Introduction
Athlete celebrity endorsement has received tremendous scholarly attention in the field of sport management (Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang, Trail, 2011; Fink, Parker, Cunningham, & Cuneen, 2012; Kim & Cheong, 2011). Drawing on several theoretical frameworks such as the source credibility (Ohanian, 1990), the match-up hypothesis (Kamins, 1989), and the meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989), prior studies identified numerous benefits of using athlete celebrity endorsement (Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004; Carison and Donovan, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004). Currently, a tremendous amount of financial resources have been invested, and this will continue to be one of the critical marketing communication strategies (Miller & Laczniak, 2010).

However, regardless of the continuous media exposures of athlete misbehaviors (e.g., Tiger Woods’ sex scandal and Lance Armstrong’s performance-enhancing drug use), the downsides of athlete endorsement have received relatively less scholarly attention with a few exceptions (Agyemang, 2011; Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009; Miller & Laczniak, 2011). Previous literature suggested that negative information captures consumer attention more than positive information does (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Ito, Larsen, Smith, & Cacioppo, 1998), and consumers store negative information in their long-term memory (Kensinger & Corkin, 2003). As a result, negative information generates unfavorable evaluation of target objects (Ahluwalia & Gurhan-Canli, 2000). Prior studies have also found the spillover effects, meaning that the negative information of an object transfers to associated objects even though it is not mentioned in publicity (Ahluwalia & Gurhan-Canli, 2000). In this vein, athlete endorsers’ negative information elicited by scandals may transfer to their endorsed brands, teams, and leagues when consumers consciously or unconsciously associate the scandalized athletes with stakeholders. Against this background, the current study examines the spillover effects of athlete scandals on stakeholders including endorsed brands, teams, and leagues. Moreover, it is hypothesized that consumer expertise plays a moderating role in the negative spillover effects. This study will contribute to the literature specifically in sport marketing communication by enhancing understanding of athlete negative publicity and its spillover effects.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development
The negative spillover effect has been explained by the accessibility-diagnosticity model (Feldman & Lynch, 2001). Accessibility refers to the ease of retrieval from memory, and diagnosticity means the relevance of the information for judgment. With respect to accessibility, when consumers receive pieces of information, they retrieve the most accessible information instead of retrieving all information from their memory. For example, consumers rely on athlete scandal information rather than their positive information because negative information has more intensity characteristics, which is easier to retrieve (Herr et al., 1991). With regard to diagnosticity, the piece of information may be used for judgment when consumers perceive relevancy or usefulness of the information.

In the negative spillover context, the information about an athlete scandal may be more accessible, and the strength of associations between scandalized athletes and endorsed stakeholders makes the information more diagnostic. For example, the characteristics of the Tiger Woods’ scandal may be more diagnostic for general consumer products rather, while Lance Armstrong’s case may be more diagnostic for sport related firms. When perceived association is strong, the negative spillover effect is more likely to occur (Ahluwalia et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, as perceived diagnosticity is based on subjective assessment (Ahluwalia et al., 2001), consumer expertise may play a moderating role in the negative spillover from athletes to endorsed brands. Consumer expertise is defined as the ability to successfully perform product-related tasks (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Consumers with high expertise have a great amount of cognitive resources to process information in their expertise domain. Previous
literature showed that evaluative process of consumers is different depending on their knowledge level (Sujan, 1985). Brucks (1985) attempted to explain the difference between subjective knowledge and objective knowledge. Subjective knowledge means the knowledge that individuals think they know whereas objective knowledge refers to what individuals actually know. Because of experts’ strong objective knowledge base, they can identify detailed product information related to their expertise area (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) whereas novice people tend to elicit overall evaluation based on their affect and thoughts (Sujan, 1985).

Based on the literature review, it is believed that expert sport consumers are more likely to detect the strength of association between (1) athlete scandals and athletes and (2) athletes and stakeholders. In other words, performance related scandals impact athletes greater than non-performance related scandals when consumers are experts in sport because they have a strong knowledge base to detect the severity of the scandals. Furthermore, the sport related association between Tiger Woods and Nike may be identified by only sport expert consumers whereas the association with Rolex may be detected by both experts and novice consumers. Incorporating aforementioned arguments, we posit that:

H1: The negative impact of performance related scandals on the athlete is stronger when consumer expertise is high rather than low.

H2: The negative impact of lifestyle related scandals on the athlete is significant regardless the level of expertise.

H3: The negative spillover effect from the athlete to the endorsed sport brand is more profound when consumer expertise is high rather than low.

H4: The negative spillover effect from the athlete to the general endorsed product brand is significant regardless the level of expertise.

H5: The negative spillover from the athlete to his or her team is more profound when consumer expertise is high.

Methods

Data will be collected through the online panel, Amazon Mechanical Turks. Participants will complete the study for $0.10 exchange. After reading a short news story of an athlete scandal, participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was mainly constructed in three parts: (a) Socio-demographic questions (e.g., gender and age), (b) perceived performance relatedness of athlete scandal, (c) perceived lifestyle relatedness of athlete scandal, (c) consumer expertise, (d) attitude toward the athlete, a endorsed sport brands, a sponsor company selling general consumer products, and the team. To confirm reliability of the measures, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients will be examined. To establish convergent validity, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and average variance extracted (AVE) will be taken into consideration. With respect to discriminant validity, the square of correlation scores and AVEs will be compared. Hypothesized model will be tested by structural equation modeling (SEM).

Results

Detailed results will be discussed in the presentation along with theoretical and managerial implications.