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DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND BRAND CHOICE AMONG SERBIAN CONSUMERS

ABSTRACT: This study examines how Serbian consumers relate to the "Made in Serbia" label and whether this influences their choice of domestic brands. My focus was on how much national origin matters in consumer decisions today. Another important question was whether choices are driven by emotional attachment or rational consideration.

The online survey received 294 valid responses, primarily from urban consumers of working age. According to the results, the "Made in Serbia" label is associated with a fundamentally positive attitude, but support is conditional: most people choose domestic products if they are competitive in terms of quality and price. Older respondents generally have a stronger attachment to domestic origin, while younger respondents tend to be more influenced by practical considerations.

Overall, the study shows that domestic origin is not a decisive factor in itself, but it is an important basis for trust. The "Made in Serbia" label can become a real advantage if the product behind it is reliable, modern, and authentic; in other words, if it is not only domestic but also of good quality.

Keywords: brand, consumers behavior, consumers' attitudes

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INTRODUCTION

When a shopper stands in front of a shelf in a store, they often consider not only which product is cheaper or better known, but also where it comes from. The "Made in" label often says more than just the origin of a product, as it also conveys feelings, memories, and trust. In the age of globalization, attachment to domestic products takes on special significance.

In Serbia, this issue is even more pronounced, as national identity is deeply embedded in the social consciousness. Nevertheless, consumer decisions are increasingly made on a rational basis: shoppers want to buy not only "domestic" products, but also good ones. This duality, the coexistence of emotional loyalty and conscious consideration, is one of the most important starting points for the research.

Similar patterns can be observed in other areas of the economy. Research on women's participation in tourism management (Kőmüves et al., 2025) showed that regional inclusivity and gender diversity correlate positively with innovation and performance outcomes. This confirms that identity-related factors, whether gender or national origin, shape trust and engagement not only in organizations but also in consumer behavior.

The aim of the study was to find out what the "Made in Serbia" label means to consumers today. Does this label inspire pride, or does it come across as neutral information? Does age or gender influence someone's choice of domestic brands? And perhaps most importantly, does this positive attitude actually translate into purchasing decisions, or does it remain merely theoretical support?

The research sought answers to these questions using an online questionnaire that collected the opinions of nearly 300 Serbian consumers. By analyzing the data, I sought to uncover not only the structure of attitudes, but also their driving forces, i.e., when and why a consumer feels confidence in domestic origin. The goal was not only to present statistical correlations, but also to understand how national origin can be made part of modern, conscious consumer thinking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Domestic or foreign? The relationship between national identity and brand choice among Serbian consumers

Globalization has a dual effect on consumer decisions (Tidake et al., 2025, Neugebauer, & Vokoun, 2024): while markets and cultures are becoming more homogeneous, localization is strengthening the expression of

national and regional identity (Oomen et al., 2021). Consumption is thus not only an economic act but also an identity-forming one, in which both alignment with global trends and expression of local belonging are manifested.

National identity is a key factor in consumer behavior (Toha, & Supriyanto, 2023).These identity-driven mechanisms are also evident in workplace contexts. A study on generational motivation in the food industry (Kőmüves et al., 2022) found that younger cohorts (Y and Z) display weaker long-term loyalty and lower commitment to collective goals. This generational shift toward individualistic values parallels consumer tendencies to prioritize quality and design over national identity when making purchasing decisions.

According to Małecka A. and Pfajfar G. (2025), consumers in globalized markets reinterpret their own cultural situation (Sakshi, & Kishor, 2024), while He et al. (2021) have shown that a strong national identity increases the preference for domestic brands. Based on the above, it is likely that decisions are also symbolic value carriers to some extent.

Glocalization, or the adaptation of global brands to local meaning systems, is particularly characteristic of Central and Southeastern Europe (Bas, 2025; Tidake et al., 2025), where cultural hybridization has led to the intertwining of Western lifestyles and local symbolism (Wang, 2022). Consumers in the region strive for modernization and the preservation of national characteristics at the same time, resulting in an ambivalent attitude towards foreign brands.

National loyalty and patriotism become part of the economic self-image (Serrano-Arcos et al., 2022), and purchasing domestic products is often a moral act (Roy et al., 2023; Wilke, 2021) that strengthens economic self-determination and collective identity. Based on my own experience, I believe that Serbian consumers support domestic brands when they are competitive with global alternatives in terms of quality and communication.

From the theoretical background on the relationship between globalization and national identity (Zajda, 2022) logically follows the concept of consumer ethnocentrism, which is one of the most important psychological bases for the preference for domestic products. Consumer ethnocentrism is one of the critical variables that influence consumers' decisions to purchase foreign products (Trivedi et al., 2023). Sumner (1906) identified the first traces of ethnocentrism. According to him, ethnocentrism is "a vision of things in which one's own group is at the center of everything, and everything else is measured and evaluated accordingly" (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). Later, Shimp and Sharma (1987) applied the concept to consumers, calling it consumer ethnocentrism (CE). They are the pioneers of this concept and created a scale called CETSCALE to measure it. CE "indicates the general tendency of buyers to avoid all imported products for nationalistic reasons, regardless of their price or quality" (Shankarmahesh, 2006, p. 147). According to the model,

ethnocentric consumers believe that buying domestic products is an economic and moral obligation, while choosing imported products can be considered a betrayal of the national community. Ethnocentric consumers often feel unpatriotic when buying foreign products because they believe that this weakens the local economy. For them, imported goods pose not only an economic threat but also a cultural one (Cleveland et al., 2009). However, these trends are not uniform everywhere: according to Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004), ethnocentrism is generally weaker in developing countries, as consumers tend to find foreign brands more attractive. Consumer habits are constantly changing, and in globalized markets, it is becoming increasingly challenging for marketers to get their products accepted by international buyers.

The degree of ethnocentrism varies significantly depending on the socio-economic context. In developed economies, it tends to manifest itself as symbolic, cultural loyalty, while in post-socialist countries such as Serbia, it often takes the form of economic self-defense and national reconstruction. Here, buying domestic products is often a symbolic act of supporting job creation, self-determination, and national pride (e.g., Gašević et al., 2017). Rakic et al. (2019) emphasize in their study that great emphasis should be placed on encouraging ethnocentrism because it can have several benefits: first, consumer behavior influences corporate profits and thus Serbia's gross domestic product; second, it can also influence consumer awareness of ethnocentric consumption.

Based on the above, consumer ethnocentrism forms a bridge between global modernity and local loyalty (Sorrentino et al., 2024) and provides a key theoretical framework for understanding the support of domestic brands.

Country-of-origin (COO) effect and the role of "Made in" labels

The effect of a product's country of origin attracted the interest of researchers as early as the 1960s and has remained one of the most studied factors in consumer behavior research ever since. Numerous studies have examined how the origin of a product influences consumers' perceptions, preferences, and decisions when making purchases (Samiee et al., 2024; Mohit et al., 2025; Rodrigo et al., 2023; Nguyen & Alcantara, 2022). According to previous studies, the way people think about their own country (Laroche et al., 2005) reveals a lot about the extent to which their economic environment determines their product choices (Zeugner-Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2010). The country-of-origin effect essentially describes how a nation's image shapes consumers' attitudes toward products and brands and how this translates into actual purchasing behavior (Abdelwahab et al., 2022). Decisions are often based not on rational considerations but on associations and impressions:

consumer confidence is strongly influenced by what they think about a given country's culture, level of development, or lifestyle. These underlying images and feelings often unconsciously influence which products are considered authentic and worth buying.

In Serbia, the "Made in Serbia" label has special significance. For some consumers, it is not just a designation of origin but also a symbol of economic independence and support for domestic labor. As research by Gašević et al. (2017) has shown, Serbian consumers feel a stronger connection to brands that convey local values and national pride. The label has both a practical and an identity-forming function. On the one hand, it refers to quality, and on the other, it carries a moral message of supporting domestic products. According to Rakić et al. (2019), communicating domestic origin not only reinforces consumer ethnocentrism but also creates new forms of economic patriotism. This attitude is particularly strong in the food industry and among small business brands, where the "Made in Serbia" label has become a symbol of authenticity and social responsibility.

Based on the above, I believe that the COO effect in Serbia not only influences quality perception but is also an important tool for expressing national identity. Today, the "Made in Serbia" label not only tells us where the product was made but also who we are when we choose it.

Nation branding and place identity

Over the past two decades, the concept of nation branding has become an important tool for economic competitiveness and cultural self-image (Christopher, 2015; Mikecz, 2019). According to Jaworski (2013), a national brand is a consciously shaped representation of a country's identity that influences how the outside world perceives that country. Vaara et al. (2021) add that national image is a political, economic, and cultural construct of the nation's self-image and its communication in the global space.

One of the most important functions of nation branding is to shape consumer perceptions not only of the country but also of the products manufactured there (Vecchi, 2021). The rapid development of the global market has prompted consumers to take into account a new external information signal, namely the country-of-origin label (Gineikiene et al., 2016; Hu and Wang, 2010; Laforet and Chen, 2012). A positive country image builds trust in the "Made in" label, while an unfavorable national reputation often hinders the export and market acceptance of local products. In Serbia, the "Made in Serbia" label has gradually become part of the national image. The range of products labeled "Made in Serbia" is surprisingly wide and reflects the diversity of the country's economy and the coexistence of local traditions and modern industries. The advantage of "Made in Serbia" products is that they

strengthen the country economically, provide social stability and identity, are more environmentally sustainable, and build consumer confidence. These products are not just commodities but symbols of local value creation and national pride.

According to the theory of place identity (Hankinson, 2009), places, like brands, become lovable and credible through stories, values, and symbolic meanings. Let us look at some specific examples. The town of Leskovac, for example, is known for its grilled foods and ajvar. Leskovački roštilj (Leskovac grill) and local ajvar producers (e.g., Bakina Tajna, Granny's Secret) build the city's reputation on its gastronomic heritage. The identity of the place is thus organized around artisanal, community-based food culture. The Bambi factory operates in the city of Požarevac, and its iconic product, Plazma biscuits, has become a national symbol. The brand's communication deliberately builds on childhood memories, family warmth, and trust, which are deeply rooted in Serbian culture. Last but not least, Jelen beer, which is brewed in the Apatin brewery and is linked to the place (Apatinska pivara) in its name, is also worth mentioning. The image of the beer evokes Serbian nature, wildness, and masculine pride, symbolized by the deer head that has become its emblem.

Place identity is clearly observable in Serbian brands. Local origin, cultural heritage, and modernity together shape an image in which "Made in Serbia" is not only an economic category but also a visual and emotional expression of national identity.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research was to explore the factors that shape consumers' attitudes towards the "Made in Serbia" label and how this attitude influences their choice of domestic brands. The study was based on measuring consumer attitudes, exploring their structural characteristics, and interpreting demographic influences.

Research design and approach

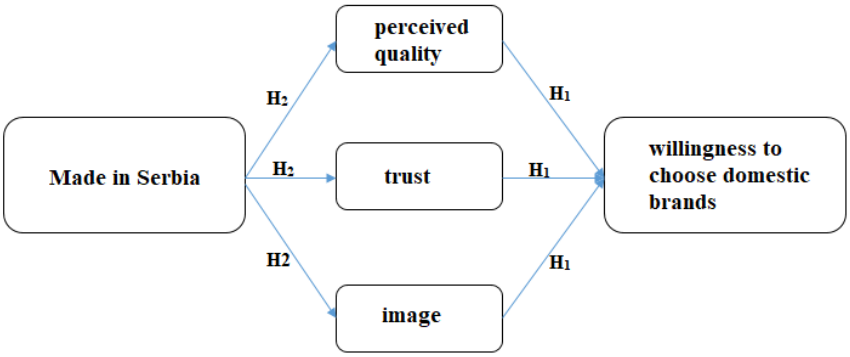
The research was conducted using a quantitative methodology in the form of an online questionnaire. Its aim was to quantitatively analyze attitudes toward the "Made in Serbia" label and to use statistical tools to reveal the underlying patterns. The questionnaire contained closed questions, statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, and basic demographic questions.

The research was descriptive and explanatory in nature: the descriptive part examined the general attitudes of respondents, while the explanatory analyses interpreted the effects of background variables such as age, gender, and educational attainment.

The theoretical model of the research

Based on the literature presented in the previous chapters, the aim of the research is to explore how attitudes related to national identity influence consumer decision-making. The model (Figure 1) is based on the assumption that emotional and rational attitudes toward the "Made in Serbia" label indirectly influence the choice of domestic brands through perceptual factors such as perceived quality, trust, and image.

Figure 1. The theoretical model of the research



Source: Author

The model therefore examines not only the direct relationship between attitude and willingness to buy, but also how national attachment is transformed into consumer experience and decision-making. The theoretical basis of the concept is provided by research findings on the country-of-origin effect and consumer ethnocentrism, according to which the origin of a product influences consumer perception on both an emotional and a cognitive level.

Based on this, the research tests two hypotheses: (1) consumers more often choose foreign brands in their purchasing decisions (H1), and (2) they find foreign products more attractive than domestic ones (H2). The model presents the relationship between these factors, illustrating the interaction between national attitude, perception, and decision-making behavior.

Sample and data collection

Data collection was carried out in 2024 using a self-administered online questionnaire. A total of 294 valid responses were received and analyzed. Although the sample is not representative of the entire Serbian population, it was diverse in terms of age, gender, and educational attainment, which made it possible to examine differences in attitudes among different groups.

The majority of respondents were urban, working-age consumers who regularly purchase both domestic and foreign products. This target group is

particularly relevant, as they are the ones who actually shape the market position of domestic brands through their everyday decisions.

Measuring instruments and variables

To measure attitudes towards "Made in Serbia," I developed an eight-item scale that examined both the emotional and rational attitudes of respondents. The scale covered dimensions such as trust, perceived quality, brand image, and price competitiveness. The statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

The questionnaire also included an index measuring willingness to choose**,** which showed whether respondents preferred domestic or foreign brands. Demographic variables included age, gender, educational attainment, and type of residence**.**

I checked the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's alpha, while I examined its internal structural validity using exploratory factor analysis (EFA).

Statistical methods used

The research combined several statistical methods, depending on the nature of the research questions.

- Descriptive statistics was used to present the general attitudes of the respondents using means, standard deviations, and frequencies.
- Reliability testing (Cronbach's alpha) was used to assess the internal consistency of the scale.
- Factor analysis was used to explore the underlying dimensions of the "Made in Serbia" attitude index, using Varimax rotation.
- Spearman's rank correlation was used to explore monotonic relationships between non-normally distributed data (e.g., attitude and willingness to vote, and age).
- Mann-Whitney U test was used to examine gender differences in independent samples.
- The analyses were performed using a combination of SPSS and Python (pandas, pingouin, factor_analyzer) software.

RESULTS

When examining attitudes toward the "Made in Serbia" label, I used an eight-item scale that measured respondents' attitudes toward domestic brands. The first analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was only 0.60, which indicates only moderate reliability in terms of internal consistency. The result suggested that there was at least one item that did not fit well with the construct or carried a different meaning.

In scientific practice, an alpha value of 0.7 is considered the minimum threshold for reliability, so refinement of the scale was warranted. To this end, I performed an item analysis that examined two key indicators:

- the item–total correlation (how much an item correlates with the other items on the scale), and
- the "alpha if item deleted" value (how the alpha would change if the item in question were removed).

The results of the item analysis are shown in Table 1

Table 1. Item analysis of the “Made in Serbia” attitude scale: item–total correlations, Cronbach’s alpha if item deleted, and interpretation

Item abbreviation	**Item–total correlation**	**Alpha if deleted**	**Interpretation**
"Foreign brands have a stronger image than Serbian brands."	–0.30	0.69	Contradictory, distorting item
“I would prefer to choose a domestic brand if it offered a similar standard to foreign brands.”	0.32	0.56	Weakly but positively related
"I would prefer to buy a domestic brand if I were sure of its quality."	0.41	0.53	Well-fitting item
"I would prefer to choose a domestic brand if it were cheaper than foreign brands."	0.38	0.53	Correct additional condition
"I think it is important that more competitive and attractive Serbian brands appear on the market."	0.50	0.51	Strongest fit
"I would be more inclined to buy domestic products if they had stronger,	0.34	0.55	Medium-strength item, image dimension

more recognizable brands."			
"How convincing/attractive do you find the 'Made in Serbia' label?"	0.36	0.54	Stable, central item

Based on the analysis, it became clear that the statement regarding foreign image continued to weaken the scale, as respondents reacted to this item from a different attitude perspective. After omitting the item (Table 2), the reliability of the scale increased to 0.69, thus approaching the value of 0.70 accepted in scientific publications.

Table 2. Statistical characteristics of the refined 7-item scale

Indicator	**Value**	**Interpretation**
Number of items	7	Uniform construction
Cronbach's alpha	**0.69**	Acceptable internal consistency
Sample (N)	29	Reliable number of items
Average	3.72	Slightly positive attitude
Standard deviation	0.61	Moderate dispersion

Based on the results obtained, the indicators of the 7-item "Made in Serbia" attitude index suggest that the scale measures respondents' attitudes towards domestic brands in a reliable but not overly homogeneous manner. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.69 is at the lower end of the acceptable range, which means that the questions point in one direction, but each adds a different aspect to the attitude towards domestic products (e.g., the importance of price, quality, or brand strength). The average value of 3.72 indicates a slightly positive attitude: consumers are basically open to products labeled "Made in Serbia," but they base their decisions on rational criteria. The standard deviation of 0.61 indicates a moderate dispersion of opinions, meaning that the majority think similarly, but there are also differing opinions in smaller groups. The sample of 294 people is large enough for these results to be statistically reliable. Overall, the scale shows that support for domestic brands among respondents is not rejected but conditionally positive, which is a good starting point for the positioning and marketing communication of domestic products.

I grouped the distribution of the attitude index (Table 3) based on the average values of the 7-item scale in order to make it clear what proportion of

respondents have a positive, neutral, or negative attitude toward the "Made in Serbia" label.

Table 3: Distribution of the attitude index

Value range	**Number of respondents**	**Proportion**
1.0–2.0 (negative attitude)	4	1
2.01–3.0 (neutral)	39	13
3.01–4.0 (moderately positive)	166	56
4.01–5.0 (strong positive)	84	29

The results show that the vast majority of respondents – around 85% – have a neutral or positive attitude, meaning that they are fundamentally favorable towards domestically produced products. The largest group (56%) consists of respondents with a moderately positive attitude, while 29% expressed a strongly positive attitude. In contrast, only 1% of the sample had a negative attitude, indicating that rejection of domestic brands is socially marginal. The distribution therefore clearly reflects openness to domestic origin, but also suggests that this openness is conditional: consumers' positive attitude is strengthened when domestic products are competitive in terms of quality and price.

After refining the scale, the next step was to examine the internal structure of the "Made in Serbia" attitude index. The aim was to understand whether the seven items actually measure a single, unified attitude dimension, or whether there are several distinct perspectives behind them. I therefore used factor analysis to explore the structure of the relationships between the items and to determine what hidden dimensions might explain the patterns in the respondents' answers. Prior to the analysis, I checked whether the data were suitable for the method: I used the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index to examine the adequacy of the sampling and Bartlett's test to examine the significance of the correlations between the items. I then performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation, which allows for the identification of well-separated factors and the verification of the structural validity of the scale.

The results of the factor analysis (Table 4) showed that the "Made in Serbia" attitude index forms a well-interpretable and reliable structure. The KMO index value is 0.709, which indicates that the correlation between the seven questions is strong enough to produce meaningful results. Bartlett's test was also significant ($\chi^2(21) = 488.58$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that there is a real,

non-random relationship between the responses, which confirms that the factor analysis was justified.

During the analysis, I examined how many different mindsets or attitude types lie behind the responses. The results show two main factors that summarize the attitudes of the respondents. The first explains about 38 percent of the total variance, and the second explains another 22 percent—together, they account for more than half of the responses. In other words, the attitudes of the respondents are organized along two basic lines.

One factor is "conditional domestic preference," which is the attitude of choosing a domestic brand when it is competitive in terms of quality, price, or brand image. Another factor is the direct perception of the "Made in Serbia" label, which is more emotional and symbolic in nature – it shows how attractive or convincing respondents find the label.

Based on the results, domestic origin is a positive value in itself, but it is not the only factor determining consumer decisions. Consumers support domestic products if they meet their expectations in terms of quality and price, meaning that rationality plays an important role alongside national attachment. Therefore, "Made in Serbia" represents a real market advantage if domestic products are competitive not only in terms of their origin but also in terms of their performance.

Table 4. Summary of factor analysis results

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
KMO indicator	0.709	Good sampling suitability
Bartlett's test	$\chi^2(21)=488.58$; $p<0.001$	Correlations are significant
Variance explained by factor 1	38.4	Conditional domestic preference
Variance explained by factor 2	22.0	Direct assessment ('Made in Serbia' label)
Total explained variance	60.4	Two factors describe the attitude structure well

After ensuring that the scale reliably and structurally validly measures the attitude under investigation, the next step was to actually test the hypotheses. My goal was to find out to what extent the attitude associated with the 'Made in Serbia' label influences consumer decisions and what role basic demographic factors such as age and gender play in this.

The attitude index, consisting of seven statements, developed as a result of previous analyses, reliably reflects how respondents relate to domestic

brands. This allowed me to use the index to retest the hypotheses. The first hypothesis (H1) sought to answer whether a positive attitude toward the "Made in Serbia" label increases the likelihood of choosing domestic brands. The second hypothesis (H2) examined whether age and gender influence this attitude, i.e., whether different groups think differently about the importance of domestic origin.

The aim of these analyses was to better understand what lies behind the support for domestic products: is it more of an emotional attachment, conscious consideration, or some kind of demographic characteristic? In the following subchapters, I will present the steps and results of the examination of the two hypotheses in detail.

H1 – The relationship between attitude and willingness to choose domestic brands

The first hypothesis (H1) was based on the assumption that those who have a more positive attitude towards the "Made in Serbia" label are more likely to choose domestic brands. For the study, I used a previously developed seven-item attitude index that reflected the respondents' general attitude towards domestic products. I compared this with the choice indicator calculated on the basis of question block 17, which showed whether respondents preferred domestic or foreign brands (Table 5).

Since the distribution of the variables was not completely normal, I used Spearman's rank correlation method, which is useful even when the data do not follow each other linearly, but only in direction. The result of the analysis was $\rho = 0.136$; $p = 0.019$ ($N = 292$), which indicates a weak but significant positive relationship between attitude and willingness to choose domestic products. In other words, the more favorably someone views the "Made in Serbia" label, the more likely they are to choose a domestic brand, even if this effect is not strong.

The results suggest that a positive attitude alone is not enough, but it does contribute to a preference for domestic products. Decisions are influenced not only by emotional attachment, but also by rational considerations such as price, quality, or brand awareness. This means that the "Made in Serbia" label is a good starting point for building customer loyalty, but it alone does not guarantee the success of domestic brands. To strengthen consumer confidence, communication must also emphasize quality, reliability, and authenticity.

Table 5. Relationship between attitude index and willingness to choose domestic brands (H1)

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
N	29	Number of valid responses
Spearman's ρ	0.136	Weak but positive correlation
p-value	0.019	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
Interpretation		A positive attitude increases the likelihood of choosing domestic products

Hypothesis H1 was therefore confirmed**,** as there was a statistically significant correlation between the "Made in Serbia" attitude index and the choice of domestic products. Although the correlation is not strong, it still indicates a clear direction: a positive attitude shifts consumer preferences towards domestic brands. This is an important message for domestic manufacturers, for whom communication based on national origin, but focused on quality, can be an effective tool for strengthening loyalty.

H2 – The effect of age and gender on the perception of the “Made in Serbia” label

The second hypothesis (H2) examined whether age and gender influence how positively people view the "Made in Serbia" label (Table 6).

I examined the relationship between age and the "Made in Serbia" attitude index using Spearman's rank correlation. The result was $\rho = 0.191$; $p < 0.001$ ($N = 294$), which shows a weak but clearly significant positive relationship. Based on this, it can be said that older respondents have a slightly more favorable attitude towards domestically produced products than younger respondents. Thus, with advancing age, the kind of trust and emotional attachment that sees the "Made in Serbia" label as authentic and valuable grows stronger.

I checked for gender differences using the Mann–Whitney U test. The result was U = 12,180; $p = 0.058$, which is close to the significance threshold. This means that women have a slightly more positive attitude towards domestic brands, but the difference is not strong enough to be considered statistically significant. The trend is therefore noticeable but not pronounced.

Table 6. The effect of age and gender on attitudes toward the "Made in Serbia" label

Variable examined	Method	Result	p-value	Interpretation
Age × Attitude index	Spearman correlation	ρ = 0.191	< 0.001	Older people have a more positive attitude towards domestic origin
Gender × Attitude index	Mann–Whitney U test	U = 12,180	0.05	The difference is not significant, women are slightly more positive

Based on the above, hypothesis H2 has been partially confirmed**.** Age does indeed have an impact on the perception of "Made in Serbia", but gender does not. It seems that trust in domestic origin is linked more to generational experiences than to gender differences. Older consumers are likely to identify more strongly with the idea and economic significance of domestic production, while younger consumers' decisions are much more influenced by practical factors such as price, design, or trendiness.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE HYPOTHESIS TESTS

The aim of the research was to better understand how consumers relate to the *"Made in Serbia"* label and how this attitude influences their choice of brands. The results clearly show that there is trust in domestic origin, but it is not self-evident. Consumers today make much more conscious decisions: they support domestic products, but only if they are competitive in terms of quality and price.

The first hypothesis (H1) assumed that a positive attitude increases the likelihood of choosing domestic brands – and this was indeed confirmed. Although the relationship is not strong, it is clear that those who have a favorable attitude towards the *"Made in Serbia"* label are more likely to choose domestic products. At the same time, many other factors influence the decision: quality, price, design, or even brand awareness. This shows that

national loyalty still matters today, but it is not enough on its own; consumers expect domestic products to not only be domestic, but also to be of good quality.

The second hypothesis (H2) was partially confirmed. Age has a certain influence on attitude: older respondents generally have a more positive view of domestic origin, while younger respondents tend to favor practical and trendy aspects. However, there is little difference between the sexes; women are slightly more favorable towards domestic brands, but the difference is not significant. Based on this, the perception of *"Made in Serbia"* is more a generational issue than a gender issue. For older people, national pride and the idea of self-sufficiency are even more important, while younger people pay attention to design, price, and modern appearance.

The results of the two hypotheses together suggest that the *"Made in Serbia"* label is more than just a marketing message; it is a real, but conditional, value in the eyes of consumers. Loyalty lasts as long as the product actually meets expectations: it is of good quality, authentic, and modern.

Overall, the model established in the research accurately describes how national identity, consumer perception, and decision-making are linked. H1 showed that a positive attitude increases the choice of domestic brands, while H2 highlighted that the appeal of foreign products is often rooted in the areas of perceived quality, trust, and image. These factors play a mediating role between attitude and actual decision.

Ultimately, national identity still influences consumer preferences today, but more at the level of thinking and evaluation than on a purely emotional basis. The model thus not only describes the relationships, but also explains how national attachment translates into purchasing decisions. This warns us that successful domestic brand building must appeal to both emotions and rationality, i.e., to the hearts and minds of consumers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important message of the research is that domestic origin is not a decisive factor in itself, but a basis of trust that can be built on—but only if the product itself is strong. The "Made in Serbia" label is therefore not an end goal, but a starting point for consumer loyalty.

The broader pattern emerging from related research indicates that social identity — national, generational, and gender-based — significantly shapes both economic and attitudinal behavior. Earlier findings in tourism management (Kőmüves et al. 2025) and workplace motivation (Kőmüves et

al., 2022) reinforce this conclusion: inclusive and identity-aware strategies enhance trust, loyalty, and performance across sectors.

1. From the consumer's perspective

The majority of respondents are open to domestic brands, but rational considerations play a strong role in their decisions. Domestic origin inspires confidence, but buyers do not choose purely out of patriotism: they expect quality, modernity, and authenticity. This is especially true for younger generations, who respond more to experience and style than to national sentiment.

2. From a corporate perspective

For domestic brands, this result provides a clear direction: it is not enough to be domestic, it must also be apparent that they are worth choosing. The "Made in Serbia" label will only be credible if it is backed by real performance, consistent quality, and transparent communication. Brand image is therefore built not through labeling, but through experience. Communicating domestic origin only works when national identity and modern competitiveness appear together.

3. At the economic policy and social level

The research highlights that the "Made in Serbia" brand has great potential, but a coordinated strategy is needed to unlock it. Consumer confidence could be boosted, for example, by certification systems, "domestic quality" trademarks, educational campaigns, or government incentives for domestic manufacturers. In the long term, national brand building can play a role not only in the economy but also in strengthening identity.

Overall, the research findings suggest that domestic origin is valuable, but authenticity is what makes it sustainable**.** The "Made in Serbia" label can become a real competitive advantage if consumers are not only proud of it, but also believe from experience that it is worth choosing.

Limitations of the research

The results of the study provide valuable guidance, but there are some limitations to consider. The sample is not representative**,** so the results can be interpreted primarily in relation to the respondents, not the entire population. Self-administered data collection may also be distorted by social expectations, which can skew the average attitudes toward domestic products upward. Despite these limitations, the results reliably show the internal patterns and directions of the attitude structure examined.

REZIME

DOMAĆE ILI STRANO? ODNOS IZMEĐU NACIONALNOG IDENTITETA I IZBORA BRENDOVA MEĐU SRPSKIM POTROŠAČIMA

Ova studija ispituje kako se srpski potrošači odnose prema oznaci „Proizvedeno u Srbiji“ i da li to utiče na njihov izbor domaćih brendova. Moj fokus je bio na tome koliko je nacionalno poreklo važno u potrošačkim odlukama danas. Još jedno važno pitanje bilo je da li su izbori vođeni emocionalnom vezanošću ili racionalnim razmatranjem.

Onlajn anketa sadrži 294 validna odgovora, prvenstveno od urbanih potrošača radnog doba. Prema rezultatima, oznaka „Proizvedeno u Srbiji“ povezana je sa fundamentalno pozitivnim stavom, ali je podrška uslovna: većina ljudi bira domaće proizvode ako su konkurentni u pogledu kvaliteta i cene. Stariji ispitanici generalno imaju jaču vezanost za domaće poreklo, dok mlađi ispitanici imaju tendenciju da budu više pod uticajem praktičnih razmatranja.

Generalno, studija pokazuje da domaće poreklo samo po sebi nije odlučujući faktor, ali je važna osnova za poverenje. Oznaka „Proizvedeno u Srbiji“ može postati prava prednost ako je proizvod koji stoji iza nje pouzdan, moderan i autentičan, drugim rečima, ako nije samo domaćeg porekla već i kvalitetan.

Ključne reči: brend, ponašanje potrošača, stavovi potrošača

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