondents stated that a well-designed feature motivates them to use sports equipment more frequently and that they are willing to pay more for it. This highlights a significant segment of consumers who value the aesthetic and functional

aspects of a product, indicating that design can serve as a motivator for increased usage and brand loyalty. On the other hand, 24% of respondents believe that manufacturers who overly emphasize design are not necessarily offering high-quality products. This group views design as something that can detract from the core attributes - product quality and functionality. For them, too much focus on design may be seen as a way to mask shortcomings in performance or durability. The largest group, comprising 47% of respondents, stated that design is not important to them and that the quality of the sports equipment is what matters most. This suggests a pragmatic approach to purchasing, where functionality and reliability are prioritized over visual appeal.

The survey also examined respondents' attitudes toward protective warranties and maintenance services offered by sports equipment manufacturers. A total of 102 individuals were surveyed, and the results reveal significant differences in how these additional services are perceived and valued.

- The largest percentage of respondents, 42% (43 individuals), stated that they appreciate having “extra peace of mind” when purchasing sports equipment, knowing it is covered by a warranty. This response indicates a high level of trust in the security mechanisms warranties provide and a desire to protect consumer rights.
- Another group, 21% of respondents (21 individuals), emphasized the importance of maintenance services, believing they can extend the lifespan of the equipment and ensure it remains in good condition. This percentage reflects awareness of the role proper maintenance plays in equipment durability.
- However, a significant portion of respondents, 37% (38 individuals), reported that they do not pay attention to warranties or services offered by manufacturers. This may suggest a lack of awareness or a perception that such services are not worth the additional cost or effort.

The analysis shows that most users value protective warranties and maintenance services - either for the sense of security they offer or for their practical benefits - while a notable segment remains indifferent to these features. Sports equipment manufacturers could benefit from further educating consumers about the importance and value of these services, potentially increasing perceived value and encouraging brand loyalty.

The results regarding respondents' attitudes toward the importance of design in choosing sports equipment are nearly evenly split, indicating varying consumer perceptions and priorities.

- 36% of respondents (37 individuals) stated that design somewhat influences their choice of sports equipment. This suggests that for a significant portion of users, design is not a decisive factor, but it still plays a role that can contribute to the purchasing decision.
- 27% of respondents (28 individuals) believe that design directly influences their choice, indicating that for more than a quarter of consumers, aesthetics and the visual appeal of sports equipment are important criteria when making purchasing decisions.
- Conversely, an equally large percentage - 36% (37 individuals) - reported that design does not influence their choice at all. This group likely prioritizes functionality, technical specifications, durability, or price over aesthetics.

These findings show that while design plays a notable role for a significant segment of consumers, there is an equally substantial group for whom design is not a deciding factor. This highlights the need for manufacturers to strike a balance between aesthetic appeal and functional performance in order to meet the diverse needs and expectations of their customer base.

The analysis shows that the most important factors in choosing sports equipment are product quality and personal experience with that quality. This is confirmed by the fact that 51% of respondents identified their own experience with quality as the decisive criterion, while 49% cited a combination of quality, price, and brand. Interestingly, not a single respondent selected price or brand alone as the primary factor, indicating that consumers do not perceive price or brand as sufficient on their own. Instead, they value functionality and prior experience with the product's performance. These findings suggest that sports equipment manufacturers and retailers should focus their market positioning and messaging on proven quality and long-term user satisfaction. Emphasizing brand or price alone - without a strong association with quality - is unlikely to significantly influence purchasing decisions.

The most important factor influencing the choice of sports equipment is product quality, cited by as many as 48% of respondents. This finding confirms previous results, where experience with product quality dominated as the key selection criterion. User reviews and opinions also play a significant role - 33% of respondents consult others' experiences before making a decision, indicating the growing importance of digital marketing and user ratings on sports equipment platforms. A smaller number of respondents (13%) value the ease of transport, which can be linked to the needs of users who train in different environments (e.g., recreational users who exercise outside the home, travel, or use equipment outdoors). The smallest share (6%) emphasized functionality and adaptability, which may suggest

that these characteristics are taken for granted or are often subsumed under the general concept of quality. These results clearly indicate that quality is the key determinant of consumer behavior in the sports equipment segment. At the same time, a significant number of users rely on social proof—namely, the experiences and recommendations of others - highlighting the need for transparent and easily accessible reviews. Therefore, manufacturers should invest not only in maintaining product quality and customer support but also in encouraging users to leave reviews. Given the lower representation of factors such as ease of transport and functionality, it is possible that users perceive these as part of the broader concept of quality or do not consider them as primary compared to durability, reliability, and brand reputation. The research results also showed that respondents most frequently obtain information about sports equipment through friends' recommendations and the Internet, clearly pointing to the importance of interpersonal communication and digital channels in the purchase decision-making process. Specifically, over half of the respondents (53.5%) stated that they most often receive new information about sports equipment through friends' recommendations, confirming the importance of personal trust and close contacts' experiences in shaping consumer behavior.

The second most common source of information is the Internet (45.5%), with an emphasis on social media and video platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. This finding shows that modern consumers increasingly rely on digital sources to learn about product features, quality, and others' experiences. Television advertising still retains some reach (22.8%) but is far less influential compared to recommendations and the Internet. Other forms of advertising, such as promotional materials and print ads, account for 12.9% of responses, while billboards are a marginal source of information, with only 1%. These results clearly suggest that sports equipment manufacturers and retailers should adapt their promotional strategies to modern communication trends, emphasizing digital marketing and the creation of positive user experiences that customers are likely to share within their networks. When asked, "Is it important to you that your sports equipment is modern and fashionable?", 100 respondents provided answers. The results show that the majority (75%) do not consider fashion and modern appearance to be a decisive factor when choosing sports equipment, while only 25% stated that it is always important to them. This result suggests that aesthetic criteria, although present for some users, are not of primary importance for most. As shown in previous analyses, consumers primarily value quality, functionality, and user recommendations, while fashion aspects are secondary and more personal.

However, the fact that one-quarter of respondents place importance on modern and fashionable appearance indicates the existence of a niche segment for whom product aesthetics matter - this may be relevant for brands targeting younger populations, urban recreational users, or consumers who wear sports equipment outside of training. Overall, for the majority of users, the choice of sports equipment is based on practical and functional values, with fashion criteria holding secondary importance. Still, for certain market segments - particularly those influenced by social media and trends within the "athleisure" culture (blending sportswear with everyday clothing - design and style may represent key factors for differentiation in the market.

Discussion of Results

The results of the conducted research clearly indicate that product quality and personal experience are the dominant factors when choosing sports equipment. These findings support the initial hypothesis that consumers in Serbia prioritize functionality and durability, while price and brand are considered secondary, complementary factors in the decision-making process.

It is noteworthy that fashion design and aesthetic aspects of sports equipment are not crucial for the majority of respondents, suggesting a pragmatic approach to purchasing. However, the existence of a consumer segment that values aesthetics points to a potential target group for lifestyle-oriented sports brands, especially in urban areas.

Although the internet and social media are becoming increasingly important sources of information, the study reveals that interpersonal influences, such as recommendations from friends, still play a decisive role in shaping opinions about brands and products. This highlights the importance of building customer loyalty and satisfaction in order to generate word-of-mouth promotion.

One of the more significant findings concerns the insufficient consumer awareness about materials, their characteristics, and their contribution to product quality. This opens the door for educational and promotional campaigns aimed at strengthening brand trust.

Additionally, the research reveals a noticeable generational gap, with older populations being significantly less active when it comes to purchasing sports equipment. This indicates the need to redefine marketing strategies by including older users through the promotion of healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and accessible products tailored to their specific needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. A qualitative analysis of consumer motivations (e.g., focus groups, interviews) to gain deeper insight into the reasons behind brand preferences and attitudes toward quality and design.
2. A comparative analysis of urban and rural environments in order to identify regional differences in consumer behavior.
3. An investigation into the impact of promotional campaigns (online vs. offline) on brand perception and purchasing behavior.
4. Development of age-based market segmentation, with particular focus on older consumers and their specific needs.
5. An evaluation of the effectiveness of educational campaigns in increasing awareness about materials and the durability of sports equipment.

Methodological Limitations

The main methodological limitation concerns the size and composition of the sample, which, although diverse, is not representative of the overall population of Serbia. The sample predominantly consists of individuals from urban areas, with secondary education and higher income levels, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Secondly, the study relied solely on quantitative methods through questionnaires, without incorporating qualitative insights (e.g., in-depth interviews) that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of respondents' attitudes and motivations.

Thirdly, the perception of product quality and design is a subjective category, which may lead to varying interpretations and evaluations depending on individual preferences, past experiences, and environmental influences.

Conclusion

The study of consumer behavior in the Serbian sports equipment market reveals several clear patterns. First, product quality represents the key criterion in purchasing decisions, while factors such as price and brand hold secondary importance. This aligns with previous research findings indicating that sports consumers pay greater

attention to durability and functionality than to the marketing image of a brand. Furthermore, older generations in Serbia purchase sports equipment significantly less frequently than younger ones. This finding suggests the need for differentiated marketing approaches aimed at motivating the elderly population to engage more actively in physical activity and consumption within this sector. The third hypothesis concerns the role of the internet and peer recommendations in the decision-making process. Results show that consumers who search for information online and consult other users make more informed decisions, though these factors are not the only determinants. The influence of digital channels exists but depends largely on trust in the source and personal experience.

Insufficient consumer education about materials and technologies used in sports equipment production also plays an important role in shaping their perception of product quality. Consumers unfamiliar with the technical characteristics of products often rely on brand reputation or price as indirect indicators of value. Finally, the study confirms that consumers willing to spend more money on sports equipment show a greater tendency to purchase products offering extended warranties and additional maintenance services. This highlights the growing importance of post-purchase support as a factor of customer loyalty and satisfaction. Overall, the findings indicate that the Serbian sports equipment market is reaching a stage of maturity, where rational purchasing criteria - quality, information, and service - are increasingly prevailing over emotional and status-related factors.

Author Contributions

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Conceptualization: M.P., D.Đ., M.M. **Investigation:** M.P., D.A. **Theoretical framework:** A.B. **Data curation:** A.L. **Resources:** M.P., M.M., D.Đ. **Writing – original draft:** D.A., D.Đ., A.B. **Writing – review & editing:** M.P., D.Đ., M.M.

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