Replicating the Kaepernick Effect:
The Power of Polarizing Frames to Make or Break Consumer Loyalty

Emily Patricia McCaul

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Michael A. Horning, Chair
Nneka J. Logan
Beth M. Waggenspack

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ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates the ways media frames influence attitude towards brands when the brand endorses a controversial celebrity spokesperson. This research was created with the intent to fill a current gap in communication research, providing original data and addressing the influence that external factors, specifically media frames and political orientations, hold over an audience's perception of spokespeople and the brands they later endorse. This was accomplished through an original, cross-sectional experiment that measured how celebrity athletes, who speak out about partisan issues, function as agents for messaging in brand advertisements. This thesis draws upon the communication theories of agenda setting, and primarily framing, in order to evaluate how impactful media frames of an athlete can become to consumers once the media highlights the spokesperson through a polarizing frame. This experiment attempts to replicate 'the Kaepernick effect,' inspired by the polarizing media coverage of Colin Kaepernick over his 2016-NFL season with the 49-ers, leading up to his partnership with Nike for its 2018 "Dream Crazy" advertisement. The findings from this study reveal that media frames, though carrying some impact, are not the most influential factor in shaping audiences' attitudes towards spokespeople or the brands they advertised. This study contributes new data to the discipline of media effects research, extending the conversation about celebrity athlete endorsers, the influence of media frames on consumer response, and implications for future studies.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the effects that media frames, within news stories, have on audiences' attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, this thesis examines audiences' developed attitudes towards controversial celebrity spokespeople, who speak out about partisan issues, and later endorse or align themselves with a brand. This thesis utilizes an original experiment that measures how controversial celebrity figures, athletes specifically, function as agents for messaging in brand advertisements. This thesis draws upon the communication theories of agenda setting, and primarily framing, in order to evaluate how impactful media frames of an athlete can become to consumers once the media highlights the spokesperson through a polarizing frame. This experiment attempts to replicate 'the Kaepernick effect,' inspired by the polarizing media coverage of Colin Kaepernick over his 2016-NFL season with the 49-ers, leading up to his partnership with Nike for its 2018 "Dream Crazy" advertisement. The findings from this study reveal that media frames, though carrying some impact, are not the most influential factor in shaping audiences' attitudes towards spokespeople or the brands they advertised. This study contributes new data to the discipline of media effects research, extending the conversation about celebrity athlete endorsers, the influence of media frames on consumer response, and implications for future studies.

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Dedication

To my siblings, Allison and Liam, who first inspired me to consider the effects of media among the generations — and to my parents, who have always supported me in my pursuit of knowledge, growth and learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In September of 2018, a 30-year-old, ex-49ers quarterback from the National Football League became the face of Nike's 30-year-anniversary "Just Do It" campaign (Belson & Draper, 2018). The news of this ex-quarterback's partnership with Nike came directly from his Twitter feed; the tweet linked to a Nike advertisement depicting only a close-up of his eyes and a call to action, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything," (Draper & Creswell, 2019). This spokesperson was Colin Kaepernick.

His tweet was sent out on September 3, 2018 following his highly documented 2016-season with the NFL in which he first chose to abstain from standing during the National Anthem (Barrabi, 2019). Kaepernick told media sources his motivation for kneeling and sitting during the National Anthem was in protest against "police brutality and racial injustice in the United States" (Barrabi, 2019, para. 11; Gregory, 2017). Two days following Kaepernick's announcement of his partnership with Nike, the corporation debuted a video advertisement, with Kaepernick as the narrator, titled "Dream Crazy" ("Nike," 2018; McCaul, 2019). This two-minute, five-second video ad later went on to receive an Emmy, accrue millions of views online and secure the spot of media headlines across the world (Belson & Draper, 2018).

The response that followed this act of "athlete activism" (Marston, 2017, p. 64) from consumers ranged from boycotts and burning of shoes (Bostock, 2018; Green, 2018) to surges in stocks and sales (Abad-Santos, 2018; Berr, 2018; Youn, 2018), begging the question: What sparked the polarized response and controversial reactions to this advertisement campaign? This thesis seeks to answer that question. It will explore how media frames influence consumer attitudes and behavior when a brand uses a controversial figure whose ideology stance converges with the brand's.

In the 21st Century, it is not uncommon to find a brand that has chosen to align its values with values from popular spokespeople or trending news headlines made visible to the public; these strategies are often adopted by brands with the intent to create or establish a positive corporate image or adopt a strategy to fulfill a version of corporate social responsibility (Keller & Richey, 2006). This trend of affiliation (with desired values) by association (with desired representatives), continues to appear in media and across news outlets, specifically tied to themes of social responsibility and corporate social responsibility (Keller & Richey, 2006). This enables brands and corporations to align themselves with a stance on a controversial topic by associating themselves with a spokesperson who has previously spoken out about the social value. This concept continues to surface across media, accompanied by both positive and negative commentary that propel the conversation into a spotlight (Keller & Richey, 2006).

At times, these corporate messages of advocacy are well-received by members of the general public, especially if audience members are already (1) consumers or supporters of the brand, or (2) already agree with the brand's views on the controversial topic before hearing the advertisement's message (Keller & Richey, 2006). This can be measured in a variety of manners by looking at items like consumer attitude (e.g., tone in online conversations, trending hashtags associated with the event) or behavioral responses (e.g., an increase in sales). However, sometimes these messages are ill-received by members of the general public, and the message can be interpreted by the public as insincere or frustrating if they are inconsistent (Keller & Richey, 2006). This can also be measured by items like consumer attitude (e.g., negative tone in online conversations) or behavioral responses (e.g., loss of revenue or sales) (Bostock, 2018).

My interest in the functional relationship between consumer attitude and behavioral intentions, along with the impacts of Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement, served as the

inspiration for this study. It has informed the design of the stimulus materials created for this thesis, which have been modelled after the news content published before the announcement of Kaepernick's partnership with Nike and its release of "Dream Crazy." This was done with the intent to further illustrate the impact of a brand's decisions to align its values with the actions of a spokesperson and to highlight the role media play in framing a spokesperson. At its core, this thesis seeks to identify the role news frames play in shaping public opinion; this thesis will evaluate how the news coverage of a brand's spokesperson possesses the capability to influence viewers' attitudes and inform their behavior, like purchase intention, thereafter.

The literature review of this thesis will first address the necessary background information needed to understand the inspiration for this study. The inspiration for this study comes from Nike's 2018 "Dream Crazy" advertisement which featured a controversial celebrity spokesperson, Colin Kaepernick, as its narrator. Following the presentation of this necessary background information, the mass communication theories of both agenda setting and framing will be explicated. These theories will explain the ways that information can be presented by the media and additionally touch on the varying responses elicited from consumers of said media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). Specifically, literature regarding the ways that framing impacts attitudes toward spokespeople, attitudes towards brands and purchase intentions will also be explored. This literature provides a lens through which this study can be understood and a framework for the design of its research questions.

This quantitative study, including an original experiment administered with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), was created with the intent to answer nine research questions. This study includes a questionnaire with three pieces of original stimulus material (i.e., one video advertisement and two optional news stories) that participants were asked to

watch and provide a response to afterward. The specifics of this study's procedure are outlined within the methodology of this paper. Lastly, the final results of this study can be found at the end of this thesis coupled with a discussion that explains the implications of the study's findings; the findings of this study unpack not only the influence of media frames on audiences' attitudes and behaviors, but the often more influential effect of audiences' pre-existing political values and beliefs on their perception of media. In conjunction with the results and discussion of this study, implications for future research, study limitations and a conclusion of thought will be provided.

Replicating "The Kaepernick Effect"

"The Kaepernick Effect," is a phrase that has been colloquially associated with Kaepernick's decision to kneel publicly during the national anthem during his 2016-season with the 49-ers and the consequential effect it had on NFL players like Terrell Suggs, Leonard Fournette and Ray Lewis who later followed suit by kneeling during the national anthem as well (Garber, 2017); "the Kaepernick Effect" has also been referenced adjacent to actions taken by the general public who "join[ed] Kaepernick's movement," (Gibbs, 2017, parag. 2) indicated by "some type of protest activity on their [college and high school] fields" (Gibbs, 2017, parag. 2) during the national anthem. Lastly, the phrase has also been associated with Kaepernick's later appearance in Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement in 2018 and the attitudinal, behavioral and financial effects that ensued following the ad's release (Gamble, n.d.) For the purpose of this thesis, I have defined and will reference "the Kaepernick Effect" as follows: the Kaepernick Effect takes place when a controversial athlete, who was either previously or currently visible in the media, serves as a spokesperson for a public brand, and polarized media coverage as well as polarized reactions from the general public ensue. This is the concept that will be replicated and analyzed for this thesis experiment.

Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement served as the muse for this thesis, as well as the vision for the original experiment crafted and conducted for this study. Varying headlines and news frames from major American news outlets such as CNBC, FOX, The New York Times and USA Today have been presented over the course of time in which Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the National Anthem was documented by the media (Costello, 2019). This phenomenon indicates that messages can be both presented and perceived differently depending on factors of perception like viewer's values or political orientations (Haidt, 2012). In order to replicate the Kaepernick effect, an original, empirical study has been created in order to measure the effect that varying frames of a spokesperson can have on a consumer's response to said spokesperson (i.e., in the form of attitude and behavior).

Before the literature review was created, background information was collected in order to present readers with an overview of the real-life occurrence(s) that inspired the need for this study. This background section does not exist as a comprehensive review of the literature needed to create the theoretical framework for this experiment; rather, this section of background information was created as an additional resource to researchers and readers alike. This section was created to provide readers with a balanced, rich yet terse, historical context surrounding the depiction(s) of Kaepernick's image in the news prior to, during and directly following his involvement with Nike, its "Dream Crazy" commercial and "Just Do It" campaign in 2018 (Mather, 2019). It is my intent that after reading this section of background information, readers will be able to confidently understand and connect the questions that arose in response to Kaepernick's 2018-partnership with Nike to the need for this research study.

Chapter 2: Background

Nike's "Dream Crazy" Advertisement

Nike's Emmy Award-winning advertisement "Dream Crazy" displays intentional nods to issues of social justice and responsibility (Mitra, 2019). This ad from Nike was released on September 5, 2018 and was narrated by Colin Kaepernick, former NFL quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers. Kaepernick is recognized the first athlete to abstain from standing during the National Anthem in protest of police brutality against the African American community, as well as people of color (Mather, 2019).

The video advertisement ran for two minutes and five seconds, and the narration atop this video, delivered by Colin Kaepernick, included only 219 words. At the end of the advertisement, before the screen fades to black, a small message appears on the screen that reads, "It's only crazy until you do it." Within the final seconds of the ad, the first five words of the sentence fade away, and the message transforms into a separate, final message: "Just do it" (McCaul, 2019).

Throughout the Nike ad, there are several recurring themes communicated through visuals, many of which were associated with advocacy for specific groups of people existing across the United States. The advertisement shed light on issues of social justice with both verbal and visual references to (1) support of equal pay opportunities, (2) female representation in sports, (3) the LGBTQAI+ community, (4) the differently abled, (5) equal opportunities for education in America, (6) advocation for fair representation in U.S. sports, as well as (7) NFL players' decisions to abstain from standing during the National Anthem (McCaul, 2019).

These themes were identified by association with particular, politically vocal athletes who were featured across clips of B-roll, or secondary video footage, throughout the advertisement (McCaul, 2019). Each athlete featured in the advertisement was associated with a

specific cause or timely social issue. These themes were identified in my personal research completed in the spring of 2019, while conducting a thematic analysis of both the verbal and visual messages communicated in the ad. The information provided in 'ascribed ethnicity/cultural background' was collected after cross-checking three public sources for confirmation of consistently documented ethnic and cultural background information for each athlete.

Table 1

Athletes Featured in Nike's 2018-Ad "Dream Crazy"

No.	Name	Age	Ascribed Ethnicity/Cultural Background	Highlighted/Athletic Division
1	Nyjah Huston	23	African-American & Japanese	Professional Skateboarder and 2020-Olympic Hopeful
2	Isaiah Bird	10	African-American	Youth-Wrestler (Born Differently Abled Without Legs)
3	Zeina Nassar	20	German-Muslim	5-Time Berlin Boxing Champion
4	Kai Lenny	25	Caucasian-American	World Champion Stand-Up Paddler and Surfer
5	Megan Blunk	29	Caucasian-American	2016-Paralympic Gold Medalist in Basketball (Paralyzed from Waist Down)
6	Eliud Kipchoge	34	Kenyan	2016-Olympic Gold Medalist in Long Distance Running
7	Odell Beckham Jr.	25	African-American	NFL Wide Receiver; 2014-Offensive Rookie of the Year for NY Giants
8	Alicia Woollcott	19	Caucasian-American	Michigan-Highschool, Female Linebacker and Homecoming Queen
9	Charlie Jabaley	31	Caucasian-American	Ironman Competitor and Survivor of Brain Tumor
10	Lacey Baker	26	Caucasian-American	First Openly Queer Skateboarder on Nike's SB Team
11	Alphonso Davies	19	Liberian-Canadian	First Major League Soccer Athlete Born in 2000s (Age 15); Born at Refugee Camp in Ghana
12	LeBron James	34	African-American	American Basketball Legend for NBA Lakers; Founder of "I Promise" School
13	Colin Kaepernick	31	African-American	Former NFL Quarterback for 49ers; First Athlete to Kneel During National Anthem; Narrator of "Dream Crazy"

14	US Soccer's Women's National Team	N/A	N/A	Hope Solo, Alex Morgan, Megan Rapinoe, and Becky Sauerbrunn file a case against EEOC for Unequal Pay
15	Shaquem Griffin	23	African-American	First One-Handed Player Drafted to NFL (Seattle Seahawks)
16	Serena Williams	37	African-American	American Tennis Legend

Nike's support for each of these ideas and issues were not outright evident upon first glance, as each of the athletes featured in the advertisement were shown briefly, less than 10 seconds each (i.e., aside from Kaepernick), and were not directly named or identified ("Nike," 2018; McCaul, 2019). Unless viewers of the advertisement were familiar enough with the athletes to identify them in a five to 10-second facial scan, the athletes featured in the ad may not have been recognized by viewers initially. This would require viewers to conduct a deeper analysis of the athletes referenced in the advertisement in order to understand Nike's support for each issue, as the average viewer may not have been able to identify every visual cue made within the ad (McCaul, 2019).

Aside from the video's focus on each of these issues of corporate social responsibility, the overarching focus of this advertisement was placed on Kaepernick, who served as the advertisement's narrator. Kaepernick, along with the polarized media coverage documenting his decision to abstain from standing during the national anthem, raised the exposure of this advertisement, creating traction for the ad's circulation (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019). The additional 15 athletes (i.e., and issues of social justice) featured in the "Dream Crazy" ad were also linked to the traction gained; viewers who were already familiar with a featured athlete would have possessed the ability to understand the underlying messages communicated in the advertisement when showcasing the athlete on-screen (McCaul, 2019). However, the 15 athletes featured in the advertisement were not the deep-seated

catalyst for this video's traction—in fewer words, they were not talked about as often as Kaepernick was in the media (Heller, 2018; McCaul, 2019).

It has been addressed in this section that previously published, polarizing media coverage of Kaepernick's decision to abstain from standing during the National Anthem, gave him exposure to more viewers leading up to the release of the Nike advertisement, than the other featured athletes. Further, the exposure Kaepernick gained in this space was controversial, as his decision to abstain from standing became politicized and associated with left political ideologies and liberal moral codes (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019). Kaepernick stated this decision was made in protest against police brutality (Mather, 2019), which was interpreted by some conservative news outlets as a jab at those who support the police, and additional ideas of nationalism or allegiance to America (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019). This not only polarized the issue but politicized the issue as well. When Nike chose to invite Kaepernick on as a spokesperson for this advertisement; here, he became an advocate for the brand, and by association, an advocate of the brand's values (Pan & Meng, 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility. Corporate social responsibility continues to gain prevalence and pertinence across spaces in corporate America in the 21st Century. Corporate social responsibility can be best understood as "the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contract" (Jones, 1980, p. 59—60). A corporation's CSR is typically defined alongside its corporate image, which is set by the corporation itself and functions as a doctrine of social responsibilities and values for the corporation to live by or align itself with (Keller & Richey, 2006). The execution of CSR often manifests in the form of activities and actions taken by the

corporation (David, Kline, & Dai, 2005), which can aid in the communication of the corporation's intentions, values and social focuses to the general public. The social responsibilities corporations choose to align themselves with will vary from corporation to corporation; David et al. (2005) provides a few examples of social responsibilities that corporations could align themselves with, including, but not limited to "supporting 5k walks for breast cancer research" and "promoting child adoption programs" (David et al., 2005, pp. 292). That being said, Epstein and Roy (2001) offer the idea that the effective communication of corporate action, is just as important as the actions taken.

Epstein and Roy (2001) place an emphasis on the value of effective communication within CSR for a few reasons. The primary need for effective communication exists here: Actions can be taken, and values can be adopted by a corporation, but until this information is effectively communicated to its intended audience, this information is entirely unknown (Epstein & Roy, 2001). In order to craft an effective CSR plan, there must be an equal level of effort administered to establish values, carry out actions and effectively communicate those values and actions to the public.

One limitation for corporations to consider, and ideally move in front of, is how trustworthy and ethical they are perceived by the public whilst establishing their CSR plan. Corporations must consider when, what and how they communicate messages to the public (DeTienne & Lewis, 2005). If their messages appear inconsistent with any of their previously established values, consumers — along with the general public — may not receive the corporations' messages well. If inconsistencies arise, they must be addressed and mitigated by the corporation in a sincere and timely manner.

Keller and Richey (2006) offer the idea that corporate image, or corporate identity, is heavily reliant upon corporate brand personality. Corporate brand personality is a space and opportunity for corporations to communicate "actual or idealized self-image" (Keller & Richey, 2006, pp. 76). Another integral point to note about corporate image is that a corporation's image is defined by corporate-employees and management, people on the inside of the company, rather than consumers or people on the 'outside looking in' to the corporation (Keller & Richey, 2006). Corporate image is a persona crafted by the individuals on the inside of the corporation; they decide how, and by whom, they want to be received in the public (Keller & Richey, 2006). This is diametrically opposed to the construction of corporate reputation. Unlike corporate image, corporate reputation is sculpted by the public or consumers' perspective of the corporation; there is less control on the corporation's part in this scenario, as it introduces the voice of others into the establishment of the corporation's trustworthiness, prominence and influence.

Nike's Incorporation of CSR in "Dream Crazy." There were several themes identified from the verbal and non-verbal messages communicated in Nike's "Dream Crazy." Many of these themes were presented alongside a specific athlete, or in association with multiple athletes, featured in the video who serves as spokespeople for the themes. Specifically, eight sub-themes were identified in this advertisement that fell underneath the umbrella of corporate social responsibility (McCaul, 2019). These themes were identified via two variables: verbal messaging (e.g. Colin Kaepernick's narration and text presented across the screen) and non-verbal messaging (e.g. video clips of athletes overcoming challenges, working diligently and experiencing triumph). The eight sub-themes of corporate social responsibility identified in "Dream Crazy" are as follows:

1. Support of refugees.
2. Support of equal pay.

3. Support of women (in sports).
4. Support of the differently abled.
5. Support of the LGBTQ+ community.
6. Support of equal opportunities in American education.
7. Advocation for fair representation and equal opportunity in U.S. sports.
8. Support of NFL players' decision to kneel in protest of police brutality.

Each of these eight sub-themes, categorized as themes of corporate social responsibility, were presented alongside an athlete, or multiple athletes. The athletes selected for this advertisement were utilized by Nike to increase viewers' awareness of specific current social issues (McCaul, 2019). Nike's decision to feature these athletes in its corporate advertisement communicated a message of support by association. Image 2 features athletes who were visible on screen when the message or theme of corporate social responsibility was highlighted (McCaul, 2019).

Table 2

Sub-Themes of CSR Associated with Athletes from Nike's "Dream Crazy"

No.	Sub-Themes of CSR	Athlete
1	Support of Refugees	Alphonso Davies
2	Support of Equal Pay	US Soccer's Women's National Team
3	Support of Women (in Sports)	US Soccer's Women's National Team; Serena Williams; Zeina Nassar; Megan Blunk; Alicia Woollcott
4	Support of the LGBTQ+ Community	Lacey Baker; Megan Rapinoe (US Soccer's Women's National Team)
5	Support of Equal Opportunities in American Education	LeBron James
6	Advocation for Fair Representation and Equal Opportunity in U.S. Sports	Isaiah Bird; Zeina Nassar; Eliud Kipchoge; Odell Beckham Jr., Lacey Baker; Megan Blunk; Alphonso Davies; LeBron James; Colin Kaepernick; Shaquem Griffin; Serena Williams
7	Support of the Differently Abled	Isaiah Bird; Megan Blunk; Shaquem Griffin
8	Support of NFL Players' Decision to Kneel in Protest of Police Brutality	Colin Kaepernick

News Coverage of Kaepernick

Reactions to Kaepernick's feature in Nike's "Dream Crazy" ad varied from media outlet to media outlet, as well as from viewer to viewer (Costello, 2019). Though before the Nike ad was ever released, news outlets were talking about Kaepernick. Media outlets documented the events that transpired during Kaepernick's final season with the San Francisco 49ers when he first began to sit and kneel during the National Anthem in the fall of 2016 in protest of police brutality against the black community in America (Mather, 2019). Additionally, media outlets also documented the unveiling of Nike's "Dream Crazy" ad and Kaepernick's feature in its fall 2018 "Just Do It" campaign (Mather, 2019). However, depending on the media outlet's political leaning and frame of choice, readers could digest two articles about the same event with entirely different points of focus (Kuypers, 2013). Frames surrounding the coverage of Kaepernick in the media varied and contributed to a polarization of the social issue(s) associated with Kaepernick and addressed in the advertisemen (Costello, 2019).

Frames of Kaepernick's Decision to Kneel for National Anthem. Prior research shows that biases in media coverage can construct certain ways of understanding an event (Haidt, 2012; Kuypers, 2013; Lakoff, 1996). There are ways to identify the presence of a frame, or media bias, in a news article. According to Kuypers' (2013) research conducted on the deconstruction of news and journalism, a few factors that may be used to camouflage bias in a news article include "sandwiching" (p. 147), "unbalanced use of sources" (p. 148), "labeling" (p. 149) and "exclusion of oppositional information" (p. 150). Within the news coverage of Kaepernick's decision to abstain from standing during the national anthem, these four factors highlighted by Kuypers' (2013) research: (1) sandwiching, (2) unbalanced use of sources, (3) labeling and (4) exclusion of oppositional information could be identified in news stories on both ends of the

political spectrum (i.e., from both left and right-leaning sources). An exploration of these factors was deemed necessary in order to further evaluate how these factors might impact consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. Additionally, these factors were considered and utilized in the creation of stimulus materials for this thesis's experiment. For example, FOX News released a news lead the day before the official release of the Nike advertisement as a "FOX NEWS FIRST," story on September 4, 2018 with a headline titled "Nike under fire for siding with Kaepernick" ("FOX NEWS FIRST," 2018). The first line of the news lead began with the question, "Did Nike 'Just Do' themselves in with Kaepernick?" ("FOX NEWS FIRST," 2018). The story pointed to Kaepernick's controversial past in abstaining from standing during the National Anthem in protest of police brutality toward the African American community in America, mentioning that he had not been employed by the NFL since 2016 (Mather, 2019).

On the other side of the news and political spectrum, MSNBC released a news video the day before the ad launch, titled, "New eyes on Kaepernick's NFL rejection after 'Madden 19' omission" ("Touré and Kmele Foster debate," 2018). In the video, Foster and Touré debated Kaepernick's decision to either sit or kneel during the National Anthem (Mather, 2019). discussing whether or not his actions were worth the negative media coverage he gained; following his 2016 season, Kaepernick opted out of his contract with San Francisco in order to seek other opportunities within the NFL (Barrabi, 2019). However, he was not resigned to the NFL by any of the 32 teams in the following 2017 season, (Mather, 2017).

The caption for this news video from MSNBC reads, "Colin Kaepernick, an outspoken athlete, used his former platform to bring attention to the loss of black and brown lives at the hands of police with his 'take a knee' protests. Many believe he paid for it with his NFL career" ("Touré and Kmele Foster debate," para. 1, 2018). The tone to this coverage framed Kaepernick

in a different light than that of the coverage presented by FOX, despite the fact that both pieces were released on the same day and addressed the same topic. These news frames directed readers' attention to certain ideas and values that would become commonly associated with Kaepernick as a result of the general public's growing interest in the event (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019). These news stories presented frames of Kaepernick preceding the general public's exposure to Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement and Kaepernick's feature in the ad (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019).

Audiences Response to Kaepernick's Role in Nike's "Dream Crazy." The digital conversations surrounding the release of Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement stretched across media, local news hubs, as well as social media (Bostock, 2018). The advertisement gained exposure and increased its reach as its circulation online increased (Bostock, 2018). The news industry played an influential role in the rise of this advertisement's exposure, by increasing the topic's circulation and scope (Iyengar, Van den Bulte, & Valente, 2011). Not only did the news industry increase the advertisement's exposure, but it utilized frames within its media coverage to draw attention to certain issues and ideas from within the advertisement (Ashuri, 2017; Carragee and Roefs 2004; Scheufele 1999). These concepts of framing and agenda setting highlight the important role media frames play in news coverage of events like controversial, politically charged advertisements (Roberts & McCombs, 1994).

According to Youn (2018) the public's perception of Nike following the release of this advertisement was mixed. Nike experienced a surge in stock prices and sales—its income went up 10 percent within the four months following the release of its ad—indicating that the messages presented in the advertisement resonated with a number of viewers positively (Youn,

2018). However, Nike also received backlash for its association with Kaepernick, as well as other athletes featured in the ad — there were a total of 16 athletes featured in Nike's advertisement including Kaepernick (McCaul, 2019). Social media-users posted videos destroying Nike products such as shoes, socks and cleats (Bostock, 2018). The varying behavioral responses from consumers after the release of the advertisement indicate a difference in consumer attitude and consumer values, which leads researchers to believe consumer attitude has the capacity to inform consumer behavior (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987).

These events raised important questions about the role of the media in interpreting controversial events and also prompted me to consider how the media's portrayal of these events impact audience attitudes towards brands. In fewer words, is it profitable for media to tie themselves to social justice issues? Does the decision impact the company's bottom line? These are questions I explorer further in this study. To begin, this thesis begins its examination of this phenomenon by first examining the communication theories of agenda setting and framing.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Agenda Setting

There is a significant body of research that has focused on understanding how the media play a role in the public's understanding of current events (Cohen, 1963; Lang & Lang, 1966, McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In early communication research, media scholars subscribed to a theory of powerful media effects, but this notion has long since been abandoned. (Cohen, 1963; Lang & Lang, 1966, McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the 70s, media scholars began to think of media as having limited effects and suggested that the media set the agenda for what we should think about (Cohen, 1963; Lang & Lang, 1966, McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In more modern times, agenda setting theories have given way to framing theories, acknowledging that not only do media frame what the public think about, but that media (i.e., with different ideological perspectives) also provide the public with a framework to understand those events (Scheufele, 2000; Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 1998). This section of the study explores early work on agenda setting theory to lay some groundwork and provide context for more recent work on framing and how this theory guides this research.

Historically, the American media has encouraged consumers to see certain issues as more relevant than others (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Agenda setting is a theory of mass communication that attempts to explain this phenomenon. It assumes the media selects the topics it wants to publicize to its audiences, with the intent of selecting topics that are relevant to the industry itself, rather than its consumers; in fewer words, this theory informs the public of what issues are important to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Cohen, 1963). Agenda setting measures the salience of an issue, or how frequently the same topic is covered, in the news (Scheufele, 2000).

McCombs and Shaw (1972) are accredited with laying the theoretical framework for agenda setting theory; they based much of their theory for agenda setting off the research provided by Lang and Lang (1966, who found "the mass media force attention to certain issues," (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177; Lang & Lang, 1966, p. 468). With this concept established in the 1960s, researchers aspired to identify the connections between what the public consumes and how they decided to consume it.

Agenda setting, as a theory of communication, assumes the media select the topics they choose to cover in the news. Rather than the media informing its audience of what to think, agenda setting theory suggests that the media informs its audience of what to think about (Entman, 2007, p. 165; Cohen, 1963, p. 13). For example, prior research has shown that when sports figures conduct themselves in atypical manners, the media selects these events for coverage of their news agenda (Li, 2018; Ma and Tan, 2013). One example of this concept in media can be observed in the news coverage surrounding Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the national anthem. Kaepernick decided to kneel during the National Anthem, in protest of police brutality toward the African American community at the start of each 49ers NFL football game in 2016 (Mather, 2019). However, though Kaepernick made the decision to kneel, the media made the decision to highlight Kaepernick's protest in the news cycle (Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017; Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; "FOX," 2019).

Two decades into the 21st Century, this concept continues to take shape in both mainstream and unconventional media outlets. In 2019, information flows at an uninterrupted pace through the screens of reporters and editors, and subsequently, consumers' technology (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). This influx of information online calls for a funnel, indicating that

some distinction must be made by news providers in order to categorize relevant, less relevant and irrelevant information to share with the public.

Ma and Tan (2013) conducted agenda setting research regarding sports-related media coverage of the 2009 Kaohsiung World Games in Taiwan. Ma and Tan (2013) found cities that hosted "mega sports event[s]" (p. 240) positioned themselves in a desirable space for positive media coverage as well as "increased visibility" (p. 240) across news outlets. This study highlights how and when media select certain events or people to cover in the news and based on their affiliation with a marketable "mega event," the coverage can turn out favorably for them (p. 245). It also sheds light on factors that may incline media to select a certain topic for its agenda, deeming the story to be noteworthy. Another example of this can be seen in the research conducted by Li (2018) on Caitlyn Jenner.

As was stated previously, prior research has shown that when sports figures conduct themselves in atypical manners, the media often select these events for coverage in their news agenda (Li, 2018). Li (2018) studied the presence of agenda setting in the recent news coverage of Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner's public "gender transition" (p. 56) to Caitlyn Jenner in April 2015. Li's (2018) research identified patterns that occurred throughout the coverage of Jenner's "planned media events" (p. 56) regarding her transition, as well as its effects on print and video news coverage. Li (2018) found that coverage of transgender-related news following the release of Jenner's *20/20* special with Diane Sawyer, as well as her reality TV show *I am Cait,* were more inclined to include specific discourses and perspectives highlighted in the coverage of her gender transformation.

One specific example of research on the media's use of agenda setting in regards to the visibility of athletes and controversial events can be examined in the research conducted by

Eagleman (2008). Eagleman (2008) analyzed the presence of agenda setting in sports magazines when covering Major League Baseball players. Eagleman (2008) found that the MLB received a large amount of news coverage throughout the regular baseball season, and of that news coverage, stories could be found in national magazines, newspapers, televised-newscasts, satellite and cable television, as well as sports web sites like ESPN.com (Eagleman, 2008). This information indicates that the media have the capacity to increase the visibility of athletes, via agenda setting, across multiple platforms—not just newspapers. Additionally, in her findings, Eagleman (2008) noted that of all the news coverage she analyzed, the most commonly referenced item of identification for MLB players from minority groups, was their race (Eagleman, 2008). Often, if their race was referenced in an article, it was accompanied by negative stereotypes or offensive language (Eagleman, 2008).

Another recent example that highlights the way news media have utilized agenda setting to bring exposure to a controversial topic from an athlete can be examined through the media coverage surrounding Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow, who has been recognized across media outlets for speaking out about his Christian morals and values (Myers, 2013). Goethals (1997) asserts that though freedom of religion is guaranteed to its citizens in America, faith and religion are both still deemed to be private, personal subjects, making faith and religion a controversial topic for discussion. Though Tebow is most notably recognized for his identity as a football player, media outlets felt it notable to discuss Tebow's identity as a Christian, bringing this narrative to the forefront of the media's agenda during both his collegiate and national football career (Meyers, 2013).

Framing Theory

Research suggests that not only do media prompt audiences to think about specific issues, but the media also choose to privilege certain ways of thinking about those issues over others (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Scheufele, 2000). This theory of framing is where we now turn our focus, as it is the primary theory for understanding this study.

The functional purpose of framing extends beyond the purpose of agenda setting (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 1998). McCombs (1997) defines framing as the "selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed" (McCombs, 1997, p. 6). In fewer words, framing emphasizes certain "values, facts, and other considerations," creating the perception that certain items carry more relevance to an issue than other frames may present (Nelson, et al., 1997, p. 569). In contrast to agenda setting, consider that agenda setting directs audiences toward ideas to think about, whereas framing selects certain aspects of a perspective and presents those aspects "in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Weaver, McCombs and Shaw (1998) assert that framing is an organic extension of agenda setting, and framing has been classified as second-level agenda setting (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997). Scheufele (2000) helps to draws a clear line between the two theories and their functional purposes. Scheufele (2000) articulates that if agenda setting works to assess the salience of an issue, then by comparison, framing can be understood as working to assess the "salience of issue attributes" (Scheufele, 2000, p. 298).

According to McCombs and Weaver (1973) the concept of framing developed from individuals' basic needs to have events interpreted for them (i.e., need for orientation or NFO).

Scheufele's (2000) view of framing stemmed from the "theoretical premises" of attribution theory (p. 300). Attribution theory, which was first introduced by Heider (1930), exists under the working assumption that human beings lack the ability to fully comprehend the world around them; in light of this assumption, Heider (1930) predicted and found experimental support for his hypothesis that, in an attempt to make sense of the world, people use context clues and sensory details to attribute meaning to circumstances. This view of attribution framing contributed to Scheufele's (2000) explanation of "frame-building" (p. 307). It is worth noting the function of attribution theory in this study, as it contributes to both types of frames built in the framing process: media frames and audience frames (Scheufele, 2000).

Media frames, as discussed already, are assigned by the media as a "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events … the frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Whereas audience frames, also assigned in attempt to make sense of events, are defined by the consumers of media frames and attribute meaning to these events through the "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

This human need for orientation leads to the development of man-made frames, supplied by the media. In other words, the media provide orientation, or frames, to audiences in order to offer a perspective for understanding events (McCombs & Weaver, 1973). Gamson (1985), who later studied the use of framing in media, found that frames selected by journalists, organizations and other groups of people, possess the affordance to deploy "collective action aimed at social change" (p. 620). This is pertinent to recognize, as Gamson's (1985) research highlights the idea that frames possess the power to enact change in attitudes and behavior. Gamson's (1985) research also highlighted the tension that exists between news outlets (i.e., in their perceived

objectivity) and the public (i.e., in their perceived detection of media bias); this study served as one of the first to highlight the impacts of framing, allowing it to take shape in mass communication research (Gamson, 1985). Utilized by specific organizations and groups of people (i.e., journalists), framing involves the intentional action of constructing a frame around an idea, issue or person; Scheufele (2000) attributes individuals' efforts to build these frames from the influence of factors like "social norms and values," as well as "journalistic routines" (p. 307).

Framing theory has been analyzed, accessed and studied by several communication scholars (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Nelson, et al., 1997; Scheufele, 2000), but at its core—its central qualities remain the same from definition to definition. According to Chong and Druckman (2007) framing, "refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p. 103). In fewer words, one's message has the power to direct or redirect a consumer's understanding of an entity or idea entirely.

It has been discussed how framing can be conceptually understood by past researchers like Entman (1993) and McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (2014), as well as the ways one can identify frames in messaging (Gamson, 1985; Scheufele, 2000), but it is also important to acknowledge how framing theory functions within empirical research.

Kim, Walkosz and Iverson (2006) conducted research on frames of athletes, looking at the salience of details emphasized in the news coverage of professional women golfers in *USA Today*. Kim et al., (2006) found that when the media talked about female pro-golfers in the news, differentiations in content as well as frequency were significant in terms of race. When examining the news coverage received by female golfer Se Ri Pak, in comparison to female

golfers Annika Sorenstam and Karrie Webb, Pak received not only less media coverage after her golf victories, but she also received additional negative commentary (Kim et al., 2006). These findings affirmed that the media do in fact frame athletes in the media, and factors of both ethnicity, as well as gender, can be used as a catalyst for those frames (Kim et al., 2006).

Also of relevance to this area of research, is the news industry's role in providing the public with information and perspective about public events, in order to aid audiences in their need for orientation and developed attitudes toward the events, issues and ideas. As Ashuri (2017) highlights in his research on framing in online media, "framing is an ideological process within a larger political context that influences how meanings are constructed in media texts in support of certain interests and concerns" (Ashuri, 2017, p. 292; Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Scheufele, 1999). These constructed meanings Ashuri (2017) talks about can be observed in the media via headlines, paraphrasing of events, syntax and diction, and consequently tone and in what is discussed today as media bias ("How to Spot," 2020; Kuypers, 2013).

These agents of framing can persuade viewers and consumers to see messages from a specific perspective. Media bias, or framing bias, can be best understood as existing in the following three scenarios: distortion bias (i.e., falsification of events or reality), content bias (i.e., showing one side of content but not another's in political conflict) and decision-making bias (i.e., motivations of writers or journalists who document the events) (Entman, 2007). Media bias is important to acknowledge as it has been integrated into both framing and agenda-setting research; in examining media bias, researchers within mass communication are able to "conceptualize and understand their implications for political power" (Entman, 2007, p. 163).

Another recent example of this phenomenon can be observed in the research from Ventresca (2011) who looked at the news frames of Major League Baseball-player, Barry Bonds.

Ventresca (2011) found that the frames selected to highlight Bonds' journey to the all-time homerun record varied in both valence and discourse. Rather than speaking only to Bonds' performance on the field, many of the frames emphasized themes about his character, as well as Bonds' alleged use of steroids (Ventresca, 2011). This is a concept that has been utilized by other media outlets as well; research from Lewis and Weaver (2015) tells us that media will emphasize points about athletes' character in a frame, rather than their athletic performance, in order to shift audiences' focus to specific ideas about the athlete.

The impact of these factors can be observed throughout media—especially when the news frames are constructed around a specific person. One question that this thesis seeks to answer is: How do the media frames of a controversial spokesperson, an athlete in particular, impact the way audiences develop attitudes towards that person? The next section of this thesis will explore the relevant and recent research needed to better understand this phenomenon.

Framing's Impact on Attitude Towards Credibility of Speakers

Research shows that the media choose certain frames when covering controversial sports figures in the news; for example, Billings, et al. (2015) found that the way media portray LGBTQ+ athletes has evolved over the past sixty years to now include certain recurring narratives. When Jason Collins became the first male athlete, actively playing on an NBA team, to publicly identify as gay in 2013 — the media coverage of Collins skewed positive over negative in terms of frame valence, highlighting praise for Collins' decision to speak out about his sexuality (Billings, et al., 2015). These media frames built around Collins in 2013 serve as an example today of how the media conceptualizes moral and political ideologies, contributing to the creation of identity politics, and influencing attitudes towards individuals who are often spokespersons in the media (Billings, et al., 2015). This is relevant to recognize, because this

research highlights the idea that when an athlete speaks out about a moral or political issue, the media include certain frames that shift viewers' attention to particular parts of the athlete's speech (e.g., praise for impact on inclusivity in other social spheres) or assumptions about the athlete (e.g., the speaker is brave) (Billings, et al., 2015). This type of skewed coverage (i.e., positive vs. negative frames) of athletes has the capacity to result in a polarization of the issue, as well as a polarization of attitudes towards the speaker, as was the case with Jason Collins (Billings, et al., 2015; Moscowitz, 2013). The role the media play in interpreting controversial events, and interpreting information about a speaker, has led this thesis to consider how the media's portrayal of athletes, can impact audiences' attitudes toward the athlete; this is why this thesis will measure attitude towards credibility of a speaker.

Although athletes stand to raise awareness for political and moral issues when featured in the news, if the issue falls on a partisan line, partisan news coverage can be expected to follow (Costello, 2019); further, this division in news coverage can result in an amplification of counterarguments from media outlets on opposing political sides (Billings, et al., 2015; Moscowitz, 2013). For example, Blecha, Harwood and Seate (2010) conducted a study on the framing of "criminal behavior" in sports news (p. 343). Blecha et al., (2010) found that accusatory frames in newspaper articles about athletes, led audiences to see athletes as more deserving of consequences. The findings of this study concluded that frames of athletes in the news were influential in readers' attitudes towards athletes. Again, this research affirms the assertation that the way in which messages are presented to an audience (i.e., its frame) can have an impact on an audience's perception of the news subject (i.e., the athlete) and the athlete's credibility (Blecha et al., 2010). This is noteworthy, because if the audience does not find an athlete to be credible, it can impact their view of this athlete negatively in the future (Hughes &

Shank, 2005). Often, the credibility of an individual or speaker is measured via scales that include items of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Boyd & Shank, 2004; Ohanian, 1990; Pan & Meng, 2008).

Literature from Ohanian (1990) points to a few specific scale items to measure when evaluating an audience's perceived credibility of a celebrity endorser; Ohanian (1990) measures credibility with three dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. When gauging a celebrity endorser's trustworthiness in particular, researchers evaluate items like sincerity, dependability and honesty (Ohanian, 1990); whereas, when gauging a speaker's expertise, Ohanian (1990) argues that audiences consider items like skill, knowledgeability and experience. Lastly, Ohanian (1990)'s research shows that a speaker's attractiveness is also influential in the formation of an audience's attitudes towards the speaker; this can be measured through items like how classy, handsome or beautiful the speaker appears. These items are important to note, because the ways in which a sports figure or athlete are framed in the media can impact each of these dimensions of the athlete's overarching credibility, and therefore, directly impacts the audience's attitudes toward the athlete featured in the media (Boyd & Shank, 2004; Ohanian, 1990; Pan & Meng, 2008).

Also of relevance to this topic are questions about the positive or negative valence of a media frame. After studying viewer's developed attitudes towards athletes in the news, Yang (2015) found negative stereotypes in media frames were linked to audiences' "biased judgments, negative feelings such as fear, contempt, dislike (including distaste, disgust, unease), and desire for distance or avoidance" from the featured induvial (Ramasubramanian, 2005, 2010; Tan & Fujioka, 1997; Tan, Li, & Simpson, 1986; Yang, 2015, p. 255). Yang's (2015) research is relevant to this thesis, as it addresses the effect of a media frame's valence (i.e., positive or

negative) on the audience's perception of the athlete featured in the news story. Though Yang's research examines the impact of negative frames of athletes, it does not closely examine the impact of positive frames of athletes. This is a gap in the literature, as often media coverage that leans left or right may often seek to praise or diminish the actions of a political individuals. As a result, the research conducted in this thesis will include both and compare the effects of differing news frames on attitudes towards the credibility of a sports figure.

Research shows that within the creation of news frames, factors of both valence and content can play a role in the formation of audience attitudes towards a sport figure (Lewis & Weaver, 2015; Yang, 2015). The way frames are employed in news stories can direct audiences' attention toward specific ideas as journalists have been noted to "emphasize specific content in their stories" (Lewis & Weaver, 2015, p. 219). Lewis and Weaver (2015) found there to be a difference in audiences' attitudes towards an athlete after reading news stories about their athletic performance as opposed to their individual character qualities. They argue that when the background of an athlete is discussed in the news, attitudes toward the athlete will be impacted. This type of background information can include information about athletes' "individual characteristics" or their "personal lives" (p. 219). What this means in regard to attitude formations is that audiences' opinions of athletes are shaped by more than just their on-the-field and on-the-court performances.

Lewis and Weaver (2015) found when sports journalists employed frames of athletes that have to do with the athletes' character, as opposed to their performance, this had a marginally significant effect on audience's attitudes towards the athlete (e.g., how pleasant they found the athlete). Continually, after reading a news story about at an athlete that highlighted the athlete's

(positive) character values, participants of Lewis and Weaver's (2015) study felt significantly more inclined to support the athlete (i.e., held greater behavioral intentions), than those who read a news story that highlighted only the athlete's performance. These results show that when character qualities of an athlete are highlighted in a news frame, it can impact the way audiences feel about the athlete.

Frames possess the power to shape the way audiences view speakers. After exploring some of the relevant literature on this topic, it has been found that news frames possess the power to shape audiences' views of athletes. It has also been noted that media frames are not only employed to frame individuals; frames can be used to direct audiences' attentions towards specific ideas or sub-categorizations of events, organizations and brands (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Kumar, 2015; Phua & Jin, 2014; Schlecht, 2003). The next section will unpack how framing effects not only the way frames impact audiences' views of certain individuals, like athletes, but the brands those athletes represent as endorsers or spokespeople.

Framing's Impact on Attitude Towards Brands

Framing, as was established in the previous section, plays an influential role in consumers' perception of athletes and sport figures; though what this research more broadly communicates, is that framing plays a role in consumers' perception of messages (Entman, 2007; Cohen, 1963). Recent research shows that frames of messages in news media and advertisements can impact consumer attitudes towards not only spokespeople, but attitudes and purchase intentions towards products and brands endorsed by these spokespeople (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Kumar, 2015; Phua & Jin, 2014; Schlecht, 2003).

Brands and corporations have increasingly sought out celebrity endorsers for company advertisements over the past 40 years (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Hughes and Shank (2005) argue

that when a brand partners with a celebrity endorser, like an athlete, the brand is able to further construct its brand values and image by association with the athlete's personal character values (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Celebrity endorsers, often athletes who partner with brands, can impact "key elements of the company–consumer relationship" like brand image and brand awareness (Jansen et al. 2009; Jin, S. & Phua, J., 2014). This means that if media frames have the power to inform audiences' attitudes toward an athlete, then by association, the media also have the power to shape audiences' attitudes toward a brand that partners with that athlete (Hughes & Shank, 2005). This is because the athlete serves as an extension of the brand, acting as a representative of the brand itself (Jansen et al. 2009; Jin, S. & Phua, J., 2014; Hughes & Shank, 2005).

One example of how brands choose to combat negative media coverage or negatively valanced news frames involves dropping sponsorships with controversial athletes (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Though it has been discussed in this paper that controversial spokespeople can contribute to a positive frame of a brand in the media, as was the case in some news frames of Kaepernick following his 2018-partnership with Nike (Mitra, 2019), prompting positive attitudes toward the brand and praise for its brand values.

However, not all brand sponsorships with controversial sports figures end as successfully, given that not all media frames of controversial sports figures will be positive (Hughes & Shank, 2005). For example, when accusations surrounding a sexual assault case with Koby Bryant surfaced in 2003, the media brought Bryant's case to the forefront of media outlets' agendas (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Bryant's major brand sponsors at the time all received "some degree of negative impact on their brand" including McDonalds, Sprite and Nike (Hughes & Shank, p. 208, 2005). The negative media frames of Bryant's sexual assault accusations impacted Bryant's

brand sponsorships in both a (1) loss of consumer base and (2) loss of purchases (Hughes & Shank, 2005). The negative frames used to depict Bryant during this scandal resulted in a personal loss of over $100 million in future endorsement deals (Robinson, 2004); further, in order to protect their brand image, Bryant was dropped completely from his sponsorships with Nutella and Ferrero U.S.A. following the media coverage of his sexual assault accusations (Hughes & Shank, 2005).

What this research communicates is that the framing of a celebrity endorser, like an athlete, in the news can not only shape audience's attitudes towards the athlete, but attitudes toward the brands the athlete partners with, which ultimately informs consumers' purchase intentions as well (Hughes & Shank, 2005). Joslyn (2003) explains that when negative media frames are presented of athletes, the media are significantly influential in how audiences perceive that information, as the media is responsible for contextualizing the negative information. The impact of these media frames have been proven to carry "potentially dichotomous effects on a sponsor's image, product and performance" (Hughes & Shank, 2005, p. 210).

The Implications of Attitudes towards Purchase Intention. Little research currently exists regarding how media frames of athletes shape audiences' attitudes toward the brands and purchase intentions; however, what current research affirms is that there is a significant relationship that exists between audiences' favorite athletes and the audiences' likelihood to support a brand that their favorite athlete partners alongside (Dalakas & Levin, 2005). Dalakas and Levin (2005) conducted a study on the fans of National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) and found that NASCAR fans favored the brands that partnered with one of their favorite drivers (i.e., the fan held a pre-existing positive attitude toward the driver). Conversely, Dalakas and Levin (2005) also found that fans fostered negative attitudes toward

brands that partnered with one of their least favorite drivers (i.e., the fan held a pre-existing negative attitude toward the driver). The findings of this research are important to note as they highlight an integral question: What is the catalyst to an individual's developed attitude toward a brand?

Previous research on attitude towards brands indicates that framing and messaging of a brand—and its products—has the potential to directly affect a consumer's intention to purchase (Gamliel & Herstein, 2007). Scales have been used in past literature to measure intentions of behavior toward a brand, specifically measuring consumer responses to "meaningful advertisements" (Wu & Dodoo, 2017, p. 592). Wu and Dodoo (2017) share how researchers can measure consumers' perceptions of an advertisement, beyond just purchase intentions, by looking at consumers' perceived meaningfulness of an ad as well. Inspired by the work of Sundar and Kalyanaraman (2004), Wu and Dodoo (2017) analyzed four specific variables to measure consumer perception of ads: how likely they were to (1) "try the product" featured, (2) "buy the product," (3) "seek more information about the product," and even (4) "recommend the product" to others (p. 601).

In summary, research confirms that both media frames and pre-existing values and beliefs (Haidt, 2012; Lakoff, 1996) can shape and inform an individual's attitude. What this thesis will measure is the impact of both variables (i.e., (1) media frames and (2) political or moral beliefs) on an audience's developed attitude toward a brand as well as an audience's purchase intention. Are audiences' pre-existing attitudes more influential than news and message frames? This is a question this thesis will answer, measuring the interaction between audiences' pre-existing beliefs and bias media frames. In the next section, media frame perception will be

explored further, looking specifically at the role political orientations play in the processing of information.

How Political Ideology Interacts with Frame Perception. Lecheler and de Vreese (2012) have conducted extensive research regarding the effects of framing and how it influences "understanding of politics" (p. 185). The way information is presented to an audience can influence a person's beliefs, belief importance or belief content (de Vreese &Lecheler, 2012). Functionally, framing selects certain ideas present within a story, event or idea and emphasizes those pieces of information over others, presenting audiences with a certain perspective of "issue attributes" (Scheufele, 2000, p. 298). According to de Vreese and Lecheler (2012), frames not only "render certain considerations more important," but "make further content available," which impacts the way consumers shape attitudes and beliefs (p. 186). In order to measure how message frames shape political orientations, de Vreese and Lecheler (2012) conducted an experiment with three different frame conditions; the results indicated that framing plays an influential role in the shaping of individuals' political beliefs and decisions to choose which political issues are most important to them. Much of de Vreese and Lecheler's (2012) work draws upon research contributed by earlier cognitive media effects scholars like Scheufele (2000). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) found evidence that media frames possess the power to influence the way consumers view messages and ideas, which is consistent with previously developed explanations regarding the functionality of framing (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Weaver, 1973; Nelson, et al., 1997).

It has been proven that news frames possess the power to shape consumers' understandings of an event and even shape their perception of the political and moral values that are most important to them. Continually, research from Feldman and Hart (2018) asserts the idea

that not only can media frames impact consumer attitudes, but consumer attitudes toward media outlets can lead consumers to later be selective in their choice of media.

Feldman and Hart (2018) conducted research on the interaction between consumers' political orientation and news frames, specifically analyzing the impact of selective exposure on consumers' pre-existing political orientations. They found that certain frames worked together with a group or individual's political beliefs to drive readership to specific news stories. Specifically, Feldman and Hart (2018) found in environmental news stories on climate change, when frames were selected to emphasize health risks were effective at increasing "public engagement with the issue" because "the health risks of climate change are seen as more personal and immediate" (p. 517). This means that when a frame is tailored to appear more "personally relevant" (p. 517) to its audience, it can affect audiences' exposure to the news (Feldman & Hart, 2018). Though all of this is true, one external factor worth mentioning is an audience's attention or investment in the message as well; Feldman and Hart (2018) note that "Framing as a persuasive or engagement strategy only works if people pay attention to the message in the first place" (p. 517).

Additional research from Lecheler, Keer, Schuck and Hänggli (2015) also examined the effects of repetitive exposure to similar news frames regarding political orientations. They looked at the way news frames shaped or manipulated political ideologies of viewers over an extended period of time. The findings concluded that repetitive exposure to similar political news frames over time did in fact lead to "stronger and more persistent effects" on political opinion than those exposed to a single media frame (p. 339). What this means for the research conducted in this thesis is that political and moral beliefs could play a role in both (1) audiences' perception

of the news frames they read and (2) audiences' reasons for approving or disproving of a person or brand featured in the news frame.

With increased access to digital media and viral news online, the variable of frequency of exposure becomes more relevant in shaping consumers' political orientations. The next section will address the specific questions this thesis seeks to answer, specifically focusing on how the framing of brands in advertisements and media can impact a consumer's decision to purchase from or withhold from supporting a brand.

Now that the relevant literature has been reviewed regarding agenda setting, framing, media frames' impacts on attitudes towards speakers, media frames' impacts on attitudes towards brands and variables of consideration like political orientations and purchase intentions, this paper will transition into the research questions of this study. Before examining the research questions of this thesis, a brief overview of the findings from this literature review will be provided.

To review, this study will be examined through the primary lens of framing theory. Frames orient readers toward a specific understanding of an event by emphasizing certain pieces of a story over others, assigning greater relevance to these items than other frames may be able to do (Entman, 1993; McCombs, 1997; Nelson, et al., 1997; Scheufele, 2000). Literature on agenda setting was explored in order to provide additional context for the theory of framing, as framing extends from the roots of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1998); agenda setting differs from framing in that agenda setting analyzes a salience of events, whereas framing analyzes a salience of details about an event (Scheufele, 2000). Recent research shows us that media frames possess the power to shape attitudes towards speakers, like celebrity spokespeople or athletes (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Kumar, 2015; Phua & Jin, 2014; Schlecht, 2003), as well as attitudes towards

brands endorsed by these celebrity spokespeople or athletes—as well as an audience's intent to purchase from the brand (Hughes & Shank, 2005; Jansen et al. 2009; Jin, S. & Phua, J., 2014). In addition to the role media frames play in shaping audiences' attitudes towards people and brands, it is important to consider how pre-existing political beliefs may also influence an audience member's perception of the frame and developed attitudes. What this literature concludes as that although research exists on the separate concepts of media frames, political ideologies, attitudes towards people, attitudes towards brands and behavioral intentions, recent, empirical research is lacking that examines all of these elements in one study. Currently, there is a need for new data in mass communication research regarding the impact of frames on audiences' perceptions of controversial spokespeople; further, there is a gap in communication research regarding the impact that news frames of celebrity spokespeople have on audiences' perceptions of the brands those spokespeople partner alongside.

Specifically, this thesis seeks to answer the question: What sparked the polarized response and controversial reactions to Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement campaign? It will explore how media frames influence consumer attitudes and behavior when a brand uses a controversial figure whose ideology stance converges with the brand's. This will be accomplished through an examination of three specific research questions.

Research Questions

To begin, this study will answer the question of how influential a media frame is in the development of a consumer's attitude. Specifically, this first research question seeks to understand how the presence of a media frame, that aligns with a consumer's pre-existing political beliefs, effects the consumer's view of the person presented in the frame. This research question will measure attitude toward a speaker's credibility. Parts a and b of research question

one will explore main effects for frames and political beliefs, and part c will measure interactive effects between frames and political attitudes.

RQ 1: How do media frames and political orientations affect attitudes towards the speaker?

RQ 1a: Are there difference in attitudes towards the speaker based on people who received a frame and those who did not?

RQ 1b: Are there differences in attitudes towards the speaker based on people's different political orientation?

RQ 1c: Does political orientation and the presence or absence of a frame interact to have an effect on attitude towards the speaker?

The second research question of this study builds from the foundation of the first. This question seeks to understand how the presence of a media frame, that aligns with a consumer's pre-existing political beliefs, effects the consumer's view of the brand that uses a controversial speaker. This research question will measure attitude toward a brand; parts a and b of research question two will explore main effects for frames and political beliefs, and part c will measure interactive effects between frames and political attitudes.

RQ 2: How do media frames and political orientations affect attitudes towards the brand?

RQ 2a: Are there difference in attitudes towards the brand based on people who received a frame and those who did not?

RQ 2b: Are there differences in attitudes towards the brand based on people's different political orientation?

RQ 3c: Does political orientation and the presence or absence of a frame interact to have an effect on attitude towards the brand?

The final research question of this study seeks to understand how the presence of a media frame, that aligns with a consumer's pre-existing political beliefs, effects the consumer's intention to purchase products from the brand. This research question will measure purchase intentions; parts a and b of research question three will explore main effects for frames and political beliefs, and part c will measure interactive effects between frames and political attitudes.

RQ3: How do media frames and political orientations affect purchase intention?

RQ 3a: Are there difference in purchase intention based on people who received a frame and those who did not?

RQ 3b: Are there differences in purchase intention based on people's different political orientation?

RQ 3c: Does political orientation and the presence or absence of a frame interact to have an effect on purchase intention?

Chapter 4: Method

Procedure

Participants of this study were asked to participate in an experiment that included two stimulus materials: one 1-minute and 15-second video advertisement and one 350-word news article that contained either a conservative or liberal news frame (i.e., concerning the advertisement and spokesperson from the advertisement). Participants were recruited from a large, public university in Southwest Virginia; results from a total of 332 participants were analyzed for this study.

Before watching the brand advertisement, participants were asked to disclose their pre-existing political leanings (e.g., extremely liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, somewhat conservative, conservative, extremely conservative). Based on participants' responses to this questions, they were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) to receive a news story that was framed to align with their political beliefs about the spokesperson or (2) to exist in the control group and consequently receive no news story to read before watching the brand advertisement. The goal of this design was to pinpoint if a difference in participants' attitudes toward the spokesperson existed, and if so, determine if the difference in attitude correlated with the presence and absence of participants' exposure to the media frame. In addition to measuring the presence of the media frame's impact on attitudes toward the spokesperson, this study also measured the media frame's impact on attitude toward brand and purchase intentions as well.

Table 3

Distribution of Conditions

	Frequency	Percent
Liberal Story	94	28.3
Liberal Control	90	27.1

Conservative Story	77	23.2
Conservative Control	71	21.4
Total	332	100.0

The video advertisement shown to participants was for a fictional athletic brand, called Athens Activewear, which was created specifically for this experiment. A fictional celebrity spokesperson and athlete-personality was also created for this experiment (i.e., to appear in the brand advertisement). The fictional athlete-spokesperson was named Jacklyn Reynolds and was presented as a successful collegiate runner for Cincinnati University. The controversial aspect to Jacklyn Reynolds' athletic career was introduced through a news story from a fake newspaper article published by '*the Ohio Gazette*,' which relayed the course of events to readers. In the news article, it explained that Reynolds' had decided to quit her university's running team as a result of her disagreement with the university's policy to keep a live animal as their school mascot.

This experiment consisted of a two-by-two between-subjects factorial design which evaluated the effects of political orientation, as well politically congruent news frames. Participants of this study were first organized into one of two groups. The first group (the experimental condition) received a news story about a fictional college athlete who made a controversial decision. The story each person received was written in a way that it aligned with their political beliefs (i.e., conservative or liberal). After reading the story they were then given a video ad that contained the same character in a brand advertisement. The control group also received the same video brand advertisement but did not receive the conservative or liberal news story.

Half of the participants in this study were placed in the control group (at random), and they were only given the video advertisement for Athens Activewear to watch. Participants not

assigned to the control groups were first given the news story to read, and then were asked to watch the video advertisement for Athens Activewear immediately following the completion of this task. Pictures of the collegiate athlete were provided in the fake news article, so participants were able to identify what the athlete (i.e., Jacklyn Reynolds) looked like, as well as the athlete's name, before watching the video ad. This model serves as the basis for the 'replication of the Kaepernick effect.'

Table 4

Distribution of Frames

	Noncongruent Frame	Congruent Frame
Conservative-Leaning Values	No news story	Conservative-frame story
Liberal-Leaning Values	No news story	Liberal-frame story

To begin, participants signed a form of consent signifying that they agreed to participate in the study willingly. Then they were prompted to answer a series of questions within a measurement instrument (i.e., questionnaire) that related to their demographics, including a question that asks participants about their political leaning. Once these questions had been answered, participants were assigned a news article to read. Participants could receive one of two media frames: liberal-leaning or conservative-leaning. Participants who are assigned a news article (i.e., not in the control group) were given an article with the frame that best aligned with their self-disclosed political leaning provided in the demographic section of the survey.

After reading the news article, participants watched the fictional brand's advertisement for Athens Activewear, a one-minute and 15-second video advertisement. The video advertisement was a promotional advertisement for the athletic brand, and it included a motivational message from the spokesperson, Jacklyn Reynolds. The script read over the

advertisement is listed in Appendix C of this thesis. Once the video advertisement had been watched by participants, they were asked to answer questions regarding their attitudes toward the speaker, the brand, as well as their purchase intentions with the band.

Stimulus Material

News story. A news story was selected for each participant to read before watching the advertisement, excluding those who belonged to the control group (i.e., participants who did not receive a news story but did receive the video ad). There were two possible news stories participants could receive, and they were given a news story based on their response to a question that measured their political orientations. One news story was framed with a liberal voice, whereas the other news story was framed with a conservative voice. Both news stories covered the same topic, but presented the information surrounding the topic through different frames. This news story highlighted a story a fictional athlete named Jacklyn Reynolds and was presented her, in both frames, as a successful collegiate runner for Cincinnati University. The controversial aspect to Jacklyn Reynolds' athletic career, covered in both news stories, was that she quit her university's running team. Reynold's decision to quit the team was a result of her disagreement with the university's policy to keep a live animal as their school mascot, making this news story one that focuses on the political issue of animal rights, which is an issue that has been debated on partisan lines (Lakoff, 1996).

Lakoff (1996) and Haidt (2012) provide research that helps to understand not only the differing frames presented by partisan news sources (i.e., sources with conservative bias vs. sources with liberal bias), but the differing motivations and moral codes by which each of these groups live by (i.e., those with conservative values and those with liberal values). Their research was used to help create and bring life to this study's stimulus materials.

Specifically, given that the political issue addressed in the news frames was animal rights, literature regarding political parties' views of environment and animal rights were consulted in order to create the news frames for this stimulus material. When constructing the news stories, Nurturant Parent morality and Strict Father morality were utilized to create frames around the issue of animal rights (Lakoff, 1996). Given that this issue addresses animal rights, it falls into the domain of environmental issues. These principles, and their sub sequential themes, were utilized in the construction of these news frames for the stimulus material. In this example of conservative and liberal views of the environment, both political parties see nature as a resource; however, conservatives view nature as more of an economic resource for personal use whereas liberals view nature as a sustainable resource (i.e., it must be sustained) that possesses inherent value (Lakoff, 1996).

Liberal News Frame. The liberally framed news article was presented to participants of the study as a simulated, digital news story. This news article discussed the nature of the advertisement the participants would watch, as well as the characteristics of the spokesperson presented in the advertisement. However, this frame presented the content from the perspective of a liberal-leaning news outlet; therefore, it was hypothesized that participants of the study who self-identified as holding liberal-leaning beliefs and values, would resonate with this liberal-leaning news frame. The only participants who were able to receive this version of the news article were those who self-disclosed in the demographic portion of the survey that they held liberal-leaning beliefs and values. Themes from Lakoff's (1996) concepts of Nurturant Parent morality were used to frame the liberal vantage point.

Conservative News Frame. The conservatively framed news article was the same news story as news article one, however, it was presented with a conservative-leaning news frame. It

was presented to participants of the study in the same simulated, digital news story format. This news article discussed the nature of the advertisement the participants would watch, as well as the characteristics of the spokesperson presented in the advertisement. However, this news frame presented the content from the perspective of a conservative-leaning news outlet; therefore, it was hypothesized that participants of the study who self-identified as holding conservative-leaning beliefs and values, would resonate with the views presented in this conservative-leaning news frame. The only participants who received this news article were those who self-disclosed in the survey that they held conservative-leaning beliefs and values. Themes from Lakoff's (1996) concepts of Strict Father morality were used to frame the conservative vantage point.

Advertisement. There was one advertisement created for this study. It was shown to all participants of the study during the survey after answering questions about demographic and political orientation. The ad was presented as a 1-minute and 15-second video, and it depicted an objectively motivational message from a single spokesperson. The spokesperson in the advertisement was the same spokesperson written about in the news article that participants were asked to read before watching the ad. The spokesperson in this advertisement served as a brand endorser, and the spokesperson promoted the brand's values. The spokesperson narrated the script read over the video advertisement and also appeared visibly in the advertisement at times as well.

Control group. Half of all participants of this study who self-disclosed their conservative views, and half of all participants who self-disclosed their liberal views, were put into a control group for this study. This ensured that an equal number of random participants could watch the video advertisement on its own and read the news article before watching the video advertisement as well. Participants who were randomly assigned to the control group held both

liberal and conservative views, and they were not pre-exposed to the news story before watching the brand advertisement. They only engaged with the brand video advertisement.

Operationalization of Measures

Independent Variables. This study included two types of independent variables: measured and manipulated variables. To begin, the measured variables will be examined.

Measured Variables. The measured independent variables in this study were related to political orientations. Each participant in the survey was prompted with the same question in the survey regarding political orientation. To measure participants' political orientations specifically, one to two questions were analyzed from the questionnaire. The first question participants received asked them, "Of the political leanings listed, which do you feel you align with most, based on your views?" They were given only three options to choose from: liberal, moderate or conservative. If participants answered "moderate" to this question, they were prompted with a second question. The second question asked participants "Which description best describes your political leaning?" This question offered participants six response options, as opposed to three: extremely liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, somewhat conservative, conservative and extremely conservative. If the participants' response included the word "liberal," they were collapsed into a single category of liberal (leaning) respondents. If the participants response included the word conservative, they were collapsed into a single category of conservative (leaning) respondents. This information was also used to identify whether or not participants were assigned a news story with a conservative frame, liberal frame or were assigned to the control group, which received no news story at all.

Manipulated Variables. The liberal news frame and conservative news frame served as the manipulated, independent variables in this study. These frames were created for participants

to read before watching the advertisement; participants' answers to the political orientation question in the survey informed which news story they were shown before watching the advertisement. To create congruency, participants were given the news story that most closely reflected their political orientation. There were only two news stories, and consequently two news frames, that the participants could receive. Participants either received a news story framed with a liberal voice or the same news story framed with a conservative voice. Both stories were about the same topic but presented through different frames.

Dependent Variables. The dependent variables of this study were (1) attitude toward speaker's credibility, (2) attitude toward brand and (3) behavioral intentions. After participants engaged with the stimulus materials, they were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to document their responses to the content. This study focused on three dependent variables.

Attitude Toward Speaker's Credibility. In order to measure consumers' perceptions of the spokesperson, this section of the questionnaire was constructed from Ohanian's (1990) research scales that used a 5-point semantic differential scale to measure variables of "attractiveness," "trustworthiness," and "expertise," in order to record consumers' attitudes towards celebrity "endorsers" (Ohanian, 1990, p. 47).

All items were measured using five-point semantic differential scale questions. The results of this study confirmed similar loadings (described in detail in the results section) to prior studies (Ohanian, 1990). Specifically, the first concept of speaker credibility was labeled as expertise, and it was measured by five items (e.g., "How knowledgeable did you perceive this spokesperson to be?"). The second concept of speaker credibility was labeled trustworthiness, and it was also captured from five items (e.g., "How sincere did you find this spokesperson?"). Lastly, four items were used to measure the final concept of speaker credibility which is

attractiveness (e.g., “How classy did you perceive this spokesperson to be?”). The 14 measures for all three of the factors were found reliable: attitude toward credibility of speaker: expertise (α = .91), attitude toward credibility of speaker: trustworthiness (α = .90) and attitude toward credibility of speaker: attractiveness (α = .82). The combined mean of each of the items was taken to construct each of the three dependent measures of speaker credibility.

Attitude Toward Brand. The variable of attitude toward brand was measured following participants’ exposure to both stimulus materials. Participants were asked a series of 23 questions specifically concerning attitude as well as purchase intent. Measured using a 5-point semantic differential scale, participants were prompted to answer questions that related directly to their perception of the brand’s values and characteristics. Participants were also be asked questions related to how much they relate to the values and characteristics of the brand.

These measurements of attitude toward brand were crafted from research presented by Spears and Singh (2004). Spears and Singh (2004) developed several a multi-item measure to access attitudes towards a brand. According to Spears their research the most relevant factors to test participants for regarding attitude toward brand include: (1) how “unappealing/appealing” the brand appeared, (2) how “bad/good” the brand appeared, (3) how “unpleasant/pleasant” the brand appeared, (4) how “unfavorable/favorable” the brand appeared, (5) how “unlikable/likable” the brand appeared (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 62). These variables were tested among all participants on a 5-point semantic differential scale in order to gauge their attitudes toward the brand presented in the experiment’s brand video advertisement.

These items were included in a factor analysis described later in this section. Specifically, attitude toward brand was determined by the five items listed above (e.g., “How good or bad did you find this brand?”). All items identified by Spears and Singh (2004) loaded on the same factor

items. Cronbach's Alpha scores indicated the items were reliable (α = .91). As a result, a new variable called attitude towards brand was constructed from each of the five items above by taking the mean of the five scores for each participant.

Purchase Intentions. It was hypothesized that if the participant resonated with the values and characteristics of the brand, it would increase the participant's likelihood of purchasing from the brand. Measured on a 5-point semantic differential scale, participants were asked a series of questions related to purchase intention in response to the video ad content they consumed. Participants of this study were asked how likely they were to (1) "try the product" featured, (2) "buy the product," (3) "seek more information about the product," and even (4) "recommend the product" to others (Wu & Dodoo, 2017, p. 601). The semantic differential scale was selected, because it enables respondents to provide feedback regarding their attitudes toward a particular idea, and the design of the scales are user-friendly and easy to navigate.

These items were included in a factor analysis described later in this section. Cronbach's Alpha scores indicated the items were reliable. As a result, a new variable called Purchase Intention was constructed from each of the four items above by taking the mean of the four scores for each participant. Specifically, purchase intention was determined by four items (e.g., How likely are you to buy a product from the brand featured in the ad?). The four measures for the purchase intention were found reliable (α = .89), and so the combined mean of each item was taken to construct the purchase intention measure.

Manipulation Check

In order to ensure the stimulus materials for this study were congruent with participants' political orientation, a manipulation check was completed. In order to ensure that participants who identified as liberal thought the liberal news frame was "liberal," and to ensure that

participants who identified as conservative thought the conservative news frame was "conservative," participants were prompted to respond to a specific set of questions that served as a manipulation check. To check for this, three questions were placed at the end of each survey prompting participants to indicate on a 5-point scale how much the news article seemed to align with their political orientation or leaning. The first question asked participants: "Indicate how much you felt the news story you read portrayed and covered its social issue accurately." The follow up question asked participants: "Some people argue that news stories have political biases. How would you describe the political leaning of the news story you read before the advertisement? Do the political leanings of the news story lean more to the right (i.e., conservative) or left (i.e., liberal)?: (1) Leans mostly right, (2) leans right, (3) is neutral, (4) leans left or (5) leans mostly left."

Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

Results of Manipulation Check

The results of the manipulation check revealed a few different findings; two questions were used as a manipulation check in this questionnaire. The first question asked participants: "Some people argue that news stories have political biases. How would you describe the political leaning of the news story you read before the advertisement? Do the political leanings of the news story lean more to the right (i.e., conservative) or left (i.e., liberal)?" (i.e., question 30). Responses to this question were recorded on a 6-point, semantic differential scale that ranged from "extremely conservative" to "extremely liberal." The second question asked participants, "Indicate how much you felt the news article you read portrayed and covered its social issue accurately" (i.e., question 31). Responses to this question were recorded on a 5-point, semantic differential scale that ranged from "a great deal" to "none at all." Not every participant in this study received a manipulation check; only the participants who received a news frame before the video ad were asked to respond to these questions. This is due to the fact that the manipulation check measured how respondents considered the frames of the news article to align, or not align, with their own political attitudes.

The results to the first question in the manipulation check (i.e., question 30) revealed that 90.4 percent of liberal respondents, who received the liberal news frame, reported that the frame they received ranged from "liberal" to "extremely liberal." On the other hand, 37.7 percent of conservative respondents, who received the conservative frame, perceived the frame to fall between "conservative" and "extremely conservative." The results of this manipulation check indicate that while the majority of liberal audiences agreed that the frame appeared to be liberal,

a smaller percentage of conservative audiences perceived the frame that they received to be conservative.

The results to the second question in the manipulation check (i.e., question 31) revealed that 90.4 percent of liberal respondents, who received the liberal frame, thought that the issues portrayed in their news frame were portrayed accurately; this was indicated by their responses which ranged from "moderate" to "a great deal." While 79.2 percent of conservative respondents, who received the conservative frame, thought that the issues portrayed in their news frame were portrayed accurately as well; this was also indicated by their responses which ranged from "moderate" to "a great deal." The results of this manipulation check indicate that the majority of liberal and conservative participants in this study perceived the issues presented to them in their news frame (i.e., animal rights), to be portrayed accurately, despite the presence of a frame.

Demographics

This study received 395 participants who were recruited through an online university research system. The first step after data collection was to examine the data for any respondents that might not have adequately given time to the study. Of the 395 participants who completed the study, 23 participants were removed from the data set for completing the study in less than 180 seconds. This decision was made based on the length of time it takes to watch the video advertisement (i.e., one minute and 15 seconds) coupled with the number of questions participants would be asked to respond to (i.e., 30 questions if placed in the control group and 32 questions if not placed in the control group), as well as the amount of time it would take participants to read a 350-word news clipping (i.e., if they were placed in the experimental conditions). Therefore, it was deemed that any

participant who completed the study in less than 180 seconds, did not complete the study with the attention and rigor needed. Further, 40 additional participants were removed from the pool of data, because they failed the attention test, which assessed whether participants could identify the person who was the spokeswoman in the brand ad that they watched (i.e., Q32). Of the 40 participants who failed the manipulation check, 19 belonged to the control group and 21 belonged to the experimental conditions. Combined, this eliminated 63 participants total from the pool of data, leaving 332 valid participants to be evaluated.

The 332 participants who took this questionnaire were college students who were recruited through the same university research system that offered students research credit in exchange for completing the study. Participants were drawn from a variety of majors and from a broad range of class standings. At the start of the study, participants were assigned to one of four conditions, based on their response to question six: "Which description best describes your political leaning?" Participants were given six options to choose from in response to this question (i.e., extremely liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, somewhat conservative, conservative and extremely conservative). Any participant who selected extremely liberal, liberal or somewhat liberal was placed into the liberal frame group; whereas, any participant who selected extremely conservative, conservative or somewhat conservative were placed into the conservative frame group. Half of the participants in the liberal frame group were assigned at random to be in the liberal control group. Half of the participants in the conservative frame group were assigned at random to be in the conservative control group. After the invalid data entries were omitted from the study (i.e., 63 participants out of 395 were removed, leaving 332 total participants), 28.3 percent of participants were assigned to the liberal news story group, 27.1 percent of participants were assigned to the liberal control group, 23.2 percent of participants were assigned to the conservative news story group and 21.4 percent were

assigned to the conservative control group. The reason more participants appear in the liberal news story and liberal control groups (i.e., as opposed to the conservative news story and conservative control groups), is because a higher number of participants self-identified as belonging to a liberal political ideology (i.e., extremely liberal, liberal or somewhat liberal) as opposed to belonging to a conservative political ideology (i.e., extremely conservative, conservative or somewhat conservative).

In regard to political orientation, 3.3 percent of respondents identified as extremely liberal, 24.7 percent identified as liberal and 27.4 percent identified as somewhat liberal; together, this totals 55.4 percent of participants proclaiming to hold a degree of liberal political orientation. Further, 2.1 percent of respondents identified as extremely conservative, 17.2 percent identified as conservative and 25.3 percent identified as somewhat conservative; together, this totals 45.6 percent of participants proclaiming to hold a degree of conservative political orientation.

Participants consisted of 28.9 percent male, 70.8 percent female and .3 percent other (i.e., transgender male), indicating an overrepresentation of female respondents. Additionally, .3 percent of participants were American Indian or Alaskan Native, 6.6 percent of participants were black or African American, 70.1 percent of participants were white or Caucasian, 4.2 percent of participants were Hispanic or Latino/a, 14.8 percent of participants were Asian, 1.8 percent of participants were middle eastern or North African and 2.1 percent self-identified as belonging to another race. In terms of class standing, 26.5 percent of participants were freshman, 43.7 percent were sophomores, 21.1 percent were juniors and 8.7 percent were seniors in college.

Factor Analysis

In order to first construct the dependent variables of attitude towards, speaker, attitude towards brand and purchase intentions, a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the 23 items that were identified from previous scales with these items. All factors with an eigenvalue measure of more than one were extracted. Based on these loadings, five factors were found that explained 73.98 percent of the total variance. Three factors measured dimensions of attitudes toward a speaker's credibility: trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise (Spears & Singh, 2004). One factor measured attitudes toward brand, and one factor measured purchase intention. These five items were determined to be the five dependent variables of this study and all the measures loaded in ways that were similar to previous studies which had used these scales. Table five shows the rotated component matric with the factors. Table six shows the total variance explained with eigenvalues greater than one for each of the five factors.

Table 5

Rotated Component Matrix

	Components				
	Expertise	Attitude Toward Brand	Trustworthiness	Purchase Intention	Attractiveness
How much of an expert did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	**.827**	.093	.182	.161	.190
How experienced did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	**.798**	.148	.266	.148	.186
How knowledgeable did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	**.794**	.210	.211	.145	.186
How skilled did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	**.734**	.221	.232	.088	.142
How qualified did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	**.729**	.194	.341	.107	.171
How pleasant did you find this brand?	.183	**.815**	.166	.174	.139
How likable did you find this brand?	.231	**.788**	.226	.198	.124

How favorable did you find this brand?	.163	**.778**	.191	.241	.144
How good or bad did you find this brand?	.187	**.745**	.270	.221	.115
How appealing did you find this brand?	.111	**.722**	.228	.322	.132
How honest did you find this spokesperson?	.234	.276	**.785**	.121	.103
How trustworthy did you find this spokesperson?	.337	.231	**.719**	.169	.244
How reliable did you find this spokesperson?	.412	.232	**.681**	.158	.212
How dependable did you find this spokesperson?	.299	.293	**.651**	.145	.175
How sincere did you find this spokesperson?	.270	.219	**.625**	.277	.210
How likely are you to buy a product from the brand featured in the ad?	.183	.234	.133	**.825**	.215
How likely are you to try a product from the brand featured in the ad?	.129	.307	.130	**.811**	.116
How likely are you to seek more information about the brand featured in the video advertisement?	.103	.222	.206	**.732**	.210
How likely would you be to recommend this brand to others?	.172	.287	.152	**.706**	.270
How beautiful did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	.190	.213	.104	.130	**.774**
How attractive did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	.235	.205	.123	.117	**.773**
How classy did you perceive this spokesperson to be?	.211	.119	.253	.227	**.686**
How elegant did you perceive this person to be?	.118	-.010	.202	.352	**.669**

Note. Original items from Spears & Singh (2004).

Table 6

Initial Eigenvalues and Total Variance of Components

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Expertise	10.800	46.958	46.958	10.800	46.958	46.958	3.923	17.059	17.059
Attitude Toward Brand	2.198	9.555	56.512	2.198	9.555	56.512	3.827	16.641	33.699

Trustworthiness	1.702	7.400	63.912	1.702	7.400	63.912	3.201	13.918	47.617
Purchase Intention	1.084	4.712	68.624	1.084	4.712	68.624	3.114	13.538	61.155
Attractiveness	1.002	4.358	72.983	1.002	4.358	72.983	2.720	11.828	72.983

Research Question One

In order to answer the first research question a 2 (Presence of Frame) x 2 (Political Orientation) between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the perceived attitudes towards the speaker's credibility. Because speaker credibility was measured by three separate factors—perceived expertise, perceived trustworthiness and perceived attractiveness, three separate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to answer this research question.

The first analysis examined whether political orientations or media frames impacted perceptions of the perceived expertise of the speaker. The first analysis of variance showed no main effects for frame presence or for political orientation and no interaction effects. However, there was some indication that political orientation was approaching significance with liberals (M = 3.45, SD = .79) scoring the speaker's expertise as slightly higher than conservatives (M = 3.28, SD = .79). This finding, while not significant, is noted only because it pointed in a direction similar to other significant effects found later in this research.

A second analysis of variance was conducted to examine the perceived trustworthiness of the speaker. This analysis showed no main effects for frame presence but there was a main effect for political orientation. Specifically, liberals (M= 3.70, SD = .68) rated the speaker significantly higher on trustworthiness than conservatives (M = 3.45, SD = .82), F (1, 328) = 9.01, $p < .01$, partial η^2=

.00. There was also a significant interaction effect between frame presence x political orientation, F (1, 328) = 4.23, $p < .05$, partial $\eta 2^2 = .01$. Table 7 shows the mean scores for this interaction and shows that the presence of the media frame has the most significant effect on liberals. Specifically, as liberals were exposed to a more liberal media frame the trustworthiness of the speaker increased. While the results do also show that as conservatives were exposed to a more conservative news frame, the trustworthiness of the speaker decreased, these effects were not as profound (see Figure 1).

Table 7

Interaction Effects of Attitude Towards Speaker's Trustworthiness

		Presence of Frame	
		Not Present	Present
Liberal	*M*	3.54	3.86
	SE	.65	.67
Conservative	*M*	3.47	3.44
	SE	.82	.82
F (1, 328) = 4.23, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$			

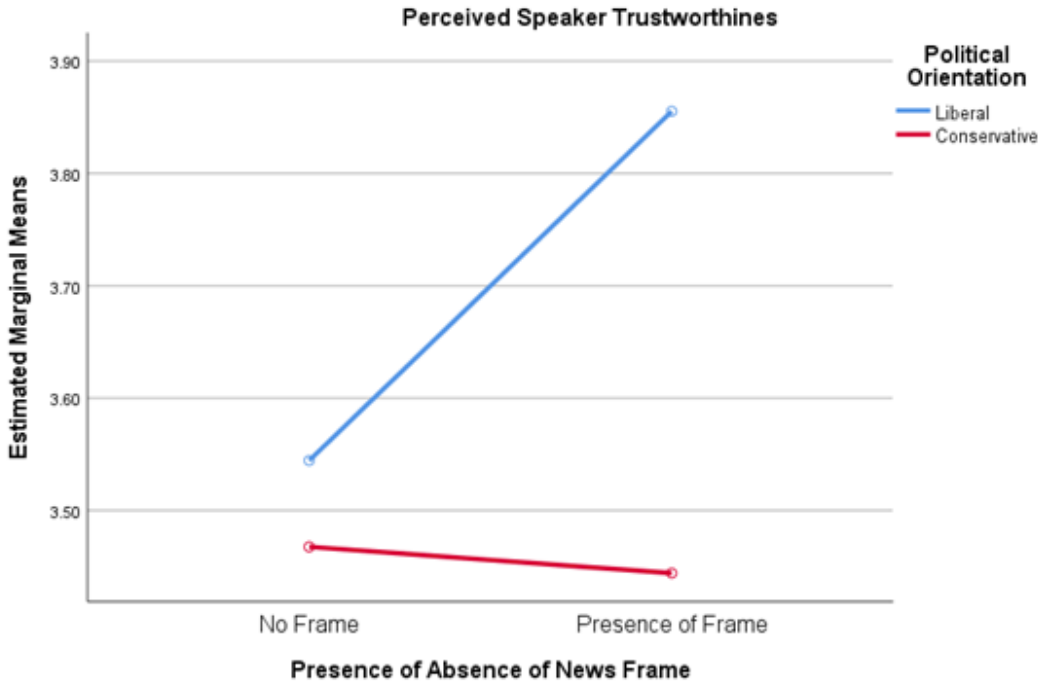

Figure 1. Interaction Effects of Frame Presence and Political Orientation on Perceived Trustworthiness.

A third analysis of variance was conducted to examine the perceived attractiveness of the speaker. This analysis showed no main effects for frame presence but there was a main effect for political orientation. Specifically, liberals (*M*= 3.22, *SD* = .74) rated the speaker significantly higher on attractiveness than conservatives (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = .75), F (1, 328) = 7.49, p < .01, partial η2= .02.

Research Question Two

In order to answer the second research question, a 2 (Presence of Frame) x 2 (Political Orientation) between subjects' analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted to determine the perceived attitudes towards the brand. This analysis showed no interaction effects and no main effects for frame presence, but there was a main effect for political orientation. Specifically, liberals'

(*M*= 3.75, *SD* = .68) attitudes toward the brand were significantly higher (i.e., more positive) than conservatives (*M* = 3.49, *SD* = .76), F (1, 328) = 10.21, p < .01, partial η2= .03.

Research Question Three

In order to answer the third and final research question a 2 (Presence of Frame) x 2 (Political Orientation) between subjects' analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted to determine the participants' purchasing intentions. This analysis showed no interaction effects and no main effects for frame presence, but there was a main effect for political orientation. Specifically, liberals (*M*= 2.73, *SD* = .99) rated that they were significantly more likely to intend to purchase the product than conservatives (*M* = 2.49, *SD* = .91), F (1, 328) = 5.00, p < .05, partial η2= .02.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Directed by three research questions, this thesis aimed to discover whether the presence of a bias news frame, of a controversial and fictitious athlete, had the potential to exacerbate a reader's attitudes towards the athlete, as well as the reader's attitudes towards a brand the athlete endorsed. Additionally, this thesis also considered the role that pre-existing political orientations played in the formation of a reader's attitude towards the athlete, as well as the brand endorsed by the athlete. This item, a reader's political orientation, was deemed integral to the study, given that the fictitious athlete featured in this bias news frame, and branded video advertisement, was vocal about an issue that has previously fallen on partisan lines (i.e., animal rights). The overarching goal of this thesis was to fill a gap in the existing bodies of research that address attitudes towards athlete endorsements and brands, by addressing the power held by external factors of news frames and political orientations. In measuring these two items, the researchers were able to determine which of the two prove to hold the greatest influence over the public's formulated attitudes and intended purchasing decisions.

Attitudes Toward Credibility of Speaker

The first research question evaluated attitudes toward the credibility of the speaker (i.e., the athlete who narrated, and was featured in, the brand advertisement stimulus). The question asked: how do media frames and political orientations affect attitudes towards the credibility of a speaker? In answering research question 1a, it was found that there was no significant difference in developed attitudes towards the fictitious athlete-spokesperson based on the presence or absence of a news frame (i.e., before watching an advertisement with the athlete spokesperson featured).

Specifically, within the liberal group of participants, whether or not a liberal participant read a news article with an intentionally biased frame, did not significantly affect participants' overarching attitudes towards the credibility of the speaker. In general, liberal audiences' attitudes toward the credibility of the speaker were unchanged, meaning that the news frame was not overtly influential in the liberal participants' formation of their attitudes towards the speaker's credibility.

Table 8

Liberal Attitudes Toward Speaker's Credibility

	Presence of Frame	
	Not Present	Present
Expertise	3.40	3.51
Trustworthiness	3.54	3.86
Attractiveness	3.10	3.32

Although the results were not significant, it is worth noting that liberals' attitudes toward perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the speaker all increased when the positively biased news story was given to participants before they watched the advertisement. The greatest difference was found in trustworthiness, with an increased mean trust of the speaker shifting from 3.54 to 3.86, on a 5-point scale, when a news frame was present.

In regard to conservative participants, it was also found that there was no significant difference in developed attitudes towards the fictitious athlete-spokesperson, based on the presence or absence of a news frame. Whether or not a conservative participant read a news

article, with a bias frame, about the athlete-spokesperson before watching the video advertisement, did not significantly affect participants' overarching attitudes towards the credibility of the speaker; in general, conservative audiences' attitudes toward the credibility of the speaker were unchanged, meaning that the news frame was not overtly influential in the conservative participants' formation of their attitudes towards the speaker's credibility.

Table 9

Conservative Attitudes Toward Speaker's Credibility

Factors of Credibility	Presence of Frame	
	Not Present	Present
Expertise	3.26	3.30
Trustworthiness	3.47	3.44
Attractiveness	3.02	2.96

It is worth noting that the news frame presented to conservative participants was intentionally biased to align with a conservative voice, though it carried a unifying, negative tone (e.g., "Collegiate runner chooses mascot over teammates"). While the news frame presented to liberal participants, as mentioned before, was intentionally biased to align with a liberal voice, but it carried a unifying, positive tone (e.g., "Collegiate runner takes a stand for animal rights"). Though none of the results were found to be significant, it was found that readers' perceived trustworthiness and attractiveness of the athlete went down when the negative news frame was present, which affirms the research referenced and collected by Yang (2015) regarding the valence of news frames and the impact it carries in regards to audiences' perceptions of the

subjects presented in the media frames. However, perceived expertise of the speaker went up when the negative news frame was present.

Based on these findings, there are a few implications for brands and spokespeople to consider. If the media frames an athlete before consumers see the athlete in a brand endorsement (i.e., an advertisement), it may impact the way they view the speaker's credibility but not in a significant way. Therefore, based on these findings, brands can take comfort in knowing that although the media may present differing frames of an athlete, the media frames themselves are not significantly influential over audiences' attitudes towards the spokesperson's expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness.

One explanation that may also account for the lack of response or insignificant effect that these news frames had on audience's developed attitudes towards the credibility of the speaker, can be referenced in the research presented by Feldman and Hart (2018). They found that, "Framing as a persuasive or engagement strategy only works if people pay attention to the message in the first place" which appears to be especially relevant to these findings (p. 517). Given that participants of this study were only offered one news article to read prior to their engagement with the video advertisement, it is possible that the audiences were not fully engaged with the messages. Audiences only had one opportunity to truly engage with a partisan frame before watching the ad and providing feedback about their developing attitudes toward the speaker. Although the presence of a news frame was not found to be significant in participants' development of their attitudes towards the credibility of the speaker, another factor was found to be significant in this study.

The findings for research question 1b concluded that there was a significant difference in liberals' perceived credibility of the speaker and conservatives' perceived credibility of the speaker. Liberal participants found the speaker to be significantly more trustworthy and attractive than conservative participants. In this case, these findings suggest audience members' pre-existing political preferences are more influential than the media's frames when audiences are determining a speaker's credibility. What this means practically for brands is that they may be able to rally more support from a liberal audience, as opposed to a conservative audience. These findings show that liberal participants of this study, including the participants who did not receive the news story before watching the advertisement (i.e., the control group), found the speaker more credible than all conservative participants.

A number of factors can be considered in an effort to make sense of the "why" behind this result. Perhaps liberal participants identified with the female speaker more than conservative participants, and consequently, scored the speaker higher on trustworthiness and attractiveness as a result. This would fall in line with research presented from Hill (1981) and Lakoff (2004), whose research affirms the liberal party's historical support of, and ties to, female liberation and representation. These ideas have been tied to "progressive principles" of the liberal party (Lakoff, 2004, p. 138). Whereas, historically, conservative audiences have been noted to support traditionally white, heterosexual male leadership figures (Lakoff, 2004). This would fall in line with conservatives' support of the "Strict Father morality" mindset (Lakoff, 2004; p. 130). With this in mind, it is plausible that the fictitious athlete presented in the video ad may not have possessed the same attributes that some conservatives look for when assigning credibility to a speaker. Though this factor of gender was not intentionally crafted or measured for this study,

given its relevancy in prior research (Hill, 1981; Lakoff, 1996), it is a factor worthy of consideration when analyzing the collected results.

Liberal participants could also have resonated with the message in the advertisement more than conservative participants. This message is visible in Appendix C of this thesis, and it includes the public link to the video advertisement as well as the script read over top of the video by the fictitious athlete, Jacklyn Reynolds. Themes of the script were drawn from themes of the script read over top of Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement by Colin Kaepernick. The eight major, recurring themes, as mentioned previously in this thesis, can best conceptualized and understood as:

1. Individuality.
2. To believe (in yourself).
3. It's okay to be the underdog.
4. If you fall down, get back up again.
5. The importance of leaving a legacy.
6. Don't let others define your purpose.
7. Don't settle (for anything less than your best).
8. Corporate social responsibility (the corporate "we" are in this with you).

These themes do not necessarily fall along partisan lines; however, they do possess motivational or uplifting characteristics to them, which suggests that the overall message delivered from Nike possessed a positive valence (McCaul, 2019; Yang, 2015).

Additionally, these findings regarding the impact of political ideology on perception of news frame echo the findings of those collected in Feldman and Hart's (2018) research as well. Feldman and Hart (2018) conducted research on the interaction between consumers' political orientation and news frames, specifically analyzing the impact of selective exposure on consumers' pre-existing political orientations. They cite that although framing is used to drive

news exposure, it does not guarantee that it will be perceived effectively. According to Feldman and Hart (2018), a frame's effectiveness is dependent upon "the resonance between the constructs a frame suggests should be applied to an issue, and the accessibility of those constructs in audience members' existing knowledge store or schema" (p. 506). This research further highlights the validity of the findings in this thesis, that the audience's values are more significantly influential to an audience's developed attitudes than the media frame on its own. Specific to the results of this study, perhaps conservatives were not as inspired by the message as liberals; this is a plausible hypothesis, as previous research suggests that people draw upon existing schema to understand an issue (Entman, 1993; Heider, 1930; Scheufele, 2000). Entman (1993) specifically draws upon the idea that audience frames are assigned by the members of an audience, not the media, in attempt to make sense of the information they are presented through media frames. Therefore, audiences may have interpreted the message(s) presented in this advertisement differently, leading them to feel differently toward the speaker, brand and in regard to their intentions to purchase.

In regard to research question 1c, a significant interaction effect was found between media frames and political orientations, specifically in regard to liberals' perceived trustworthiness of the speaker. Specifically, as liberals were exposed to a more liberal media frame, the trustworthiness of the speaker increased. While the results do also show that as conservatives were exposed to a more conservative news frame, the trustworthiness of the speaker decreased, these effects were not as profound. Based on these findings, there are a few implications for brands.

If a brand is attempting to rally support for its spokesperson, the brand may want to recognize that a positive news frame of the spokesperson, produced by a liberal publication (i.e., including a liberal frame), has the potential to significantly increase liberal readers' trust in their spokesperson. According to the findings of this study, this trust is not necessarily sparked by the media's frame itself, but rather, the visibility of the story made available to liberal audiences.

Conversely, if a brand is attempting to rally support for its spokesperson, the brand may want to recognize that a negative news frame of the spokesperson, produced by a conservative publication, will not necessarily decrease conservative readers' trust in their spokesperson. According to these findings, the media frames will not have much of any effect on the conservative readers at all. This indicates that for a brand, it is worth the risk to adopt a controversial spokesperson, as the positive effects are significant among liberal audiences, and there are no significant negative effects among conservative audiences.

All this to say, it should be recognized that the brand may not appeal much to the conservative audience, if the spokesperson is also framed by the media as a liberal. Conservative audiences may not find the spokesperson to be an expert, trustworthy or attractive if the spokesperson's values conflict with their own (Lakoff, 1996). Though again, this puts an emphasis on the importance of the audience's pre-existing political orientations rather than on the media frames themselves. This finding fills a current gap in communication literature regarding practical implications for brands and whether or not they should adopt a socially responsible spokesperson for their advertising efforts.

Attitudes Toward Brand

The second research question evaluated attitudes toward the brand (i.e., Athens Activewear, the fictitious brand that the fictitious athlete promoted in the brand advertisement stimulus material). The question asked: how do media frames and political orientations affect attitudes towards a brand? In answering research question 2a, it was found that there were no significant differences in attitudes towards the brand, based on people who received a news frame and those who did not. Again, similar to the results captured for research question 1a, news frames are not significantly influential to audiences' formulated attitudes. Again, this may come as a relief to brands who question the influence that news outlets and news frames hold over their audiences' attitudes. Though media frames were not found to be significantly impactful to audiences' attitudes towards the brands, another factor was found to be impactful.

Research question 2b indicates that audiences' pre-existing political orientations do play a role in their attitudes toward a brand. In fact, the audience's political orientations are more influential and formational to their attitudes towards a brand than media frames. The findings of this study indicated that liberal participants liked the brand significantly more so than conservative participants of the study. What these results of this study confirm, is that — similar to the online conversations that rose in response to these events with Kaepernick — attitudes toward the fictitious brand were significantly more liked by liberal audiences, as was the case with Nike (Costello, 2019). These findings support the phenomenon that, if a brand desires to gain support for its image and reputation, choosing a controversial spokesperson is of benefit to the brand when the spokesperson holds liberal values, because it can incite significant support from the liberal audience. Though it may not incite support from the conservative audience, according to the findings of this study, the brand will not lose a significant amount of support from the conservative audience as a result. Conservative audiences' attitudes remain virtually un-

swayed, meaning that the pay-off for a brand (i.e., to gain significant support from a liberal audience) outweighs the cost (i.e., to see no significant change in conservative audiences' attitudes).

The findings of this study found that even participants placed in the liberal control group liked the brand more than conservative control group members. Neither of these groups held insight into whether or not the brand was aligning itself with a politically active athlete spokesperson, because neither of these groups received the newspaper article that would have informed them of this information. What these findings conclude is that, with or without the presence of media frames, the liberal audience was more supportive of the brand than the conservative audience.

If these findings are recognized as true, they hold a few implications for brands who are attempting to rally support behind their brand name. Perhaps it is not a brand's commitment to corporate social responsibility, or even socially responsible acts, that will establish an audience's trust of the brand. Rather, what informs the levels of trust in a brand's audience is simply how many liberal individuals exist in the brand's audience. If liberals are more trusting of brands than conservatives in general, with no significant sway from the media recorded, then brands really only need to prioritize visibility to a liberal audience.

Given that this study was created in order to replicate 'the Kaepernick Effect,' it is important to recognize a few practical implications about this finding, as well as its relevancy to future studies. The news frames presented of Kaepernick, following his decision to kneel during the national anthem, included commentary from both liberal and conservative frames in the media (Costello, 2019). Costello (2019) presented in his research that Kaepernick's decision to kneel was politicized by the media; thematically, Kaepernick was praised for his activism by liberal

outlets and criticized for his lack of patriotism by conservative outlets (Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; Costello, 2019; "FOX," 2019; Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017). This meant that liberal frames adopted a positive tone toward Kaepernick, whereas conservative frames adopted a more critical tone toward Kaepernick (Abad-Santos, 2018; Barrabi, 2019; Costello, 2019; "FOX," 2019; Gregory, 2017; Mather, 2017). These concepts were all taken into consideration when creating the newspaper frames of the fictitious athlete for this study.

This is the justification for the design of this study; it is why the fictitious athlete created for this study was depicted as (1) an advocate for a socially responsible cause (i.e., animal rights), (2) praised in the liberal news frame (i.e., Nurturant Parent morality and animal rights), (3) critiqued in the conservative news frame (i.e., Strict Father morality and animal rights), and why (4) the fictitious athlete in the brand advertisement offered a nondescript, motivational message to believe in oneself and stand up for their way of thinking. The experiment was modeled after the events that took place in the media surrounding the media coverage of Kaepernick before he appeared in Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement, as well as Kaepernick's role in the advertisement itself.

Additionally, in regard to research question 2c, political orientation and the presence or absence a news frame did not interact in a significant way to have an effect on attitude towards the brands. Meaning, the only significant informant of attitude toward brand in this study was audiences' pre-existing political orientations.

Purchase Intentions

The third research question evaluated audiences' purchasing intentions (i.e., would they buy a product from the brand 'Athens Activewear,' that the fictitious athlete endorsed). The question asked was: how do media frames and political orientations affect audiences' behavioral

intentions? In answering the research question 3a it was found that there was no significant difference in audiences' intentions to purchase a product from this brand, based on the presence or absence of a news frame (i.e., before watching an advertisement with the athlete spokesperson featured).

On the other hand, the findings to research question 3b indicated that audiences' pre-existing political orientations do play a role in their behavioral (i.e., purchasing) intentions with a brand. In fact, the audience's political orientations are more influential and formational to their attitudes towards a brand than media frames. The findings of this study indicated that liberal participants were significantly more likely to purchase a product from the brand than conservative participants of the study.

Similar to the implications of the findings collected for research question two, it is important for a brand to consider who their audience is before they attempt to frame a message. According to these findings, if a brand is considering adopting a controversial spokesperson for an ad, and the spokesperson's values fall on partisan lines (i.e., leans liberal or leans conservative), the brand will have more success in rallying support from audiences that already hold the same values as the spokesperson. In fact, an audience's pre-existing political orientations are more influential than the influence of media news frames. This indicates that although some may view media frames of brands, or brand endorsers, as a threat to their brand's reputation — the most important factor for a brand to take into consideration (i.e., in regard to purchase intention among audiences), is how well their brand values align with audiences' values.

It should be noted that members of the control group, likely drew their conclusions regarding attitude toward brand and speaker from the context clues they collected from the advertisement

message (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 2000). As opposed to the non-control groups, who likely drew their conclusions regarding attitude toward brand and speaker from context clues collected from reading the news article as well as watching the video ad.

In answering the third part to research question 3c, political orientation and the presence or absence a news frame did not interact in a significant way to have an effect on audiences' behavioral (i.e., purchasing) intentions. Meaning, the only significant informant of purchasing intentions in this study was pre-existing political orientations.

This study has contributed a few significant findings to media effects research**.** If a brand is attempting to grow the support of its audience (i.e., increase purchase intention) or expand its audience (i.e., increase audience attitudes), it may want to consider a few particular items. One, these findings suggest that inviting a controversial celebrity spokesperson to endorse one's brand can be helpful to increase a positive attitude toward the brand and positive intentions to purchase. However, the groups that are most likely to approve of the brand's spokesperson, and subsequently desire to purchase a product from them afterward, will feel motivated to do so of their own accord. It will not be in response to a media frame. This differs a bit from the research collected from Blecha et al., (2010), who found certain frames in newspaper articles about athletes (i.e., accusatory frames), to have a direct effect on audiences' perceptions of the athlete featured in the frame; audiences saw these athletes as more deserving of consequences. The findings of this thesis more closely resemble those collected by Lewis and Weaver (2015) who found only a marginal significance in the effect of media frames on audience's attitudes toward people. Lewis and Weaver's (2015) findings communicate a smaller scope of impact from media frames on audiences' attitudes; though even still, these findings differ from the ones collected in

this study. There was no significant evidence collected from this thesis to suggest that the media frames presented to audiences had a direct effect on their attitudes.

What this implies is that audiences' pre-existing political ideologies, moral and beliefs are more influential in their decision(s) to find a spokesperson credible (i.e., an expert, trustworthy, attractive), approve of a brand or intend to purchase from the brand. Given the findings of this study, brands should consider who their ideal audience, or current audience, is before selecting a controversial spokesperson; if the spokesperson's values do not align with those of the existing audience, the brand may not lose a significant number of supporters, but they certainly will not increase their scope or degree of support from existing audiences.

This means that if a brand's goal is to increase audiences' attitudes towards the perceived credibility of their spokesperson, increase audiences' attitudes of support of the brand and increase audiences' purchase intentions — the existing audiences' political leanings, morals and values must be considered before the brand releases any advertisement of messages with the celebrity spokesperson (i.e., athlete). If the controversial spokesperson's values align with that of the brand's existing audience, there is a higher probability that that audience will respond more positively to the spokesperson and brand and in their intent to purchase from the brand.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This research offers valuable findings to the advertising, athletic, branding and public relations industries to consider when crafting messages for audiences; this research also provides new and original data to the social science research community, extending the conversation and providing new insights to the media effects research community. After completing this study, it

has been noted that there are ample opportunities for future research in this area of study. It should also be recognized that the research plays a role of contribution, not finality.

In regard to the design of this study, and its stimulus materials, participants were shown only one news article before watching the brand advertisement; they were shown this news clipping directly before watching the advertisement. This can be acknowledged as a limitation, as it was the only time that participants were introduced to the fictitious athlete in the study before watching the video ad. Given the time frame, this may not have given participants as much time to develop their attitudes toward the fictitious athlete, as one might have had the opportunity to do with Kaepernick — given his visibility in the news over a timespan of nearly two years prior to his advertisement feature with Nike (Costello, 2019).

Additionally, this study surveyed a niche population of participants, familiarly recognized by social science researchers as "WEIRD" participants: "Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic" (Haidt, 2012, p. 96). This study was conducted on the campus of a large Southwest Virginia university, which explains the presence of predominantly WEIRD participants in this study; it is also acknowledged that this group of participants will "see the world differently" in comparison to groups who do not identify with the WEIRD categorization of thought, and it is worth acknowledging that they may carry "different moral concerns" (Haidt, 2012, p.97). In future studies, researchers may find a more holistic, representative data set if they are able to include participants from adult populations, differing socioeconomic backgrounds and different cultural backgrounds.

Another item worth discussing in this section is the demographic of the fictional athlete that appeared in the video brand advertisement. The fictional athlete, Jacklyn Reynolds, was

represented visually by a young (i.e., early twenties), white female. It is worth noting that if this study were replicated with a different fictional athlete represented (e.g., different gender, race, etc.), this may produce different findings from participants of the study (i.e., attitude toward speaker, attitude toward brand, purchase intention).

This area of advertising and media effects could also benefit from conducting a similar study, only over a longer period of time—perhaps in a longitudinal study, in order to document audiences' shifting attitudes towards a spokesperson, brand and shifted purchasing intentions. This could present researchers with the opportunity to more accurately pinpoint the cause of specific attitudinal and behavioral shifts in audiences, whether it be sparked from the influence of media consumption or pre-existing political orientations or other external factors.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The way the media frames a controversial spokesperson can have an effect on the way audiences view the spokesperson; this should be acknowledged, as it was supported within the findings of this thesis. However, just as valuable to acknowledge is that the results of this study suggest that media frames, though they carry some effect, are not significantly impactful in shaping audiences' attitudes towards the credibility of a spokesperson, brand or in informing their purchase intent. Ultimately, an audiences' pre-existing political values are the most impactful indicator of whether or not an individual will choose to approve of a controversial spokesperson, support a brand endorsed by said spokesperson, and feel inclined to purchase from the brand.

These results point to a "why" behind some audiences' responses to Kaepernick following his saturated presence in the news and eventual appearance in Nike's "Dream Crazy" advertisement. This research presents the following conclusion in response to the initial question carried forward from this thesis: What sparks a polarized response, and controversial reactions, to an advertisement campaign? After 'replicating the Kaepernick effect,' the findings of this study suggest that though the frames presented in media (i.e., of celebrity athletes and spokespeople) play some role in shaping attitudes, ultimately, the values an audience carries — and whether or not those values align with those presented of the brand and spokesperson (i.e., she advocates for a cause I like vs. he advocated for a cause I do not like) is the most influential factor in determining one's support of a brand. Liberal audience members expressed significantly more support, via approval of the spokesperson, brand and intention to purchase, than conservative audiences. Given that this finding was true of both control groups as well (i.e.,

liberal audiences who did not read the news article, still liked the spokesperson more than conservative audiences) this finding indicates that liberal audiences may be more willing to support a brand and spokesperson than conservative audiences.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Division of Scholarly Integrity and Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 20, 2020

TO: Mike Horning, Emily McCaul

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Media Frames of Brand Spokespeople

IRB NUMBER: **19-1085**

Effective February 20, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 3(i)(B).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As:	**Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 3(i)(B)**
Protocol Determination Date:	**February 20, 2020**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
   _____

2. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female
   Transgender Male
   Transgender Female
   Genderqueer
   Gender-nonconforming
   I'd prefer not to say
   Other: _____

3. Select one or more of the following options that best describes your race:
   American Indian or Alaska Native
   Black or African American
   White / Caucasian
   Hispanic or Latino/a
   Asian
   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   Middle Eastern or North African
   Other: _____

4. What is your current class standing?
   Freshman
   Sophomore
   Junior
   Senior
   Graduate Student / PhD Student: _____

5. Of the political leanings listed, which do you feel you align with most, based on your views?
   Conservative
   Moderate
   Liberal

6. Which description best describes your political leaning?
   Extremely Liberal
   Liberal
   Somewhat Liberal
   Somewhat Conservative
   Conservative

Extremely Conservative

7. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the brand depicted in the video advertisement you just watched. How appealing did you find this brand?

Appealing				Unappealing
5	4	3	2	1

8. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the brand depicted in the video advertisement you just watched. How pleasant did you find this brand?

Pleasant				Unpleasant
5	4	3	2	1

9. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the brand depicted in the video advertisement you just watched. How favorable did you find this brand?

Favorable				Unfavorable
5	4	3	2	1

10. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the brand depicted in the video advertisement you just watched. How likable did you find this brand?

Likable				Unlikable
5	4	3	2	1

11. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the brand depicted in the video advertisement you just watched. How good or bad did you find this brand?

Good				Bad
5	4	3	2	1

12. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How dependable did you find this spokesperson?

Undependable				Dependable
1	2	3	4	5

13. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How honest did you find this spokesperson?

Dishonest				Honest
1	2	3	4	5

14. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How reliable did you find this spokesperson?

Unreliable				Reliable
1	2	3	4	5

15. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How sincere did you find this spokesperson?

Insincere				Sincere
1	2	3	4	5

16. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How trustworthy did you find this spokesperson?

Not trustworthy				Trustworthy
1	2	3	4	5

17. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How much of an expert did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Not an expert				Expert
1	2	3	4	5

18. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How experienced did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Inexperienced				Experienced
1	2	3	4	5

19. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How knowledgeable did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Unknowledgeable				Knowledgeable
1	2	3	4	5

20. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How qualified did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Unqualified				Qualified
1	2	3	4	5

21. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How skilled did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Unskilled	Skilled

1 2 3 4 5

22. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How attractive did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Unattractive				Attractive
1	2	3	4	5

23. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How classy did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Not Classy				Classy
1	2	3	4	5

24. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How beautiful did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Ugly				Beautiful
1	2	3	4	5

25. Please select the response that best describes your overall feelings toward the spokesperson shown in the video advertisement you just watched. How elegant did you perceive this spokesperson to be?

Plain				Elegant
1	2	3	4	5

26. Please select the response that best describes your overall intentions based on the video advertisement you just watched. How likely are you to try a product from the brand featured in the ad?

Try it				Not try it
5	4	3	2	1

27. Please select the response that best describes your overall intentions based on the video advertisement you just watched. How likely are you to buy a product from the brand featured in the ad?

Buy it				Not buy it
5	4	3	2	1

28. Please select the response that best describes your overall intentions based on the video advertisement you just watched. How likely are you to seek more information about the brand featured in the video advertisement?

Seek information			Not seek information	
5	4	3	2	1

29. Please select the response that best describes your overall intentions based on the video advertisement you just watched. How likely would you be to recommend the brand to others?

Recommend				Not recommend
5	4	3	2	1

30. Some people argue that news stories have political biases. How would you describe the political leaning of the news story you read before the advertisement? Do the political leanings of the news story lean more to the right (i.e., conservative) or left (i.e., liberal)?
    Extremely conservative
    Moderately conservative
    Conservative
    Liberal
    Moderately Liberal
    Extremely Liberal

31. Indicate how much you felt the news article you read portrayed and covered its social issue accurately.
    A great deal
    A lot
    A moderate amount
    A little
    None at all

32. The athlete that was featured in the brand advertisement I watched today was:
    Athlete A
    Athlete B
    Athlete C

Appendix C

Stimulus Materials

Conservative Frame News Article.

The Ohio Gazette
Local Sports

5 February 2020

Collegiate runner chooses mascot over teammates

by: Matthew Willard, Sports Writer

"It's disrespectful not only to her teammates ... but the whole university," said Randy Thompson, head running coach of Cincinnati State University. "Her decision effects multiple groups; I don't know if she has considered that yet."

Thompson spoke in response to a viral tweet from one of Cincinnati State University's most reputable running athletes, Jacklyn Reynolds. Reynolds tweeted the morning of Tuesday, Feb. 4 that she no longer planned to run for the university, which came as a shock to many coaches and teammates.

One of the reasons Reynolds' tweet gained so much traction online was attributed to her entitled phraseology; Reynolds offered the university a plan of contingency She conceded she would be happy to continue running for the university on the condition that the school would release its current mascot, Bruce the bear, from the care of the school.

A 22-year-old male, brown bear, Bruce has been kept under the university's care and provision for the past 20 years as the school's official mascot. He is often associated with messages of ferocity and strength for CSU.

Jacklyn Reynolds, current Cincinnati State University student and former Cincinnati State University runner, pictured on the campus of CSU in Spring 2020.

Cincinnati State University's mascot logo of Bruce the Bear, last updated September 2019.

He is frequently featured within CSU's promotional materials like pamphlets, signs and sports gear. Beloved by many sports fans, Reynolds voiced she has a problem with the way the university has profited from Bruce.

"Animal rights are rights, and I will always advocate for their fair and equal treatment — running career or not," Reynolds said.

Reynolds took to social media to further rant about the university's profits from Bruce via promotional advertisements, which she did not support. Her decision to quit CSU's running team mid-season, abandoning teammates, coaches and fans alike has left members of CSU feeling hurt and confused.

> ***"It's disrespectful not only to her teammates ... but the whole university."***

"I love this school, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunities that CSU has granted me on this team," Reynolds said. "However, I've reached a point in my career where I can no longer stand as a symbol for something I do not support."

CSU's president, Jake Johnson, released a university-wide address within the hours following the release of Reynolds viral tweet stating, "CSU has always and will always support the right to freedom of speech. We acknowledge each of our CSU students and their freedom to maintain their own opinions, beliefs and ideas."

No word has been released from the university in regard to Reynold's demands.

Liberal Frame News Article.

The Ohio Gazette

Local Sports

5 February 2020

Collegiate runner takes a stand for animal rights

by: Matthew Willard, Sports Writer

"I love this school, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunities that CSU has granted me on this team," said Jacklyn Reynolds, former Cincinnati State University runner. "However, I've reached a point in my career where I can no longer stand as a symbol for something I do not support."

Reynolds shared these words with the general public yesterday evening, Tuesday, Feb. 4 around 6:15 p.m. at an animal rights rally in downtown Cincinnati. The rally was held in response to questions Reynolds received following her viral tweet sent the same morning.

Reynolds tweeted the morning of Tuesday, Feb. 4 that she no longer planned to run as an athlete for the university. She shared she would be happy to continue running for the university on the condition that the school would release its current live mascot, Bruce the bear, from captivity.

Bruce is a 22-year-old male, brown bear who has been used for university profit, promotional advertisements and branding efforts since 2000. Though Bruce is often associated with messages of ferocity and strength for the school, Bruce has been pictured multiple times over the past decade looking dangerously underweight and exhausted at mandatory football game appearances.

Jacklyn Reynolds, current Cincinnati State University student and former Cincinnati State University runner, pictured on the campus of CSU in Spring 2020.

Cincinnati State University's mascot logo of Bruce the Bear, last updated September 2019.

University employees have intentionally dodged questions relating to his care and upkeep, leading some to believe that Bruce is not being properly cared for at CSU.

In a stand against animal cruelty, and in advocation for animal rights, Reynolds took the brave step to speak out about the mistreatment of Bruce the bear. Reynolds states that animals should not be sheltered from natural habitats or used for a university's profit via promotional advertisements.

> ***"I've reached a point in my career where I can no longer stand as a symbol for something I do not support."***

CSU's president, Jake Johnson, did not provide a comment when asked to speak to the incident with the *Ohio Gazette*. However, president Johnson released a university-wide address within the hours following the release of Reynolds viral tweet that stated, "CSU has always and will always support the right to freedom of speech. We acknowledge each of our CSU students and their freedom to maintain their own opinions, beliefs and ideas."

No word has been released from the university in regard to Reynold's request for Bruce's freedom.

Brand Video Advertisement

Link to video advertisement used for stimulus material (public link): https://youtu.be/8h-_Hi-Qm48.

Brand Video Advertisement Voice-Over Script

> Not everyone thinks like you; they may not laugh at the same things you find funny. They may not pause at the same things that make you pause — that make you think. That's okay. Because the way you see the world, matters. It's not weird to think different. To be different is good. It's good to be weird. The people that think about things differently, that look at life through a new lens, that challenge themselves to simply – see more, those people are the ones that do more. They motivate the motivated. They lead the energized. They ask more of others with the anticipation that they will rise to the challenge ahead. So, go ahead. Don't be afraid to lead the pack — to see something different. Do something different. Make something different — and own it. So? Whatever you make in this life, make it your own.