27 - 29 November 2026 Vienna , Austria

Country of Origin Effects on Consumer Brand Loyalty in the Sportswear Industry: Evidence from Western Balkan and European Consumers

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Abstract

This study examines how the country of origin (COO), communicated through the “Made in” label, influences consumer evaluations, purchase decisions and loyalty-related outcomes in the sportswear industry. Building on cue utilization theory and the cognitive, affective and normative mechanisms of COO effects, it proposes a conceptual framework and examines it with a primary online survey of 114 consumers, mostly living in the Western Balkans (54.4%) and Western Europe (18.4%). Data were analysed with descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, the Mann-Whitney U test, the chi-square test and Fisher’s exact test. COO ranks eighth of nine purchase factors (M = 2.40 on a five-point scale), far behind style and design (M = 3.80) and performance features (M = 3.79). The COO effect is nevertheless broad but shallow: 69.3% of respondents acknowledge at least a slight influence of the label on their purchase decisions and 39.5% state that it improves perceived quality, yet only 12.3% regard it as a significant influence. About one third (32.5%) would pay a premium for a preferred origin and a further 27.2% would do so conditionally. Italy, Germany and the USA are the origins most associated with high-quality sportswear, which mirrors brand origin rather than actual production locations. Western European respondents were more likely than Western Balkan respondents to report a significant COO influence (28.6% vs. 6.5%; Fisher’s exact p = 0.015), while links between COO and national pride were modest. Sportswear brands in Western Balkan markets should therefore use COO as a supporting rather than a leading message.

Keywords: Country Of Origin, “Made In” Label, Brand Loyalty, Sportswear, Western Balkans