

## RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE DECISION AMONG CROATIAN CONSUMER'S SNEAKER SHOES

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to research and analyze the perception of Croatian consumers, their attitudes and behavior regarding purchasing and using sports shoes, specifically sneakers. Therefore, after secondary research, a primary study was conducted to fulfil the fundamental goal of this paper, i.e. to gain insight into the costumer's perception, attitudes and behavior regarding their decision-making process during purchasing and using sports, sneaker shoes. Attitudes about price, quality, comfort, design, fashion brand and other behavioral factors such as purchasing sneakers for personal use or as a gift were examined. The study was conducted using a quantitative, on-line, anonymous survey questionnaire on a convenience sample of Croatian sneakers consumers using Google forms, which was completed by 124 adult respondents of both sexes, during the summer of 2023. The results of the study showed that there is no significant difference in preferences and purchases of sneakers between male and female respondents. The conclusion of the study provides insight into the characteristics, habits and preferences of respondents regarding the purchase and usage of sneaker shoes.*

**KEYWORDS:** sports footwear - sneakers, consumer perception of sneakers purchase, customer attitudes, consumer behavior, purchase / buying process, Croatian sneakers consumers

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer Behaviour is a study of how individuals make decisions on spending their available resources in consumption related aspects. It is a study of when, why, how, where and what products people do or do not buy. It blends elements from psychology, sociology, social psychology, anthropology and economics. It attempts to understand the influencing factors of a customer purchase decision-making process, both individually and in groups by understanding

its demographics and behavioural variables, impacts on the consumer from groups such as family, friends, reference groups, and society in general [Sethi, 2018 in Vukasović and Petrič, 2022].

Consumer perception, values, attitudes and behavior play a key role in the modern market, especially when it comes to purchasing fashion and sports garments and footwear. The decision to purchase for products or services, is often the result of a complex process that includes psychological-, self-oriented-, socio-cultural-, economic- factors, such as personal preferences, functionality, aesthetics, product brand, loyalty and other factors [Kesić, 2006] and it also stands for sports footwear. There are several types of sport consumers, which can be grouped based on different characteristics such as their level of engagement and commitment with sports, their purchasing behaviour, or the types of products or services they consume [Shifman and Kanuk, 2004]. Consumer perception is crucial in the market, particularly for fashion and sports apparel and footwear, therefore understanding consumer perception is becoming increasingly important for manufacturers, retailers and marketers. “In recent decades, the world has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the perception of sneakers, which transcended their utilitarian origins to become a symbol of cultural expression and fashion-forward identity. This shift has given rise to what is now commonly known as sneaker culture” [Richer, 2023] as well as athleisure phenomenon. Previous studies researched and provided insights and the analysis of how sports consumers experience and value sport’s goods and among them sports footwear and what are the key factors that influence their lifestyle and buying behavior, choice, brand preferences and loyalty [McKinsey & Company, 2025] to sneakers brands. Fritz et al. [2024] explores consumer sport segmentation and how marketing strategies, branding and product quality shape consumer perception and behavior, and how these factors are reflected in the market share of individual sports footwear brands.

Within the Croatian and surrounding national markets, in the available scientific literature, apart from the work of Vukasović and Petrič [2022], no scientific research was found that would analyze consumer attitudes and behavior specifically towards purchasing sneakers in the Croatian and local markets. This paper aim is to fulfil that gap and based on primary research data from Eršeg’s Bachelor Thesis [2024], to analyze and to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of consumer’s perception, attitudes and behavior in the context of the sports fashion industry in general and specifically among Croatian consumers during purchasing sports footwear, specifically sneakers shoes buying process.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. SPORTS COSTUMER**

Referring to the AMA [2025] definition that sees “consumer behaviour refers to the study of how customers (individuals and organizations) satisfy their needs and wants by choosing, purchasing, using, and disposing of goods, ideas, and services. ...helps marketers learn what influences buying decisions. This knowledge helps marketers identify products and services that fulfil consumer needs and fill a gap in the market“. Casper [2007] related “consumer behaviour to sports practice represents a substantial economic impact in the sport industry” and Funk [2008] define “sport consumption behaviour as a process that involves the individuals when they select, buy, use and have products and services related with sport to satisfy their needs”. While elaborating sport consumer typologies over a critical review Stewart et al. [2024] presents past works of some academic authors, arguing that they have identified important motivational and behavioural differences and that they frequently provide only partial

explanations of sport consumer behaviour, while lacking holistic approach. Stewart et al. [2024] found in the previous studies the constrained by an overemphasis on social-psychological traits, that give only limited attention to the cultural and economic context in which behaviours take place. One of (the third) perspective focuses on multidimensional approaches that link underlying motives for consuming sport products, factors that give sport meaning, indicators of loyalty, levels of emotional attachment, and frequency of game attendance, to produce an array of sport consumer types / segmentation [Kunkel and Biscaia, 2020; He, 2022].

Academic research on sneaker purchase decisions highlights a standard 5-step process (need recognition, information search, evaluation, purchase, post-purchase evaluation) and identifies key factors influencing consumers, including psychological (motivation, perception), personal (lifestyle, self-expression), and social (brand awareness, endorsements, community influence) factors. Product attributes like quality, style, and comfort are critical, alongside brand image and price, while online factors like virtual features, user reviews, and social media significantly impact purchasing and post-purchase behavior [Kesić, 2007; Richards, 2023]. Sport consumers are classified into four categories: active sports consumers, passive sports consumers, consumers of tangible sports products, and consumers of a sports event. A consumer of tangible sports goods is a person who purchases sport related equipment and clothing for sport, recreation, fitness, or lifestyle” [Func et al., 2016].

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

Based on the expert and practitioner knowledge in the research field the methodology and a research instrument, later used for this research, was designed and previously tested on 6 member focus group. Final research instrument chosen for this research was quantitative, online, anonymous, self-completed survey questionnaire created in Google Forms with link distributed over e-mail. The survey questionnaire consists of 22 questions, open-ended and closed-ended. First 3 questions were socio-demographic questions; next 9 questions were behavioural regarding sneakers buying habits; next (13.) question was attitudinal regarding importance of 9 extrinsic and intrinsic factors when buying sneakers that respondents has to evaluate on 5 point Likert scale; then 2 questions were consumer preferences regarding material and brand; followed by next 2 behavioural questions asking respondents about their consumption practice regarding brand and price, in last year; the following question asks about preference for future behaviour; following by 2 attitudinal questions regarding retailer preferences; 19. question using 5 point Likert scale asks about the importance and preference of 6 retailer characteristics-factors when choosing sneaker`s retailer and next closed-end question asks about the consumers preference regarding a communication style with retailers; next question asks about self-awareness of respondents about consumer rights and last question was about post purchase reason for reclamation or return of product if consumer is unsatisfied with purchased. For the analysis purpose the simple statistics method was used over collected research data to present the results of this primary research.

#### **3.2. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE**

The survey research has been conducted in the period from July 28th 2023 to September 26th 2023., in Croatia (on Croatian language), on the convenience sample. Data collection was gathered by direct distribution of a link for survey via e-mail to families and friends of

researchers who was asked to forward it to their acquaintances (mailing list). The survey was also placed on several forums where willing respondents could fill it out. The total sample collected in the research period consists of 124 respondents both genders, which fully completed the questionnaire.

#### 4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research sample includes a total of N=124 respondents both genders.

The first 3 questions of the survey questionnaire were related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, status of the respondents. Thus, according to the gender structure, 60% (n=75) were men and 40% (n=49) women that participated in this research. According to the results of the age structure, the largest share of respondents, 38.7% (n=48) was between 25 and 34 years of age. Table 1. Shows distribution of respondents by Age and gender.

Table 1. Respondents distribution by age and gender

Age	N	%	Gender F	F/age	n (F)	% (F/age)	% (F/age)/N	Gender M	n (M/age)	n (M/age)	% (M/age)	% (M/age)/N
18-24	36	29.03	Female	18-24	16	32.65	12.90	Male	18-24	20	26.67	16.13
25-34	48	38.71	Female	25-34	16	32.65	12.90	Male	25-34	32	42.67	25.81
35-44	28	22.58	Female	35-44	10	20.41	8.06	Male	35-44	18	24.00	14.52
45-54	8	6.45	Female	45-54	5	10.20	4.03	Male	45-54	3	4.00	2.42
>55	4	3.23	Female	>55	2	4.08	1.61	Male	>55	2	2.67	1.61
$\Sigma$ (N)	124	100.00	$\Sigma$ (F)		49	100.00	39.52	$\Sigma$ (M)		75	100.00	60.48

Source: Authors

According to the employment status, 72.58% (n=90) of the surveyed respondents were employed. The rest were students 25.00% (n=31), unemployed persons 1.61% (n=2) and pensioners/retired 0.81 (n=1). These socio-demographic characteristics are similar to respondents who participated in the study by Vukasović and Petrič [2022], which investigated „Consumer Behaviour and Loyalty When Purchasing Sporting Goods” among Slovenian consumers a year before this study.

In this study, respondents were asked, using an open-ended question, to write down the amount of money (how much) they spend annually (regardless of how many pairs they buy) on buying sneakers in euros. 2.42% (n=3) of respondents do not spend at all on buying sneakers (0 €), while the maximum amount was exactly 1359.76 €, which was stated by 0.81 (n=1) respondent.

The majority of respondents 16.94% (n=21) spend on sneakers 100 € per year, 14.52% (n=18) 200 € on the third most frequently cited sum was 150 € that was payed by 11.29% (n=14), and if those single answers are cumulate and summarize so that previews single answers are put in intervals of spending ranks-classes Table 2. show how much respondents spend annually on buying sneakers.

Table 2. Annual spending money amount in Euros on sneakers summarized in spending ranks

€ per year	n	% (n/N)
0	3	2.42
20-100	52	41.94
120-200	42	33.87
250-300	14	11.29
400	2	1.61
500	5	4.03
600-1359.7	6	4.84
∑ (N)	124	100.00

Source: Authors

When it comes to the occasions in which respondents wear sneakers, it is partially evenly distributed. Thus, most of the respondents wear sports shoes every day 34.68% (n=43), then 26.61% (n=33) wear sneakers in their free/leisure time, 23.39% (n=29) wear them only for sports, or 12.9% (n=16) on all occasions and 2.42% (n=3) respondents sad thy never them.

When respondents were asked to mark how they provide their sneakers the majority 95.97% (n=119) buy their sneakers, 2.42% (n=3) receive sneakers as a gift and 1.61% (n=2) get their sneaker trough sponsorship.

62.90% (n=78) of respondents answer that they love to purchase sneakers, while 37.1% (n=46) do not like going for sneakers shopping.

On question how often respondents buy sneakers, i.e. goes on shopping for a sneaker 63.71% (n=79) once a year, 29.03% (n=36) seasonally, 3.23% (n=4) once in a month, 0.81% (n=1) more than monthly and 3.23% (n=4) do not buy sneakers.

Among respondents (n=97) 78.23% do not buy and give sneakers as a gift to other people, while (n=27) 21.77% buy and give a sneaker as a present.

Regarding the place where respondents most often buy sneakers they answer that majority of them mostly buy sneakers in a specialized sports shoe/equipment store 69.34% (n=86), than 20.16% (n=25) buy trough an online store, 8.06% (n=10) buy sneakers in stores that are not specialized for selling sports sneaker shoes, 0.81% or one respondent answer that he buy in equally online and in store selling sports goods (Decathlon), also one respondent buy sneakers at the market and one respond that he do not buy sneakers.

When it comes to the sports and physical activities in which the respondents wear sneakers, it is partially evenly distributed among a lot of different sports and activities, although few respondents didn't answer this question or emphasize that they wear them just for go to work and at work and they do not do any sports or any sports activities 4.03% (n=5). What is in the line with Fernandes et al. [2013] discusses "Sportswear is clothing that falls into one of two categories. First and foremost, it may be purchased to facilitate participation in sports activities. So, sneakers were first invented for athletic purposes, but they can now be seen everywhere. The second category is based on the acknowledgment that sportswear can be fashionable within certain market segments. ... Probably many participants associate sport shoes not only to sports but also with a specific lifestyle".

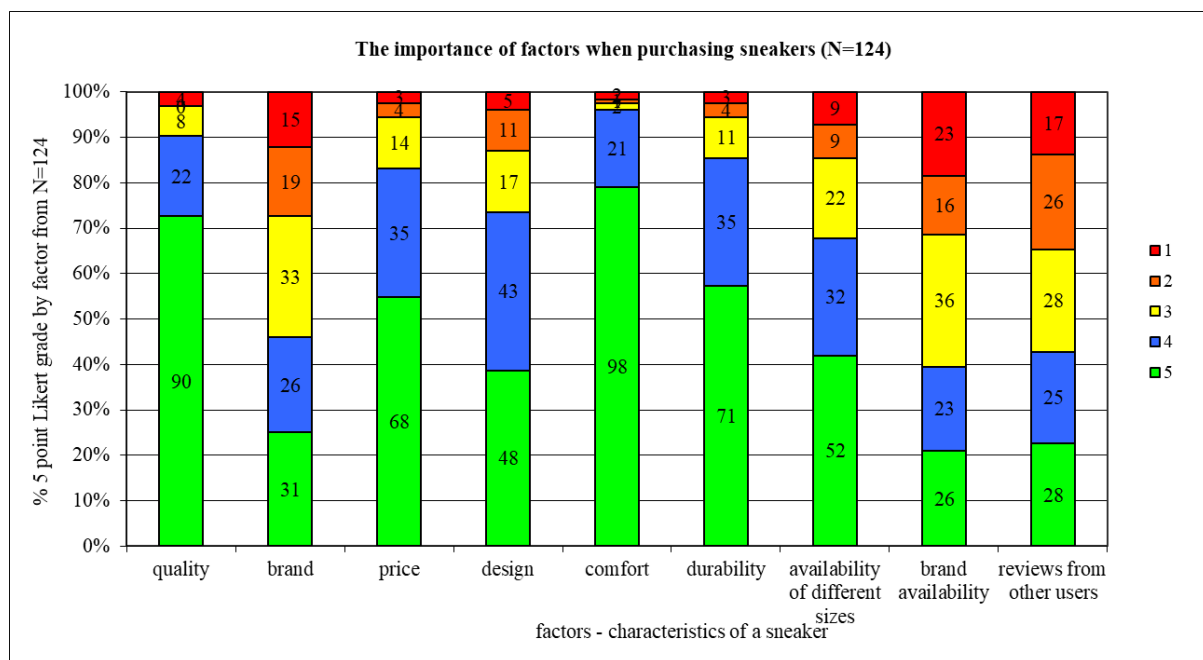
50,81% (n=63) the respondents that use sneaker for 1 sport, for 2 sports activities 25,00% (n=31), for 3 sports activities 11,29% (n=14), for 4 sports activities 4.84% (n=6), while 1.61% (n=2) of respondents wears sneakers for all sports activities. 2.42% (n=3) respondents use

sneakers every day, but do not do sports. Most respondents wear sneakers every day, in their free time and exclusively for sports or on all occasions. Respondents answer that they use sneakers as their first choice/sport: jogging/running 23.39% (n=23), walking 14.52%, (n=18) football play 12.10% (12.10), cycling 0.87%, basketball play 8.08%, gym 7.26%, hiking and climbing 5.65%, tennis play 4.03, fitness 2.42%, generally training 1.61% and one respondent play volleyball, boxing, weight lifting and calisthenics. There is a slight deferens to Slovenian research and costumers, which the most likely buy sports and leisure products (82.0%) and hiking products (55.9%). Follows equipment for cycling (29.8%), running (28.6%), fitness (24.2%) and skiing (19.3%). Then come volleyball (8.1%), basketball (8.1%), football (6.8%). The lowest purchases are related to handball (1.2%), martial arts (1.9%) and tennis (5.0%).

On open-end question asking What are your main sources of information about sports shoes before purchasing(?) the respondents obtain most information through manufacturer websites (73.39%), online reviews and user ratings (70.16%), and recommendations from friends/family (63.71%), magazine reviews (40.32%), TV commercials (21,77%) and other sources mention just once.

When buying sports shoes, how important do you consider the following factors(?) respondents had to answer with Likert scale (1unimportant-5most important). The answers are shown later at Figure 1.

Figure 1. The importance of sneaker`s factor/characteristic when purchasing sneakers (N=124)



Source: Authors

Respondents answered on an open-ended question about which brand they like the most (the best), naming 26 different brand names of sneakers. In 37 respondents, it is possible to find a high level of brand preference to the level of loyalty (to 11 brand names), since they simultaneously name the same brand that they like the most and only wear exactly that brand. Respondents 8.87% (n=11) are equally loyal to two brands Adidas and Nike, then to Mizuno 3.32% (n=4), 42% Asics (n=3), to a 1.61% Benger brand name (n=2) and to other 5 brands was named by one respondent (Brooks, decathlon, Kalenji, La sportive, Reebok, Under Armour). Only 4.84% (n=6) respondents do not wear the brands they say they like the most. Adidas

25.81% (n=32), Nike 22.58% (n=28), Mizuno 5.65% (n=7), Puma 4.84% (n=6), Asics 4.03% (n=5), Reebok 3.32% (n=4), Benger and Under Armour 2.42% (n=3), Gaerne, Jordan and Kalenji 1.61% (n=2) and other brand names are chosen as preferable and actively used 15 different brand names. With brand names that respondents also wear are other 32 brand names, making a total of more than 50 different sneakers brand names respondents not just know, but actively wear. 15 respondents do not have a favourite brand, among them 11 respondents either do not have or do not know their favourite brand, but wear sneakers. 4 respondents neither have a favourite brand nor wear sneakers.

Findings of Vukasović and Petrič [2022] were a bit higher, but in the line with present research, where they found that Slovenian costumers/respondents prefer to buy Nike (44.05%) and Adidas (35.71%) as top brand names again, follows by Asics (2.38%). This is to be expected as Nike and Adidas are the leading brands in sports products and equipment. In Interbrand's [2020] ranking of the world's top 100 brands, Nike ranks 15th and Adidas 50th.

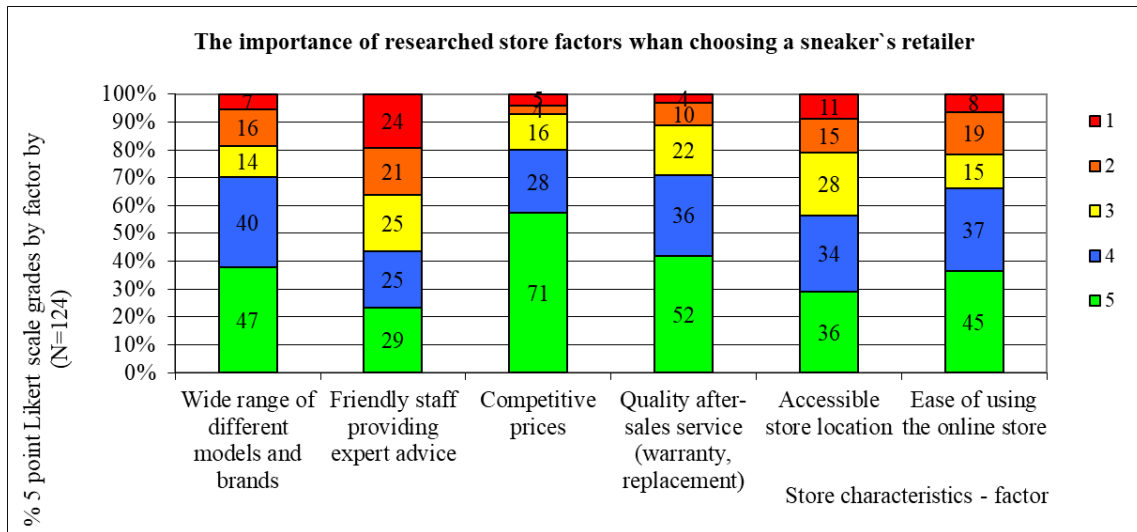
Respondents average spending for 1 pair of sneakers (2023) was in following amounts of euros: 18.55% (n=23) spend less than 50 €, between 50-100 € 52.42% (n= 65), 100-200 € spend 25,00 % (n=31) of respondents and more than 200 € for 1 pair of sneakers spend 4.03% (n= 5) of respondents.

The majority 25,00% (n=31) respondents answered that they buy from 1 to 2 pairs of sneakers average per year (2023) and cumulatively 60,48% (n=75) purchase till 2 pairs of sneakers annually. From 2 to 3 pairs buy a another 16.94 (n=21) respondent and so on. Minimum is non, maximum over 10 pairs average annually. According to Glace, J. study [2023], sheard on her blog, findings show that among Americans (respondents) in the year 2023., “66% of them (consumers) purchase sneakers 2 times a year or less.

When asked if they would be willing to pay a higher price for sports shoes that were produced in compliance with environmental standards (?), respondents gave the following answers: “yes, always” 9.68 (n=12), majority answered “yes, if the price difference is reasonable” 51.61% (n=64), unwilling to pay more for eco-label, while answering “no, price is a decisive factor in the choice” 18.55% (n=23) and “no, environmental aspects are not important when choosing sports shoes” think 20.16% (n=25) of respondents.

Questioning the importance and preference of 6 retailer characteristics (factors) when choosing sneaker's retailer and asking respondents to choose one of the grade from 5 point Likert scale (5 very important, 1-unimportant), respondents were asked: How important are the following factors: “wide range of different models and brands”, “friendly staff providing expert advice”, “competitive prices”, “quality after-sales service” (warranty, replacement), “accessible store location” and “ease of using the online store”, when choosing a sports shoe retailer? The cumulative answers by measured characteristics are presented on Figure 2.

Figure 2. How important are the following characteristics to respondents when they are choosing a sports shoe retailer



Source: Authors

When purchasing sneakers majority of respondents 75.81% (n=94) prefer direct communication, i.e. personal visit to the store, conversation with the retailer (seller), while indirect, i.e. communication via email or social media prefer 24.19% (n=30).

Regarding costumers rights knowledge of respondents in this research, they are mostly very well familiar 29.03% (n=36) and partially familiar 33.87% (n=42) that is cumulatively 62.90%, while pure knowledge had 23.39% (n=29) and completely unfamiliar with costumers rights were 13.71% (n=17).

The most common reason for returning or exchanging sneakers after purchase were following reasons that respondents answered: inappropriate size/wrong shoes number 50.81% (n=63), poor quality of materials/manufacturing 23.39% (n=29), Uncomfortable wearing 21.77%. The rest of the respondents answered that they do not return 1.61% (n=2) or that they had never returned anything 1.61% (n=2), one respondent's reaction was surprise he asked is it even possible to return sneakers or to be exchanged after buying them.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This empirical study on Croatian sneakers consumer's perceptions and preferences, attitudes and behaviour when purchasing sneakers highlighted the key factors that shape consumer's perception and decisions regarding sneakers and where and how they buy sneakers as well as highlighted some aspects of sneaker's buying process.

Through data analysis, the sociocultural profile of sneakers consumers is researched; analysis reviled the importance of 9 extrinsic and intrinsic factors when buying sneakers. Among them respondents mostly cherish "comfort", "quality", "durability", then important factor is a "sneaker's price", then "design" and "availability of different sizes". Among factors of "brand availability" and "reviews of other users about sneakers" (particular model or brand), the respondents are equally distributed from important to unimportant for their decision-making regarding sneakers' purchase. The most preferred materials for sneakers are leather and textile. Croatian buyers (respondents) wear sneakers every day and use them on all occasions for

various sports activities (only one or more), only a few respondents do not wear sneakers or do not play sports at all. Mostly and as their first choice, the sports activities for which they wear sneakers are running and walking, and for playing football. Respondents mostly buy 1 to 2 pairs of sneakers yearly and spend mostly for 1 pair of sneakers (2023) between 50-100 € or less than 50 €, just 1/3 is willing to spend more than 100 €, but more than 1/2 of respondents are willing to spend more for eko-friendly sneaker. They usually do not give or get a sneaker as a present and over 90% buy them. But 63% love to purchase for sneakers and the rest do not like going for sneakers shopping. The majority goes on sneaker shopping once a year and seasonal, just few respondents goes more frequently.

Regarding brands, respondents know more than 50 different sneakers brands (names) and around 9% prefer and some of them are loyalty to the one among 11 brand names. Respondents usually prefer to buy and mostly wear Adidas, Nike and Mizuno. Croatian costumers, respondents mostly buy sneakers in a specialized sports shoe/equipment store and prefer direct communication and 1/5 of respondents prefer indirect communications and they buy sneakers in online stores. Among characteristics of the sneakers store for costumers are the most important “competitive prices”, than “after-sales service quality” (warranty, replacement), followed by “wide range of different models and brands” (assortment) that store purchase and “ease of using the online store”, while importance and unimportance is equally distributed for “accessible store location” as a store factor and it’s slightly less important to respondents that “staff are friendly and providing expert advice”. More than 60% of respondents are familiar with costumers’ rights and the main reason for return or reclamation are inappropriate size or poor (bad) sneaker’s quality.

This study is one of the few studies that investigates sneakers as sports footwear or sports equipment, but also sneakers as fashion footwear for everyday life on the Croatian market, where this topic has not been sufficiently researched so far. Therefore, although this research has numerous limitations, it provides indicative and valuable insight into the perception, attitudes and behaviour of consumers towards purchasing sneakers on the Croatian market.

One of the limitations of this study is that semi-structured interviews were conducted on a limited convenience sample, which may not be representative of the larger population of sneakers consumers in Croatia and local markets. Another limitation is the methodology that uses only simple statistics as a method. Therefore, a stronger and deeper statistical analysis, revealing the validity and reliability of the instrument and sample (of this work), as well as the application of some multivariate analysis in future research, would show a deeper, holistic relationship between attitudes and behavior. For example, the analysis of attitude variables about the characteristics of sneakers or stores according to behavioral variables in the process of purchasing sneakers could also be a motivation for future research on this topic. Also, future research could encompass a wider population (local and global markets) and provide deeper insight into comparative analysis between different consumer markets for sneakers.

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