

## Media Relations

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### UNH Researcher: The More We Know About Celebrities, the Less We Like Them

Movie Stars Would Be Wise to Zip It on Political, Religious, and Social Views



Bruce Pfeiffer, assistant professor of marketing at the UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics.

DURHAM, N.H. – Clint Eastwood’s famous interview with an invisible President Obama seated in an empty chair at the Republican National Convention may have done more than elicit a round of late-night television jokes. Celebrities who publicly support political candidates may want to think twice about doing so, according to a University of New Hampshire researcher who has found that those who are most vocal about political, religious, and social causes may pay with decreased popularity and a hit to their wallets.

In fact, the more the public knows about celebrities’ personal views, the less we like them, according to Bruce Pfeiffer, assistant professor of marketing at the Whittemore School of Business and Economics.

“The willingness of celebrities to take on controversial issues out of a sense of social responsibility is admirable. However, informing the public about themselves and their positions on political, religious, and social issues may diminish not only their popularity, but their endorsement appearances and sales at the box office,” Pfeiffer said.

Pfeiffer has conducted extensive research about how people react to celebrities once they know their personal viewpoints. For example, he found that when people learned about the personal and religious opinions of two well-known actors with opposite views — Tom Hanks and Mel Gibson — they liked them less.

Liberals and conservatives had similar opinions about Hanks and Gibson prior to learning about the actors’ beliefs. However, “when descriptions of the practices and attitudes of the celebrities were provided, liberals and conservatives diverged in their evaluations of the actors, particularly Gibson,” Pfeiffer said.

In addition, certain groups differed in how they perceived celebrities once they had more information about their views. In the experiment with Hanks and Gibson, liberals and women tended to rate Gibson less favorably with more information. Similarly, likability ratings among conservatives and men dropped as they learned more about Hanks’ views.

Pfeiffer also has investigated the impact of educating people about just how little they know about celebrities’ personal beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Once this lack of knowledge is made clear, people tend to think less favorably of the celebrities and consider them less credible as

spokespeople.

“The findings reveal one of the important foundations underlying the adoration of celebrities: ignorance,” Pfeiffer said. “Unless celebrities harbor mainstream attitudes that have widespread appeal, they are probably better off financially keeping their opinions and practices private.”

The UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics offers a full complement of high-quality programs in business, economics, accounting, finance, information systems management, marketing, and hospitality management. Programs are offered at the undergraduate, graduate, and executive development levels. The school is accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the premier accrediting agency for business schools worldwide. In January 2013, the business school will move into its new state-of-the-art facility and become the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

#### **PHOTO**

Bruce Pfeiffer, assistant professor of marketing at the UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics

<http://www.unh.edu/news/img/pfeiffer.jpg>

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*Editors and Reporters: Pfeiffer presents this research in the forthcoming paper “The Less the Public Knows the Better? The Effects of Increased Knowledge on Celebrity Evaluations” in the journal Basic and Applied Social Psychology. If you would like to receive an advance copy of this journal article, contact Lori Wright at [lori.wright@unh.edu](mailto:lori.wright@unh.edu).*

Media Contact: [Lori Wright](#) | 603-862-0574 | UNH Media Relations

Secondary Contact: [Bruce Pfeiffer](#) | 603-862-0868 | Whittemore School of Business and Economics

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UNH Experts available for comment:

- [Bruce Pfeiffer](#)

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