

# Controversial Spokesperson is not Negative: A Case of Nike Campaign



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## Abstract

The aftermath of Nike's "Just do it" 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary commercial featuring Colin Kaepernick caused an immediate public stir and led to polarized consumer responses. Considering the general intentions and strategies that companies adopt celebrity endorsement, Nike's decision to use Kaepernick can be regarded as atypical and has raised a question whether a controversial figure can also be effective. While extant research has extensively examined the celebrity endorsement effects, it has largely focused on positive figures whose image and reputation are favorable. Thus, there is a need for empirical research on how a controversial celebrity spokesperson would perform for an endorsed brand. Accordingly, based on the meaning transfer model (MTM) and persuasion knowledge model (PKM), the current study investigates if and how a controversial celebrity spokesperson plays a role in the consumer's evaluations of a brand and its marketing activity. Employing Nike's commercial featuring Kaepernick, two separate studies are conducted. As a preliminary study, Study 1 explores the presence of celebrity meaning transfer to a brand, and Study 2 extends the analysis of meaning transfer effects by developing a conceptual model. Results of Study 1 show that a controversial celebrity can be associated with both positive and negative meanings implying that controversy with a celebrity is not always necessarily negative. Besides, such meanings, particularly positive meanings, influence consumers' beliefs about a brand. Study 2 demonstrates that the meaning of a celebrity also influences consumers to discern a purpose of advertising and further, the significant impacts of a perceived advertising purpose on the attitudes toward advertising and purchase intentions are found. Specifically, in the current context, consumers who were favorable to Kaepernick perceived Nike's commercial as advocacy advertising, which resulted in more positive attitudes toward advertising and higher intentions to purchase Nike products. It also verifies a mechanism of celebrity endorsement effects by showing the positive effects of attitudes towards a celebrity on brand attitudes and advertising attitudes. Lastly, this study reveals that a perceived advertising purpose mediates the relationship between attitudes toward a celebrity and advertising. This signifies that it is important for marketers to comprehend how consumers view a pur-

pose of advertising for a successful endorsement practice using a controversial celebrity. These findings broaden the scope of celebrity endorsement research by articulating the controversial celebrity effects. Also, for sport scholars, the present study provides meaningful insights into the consumer's cognitive process of sport celebrity endorsement. It further suggests practitioners a new empirical approach to develop effective strategies for their advertising campaigns.

**Keywords:** Colin Kaepernick, endorsement, celebrity controversy, Meaning Transfer Model, Per-suasion Knowledge Model

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## **1. Introduction**

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Celebrity endorsement continues to be a popular communication strategy used in advertising. The literature has repeatedly shown direct and positive effects of celebrity endorsement on consumer's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). However, there has been mounting concern over negativity associated with the celebrity spokesperson backlashing on the brand and putting the endorsed brand at risk (Erdogan & Baker, 2000; White, Goddard, & Wilbur, 2009). As such, businesses have been particularly cautious in selecting celebrities who carry low risk, while possessing positive attributes and images (Comenos, 2018). In academia, several models measuring the celebrity endorsement effectiveness have been developed focusing on personal attributes of the celebrity, that is, source credibility (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002) and source attractiveness (Freidman & Freidman, 1979; Kamins, 1990). In addition, extending beyond celebrity's personal attributes, meaning associated with the spokesperson has been noted as one of the most important criteria (Batra & Homer, 2004; Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001), known as the meaning transfer model (MTM; McCracken, 1989).

As a result of kneeling during the national anthem as means to protest of police brutality and racial inequality, Colin Kaepernick has been considered one of the most controversial figures in recent years. In fact, according to a Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll, over 50% of Americans object to kneeling during the national anthem in protest (Clement & Guskin, 2018).

Yet, due to his commitment toward a wide variety of causes and charities over the years (Lauletta, 2018), Kaepernick has emerged as a cultural symbol and is also known as a social activist. Interestingly, in the midst of contention surrounding Kaepernick, Nike launched an advertising campaign featuring Kaepernick as the spokesperson to commemorate its 30th "Just do it" anniversary. Despite equivocal opinions and attitudes toward Kaepernick, the aftermath of the campaign turned out to be a success, in terms of surge in social media (Thomas, 2018).

While the effectiveness of celebrity spokespersons has been extensively examined, there exists a void in the literature that limits full explanation of the phenomenon found in Nike's case where a rather controversial/polarized figure was used. Earlier Campbell and Warren (2012) found that negativity associated with a celebrity spokesperson is more easily transferable to a brand than positive associations, and Amos, Holmes, and Strutton (2008) concluded that negative information about the spokesperson can have a significant impact on consumer perceptions. Although opinions toward Kaepernick have been divisive and speculation exists that controversial spokesperson may be perceived in a negative light, it would be premature to conclude one way or the other (positive or negative) and simply equate controversy with negativity without empirical research. Accordingly, by integrating the basic tenets of MTM, this study examines individual's thoughts and beliefs towards Kaepernick by capturing the meanings associated with him and further explores whether the associated meanings subsequently transfer to the brand (McCracken, 1989).

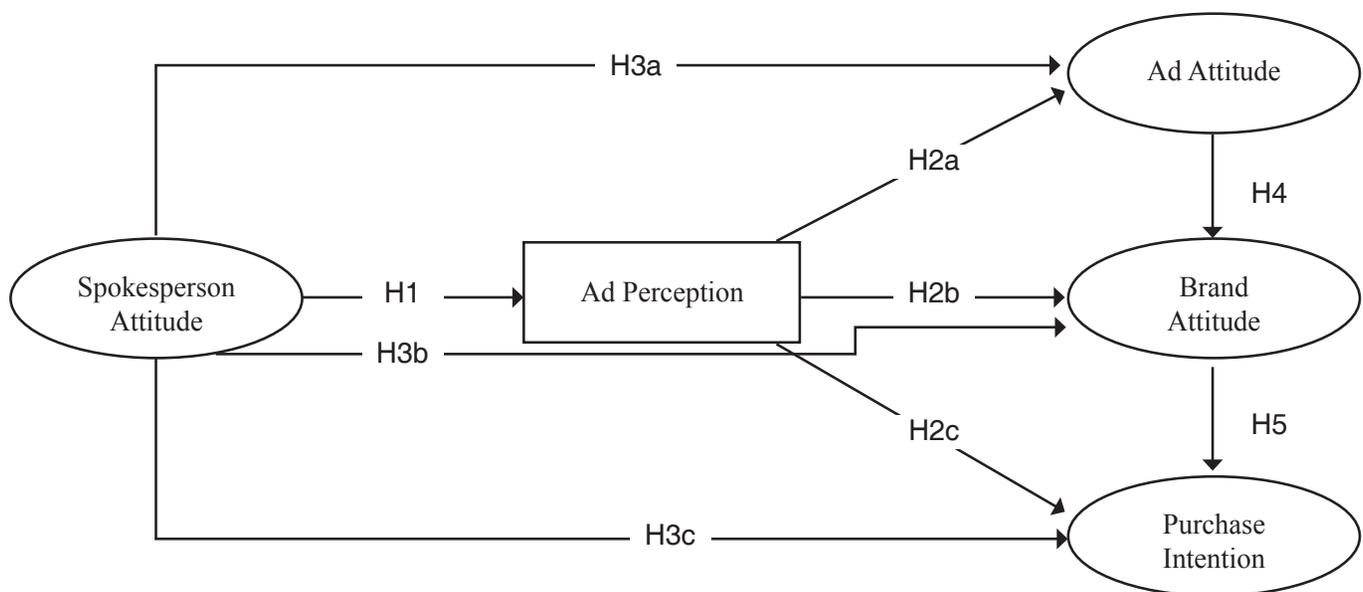
Considering the recent activities of Kaepernick as a social activist, it is reasonable to expect that individuals would take his public roles into consideration to derive meanings, which could eventually have impacts on building their attitudes.

Furthermore, while a corporation’s advertising is mostly commercial (i.e., advertising that directly promotes specific products or services), it also engages in non-commercial advertising such as advocacy (i.e., advertising that contains issues of societal relevance). Differently stated, corporations practice their advertising for not only their own benefits, but also the overall social good. Consumers may react differently to such different advertising types because they tend to infer the ultimate purpose of advertising. This tendency can be supported by the persuasion knowledge model (PKM), which offers explanation in relations to how consumers respond to a marketer’s persuasion attempt (advertising), wherein the practice of persuasion knowledge may result in

either positive or negative attitudes and decisions toward the brand. Based on such premise, we attempt to empirically examine the individual’s responses toward the ad, in which perceptions toward the ad would, in turn, influence attitudes and behavior towards a brand. To the best of our knowledge, no study has shed light on the effects of a controversial or polarized spokesperson in the context of celebrity endorsement. In order to fill this gap, the current study investigates Nike’s case on the foundation of the MTM and PKM and also provides an extended perspective on existing celebrity effectiveness literature.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the presence of celebrity meaning transfer and 2) to examine how attitudes toward spokesperson ( $A_{spokesperson}$ ) and perception of advertisement influence attitudes toward advertising ( $A_{ad}$ ), attitudes toward brand ( $A_b$ ), and behavioral intention. More specifically, a structural model delineating the relationships among the

**Figure 1.** *The Structural Model*



aforementioned variables is developed and tested (see Figure 1). In the model, it is hypothesized that  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  is positively associated with advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intention via perception of advertisement. Finally, it is proposed that advertising attitudes positively affect brand attitudes, which lead to purchase intentions.

This study includes two separate studies. Within the framework of MTM, Study 1 explores meanings associated with the celebrity and transferability of meanings to the brand. Study 2 extends this work by testing a conceptual model of celebrity endorsement effects based on PKM. This study suggests valuable findings, which strengthen the extant body of research on a role of celebrity in advertising and the development of effective strategies for marketing communication campaigns.

## **2.Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development**

### *2.1 Meaning Transfer Model and Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness*

As a means to enhance the performance of marketing communication practices in the cluttered marketplace, celebrity endorsements have endured popularity. A celebrity endorsement refers to an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016, p.644). Scholars have explored the persuasive power of celebrities and found a significant effect of celebrity endorsement on consumer's cognitive, affective, and behavioral

responses (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Focusing on personal attributes of the celebrity, two models notably, source credibility (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Lafferty et al., 2002) and source attractiveness (Freidman & Freidman, 1979; Kamins, 1990) have been widely applied. Nevertheless, these source models fail to clarify the role of the source, thus as an alternative, McCracken (1989) developed the meaning transfer model (MTM). The basic premise of the MTM is that celebrities are public figures who possess a variety of meanings, wherein consumers through experience identify with such symbolic properties that has been created for, and by the celebrity (McCracken, 1989). Accordingly, the model suggests that the effectiveness of the celebrity is dependent upon the meanings that is brought into the endorsement process, which subsequently transfers to the respective product or brand (McCracken, 1989).

Langmeyer and Walker (1991a, 1991b) were one of the first to demonstrate the applicability of the MTM framework. In their study (1991a), the celebrity's symbolic meanings were more likely to transfer to the endorsed product than meaning transferring to a product within a non-endorsed context. In addition, Langmeyer and Walker (1991b) examined meanings communicated by different celebrities by combining with products. The findings of their study supported the basic premise of the MTM and further provided empirical support by conducting three studies employing an experimental research design. Batra and Homer (2004) showed that celebrity's personality traits transfer from the spokesperson to the endorsed brand while Miller and Allen

(2012) upheld the celebrity's meaning transfer effects focused on mature brands. Campbell and Warren (2012) found that there exists the stronger impact of negativity associated with the celebrity than positive traits on brands. More recently, by integrating the tenets of metaphor theory in marketing, Roy (2018) added a new perspective and validated the MTM model. It was concluded that celebrity's meaning can be explained through metaphors, and the metaphor would be transferred to the brand. In the light of such significant celebrity meaning transfer effects and Nike's commercial featuring Kaepernick whose meanings are inconsistent, we consequently formulated two research questions to explore the effectiveness of the celebrity spokesperson on the foundation of MTM.

RQ1: What are the established meanings associated with Colin Kaepernick?

RQ2: Do established meanings associated with Colin Kaepernick transfer to a brand through advertising?

In the advertising and communication literature, extensive research has well-recognized the impacts of celebrities on the consumer's decisions. Particularly source credibility (Lafferty et al., 2002) and source attractiveness (Kamins, 1990) have been the focal point, while persuasive effects specifically tied to  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  has been limited. However, as source attractiveness has been used in determining the liking for the spokesperson, a more general perspective exists, viewing attractiveness as comprehensive attitudes toward the celebrity (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Silvera & Austad, 2004). In prior studies, attitudes toward the celebrity have often been labeled as celeb-

rity liking or celebrity likability. As a construct that encompasses one's cognitive (belief and thoughts) and affective (feelings) reactions to a given object or person (Katz & Stotland, 1959; Rosenberg, 1968), attitude formation typically occurs as a result of learning, modeling others, and experience (Pickens, 2005).

Interestingly, the phenomenon that followed upon Kaepernick's kneeling was not merely confined to divisive opinions and attitudes toward Kaepernick. It is conceivable that such attitudes further influenced consumers' perception toward the Nike ad. Closely related to attitudes, perception is known as a process whereby individuals interpret information to something meaningful based on their prior experiences (Pickens, 2005). The perception that one holds, however, can be substantially different from reality. According to selective perception theory developed by Bem (1967), individuals tend to be selective in what they perceive and interpret information in a way that is congruent with their values and beliefs, while ignoring opposing viewpoints. This means, the individual's interpretation of advertising messages can vary by their existing beliefs; it is critical to examine the perceived intent of the advertisement from the recipient's perspective than the communicator's (Sethi, 1979).

Although the common purpose of corporations' advertising is commercial, corporations also engage in non-commercial advertising (i.e., advocacy). Considered as one form of institutional/image advertising (Haley, 1996), the intent of the advocacy advertising is to have the audience think favorably about the company in taking appropriate stands on key issues (Fox, 1986). De-

spite corporate intention behind their communication efforts, consumers are likely to interpret the message differently (Sethi, 1979) because intention of advocacy advertising is implicit, whereas commercial advertising is explicitly and solely for the company. Using Kaepernick as the spokesperson of the message, it may have created a perception of advocacy to some, while others, regardless of the lack of product or service embedded, may simply consider the ad as commercial, given that by nature, ads are a for profit organization's communication effort, and thus readily perceived as such (Baker & Churchill, 1977).

Therefore, in accordance with the MTM and Kaepernick's protest, it is assumed that individuals who are favorable to Kaepernick will believe that Nike's commercial is to support a social cause (racial equality). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals with positive attitudes toward the spokesperson will perceive the ad as non-commercial rather than commercial.

## *2.2 Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) and Consumer Responses to Advertising*

Consumers tend to have doubts about a marketer's ultimate goal and motives in implementing marketing activities, and also question the trustworthiness of advertising messages when encountering persuasive communication (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). In an attempt to better understand consumers' propensity to consciously avoid advertising, Friestad and Wright (1994) proposed the PKM. The model posits that through exposure to a series of persuasion episodes, consumers develop persuasion knowledge

and strategies designed to defend against the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Persuasion knowledge is known as a loose set of beliefs in and knowledge of a company's goals, persuasion motives, strategies and tactic, which may or may not be accurate (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Such knowledge enables consumers to recognize, interpret, evaluate, and remember marketing and advertising strategies, and influences the extent to which individuals accept or resist the persuasive communication (Taylor & Barber, 2012).

In the context of advertising, consumers' persuasion knowledge elicits skepticism and triggers negative attitudes toward advertising and brand (Lee, 2013), as well as purchase intentions (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Chen & Leu, 2011). Nevertheless, when it comes to non-commercial advertising (e.g., advocacy), consumers are known to be less skeptical than general advertising due to the lack of commercial motive (Kim, Yim, & Ko, 2013). Kim et al. (2013) indicated that non-commercial messages (e.g., pro-social messages) suggested by a corporate can mitigate skepticism toward advertising, and that consumers tend to trust and support advertising claims. However, when consumers perceive the message as a way to fulfil advertisers' self-serving motives, they are more likely to distrust the corporate and be skeptical to the ad, which consequently leads to consumers' negative responses to the brand (Manuel, Youn, & Yoon, 2014). One of the reasons for such tendency might be cognitive biases because people categorize and interpret sensory information based on their particular frame of reference. Furthermore, as previously stated, individuals are apt to recognize and construe in-

formation in a way that their values and beliefs are promoted (Bem, 1967). Thus, building on the PKM and previous literature on how perception of different types of advertising influence consumer's subsequent responses, three hypotheses were proposed as follows:

H2a: Non-commercially perceived ad will be positively associated with attitudes toward advertising.

H2b: Non-commercially perceived ad will be positively associated with attitudes toward the advertised brand.

H2c: Non-commercially perceived ad will be positively associated with purchase intention.

### *2.3 Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness*

In academia, scholars have explored the persuasive power of celebrities on the consumer's brand evaluation. Specifically, a celebrity appearance in advertising generated greater message believability and more favorable attitudes toward advertising and toward the endorsed brand or product (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Further, with regards to the celebrity's effectiveness on consumer behavior, researchers showed that celebrity endorsement motivated consumers to make a purchase (e.g. Chi, Yeh, & Huang, 2009; Roozen & Claeys, 2010).

Given that individuals are likely to maintain cognitive consistency to achieve a balanced psychological state (Heider, 1946), applying such notion to celebrity endorsement, it can be implied that if a consumer is favorable to a celebrity, he/she will eventually have positive responses toward a brand in order to ensure balanced cogni-

tive links among oneself, celebrity, and brand. Thus, on the foundation of the theoretical concepts and extant findings about celebrity endorsement effects, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: Attitudes toward the spokesperson will be positively associated with attitudes toward advertising.

H3b: Attitudes toward the spokesperson will be positively associated with attitudes toward the advertised brand.

H3c: Attitudes toward the spokesperson will be positively associated with the consumer's purchase intentions.

### *2.4 Impact of Advertising on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention*

As a personal reactive disposition,  $A_{ad}$  refer to the individual's psychological status formed in accordance with the evaluations of a given idea or object (Lin, 2008). The  $A_{ad}$  can be two kinds – cognition and affection, which implies thinking and feelings respectively (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). Much of the empirical evidence have shown  $A_{ad}$  as a strong element in the consumer's brand attitude formation. Prior research suggests that the consumer's  $A_{ad}$  has a significant impact on their brand attitudes (e.g. Batra & Stephens, 1994). Yoo and MacInnis (2005) also manifested that regardless of advertising types, a consumer's evaluation of advertising directly affected their  $A_b$ . Further, irrespective of the consumer's brand familiarity, their attitudes toward advertising could significantly increase their purchase intentions, especially when their affective reactions were aroused by advertising (Goldsmith, Lafferty,

& Newell, 2000). In the same vein, a positive relationship between a consumer's brand attitudes and purchase intentions has been indicated with rigorous evidence in many studies (Batra & Ray, 1986; Phelps & Hoy, 1996).

In addition to such direct associations of  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  with purchase intentions, scholars demonstrated an indirect flow of these three constructs. When a consumer builds positive  $A_{ad}$ , he/she will become favorable to an advertised brand, which will in turn motivate him/her to have greater purchase intentions (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Mackenzie et al., 1986). Following these findings, a causal relationship between  $A_{ad}$  and purchase intentions through brand attitudes is expected, which leads to the following hypotheses:

H4: Attitudes toward advertising will positively influence attitudes toward the advertised brand.

H5: Attitudes toward the advertised brand will positively affect the consumer's purchase intentions.

### 3. Study 1

Study 1 provides preliminary evidence regarding the relationship between the consumer's perceived meaning of a celebrity and a brand endorsed by the celebrity. This experiment was a precursor to Study 2, which looks into a cognitive mechanism of celebrity effects on a brand. Employing the Nike's commercial featuring Kaepernick, the first step of Study 1 was to identify the most prominent meanings that the celebrity possesses. Then, consumers' responses to advertising were analyzed and compared with the meanings conveyed through the celebrity to clarify if a con-

sistency in an evaluation of each entity would exist.

#### 3.1 Participants and Procedure

One hundred and sixty-eight undergraduates enrolled in sport management and business classes at a medium-size East Coast university in the United States were recruited. The majority of participants were male 60.70% ( $n = 102$ ) and white 70.1% ( $n = 117$ ). The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 46 years old with 20.6 years being the average age.

Participants were first asked to read and sign an informed consent. Once consent was obtained, they were asked to complete a pre-survey designed to collect the background information on their existing thoughts and beliefs about Kaepernick and Nike, and their demographic information. After the pre-survey, participants watched the Nike commercial featuring Kaepernick, and finally completed a post-survey containing questions about their attitudes and beliefs toward the brand. This experiment was conducted in a classroom setting.

#### 3.2 Measurement

All measures were adopted from previous research with some modifications in accordance with Nike's case. To gauge the consumer's attitudes toward the celebrity, four items (bad/good; not likeable/likeable; unpleasant/pleasant; uninteresting/interesting) on a 7-point semantic differential were adopted (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Similarly, brand attitudes were measured using six items (good/bad; appealing/unappealing; pleasant/unpleasant; attractive/unattractive;

interesting/boring; like/dislike) developed by Bruner (1998) on a 7-point semantic differential scale. Lastly, a standard thought-listing technique was employed to explore the participants' beliefs about Kaepernick and Nike (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). Participants had open-ended questions and were asked to freely write down their thoughts or ideas regarding the celebrity or the brand.

### 3.3 Data Analysis and Results

#### 3.3.1 Identified prominent meaning associated with a celebrity

Once collected, the semantic contents of participants' cognitive responses (i.e., listed thoughts) were coded into celebrity-thought categories by three judges who were blind to the experiment. The participants were able to identify a total of 812 meanings about the celebrity ( $M = 4.86$ ,  $S.D. = 2.66$ ) including both positive and negative cognitions. The results showed that about 35.5 percent of individuals' thoughts indicated positive attributes of Kaepernick. *Strong/brave* (11.7%) is the most prominent positive meaning that Kaepernick possesses, followed by *Determined/dedicated* (7.9%), *Inspirational* (6.5%), *Activist/leader* (5.3%), and *Proud* (4.2%). The negative meanings of Kaepernick identified were: *Controversial* (4.3%), *Irritable/annoying*

(3.6%), *Disrespected* (2.3%), *Attention seeker* (2.0%), *Inappropriate/irrelevant* (1.7%), and *unpatriotic* (1.2%).

#### 3.3.2 Assessing meaning transfer using cognitive responses pairing

To examine the influence of a celebrity's meaning on brand beliefs, participants' cognitive responses, listed thoughts, to the brand in a pre-survey and a post-survey were compared. As shown in Table 1, participants expressed both positive and negative reactions to the brand before and after watching the commercial and in specific, *Inspirational* and *Activist/leader* were most commonly mentioned in both conditions. However, the participants' brand beliefs became more consistent with the celebrity's meanings after watching the commercial such as *Strong/brave*, *Determined/dedicated*, as well as *Inspirational* and *Activist/leader*. In addition, the negative perceptions of the brand were also revealed in the post-survey such as *controversial* and *attention seeker*. Additionally, the Paired Sample T-test was performed to compare the brand attitudes in the pre- and post-condition, and the results indicated that there was not a significant difference between pre-ad brand attitude scores ( $M = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and post-ad brand attitude scores ( $M = 6.01$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ):  $t(164) = -.52$ ,  $p = .601$ .

**Table 1** Cognitive Response Categories and Frequencies

Category		Kaepernick No. (%)	Nike	
			Pre-Ad No. (%)	Post-Ad No. (%)
Cognitions				
	<i>Positive</i>			
	Strong/Brave	95 (11.7)	18 (1.7)	34 (4.4)
	Determined/dedicated	63 (7.9)	11 (1.1)	31 (4.0)
	Inspiration	53 (6.5)	52 (5.0)	56 (7.2)
	Activist/Leader	43 (5.3)	63 (6.1)	72 (9.3)
	Proud	34 (4.2)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.4)
	<i>Negative</i>			
	Controversial	35 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	16 (2.1)
	Irritable/annoying	29 (3.6)	14 (1.4)	5 (0.6)
	Disrespected	19 (2.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
	Attention seeker	16 (2.0)	31 (3.0)	46 (5.9)
	Inappropriate/irrelevant	14 (1.7)	6 (0.6)	8 (1.0)
	Unpatriotic	10 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Irrelevant		176 (21.7)	60 (5.8)	54 (6.9)
All others		225 (27.7)	781 (75.4)	452 (58.2)
Total		812 (100)	1036 (100)	777 (100)

## 4. Study 2

In Study 2, the proposed conceptual model delineating the impact of attitudes toward celebrity and a perception of an advertising purpose on advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and behavioral intention was tested using the general public sample (see Figure 1).

### 4.1 Participants and Procedure

A total of 305 participants were recruited us-

ing Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for Study 2. Participation was limited to those who were 18 years or older and restricted to take the survey only once. After eliminating 41 participants not meeting the aforementioned criteria, data from 264 surveys were retained for analysis. The majority of the participants were White (72.0%) and male (56.8%). Approximately 64.1% reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. The average age of the participants was 35.13 years old (range:

20-71 years old). Individuals between the ages of 21 and 40 represented 73.9% of the participants.

Prior to completing the survey, participants were asked to review the IRB consent form to agree with a voluntary participation in the survey. Upon providing their agreement, participants were first asked to answer questions about social cause involvement. Thereafter, they were presented with a short description of Kaepernick regarding his protest during a pre-season game in 2016. Participants were asked to answer questions about their attitudes toward Kaepernick supporting a social cause, and then watched the Nike commercial featuring Kaepernick. After the Nike commercial, they completed a survey asking about their responses to the commercial. Finally, they answered several demographic questions at the end of the survey. To encourage participation and also as a way to express appreciation, respondents who successfully completed all questions were awarded a \$.50 incentive.

#### 4.2 Measurement

The survey was composed of three major sections: (1) attitudes toward spokesperson, (2) consumer attitudinal responses, and (3) consumer behavioral responses.

*4.2.1 Attitudes toward spokesperson.* Four items (bad/good; not likeable/likeable; unpleasant/pleasant; uninteresting/interesting) on a 7-point semantic differential scale were adopted to express the participant's attitudes toward Colin Kaepernick supporting a social cause (Silvera & Austad, 2004).

*4.2.2 Consumer Attitudinal Responses to the Nike Ad.* This section included three instruments: the perception of advertising,  $A_{ad}$ , and  $A_b$ . To determine participant's perception of the advertising, they were inquired to identify the main purpose of the ad. Participants' responses (to increase sales) were then recoded as 1 (commercial advertising) and 0 (non-commercial advertising).

To capture  $A_{ad}$ , four items (bad / good; not likeable/likeable; unpleasant/pleasant; uninteresting/interesting) on a 7-point semantic differential were adopted (Silvera & Austad, 2004). Similarly, participants'  $A_b$  was measured using six items (good/bad; appealing/unappealing; pleasant/unpleasant; attractive/unattractive; interesting/boring; like/dislike) developed by Bruner (1998) on a 7-point semantic differential scale.

*4.2.3 Purchase Intention.* Four items (unlikely/likely; improbable/probable; uncertain/certain; definitely not/definitely) on a 7-point semantic differential scale were adopted from Bearden, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1984) to measure the participants' purchase intention.

#### 4.3 Data Analyses and Results

A two-step approach was adopted to test the hypothesized relationships in the proposed research model and measurement scale. First, a measurement model was tested to denote the conceptual distinctions among latent variables and to establish construct validity. Second, a structural model was tested to examine the overall model, including the relationships among  $A_{spokesperson}$ , advertising perception, advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intention. Anderson and

Gerbing (1988) noted that the two-step approach allows researchers to gain proper assessment of construct and nomological validity by separately estimating the measurement model prior to the estimation of the structural model. Thus, the properties of the measurement model and the structural model were tested separately. Following guidelines from Preacher and Hayes (2008) on multiple mediation models, we used bootstrapping procedures to examine the total effects containing both the direct and indirect effects of variables in the model. In the bootstrapping procedures, the path coefficients, standard errors, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals were produced with 5000 times re-sampled data (Cheung, 2007). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using analysis of moment structure 24 with the maximum likelihood method of estimation.

#### *4.3.1 Measurement model*

To verify the appropriateness of measurement models for the current study, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed. The data met the linearity assumption, and severe multicollinearity was not detected. The measurement model was assessed using various fit indices and cutoff criteria recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999): Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > .95, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) > .95, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) < .08, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < .06. The CFA results revealed that the five-factor model fits well with the sample data (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 315.4/125 = 2.52$ , CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .06).

**Table 2***Measurement Model*

Factors and Items	$\lambda$	AVE	CR
<i>Attitude toward Spokesperson</i>			
		0.89	0.97
Bad – Good	.96		
Not likeable – Likeable	.89		
Unpleasant – Pleasant	.97		
Uninteresting - Interesting	.96		
<i>Advertising Perception</i>			
Commercial or Non-Commercial	-	-	-
<i>Attitude toward Advertising</i>			
		0.88	0.97
Bad – Good	.93		
Not likeable – Likeable	.95		
Unpleasant – Pleasant	.95		
Uninteresting - Interesting	.93		
<i>Attitude toward Brand</i>			
		0.87	0.97
Bad – Good	.92		
Unappealing – Appealing	.91		
Unpleasant – Pleasant	.93		
Unattractive – Attractive	.94		
Uninteresting - Interesting	.95		
<i>Purchase Intention</i>			
		0.89	0.97
Unlikely / likely	.97		
Improbable / probable	.96		
Uncertain / certain	.90		
Definitely not / definitely	.95		

Notes: Average variance extracted (AVE), Construct reliability (CR)

As shown in Table 2, all factor loadings were high ranged from .92 to .97. All reliability coefficients were larger than .70 (ranging from .75 to .97). The average variance extracted (AVE) estimates for each construct ranged from .87 to .89, indicating that the amount of variance explained by the constructs was greater than the variance explained by measurement error (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). In addition, the square

roots of AVE values for all constructs were larger than the corresponding inter-construct correlations (Table 3), supporting the discriminant validity of the measurement platform. Based on the overall results of the CFAs, it is deemed that the measurement model was acceptable with good model fitness. The analysis also demonstrated strong evidence of reliability and validity in the scale.

**Table 3** Means, Standard Deviations (SD), Correlations, and Squared Roots of AVE

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attitude toward Spokesperson	5.13	1.93	<b>.94</b>				
2. Ad Perception	.47	.50	-.16	<b>--</b>			
3. Ad attitude	5.83	1.52	.63	-.25	<b>.94</b>		
4. Brand Attitude	5.63	1.55	.59	-.26	.87	<b>.93</b>	
5. Purchase Intention	5.38	1.82	.50	-.30	.61	.77	<b>.94</b>

Notes: The square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVEs) for each construct appear in boldface on the diagonal of the correlation matrix.

#### 4.3.2 Structural Model

A structural equation model (SEM) analysis was conducted to test the overall research model and hypothesized relationships among the research constructs. The goodness-of-fit indices of the structural model fits well with the data (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 308.53/126 = 2.45$ , CFI = .97, TLI = .97, SRMR = .03, RMSEA = .07). Table 4 presents parameter estimates for the structural model assessing the theoretical relationships among  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$ , advertising perception, advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intention. The SEM results revealed that  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  had a nega-

tive relationship with advertising perception ( $\beta = -.16, p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1 which anticipated that individuals with favorable  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  tends to perceive advertising associated with the spokesperson as non-commercial advertising. As displayed in Table 3, confidence intervals indicate significance of the relationship between  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  and advertising perception, which do not contain zero between upper and lower bound distribution estimates.

As expected, advertising perception had significant influences on advertising attitudes ( $\beta = -.16, p < .01$ : Hypothesis 2a supported) and purchase intention ( $\beta = -.10, p < .05$ : Hypothesis 2c

supported), but not for brand attitudes ( $\beta = -.04, p = n.s.$ : Hypothesis 2b not supported).

Regarding the impact of spokesperson,  $A_{spokesperson}$  had significant influences on advertising attitudes ( $\beta = .60, p < .05$ : Hypothesis3a supported) and brand attitudes ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ : Hypothesis3b supported). However,  $A_{spokesperson}$  did not exhibit significant influences on purchase intention ( $\beta = .05, p = n.s.$ : Hypothesis3c not supported). As predicted in hypothesis 4 and 5, the relationship between  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  ( $\beta = .80, p < .05$ ), and the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intention ( $\beta = .73, p < .01$ ) are both statistically significant.

Using bootstrapping technique, we tested indirect effects of  $A_{spokesperson}$  on advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intention through multiple mediators in the model. As shown in Table 4, the indirect effect of  $A_{spokesperson}$  on advertising attitudes through advertising perception ( $\beta = .09, S.E. = .01, p < .01$ ), brand attitudes through advertising perception and advertising attitudes ( $\beta = .43, S.E. = .04, p < .01$ ), and purchase intention through all mediators ( $\beta = .37, S.E. = .04, p < .01$ ) were all statistically significant. The variance explained by the latent constructs was 41.7% (advertising attitudes), 75.5% (brand attitudes), and 63.4% (purchase intention).

**Table 4** Hypothesized Structural Model using Bootstrapping Procedures

Hypothesis: Path	Bootstrap estimate		95% Confidence Interval Bias-corrected	
	B	SE	Lower	Upper
H1: Attitude Spokesperson → Ad Perception	-.16**	.06	-.29	-.05
H2a: Ad Perception → Ad Attitude	-.16**	.05	-.27	-.06
H2b: Ad Perception → Brand Attitude	-.04	.03	-.10	.03
H2c: Ad Perception → Purchase Intention	-.10*	.04	-.19	-.01
H3a: Attitude Spokesperson → Ad Attitude	.60*	.04	.52	.67
H3b: Attitude Spokesperson → Brand Attitude	.09*	.05	.01	.19
H3c: Attitude Spokesperson → Purchase Intention	.05	.06	-.06	.15
H4: Ad Attitude → Brand Attitude	.80*	.04	.71	.87
H5: Brand Attitude → Purchase Intention	.73**	.04	.64	.80
Indirect Effects				
Attitude Spokesperson → Ad Attitude	.09**	.01	.01	.06
Attitude Spokesperson → Brand Attitude	.43**	.04	.43	.60
Attitude Spokesperson → Purchase Intention	.37**	.04	.37	.52

Notes: Two-tailed tests of significance - \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## 5. Discussion and Implications

Despite a plethora of celebrity effectiveness research within marketing and communication literature, little empirical research exists to fully explain the impact of a controversial/ polarized figure. The current study was conducted to fill the conceptual void existing in this particular area of research by combining the MTM with the PKM.

The MTM framework posits that a celebrity's effectiveness stems from the celebrity's meanings, which pass on to the endorsed product/brand. Given that transfer of meanings celebrity embody is facilitated and accomplished by advertising (Batra & Homer, 2004; McCracken, 1989), the celebrity's effectiveness was examined within such context. Consistent with previous studies using MTM framework, this study provides empirical evidence supporting the transfer of meaning from celebrity to brand. It should be noted that both positive and negative meanings were present toward the controversial spokesperson considered in this study. Thus, although speculation surrounding controversial spokesperson being perceived in a negative light, controversy does not simply equate with negativity, but as found in this study, rather positive and negative association may coexist. Unlike the finding of Campbell and Warren (2012), this study shows that positive meanings associated with the celebrity were dominant, which has a more significant impact on brand beliefs than negative association. This provides insight into the impact of controversial spokesperson on brand beliefs and advertising effectiveness.

To further explore the impact and effectiveness

of the celebrity spokesperson, a follow-up study was conducted to test the conceptual model. Accordingly, Study 2 hypothesized and sought to examine individuals'  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  based on meanings derived from and accumulated through a public role. The result confirmed H1 that individuals with favorable  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  are more likely to perceive the ad as non-commercial. Although a celebrity's persuasive effect specifically tied to  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  has been limited, in line with prior studies that have considered attractiveness as a comprehensive  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$ , this supports general conception that the attractiveness (likeability) of the spokesperson has an impact on consumers' perception of the ad (Baker & Churchill, 1977). It is to be noted, however, that such a finding be interpreted with caution as it may hold true confined to the specific case context. The significance of this study lies in that unlike previous studies which viewed and used attractiveness or likability to measure feelings toward the spokesperson (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016; Silvera & Austad, 2004), the current study applied MTM and examined individuals' specific  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$ , responding to a particular meaning. As such, taking into account Kaepernick's role in supporting a social cause, it may have led to varied interpretations of the ad and ultimately those more favorable toward Kaepernick perceived the persuasive attempt as advocacy. Thus, it could be implied that the source effect is present on how consumers interpret and perceive the ad is not merely because of the attractiveness/ likability of the celebrity spokesperson as previous research suggests, but rather a result of the attitudes toward the celebrity's meaning.

To further investigate the effectiveness of the celebrity spokesperson, we explored the relationships between  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  with  $A_{\text{ad}}$ ,  $A_{\text{b}}$ , and purchase intention. The results were consistent with previous studies showing that  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  had significant positive effects on  $A_{\text{ad}}$  and  $A_{\text{b}}$  (Amos et al., 2008; Silvera & Austand, 2004). Interestingly, contrary to the previous studies (e.g., Chi et al., 2009), a significant relationship between  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  and purchase intention did not emerge. Kaepernick has been representing Nike since 2011, but not until the 30<sup>th</sup> “*Just do it*” anniversary commercial did the endorsement deal and the relationship between Nike and Kaepernick become prominent. Thus, in order for Nike to realize a significant relationship leading to purchase intention, Nike and Kaepernick may need to establish a stronger and continuous linkage. Such a finding could also be partially explained given that the ad did not deliberately support or appear with a product or service.

Further, of particular interest in this study was to examine how advertising perception influences attitudes and behavior. As expected in H2a and H2c, consumers perceiving the ad as non-commercial were positively associated with  $A_{\text{ad}}$  and purchase intention. Consistent with the findings of previous research (Kim et al., 2013; Manuel et al., 2014), this suggests that advertising perception influenced advertising attitudes and purchase intention, as measured from these constructs. However, a direct impact of advertising perception on brand attitudes (H2b) was not detected. This may be due to a positive and strong relationship that exists between advertising attitudes and brand attitudes (H4) found in prior

research on advertising (e.g., Yoo & MacInnis, 2005). In other words, this provides speculation that when advertising perception affects brand attitudes through advertising attitudes, the strong relationship between advertising attitudes and brand attitudes may overshadow the direct impact of advertising perception on brand attitudes. The results of the current study showed that advertising perception results in favorable brand attitudes through advertising attitudes.

In addition, this study found an indirect effect of spokesperson attitudes on advertising attitudes via advertising perception. This confirms the premise of the PKM model and establishes the important mediating role of advertising perception. Consumers are generally skeptical of advertising, which may trigger negative  $A_{\text{ad}}$  (Lee, 2013). However, when it comes to non-commercial advertising, consumers are more receptive and are more likely to positively evaluate the ad (Kim et al., 2013). This provides speculation that the favorable attitudes toward Kaepernick’s voluntary behavior supporting of a social cause may affect how consumers perceived the ad, and via the path, subsequently influenced  $A_{\text{ad}}$ .

A major contribution of this study to existing communication and marketing literature lies in providing a fundamental base for understanding celebrity endorsement effectiveness. The current study extends the line of research on advertising effectiveness, focusing on a controversial spokesperson in advertising. In particular, the proposed models in this study combined the MTM with the PKM as a background theory. This conceptual framework provides insights into how consumers perceive and accept advertising.

The findings that  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  have both direct and indirect influences on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes through advertising perception serve as benchmark data that will spark future research in this growing area of sport marketing communication. This study demonstrated that the MTM and PKM theory appeared to provide sport scholars a theoretically sound and parsimonious model that can be used to predict consumers'  $A_{\text{ad}}$  and  $A_{\text{b}}$ , and purchase intention.

The results also provide sport practitioners with several meaningful implications. First, in this study,  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$  is the most significant determinant of celebrity endorsement effectiveness. There has been some speculation that controversial spokesperson may lead to a negative outcome. However, an encouraging finding of this study is the notion of controversy. As found in this study, simply equating controversy with negativity is premature as using such a spokesperson for communicating a brand could be equally effective and have a strong impact on consumers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to advertising. A precondition is, perhaps, that the controversy or negativity not to be associated with celebrity transgression that are deemed unethical or immoral (e.g., marital infidelity, assault, drugs). How individuals perceive the cultural and social significance, the meaning of the spokesperson, thus is of an importance which will dictate one's  $A_{\text{spokesperson}}$ . Accordingly, this provides insight into the importance of identifying celebrity spokesperson who possess favorable symbolic properties that will not only resonate well with intended consumers, but also whether such meanings are desirable for the respective brand. It sug-

gests that sport organizations should make efforts to select the right spokesperson in order to maximize the effectiveness of marketing communication activities.

Second, advertising perception is found to be one of the most important determinants of advertising attitudes. This result indicates that consumers tend to be less skeptical to advertising when they perceive advertising as non-commercials. In addition, according to the PKM, individuals are more receptive toward advertising when congruent with their values and beliefs. This suggests that companies should engage in executing a marketing communication strategy that focuses on tapping into values and beliefs consistent with their targeted audience. In particular, marketers can reduce resistance from target markets by creating brand associations with a spokesperson who may possess a particular meaning as found in this study.

## **6.Limitation/Future Research**

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There are several limitations that need to be acknowledged in this study as it provides important guidelines for future research. First, the current study attempted to increase the generalizability of the study by recruiting participants via Amazon's crowdsourcing platform, MTurk. Although the MTurk's respondent pool is known to be much more diverse and representative of the population than a typical student sample or online panels (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), it was found that Mturk samples were more politically liberal, younger, less religious, and less racially diverse compared to the U.S. population (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Huff & Tingley,

2015). As such, caution is needed in interpreting and generalizing the findings. Thus, in order to develop a more comprehensive view of celebrity effects and to increase generalizability of the present research findings, efforts should be made to replicate this study using a different sample. In addition, this study was restricted to U.S. residents. However, given that a successful advertising in one country may not hold true in others, this research can be extended to diverse cultural settings in different countries.

Another limitation revolves around the fact that the present study was confined to one brand (Nike), which is a well-established and mature brand. Previously Shimp, Stuart, and Engles' (1991) study concluded that advertisement has differing effects on brand attitudes which is dependent on the level of brand novelty. In the future, research should continue to examine and compare the effects of a controversial or polarized spokesperson on unknown, moderately known, and mature brand in different contexts. Further, Nike's spokesperson, Colin Kaepernick, brings to light a specific social issue (social equality), hence a particular cultural meaning associated. Therefore, future research investigating how meaning attached to the spokesperson subsequently transfer to the different level of brand novelty should provide more guidance for advertisers.

Lastly, in this study as a means to measure consumer's behavioral response, purchase intention was used. As empirical results in this study brought forward the cultural significance of the spokesperson playing a critical role, it is worth

to investigate in future research the effect of the celebrity spokesperson extending to other behavioral response with respect to their role (e.g., support for racial equality).

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