Original research article

THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY ATHLETE ENDORSEMENT ON PURCHASING HABITS

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Abstract. *Sports marketers have had to become much more entrepreneurial to create a competitive advantage for a sports organization and deliver relationship value to consumers. The aim of the paper is, therefore, to establish a link between athletes and potential customers, which offers the market (through the transfer of athletes) the image of the company that is acquired through access to a public promotional effect.The problem to be solved in this paper is to explain the relationship that exists between successful athletes and their fans. The quality of this relationship is determined by the tendency of respondents (N=314) to make a decision to purchase products of companies that hire famous athletes. It is important for sports because in this way the performance of athletes can be valorized on the global market. Based on the results of the study, the conclusion can be drawn that most participants are attracted by sports celebrity endorsement promotions (61.81%) that help them identify the brand (63.43% thus confirming the initial hypothesis). The respondents interested in tennis are mostly attracted to watching matches and following their favorite player's conduct.*

Key words: *sports, tennis, celebrity athlete endorsement, identification by attitude, impact on purchasing decisions.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is one of the major determinants of growth in the sports industry worldwide, especially with the increasing importance of brand creation, brand awareness, brand image, brand identity and brand equity (Howard & Sandeep, 2010, p. 44). Professional sports teams have become top sports brands through leverage with major company sponsors. Research promoting the use of figure sportsmen is common in modern sports practice and it has been realized in different sports fields and economic

environments. The paper uses the ideas from Agrawal & Kamakura (1995); Thomson (2006); Bauer, Stokburger-Sauer, & Schmitt (2005); Bauer, Sauer, & Exler (2008); O'Reilly & Braedley (2008); Vincent, Hill & Lee (2009), and others. All of them generally believe that celebrity endorsement is a useful marketing strategy, but that it has a different impact on respondents and their purchasing decisions. Research on the impact on the attitudes of athletes in the region was also conducted by Muratović, Bjelica, & Popović (2014). Studies of famous tennis players and the effects of their involvement in promotions were carried out by Badenhausen (2013); Katyal (2013); Futterman (2013), and others. They investigated the impact of famous players on the respondents, and the contribution of their involvement to the growth of the image and brand.

In a promotion using the image of an athlete, a company provides an individual with financial (tangible) benefits, and in return requires the use, promotion or support of its products (Beech & Chadweek, 2010). A promotion using the image of an athlete is an emerging strategy purposed to minimize high advertising costs. This kind of promotion provides almost the same effects as a sponsorship but with relatively lower costs, thus justifying its choice (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). From the aspect of the social-cognitive theory of personality, psychological factors contribute to personal marketing as personalities, behavior, emotions, temperament, character and intelligence, and above all their own 'self' the personal image, needs, desires, motives, motivation, attitudes and behavior (Penava Brekalo, 2010). An athlete contributes to building a recognizable image of the company and its product and increases the response of viewers (Smith & Stewart, 1972; Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Futterman, 2013; Katyal, 2013). Brand personality works the same way as the brands of products/services, by transmitting values and perceptions that have a special effect on certain target markets.

These studies have created the basis for standardizing the model which has found a wider application in the promotion. A number of studies show numerous models that assist in the research and implementation of promotion by using athletes. The model sports brands are based on athletic performance, an attractive appearance, and a marketable lifestyle (Model of Athlete Brand Image - MABI model; Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014). McCracken's model (1989) is based on the following sources: credibility and attractiveness (credibility and attractiveness source models). Shuart's (2007) model of CHM (Celebrity - Hero Matrix) is based on the following characteristics: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and additional constructs. The selection of promoters can be done by using the following attributes: familiarity, reliability, respect (credibility), and differentiation (diversity). Miciack & Shanklin (1994, p. 57) have perfected the existing concept of FRED (Familiarity, Relevance, Esteem and Differentiation), adding behavior (Deportment). Thus, identification can be the result of certain aspects of behavior of a known athlete or his/her personal traits, that is, the way the public sees him/her (Roll, 2013). Earlier studies of the impact of tennis celebrities on purchasing habits (Dugalić & Ivić, 2015; Dugalić, 2015) show different effects in the decision to buy a product endorsed by a celebrity. This research shows that although most respondents claim that they are attracted by promotions involving celebrities in order to help them recognize the brand, a small percentage is still hesitant to purchase products endorsed by famous athletes.

The motivation in the research is the fact that celebrity endorsement at the same time brings numerous controversies and risks (Pitts & Stotlar, 1997), and the aim is to precisely determine the contribution of the branch of sport and athletes to deepening the consumer experience. Although the competitiveness of companies is a global phenomenon, the promoting strategy often relies on locally-ranking figures, which have grown in popularity

under the influence of sports results and the media. For this reason, research on this subject is inexhaustible. Considering that no similar research has been conducted in Serbia, the authors endeavored, first with a pilot study, and then with a repeated study, to identify the core activity (sports, entertainment/media, fashion or culture) of the celebrities which have an influence on their purchasing decisions, followed by the extent to which the respondents have been attracted by the promotion which includes celebrities, as well as how much celebrities help in identifying the brand, and how this is reflected on the purchasing decisions. During the research, the survey suggested to the respondents to bear in mind the tennis player they identify with, whose name they quoted at the end of the survey.

THE METHOD

This research presents the results of the attitudes of respondents related to celebrity endorsement promotion using comparative scaling techniques, and using a Likert scale of 1-5. Respondents answered questions related to the promotion of products by famous tennis players. The pilot test (T1) was carried out through Facebook and e-mail in 2014, using a questionnaire created in Google Forms; it included 85 respondents, most of whom were young people, pupils and students. Accordingly, most were unemployed (students, housewives, retired persons). Repeated research (T2) was carried out in 2015 in the form of an identical written questionnaire, and it included 229 respondents and provided a more representative sample resulting in a total of 314 processed participants.

The Missing Value Analysis (MVA) indicates the number of missing answers in T2, highly extreme cases outside the range (Q1 - 1.5 * IQR, Q3 + 1.5 * IQR) with: 1. the attractiveness of promotions involving celebrities - 1 respondent; 2. the assertion that they influence current habits - 14 respondents; 3. the claim that they would buy that product just because it is promoted by celebrities - 28 respondents. In percentage terms, the largest number of missing answers is related to the assertion – celebrities have an impact on my purchasing decisions (25 respondents or 10.9%), while in the remaining statements they are present with less than 5%.

The sample

The study included a sample of 314 respondents (85 respondents in the first test (T1) and 219 from the repeated test (T2), shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The sample structure

Variable	T1	%	T2	%	Total	%
Gender						
Male	40	47.06	129	56.33	169	54
Female	45	52.94	100	43.67	145	46
Age						
< 15	2	2.35	1	0.44	3	1
15-21	6	7.06	64	27.95	70	22
22-28	44	51.76	63	27.51	107	34
29-35	19	22.35	31	13.54	50	16
36-41	7	8.24	28	12.22	35	11
>42	7	8.24	42	18.34	49	16
Employment						
Employed	30	35.29	108	48.21	138	45
Inactive	37	43.53	90	40.18	127	41
Unemployed	18	21.18	26	11,61	44	14
Total	85		229		314	

The variables and data collection techniques

The independent variables were: gender, age and employment status. The interview was anonymous. The main method of data collection was a questionnaire (primary source): Promotion using sporting celebrities, applied to tennis as one of the sports where ranks may be precisely defined. It was in E-form or written form available on (https://www.researchgate. net/publication/299507354_Anketa_Tenis_Promocija_upotrebom_lika_sportista_Questionnai re_Tennis_Celebrity_Endorsement). The respondents filled in a questionnaire and identified the core activity (sport, culture, fashion, entertainment and media) of the celebrities, as well as expressed their views and motives for following a sport, and making purchasing decisions.

Data processing

The basic method of the paper is generally scientific (using the statistical and comparative method). For data processing and statistic procedures, SPSS software version 11 was used. Information was analyzed through the sampling method, descriptive analysis (mean values and correlation models), the test for homogeneity of variances, and equality of means test.

The issue took on the form of the Likert scale (1-5), with 1 being the lowest and 5 as the highest valued category. From the answers of the respondents of the first test, it was found that most of the high ratings (4 and 5) were granted to sports, followed by entertainment/ media and culture, while fashion had the lowest score (1), meaning that celebrities from the world of fashion had the least influence on the purchasing decisions of the respondents in the first test. Since it is assumed that the poor majority of the respondents prefer sport, the survey offered tennis, a sport in which there is a clear delineation of placements and regular updating of achievement in the form of rankings. This facilitates the comparison of the values of sport results and earnings from promotion through measurements, made publicly available to the respondents.

Measures and procedures

Measurements were conducted twice: First, the respondents were asked to give their opinion about the core activities of the celebrities, and their impact on their decision to buy the product (sports, entertainment/media, fashion and culture). Further the respondents were directed to quote the name of their idols, that is, the names of top tennis players. With the success and ranking of Serbian players in the world, tennis has gained complete affirmation, thus becoming the most popular sport in Serbia in last decade.

The respondents answered the following questions: *Are respondents more attracted to promotions involving celebrities? Does the presence of celebrities in a promotion help them identify the brand? How much does the core activity of celebrities influence the decisions of the respondents about buying a product?* They were asked questions regarding the motives for choosing a famous tennis player, measured by the Likert scale, which helped the authors asses the motives of their choice more precisely: *How much do celebrities influence their decision to purchase? Do they find the conduct of the athletes on and off the court to be important? Would they buy a product just because a certain person promotes it? What are their motives for watching tennis?*

Statistical analysis

Broken down by employment status, most were employed 108 (48.21%), followed by the inactive (90 or 40.18%), who accounted for 88.39% of the basic set, and the unemployed

(26 or 11.61%), though the number of unemployed in the sample is not representative; in terms of age, the participation of young people up to 30 years of age was 25.1%, older than 50 was 27.2%, and 30 to 49 was 47.7%. In order to avoid a stronger influence on the results by young adults who were interviewed via the Internet (the majority of whom were women, inactive and unemployed people), average values were calculated for both tests, as well as the deviation of repeated measurements in relation to the average.

This method reduced the differences in measuring the attitudes of participants and it can be concluded that recent measurements, as compared to the average (of 314 respondents) included the following: 5.44% fewer women; 20.26% less of the population aged 22-28, and 15% less of 29-35 year olds. Also, in the repeated test, compared to the average value, there were fewer unemployed by 18.47%, and inactive by 2.24%.

THE RESULTS

The structure of the sample (N = 314) is shown in Table 1. The basic group for the repeated test included 129 male (56.33%) and 100 female (43.67%) respondents. When it comes to the age structure of the sample, the largest group represented in the sample were young respondents, ages 15-21 (27.95%), and 22-28 (27.51%), who together account for more than 50% of the basic set (55.46%). The structure of the total sample of 314 respondents by gender was the following: 54% of men and 46% women; according to age: 1% of up to 15 years, 22% of 15-21, 34% of 22-28, 16% of 29-35, 11% of 36-41, 16% and over 42 years of age; by employment status: 45% employed, 14% unemployed and 41% inactive. The average sample consisted for the most part of males (53.82%), the younger population from 22 to 28 years (34.5%), and the employed 44.66% of respondents. The analysis includes data from the average sample of respondents to both tests (314 replies).

The respondents were primarily asked to evaluate the core activity of the celebrities that influences their decision about purchasing products, namely: sports, entertainment/media, fashion and culture. The analysis of the calculated values of the average score of the core activity in the repeated test revealed that the majority of the respondents emphasized sports as the core activity which the most influential celebrities belong to (average value 3.20), followed by culture (2.92), fashion (2.79), and the last being entertainment and media (2.57). The results of the second test are shown in Figure 1. After the celebrities' core activities, the respondents were supposed to give their opinion on the influence of their idol on their attitudes and decisions.
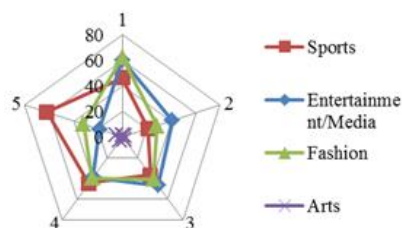

Fig. 1 Reactions of the respondents to the core promotions activities of the celebrities

By examining the normal distribution of variables in all populations, the level of statistical significance (σ) shows that the least dissipation of the respondents' answers is in the core activities of fashion and sport. Thus, in the sports activity within the variable

of "gender" (p=0.006), statistically there are significant differences that do not exist in the variables "age" and "employment status." The differences within sports and fashion (for gender p=0.001, age p=0.009, and employment status p=0.004) activities were statistically significant ($\sigma \leq 0.05$). Since there were no statistically significant differences between the variables in the activities of entertainment and media and arts ($\sigma \geq 0.05$), further analysis includes only responses that are related to sports. Tennis was chosen for ease of monitoring of the results in ATP rankings in which Serbia has 2 representatives among the top 25: Novak Djoković, 1st, and Viktor Troicki, 24th (ATP World Tour, 2016), and WTA rankings, Ana Ivanović, 19th, and Jelena Janković, 23th (Women's Tennis Rankings, 2016), within which the largest commercial effects were realized simultaneously.

The question about the attractiveness of promotions involving celebrities

Test T1 showed that more than half of all the respondents were more attracted to promotions involving celebrities (58%). Repeated measurements showed that 63.39% of the respondents were more attracted to promotions involving celebrities. The average value for both tests was 61.81%. The conclusion is that there is an increasing number of respondents who are attracted by promotions involving celebrities (9.29% as seen in Table 2, and Figure 2). Compared to the average value of each test, the second measurement records a growth of 2.51%.

Table 2 The attractiveness of promotion: results of a pilot (T1),
repeated test (T2), and summary of the results

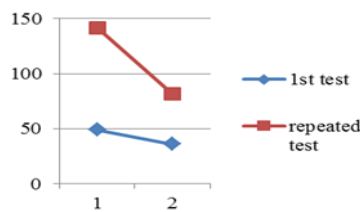| Variable		T1	%	T2	%	∑	%	T2/T1 %	T2/Mean %
They are more attracted to promotions involving celebrities.	Yes	49	58	142	63.39	191	61.81	9.29	2.51
	No	36	42	82	36.61	118	38.19	-12.83	-4.14
Total/average		85	100	224	100	309	100	163.53	-27.51
The presence of celebrities help them identify the brand.	Yes	63	74	133	59.38	196	63.43	-19.76	-6.38
	No	22	26	91	40.62	113	36.57	56.23	11.07
Total		85	100	224	100	309	100		

Fig. 2 Line plot: attracted by celebrities

How many celebrities help to identify a brand?

The relative majority (74%) agreed that the presence of celebrities in a promotion campaign helps them to identify a particular brand, and 59.38% of the respondents believed that the presence of celebrities in promoting campaigns helps them to identify a particular

brand. The average value for both tests is 63.43%. This means that respondents have become more skeptical when it comes to the issue of celebrities helping them recognize a particular brand (reduced from 19.76%), as shown in Table 3 and Figure 3. Compared to the average value of both tests, the second measurement recorded a decline of -6.38.

Table 3 The impact on purchase decisions: results of a pilot,
repeated measurement and summary of the results

| Variable	T1	%	T2	%	∑	%	T2/T1 %	T2/Mean %
The influence of celebrities on purchasing decisions.	85	100	205	100	290	100		
Average		2,69		2,32		2,43	-13,75	-4,53
Famous players have an impact on current purchasing habits.	85	100	218	100	303	100		
Average		2,33		1,86		1,87	-20,17	-0,53
Their behavior on and off the court are essential.	85	100	214	100	299	100		
Average		2,78		2,62		2,66	-5,76	-1,50
They bought a product just because it promoted a certain figure.	85	100	217	100	302	100		
Average		2,52		1,83		2,02	-27,38	-9,40
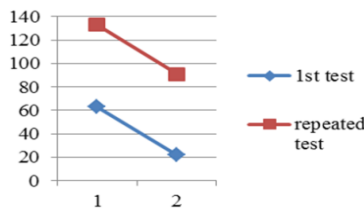
Fig. 3 Line plot: assessment of aid in brand recognition celebrities on purchasing

How much influence do celebrities have on the respondents' decision to purchase?

It can be concluded that, generally speaking, celebrities have little bearing on purchasing habits, but a number of respondents would still buy a product just because it is promoted by a certain figure. The average value of these claims is 2.69 and 2.32 (average 2.43) in the first and in the second test respectively. There is increased skepticism when compared to the results of the second measurement with the first (down by 13.75% compared to the average grade). Cumulatively, the second measurement compared to the average indicates 4.53% lower average scores for statements that celebrities have an impact on their purchasing decisions (Table 3, Figure 4).
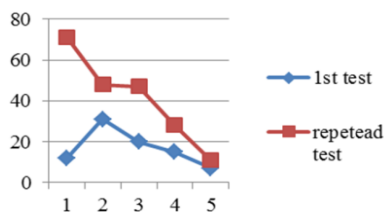

Fig. 4 Line plot: impact of decisions

How do celebrities influence purchasing decisions, how much is their behavior (on and off the court) significant and would they buy a product just because it is promoted by an individual from the tennis world?

Respondents were asked to evaluate their fondness for famous athletes, tennis players (whose name was given at the end). The aim was to investigate the degree of identification with their idols, which motivated them to make a decision to purchase. The first measurement recorded the average value of the first claim by 2.33 and the second by 1.86. By comparing the calculated cumulatives, the average value was 1.87. The views of the respondents were more rigorous for the second measurement compared to the first by 20.17%, and generally speaking, they were lower by 0.53%, so they can be taken into account in reaching conclusions and decisions (Figure 5). The average value of other claims that the respondents care about celebrity behavior on and off the court in the first measuring was 2.78 and 2.62 in the second. By comparison, it can be concluded that these attitudes are uniform, as the average value of the second measurement was lower by 5.76% compared to the first, and the second measurement was lower by only 1.5% in relation to the entire set (Figure 6). The average value of the third statement, that the respondents would have purchased a product just because it is promoted by a certain person (Figure 7) was 2.52 in the first measurement and 1.83 in the second (the cumulative average is 2.02). In the second measurement compared to the first, the test average rating of these claims decreased by 27.38%, but a comparison of the average values of the second test in relation to the entire collection was lower by 9.40%.
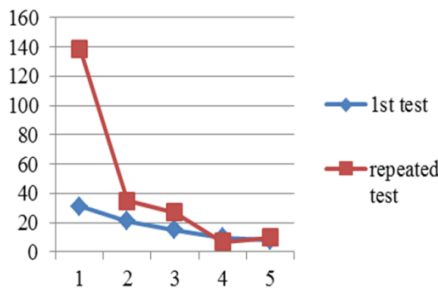

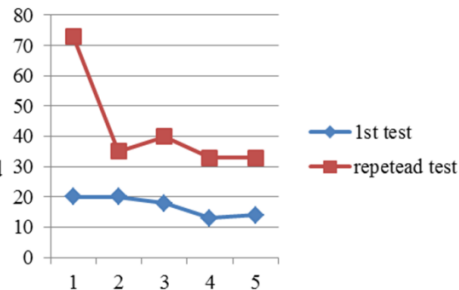**Fig. 5** Line plot: Impact on purchasing habits of celebrities is essential

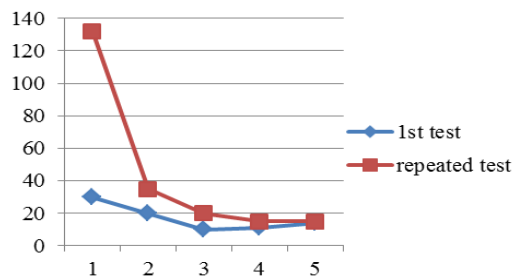**Fig. 6** Line plot: the behavior of respondents

Fig. 7 Line plot: purchasing a product because it is promoted by a celebrity

What do I enjoy the most when it comes to tennis?

Most of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed watching matches and following a certain tennis player (these answers had the highest grades of 4 and 5, as shown in Figure 8). The calculated correlation coefficients were based on the respondents' answers; there were slight negative correlations in the question "What do I enjoy the most when it comes to tennis" - by gender -0,02, age -0,04, as well as slightly positive by employment status – 0.02.
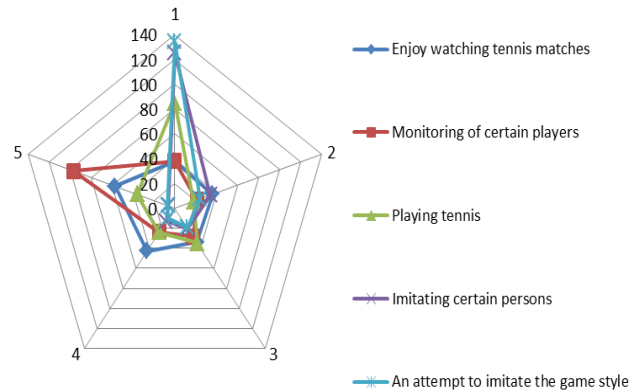

Fig. 8 Line plot: decision under the influence of celebrity monitoring

DISCUSSION

Most respondents valued sports, entertainment and media more than all other industries as the area of the core activity of celebrities. They felt that athletes-players influenced them to make purchasing decisions and they would make a purchasing decision just because the product is promoted by a certain celebrity. Thus, that makes sports suitable for the promotion of different products by companies that have an interest to do so.

The answers to the following question: "How much influence do celebrities have on their decision to purchase?" shows that the largest number of respondents (55.86%) evaluated the statement with the lowest scores (values 1 and 2, Table 3). The average of all the responses was 2.43 and it was much less than the average scores of 3.2, by which they evaluated sports as the core activity of celebrities who dominantly influence their decision to purchase. The claim that celebrity behavior on and off the court is essentially important to the respondents was evaluated by average grades in both measurements by 2.66 (with a deviation of the average in relation to the retest by only 1.5%). The respondents assigned an average score of 2.02 (on the deviation results of the second measurement from the average by 9.4%) to the claim that they would buy a product just because it is promoted by a certain celebrity. Famous tennis personalities have very little impact on the current buying habits of respondents, as the average value was only 1.87 (with a slight deviation of the results of the second measurement compared to an average of 0.53%) in both measurements.

Respondent answers were digressively linearly arranged and corresponded to the previous studies (Agrawal & Kamakura 1995; Mukherjee, 2009; Dugalić & Ivić, 2015;

Dugalić, 2015). They showed that the decisions to buy the product were not significantly influenced by celebrities, or the respondents did not want to admit that others have such an impact on their consumer habits. This may partially corroborate the initial assumption. Although research directly confirms that sports celebrities have an impact on respondents and help them identify the brand, it obtained a low average grade for the claim that famous tennis personalities have an impact on the current purchasing habits of the respondents (1.87); for the assessment of the impact of celebrities on the purchasing decisions of the respondents (2.43); and that the behavior of players is important both on and off the court (2.66). Thus, the research shows that the number of respondents who choose to purchase under the influence of famous athletes is decreasing. This means that the promotional strategy in a modern business must be based on solid data for a specific personality that wants to engage in the promotion. Also, it is useful to create a complementary strategy in the case that potential consumers do not respond adequately to this type of promotion.

Most respondents valued sports, entertainment and the media more than all other industries as the area of the core activity of the celebrities. They felt that athletes-players influenced them to purchase decisions and they would make a purchasing decision just because the product is promoted by a certain celebrity. Thereby, as it has already been stated, that makes sports suitable for the promotion of different products by companies that have an interest in doing so.

This research proved the following: 1. celebrity endorsements have the greatest impact on the attitudes of respondents (average value 3.20); 2. 61.81% of the respondents are attracted to promotions involving celebrities; and 3. celebrity endorsements help them identify the brand (63.43%). The conclusion is that the results of the study confirm the previous research and are useful for creating strategies in the sports industry. In changing the attitudes of the respondents in a repeated test in view of the promotions that involve celebrities (compared with the average of both measurements), there was a growth of 2.51%. But measuring the attitudes of respondents in relation to the claim that the presence of known personalities in a promotion helps recognize the brand shows that respondents have become more skeptical by 6.38%; this is much less defined than the average results of both tests.

It is probable that the results would be different if the survey had taken into account the attitudes of potential respondents from all regions and rural areas. Most of the missing responses were related to the question of the impact on their purchasing decisions. The respondents probably found it a leading question or one that impinges on their personal integrity.

Studies show a link within the various groups that evaluated purchasing decisions. Correlations between these variables are negative and insignificant: by "gender" - 0.078; by "age" -0.083, and by "employment status" - 0.067. The results are significant at a 5% significance among respondents with different "employment status" ($\sigma = 0.006$) and "gender" ($\sigma = 0.043$), while with the variable "age group" results are relevant to $\sigma = 0.214$, far from the mean (≥ 0.05 significance level).

In the evaluation of the other statements, the respondents had a certain tennis player whom they identified with in mind.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the conclusion can be drawn that most participants are attracted by sports celebrity endorsement promotions (61.81%) that help them identify the brand (63.43% thus confirming the initial hypothesis). The respondents interested in tennis are mostly attracted to watching matches and following their favorite player's conduct. These attitudes justify the use of celebrities in promotions and the effectiveness of this strategy is quantifiable and recommended in the sports industry. However, research shows that buying decisions influenced by famous tennis players were formed at a much lower level. The average score of just 2.66% of the respondents states that they decide about purchasing under the direct influence of famous players, indicating the high risk of these strategies. It is therefore useful to include in the analysis some additional factors that can profile the attitudes of participants when it comes to purchasing decisions that are influenced by the conduct of famous athletes (e.g. whether the company operates locally, the example of a former athlete who can be tainted by scandal as athletes are subject to pressure to achieve sports results before and after the competition, whether the contracts were already signed, etc.).

Although the results of the study provide useful guidance and justify the strategy of choosing famous athletes in the promotion, there were some limitations in the findings: the impact of celebrity endorsement is lesser among those respondents who valued celebrities coming from the world of culture and fashion: surveys show that there are differences among these groups of respondents. It is assumed that gender structure and purchasing power, and probably the styles present in culture and fashion, multiply the properties that characterize these groups and form the different attitudes of the respondents. That is why celebrity endorsement promotions have certain risks that can be minimized, taking into account the greater number of samples, the field of sports and variables. All the above indicates the necessity of this and similar studies that would include as many factors as possible. Thereby, it is recommended in future research to consider a model with more features that corresponds to a particular product (sports results promoter, personal characteristics and the financial strength of the company) and to conduct a research of attitudes before and after promotional campaigns, in order to determine more precisely the contribution of sports celebrities to sales.

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UTICAJ PODRŠKE SLAVNIH SPORTISTA PRILIKOM PROMOCIJE PROIZVODA NA POTROŠAČKE NAVIKE

Marketinške strategije u sportu sve češće za cilj imaju da poboljšaju konkurentnost sportskih organizacija i da razviju dobar odnos sa potrošačima. Cilj ovog rada samim tim bio je da uspostavi vezu između sportista i potencijalnih kupaca, što omogućava kompaniji da se predstavi na tržištu (kroz transfer sportiste) imidžom koji se stiče kroz uticaj javnih promocija. Problem koji je ovom prilikom trebalo rešiti je kako objasniti odnos koji se uspostavlja između uspešnih sportista i njihovih fanova. Kvalitet ovog odnosa određuje se tendencijom učesnika da odluku o kupovini proizvoda donesu na osnovu toga kog sportistu kompanija angažuje da promoviše proizvod. To je važno za sport jer se na taj način učinak sportiste vrednuje na globalnom. Na osnovu rezultata istraživanja, može se izvući zaključak da je većina učesnika privučeno sportskim ličnostima (61.81%) koje im pomažu da identifikuju brend (63.43% čime se potvrđuje početna hipoteza). Ispitanike koji su zainteresovani za tenis uglavnom privlači gledanje utakmice i ponašanje omiljenih igrača.

Ključne reči: *sport, tenis, podrška slavnih sportista, identifikacija stavom, uticaj na donošenje odluke o kupovini*