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### Transcending Ball and Ballin': Connecting the Jordan Brand and College Football Fans

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**Transcending Ball and Ballin': Jordan Brand and College Football Fans**

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## Transcending ~~the Game~~Ball and Ballin': Jordan Brand and College Football Fans

### *Introduction*

*“Be true to the game, because the game will be true to you. If you try to shortcut the game, then the game will shortcut you. If you put forth the effort, good things will be bestowed upon you. That’s truly about the game, and in some ways that’s about life too” – Michael Jordan*

### Effective and Affective Influences on Consumer Responses

Michael Jordan, ~~who~~ played 15 seasons in the National Basketball Association (NBA) between 1984 and 2003 and is considered by many to be the greatest basketball player of all time. Not surprisingly, he is the subject of much discussion and lore in today’s popular culture. The Jordan Brand, first introduced in 1984, is famously characterized by the Jumpman logo; a silhouette of Michael Jordan ~~which that~~ conjures images of Jordan flying through the air to dunk a basketball and is one of the most widely recognizable logos of athletes in the world (Rovell, 2006<sup>18</sup>). ~~With T~~ the Jumpman logo has ~~appeared~~ on Jordan Brand products since 1988 ~~and,~~ ~~the~~ brand has been wildly popular, with the brand valued at over \$10 billion and generating over \$3.1 billion in revenue in the 2019 fiscal year. ~~It has, thus making become it~~ one of Nike’s largest business units. There has been much scholarly attention given to Nike and its strategy, business model, and innovation (Ramaswamy, 2008), its social responsibility (DeTienne & Lewis, 2005), and its branding and marketing (Coleman, 2013). However, much less attention has been given to Nike’s individual business units. Given the Jordan Brand’s substantial role and distinct position within the Nike business structure, the Jordan Brand business model merits focus due to its effective influence ~~the potential of its strategies to affect~~ the overall Nike brand, as well as its consumers, sport fans, and other influencers.

The role of Michael Jordan and his associated endorsement, brand, and marketing efforts with Nike has been examined in a broader analysis of Michael Jordan as a celebrity endorser (Mathur et al., ~~Mathur, & Rangan,~~ 1997). ~~This~~ study highlighted the wealth effects (e.g., the increased values of Jordan's client firms) associated with a celebrity figure and specifically an iconic athlete, utilizing an event study methodology to collect data. At the time of their study, it was estimated that Michael Jordan's return to the ~~National Basketball Association (NBA)~~ after his (first) retirement would be financially impactful for Jordan Brand and other associated brands. In 1997, Mathur et al. ~~(1997)~~ indicated that "Jordan's expected return has increased the stock values of related firms by \$1.016 billion. This illustrates the potential value of celebrity endorsements" (p. 67). However, there remain gaps in the understanding of the consumer experience, emotion, intentions, and behaviors related to brands ~~which~~ that are so tightly linked to a company.

There is a myriad of evidence that discrete emotions play a pivotal role in product marketing, brand loyalty, and consumer purchasing behavior. It is heavily documented that the role that emotions such as fear (Tannenbaum et al., 2015), attachment (Akgun et al., ~~Kocoglu, & Imamoglu,~~ 2013), ~~and~~ companionship, and love (Rossiter & Bellman, ~~2012~~ 1999) play in consumer responses across a variety of branding contexts. But what about the emotion awe? Awe is a powerful emotion characterized by vastness and the need for humans to adjust their cognitive framework to accommodate it. Keltner and Haidt (2003) explored the conceptual aspects and dimensions of awe, ~~—discussing the dimensions of awe and~~ ~~characterizing~~ disaggregated its differences from other positive emotions, ~~while also~~ and ~~noting~~ ing the lack of consideration given to awe as an emotion. Consistent with this discussion is a lack of

empirical investigation of the depth and breadth of the effects of awe in the branding and consumer behavior setting.

In 2016, the University of Michigan's athletic department announced a partnership with Jordan Brand wherein Air Jordan provided~~s~~ the equipment for the university's football team. Similar partnerships were subsequently announced between Jordan Brand and the University of North Carolina, the University of Oklahoma<sub>2</sub> and the University of Florida<sub>2</sub> along with the basketball programs at four other institutions. In addition to athletic uniforms at these universities that display~~ing~~ the Jumpman logo, fans may also purchase merchandise ~~for fans to purchase including~~such as jerseys, hats<sub>2</sub> ~~and~~ t-shirts, ~~among and~~ other items ~~that~~<sub>2</sub> display the logo. The partnerships between these large, tradition-laden football programs and the value created by ~~the~~ Jordan Brand invites several new lines of inquiry<sub>2</sub>:

1. Does the experience of watching Michael Jordan's superior play skills on the court carry over into consumer perceptions of the brand bearing his likeness?
2. Does the partnership between these athletic departments and Jordan Brand evoke attachment and feelings that are documented ~~to as~~ being associated with awe?
3. To what extent does the perceived quality, admiration<sub>2</sub> and tradition of Jordan Brand influence behaviors of fans associated with athletic departments that chose to engage in the sponsorship?<sub>2</sub>

The current study investigates the role that awe plays in sports branding by examining how the Jordan Brand's use of the likeness of an iconic athlete such as Michael Jordan, whose style of play elicited emotions of awe, impacts consumer responses.

## Review of the Literature

### *Branding and the theory of awe*

Scholarly research into the conceptual foundations surrounding the emotion of awe is relatively new within the context of the social sciences, but the breadth of knowledge is rapidly expanding. As stated above, Keltner and Haidt (2003), initially framed the construct defining two central elements to conceptualizing awe: *vastness* and *accommodation*. Weber (1978) detailed the importance of a charismatic person in changing attitudes and behaviors. This concept is central to corporate branding and/or athlete and celebrity endorsements where one charismatic individual can deeply influence customers and their behaviors. Keltner and Haidt (2003) further synthesized how, “certain collective emotions have transformative powers; they change people’s attitudes and inspire them to follow something larger than themselves” (p. 300).- Successfully branding charismatic people, then, can have observable outcomes.

While awe is typically viewed as a relatively spiritual emotion without many concrete applications, recent research has shown that it to have has more positive, tangible associations, that-which are unique relative to other positive emotions (Gottlieb et al., Keltner, & Lombrozo, 2018). Some of these associations include wonder, admiration, respect, and reverence; additionally, it-and can drive outcomes such as intentions to generosity, and helping behaviors, and have positive effects on self-image (Rudd et al., Vohs, & Aaker, 2012). Thus, experiencing awe can produce changes in actions or behavior amongst those that experience it.

When considering how awe relates to firms and companies, the concept is deeply connected with a feeling of admiration for the brand. Aaker et al., Garbinsky, and Vohs (2012) note that when consumers seek to express their intense feelings of admiration about the firm, there can be spillover into feelings associated with awe. It is documented that awe can be experienced-present in settings such as sporting events (Ohlin, 2019) and that engaging in an awe-inducing experience-conditions can cause the individual experiencing it to feel small relative

to the world around them and feel more connected to the culture in which the experience was contextualized (Shiota et al., 2007). Michael Jordan's exceptional ability on the basketball court has ~~made-precipitated~~ many a fan to experience these feelings, and the growth of his legacy may continue to elicit levels of awe ~~which-that~~ can create spillovers into his brand; feelings which may ultimately be leveraged into enhancing consumer perceptions and influencing behaviors (Rudd et al., 2012).

While a gap exists in previous work surrounding the role that awe plays in branding, branding and consumer behavior ~~have~~s been examined from a variety of other angles. There is a general consensus that branding has become integral to product success – a critical element in today's market conditions (Chovanová et al., ~~Korshunov, & Babčanová~~, 2015). A company's brand provides products with identity and personality and often serves as a signal to consumers of product quality, market segmentation, and company values. A brand allows companies to build a relationship with consumers; ~~and~~ this helps dictate consumer behavior.

~~The~~Ssport literature also provides important insights into branding patterns and the people behind them. Sport organizations at both the professional and collegiate level often build their brands s through corporate sponsorships that convey characteristics of the organizations' values, ~~which-and-also then~~ impacts consumer perceptions. Mason (2005) found that sport sponsorships can impact consumers' attitudes and can help build emotional attachments that favorably alter consumer behavior, particularly if there is a strong fit between the organization and the corporate sponsor, and if the consumer is a highly involved fan. A key distinction that separates the Jordan Brand from many other modern-day brands lies in the connection with Michael Jordan's name and likeness. Carlson and Donovan (2013) determined that consumers view athletes, such as Michael Jordan, as *human brands*. Thomson (2006) concluded that



attachment to a human brand leads to higher levels of satisfaction, trust, and commitment associated with the brand ~~— a —~~ and an overall richer experience for consumers. In this context, factors such as prestige and distinctiveness led to higher levels of emotional attachment between the consumer and the brand, which in turn, resulted in higher levels of viewership of the athlete and more purchases of the athlete's brand merchandise. This is key for the Jordan Brand, as Michael Jordan is generally viewed as one of the most prestigious human brands in sports history (Crowley, 1999).

While the concept of awe has been studied in spiritual, artistic, and sociological contexts, the literature exploring the relationship between awe and consumer behavior is sparse. Examining the relationship between consumer behavior, branding, and awe through the lens of a sports brand is a logical progression to better understand the effects elicited by the performance of “once in a generation” athletes, such as Michael Jordan. Previous scholars build on the idea that as an emotion, awe, ~~as an emotion~~, can be elicited as a result of watching peak performances in sport and ~~awe can~~has become associated with athletes who have demonstrated these peak performances (~~Ravizza, 1977~~; Chidester, 2012; Ravizza, 1977). Given his remarkable performance while playing, it is intuitive that Michael Jordan would emerge as a natural figure to study awe.

There is, however, ~~something a~~ quality of wonderment inherently unique about Jordan (i.e., Jordan Brand), for he is still perceived as one of the most prestigious athletes and human brands in sport history, despite not playing in nearly two decades (Crowley, 1999). Jordan seems to have transcended Weber's (1978) assertion that “charismatic authority is naturally unstable” and that one “gains and retains [power] solely by proving his powers in practice” (p. 1114). As such, exploring the Jordan Brand phenomenon is even more important, as it appears that through

reputation and image alone, Jordan continues to inspire awe. ~~Furthermore, t~~The awe-inspiring nature of the Jordan Brand is ~~further~~ evidenced by the extent to which youth and adults relate to and consume the Jordan Brand across the world. Whether it be parents taking their children out of school to stand in line for the latest Jordan Brand sneaker release, or *sneaker heads* with their shoe collection including the original packaging preserved like a museum artifact, or those who get tattoos of the *Jumpman* logo —there appears to be some aspect of awe associated with the brand (Connolly, 2016; Jackson, 2016).

### ***Fans and Audiences of Michael Jordan and the Jordan Brand***

Although Michael Jordan's playing career ended in 2003, he remains extremely popular in modern culture. ~~He and~~ is revered as a symbol of greatness by former and current basketball players, other athletes/celebrities, and basketball fans, both casual and devoted, alike. The on-court success of Michael Jordan is undeniable—~~s~~six NBA championships, five NBA Most Valuable Player Awards, ten NBA scoring titles, two Olympic gold medals and much more. He is a two-time inductee into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, and in 2016, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor award to civilians of the United States. ESPN named Michael Jordan the top North American athlete of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ahead of famed athletes such as Babe Ruth, Muhammad Ali, and Wayne Gretzky (ESPN, n.d.). Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Michael Jordan's career relative to those of legendary athletes, both in basketball and in other sports, has been his ability to leverage the emotional response from fans garnered by his on-court play into legacy effects and financial success in his business ventures off the court. Jordan is the wealthiest former professional athlete in the world (Gaines ~~et al.~~, ~~Borden & Askinasi~~, 2020) and in 2013, ten years after his retirement from the NBA, was

earning an estimated \$30 million more than the highest paid active NBA player, stemming mostly from Jordan Brand and various other endorsements (Lubin, 2014).

In the years since Jordan's retirement, a multitude of statements by former and current professional basketball players, media members, and other figures in popular culture have shed light onto Jordan's long-lasting impact both on and off the court. In 2019, a poll of 117 current NBA players showed that 73% of players view Michael Jordan as the best basketball player of all time (Amick, 2019). His NBA.com (2017) legends profile remarks that "he was an accessible [through the Air Jordan brand] star who managed to maintain an air of mystique." Current NBA star LeBron James remarked that the first time he met Jordan "it was like meeting God for the first time." (Olivieri, 2020). Likewise, NFL quarterback Tom Brady stated that he "was in awe of Michael Jordan and [is] still in awe of what he was and what meant (...) there's an art and a beauty to the way he played the game" (Conway, 2017). Current NBA player Chris Paul notes that the Jordan Brand is a large reason why Michael Jordan's legacy still inspires players in the modern NBA, aided by Nike's storytelling prowess, with many shoes associated with iconic moments from Jordan's career (Harris, 2018).

The Jordan Brand also has facilitated Michael Jordan's transcendence from a basketball player to a popular culture figure. Grammy Award-winning hip-hop artist DJ Khaled has stated "for me, he is the definition of greatness. His influence is generational. A brand you can trust forever, timeless. It represents winning and being the best period" (Harris, 2018). While the above quotations are anecdotal, they are illustrative of how Michael Jordan's aura is perceived on and off the basketball court and the feelings of awe that are conjured by his performance and likeness. In a 2019 survey of over 1,000 basketball fans conducted by Business Insider, Michael Jordan was overwhelmingly supported (66% of participants) as the greatest basketball player of

all time, with his overall influence in elevating the NBA's global profile and popularity cited as a major contributing factor (Davis ~~et al.~~, ~~Hickey & Yuan~~, 2019). The results were consistent across fans who categorized themselves as only casual fans and those who identified themselves as loyal NBA supporters. They ~~also~~-were also consistent across age groups with over 60% of the 18-29 age group recognizing Jordan's elite prowess. This is further illustrative of the long-lasting effects of Jordan's image, as many of the fans in this age group were born after the peak of Jordan's career in the mid-1990's, and thus never personally witnessed it. Providing an explanation for this phenomenon, former ~~United States~~ President Barack Obama notes that "Michael Jordan helped create a different way people saw athletics as part of the entertainment business (...) [he] changed the culture. He became an extraordinary ambassador, not just for basketball, but for the United States." (Manrique, 2020).

From a more academic perspective, Harrison et al. (2010) further investigated the connection between the awe-like emotions that fans experience while watching Michael Jordan on the court to the emotional responses they experience when coming into contact with Jordan's Brand and the Jumpman logo. This ~~is~~-was accomplished by collecting responses from 89 college students ~~by~~-using the photo elicitation technique to qualitatively analyze consumer perspectives related to logo. ~~The results demonstrate that Jordan's brand is capable of eliciting awe-like emotions~~-Wwith Michael Jordan's on-court play serving as key facilitator of the strength of the emotional responses, the results demonstrated that Jordan's brand is capable of eliciting awe-like emotions. Examples of participant responses to the Jumpman logo included, "Michael Jordan, greatness"; "greatness and style"; "people want to 'be like Mike' on and off the court"; and "Michael Jordan – One of the greatest to ever play the game [of basketball]; It is a logo that represents a brand name ~~J~~-Jordan." Major themes of the findings stemming from the responses

to the logo and the Jordan Brand included (a) *Be Like Mike*, (b) *The Branding Representation of Michael Jordan the athlete*, (c) *and Greatness, Style and Winning*. This further establishes a key link between Jordan's athletic performance and the brand bearing his likeness and confirms that Michael Jordan's image is capable of eliciting strong emotional responses from consumers engaging with his brand.

Given the strong emotional responses elicited by Jordan Brand and the Jumpman logo, particularly with younger audiences across all regions of the country, the partnerships between Jordan Brand and the athletics departments at major universities, i.e., in the Big 10, SEC, Big XII, and ACC ~~respectively~~, all seem intuitive. In 2015, when the University of Michigan officially announced the partnership with Jordan Brand, interim athletic director Jim Hackett remarked, "this partnership is about more than Michigan athletics; at the core, it is about our University community and it is about two great names reuniting for an opportunity that speaks to more than uniforms and apparel" (University of Michigan, 2015). Michigan's basketball coach John Beilein concurred, stating that "the traditions and reputations of both brands make this relationship one of the best in college athletics" (University of Michigan, 2015). Similar characterizations were provided at other partnering institutions, with University of Florida athletic director Scott Stricklin noting that, "The Florida Gators and Jordan Brand are two of the more iconic brands in athletics and we are looking forward to our partnership that will be enjoyed by the student-athletes of our football and basketball programs and our fans" and Florida football coach Dan Mullen saying, "I know our players and staff will be pumped up" (Hutchins, 2017). It seems that the Jordan Brand elicits emotional responses from even the highest levels of athletic leadership in higher educations.

### *The last dance phenomenon*

In 2020, ESPN and Netflix released *The Last Dance*, a documentary centered on capturing the progression and impact of Michael Jordan's career ~~was co-produced by ESPN and Netflix and aired between April 19 and May 17~~. The series covers Jordan's playing career from high school through the end of his final season with the Chicago Bulls in 1998, airing footage from a film crew that followed the Bulls during the 1997-98 season. It also features interviews and analysis from key figures, including Jordan himself, former teammates, coaches, media members who covered Chicago while Jordan was a member of the team, NBA players that Jordan played against, and other non-athlete public figures who offered their perspectives. Premiering during the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic ~~with as~~ live sports were indefinitely paused, the docuseries averaged 5.648 million viewers across the ten aired episodes, making it the most watched ESPN documentary ever released and top program viewed on television since live sports had been paused (Young, 2020). Since the premier, viewership has continued to increase with the first two episodes garnering an average ~~minute~~ audience of over 13 million viewers as of May 2020 (NBA, 2020).

The content and subsequent analysis of the docuseries has ~~furthered~~ precipitated contemporary conversation surrounding Michael Jordan's legacy, particularly with younger viewers. The series received overwhelmingly positive reviews with a 95% approval rating from audiences and a 96% approval rating from critics (Rotten Tomatoes, 2020). Critics remark that *The Last Dance* serves as an "education and spiritual reunion" with Jordan's Bulls and that viewers will be in "awe of [Jordan's] superpowers." Analysis of the docuseries yields that the content will change the way ~~that~~ viewers think of Michael Jordan and his legacy (ESPN, 2020). In a survey of ESPN NBA analysts, the docuseries is said to confirm that Jordan is the greatest

and most charismatic player in history, appearing invincible (Zach Lowe), and ~~to~~-inspires awe surrounding his life and basketball career (Brian Windhorst). The docuseries has changed the way that younger NBA players (born in the late 1990's to early 2000's) and current college players perceive the career and image of Jordan, even ~~while-for those who~~ having grown up watching video of him playing (Youngmisuk, 2020). Finally, college-aged fans who watched the docuseries characterized their view of Jordan as being that of a dominating athlete and a global icon (Taub, 2020).

### **Method: collecting data in real time**

*The Last Dance* phenomenon coupled with the enduring aura and legacy of Jordan and his brand ~~motivate-necessitate~~ further study surrounding the emotional responses from consumers who engage with products bearing his likeness. The newly minted partnerships between Jordan Brand and the athletic programs of elite universities serves as an optimal vehicle to conduct this study ~~as-because (a)~~ consumer responses are capturable as the transition to Jordan Brand products is being implemented and ~~(b)~~ resulting changes in behavior can be analyzed. Attendees of football games at the partner institutions serve as a primary population from which to sample for two reasons. First, these four football programs, each from a different major conference, were exclusively chosen to have their equipment and associated merchandise branded with the Jumpman logo. While there are other universities with basketball uniforms that contain the Jumpman logo, the inclusion of the logo on the football uniforms of these institutions received considerable promotion ~~and-represent-a-unique-branding-partnership~~. Second, the surveying of fans at football games allows for the analysis of whether Jordan Brand and the Jumpman logo elicit emotional responses strong enough to transcend the game of basketball. As discussed previously, even casual basketball fans revere Michael Jordan and his image. By

examining football game attendees who have no outward affinity to the game of basketball, a richer analysis can be conducted. Additionally, in 2019 the University of Michigan led the nation in average football attendance at 111,459 attendees per game (NCAA, 2020~~19~~). The University of North Carolina averaged 50,500, the University of Florida averaged 84,684, and the University of Oklahoma averaged 83,256. The two stated factors coupled with the large attendance at games from each partner institution provide a diverse population from which to sample.

To study the impacts of the partnership, the survey construction process was designed to gain a holistic view of the respondents' feelings and emotions toward the Jordan Brand, their university, and the partnership between the two. Survey questions were constructed so that subsequent analysis of the data allowed for the determination of key characteristics that serve as predictors of favorable consumer behavior (and feelings of emotional attachment and awe) in relation to the Jordan Brand. By measuring the level of affinity survey participants feel towards Jordan Brand, the potential gains from a partnership with a brand that elicits strong emotional responses such as Jordan Brand can be examined. More specifically, the survey was designed to collect data on four dimensions: (a) the demographic background of the survey participants; (b) their level of connection to the University and Jordan Brand; (c) their emotional feelings and perceptions toward Jordan Brand and its partnership with the university's athletic department; (d) ~~finally,~~ the likelihood the Jordan Brand partnership would influence their future actions. Survey participants' emotions towards Jordan Brand were captured using a 5-point Likert scale, in which a response of 1 generally indicated a strongly negative response while a response of 5 generally indicated a strongly positive ~~/or~~ affirmative response.



Demographic data collected included information on participants' age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Data corresponding to the participants' relationships and prior interactions with the university and Jordan Brand were collected using objective, discrete choice questions. Information collected included the connection to the university (e.g., student, alumni, faculty), their typical level of home game attendance, season ticket holder status, level of awareness of the new partnership between the university and Jordan Brand, whether they had previously purchased their university's Jordan Brand merchandise, and the amount they previously spent on Jordan Brand merchandise.

Successfully quantifying the emotional attachment to Jordan Brand is a crucial feature of the survey design and data collection process. Given the anecdotal evidence of awe-like emotional responses to Michael Jordan the athlete and the connections between his athletic performance and his human brand, data ~~is-were~~ collected on a variety of variables that serve as proxies for awe, based on its definition and theoretical dimensions. A Likert scale allows for quantification of the strength of participants' feelings toward Jordan Brand, as well as their beliefs as to how the partnership with Jordan Brand influences outside perspectives. With the theoretical sentiments surrounding awe in mind, the survey asked participants whether they perceived Jordan Brand as representing quality, embodying tradition, and displaying excellence. Participants were also asked whether they believed the partnership with Jordan Brand would bring more attention to the athletic programs and create a more positive perception from those not affiliated with the university. As additional measures of emotional attachment and proxies for awe, participants were asked whether they felt Jordan Brand was a good fit for the university, whether it brought value to the university, and how they personally felt when wearing Jordan Brand apparel. In addition to measuring affinity to Jordan Brand partnership, these questions

allowed for analysis of participants' perceptions of how others perceived the Jordan Brand partnership, and hence the collectiveness of the emotional response, a key theoretical construct of awe.

While understanding the emotional response to the branding partnership is an important first step, it was also important to understand how these emotional connections translated to impact in consumer behavior and other actions. Thus, participants whether they intended to purchase their university's Jordan Brand apparel in the future or ~~whether they intended to~~ purchase ~~more~~ additional apparel in the future if they had already done so. To understand whether the emotional response to the new branding would translate to non-purchasing behaviors, individuals were asked whether they were more likely to donate to the university and the university's athletic department as a result of the partnership with Jordan Brand, whether they were more likely to attend football games in the future as a result of the partnership, and whether the partnership encouraged them to purchase non-university Jordan Brand apparel. Finally, individuals were asked whether they were willing to pay more for their university's apparel because it has the Jordan Brand logo.

Data collection was completed in two phases. As the partnerships were first established at the University of Michigan and the University of North Carolina, the first phase of data collection occurred at these two institutions. Subsequent data collection occurred at both the University of Florida and University of Oklahoma. Data collection occurred in the tailgate areas around each stadium beginning four to five hours before the start time of the game taking place on the day of collection. The survey itself was distributed in paper form and participants were asked to answer each question with the response that best characterized their reaction to the stated question.

## Findings

~~Findings from analysis of the first phase of surveys are now presented. For the first phase of data collection,~~ Survey results were compiled and analyzed for over 1,000 participants ~~during the first phase~~. Results can be summarized into three main findings: (a) changes in perceived beliefs of outsiders as influences on consumer outcomes, (b) cultural relevance and historical significance as determinants of consumer behavior, and (c) the desire to be engaged in a broad, and collective movement.

Before analyzing behavioral impacts that the partnership had on consumers, it is first important to understand their emotional responses along the dimensions mentioned above. Overall, participants agreed that the partnership with Jordan Brand created a more positive perception (Mean = 4.07) and brought more attention (Mean = 4.31) to the football program. They agreed that Jordan Brand represents quality (Mean = 4.39), value (Mean = 4.36), excellence (Mean = 4.32) ~~and~~ tradition (Mean = 3.96), and they experienced a positive personal response when wearing their university's Jordan Brand apparel (Mean = 3.77). The mean response values for these questions indicate that the partnership was successful in eliciting awe-like emotions from fans and developing a level of emotional attachment to the merchandise. These response items provide insight not only into participants' personal feelings towards Jordan Brand and the partnership, but also insight into how they believed others perceive the partnership and the impact that these perceptions will have, highlighting the collective nature of their perception. Additionally, most survey participants indicated a high level of awareness regarding the introduction of the partnership between Jordan Brand and the university (Mean = 4.17), indicating that the launch of the new merchandise was sufficiently promoted. Just over half of

participants (Mean = 0.51) indicated that they had purchased some of their university's Jordan Brand apparel and had spent on average about \$100 on such merchandise.

The impact that emotional responses had on an individual's intention to purchase the university's Jordan Brand merchandise in the future was analyzed using a logistic regression. The results show that younger people, ~~those as well as those~~ with higher incomes, ~~as well as those and~~ who are more engaged with the university's athletics (proxied by game attendance) are more likely to purchase the university's Jordan Brand merchandise on average. Additionally, individuals who are more aware of the partnership are more likely to purchase merchandise. Furthermore, the extent of previous purchases (proxied by amount spent) also positively influences likelihood of future purchases, indicating satisfaction with the product and brand loyalty. Finally, individuals who felt that Jordan Brand invoked awe-like emotions, who perceived that the partnership with Jordan Brand positively, and individuals who personally elicit a positive response to wearing Jordan Brand merchandise ~~are~~, all ~~are~~ more likely to purchase merchandise in the future.

It is also of interest whether the feelings elicited by the branding can have broader effects that are more impactful for the university. The analysis provides insight into participants' propensity to donate, both to the university itself and to the university's athletic department. Individuals who previously spent more on the university's Jordan Brand merchandise are more likely to donate to both the university and the university's athletic department. Interestingly, more casual, younger fans who do not attend every game and thus, likely haven't donated as much in the past as participants who attend every game, seem to be more influenced by the partnership to donate. This suggests that the partnership can help universities solidify their young alumni bases ~~which that~~ could pay dividends as these individuals age and obtain the financial

ability to donate larger sums. Variables that capture the historical significance of Jordan Brand and that capture how outsiders perceive the university and its athletics program, as a result of the partnership with Jordan Brand, tend to be positive and significant. Taken together, this suggests that the ability of Jordan Brand to influence behavior outside of strict purchasing behavior hinges on the emotional vastness conjured by the historical significance of the brand<sub>2</sub> and the larger scale change in perception that the partnership has on the collective view of the university (accommodation).

Finally, the analysis investigates whether individuals are willing to pay more for the merchandise simply because it displays the Jumpman logo. Younger individuals, who have spent larger amounts of money on the university's Jordan Brand merchandise in the past, are more likely to spend more on future purchases simply because it has the Jordan Brand logo. Additionally, more casual fans of the university's athletic program that have strong emotional attachment to Jordan Brand are also willing to pay more, suggesting that the partnership of the two entities together influences behavior. Factors relating to how individuals believe outsiders perceive the partnership (whether they believe it is a good fit, represents tradition, etc.) also have a positive impact on willingness to pay. This suggests that the Jordan Brand logo raises the significance of the university's merchandise and places it within a cultural and historical context to a level sufficient to raise the individual's willingness to pay for the apparel.

## **Discussion**

While the initial survey analysis serves as a first step at understanding the connections between Michael Jordan's athletic performance, the emotional responses to his brand and the power of the university-Jordan Brand partnership, there are still a variety of avenues of future research to be undertaken. Future scholarship should examine the next wave of schools

partnering with athlete sport brands; specifically, to investigate what impact the history, traditions, and geographical locations of these institutions have on their fans' consumption patterns. Different universities have varying compositions of students, alumni, and visitors, and future research will allow for a richer set of findings relative to those in the initial phase of results. Fans and their purchasing decisions are nuanced. Thus, future studies should continue to tease out the major factor(s) for the support of the merger between these reputable institutions and the ~~very-exceedingly~~ popular global brand by Michael Jordan at Nike. ~~Specifically~~Perhaps, future research ~~should-could~~also investigate any differences in perception relating to the Jordan Brand partnership that exist between game attendees and non-game attendees.

These findings suggest and support the expansion of partnerships between Jordan Brand and the athletic departments of Division I universities; due to the mutual benefits experienced by each entity. For Jordan Brand, a partnership is valuable as it allows them access to a segment of the market that it may not have had access to before. Consumers who are simply interested in buying the university's apparel appear inclined to purchase merchandise that is also Jordan Brand apparel, which they would not have been inclined to do so beforehand. The finding that previous purchasers are more likely to purchase again, bodes well for Jordan Brand as it indicates it can retain and expand its customer base. For a university, the partnership with Jordan Brand is advantageous because of its transcendent nature: the affiliation with a brand like Jordan causes those with a relationship to the university to believe that outsiders have raised perception of the university brand, which positively influences the behaviors of those with a connection to the university. This ripple effect is illustrated by the finding that consumers are willing to pay more for apparel simply because it is affiliated with Jordan Brand and by the fact that these individuals are more likely to donate to the university and its athletic programs.

The findings of this study can be used by both entities to better understand the types of consumers who are likely to elicit a response to a partnership between the university and the Jordan Brand. This allows these entities to diversify branding strategies to best meet the needs of each customer base, i.e., students, alumni, and visitors, which will continue to increase brand awareness and loyalty. By continuing to strategically connect consumers to the university, the Jordan Brand, or both, the partnership will be able to enhance the cognitive identification that consumers associate with the brands, which will ultimately impact their behavior.

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