Reputation Management: An Experimental Study of Public School

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ABSTRACT

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The concept of reputation has emerged as a central feature in the governance of public administration as to appreciate and heighten the impressions of stakeholders. Reputation is considered to be a construct that organizations may use by actively influencing the perceptual processing of stakeholders, especially through a focus on distinct expectations and values. Within this management perspective of reputation, organizations and scholars have proposed and analyzed the eminent function of corporate branding. Schultz and de Chernatony (2002) assuredly note that "corporate branding provides a basis for a corporation to develop and express its distinctiveness through its consistent relationships with all stakeholders (p.105)". Managing corporate branding refers to the deliberate and strategic process to construe and enhance the desired image of the organization to all stakeholders. Within this context, strategic communication, in the perspective of the utilitarian motivational function of brand management offers potential opportunity to not only enhance brand awareness but also prompt brand meaning.

This research seeks to examine whether local agencies can influence the attitudes and behaviors of their constituents in their favor by managing the image(s) associated with their institutions. To explore this issue, an exploratory mixed-methods framework was selected to investigate the following question: *To what extent do branding cues, as* *communicated by local public agencies, influence citizen attitudes and behavior towards that particular agency?*

Considering the objective of this dissertation, an exploratory, mixed-methods sequential design was used. More specifically, the research was carried out in the context of public schools in two phases: qualitative methods, including interviews with ten superintendents and the evaluation of more than 30 public school districts websites, were first used to collect important data, which were analyzed and the results were used to design the main quantitative experimental component of the study.

The findings advocate for a fit approach of reputation management, which implicates to strengthen what the organization stands for and the capacity to recognize it, by directly influencing stakeholders perceptual processing. Within the framework of public schools, strategic branding communication appears as a feasible and compelling approach to promote positive reputation. Specifically, this study demonstrates that through the direct effects on both components of brand equity, strategic branding communication is capable to enhance the efforts of public organizations to favor positive reputation and uphold favorable attitudes and behaviors.

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Introduction

The context of public administration is more than ever characterized by high level of dissatisfaction towards the institutions and the public servant in general. Whether these criticisms relate to the inefficiency of public organizations, bureaucracy being unproductive, stiff, and extravagant; or to their ineffectiveness, their inability to be reliable and address adequately the issues of their constituents; they have advocated for a complete overhaul of the traditional bureaucratic decision-making. These doctrines, which have endorsed a more business-like approach to public affairs, have reinforced the obligation of the state to endorse the responsibility of public administration. In addition to the complexity of administrating policies and public programs, the whole sector faces an extraordinary disparate number of stakeholders. In this context, the concept of reputation has emerged as a central feature in the governance of public administration as to appreciate and heighten the impressions of stakeholders. Reputation is considered to be a construct that organizations may use by actively influencing the perceptual processing of stakeholders, especially through a focus on distinct expectations and values. Walsh and Beatty (2007) define reputation as "the [constituents'] overall evaluation of an [organization] based on his or her reactions to the public [agency's] goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the [organization] and/or its representatives and/or known corporate activities (p.129)".

Within this management perspective of reputation, organizations and scholars have proposed and analyzed the eminent function of corporate branding. Schultz and de Chernatony (2002) assuredly note that "corporate branding provides a basis for a corporation to develop and express its distinctiveness through its consistent relationships with all stakeholders (p.105)". Unlike product brands that are only directed to the customers, corporate brands include not only external stakeholders but also internal members of the organization. Corporate branding is the result of the combination of multiple aspects of the management of an organization, from organizational strategy to organizational culture to organizational communication. Managing corporate branding refers to the deliberate and strategic process to construe and enhance the desired image of the organization to all stakeholders. Within this context, strategic communication, in the perspective of the utilitarian motivational function of brand management offers potential opportunity to not only enhance brand awareness but also prompt brand meaning.

Albeit recent scholarship provides relevant insight on the mechanisms in place – i.e. either the factors governing reputation or the outcomes of reputation –, it relies on case-based analysis to examine the overall scheme of organizational reputation, with the particular role of corporate branding. However, the current literature does not explore these items in relation to the individual perceptual processing in the formation of perceptions; and therefore, it undermines the multidimensionality (i.e. awareness vs. assessment) of reputation as well as its affective attribute (i.e., "this organization is not performing properly but I like it anyway"). Thereby, this study addresses the following research question: *To what extent do branding cues, as communicated by local public agencies, influence citizen attitudes and behavior towards that particular agency?*

Considering the objective of this dissertation, an exploratory, mixed-methods sequential design was used in the context of public schools. More specifically, the research was carried out in two phases: qualitative methods were first used to collect important data, which were analyzed and the results were used to design the quantitative component of the study.

This research contributes to current scholarship in many interesting and insightful manners, of which three stand out: 1) the attention to individual perceptual processing onto the two-stages of reputation management, 2) the prominence of strategic communication in the occurrence of corporate branding in the public sector, and 3) the introduction of generic model to study brand image management in the public sector. In details, the findings advocate in favor of advancing the conceptualization of reputation not as the simple subjective appraisal of public institutions' attributes, but as its aggregation with the intrinsic evaluation of the organization. In addition, albeit the individuality of both the brand trajectory and the brand graphic elements do not have the quality to leverage the influence of the organization's brand, the essence of those components are a requisite to the materialization of brand equity associated with the organization.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

The mandates of local public agencies, which define their functions and responsibilities, are expressed to the public through the administration and the implementation of public policies. The application of recent managerial reforms in the public sector around the world, such as the New Public Management doctrine, have endorsed a more business-like approach to public affairs to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of government (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Hood 1998). Some noteworthy effects of these reforms have been the fragmentation of public governance, the contraction of government size and scope, advocacy for entrepreneurship, and an increase in the use of performance measurement (Campbell 1993; Gore 1995; U.S. General Accounting Office 1995; Peters and Savoie 1996). As a result, these administrative reforms have eroded the traditional bureaucratic decision-making processes that once prevailed in the public sector, thus reinforcing the obligation of the state to ensure the responsibility of public administrators to pursue the public interest. Another perspective refers to a citizenship model in which citizens as owners of the government should be educated and prompt to participate and support government in its pursuit of public value (Schachter 1995).

In addition to the complexity of administrating policies and public programs, public agencies face a convoluted environment embodying disparate stakeholders. The concept of a stakeholder was recently introduced to the field of public administration and refers to "individuals, groups [or organizations] who have some type of stake, such as actual or potential interest toward the organization" (Luoma-aho 2008, 447). The emergence of this concept fundamentally corresponds to the evident evolution of public organizations as no longer being considered as self-reliant actors but rather as participants in an articulated system (Luoma-aho 2007, 2008; Luoma-aho et al. 2013). This system can include those who affect the *raison d'être* of public agencies, cooperate in their activities, or are influenced by them. Accordingly, this transformation, which demands public organization to be more accountable, achieve higher performance, and be transparent and collaborative, requires public agencies to take into consideration the changes that occur in stakeholders' expectations, values, and practices.

As such, every group of stakeholders may influence diverse attributes of any particular public organization. Elected officials, for instance, due to their legal position, directly impact the objectives pursued by public organizations as well as the resources allocated for the activities they carry out. On the other hand, employees, interested in their working conditions, participate in the functioning and the performance of public organizations. In order to prosper and be endorsed, public agencies need to nurture the specific affiliation that exists within each stakeholder group. Among them, citizens comprise a group that attracts increasing attention, not only from scholars but also from practitioners. Indeed, there is a growing demand for public agencies to take into consideration the apprehensions and representations that emerge from these diverse groups. Within this context, understanding the patterns that establish stakeholders' perceptions about a public entity becomes critical.

Since these representations rely not only on attributes of the organization and of its actions, but also on each individual experience, government institutions must facilitate the construction of favorable perceptions. Specifically, to be perceived as creating public value for their stakeholders, governments need to actively manage their relationships with their constituents to ensure continued support. Within this context, in order to assess the influence of stakeholder perceptions of an organization, the role of organizational identity, image, and reputation becomes compellingly important (Fombrun 1996; Special Issue: Corporate identity 1997; Davies *et al.* 2003).

1. The concept of reputation

The issue of reputation has recently become a subject of greater interest in the field of public administration (Chun 2005; Carpenter and Krause 2012; Maor *et al.* 2012). Reputation has not only attracted the attention of scholars who study decision-making processes in public entities, but also those who are interested in the design and implementation of policies and public programs. Maor (2013) argued that the subject of reputation has emerged in the public sector for four reasons: "the specific view of reputation which enables an agency that possesses it to make a claim for unique contribution to the public good; the multifaceted nature of reputation; the existence of multiple expectations by multiple audiences; and the context of today's knowledge society and blame culture which foster conditions" (p. 4). Citizen appreciation of public institutions results in part from the provision of information by the government, but substantially more from citizen experiences with public institutions and the representations and impressions they have of them.

Reputation is of great importance in the public sector; in situations where there is little means by which to assess and evaluate the qualities and values of public agencies, their reputation becomes the ultimate factor. Furthermore, reputation has the capacity to provide a simplistic vision of public institutions, their objectives, and their practices, which gives constituents a better representation and understanding of the organization's character and values. For instance, a restricted number of professionals interacts with the

National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA); therefore, when asked to assess its activity and performance, most individuals will necessarily base their opinions on the impressions they hold about this organization. More specifically, as McCurdy (1995) points out, the images and perceptions associated with the U.S. Space program throughout the year has not only altered the apprehension stakeholders hold about that issue, but also influenced the orientation and foundation for public policies. In sum, reputation constitutes a critical foundation for the establishment of representations, evaluations, and attitudes by stakeholders towards specific public entities.

1.1. What do we mean by reputation

In recent times, the concept of organizational reputation has gained great appeal of a growing scholarship in diverse fields such as management, marketing, organizational behavior, and economics (Rindova et al. 2005; Barnett et al. 2006; Walker 2010; Lange et al. 2011). Although the concept is ubiquitous in its usage, reputation still emerges as a complex and unsettled notion. It only takes for proof the long list of definitions, understandings, and modeling (Lange et al. 2011). In this regard, numerous studies conducted by Schwaiger (2004), Chun (2005), Barnett et al. (2006), Walker (2010), and Lange et al. (2011) to cite only few, which have carried a comprehensive review of existing discourses, explicitly reinforce the multiplicity of theoretical and conceptual approaches of organizational reputation and its measurement. More specifically, as Barnett et al. (2006) express, reputation is often in this plethora of conceptualizations associated with related terms known as organizational identity and organizational image. Although all three concepts relates to perceptions held by individuals about a singular organization, it is possible to establish clear distinctions by considering both the stakeholder group of reference and the nature – i.e. actual or desired – of the perceptions (Walker 2010, 363).

Organizational identity frequently relates to the actual associations held by internal individuals to the organization (Barnett et al. 2006, Brown et al. 2006). More specifically, organizational identity describes the fundamental characteristics that constitute for the internal members the essence of the organization. Identity, therefore, intends to acknowledge what Albert and Whetten (1985) named as the most central, enduring, and distinctive about an organization by answering questions such as "who/what do we believe we are?" (Whetten 1997, 27) or "who are we as an organization?" (Brown et al. 2006, 101) or else "who are we? How do we see ourselves?" (Chun 2005, 96). Overall, organizational identity encompasses the perceptions of internal members not only about the organization's business but also about the way to approach it and to develop strategies.

Organizational image, on the other hand, exclusively relates to external stakeholders. Although the nature of organizational image does not reach a clear consensus in the literature as to be desired or actual perceptions, Walker (2010) argues, in the most recent systematic review of the literature I have identified, "following the majority of articles in [his] sample, in [his] paper, organizational image is viewed as a desired image (p. 366)". Hence, within the framework of this dissertation, organizational image is apprehended as the perceptions that the organization aspires external stakeholders hold. In conjunction with the concept of identity, Whetten and Mackey (2002) acknowledge image as "what organizational agents want their external stakeholders to understand is most central, enduring, and distinctive about their organization (p.401)". Additionally, Brown et al.

(2006) assert that considering organizational image as a desired perceptions recognizes two separate viewpoints, namely the “mental associations about the organization that organization leaders want important audiences to hold” and the “mental associations that organization members believe others outside the organization hold about the organization” (p.102). This perspective on organizational image is relevant as it offers the opportunity for organizations to strategically influence the perceptions external stakeholders hold about their organization.

Unlike organizational image, organizational reputation refers to the actual perceptions stakeholders hold about a given organization. Although some scholars (Bromley 1993; Brown et al. 2006; Barnett et al. 2006, Walsh and Beatty 2007) have restrained their approach to external stakeholders, the literature for the most relates to both internal and external parties (Fombrun 1996; Fombrun and can Riel 1997; Gray and Balmer 1998; Davies et al. 2001; Gotsi and Wilson 2001; Whetten and Mackey 2002; Schwaiger 2004; Luoma-aho 2007; Carpenter 2010). Another critical difference between organizational image and reputation concerns the flexibility and duration of time the perception spend in an individual’s mind. Reputation is indeed a more stable and sustainable construct than image (Markwick and Fill 1997; Chun 2005). As Gray and Balmer (1998) contended, reputation is built over time via stakeholder interaction with a particular public organization, often reinforced by communication, while image is promptly constructed via communication and symbols. In other words, the image of an organization may be quickly fashioned through effective communications, whereas reputation is consolidated with time and consistency (Markwick and Fill 1997; Nguyen and Leblanc 2001; Chun 2005). As Chun explained, “this distinction between image and reputation is useful, in that we can form an image of an organization without any real experience of it, whereas, something deeper, often referred to as reputation, implies something grounded in experience" (2005, 96).

In the context of the public sector, scholarship on organizational reputation follows a pattern identified by Carpenter (2010). Carpenter defined reputation as "a set of symbolic beliefs about the unique or separable capacities, intentions, roles, obligations, history, and mission of an organization that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences" (p. 33). Given the focal point of the evaluation of the organization, its activities, and qualities, by various audiences, this definition emphasizes a unidimensional approach of reputation, in which stakeholder groups' judgment is the paramount. Within this perspective, stakeholder groups assess and perceive the organization by means of the attributes and values each appraises as compelling and essential. This conceptualization of organizational reputation refers to the opportunity for public organizations to manifest their ability to comply with aspirations (Carpenter 2010; Pfaffer, Pollock and Rindova 2010). Hence, organizations encounter a reputation due to being known for something. In sum, Mahon (2002) asserts, "reputation is an asset in relation to (a) a specific context or process, (b) a specific issue, (c) specific stakeholders, and (d) expectations of organizational behavior based on past actions and situations (p.439)".

However, considering the nature of the public sector, the management of reputation by public organizations may appear somewhat as an unworkable task. Carpenter and Krause (2012) identify numerous public organizations' characteristics confronting the handling of reputation, of which three deserve attention: 1) addressing the multiplicity of audiences expectations may lead public organizations to privilege certain groups over other stakeholders as well as bring confusion and ambiguity; 2) establishing a uniform strategy among the different internal members in support of a coherent reputation strategy may require incommensurate effort; and 3) breaking away singular organization reputation from the overall perceptions of the sector may demand innovative and unusual strategies.

Approaching bureaucratic reputation from this perspective, which has concentrated the bulk of the research in the field of public administration, is essential with respect to the accountability process underlining the prospect of foreseeing expected behaviors and results in a context of complexity and of limited information. However, in doing so scholars have discounted the multidimensional framework of reputation. In this regard, Lange et al. (2011) as well as Barnett et al. (2006), in their review of the diverse constructs of reputation, assert that organizational reputation should be embraced as a multidimensional concept. More specifically, the approach developed by Lange et al. (2011) includes three dimensions, namely “being known, being known for something, and generalized favorability (p.163)”.

The first dimension, being known, refers to the stakeholders awareness of the organization without judgment (Barnett et al. 2006; Lange et al. 2011). This perspective reflects the approach employed by Rindova et al. (2005), who argue, “the extent to which an organization is widely recognized among stakeholders in tis organizational field, and the extent to which it stands out relative to competitors, may be an important dimension to organizational reputation (p.1035)”. The second dimension, being known for something, fits the approach adopted by the current literature in public administration. Finally, the third dimension, generalized favorability, “entails perceiver judgments about the firm that are based on aggregated multiple organizational attributes rather than being dependent on a given audience's expectations for specific organizational outcomes (Lange et al. 2011, p. 159)". In contrast to the previous dimension, the generalized favorability dimension refers to stakeholders' aggregated perceptions of the organization as an institution. Although being one of the most common approaches used to study organizational reputation, this perspective has been highly decried to not adequately reveal the stakeholders perceptual processing (See Walker 2010).

Within this framework, although the aim for organizations to accentuate their distinctiveness with respect to peculiar attributes in the mind of their stakeholders is relevant to build upon their reputation as an asset, attention should be given to the capacity to be apparent and manifest. As such, this dissertation, in contrast to current scholarship, apprehends the multidimensionality of reputation and features the importance of the identification process in the formation of stakeholders reputation of a public organization. In coherence with the unidimensional definition of reputation used in the public sector, scholars have espoused a singular approach to study reputation management. The following section analyzes this specific approach.

1.2. Public sector: Two approaches of reputation

Scholarship on the public sector has essentially discussed reputation as an integral component of the governance of public agencies (Carpenter 2010). In conjunction to the literature in marketing, business management, and accounting and economics, scholars have addressed how reputation and its attributes influence the decision-making process and related behavior. However, as Waeraas and Byrkjeflot (2012) noted, the nature and the characteristics of the public sector context forbid public agencies to manage their reputations on the same terms as their for-profit counterparts. More specifically, they argue that public organizations, owing to the characteristics of their sector of operation, experience five impediments – i.e. politics problem, consistency problem, charisma problem, uniqueness problem, and excellence problem – to carry out equal reputation management.

In short, public agencies are forced to comply with laws and policies that apply only to the public sector and this in turn limits the options they have for managing their reputations (Luoma-aho 2008; Waerass and Byrkjeflot 2012). By nature, the existence and operations of public agencies are exclusively conditioned by the decisions of elected authorities. As such, public organizations are incapable of formulating their own *raison d'être*, providing exclusive products and/or services, promoting favored core values, or selecting their targeted users. In addition, due to the complexity and diversity of their objectives, public organizations often ensue of the aggregation of miscellaneous values and cultures, which contributes to the challenge to bring out congruence. In conjunction with a context of general skepticism towards government and public agencies, these puzzling postures curtails the ability to manifest distinctiveness and disparity.

This is not to say that public organizations cannot manage and handle their reputation, but rather that public managers should be conscious of and address constraints as an intrinsic feature of the management of their organizations. In the field of public administration, reputation has been approached from two distinctive approaches: the political science and the organizational. As Waeraas and Maor (2014) indicate, "the *political science* approach focuses empirically on executive agencies and their standing within a political-administrative system" (p.4) whereas "[the *organizational* approach] emphasizes the general standing of public organizations and the overall socially constructed and aggregate nature of reputation" (p.6).

With respect to the former, the traditional approach used to manage reputation in the public sector has been to engage in opportune decisions and/or adopt practices typical of favored organizations in order to promote an agency's reputation (Luoma-aho *et al.* 2013). This approach conceives the concept of reputation management as a passive exercise in which public managers adapt their organization, its structure, and/or the services to achieve favorable interactions with stakeholders. De facto, the approach employed to examine reputation management is distinct on two features: 1) it concentrates on the appraisal perceptions of the organization attributes, and 2) it acquiesces the precedence of reputation as positive evaluation.

Carpenter (2010) contends that organizational reputation emerges from the inclusion of four features, namely performative, moral, procedural, and technical dimensions of an organization. More specifically, organizations select and direct their endeavors on the dimension(s) determined as prevailing to enhance not only their distinctiveness from other organizations but also their singularity. As such, reputation oversight come forth being the adjacency between the organization's decisions and activities and one or more of those dimensions. Evidence has argued that public institutions become engaged in particular activities associated with respected and applauded organizations or appoint charismatic leaders in order to promote their reputation (Maor 2011; Petkova 2012). Within this configuration, as Maor (2013) explained, "According to reputational theory, as long as the agency can provide consistent quality of activities and effectiveness of outputs over time, and be perceived by multiple audiences as doing so, agency reputation will be solidified" (p. 13). Obstructing the assumptions that public managers are genuinely aware of their stakeholders and their expectations and their stakeholders hold them to account, reputation management inheres in maintaining reputation status and/or protecting it against potential threats.

Handling reputation hazard for public entities has bent towards two majors directions: 1) the manipulation of the decision-making process, of the organizational structure and activities, and of the outputs and outcomes (See Carpenter 2002, 2003, 2004; Moffitt 2010; Maor 2011; Carpenter et al. 2012; Maor and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2013); and 2) the dynamic application of strategic communication and public relation management (See Gilad et al. 2013; Maor et al. 2013).

In regards to the second approach, the *organizational*, clearly reflects recent administrative reforms that intend to make public entities perform more like businesses and also to promote the use of competition as a leading element of public service delivery. In furtherance of private for-profit and nonprofit organizations' guidance, the emphasis is placed on the managerial aspect of reputation. Hence, this approach mainly regards reputation as an objective to be pursued per se by the organization by examining the factors that favor its formation and enhancement. In other words, although the *political science* approach considers reputation as the starting point of the skeleton, the *organizational* approach deems it as the targeted aim. In this context, Waeraas and Byrkjeflot (2012) remark that the focal point consist in aligning organizational reputation to organizational image, scilicet "bridging the gap between a desired and an actual image of the organization (p.7)".

The central component of this management process relates to the development and the implementation of a deliberate scheme to expound the organization, its attributes, and its coherence (Waeraas and Byrkjeflot 2012). In reference to the aforementioned definition of organizational reputation, the efforts deployed by the management and leadership of the organization is directed towards not only the multitude of external stakeholders but also the internal members of the organization. In this view, public agencies attempt to directly manage their reputations by influencing the associations and imagery constructs stakeholders have of the organization in an effort to promote desired attitudes and behaviors. Here, reputation implies not only the interpretation of what the organization stands for but also the capacity to recognize it (Weiss *et al.* 1999). In doing so, public managers may count on enhancing governance objectives, such as citizen satisfaction, trust, and commitment to government as well as employees satisfaction and motivation.

Owing the nature of the public sector, this approach, although investigating a wider range of organization, has essentially focused on markets outlining the possibility of competition among possible entities or institutions. As such, studies in this tradition have concentrated on healthcare institutions, higher education establishments, nonprofit organizations and even communities or cities. More specifically, inquiries in this domain of research have not only illustrated the specific strategies and practices used by organizations to encounter their reputation (Waeraas and Solbakk 2009; Aula and Tienari 2011; Nielsen and Salomonsen 2012; Waeraas and Sataøen 2013, Waeraas, 2014; Waeraas et al. 2014) but also how specific features of organizational image influence stakeholder behaviors and attitudes (Arnold et al. 2003; Whelan et al. 2009; Rho et al.

2015). Overall, the attention directs toward the place of strategic communication and marketing techniques within the formation of organizational reputation.

Although this perspective provides insightful lessons to uphold public organizations' awareness of both the relevance of reputation and its formation, it is substantially descriptive, case-based, and it does not regard into the individual perceptual processing.

1.3. Effects of reputation

As mentioned previously, reputation is a construct held by individuals that results from their experiences with an organization (Gray and Balmer 1998; Luoma-aho 2007, 2008). The consolidation of a reputation requires consistency on the part of organizations in term of its behavior and values (Markwick and Fill 1997; Nguyen and Leblanc 2001; Chun 2005; Luoma-aho 2007, 2008). In essence, reputation offers stability and reassurance to an organization's stakeholders by forecasting how the organization will perform (Fombrun 1996). A consistent part of the related literature has focused on the diverse effects that reputation can have on the conduct of organizational business.

Mainly derived from the accounting and management literature on for-profit corporations, research has evidenced the diverse consequences of reputation on organizational performance, especially in terms of financial performance, external stakeholder behavior, and employee motivations. Evidence shows that organizations with an excellent reputation frequently present increased earnings owing to higher prices, greater market shares, and lower financing costs, among other factors (Roberts and Dowling 1997; Gaines-Ross 1997; Gregory 1997; Srivastava *et al.* 1997; McMillan and Joshi 1997). Scholars have demonstrated that reputation, by fulfilling stakeholder impressions, also provides operational value for the organization (Dowling 2000). On the one hand, organizations with a good reputation experience greater employee satisfaction, attract higher quality workers, and promote a more appealing working environment. On the other hand, organizations experience greater customer loyalty and commitment, expend their business scope more successfully, and encounter more effective marketing results when they have favorable reputation.

In the public sector as well, scholars have highlighted the effects on organizations that experience favorable reputation. In regards to the political-administrative configuration, evidence argues in favor of the influence of reputation on organizations' autonomy and discretion (Carpenter 2002, McDonald 2010). According to these scholars, reputation, functioning as an asset for the organization, awards organization with greater discretion and autonomy in the decision-making process from elected officials and other political influence. Other scholars have looked at the role of organizational reputation on internal members. On this subject, Rho et al. (2015) demonstrates that employees' positive identification with their organization (i.e. both perception of the organization identity and of external image) prompts employees to not only work beyond expectation but also reduce their voluntary absenteeism. On the other hand, Arnold et al. (2003) demonstrate the direct influence of organizational reputation on recruiting new employees as well as on retaining the current employees within the organization. In the context of the United Kingdom National Health System, the authors emphasize the importance of the social performance of the organization reputation when it comes to internal members. Overall, these studies imply the imperative for public organizations to manage and communicate their image in a positive way in their pursuit of operational objectives.

Finally, a segment of this literature has taken an interest in the encountering feature of organizational reputation in examining the influence of the interaction between internal members and external stakeholders on each other. Thereby, Whelan et al. (2009) underscores that in the context of public hospitals in Ireland, customers were expressing a greater satisfaction with the hospital when they perceive employees of the hospital to primarily address their needs.

In sum, although the concept of organizational reputation is of recent interest in the field of public administration, the concept is of critical importance for public institutions, which evolve in an environment characterized not only by a growing access to information and a large criticism feeling on the ability of government to address public issues, but also by a multiplication of the stakeholders and of their expectations. Albeit recent scholarship provides relevant insight on the mechanisms in place – i.e. either the factors governing reputation or the outcomes of reputation –, it relies on case-based analysis to examine the overall scheme of organizational reputation, with the particular role of strategic communication and marketing strategies. However, the current literature does not explore these items in relation to the individual perceptual processing in the formation of perceptions; and therefore, it undermines the multidimensionality (i.e. awareness vs. assessment) of reputation as well as its affective attribute (i.e., "this organization is not performing properly but I like it anyway").

In this dissertation, reputation is considered to be a construct that organizations may use to actively influence the perceptual processing of stakeholders, especially through a focus on distinct expectations and values. Therefore, the definition of reputation proposed by Walsh and Beatty (2007) best applies to the approach taken in this dissertation. They define reputation as “the [constituents’] overall evaluation of an [organization] based on his or her reactions to the public [agency’s] goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the [organization] and/or its representatives and/or known corporate activities” (Walsh and Beatty 2007, 129). Within this perspective, reputation, as Schwaiger (2004) asserts, is approached as “an attitudinal construct, where attitude denotes subjective, emotional, and cognitive based mindsets (p.49)”. This definition implies not only the interpretation of what the organization stands for but also the capacity of others to recognize it (Weiss *et al.* 1999). This definition, as Davies and Miles (1998) advanced, embraces three components – “how others see ourselves”, “who we really are”, and “what we say we are.” Organizational reputation, being the results of perceptions rather than actual knowledge, should be managed essentially via communication (Schwaiger 2004). Hence, marketing and branding strategies, in particular, present an interesting prospect for public organizations to enhance their reputation.

2. Corporate branding

2.1. Corporate branding and reputation

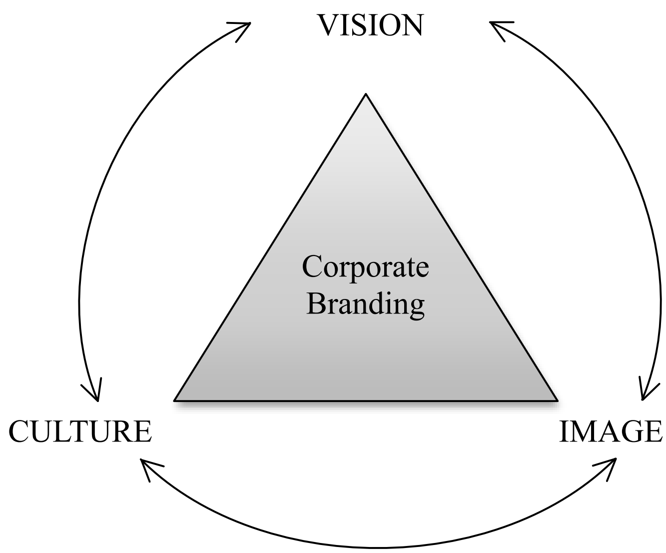
The concept of a public agency’s image refers closely to the marketing concept of brand. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one [provider] or group of [providers] and to differentiate them from those of competition” (American Marketing Association). A brand plays a significant role not only for products and services provided and offered by an organization, but also to the organization itself. Indeed, brand provides information about the attributes and the benefits of products and services as well as the identity of the organization that delivers them. These perceptions may be tangible or symbolic. Moreover, “brand is something that resides in the minds of [users]” (Keller 1998, 10). As such, although organizations may be similar, a brand appears as something unique. A brand creates an organized structure in the minds of those who use them, organizes their knowledge, and supports their assessment process. Ultimately, a brand provides value for the organization and its products and services, as it creates a unique representation of an organization for stakeholders.

Although branding has mainly been studied in the context of products, it appears as relevant for services and organization. In the context of the latter, branding, often referred as corporate brand, establish the identification and differentiation process at the organizational level (Ind 1998; Balmer 2001; Balmer and Gray 2003; Hatch and Schultz 2003; Balmer and Greyser 2006; Gylling and Lidberg-Repo 2006). The brand refers exclusively to the organization. According to Schultz and de Chernatony (2002), “corporate branding provides a basis for a corporation to develop and express its distinctiveness through its consistent relationships with all stakeholders (p.105)”. Corporate branding offers a representation of what the organization is and what it stands for. In this context, corporate branding not only refers to the perceived quality of the services delivered but also includes the values carried by the organization. In other words, elements related to the organization’s ethical principles, its attitudes towards its employees and stakeholders or even its operational procedures are as critical as the quality of the services delivered. Overall, as Hatch and Schultz (2003) enounces, "corporate brands […] contribute to the images formed and held by organizational and community members (p.1045)".

Literature on corporate branding presents the concept as a coherent and appealing pledge (Aaker 2004; Fombrun and van Riel 2004). Unlike product and service brands that are only directed to the customers, corporate brands include not only external stakeholders but also internal members of the organization. The entire organization, involving all internal members and all units, is involved in transferring the corporate brand. Indeed, considering the intangible nature of corporate brand, an organization is much more dependent on the interaction external stakeholders experienced with the organization and its internal members. Balmer (2001) emphasizes the role of internal members in transmitting the brand's values, "A corporate brand proposition requires total corporate commitment to the corporate body from all levels of personnel (p.281)". Overall, corporate branding is the result of the combination of multiple aspects of the management of an organization, from organizational strategy to organizational culture to organizational communication (Hatch and Schultz 2003, Knox and Bickerton 2003; Gylling and Lindberg-Repo 2006). Hence, as proposed by Einwiller et Will (2002), the corporate branding process is defined as "a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintain favourable images and consequently a favourable reputation of the company as whole by sending signals to all stakeholders by managing behaviour, communication, and symbolism (p.101)".

However, whereas the focal point of product and service brands was the differentiation among a possible selection, corporate brand also encompasses a belonging dimension (Hatch and Schultz 2003). Indeed, as those authors express, "when corporate branding works, it is because it expresses the values and/or sources of desire that attract the key stakeholders to the organization and encourage them to feel a sense of belonging (p.1046)." Hence, corporate branding is construed as the aggregation of strategic vision, organizational culture, and corporate images (See Hatch and Schultz 2001, 2003). Figure 1 below displays the model developed by Hatch and Schultz to successfully construe corporate branding.

Figure 1 – Hatch and Schultz' successful corporate branding



2.2. Developing organizational brand as an asset

As assumed by the aforementioned definition, corporate brand management undertakes the development of favorable perceptions or images of the organization through three mechanisms: 1) behavior, 2) communication, and 3) symbols. As expressed before, the relationships and the interactions external stakeholders have with the organization is a fundamental component in the formation of their perception. These interactions are mostly carried through the direct interaction of these stakeholders with the members of the organization. Hence, the transmission of the brand's values is carried through the organization's employees (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2001; Schultz and de Chernatony 2002). In this regard, Schultz and de Chernatony (2002) assert, "in corporate branding, the attitudes and behavior of employees play a central role in brand delivery (p.106)". Through the use of communication, an organization can send messages to both internal and external stakeholders to advocate and/or reinforce the values that summarize the brand (Gray and Balmer 1998; Marwick and Fill 1997; Stuart and Kerr 1999). Finally, symbols refer to, as defined by Hawabhay et al. (2009), "the standardized visual identity systems such as symbols/logos, colors that serves as identification tools to make the abstract values of the organization more tangible and consistent (p.5)". The success of corporate branding management relies on the alignment of the organization's vision and values with the images held by external stakeholders, which assumes the establishment of a coherent and viable brand values (also known as brand identity) and the capacity to transfer them into the perceptions of external stakeholders.

Brand identity is frequently associated with the sender side of the interaction process, namely the organization (Christensen and Askegaard 2001). Linked to the notion of brand image, brand identity is considered to be an intended image (Brown *et al.* 2006). More specifically, "brand identity is the articulation of what the organization is, what it does, how it does it, and is linked to the way an organization goes about its business and the strategies it adopts" (Markwick and Fill 1997, 397). Van Riel and Balmer (1997) indicated that the concept of brand identity has evolved over time. While brand identity initially focused on the graphic design associated with an organization, such as its name, its symbols, and any other visual identification, it has progressively incorporated a communication component. The construct nowadays can take any medium that allows an organization to forward its unique attributes and character. As such, any organization that seeks to carefully manage its brand identity can deliver a comprehensive set of cues through communication, symbols, and/or behaviors.

Table 1: Definitions of the concepts of reputation, brand, brand image, and brand identity

Concept	Definition
Reputation	The [constituents'] overall evaluation of an [organization] based on his or her reactions to the public [agency's] goods, services, communication activities, interactions with the [organization] and/or its representatives and/or known corporate activities (Walsh and Beatty 2007, 129)
Brand	Name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one [provider] or group of [providers] and to differentiate them from those of competition (American Marketing Association website)
Brand Image	[Brand] image can be said to be the totality of a stakeholder's perceptions of the way an organization presents itself, either deliberately or accidentally (Markwick and Fill 1997, 398)
Brand Identity	Brand identity is the articulation of what the organization is, what it does, how it does it, and is linked to the way an organization goes about its business and the strategies it adopts (Markwick and Fill 1997, 397)

Ultimately, in order to produce positive impressions that they perceive as promoting desired behaviors from stakeholders, government agencies should cautiously capitalize on a suitable identity to encourage positive image and reputation. Although the concept of corporate branding has attracted many organizations of all kinds, Waeraas (2008) argues that the essence of public organization for their most part prevents the development of "the ultimate unique corporate brand proposition (p. 217)". Instead, he asserts, “public organizations should draw on the diversity of their identities and values to march the diversity of their constituencies (p.217)”.

On the other hand, a brand’s image represents the comprehensive impression formed in the minds of stakeholders about an organization (Nguyen and Leblanc 2001). More precisely, Markwick and Fill considered that, “[C]orporate image can be said to be the totality of a stakeholder’s perceptions of the way an organization presents itself, either deliberately or accidentally (1997, 398).” Implicit to this mechanism is the formation of impressions. Stakeholder impressions are made through the immediate conceptualization of the cues intended to transfer a specific image. As Highhouse et al. (2009) define, “cues are specific pieces of information about the organization that signal certain images of the company in the mind of the constituent (p.1485)”. With this objective in mind, organizations may engage in a multitude of activities, including among others human capital or social capital (See Petkova et al. 2008), advertising or public relations (See Fombrun and Shanley 1990). Accordingly, brand image is a very interactive and volatile construct, which can evolve with each interaction between an individual and an organization. In so doing, the impression that results from this interaction will be linked to previously held associations. Furthermore, owing to the diverse ways that individuals process information, the brand image projected by an organization is not interpreted by individuals in the same way. This makes the management of an organizational brand image a complex and cumbersome task for public managers. Hence, this dissertation aims considering individual perceptual processing to determine how the manipulation of certain cues by public organizations impact organizational image and reputation.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Model

This research seeks to examine whether local agencies can influence the attitudes and behaviors of their constituents in their favor by managing the image(s) associated with their institutions. To explore this issue, an exploratory mixed-methods framework was selected to investigate the following question: *To what extent do branding cues, as communicated by local public agencies, influence citizen attitudes and behavior towards that particular agency?*

As the previous chapter discussed, the organizational image of public entities deeply depends on the impressions and representations that multiple stakeholders have about a particular institution, and these are often fraught with challenges. Since these representations rely not only on attributes of the organization and of its actions, but also on each individual perceptual processing, government institutions must facilitate the construction of favorable perceptions. Specifically, to be perceived as creating public value for their stakeholders, governments need to actively manage their relationships with their constituents to ensure continued support. Within this context, public managers try to support the values and the cues their stakeholders use to construct their impressions and opinions.

From this perspective, the task for public managers is to adequately position their organization in the mind of key stakeholders. In essence, evidence has illustrated that positioning the organization is relatively more relevant in the construct of impressions than the actual attributes and characteristics of the organization and its services. Blankson et al. (2008) conceptualize positioning as "a complex multidimensional construct that attempts to positively adjust the tangible characteristics of the offering and the intangible perceptions of the offering in the marketplace (p.107)". The ultimate objective of marketing strategy for any organization is to form, emphasize, or alter the positioning of an object in the mind of stakeholders (Blankson and Kalafatis 2007; Blankson et al. 2008; Schiffman and Lazar Kanuk 2010)

1. Toward a model

1.1. Perceptual Processing

Within the intention to manage and influence the image that stakeholders held about a product or an organization, marketers have naturally been interested in understanding the process individuals follow in forming perceptions. In this regard, cognitive psychology provides insightful information about how individuals select, organize, and interpret information. More specifically, as Weilbacher (2003) assert, the interest of the field aims to understand "what stimuli [individuals] attend to and remember and how the brain then processes these perceptions and memories to develop specific behaviors (p.231)".

Balcetis and Cole (2013) argued that, "certainly, the view people have of the world will depend on the window through which they see it" (p. 347). The perception individuals carry about an occurrence is very subjective and differs from one individual to another. On the one hand, the complexity of the phenomena individuals are exposed to makes it difficult for any one individual to absolutely represent them. When encountering a particular situation or some information, individuals focus their attention on a restricted number of elements, which obstructs the construction of an unconditional reality. On the other hand, the interpretation of the same instance can take different forms. Individual experience and context undoubtedly influence the perspective used to understand and interpret a phenomenon or information. According to Balcetis and Cole (2013), "perceptual experience is a product not only of the qualities of the actual object present but also of characteristics of the perceiver that shape interpretations of the ambiguity" (p. 330). In other words, perception is a unique construct that results from the integration of information by individuals.

Understanding the materialization of individual opinions requires analyzing the process by which people create and interpret the phenomena they experience. With respect to the social cognition literature, individuals are mostly constructing their interpretation of their environment through three major processes – perceptual miser, perceptual monster, and perceptual manager (Balcetis and Cole 2013). Perceptual miser refers to the process in which individual in direct contact with their environment use previous experiences and current knowledge to establish their interpretations. Past experiences create references that will enact as filters, thus establishing a structure of recalled associations to categorize, encode, and analyze incoming information. These categories enhance the processing of information by creating shortcuts individuals rely on. Although this process can only occur in the case of categories that have previously been experienced or "activated" – and therefore directs the attention of an individual to specific elements, it also enhances both the pace and efficiency of perceptual processing (Bruner and Minturn 1955; Bruner 1957; Brewer 1988).

Perceptual monster processing consists of individuals using pre-established beliefs, ideas, or even stereotypes associated with the context or the instance they encounter. These structures, also called schemata, tend to be complex and stable. Although they may be specific to each individual, they are not simply innate as they can be suggested, appropriated, appraised, or even supposed. Uleman and Kressel (2013) noted that, "they usually operate outside of consciousness and affect the direction of attention at encoding, the interpretation of ambiguous events, inference about thing not directly observed" (p. 63). These automatic constructs, once assimilated, are difficult to reverse and may lead to the misapprehension of the information. In addition, research demonstrates that the activation of those ideas or beliefs occur eminently in negative circumstances, hence the denomination of "monster" (Skowronski and Carlston 1989; Baumeister et al. 2001; Walton and Cohen 2003). In sum, these preexisting connotations, which can lead to mistaken interpretations, allow an instant and automatic perceptual processing.

Perceptual manager processing refers to the subjective appreciation of instances and information in the pursuit of defined goals and objectives. Impression formation, and thereby interpretation, is adjusted towards a satisfying inclination (Hoffman et el. 1984; Ferguson and Bargh 2004; Fishback et al. 2010). Processing information results in preconceptions about one's ability to achieve a stated goal or objective rooted in the individual's perceptions of the goal. The decisions and/or actions required to attain the conscious or unconscious goal focus the attention of the individual on specific environmental elements and even frame their representations. Uleman and Kressel (2013) noted that, "[the] 'goal shielding' thereby focuses attention on affiliation relevant concepts…and left other concepts relatively inaccessible" (p. 67). Overall, the pursuit of objectives interferes with the perceptual processing of the environment or information in a selective way that supports their achievement.

Although the three perceptual processes were presented independently, it is noteworthy to consider that information processing is the combination of the three processes in concert. Apart from the product of information processing, attention should be given to the process as well. Although this analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the role of imagery formation is useful. Kosslyn et al. (2006) explained that, "a mental image occurs when a representation of the type created during the initial phases of perception is present but the stimulus is not actually being perceived; such representations preserve the perceptible properties of the stimulus and ultimately give rise to the subjective experience of perception" (p. 4). Libby and Eibach (2013) asserted that when people lack knowledge, they are likely to use an imagery representation to interpret the instance or event they encounter. Evidence demonstrates that perceptual processing is more effective when it relies on tangible images (Schultheiss and Brunstein 1999; Epstein and Pacini 2000-01). Although there is widespread agreement with this perspective, specific research suggests that imagery could process general and abstract instances (Libby et al. 2009; Libby et al. 2011). Within this framework, Libby and Eibach (2013) argued that, "manipulating perspective influences the extent to which people think about actual life events abstractly in terms of the meaning in relation to their general self-knowledge, emotion, motivation and behavior" (p. 160).

In sum, perceptions are the result and the expression of the interpretation of the bounded information the individual's brain has selected from all the information received from the environment. The relevance of the stimulus is contingent on individual's characteristics, past experiences, expectations, motives, and the nature of the stimulus. In this context, the aim of any marketing strategy, and strategic communication in particular, is twofold: 1) capturing the attention of the individual, and 2) once recognized, framing the perception about an object (e.g. a brand).

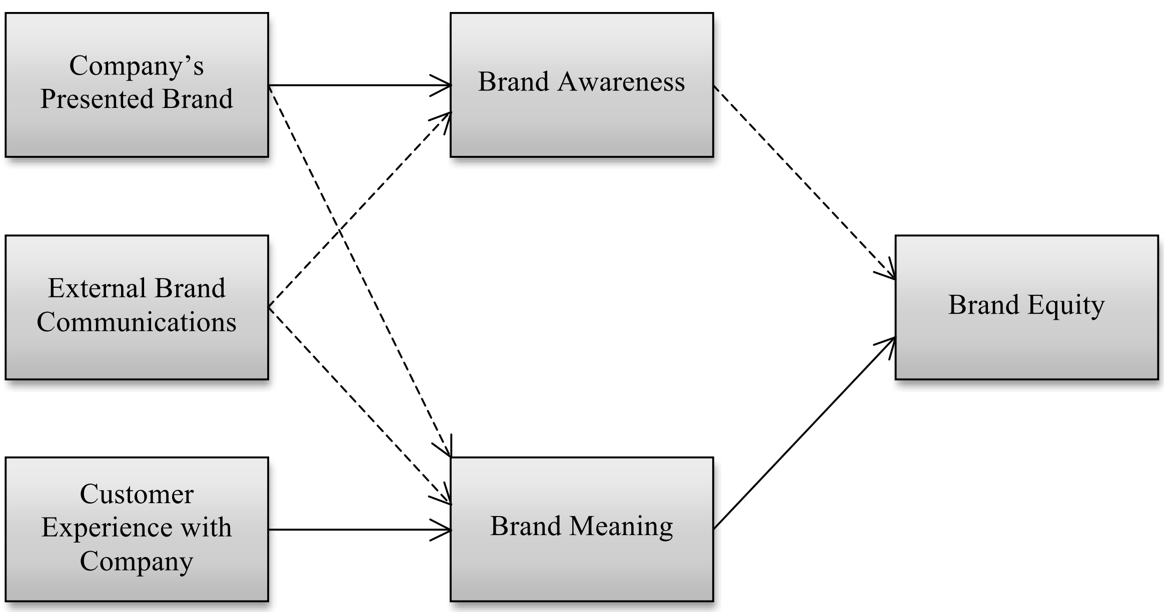
1.2. Brand equity

Within the context of branding, Keller and Lehman (2003) refer to brand memories as "everything that exist in the minds of [individuals] with respect to the brand (e.g. thoughts, feelings, experiences, images, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes) (p.28)". Intuitively, it is assumed that the perceptions associated with the brand will influence stakeholders attitude and behaviors towards the brand and its object. This is what scholars in marketing have described as brand equity (Aaker 1991; Keller 2000). Although scholars have approached the concept of brand equity with diverse definitions, brand equity corresponds to the value the brand contributes to an object beyond its functional utility (Farquhar 1989).

Albeit brand equity is a recent concept in the branding literature, several conceptual models have been developed by scholars with the purpose to understand the components that influence the creation of value for a brand. Aaker (1991) delineates brand equity as the aggregation of four features, namely brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and other brand associations. The framework developed by Aaker essentially relates to product brands, and thus, encompasses mainly the perspective of customers. Keller, on the other hand, with a focus on all type of stakeholders, proposes a knowledge-based conceptualization of brand equity. Hence, he defines brand equity as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on the [individual] response to the marketing of the brand (Keller 1998, 45)". Keller decomposes brand equity into two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image (also named brand meaning (Berry 2000)).

In details, Berry (2000) defines brand awareness as [individuals] ability to recognize and recall the brand when provided a cue (p.129)". On the other hand, "brand meaning refers to the [individual's] dominant perceptions of the brand (p.129)". In other words, while brand awareness represents the likelihood stakeholders acknowledge the existence of a specific organization in a marketplace; brand meaning involves the associations attached to that organization, what comes to mind about the organization. At glance, owing to those two elements affect brand equity to varying degree as stakeholders have previous experiences with the organization or not, the aims of an organization are manifold. In the case of unaware stakeholders, the organization intends mainly to prompt brand awareness by swaying evidence about what the organization stand for. On the other hand, in the case of experienced-stakeholders, the organization essentially seeks to strengthen and frame the brand meaning. Figure 2 displays Berry's (2000) service-branding model, which illustrates the composition of brand equity.

Figure 2 – Berry's (2000) service-branding model



Integrated into an organization strategy, the aforementioned objectives occur inter alia through the development of corporate communication. Weilbacher (2003) deservedly asserts, “communications […] have the potential to reorganize the way in which the [individual] perceives and appreciates the brand (p.234)”. More specifically, Cornelissen (2004) defines corporate communication as “the functions and process of managing communications between an organization and important stakeholder groups (including markets and publics in its environment) (p.185)”. The purpose of corporate communication is to favor stakeholders to perceive the organization in a positive way, to display favorable attitudes and behaviors; namely to generate a beneficial relationship.

1.3. Marketing strategies to influence

In the pursuit of this objective, several strategies are available to organizations. Schiffman and Lazar Kanuk (2010) point out five specific strategies: “(1) changing [individual’s] basic motivational function, (2) associating the [object] with an admired group or event, (3) resolving two conflicting attitudes, (4) altering components of the multiattribute model, and (5) changing consumer beliefs about competitors’ brands (p.242)”. Considering the nature of the public sector, mainly characterized by the absence of competition, the last strategy offered by the authors is perceived as pertinent with hardness. Beside this consideration, this dissertation more concretely examines the motivational function approach of brand management. This particular approach banks on the motivation for individuals to meet prominent needs. More specifically, Park et al. (1986) assert that individual needs may be sorted into two categories functional and symbolic. They note that functional needs refer to the pragmatic utility of an object, while the symbolic needs refer to self-image and social identification. More specifically, Katz (1960) classifies this approach into four distinct functions: 1) *the utilitarian function*; 2) *the ego-defensive function*; 3) *the value-expressive function*; and 4) *the knowledge function*.

Within the knowledge function, the objective of the organization relies on the individuals' cognitive need, knowledge. Individuals are by essence motivated by the desire to enhance their knowledge of the objects that compose the world, and particularly for those that belong to individuals' near environment. Katz (1960) attests that the contribution of knowledge provides individuals with meaning about the object they encompass and intend to appraise. Following this function, the aim for organizations is to enhance the awareness and the recognition of the object, namely the organization itself. The utilitarian function, on the other hand, focuses on the utility individuals associate with a particular object or brand. Utilizing this function, organizations intend to exhibit and accentuate a utilitarian feature of their brand that individuals either strongly anticipate or even may not have taken into account. In addition, most people carry their own perception and image about themselves, and therefore accustom their attitudes and behaviors towards the world with respect to their ego. From this perspective, organizations endeavor to fit with or influence the self-conception of their stakeholders. Finally, the value-expressive function refers to individuals' general values and outlook. In the pursuit of the function, organizations can reflect and/or promote some brand features to either match accepted values or even to prompt some desirable ones.

Within the management of a corporate brand, public institutions dispense their communicated brand through the aggregation of a brand's two attributes – brand performance and brand imagery (Keller 2001). Brand performance establishes a coherent link between an organization's vision and its core values. In other words, it suggests a value of the product or service delivered by an organization by delineating how the brand is intending to meet the practical needs of citizens.

Table 2 – Keller's definitions of the brand dimensions

Brand Dimension/ Facet	Definition
Brand Performance	Brand performance relate to the ways in which the product or service attempts to meet customers' more functional needs. It refers to the intrinsic properties of the brand in terms of inherent product or service characteristics (Keller 2001)
Primary & Secondary Characteristics	Coherence between the organization's vision and its core values, by projecting a unique value proposition to influence what people believe the brand should do and how it performs
Performance Reliability	Brand performance reliability refers to the consistency of performance over time and from purchase to purchase (Keller 2001)
Service Effectiveness	Brand service effectiveness refers to how completely the brand satisfies customers' service requirements (Keller 2001)
Service Efficiency	Brand service efficiency refers to the manner in which these services are delivered in terms of speed, responsiveness, and so forth (Keller 2001)
Service Empathy	Brand service empathy refers to the extent to which service providers are seen as trusting, caring, and having the customer's interests in mind (Keller 2001)
Style and Design	Consumers may have associations with a product that go beyond its functional aspects to more aesthetic considerations (Keller 2001)
Brand Imagery	Brand imagery deals with the extrinsic properties if the product or service, including the ways in which the brand attempts to meet customers' psychological or social needs (Keller 2001)
User Profiles	User profiles involves the type of person or organization who uses the brand. This imagery may result in a profile or mental image by customers of actual users or more aspirational, idealized users (Keller 2001)
Usage Situations	Associations of a typical usage situation may be based on a number of different considerations, such as (1) time of the day, week, month, or year when the brand is used; (2) place where the brand is used; and (3) type of activity for which the brand is used (Keller 2001)
Personality and Values	Brands may take on personality traits and values similar to those of people (Keller 2001)
History, Heritage, and Experiences	Brands may take on associations with their past and with certain noteworthy events in the brand history (Keller 2001, 17)

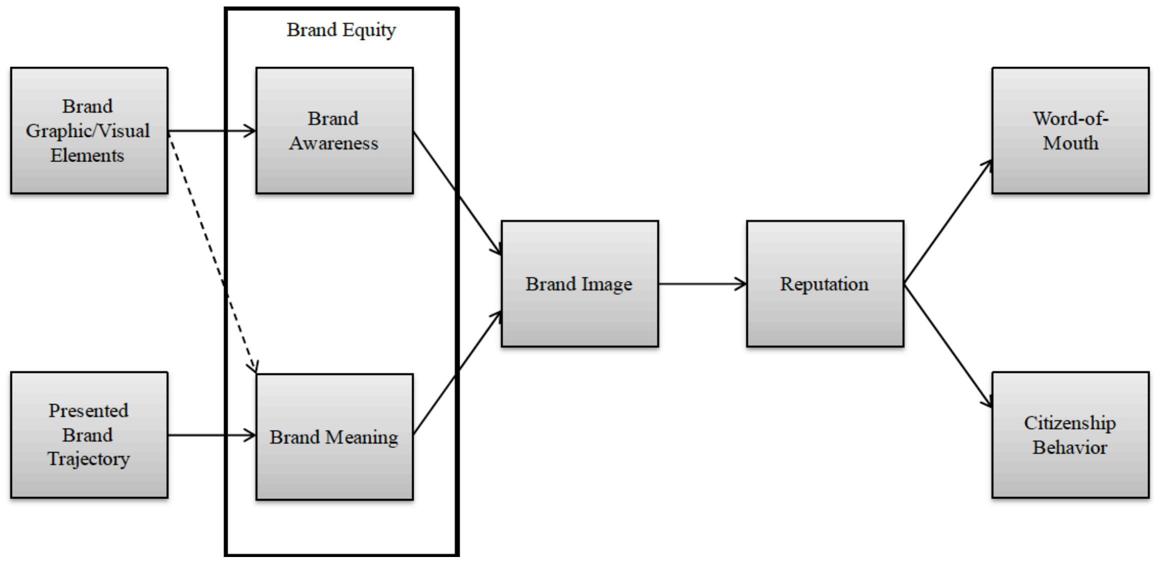
From a stakeholder's perspective, brand performance will influence what people believe the organization should do and how it performs. Categories used to distinguish brand performance include primary and secondary characteristics, performance reliability, service effectiveness, efficiency, and empathy. Brand imagery, on the other hand, deals more with the cognitive and social needs expressed by citizens. Brand imagery does not directly relate to a product or service, but rather with external associations perceived by users. Keller (2001) cited four categories of external associations: 1) user profiles, 2) usage situations, 3) personality and values, and 4) history, heritage, and experiences. In order to promote positive associations with its brand, a public agency may draw on either or both of these two components.

2. Research Model

2.1. Theoretical Model

This dissertation analyzes the extent to which branding by public school districts, as communicated by local governmental institutions, influences citizen attitudes and behaviors toward the agency that "owns" the brand. Relying on the perceptual processing of individuals for the construction of corporate image and reputation, public managers adopt branding to promote desired perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, such as favorable opinions communicated by word-of-mouth and other behaviors that express approval, thereby facilitating the achievement of good governance objectives. Figure 3 displays the theoretical model, highlighting the variables and mechanisms explored in this dissertation.

Figure 3 – Theoretical Model



2.2. The case for local public school

Considering the focus of this dissertation on the local government context to analyze the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of constituents, an exploratory research approach was selected to study the case of local public school districts. This section details the legitimized rationale behind this choice.

While there are several levels of government in the United States, local government is arguably the most pertinent for this research. The local governmental context is clearly the level of government in which the concept of brand image and reputation have the most capacity to influence citizen perceptions and impressions due to the proximity of local governments to their constituents. Both local governments develop ties with their constituents within a specific community. Likewise, citizens often display greater interest in their local government, which are often perceived as having greater impact on their daily life (Piotrowski and Van Ryzin 2007), and are thus more likely to engage with local government than other levels of government (state or national). This context makes citizens more likely to be knowledgeable and fastidious about local governmental organizations to which they feel connected. The concept of brand image is assumed to be more powerful in the local government context, in which public agencies have a greater capacity to identify with the values and expectations of citizens. Therefore, brand image should be more effective at this level of government. In addition, local governments often have limited access to resources to improve their programs or to focus more narrowly on "consumer service" activities. In so doing, the application of the brand image concept could provide appreciated outcomes associated with good governance.

Public schools are a very common local public institution that citizens interact with either as users, funders, or members of the community. They are also located in nearly every local jurisdiction. Public school districts were selected for two principal reasons: neutral innate conception of public schools and the marketization of the educational system.

The first argument concerns the "innate conception" of the organization in the minds of citizens. This concept refers to impressions citizens may have about an organization not because of the value it produces but only because of its nature and character. For instance, evidence has demonstrated that citizens display an overly-positive conception about local fire departments and firefighters in general (Lee and Olshfski 2002). Although these impressions are integral features of the brand image and reputation of governmental agencies, this study focuses on the capacity for management to develop such impressions through the communication of elements of a brand identity. Thus, it was strongly necessary that this dissertation study a type of organization that demonstrated the most neutral conception as possible. In this regard, evidence has demonstrated that citizens do not rate public schools with any particular favor among governmental agencies (Poister and Henry 1994; Van Ryzin et al. 2004). In a study of public schools in Georgia, Poister and Henry (1994) demonstrated that public schools obtain satisfactory rate from citizens, e.g., around 60 on a scale from 1 to 100. In this particular study, public schools were given a lower innate perceptual conception rating than types of government agencies, such as fire departments, public health clinics, police, and parks and recreation. Similarly, Van Ryzin et al. (2004) indicated that although citizens rate public schools positively, they do not display any particular overly-positive innate conception, unlike for firefighters, libraries, or parks and recreations.

The second argument in favor of selecting public school districts relates to the practical context in which these organizations operate. Brands implemented in market conditions where competition exists among actors is often presented as a practice of differentiation. Recent educational reforms have purposely emphasized the marketization of the education system relying on choice and competition (Lubienski 2005, 2007). As a response to this increased competition, schools are implementing marketing strategies based on the model of higher education institutions (Kirp, 2003). More specifically, alongside public schools, the K-12 education system includes multiple stakeholders, such as private and charter schools. These institutions are using branding strategies to varying extents in the administration of their organizations and in their relationships with external stakeholders (Lubienski 2007). The use of branding by private and charter schools justifies the decision of public school districts to look at the opportunities such practices could bring to their operations.

In sum, although it is recognized that the adoption of branding strategies in the public sector is acutely controversial and often presented as a waste of resources, the environmental context of public school districts is suitable for the analysis of the adoption of branding.

2.3. Proposition advanced

In accordance with their mandates, government agencies provide citizens with a set of products and services to respond to the expectations and needs of the community. It is assumed that public managers are legitimate and proficient administrators of public agencies, which they demonstrate by performing their responsibilities in an efficient and transparent manner. As stated above, in complex democracies, the ability and capacity of individuals to assess government enterprises is based on their own individual impressions. This process is frequently limited not only by the availability of adequate information about the organization and its activities, but also by the way in which individuals process interpret the information. Building on the experience of their counterparts in the private sector, the development of corporate brand by public entities appears an adequate strategy in the pursuit to uphold favorable perceptions and associations about a given organization. In return, such strategy confers to the organization and its affiliated brand a singular value, known as brand equity, which occurs through burgeoning awareness and prospering an aspired meaning.

Within this framework, an effective branding strategy demands the aggregation and cohesion of all components of brand image, and in particular strategic communication (Berry et al. 1988). More specifically, Berry et al. (1988) assert, “[brand image] includes the integration of words, colors, symbols, and slogans, and the consistent application of these elements to send a clear and cohesive message to [stakeholders] (p.30)". More specifically, evidence has indicated the prominence of graphic/visual elements in any communication process (Phillips 1997; McQuarrie and Glen Mick 1999; Nordhielm 2002; Scott and Vargas 2007). In this vein, scholars have argued that graphic/visual elements of a brand not only provide attraction and stability to the labeling of a brand, but also support the credibility of the communication process. Hence, I propose that

(1) Publicizing tangible graphic/visual elements affiliated to a public entity brand strengthens stakeholders capacity to recognize the brand, namely brand awareness

Evidence has advanced that in order to build a strong brand image, a public organization should hinge it on a delineated brand meaning (Park et al. 1986; Berry 2000). With respect to the motivational function of individuals, this process encounters the opportunity for an organization to influence stakeholders prominent needs and expectations. Hence, as Parasuraman et al. (1991) enounces, "[b]ecause service companies influence [stakeholders'] expectations levels by the explicit and implicit service promises they make, a key approach to managing expectations is to manage the promises (p.45)". In concordance with the utilitarian motivational function, this process accentuates the requisite for public entities to articulate the utilitarian features they present or reinforce towards stakeholders. Hence, I advance:

(2) Exposing individuals to a government institution's presented brand will prompt the individual's brand meaning, emphasizing specific attributes and expectations

The brand image and reputation of government institutions result in part from the sum of all associations and impressions individuals construct about an instance, an organization, or an event. Notwithstanding, these impressions are frequently biased by imperfect knowledge, misleading perceptions, or even misrepresentations stakeholders have about public institutions and government in general, which are the result of not only of the quality of the relationship that exists between an organization and its stakeholders, but also of the unique ways that individuals engage in processing information. The power of branding on an individual's impressions depends on the available opportunities an organization has to ease the processing of information. Taking into account the capacity of strategic communication to manipulate and facilitate an individual's brand awareness and brand meaning, thereby activating specific values and expectations, the following proposition is put forth:

(3) Publicizing a government institution's brand heightens the brand image and the reputation that citizens have about that institution

More recently, enhancing public trust, citizen participation, and citizen satisfaction have been viewed as fundamental to democracies and perceived as components of good governance on the part of public institutions. The fulfillment of these objectives clearly relies on the attitudes and the behaviors citizens express toward a specific agency. The perceptions – brand image or reputation – citizens have about an instance or an organization is likely to determine their mindset and their behavior towards it. Citizens who have a positive image of a government institution are more likely to exhibit favorable attitudes and behaviors towards that specific agency. In this case, brand image and reputation are interpreted as assets that an organization attempts to cultivate and enhance. With respect to good governance, government institutions attempt to elevate their brand image and reputation to encourage stakeholders to have supportive and beneficial attitudes and behaviors towards the institution.

(4) The use of branding, through the medium of brand image and reputation, favors the pursuit of good governance objectives by government institutions

The following chapter introduces the research design and the methods developed in the pursuit of this study.

Chapter 3 – Research design

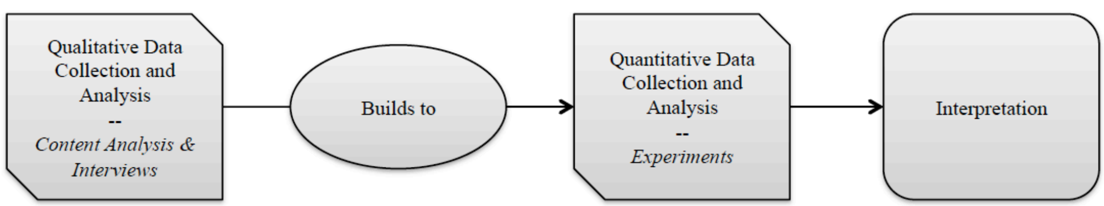
Considering the objective of this dissertation – to assess the extent to which branding, as communicated by local governmental institutions, influences citizen attitudes and behaviors toward that particular entity – an exploratory, mixed-methods sequential design was used. More specifically, the research was carried out in two phases: qualitative methods were first used to collect important data, which were analyzed and the results were used to design the quantitative component of the study.

Johnson et al. defined mixed methods research as "a type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (2007, p.123). Mixed methods research is not a simple combination of two different types of research methods; rather, as Creswell and Plano Clark argued, "mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry (2007, p.5)", and more specifically they stated that,

> …as a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis, and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases of the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problem than either approach alone. (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, p.5)

Many variants of exploratory sequential designs exist. For the purpose of this dissertation, the type of exploratory sequential design selected for the study was one in which the researcher combines the collection and analysis of the qualitative data within a traditional experimental design. In this case, the collection and analysis of the qualitative data set occurs before the deployment of the data collection and analysis procedures linked to the larger quantitative experimental design. This type of research method was preferred given the need to adequately explore an emerging concept in the field of public administration that requires both practical and conceptual support. In other words, the methodological design of this study was driven by the research inquiries characterized by the uncertainties, values and traditions of social sciences (Riccucci 2010). Hence, this research design reflects the postnormal nature of the field of public administration, which Riccucci (2010) points out as "a process of inquiry for which objectivity is not always achievable (p.28)."

Figure 4 – Exploratory Sequential Experimental Research Design



The specific research method design used in this study includes several assumptions that ought to be stated at this stage. The characteristics of this study design are outlined by the primary quantitative approach, and the qualitative set is subservient within that methodology. Backing the quantitative segment with a qualitative component provides this dissertation with the opportunity to address the incipient nature of the themes encountered. Moreover, this design permits expanding the analysis to include additional perspectives, such as the functional motivation and application of reputation management, communication, and branding in the context of local government. In sum, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods fulfills the objectives of this dissertation to provide solid and extensive understanding and evidence of the investigated phenomena.

On the other hand, the use of an exploratory sequential research design presents some challenges that should not be overlooked or understated. One of the most important potential limitations concerns the design of the quantitative component of the study, which was informed by the findings of the qualitative component. The materials used in the quantitative phase were indeed built upon the information gathered during the qualitative phase. In addition, the overlapping of the two types of research methodologies, which primarily addressed two different inquiries, posed potential challenges. In order to overcome any potential hazards with the preferred design, meticulous procedures were employed within the collection and the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

More specifically, the qualitative component of this dissertation attempted to appreciate the extent to which local governmental agencies were appraising reputation and its management as well as communication and branding at the time of the carrying out of this research. This segment focused not only on identifying and understanding such practices and the factors that motivate local public agencies to adopt them, but also to illustrate current trends among local educational systems. The qualitative piece, which sought to uncover practical information on what the private sector concept of branding looks like in the public sphere, was done using exploratory multiple case study analysis. In contrast, the quantitative element intended to measure the influence of branding on organizational reputation management and citizen attitudes and behaviors. This included not only evaluating the role of branding in perceptual processing by individuals, but also its likelihood of facilitating favorable reactions. Experiment is the method preferred for that purpose.

Prevailing studies related to reputation management and corporate branding, although providing interesting insights, has essentially approached the analysis of these concepts in a very-specific case-based context restrained to a limited number of areas, such as regulatory agencies, health institutions, and higher education establishments. The methodology developed in the pursuit of the objectives of this dissertation singularly contributes to the existing knowledge of corporate branding in the public sector by providing a generic model that uncovers the influence of particular features of corporate branding on organizational image and reputation and their incidences on citizen attitude and behaviors.

1. Exploratory Qualitative Methods

This section focuses on the qualitative exploratory methodology of this dissertation, describing the participants involved, the methods selected, and the protocols developed. The purpose of this qualitative phase, as described above, was to explore the tendency of public managers to consider organizational reputation and to adopt a plan of action via communication, marketing, and branding. The use of qualitative methods was justified by the nature of this study as one that seeks to explore and interpret a phenomenon in its natural context. As Denzin and Lincoln expressed, "…qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the word. […] They [qualitative practices] turn the world into a series of representations […]. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach of the world (2000, p.4)".

Considering the uncharted character of the themes of this dissertation, it appeared necessary not only to deliver a pragmatic outlook of the concepts studied, but also to appreciate them in the explicit context of local public school districts. Hence, qualitative data collection was carried out in two phases, utilizing the fundamental approach of multiple case study analysis (see Carpenter and Feroz 1992; Yin 2003). Within the context of an exploratory study, the use of case studies is adequate to the "how" and "why" inquiries, especially when the subject matter is short of scrutiny (Yin 2003). Using case study analysis as a research method enables the researcher to evaluate phenomenon in its real-life setting. Moreover, evidence suggests that a multiple case study approach favors the generalization of the findings, thereby providing a better opportunity for linking data and theory (Yin 2003; Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). In the case of this study, multiple case studies showed that local government institutions were engaging with the concepts of organizational reputation and branding, which lent credibility to the broader argument that public sector organizations are indeed adopting marketing techniques. More specifically, 11 exploratory case studies were conducted in three northeastern states – New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. From an operational standpoint, these case studies allowed the researcher to consider a variety of contextual environments in terms of configuration, legislation, socio-economic traits, and resource capacities.

Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews with key informants and, to a lesser extent, website evaluation. The data collected through the interviews and websites were analyzed consistently. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the NVivo software. This process also included theme identification and description (Creswell 2009). Given the predominance of websites as a key feature of the communication process between government institutions and their constituents, information found on the websites of identified public school district was also considered and analyzed as an insightful source of data.

1.1. Semi-structured interviews

Interviews generally seek to collect data about particular phenomena from the perspective of interviewees. Interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to deeply investigate phenomena in a real-life context. There are many kinds of interviews. Semi-structured interviews, which include a series of prepared questions, allow a certain degree of freedom to the interviewer. Using such an approach, the interviewer is able to adjust the course of the interview as it progresses, probing for additional information when the opportunity presents itself over the course of the interview. Owing to the exploratory nature of this phase of the research, the use of semi-constructed interviews was chosen as the most suitable research method for acquiring the desired information.

More specifically, the laddering interview technique was used to attempt to determine the interviewees' cognitive impressions about organizational reputation and branding. The laddering method is a structured questioning strategy that attempts to uncover the different associations linked to general concepts (Reynolds and Gutnam 1988; Grunert and Grunert 1995). Reynolds and Gutnam explained that this strategy focuses "specifically on the linkages between the attributes that exist […] (the 'means'), the consequences for the [user] provided by the attributes, and the personal values (the ‘ends’) the consequences reinforce (1988, p.11)”. Based on an established format using a series of questions, laddering interviews allow the researcher to highlight those linkages between attributes, consequences, and values. The laddering method is frequently used, especially in marketing, to predict the attitudes and behaviors of individuals toward a product, service, or organization. Grunert and Grunert argued that “human behavior is the result of interaction of cognitive structures and cognitive processes (1995, p.212)”. By linking consequences and personal values to the attributes of a concrete concept, the laddering technique attempts to predict how individuals may process information and therefore behave in a specific manner.

When appraising reputation management and adopting marketing techniques, public school administrators have a unique understanding of the concepts, the connection better the concepts and their organization, and the utility the concepts may have for their organization. As such, the objective of conducting these interviews was threefold: 1) capturing how public managers understand these concepts, 2) identifying the factors that motivate public managers to use them, and 3) characterizing current practices. Ten interviews were conducted with superintendents in public school districts located in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. More specifically, five districts were located in New Jersey, three in New York, and two in Connecticut. This geographic area was selected by the researcher as these three states share several similarities in regards to education system, with a high level of tax allocated to school districts, but also offer the opportunities to select a wide rand of varieties in school districts. Contact information for superintendents in all three states was retrieved from the respective Department of Education[1] or from each school district's website in the case of erroneous information.

Table 3 – Profile of the public school district participating in the interviews

District Name	Schools	Number of students 2014/15	Budget 2014/15	High School Graduation Rate (year)
Berlin Township, NJ	1 elementary & 1 middle schools	634	$15,817,006	N/A
Caldwell – West Caldwell, NJ	5 elementary, 1 middle, & 1 high schools	2,643	$43,445,132	96% (13-14)
Herricks, NY (2013-14)	3 elementary, 1 middle, & I high schools	3,892	$79,018,087	93% (13-14)
Hopewell Valley Regional School, NJ	3 elementary, 1 middle, & I high schools	3,704	$78,814,766	96% (12-13)
Middletown, CT	8 elementary, 2 middle, & 1 high school	4,800	$76,205,914	79% (12-13)
North Bergen, NJ	6 elementary, 1 high schools	8,051	$126,941,422	84% (13-14)
New York City District 15, NY	23 elementary, 7 middle, & 8 high schools	30,410	N/A	N/A
Pinelands Regional School, NJ	1 junior, & 1 high school	1,580	$30,953,687	88% (13-14)
Regional School District 12, CT	3 elementary, & 1 middle/ high school	747	$21,618,021	85% (12-13)
York Central School, NY	1 elementary, & 1 middle/ high school	735	$8,752,722	92% (12-13)

[1] For the State of New York, the directory of public and non-public schools and administrators for the State of New York. New York State Education Department was consulted (http://www.nysed.gov/admin/bedsdata.html [retrieved on September 13, 2014]); for the State of New Jersey, the public school directory published by the State of New Jersey Department of Education was consulted (http://education.state.nj.us/directory/ [retrieved on September 13, 2014]); finally, for the State of Connecticut, the Connecticut State Department of Education website was consulted (http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/csde/Connecticut%20State%20Department%20of%20Education4.htm?sdePNavCtr=|#45474 [retrieved on September 13, 2014]).

Once identified, the lists of superintendents were combined into a single, master list of more than 1,000 contacts (575 in New Jersey, 142 in Connecticut, 658 in New York State, and 42 in New York City) and randomly ordered. The first 25 contacts were initially invited to participate in the interview process via email. The subject line of the email was "public school district communication process" and the body of the email briefly described the subject and objectives of the study to potential participants, and also stated that it was an anonymous study. A similar reminder email was sent a week after to those superintendents that did not respond to the first emailed invitation. At the conclusion of this first iteration, seven superintendents agreed to participate in the interviews. Using the same method, a second group of emails were sent out the next 25 superintendents on the randomly ordered, master list. At the end of this second iteration, three additional superintendents agreed to be interviewed by the researcher, for sum total of 10 between the two iterations. Table 3 shows the profile of the public school district for each superintendent that participated in an interview.

Besides the undeniable role of public managers in reputation management and in the adoption and commitment to branding, marketing strategies in general require expertise and resources that local governmental institutions frequently lack. To that end, marketing consultants are usually hired to facilitate the adoption or enhance the effectiveness of marketing practices. Including the perspectives of marketing consultants on this matter was expected to provide valuable insights not only to identify the characteristics of the marketplace and its participants, but also to highlight the trends utilized in the public sector, and particularly in K-12 schools. Using key words in a Google Search, five consulting companies that provide marketing strategy services for public schools were identified. Using a similar procedure as that which was done to invite the superintendents, the researcher invited all five consulting organizations to participate in the interview process. Unfortunately, only one contacted company agreed to participate.

Invitations to participate in the interviews were first sent on November 3, 2014, and interviews were carried out with the 10 volunteer participants between November 11 and December 16, 2014. These interviews, face-to-face or via phone, lasted between 20 to 40 minutes and each interview was electronically recorded and then manually transcribed by the researcher. Regarding the marketing consultants, an invitation email was sent on December 1, 2014 to the five identified consulting organizations. As mentioned before, only one participant accepted to participate in the interview process. The interview took place on December 4, 2014 over the phone and was also electronically recorded. The interview lasted for about an hour. Although the number of participants in the interview process appears low, data saturation was achieved to the point of diminishing returns, especially with respect to the exploratory nature of this study.

1.2. Website information from public school districts

Although the concept of evaluation has many distinct definitions varying by disciplines, it appears to be an effective technique for the purpose of this dissertation (Scriven 1996; Mark et al. 2000; Schwandt 2008; Fitzpatrick et al. 2011). In the context of this research, as proposed by Fitzpatrick et al., evaluation is defined as “the identification, clarification, and the application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object’s value (worth or merit) in relation to those criteria (2011, p.7)”. This methodology was used to assess the websites of local government institutions and was assumed by the researcher to be a sufficient means for identifying and defining the components of branding advanced by public school districts. The evaluation approach relies on a threefold process to evaluate an object's value, as explained by Fitzpatrick et al. in the following: "(1) determining the criteria and standards for judging quality and deciding whether those standards should be relative or absolute, (2) collecting relevant information, and (3) applying the standards to determine value, quality, utility, effectiveness, or significance (2011, p.7)".

As a research method, evaluation presents several advantages in comparison with other methods. First, as its definition suggests, the principal purpose of evaluation is to assess the pertinence of objects in relation to the concepts explored in the research. In the context of an exploratory study, evaluation can generate valuable evidence about the phenomena studied. Furthermore, evaluation is unobtrusive as it focuses on documents already produced by their source at the moment of the data collection. In other words, evaluation examines phenomena that were not produced in a research context. As such, the data collected is not influenced by the conditions of the research. Evaluation can be handled via the production of rubrics, which enable the researcher to corroborate the selected standards to the evaluation of the value and the quality of the objects (Reddy and Andrade 2010). The use of school district websites is suitable for assessing the presence and the importance of the elements of each brand, considering the sequential nature of this study.

On the other hand, evaluation presents several shortcomings that should be indicated. First, evaluation relies on the ability to access documents, or websites in the case of this dissertation, at one given moment. In other words, the analysis that results from the evaluation of the websites expresses the value of the objects at that precise moment. The nature of this process may eventually impede the ability to reproduce the study, as the information contained on the website may change from time to time. Second, with regards to the method of carrying out evaluation, the researcher should carefully consider two elements – objectivity and reliability. The objectivity of the process is contingent not only on the standards selected to assess the object but also the quality of each selected criteria. The researcher may be tempted to influence the extrapolations of inferences to produce favorable results. In order to ensure the validity of this process, this research clearly established criteria and stated their definitions.

Table 4 – Adapted Keller's nine brand components

Concept	Criteria/Examples
Graphic Design	Slogan or Color, Logo and other visual dimension of a brand
Primary/Secondary Characteristics	Brand primary and secondary characteristics are attributes unique to the public institutions
Brand Performance	Brand performance establishes the coherence between a brand's vision and its core value by projecting a unique value proposition
Performance Reliability	Brand performance reliability refers to the consistency of performance over time and from usage
Performance Efficiency	Brand service efficiency pertains to the processes associated with the delivery of the services
Performance Effectiveness	Brand service effectiveness addresses the ability of the brand to satisfy the functional needs and expectations of citizens
Performance Empathy	Brand service empathy refers to the sentiment conveyed by the organization – that it cares and has the citizens' interests in mind, and therefore can be trusted
Brand Imagery	Brand imagery component relates to the extrinsic characteristics of the service offered, which intend to address psychological or social needs expressed by the stakeholders
User Profile	User profiles emphasize associations with the common users, either through demographic or socially-constructed characteristics
Usage Situation	Usage situations focus on the elements, such as the time and the location, and the activities associated with the use of the services
Personality and Values	Personality may be characterized as those traits of a person that reflect consistent patterns of attitudes and behaviors
History, Heritage, and Experience	History, heritage, and experiences refer to "associations with [the institution's] past and certain noteworthy events in [the institution's] history" (Keller 2001, 17)

The rubrics chosen for evaluation and their definition were based on Keller's (2001) nine-component framework, which is divided into two broad categories – brand performance and brand imagery. Table 4 shows Keller's brand components and their definitions. As mentioned previously, brand performance establishes the coherence between a brand's vision and its core value by projecting a unique value proposition. Within this category, a brand's primary and secondary characteristics are used to convey its value proposition by influencing what individuals believe the organization should do and how it performs. The brand performance reliability refers to the consistency of performance over time and from usage (Keller 2001). The brand service effectiveness addresses the ability of the brand to satisfy the functional needs and expectations of citizens, whereas brand service efficiency pertains to the processes associated with the delivery of the services (Keller 2001). Finally, brand service empathy refers to the sentiment conveyed by the organization – that it cares and has the citizens' interests in mind, and therefore can be trusted (Keller 2001).

On the other hand, Keller's (2001)- brand imagery component relates to the extrinsic characteristics of the service offered, which intend to address psychological or social needs expressed by the stakeholders (Keller 2001). User profiles emphasize associations with the common users, either through demographic or socially-constructed characteristics. Usage situations focus on the elements, such as the time and the location, and the activities associated with the use of the services. Personality may be characterized as those traits of a person that reflect consistent patterns of attitudes and behaviors. The metaphor between an organization and a person has a long tradition in marketing literature and has been intensively used to assess outside stakeholders' views of an organization (Martineau 1958; Biel 1993; Aaker 1997; Davies et al. 2004). Finally, history, heritage, and experiences refer to "associations with [the institution's] past and certain noteworthy events in [the institution's] history (Keller 2001, p.17)".

The purpose of including these standards to evaluate the websites of public school districts was to subjectively highlight patterns and individual instances of conventional practices in local public school branding. More specifically, this approach sought not only to deduce which brand facets are promoted by local public school districts, but also to extrapolate tangible examples. These corollaries were included in the design of the quantitative component of this dissertation.

The public school districts for which website evaluation was carried out can be categorized into three major groups, namely schools that opt for in-house branding, schools that employ the services of consultant agencies/third-parties, and schools that are not actively engaged in branding. In order to categorize public school districts in the tri-state region, an online survey was used to ascertain the extent to which each identified school district adopted branding as part of the process of communicating with their constituents. The survey used the software Qualtrics and was distributed to the same list of over 2,000 superintendents that was used to identify potential participants in the semi-structured interviews. Using the same procedure as that used to invite potential interviewees, an email was sent to superintendents inviting them to participate in the survey, and this email also gave a brief description of the survey, its purpose, and its objective, as well as a note explaining that the survey was confidential. In order to link each response to a particular school district, the Qualtrics email distribution option was utilized, which is an option in the software that offers researchers the ability to link responses to the initial emails sent. Two additional reminder emails were sent over the following 10 days. The survey responses were received between November 17 and December 7, 2014.

Table 5 – List of school districts included in website evaluation per category

In-house Extensive Marketing Group	In-house Narrow Marketing Group	External Marketing Group
• Herricks School District • North Warren Regional School • Roxbury School District • Pelham Public Schools • Mountain Lakes School • Piscataway Township Schools • Maryvale School District • Summit Public School • Berlin Township School District • Oysterponds School District	• Allegany-Limestone School District • LaFargeville Central School • Lawrence Township Public Schools • Spotswood Public School • West Cape May School District • Middletown Public School • York Central School • Delaware Township School District • New Brunswick Public School • Middleburgh Central School	• North Bergen Schools • Pinelands Regional School • Port Byron Central School • Gouverneur Central School District • Delsea Regional School District • Schalmont Central School District • Stamford School District • Babylon School District • Hauppauge School District • Poland Central School

A total of 151 usable survey responses were obtained for a response rate of 10%. Based on the responses of participants and their descriptions of distinctive features of their respective institution, the school districts were classified into three groups: in-house extensive marketing, in-house narrow marketing, and external marketing. Thus, for each category, the school districts were randomly ordered in a list, and the first 10 in each group were selected for evaluation. Table 5 provides an exhaustive list of the school districts. Interestingly, four selected school districts also participated in the interview process. This coincidence is presumed to result from their presence in the external marketing and the in-house narrow marketing group, which included a lower number of school districts (26 and 17, respectively). Because changes to the websites of school districts selected for website evaluation could create biased results, website evaluations were carried out quickly soon after the survey results were received, on December 15 and 16, 2014.

2. Experimental Quantitative Method

Recently, the use of experimental studies has grown dramatically in number and in influence in the field of public administration. Bozeman (1992) reminded us that while researchers in the field are not too adventurous in terms of the methods they use, methods such as experimentation have important potential to advance some of the major issues in the field. There are many reasons for this growing interest in using experimental methods. Most importantly, the field emphasizes an expanding attention on causal inference (Cook and Campbell 1979; Druckman et al. 2011; McNabb 2013). Experiments are inductively perceived as a research method to facilitate the analysis of causal relationships. Similarly, Cook and Campbell advanced that quasi-experiments are adequate for research studies that are interested in analyzing inferences without “the dangers of inferring causation from passive observational data (1979, p.1)”. With this in mind, some have argued that experiments have great potential for studies that are focused on the individual and/or deal with judgments or perceptions (Bozeman 1992; Druckman et al. 2011).

The second argument in support of experiments concerns the interest more closely linking theory and practice in the field. Experimental methods are designed to reproduce as closely as possible the conditions and the context in which the phenomenon studied takes place in the natural environment (Roth 1995). This enables not only an increase in the degree of knowledge and understanding, but also allows for the direct evaluation of the potential processes taking place. With traditional research methods, "researchers are more interested in the problem than in problem-solving technics (Bozeman 1992, p.290)". Although trying to recreate the natural context may sometimes be a challenging task, experiments are seen as an insightful research method to enhance the managerial perspective of public issues. In this regard, the growing usage of experiments in the field of public administration is related to the readiness to promote public administration in a more traditional science conception (Cook and Campbell 1979). The authors argued that such methods relate "to most persons' everyday understanding of the notion of cause, and to the way that most changes would have to be made to improve our environment (Cook and Campbell 1979, p.9)".

Bozeman and Scott (1992) gave many reasons why researchers in the public administration field are unwilling to use experiments. First, the authors argued that the field, "driven by 'realism' and a need to provide prescriptions for action (Bozeman and Scott 1992, p.294)", has emphasized external validity at the expense of internal validity. Indeed, many authors have argued that, owing to the specificity of their methodology, experiments are too specific to the context, and thus the results are not easily generalizable. This line of argument is actually missing the ultimate value of experiments – that they are specific and contextual. Another element Bozeman and Scott pointed out concerns the level of analysis. In experiments, the level of analysis is frequently the individual or a small group with a particular attention to behaviors and attitudes. Studying groups or organizations becomes more challenging within the context of an experiment. Scholars have argued that solely examining the individual level is insufficient for producing relevant and useful results; rather, it is necessary to focus analysis on the organizational level. This argument, however, neglects the potential for new knowledge to be brought into the field via studies examining the individual level. Finally, Bozeman and Scott suggested that experiments are neglected because researchers are not familiar with such research methods. They further argued that experiments are rarely found in the curricula of public administration graduate programs, unlike those of other disciplines. As with any research process, learning about an innovative research method should be part of any scholar's journey.

Although experiments have become more "fashionable," they carry some challenges, which, nevertheless, can be overcome. Bozeman and Scott (1992) noted that these challenges result from the conflict between "the merits of artificiality versus naturalism (p.306)". This particular element refers to the dilemma between internal and external validity. Bozeman and Scott cited Drabek and Haas' (1967) four dimensions for ensuring the realism of an experiment, which included the realism of the subjects, the realism of the task, the realism of the ecological setting, and the realism pertaining to the subjects' knowledge (1992, p.307). Overall, Bozeman and Scott argued that the more realistic the experiment, the more relevant and the more effective in captivating valid behaviors.

With respect to this research study, in which I attempted to analyze the extent to which branding, as communicated by local governmental agencies, influences citizen attitudes and behaviors, an experimental study seemed to be most appropriate. The design of this experiment is believed to reflect a realistic context. I designed this experiment using the information collected and analyzed in the qualitative stage of this dissertation.

2.1. Experimental Protocol

In order to measure the influence of branding, as communicated by local governmental institutions, on citizen attitudes and behaviors, an two-way experiment (with four treatment groups and one control group was chosen as the most adequate research method. This decision was justified by the need not only to understand the influence of several components of branding on individuals' perceptual processing, but also to assess their relationship to citizen attitudes and behaviors.

The procedure carried out for this part of the study essentially had three components: (1) an introduction, the instructions for the research study, and some pre-treatment questions; (2) the treatment itself; and (3) a post-treatment questionnaire. The introduction informed the participants about the study and its objectives – the communication process of local government agencies. The purpose here was to ensure that the participants did not detect or perceive any associations with the subjects of the study – branding, brand equity, and reputation – in order to prevent the likelihood that they would fashion their responses in a way that they would perceive as positive. The initial questions were introduced with the purpose of collecting the participants' general assessment and interaction with government and with public school districts, more specifically.

In the treatment section, participants were asked to review information an imaginary school district could communicate to them. Although only the four treatment groups were exposed to the interventional treatments, all groups, including the control group, were given general information about the district, such as the number of students, the number of instructors, and the contact information of the administrators. In an effort to make the activity more realistic, the information used was taken from a real-life public school district.

The four treatments utilized in this experiment recreated the communication a school district might use to promote their brand attributes. Using the information identified during the qualitative phase, the treatments revolved around two main trajectories: (1) academic performance and (2) character and values. For each branding proposal, a text and a graphic version of the prospectus were created. While the text version only included wording, the purpose of the graphic version was to create a prospectus that school districts could share with their constituents. For each proposal, the use of two versions enabled the researcher to distinguish the role of graphic design in the construction of perceptual processing. A copy of the full documents utilized in the interventional treatment can be found in Appendix J.

The third component of the experimentation was a post-treatment questionnaire intended to measure the influence of the branding propositions on individuals' perceptual processing as well as on their attitudes and behaviors toward that particular school district. This experiment strictly employed a post-test questionnaire. Because the influence of branding propositions was not tested prior to the experiment, the internal validity of the study may be compromised; however, the decision to do this was deliberate so that the subjects did not have to take the same test twice. Instead, the researcher chose to analyze the influence of branding on individuals' perceptual processing by comparing the treatment groups to mainly the control group but also to each other.

In order to ensure the success of this experiment in testing the two trajectories mentioned above – academic performance and character and values, a series of steps were carefully carried out. Regarding the design of the materials used in the experimental part of this study, this information was explicitly derived from the qualitative analysis done beforehand. References to previous studies reaffirm the compelling character of the selected trajectories tested in this experiment (Glaser et al. 2002; Lubienski 2007; Delaney 2008). In addition, the materials were pre-tested with professors at the Department of Urban Education at Rutgers University–Newark using the same rubric based on Keller's (2001) brand components that was employed for the website evaluation described above. This process helped to ensure that the materials correlated as intended. Finally, the experiment in its online format was tested with graduate students from the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark.

Table 6 – Wording for both brand trajectory treatments

Academic Success Brand Trajectory Wording	Character Development Brand Trajectory Wording
The Academy	**The Academy**
Education. Your Door To The Future *Inspiring a standard of excellence for all students*	**Thinking, Feeling, Succeeding, Engaged** *Challenging each student to become a successful citizen of a global society*
We create innovative and rigorous curriculum in an effort to ensure students are equipped with the tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to maximize excellence and achievement. The Academy sets high expectations and provides opportunities for all students to reach their full potential on their path to college and career readiness through The Academy Success Booster. Our Success Booster is based on the core belief that assessment should work as an apparatus for enhancing teaching and learning. These high quality K-12 assessments in academic standards give teachers, students, and parents better information whether students are on track in their learning and maximize their potential for success after high school. The Academy Success Booster provides the tools to help teachers customize learning to foster student abilities. Our Impact: High achievement of all students on state and national assessments, K-12 High participation and passing rates in Advanced Placement courses in the high school Quality instructional programs aligned with academic standards and offering 21st century learning opportunities High graduation rate with 96% attending college – 66% entering the top three tiers of competitive school. Outstanding achievement in state and national programs in variety of arenas.	We create a comprehensive, intentional and proactive approach that promotes core ethical and educational values as the foundation of future successful and caring adults. Acting consistently with our beliefs, acknowledging our obligations, and delivering on our promises, we work together as professionals – and with parents and community members as partners – to positively shape the social, emotional, and educational development of the young people entrusted to them each day. Each student is encouraged to feel safe, respected, and connected to those around them, allowing them to thrive academically and socially and be motivate to make their community stronger. They are invited to value and seek input from as wide a spectrum of viewpoints and experiences as possible. Our Philosophy Fosters: A sense of responsibility A pride in work A feeling of self-confidence An awareness of young people's potential A sense of self-respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and citizenship An awareness of the needs and sensitivity of others

2.2. Measures

The theoretical model introduced above describes several components for exploring the extent to which branding, as communicated by local governmental agencies, influences citizens' attitudes and behaviors toward that particular institution. This section introduces the variables present in that model, as well as how they were measured in the context of this dissertation. This research approaches the influence of individuals' perceptual processing as an opportunity for branding to stimulate the attention of citizens to non-ordinary elements of the services or the organization. This process ultimately derives in the knowledge and perception structures in the minds of citizens (Keller 1993, 2001; Keller and Lehman 2006). Therefore, in the context of this study, I captured this process on two levels: 1) the ability of citizens to recognize and recall the organization and its attributes (brand equity/value) and 2) the likelihood that they focused on singular considerations in their appraisal of the institution. Regarding the former, this study include four 5-point scale questions to evaluate citizen acknowledgment of the government organization. In terms of the latter, this study examined the propensity of citizens to select specific factors in their assessment of the public entity, such as curriculum, security, or graduation rate.

In this dissertation, reputation is understood in the broad sense of the term, which combines both an effective and a cognitive component (Hall 1992; Schwaiger 2004). As such, reputation should not only integrate the subjective assessment of the organization's attributes (i.e., the success of the organization or the high quality of services), but also an intrinsic evaluation of the organization (i.e., "this organization is not performing properly but I like it anyway"). Therefore, this research accommodates the two factors developed by Schwaiger (2004) to measure reputation, scilicet sympathy, and competence. In order to capture these two dimensions, this research integrated a series of four 5-point scale questions – two related to likeability and two related to competence.

Considering relevant good governance outcomes reflected in citizen attitudes and behaviors, the theoretical model relied on established scholarship (Walsh et al. 2009; Sarstedt et al. 2013). More specifically, this research analyzed the influence of branding on word-of-mouth and citizenship behaviors. Word-of-mouth is defined as "all informal communications between an [individual] and others concerning evaluations of goods or services [or organizations] (Henning-Thurau *et el.* 2002, p.231-32)". I measured word-of-mouth using two 5-point scale questions. Citizenship behavior refer to behavior that citizens may engage in in to support or benefit government institutions (Bartikowski and Walsh 2011). Essentially, these behaviors can be organized into two categories: behavior to help the organization and behavior to help other citizens. Citizens can support an organization by getting involved or providing feedback concerning the services offered. They can also assist other members of their community by providing advice on how to use the services. This dissertation focused on the first type of citizenship behavior, which intended to directly support the organization. This category was measured using a series of three questions with a 5-point scale that referred to basic activities in which citizens may participate within a school district.

2.3. Sample

This experiment was carried out with Civic Panel, an online research panel hosted by the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark in which citizens can participate in online surveys. Although the use of online surveys/experiments has become popular, they entail many methodological challenges. Baker et al. (2010) note several challenge to be considered in the use of online panel for research. First, since evidence attests that still a large part of the population do not have Internet access, the use of online research techniques may present an inherent coverage error. In addition most of the online panel include participants recruited via the diverse methods, which results in curtaining the probability dimension of those panel. These techniques may ultimately affects the accuracy of such online methods. The quality of online panel data has been debated in the literature, but there is empirical evidence that MTurk samples, an Amazon online panel, do not yield fundamentally different results than samples that have been collected in other ways (Berinsky et al. 2012).

Started in 2003, in order to recruit a panel of adult residents in New York City, Civic Panel has quickly expanded to include individuals from all across the nation as well as from other parts of the world. The panel has a particular interest in capturing citizen viewpoints and opinions on public issues at both the local and national level. Generally speaking, Civic Panel is a very useful tool for research studies in which citizens participate. According to the Civic Panel website,

> …the overall size of the panel is about 20,000 people currently, with about government, with about 1,000-2,000 participating in any one study. About 6-10 studies are conducted each year by SPAA faculty and doctoral students using CivicPanel, and a half dozen articles from the project have been published in peer-reviewed journals such as *American Review of Public Administration*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Performance & Management Review*, and other journals. CivicPanel is not a random sample, and thus the results are not scientifically project to the larger population. Survey results are, however, weighted by gender, race, age, and geography to more closely reflect the general demographic profile of the population. The project has proven

> especially useful for conducting web-based experiments on large, diverse samples to test various causal hypotheses about citizens and government.

There were many advantages to carrying out the experiment explained above using Civic Panel. First, the large number of individual participants in Civic Panel ensured access to a significant number of potential participants. The high likelihood that individuals would participate in the study was positive for this experiment, which required no less than four treatment groups. As the objective of the study was to achieve statistically significant results, reaching a sufficient number of participants was definitely a necessity.

Second, in terms of the implementation of the experiment, as an online panel, Civil Panel offered effectiveness and efficiency. The use of online panels greatly reduces the risk of redundancy and is more cost-effective to implement. In particular, access to Civic Panel, being hosted by the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University–Newark, was made easy and convenient for the researcher.

Finally, given that Civic Panel has emphasized studies involving citizens with a focus on local issues, it enabled the targeting of a suitable population. On the other hand, Civic Panel did not allow for a focus on a determined geographic area, which would permitted for a more contextual component to the experiment. It is believed that the design of the treatment was, however, made broad enough to apply to any particular environment.

The initial invitation to participate to the study was sent on June 18 to all members registered in the Civic Panel. By the end of this first phase, 360 individuals participated to the experiment. A reminder email was sent on June 26 to collect further data. The completion of the data collection took place on July 5 with a total of 502 participants. Among those participants, 68 had only partially completed the survey. These responses were therefore no included in the analysis. The final sample submitted to analysis included 434 responses.

Chapter 4 – Qualitative results

The preceding chapter introduced the methods utilized in this dissertation to explore the extent to which branding, as communicated by local public school districts, influence citizen attitudes and behavior towards that particular district. This chapter addresses the exploratory results of this research derived from the analysis of the qualitative data collected through interviews and website evaluations. First, the perceptions participants carry about organizational reputation in the management of their school district and the role of communication are discussed. Second, the likelihood of school management adopting and implementing marketing and branding strategies are outlined.

All interviews were conducted via phone or in-person and recorded. The information gathered was then transcribed and computed into NVivo 10, an application used to ease the administration and the analysis of data. Each interview was kept separate and examined as a distinct case. Data analysis was carried out following a three step process: structural coding, focused coding, and selective coding.

Structural coding generally results in the identification of large segments of text on broad topics, which can then form the basis for an in-depth analysis within or across topics (MacQueen et al. 2008, p.125). Given that semi-structured interviews were conducted, structural coding as the first phase of coding was suitable choice for classifying the large amount of information collected into the main themes of inquiry. In addition, structural coding enables the researcher to more easily measure the frequency with which the most common themes or domains are mentioned by the different participants in the interviews. As Namely et al. (2008) suggested, “determining frequencies on the basis of the number of individual participants who mention a particular theme, rather than the total number of times a theme appears in the text […] code frequency report can help identify which themes, ideas, or domains were common and which rarely occurred (p.143)". Five different codes emerged from this initial step of coding.

Table 7 – Themes identified at the completion of the coding process

Themes identified through structural coding	Themes identified through focused coding
Communication	Message
	Medium of communication
	Function of communication
	Effectiveness of the communication process
Reputation	Approach (active vs. passive)
	Importance
	Function of reputation
Marketing strategy	Range of marketing strategy
	Effectiveness of marketing strategy
Branding strategy	Understanding
	Usage
Branding attributes	Graphic design
	Brand performance attributes
	Brand imagery attributes
	Function of branding attributes
Unique proposition/ Distinctive characteristic	Unique proposition/ Distinctive characteristic

In a second iteration of coding, focused coding was carried out to identify the most frequent or significant ideas reflecting the initially identified five themes. This coding process enables the researcher, especially when multiple case study analysis is used, to contrast participant perspectives. In this regard, Charmaz (2006) asserted that, "your study fits the empirical world when you have constricted codes and developed them into categories that crystalize participants' experience (p.54)". In this phase, the researcher re-examined the data with the aim of identifying those ideas belonging to the previously identified five themes.

As the interview questions encompassed the larger theme of communication, the third and last step of the coding process was selective coding, which aims to arrange and compile the relevant and related codes according to the appropriate research question. In this qualitative phase of the study, the major objective was to capture the current viewpoints on reputation management as well as the importance of marketing and branding strategies in the context of public school districts. To conclude the coding process, the researcher excluded the domains unrelated to the primary objective of this qualitative phase. By the end of the process, five themes remained. Table 7 above provides a summary of themes and domains explored in the analysis.

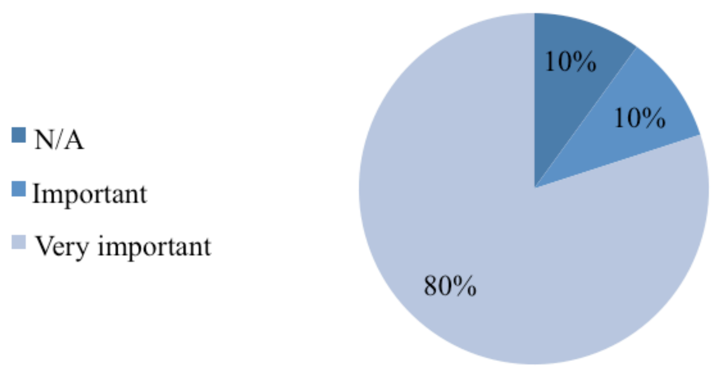
With respect to exploring the extent to which public school districts use branding in the communication with their stakeholders to bolster favorable attitudes and behaviors, this section discusses the data analysis process employed for the evaluation of the 30 public school district websites. The motives behind the deployment of these attributes are also addressed. Adapting the framework developed by Keller (2001) regarding the dimensions of branding, the analysis was conducted by classifying brand facets into four broad categories – service proposal, graphic design, brand performance, and brand identity.

The website evaluation focused on the main school district website, which normally included general information about the district, its administration, and the services offered. It should be noted that the choice was made to exclude the information placed on each school's website from the evaluation. The reason for this choice was twofold: 1) to parallel the interview process, which focused on the school district, and 2) to treat school districts as a public institution, *per se*, with the goal of standardizing the characteristics of each school level across the school districts included in the sample. When assessing the website, the evaluator was offered the opportunity to score the website on the eleven standards included in the instrument. The absence or presence of one element was codified by attributing either a score of "0" or "1", respectively. In addition, for each standard, the evaluator was requested to note the specific elements associated with each standard.

1. Reputation in local public school districts

    1.1. The role of reputation management

Figure 5 – Interviewee's assessment of reputation importance as managerial objective

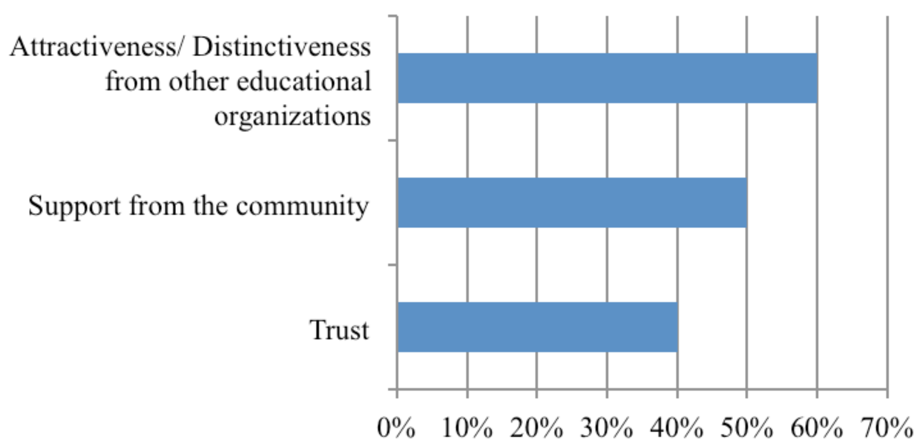


Consistent with existing literature that underscores the growing importance of reputation management, the data collected from the interviews with superintendents demonstrated that reputation is an intrinsic component of the management of their district. Altogether respondents gauged reputation as either an important or very important managerial objective for their district. Figure 5 displays the views of interviewees when asked to assess the importance of reputation in the management of their school district. Additionally, comments by interviewees clearly attest to the critical role of reputation:

> *That's what it is all about; it is all about reputation.*
> *Our school district's reputation in the community is very important to us.*

Although responses suggest that reputation is a factor to take into consideration, the motives to promote positive reputation vary from district to district. As the gathered statements suggest, promoting reputation is essentially motivated by four major ambitions – enhancing confidence, elevating support for the schools or the district, strengthening competitive advantage, and promoting the community as a whole. Figure 6 shows the frequency of the major reasons for upholding reputation.

Figure 6 – Major reasons to strengthen reputation



In detail, 40% of the respondents acknowledged reputation as a mechanism to secure trust. 40% also acknowledged the extension of their district reputation on the community´s status. In addition, 50% of the interviewees stated that they see strengthening their reputation as a way to gain support from the community, financial or otherwise. Finally, 60% perceived reputation as decisive in competing with other educational institutions.

The data collected in the interviews suggest the capacity of reputation to boost opinions stakeholders have about the school districts. Reputation reinforces the likelihood that stakeholders will believe in the abilities of the organization and its administration to accomplish their mission and reach their objectives. As such, reputation, in establishing confidence between the school district, its leadership, and the stakeholders, decreases the need for constituents to demand accountability from the organization with respect to its responsibilities. As such, interviewees stated:

> *Our school district reputation in the community is very important to us. Just for parents to trust us, ownership, knowing what's going on in our schools, believing in what we are doing.*
>
> *I think the stakeholders in the community need to know that they can trust the leadership to do the right thing and to keep the school performing, so the students can achieve.*
>
> *It [reputation] is an important piece and as far as developing a positive culture and everything else, and trying to prevent problems.*

To fulfill the school´s objectives, reputation – in the form of approval – enables school districts and respective leadership not only to take initiative, but also to positively address complications and lessen their burden. Regarding the latter, interviews demonstrated that in the case of established reputation, stakeholders are less inclined to question the abilities of the organization when issues occur. As such reputation accredits an organization with a certain level of approval and eases the administration of the district.

On the other hand, the data also stressed the link between reputation and trust, in which trust contributes to a positive reputation. One interviewee explained further:

> *I don't want them to ever feel that I am deceiving them. When I do say things, they know I am speaking truthfully. […] It is that if you are trying to deceive, if you are trying to spin, and you look like you are an idiot; and then they won't trust when it count.*

Another reason for local school districts to oversee reputation involves the opportunity for the community to actively support the district and its leadership. One interviewee explained the aim of building a positive reputation in stating that their district was "looking for support from the community all the time." When seeking the support of the community, schools are more inclined to emphasize not only their programs and activities, but also the results thereof. The data collected supported two issues in particular – involvement of community members in the schools and financial support. With regard to the former, superintendents identified the involvement of parents and other members of the community as a prominent factor in attaining academic success. The opinions parents have about the district and its endeavors are likely to influence their engagement in schooling and helping their children to perform well. Interviewees also reported to count on the reputation of their district in promoting community participation in the district´s operation and programs managed by the district. The following illustrate the viewpoint of interviewees when invited to comment on the role of reputation in their district:

> *To increase involvement and interest in our school district within our local community.*
>
> *Letting them [the community members] find ways to be involved in the schools and in their child education.*

Besides the direct benefits school districts can gain from community involvement, reputation plays an important role in the securing of financial resources. One interviewee stated that "[members of the community] know that they pay all of our budget through their taxes. They have a sense of ownership or return on their investments.*"* In fact, the community, through voting, directly engages in the budget process to determine the financial resources allocated to the district to conduct its operations. Sustaining a favorable reputation determines the community´s response when voting on the district budget. If the community views the school district favorably, they will be more willing to pass the budget. On the contrary, if citizens believe that their taxes are not being wisely used, they are more likely not to pass the school district budget. Superintendents agreed on the importance of reputation on budget matters:

> *The community supports our schools, the community needs to pass our budget. They have to know that you are providing students with the best education. They have to know that what you are doing for kids is important and realistic and that you are financially efficient and effective.*
>
> *I think it [reputation] is hugely important because we need the support of our taxpayers. They got a chance to vote out budget every year, and if they are not pleased with the schools – if they feel we don't have a good reputation – they can lower our budget and we will have problem with funding and staffing and programming.*

As expressed in a former chapter, as a consequence of recent educational reforms, the context of the primary and secondary education system is clearly marked by a growing competition among multiple actors. Within these circumstances, parents have the opportunity to send their children to the school of their choice. More than ever, public schools face the challenge of maintaining a solid enrollment of students. Furthermore, the children who opt for a private or a charter school are frequently academically more successful and/or display better academic performance. Hence, public school districts are driven to retain these students. Thereupon, one interviewee stated:

> *Well it is a competition to some extent because typically the students who leave us are some of our better students in terms of SAT scores or things like that. So we don't like to lose them.*

Another interviewee contended that the existing competition as well as incentives for school districts act as influential factors in retaining students in public institutions:

> *In Connecticut, we have lots and lots of magnet schools that get a ton of state dollars […] So you can imagine that I would rather keep the money and the student rights here in our city. And so communicating to parents about all the wonderful things that are going on with the […] public schools is of huge importance for me right now.*

The content of the interviews articulated the great importance of reputation in parents' school selection. Parents, when selecting a school for their children, actually based their judgment on the schools' competency predominantly on the impressions they have about the schools, namely their reputation. In order to enhance or preserve the enrollment of students, public schools must maintain a good reputation within the community. Indeed, 60% of the superintendents interviewed named reinforcing the attractiveness of their district as the principal aim of building a good reputation, which makes this concern the most pressing. In addition, in light of limited available resources, public school districts rely exclusively on their reputation as their prime asset. The remarks below further explain this perspective:

> *We understood that we needed to change the perception of the community, so that parents who were taking their kids out or sending them to private school or other schools, because of the academics side of things. We didn't want to lose those parents either.*
>
> *After 5th grade, kids go to middle-high school, so you have to try to compete with families who think they are not going to send their kids to public schools. They are just going to private schools. And that comes from having a good reputation.*

Finally, superintendents interviewed recognized the specific position of a school district within its community. Owing to its nature, a school district reputation goes beyond the boundaries of the district, per se, and has noteworthy repercussions on the community as a whole. One interviewee explained:

> *I think a school is always a community builder; it is not just about the kids that are here at this point. […] If the school is not good, the community is not going to be good as well, so they have to go hand and hand.*

Explicitly, the reputation of the school district contributes directly to the attractiveness of the community by giving incentive to individuals and families to relocate and settle down in that particular community. Besides the direct benefits that school districts can provide to families with children, many inhabitants correlate public schools with a certain lifestyle and environment. Among other things, the essence of the school district entails the value of the properties or the provision of specific services. When invited to comment on the effects of their district reputation on the community, interviewees clearly defended incentives to enhance attractiveness:

> *Something [reputation] that would persuade them to buy a house here and send their kids here.*
>
> *Property values are directly tied to the quality of schools in NJ, so it is important for parents to know that we are a good school district.*

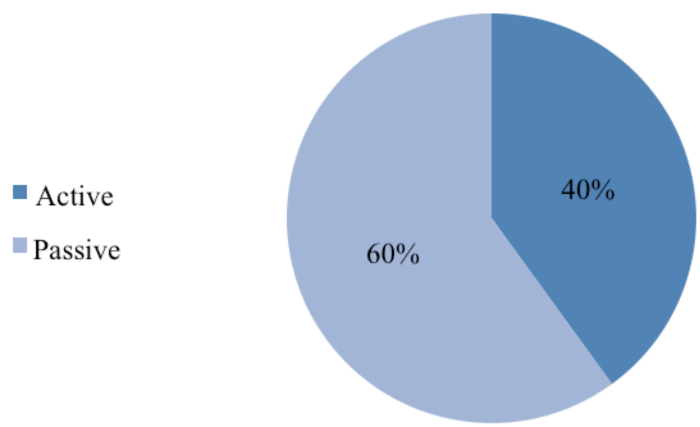
Clearly, the observations resulting from the interviews conducted attest to importance of reputation for the management of public school districts. It should be noted at this point that there are other reasons for schools to cultivate their reputation. One interviewee also mentioned college enrollment as another incentive for managing reputation. As a result of the evolution of the education, reputation is becoming an imperative element to be considered. Although reputation management is observed as a factor that determines the extent to which a school district is known, public schools handle reputation management in diverse ways. The subsequent section discusses these methods of building a favorable reputation.

1.2. Type of reputation management

As the evidence shows, there is growing momentum to consider reputation in the management of public institutions. More specifically, the data collected from the interviews suggests that reputation management involves strengthening the community awareness and knowledge about the district, its activities, and its accomplishments. Within this context, communication plays a prominent role in informing and, to a certain extent, persuading the stakeholders. It should be noted, at this point, that public school districts carry out reputation management using a variety of methods, of which communication is only part. However, the analysis of the remarks made by interviewees demonstrates that the degree to which school district management is dedicated to reputation management varies from one organization to another. As Figure 7 shows, 60% of the superintendents interviewed displayed an inactive approach to administering their district´s reputation. Participants agreed that there was no particular path for carrying out reputation management. One superintendent specifically mentioned that,

> *We are very fortunate our district has a very fine reputation and it is very well respected.*

Figure 7 – Degree of interest in managing organizational reputation



Although all the superintendents interviewed reported communicating with their stakeholders about the district in general and the activities that are taking place, the majority of them merely adopt an informational position. In this case, communication with the community at large is limited to general announcements about activities, events, and other announcements. Surprisingly, this informative communication does not just accentuate favorable aspects, but also covers the complications and contentions the district is facing. One interviewee affirmed this, stating:

> *I want them to know what we are doing here and all the good things we have going on. I want the community to know we are very transparent; if there is an issue we will take care of it right away.*

The foundation for such practices is twofold: building stakeholder knowledge and endorsing transparency. Consistent with the arguments already advanced, the intention is to create a context of confidence and trust between the public institution and its stakeholders. Being straightforward about all matters, good or bad, is expected to strengthen confidence. However, there is neither structure nor cohesion in the message disclosed. The information is generally disclosed as circumstances unfold, as explained in the following statements by interviewees:

> *People need to understand what's happening and just feel comfortable with it. I think if they don't know what's going on, if they are not clear as to the information, then they don't have an understanding.*
>
> *Usually just publicizing events, things that are happening and that they might be interested in participating.*
>
> *I send out a message every other month. It is kind of an update on district progress or walking back-to-school or getting ready for the end of the year – things like that. That's what my general information is and then individually principals will send out information like parents' night or college planning or the SATs.*
>
> *We also send out before budget time a publication to everybody about all the things that are going on for the year.*

To identify the characteristics and the trends in school communication and marketing, a marketing consultant voluntary participated in the interview process. The tendency for public school districts to approach communication as informational and reactive is also supported by the experience of the interviewed consultant, who stated:

> *They tend to be very conservative in their approach. Communication people generally come from a journalistic background, often from public relations. Perhaps they were reporters before, and they tend to focus on crisis management. Their job is largely to make sure that people are not angry or afraid that they feel*

> *a sense of fidelity and calm around the organization. That's how traditional public schools communication work.*

As these statements indicate, this passive process of conveying information accompanies the course of events and does not reveal any deliberate scheme. In other words, the mere provision of information is expected to produce the desired outcomes. However, there is little certainty that the information results in favorable views and/or constructive representations. These practices echo the transparency movement, which contends that the disclosure of information by public institutions favors the pursuit of good governance objectives (Hood 2006; Heald 2006; Meijer 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen 2009; 2010; 2011; Worthy 2010; Meijer et al. 2012; Welch 2012).

On the other hand, in a number of cases, superintendents have adopted a dynamic approach to their communication aimed at managing their reputation. For these superintendents, reputation management involves a defined and calculated communication strategy in order to produce desirable outcomes. According to the interviews conducted, these active strategies intend to address two specific elements: change the stakeholder perceptions and promote district achievement. In greater detail, 20% of the superintendents admitted to pursuing active communication to change the perceptions held by the community or even their misconceptions. Participants commented:

> *I don't think that the district has always had the highest reputation on the academic side and it is something we have especially set out to change. And it is not just talking. It is how we do provide evidence for the parents so that they see that.*
>
> *Again, when I first arrived here there was not the sense within the community that we had a very good academic school here. And with these different efforts of*

> *getting information out like that so people are aware that their perceptions from the past are not accurate today.*

Thirty percent of superintendents interviewed reported using active communication to promote the district or school achievements. As the following statements exemplify, school districts involved in a purposeful communication process assiduously select the information they convey to their stakeholders. As opposed to those districts that adopt more passive means of communicating with stakeholders, districts practicing active communication deliberately structure the message and the process of disclosing the information. The ultimate aim is to strengthen positive reputation by drawing attention on selected elements:

> *We are picking things selectively that we think the community would pay attention to – that would be illustrative of what we are trying to do […] And when our students did well we promoted that because we wanted to the parents and the community as a whole to know that our students were competitive with anybody in the world, not just among the best in the U.S.*
>
> *The underline message I think is just 'this is a school to be proud of' for the community and doing that through the variety of stories that highlight the exceptional things that are going on in the school.*

Within these circumstances, public school districts undoubtedly adopt a dynamic means of communicating with their stakeholders. In lieu of covering every event or matter with them, the communication emphasizes a restrained number of key aspects. The comment of one of the superintendents clearly attests to this:

> *[We] developed what we call an elevator speech which are really quick like five key points about our school district that we think somebody should know or if you are just happening talking to somebody new about [municipality] and about the schools.*

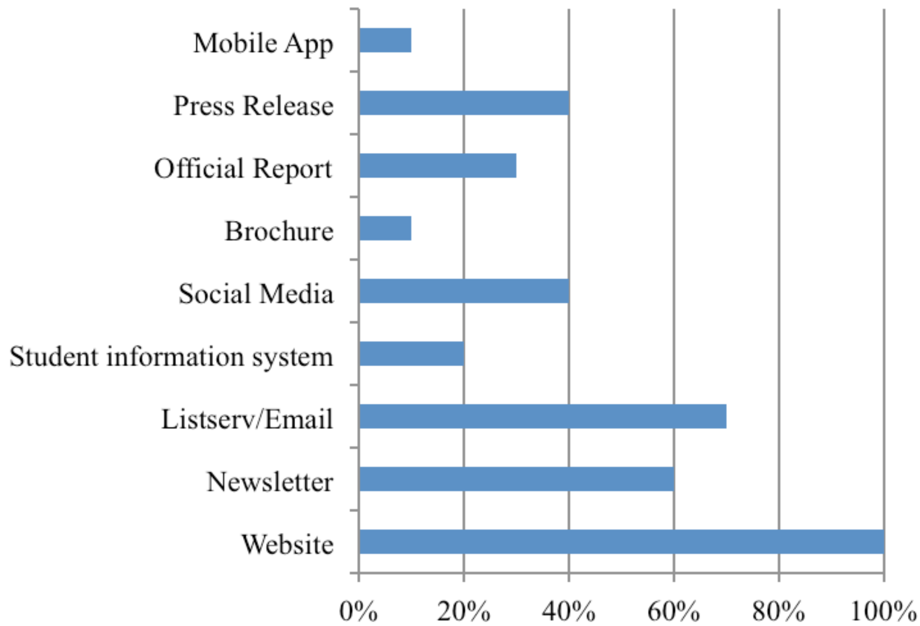
In sum, public school districts at large treat communication as a key element of reputation management. The findings tend to demonstrate that communication techniques, in the context of public school districts, take a passive rather than an active approach. The following section addresses the details of the communication process used by public school districts.

1.3. The communication capacity of public schools and techniques they use

As communication plays a key function in the building of reputation, it is critical to understand the characteristics of this process in public school districts. This section specifically aims to shed light on the capacity of public schools to communicate and the techniques they use to effectively convey information to their stakeholders.

When it comes to communicating with their stakeholders, public school districts employ a variety of techniques. Figure 8 reports the frequency of the communication techniques used by the interviewees according to the collected data. Websites are noticeably the most common instrument used by schools to disclose any sort of information about the district and its activities. Websites are followed by listserves/emails and newsletters used by at least 60% of the participants. Although it seems that certain types of communication techniques still appear challenging for school districts, the data gathered indicates that they are nowadays inclined to adopt new mediums, such as social media, student information systems, and even mobile apps, as mentioned by one superintendent. On the other hand, "traditional" forms of communication, such as press releases or official reports, appear to be less attractive.

Figure 8 – Frequency of communication techniques



The interviewees confirmed their willingness to follow not only people's evolution of communicating but also their format. The following remarks reflect the interest in enhancing direct and compelling interaction with the stakeholders:

> *I wanna try the electronic communication. I think the days of sending newsletters are becoming antiquated. Almost everybody has smartphones now – they are on Facebook, they are on Twitter.*
>
> *We have been talking about doing more of a video communication with parents. […] We certainly want to communicate on a regular basis and how we can adapt to people use of technologies, and let them get the message at a time that is convenient to them.*

Regardless of the communication methods used, the data collected from the interviews illustrates the dedication of public school managers to adapting their communication not only to the environment of their districts but also to the habits of their stakeholders. As such, in certain circumstances, traditional mediums are still understood as the most effective means of communicating. One interviewee further explained:

> *Some people would express satisfaction with the electronic communication. Others still want hard copy of the different events that are coming up.*

Singularly, the preferred form of communication is understood as finding the most adequate channel for maintaining a strong connection with the school stakeholders. However, the state of affairs of the district may restrain its communication ambitions and competency. One participant talked about how the school district context also affects opportunities for communication:

> *We have no […] school district government, so there is no entity which is continually reinforced for having the same boundaries. […] My point is that the challenge of communicating is very different from one place to the next, depending upon what instruments exist, the sort of cohesiveness of the community, whether there is government there or not.*

Furthermore, the interview data revealed that the selection of the communication method is purposely carried out depending on both the type of stakeholders to interact with and the type of information to be disclosed. With regard to the audience, communication is intended to not be merely directed to school users, parents and students included, but rather encompass the community at large. For instance, while listserves/emails are directed to the most involved stakeholders – parents, students, teachers, and administrators – newsletters or press releases are intended for the entire community. Hence, the kind of information and the content of the message transmitted are customized accordingly to the identified audience's expectations. More specifically, listserves/emails often call attention to day-to-day aspects of the districts, whereas newsletters convey essential matters. One interviewee described the process used by their district:

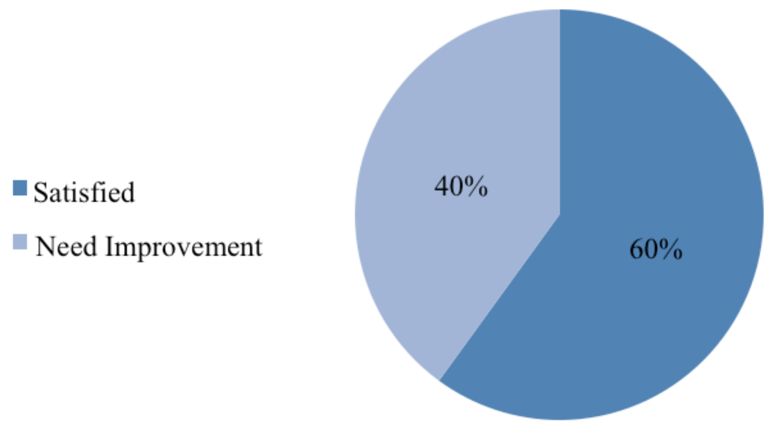
> *We send those [electronic newsletters] out. But I created a distribution list where I reach out to the homeowners association of retirement communities. I have a distribution list that goes out to mayors or contacts with each of the five towns we serve in our school district.*

Besides the message and the form of communication used, superintendents appear conscious of the necessity to make their communication effective and to reach as large an audience as possible. No matter which stakeholders they attempt to reach, superintendents intend not only to be exploring new means of effectively communicating, but also learning about the reaction to the strategies deployed.

Concerning the significance of communicating with stakeholders, the interviewees acknowledged that school districts administrators are conscious of tailoring the messages to the audience, adjusting the amount of information disclosed, and recognizing the capacity of the district. Figure 9 shows that 60% of the interviewed superintendents are satisfied when it comes to opinions of the effectiveness of their communication process. These findings fall directly within current scholarship that promotes transparency from a perspective of conversation between governmental institutions and their stakeholders (Meijer 2003; Welch et al. 2005; Roberts 2006; Gil Garcia et al. 2009). One interviewee stated:

> *I think there needs to be a balance between what you are communicating, how much you are communicating, what your message is. You don't want to over-communicate.*

Figure 9 – Opinions concerning the effectiveness of the district's communication process



Beyond the good intention of public school districts to communicate with their stakeholders, the effectiveness of the process frequently depends on the capacity of each district. Essentially, these capacities can be classified into three categories – financial, human, and expertise. In terms of financial capacity, the opportunity for a district to exploit a full range of communication vehicles relies on the resources that the district can dedicate to accomplishing this. In addition, the availability of financial resources allow for some school districts to access the services of external parties to support them in their communication process. Table 8 shows the school districts resorting a third-party and those conducting every aspect of communication in-house. One interviewee addressed this particular point in the following:

> *I would like to send out a monthly newsletter, but because of the cost of printing, and mailing and paper, we don't do that anymore. We cut back on that. We are held back because of the budget.*

Table 8 – List of school districts relying on third-parties and on in-house capacity

In-House Communication	External Third Party Communication
School District #1	School District #2
School District #3	School District #4
School District #5	School District #8
School District #6	School District #9
School District #7	School District #10

In the matter of human capacity, communication requires a sufficient number of individuals dedicated to ensure a proper interaction, especially when it comes to more recent use of technologies such as social media. Vigorous communication requires a work force to not only constructing the message to be sent, but also administering a dynamic interaction. On this matter, one interviewee, whose district is planning on launching a social media communication platform, explained why the functionality of this approach would ultimately be limited:

> *As we first start it, it is going to be informational only. So with our Facebook, it is not going back and forth, so parents won't be able to post send back. Right now it is just information out. We just don't have the capabilities of being able to handle that.*

Finally, expertise capacity tends to affect the effectiveness of the overall communication process. The remarks collected indicated that school administrators that manage the districts often have an education background, and therefore lack distinct know-how or competence in communication. However, acknowledging its importance, certain school districts have emphasized communication. Sometimes the emphasis is placed by members of the board of education and in other instances school administration creates a specific staff position to handle district communication. Interview data affirms the need to advance proficiency by adopting professional and distinct communication strategies that demand ability and expertise. Interviewee comments supported this perspective of considering communication as a necessary component of the management of their districts:

> *We have a communication sub-committee of the board of education and so we are looking at how we market our schools.*
>
> *We just hired someone about two or three month ago to help us, so this way we are more focused and we are more aligned; not only working hard but also working smarter.*

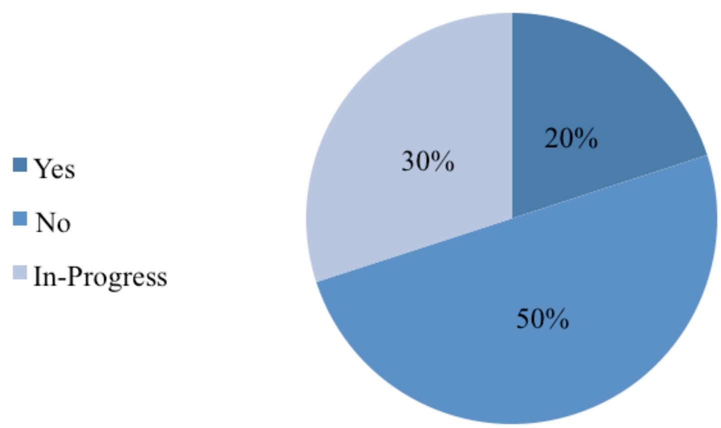
The analysis of the interviews conducted with superintendents shows the prominent role of organizational reputation in the management of public schools dedicated to achieving favorable outcomes. Within this perspective, the communication process, as a strategic foundation of a school´s reputation, is converted into a carefully constructed discourse aimed at promoting and marketing the district to its various stakeholders. In the pursuit of this development, the data suggests the growing adoption and application of marketing strategies in the communication process of public schools. Yet these practices still remain exceptional and simple, in part limited by the abilities of the districts. In sum, our findings tend to confirm the assertions on the evolution of managerial practices in educational institutions towards more business-like proceedings. The following section explores the extent to which participating public school districts employ marketing and branding strategy to promote their reputation.

2. The role of marketing and branding strategies in reputation management

The previous section discussed reputation management from the traditional approach adopted in public administration research, in which public institutions engage in transparent and forthright interaction with their constituents. This section, on the other hand, addresses the aptitude of public school districts to be committed to influencing the perceptual constructs or imagery formation of individuals. Therein, marketing and branding mechanisms play an important determinant for framing attention on particular prospects of the district and to make it distinctive and unique.

2.1. The extent of the use of marketing strategies

Figure 10 – Involvement in marketing scheme



Reasonably, the information gathered from the interviews reflects broader trends in marketing, particularly in that active communicators tend to engage in marketing and passive communicators tend not to. More specifically, 50% of the interviewed superintendents indicated that they were not involved in any sort of marketing scheme, while 30% mentioned being somewhat engaged in the development of a marketing plan and only 20% reported actively using marketing techniques. Figure 10 above displays the degree of involvement of the interviewees in marketing schemes. These results corroborate the emergent propensity for marketing techniques in the educational context

(Kirp 2003; Lubienski 2005, 2007). However, as the numbers show, these practices remain at a rudimentary stage.

Several responses suggest the nascent use of marketing practices in the context of public schools. When asked about the role of marketing strategies in the district communication process, one respondent noted:

> *Not really, we don't really have the expertise or the resources to have a marketing campaign per se. As I said before, we really just do what we can do given the few resources that we have. Mostly it is just people who do it as part of their job.*

Although the analysis of the information collected reveals only a limited use of marketing methods, superintendents – regardless of whether they were using marketing techniques or not – expressed a noteworthy understanding of marketing techniques and their purpose. Indeed, superintendents expressed the capability of marketing practices to influence the community's impressions and, thus, the reputation of their district or schools. One particular interviewee indicated that the district was not involved in any sort of marketing owing to the district and the schools already had a favorable reputation within the community:

> *I would say that in some cases they [schools] don't even have to; they are very well-thought. My district is very popular and very busy.*

Another one answered:

> *I think we are just putting out honest information [and] looking for support from the community all the time. I don't believe we are doing any sort of marketing though.*

On the same matter, a superintendent steadily employing marketing stated:

> *In general marketing is behind the all things. We are trying to increase involvement and interest in our school district within our local community. So by itself I would not have any specific definition, but I would include that within marketing because we are trying to improve the marketing image of our school district.*

The same factors that explained why a school would or would not engage in active communication also explain why the school would or would not engage in marketing. Therefore, the inability to devote adequate financial, human, and vocational capacity frequently prevents school administrations from developing and implementing any sort of marketing plan. On the other hand, hiring a specialized third party is a preferred solution to support such an endeavor. As noted in the interviews, in contrast to communication, when it comes to marketing support, school districts rely on specialists for help. The data suggests that, without exception, school districts engaged in marketing have either hired committed staff or employ the services of a professional organization. One interviewed superintendent, whose district recently started developing marketing materials, explained:

> *For the first year, we are working with a media consultant. So we can get that message out – the right message. So again that is something we have identified as critical so we are working with an outside media specialist to certainly own our message, to establish a brand for our schools, and as we talked earlier to influence people's perception of the schools.*

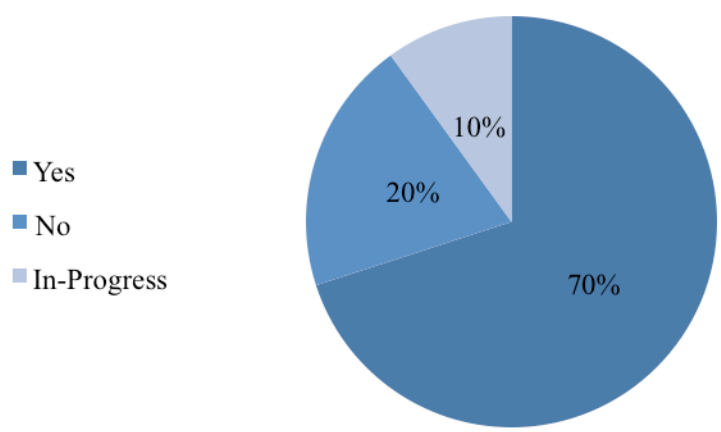
All things considered, the results of the interviews point to a developing interest on the part of public managers to embrace marketing in the management of their institutions, with the specific goal of upholding positive opinion. While marketing can take several forms, the following section pays particular attention to the role of branding.

2.2. The role of branding in reputation management

The results of the conducted interviews clearly reveal the connection between branding and the management of reputation for public school districts. In essence, branding, as the foundation for the identification and perception construct, should reasonably be understood as a fundamental apparatus of any organization's marketing strategy. As such, it should be assumed that an organization not involved in marketing would not make use of any sort of branding. Surprisingly, the comments gathered from superintendents bring to light quite a different picture. As seen in Figure 11, 80% of the public managers included in this study reported having developed or being in the process of developing a brand for their district. However, with respect to the districts that do not brand, it is apparent that the decision not to do so results from the viewpoint that a brand would not have any repercussions on members of the community. When asked about the importance of branding for the district, one interviewee stated:

> *Do we try to sell our district to everybody? We have kind of a captive audience and we are crowded as it is.*

Figure 11 – Extent of branding usage

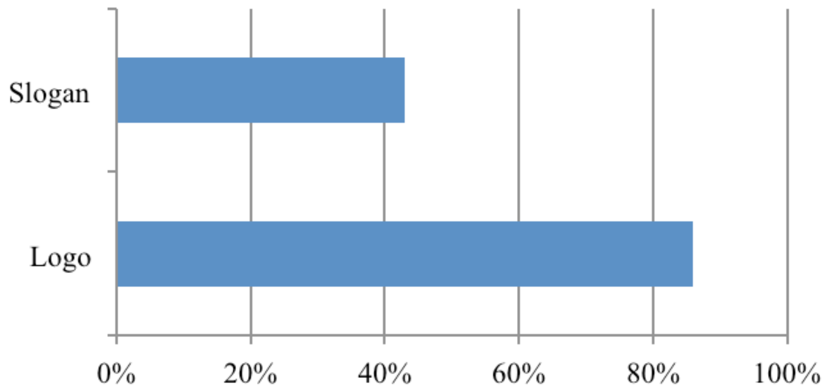


A compelling insight that emerges from the analysis of the interviews concerns the layout of branding. For 60% of the districts that have a brand, the creation of their brand is done by means of graphic design. Indeed, as basic components of any brand, almost all respondents referred to either their logo or their slogan as the preeminent component of their brand. One superintendent specifically explained how the visual graphics of the district are used at every possible interaction with the community – from communication to buildings to uniforms:

> *I think basically it was getting what the symbol is for our district. We settled down a specific graphic that we use, and that graphic is consistent in all of our communications. It is on all over our newsletters […]. The Facebook page that we have has that banner on it. That banner – I mean we are talking about 15 feet by 15 feet – is hanged on our buildings. […] It is on our uniforms and everything else.*

The evaluation of the 30 public school district websites also corroborates the emphasis on the graphic components of branding. Twenty-five of the thirty websites evaluated, or 83%, included a logo. On the other hand, 13 of the websites included a specific slogan on the district's page. Figure 12 reports the frequency of observations concerning the presence of a graphic element in the sample of the public school district websites evaluated in the study. The analysis conducted demonstrated that the presence of graphic elements does not differ significantly among the three groups of school districts – strong, weak, and 3rd party. Indeed, each group displays graphic elements in the same proportion – about 80% for logo and 40% for slogan.

Figure 12 – Frequency in use of branding graphic component



This evaluation also revealed that logo designs makes reference to the respective municipality in the majority of cases, or to the mascot of the district (i.e., athletics) or a traditional emblem. A limited number of districts actually have developed an explicit logo possibly having a specific meaning. For instance, one district logo displayed an open book with stars rising, as knowledge arising. In a few cases, logos were actually a combination of two elements, such as a reference to the municipality and to the athletics. Figure 13 shows the frequency of logos seen on the district websites by category. Although graphic design is an integral part of branding, the analysis of current practices illustrates that graphic design is often used to emphasize the process by which citizens recognize or identify the school but not necessarily used to convey the values or characteristics of the school.

Figure 13 – Frequency of observed logo category

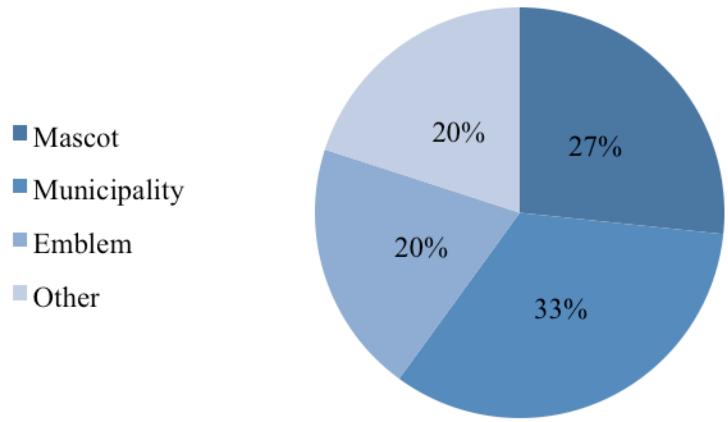


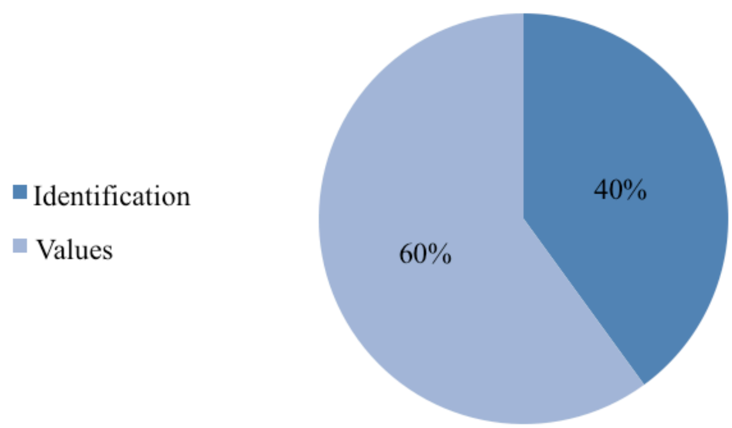
Table 9 displays a summary of the slogans observed in the evaluation of the district websites.

Table 9 – Summary of public school district slogans

District	Slogan
School District #5	*We will nurture self-worth and develop personal integrity and social responsibility in our students*
School District #7	*Preparing the children of today for tomorrow…*
School District #9	Lead • Achieve • Succeed
School District #12	INSPIRING A STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS
School District #14	**Achieving** Academic **Excellence** Every Day
School District #15	Dedicated to the Service & Growth of Each Student
School District #16	Tradition of Honest Excellence
School District #19	EXCELLENCE IS THE POINT
School District #22	*Enabling Growth Through Education*
School District #26	*Where Pride in Achieving Begins*
School District #27	*Developing prepared, productive and proud citizens*
School District #28	*Educating Today for Tomorrow's Success*

Analysis of branding in public schools tends to advocate the quality of a brand as a means of identification and differentiation. In this regard, the interviews indicated that the purpose of having a brand is twofold: to reinforce the identity of the district and the schools (i.e., the ability to recognize the organization and its values) and to distinguish the district and its values from others (i.e., promote distinctive elements or values about the organization or its services). Among the districts reporting to have and use a brand, about 40% reported to have the brand as a means of reinforcing school identity and about 60% reported that the brand served to differentiate the district and its values. Figure 14 displays the types and frequencies of the motives for public school districts to engage in branding.

Figure 14 – Frequency of the motives to engage in branding



On the matter of identity, one interviewee confirmed the inclination to promote the district's brand to underscore its link to the municipality and its history by designing the logo as the first letter of the name of that municipality. In doing so, the district not only established a particular connection with its community but also recalled the values that people associate with it:

> *We are rolling out our branding, and we have adopted [Municipality] 'M', which is something that has been in existence since 1984.*

On the other hand, considering the promotion of the district and its values, another superintendent indicated using branding to promote not only the academic achievement of the schools, but also a positive sentiment about the educational environment:

> *We are really promoting a district model, quality academics, and pride, and we think those three qualities summarize what the district is about. So that's kind of the overarching theme of our branding, if you will. Within a caring and nurturing environment, yet high quality education and high expectations for students.*

Describing the process undertaken by the district in collaborating with a consultant to develop the brand, another interviewee referred to the critical motive to focus on unique items to distinguish the district and its accomplishments. Within this context, branding the school district aimed to portray the institution as unique and distinct in order to publicize and promote it:

> *I will never forget the comment that he made after he's been here for a day and a half. He said, 'This is the single best high school in the U.S. that no one knows about.' He said, 'The single best,' and he followed with, 'and you all are doing an absolutely horrible job of selling it.[…] You sound like any of 200 high performing suburban district around the U.S., and if you are going to sell yourselves you should talk about who you are and differentiate yourselves.*

In addition, although the study of the extent to which school district are employing branding reveals that such practice is not correlated to the use of marketing plans, results of the interviews indicated that the expertise factor influences the aptitude to make branding a performance tool. Despite the fact that the interviews did not clearly ask about this item, some interviewees mentioned the impact of expertise and dedicated resources:

> *Most of us educators are rather immature when it comes to market ourselves. We have all those great kids – some of the best kids graduating from high school in the U.S. – and we are doing a terrible job selling them to colleges. It [branding] is very important but we are not very good at it.*

The lack of expertise on the part of school administration to adequately advance a coherent branding strategy was also recognized by the interviewed consultant as a major factor. From his professional perspective, this lack of expertise in part explains the need for public school districts to rely on external third parties. On this issue, the consultant stated:

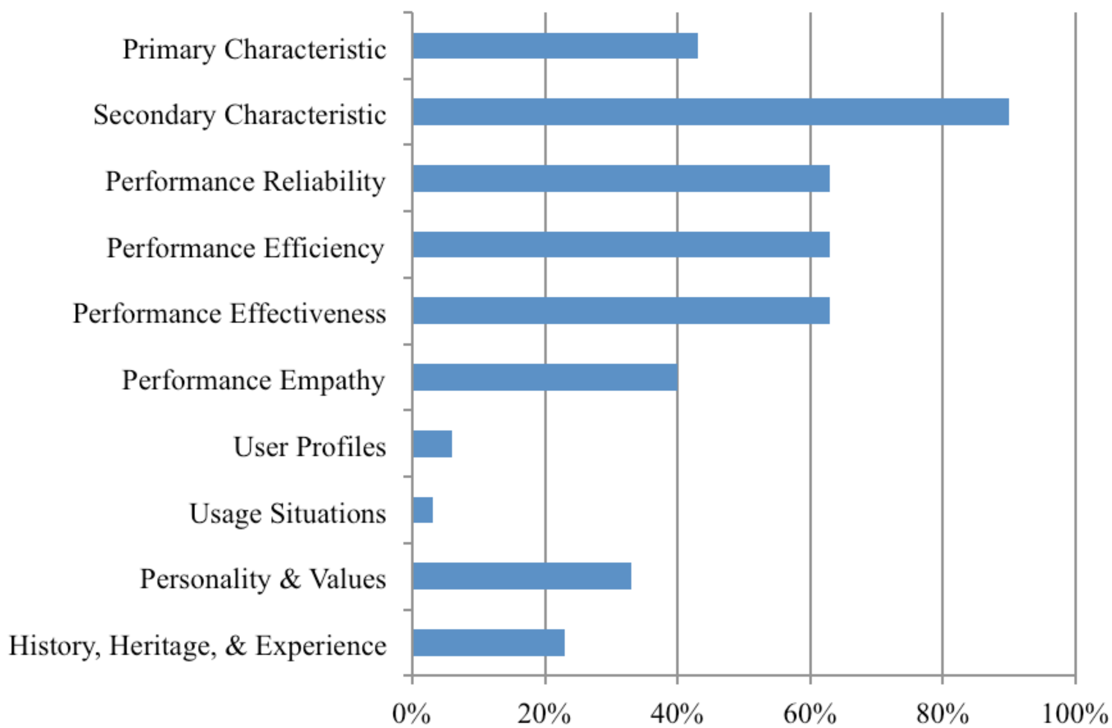
> *A lot of this is really because school districts themselves are not doing a very good job of communicating with their community. So that's what we do. We are trying to find ways to create more touch points, so the school districts have more ways to get people involved, even if it is as casual as to get people involved.*

In sum, the analysis reveals the growing function of branding in fostering the identity of local school district. In doing so, a brand aims to mobilize the associations stakeholders have about the district. Special attention should be given to the methods employed and the attributes included in public school district brand. The following section addresses these qualities by evaluating school district websites with the support of the information collected during the interviews.

2.3. Branding in local public school districts

The results of both the interviews and the website evaluations confirm the dominance of performance branding. Figure 15 shows the frequency of the use of the different brand attributes among the websites evaluated. The analysis provides interesting insight as it suggested that, at the expense of the performance effectiveness and empathy facets, the three types of school districts do not demonstrate any particular difference when it comes to the brand characteristics disclosed on their website.

Figure 15 – Frequency of use of branding components



The data gathered during the interviews suggests that brand characteristics are more the result of deliberate consideration rather than a matter of unforeseeable coincidence. Deservedly, without exception, all superintendents explained that the essence of the attributes publicized was positioned according to the prevalence of the expectations expressed by their stakeholders. Interviewees stated that the expectations of their stakeholders were the ultimate influence in terms of not only promoting specific elements, but also not promoting others. The following comments from interviewees further attest to this perspective:

> *Because it is what parents said they wanted when I got here. It is because staff members say that is what they wanted.*
>
> *This information is probably on the city website and every school talks to parents about it and I have a public meeting about it. It is not something that we promote that much. Many of our parents are very sophisticated and they don't see state tests as an important factor.*
>
> *[Name of municipality] is really a rich mixture of diversity. It is something that people specifically come to [name of municipality] because of it. We just do a really good job at celebrating this diversity in a very unique way.*
>
> *Well I'd love to say academics but I am going to have to say it is almost that basketball is king up here.*

Another important motive advanced by superintendents relates to the desire to change the perceptions of the community about a particular aspect of the district or the school. By emphasizing a distinctive brand, school districts attempt to change these perceptions in a way that will bring more favorable views of the schools, its administration, and its activities and achievements.

The perspective expressed by the marketing professional suggested a similar viewpoint, although his experience was somewhat nuanced. The promotion of brand characteristics, particularly when it comes to those related to brand performance, appeared to be shaped not only by the quality of the district but also by its ability to fulfill its aspirations, whether educational or communal. As such, school districts are inclined to accentuate a positive image either in affirming their actions and results or in inflecting presumptions. With respect to the educational part, the motive for school districts is to convey the impression that they are effective. The consultant interviewed, in this regard, attested:

> *School districts that have good numbers, that have good test scores to show off, they will bring them up, and often it is a core message: 'your schools are performing well, and here is the proof, here are the numbers'. […] But we've got other school districts that we work with in very poor areas, and they cannot talk about performance to the same degree. So we talk about performance there as well, but in a different context. It is more about the things we are doing that are showing better performance that you might think and expect. Whereas with the more affluent districts, it is more a matter of confirming that things are going well, in other districts you are talking about surprising people with information they didn't expect.*

On the subject of primary and secondary characteristics, as the endorsing attributes of the school and the district, the review of the data collected supports the preeminence of brand performance in the contrast of the schools. As a reminder, primary and secondary brand characteristics are attributes unique to the public institutions. One interviewee clearly advanced secondary characteristics, including the different programs offered by the district as the major selling point:

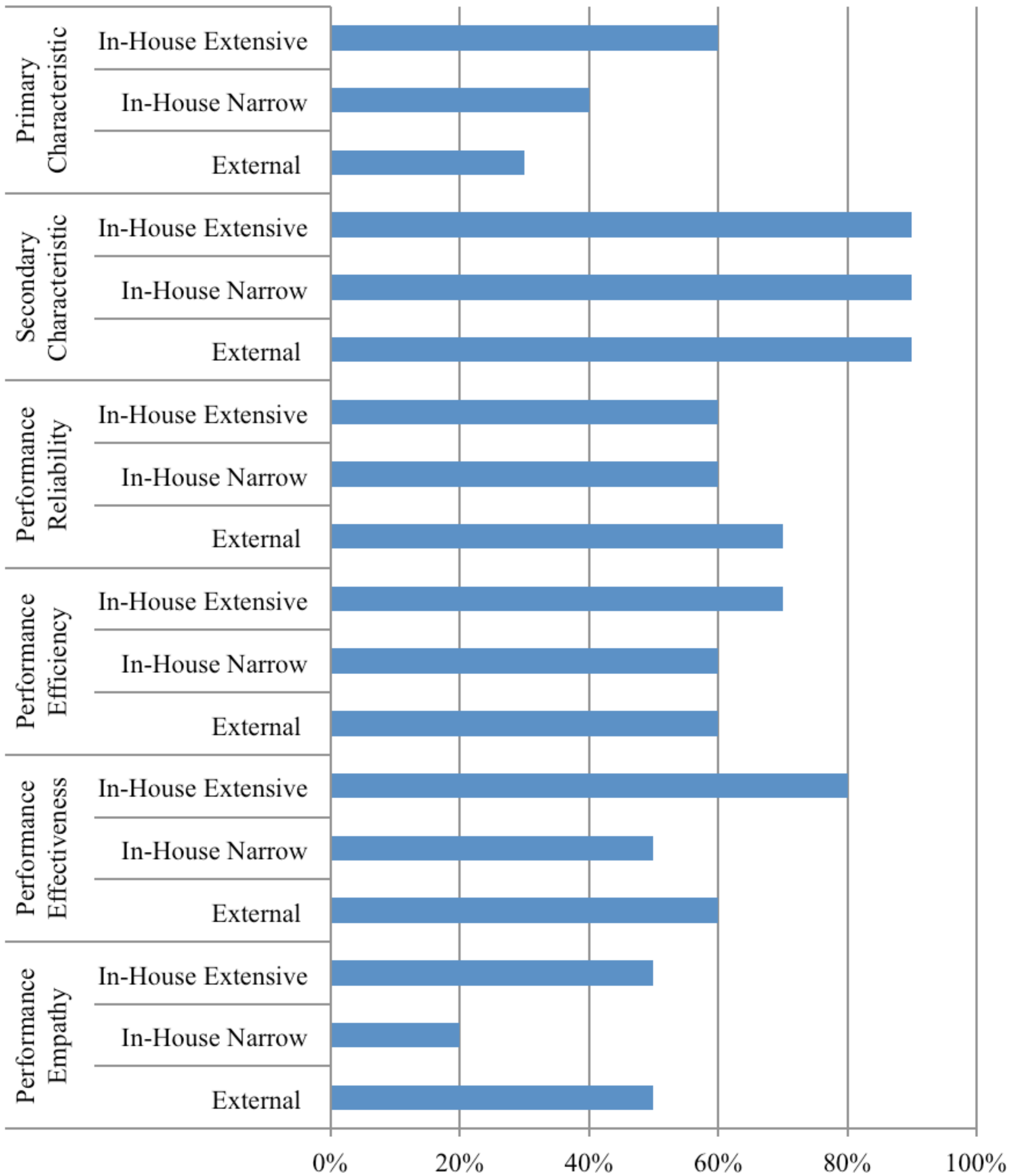
> *We have an incredible array of clubs, sports, arts, and academics, and they are really fabulous programs.*

Regarding the website evaluations, 43% of the websites headlined a primary/unique service characteristic, while 90% promoted a secondary service characteristic. Furthermore, the unique service characteristic, by essence, was publicized with the aim of making the organization unique and distinguishable from other districts. Illustrations of this practice included, for instance, the promotion of specific programs, like "Saturday Academy", or the publication of noticeable distinction, such as "Most Challenging High School" or "National District Character." Other districts endorsed the nonprofit foundation associated with the school, unique curriculum features, or even some initiatives undertaken by the district (e.g., “Ipad Initiative”).

The most common secondary brand attributes advertised on the websites to differentiate districts concerned the presentation of several programs and/or activities that served to fulfill district duties. These included, among other things, the promotion of afterschool activities in athletics, music, and arts; supportive academic programs (e.g., ESL, ASI, basic skills); programs for special education; and programs for gifted and talented students. Although these programs may have helped to differentiate the district from others, these programs, with the exception of those related to athletics and arts, were not publicized as being unique to the district.

The results of the website evaluations suggest that schools focus communication on the academic elements of their programming, versus other elements like child socialization and character development. Indeed, every district’s website publicized some performance branding component in the form of academic curriculum, academic performance, or activities offered. Additionally, 63% of the websites promoted aspects related to either academic performance reliability or performance efficiency or effectiveness, whereas only 40% advertised components about performance empathy. Figure 16 displays the frequency of the brand performance component in the websites evaluated.

Figure 16 – Frequency of the use of the brand performance facets in district website



Looking at the brand component "performance reliability," or the consistency of performance over time and from use, the information on the website consisted, in nearly all the cases, of the promotion of the district's state performance card/report, a system instituted at the state level to assess school district performance. In other instances, this component included student achievements, graduation rate, and to a lesser degree the names of the colleges alumni attended.

Concerning the “performance effectiveness” component of a brand, or the response to the functional needs and expectations of citizens, the public school districts involved in this practice accentuated the rationales behind the actions taken by districts to advocate the vision, mission, and objectives of the various districts. On the other hand, the “performance efficiency” component, or encouraging the taking of actions that reflected the interests of the community, was expressed by disclosing enrollment information, mostly financial information related to the budget of the district, the use of the funds, and the use of taxes budgeted for the schools. Also included in this category was information for voters.

The final component belonging to the category of brand performance concerns the process and the methods generally used by the districts and the schools to help them to achieve their academic objectives. Also referred as “service empathy,” this brand performance component was less employed on websites to promote school district brands. Concerning this component, the analysis revealed the inclusion of a learning and teaching process, significant details about the curriculum, and the publicity of parent and students portals.

The information gathered from the interviews suggests the predominance of the performance brand components. When asked about the preeminent attributes publicized about their district, the majority of superintendents mentioned those related to academics. Although the data from the interviews did not allow for the identification of the specific component of branding that the school was using, the findings did suggest that that the components related to service effectiveness were the most frequently mentioned by the interviewees. The following comments confirm the preeminence of academics without providing any particular details on the brand components promoted.

> *We believe in having everyone who graduates from [name of municipality] be ready to go off to college and succeed in college, and that they have the skills above and beyond; skills and knowledge above and beyond doing well on test scores.*
>
> *The academics, the emphasis is on the academics. […] I don't think it has always been at the forefront of the school district, and we certainly want to change that.*

In addition, one interviewed superintendent specifically referred to service efficiency as the principal element to promote about the district and the associated schools. While academics are still the central component, the superintendent distinctively linked academics to the taxpayer expectations:

> *I would say that we are providing an excellent value education for people's tax dollars.*

Finally, one interviewee carefully indicated the importance of the service effectiveness facet:

> *We just revised our mission and vision last year with parents, board members, and staff and administrators to really get a hand on exactly what we stand for, what we want to achieve – all of those things.*

Surprisingly, those superintendents interviewed mentioned either primary characteristics of their district or performance reliability, such as results for state tests or graduation rate only as subordinate attributes to be promoted. This is even more surprising when linking the information from the interviews to the information collected from the website evaluation. Indeed, organization #3's website clearly promoted having been recognized as the "most challenging high school"; however, when interviewed the superintendent only talked broadly about the importance of academics.

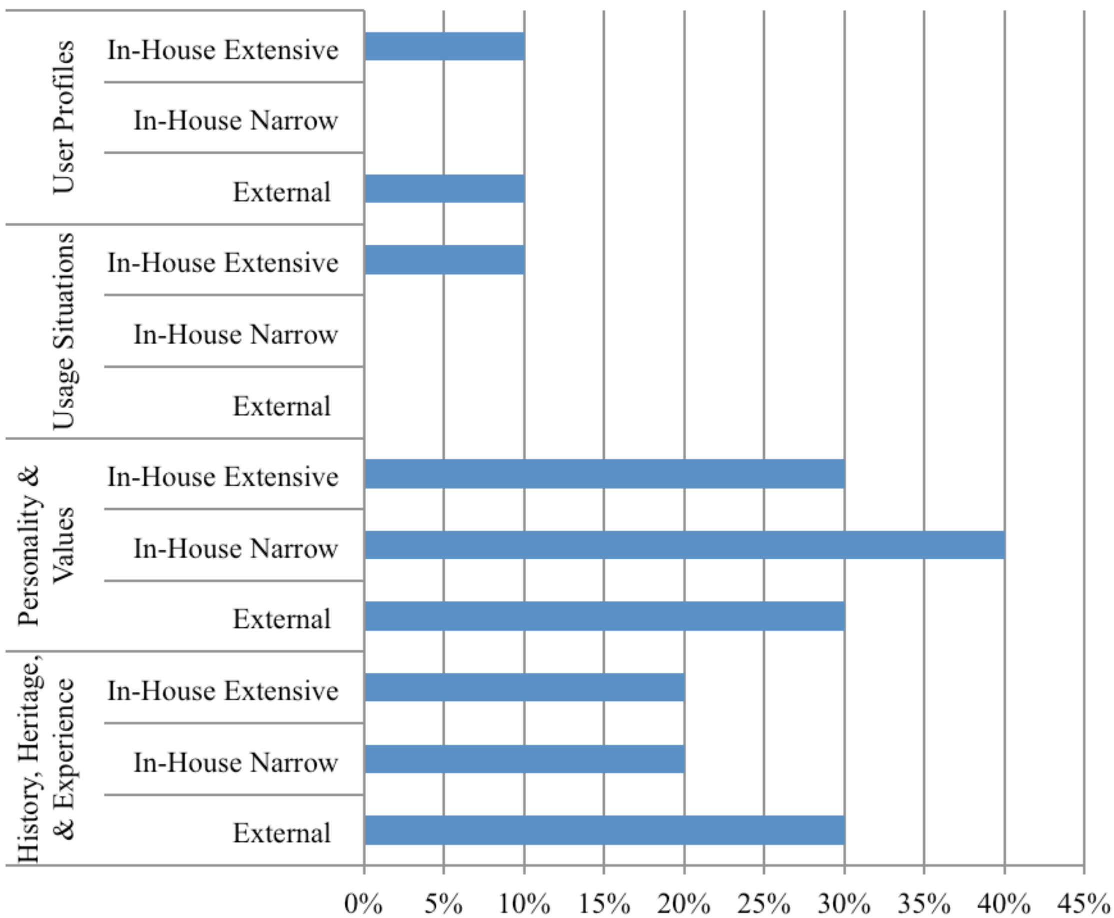
> *One is trying to promote academic excellence because from my perspective, and a lot of other people perspectives, when I got here, there was not a lot of pride in the program – in the academic program we have here.*

The superintendent mentioned that the reference as one of the most challenging high schools is only *"*one piece of putting out there about our academic excellence."

On the other hand, the imagery components of brand are much less employed and illustrated than performance components. Indeed, in consideration of the materials evaluated on the district websites, the component entitled personality and values, the most exhibited component, was publicized by less than 35% of the sample. Figure 17 discloses the frequency of the brand imagery components as exhibited on the district websites. By orders of magnitude, personality and values come first, with a total of 33% of the websites assessed, followed by history and heritage, with a presence in 23% of the websites. Finally, far behind, are the facets of user profile and use situation displayed respectively in 6 and 3% of the cases, which represents less than 2 districts out of a total of 30.

Emotional brand facets appear as an effective means of establishing a proper connection between the school district and the members of the community. This is primarily the case for community members who no longer engage in direct interaction with the district as an institution of the community. More specifically, emotional facets enable the district to foster positive attitudes related to other aspects besides academics to gather approval and support. The perspective of the consultant, in particular, refers to emotional facets not as a separate but rather as a supportive component of performance facets that further reflects how well the district is doing.

Figure 17 – Frequency of use of the brand imagery facets in the district website



With regards to personality and values, the items publicized by the districts make reference to either the beliefs or the philosophy endorsed by the schools and the administration. These beliefs and the accompanying philosophy were linked to the role of educational institutions in the social development of children. As such, the information found on the websites often displayed the environment as well as the morals encouraged by the district. Related to this broad scheme, the importance of safety and diversity were advertised to a lesser degree as fundamental components of the district brand.

When it comes to the brand component of history and heritage, the information gathered from the websites frequently provided an extended narrative of the history of district, making references to the first class graduated, the evolution of the district, and its buildings or specific facts that have marked its evolution. The main goal was essentially to explain the function of the school district in the development of the community in the present day.

In contrast to the brand performance, the superintendents interviewed were relatively more inclined to acknowledge brand imagery as an item to be promoted via the information found on the websites. Indeed 70% of the interviewees reported using this component as an important part of the message intended for their stakeholders. Specifically, Organizations #2 and #10 emphasize the brand imagery component in their communication messages. When asked about the main aspects promoted by the district, these two superintendents stated:

> *I think sometimes the high school gets a misconception that it is, I would say, more violent than it is. What happens is the perception out there is that the school is unsafe, and it is further from the truth. And that's what we are trying to do, we are trying to market number 1 that it is safe.*
>
> *That we are preparing our students to be successful citizens, productive citizens, when they leave our school system.*

Throughout the conducted interviews, superintendents indicated that brand imagery was often an area in which they fell short when promoting their district. One superintendent on this matter stated:

> *I would say that is an area we have been weakened and I learned just recently that [name of municipality] public schools, and the [name of municipality] high school is the oldest diploma granting in the nation. So we have not done a great job at preserving records.*

In sum, the findings from the evaluation and the analysis of the interviews unequivocally shows that when it comes to marketing of the school districts, superintendents demonstrate a suitable understanding of the concepts of marketing and branding as well as the potential that such techniques may play in the pursuit of their objectives to create and/or support favorable perspective from the constituents of their community. In addition, although school districts are limited by the resources available and their expertise, they deploy diversified methods coherently to achieve their objective in terms of communication, marketing, and branding. In this context, the strategies deployed intend to fit with the habits and expectations of the constituents. Finally, the findings that emerge from the interviews also assert that public schools' efforts and resources concentrate on enhancing brand awareness by favoring citizen ability to recognize the organization. On the other hand, managing brand meaning is limited to the institutions that have developed sufficient experience. Within the performance component of branding, public schools essentially emphasize two common elements, namely academic success and student behavioral development. On the other hand, an important attribute of strategic communication relies on the development of a coherent visual pattern to favor the recognition of the institution.

As mentioned heretofore, the branding components identified as pertinent during the qualitative phase of this study are being used as the foundation for the dominant experiment section of this study. Hence, the design of the experiment aims attention of analyzing the two components that graphic visual and brand trajectory towards either academic success or student character development development.

Chapter 5 – Quantitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis presented in the previous chapter detailed the current application of marketing and branding techniques in the context of public K-12 school districts located in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut. This chapter introduces the analysis and results of the quantitative experiment conducted to explore the extent to which the strategic communication of a local public school brand influences citizen attitudes and behaviors towards the school in question. To clearly address this research aim, a two-stage analysis was selected. The first part of the analysis evaluated the comprehensive effect of branding communication on citizen attitudes and behaviors by comparing participants exposed to strategic branding communication (treatment groups) and participants exposed to informational communication of the school (control group). The second stage of this analysis entailed a more advanced analysis and included diverse intervening effects. This additional analysis enabled the understanding of the mechanisms through which branding communication exercises an influence on citizen attitudes and behaviors. Altogether, the sequential analysis is designed to not only determine the level of the effect, but also to evaluate the processes through which branding communication affects reputation and citizen attitudes and behaviors.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), a five group experiment (one control and four treatment group) was used to test the overall effect of branding communication on citizen attitudes and behaviors. In addition, the experiment included a 2 x 2 factorial design to elaborate on the comparison of two instances for each component tested (school's trajectory and graphic design). The first element considered in this experiment related to the main trajectory pursued by the school: 1) academic success or 2) student character development. The second component tested reflected the role of graphic design as a critical element of the branding process. As such, for each school's trajectory, a text and a graphic version of the prospectus was created. Altogether, the experiment included four treatment groups exposed to the interventional treatments and one control group.

Table 10 – 2x2 Factorial Experiment Description

		Brand Trajectory	
		Academic Performance	Character Development
Graphic Brand Element	Text	Treatment Group 1	Treatment Group 3
	Graphic Design	Treatment Group 2	Treatment Group 4

1. Final sample characteristics

To recall, by the end of the data collection process, 502 individuals participated in the experiment. After further analysis of the responses collected, it was determined that only 434 participants fully completed the experiment survey. More specifically, participants were distributed among the five groups as follows: control group (N=89), treatment group 1 (academic text; N=81), treatment group 2 (academic graphic; N=81), treatment group 3 (character text; N=94), and treatment group 4 (character graphic; N=89).

The first part of the analysis concerned ensuring the homogeneity of each group in terms of demographics. Participants were randomly assigned to each group in order to maintain homogeneity. The following tables (Tables 11 - 16) detail the demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, political view, and household income) selected for each group. These variables were selected as factors that could potentially influence the general perceptions that citizens may have about public schools.

In terms of gender, the composition of the different groups suggested an equal distribution. In regards to the level of education, the composition tended to display a skewed distribution among the experimental groups. Individuals with college experience but no degree were under-represented in treatment group 2 (academic text), while they were over-represented in treatment group 3 (academic graphic). Similarly, the number of individuals with a graduate degree appeared low in treatment group 3 (academic graphic), while their numbers tended to be higher in treatment group 4 (character text). In addition, the number of individuals with a Bachelor’s degree was more limited in treatment group 4 (character text).

Furthermore, different ethnic groups tended to be over-represented in some groups. For instance, in treatment group 3 (academic graphic), there seemed to be higher number of individuals identifying themselves as Black or African American. In treatment group 2 (academic text), there tended to be more individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino relative to other groups. Finally, in treatment group 4 (character text), the number of Asian or Pacific Islander individuals was more pronounced and considered to be over-represented.

In regards to political views, the distribution suggested that the composition of participants was relatively different among the groups. In particular, very conservative individuals were under-represented in treatment group 2 (academic text), while they were over-represented in treatment group 5 (character graphic). In addition, the number of individuals identifying as “middle-of-the-road” was relatively low in treatment group 3 (academic graphic) and high in treatment group 4 (character text). Finally, treatment group 3 (academic graphic) and treatment group 4 (character text) included, respectively, more and less very liberal individuals relative to other groups.

In terms of household income level, participants did not seem to be equally distributed among the diverse groups included in the experiment. Specifically, in treatment group 2 (academic text), individuals with household income between $10,000 and $25,000 were over-represented and individuals with incomes between $25,000 and $50,000 were under-represented. Treatment group 3 (academic graphic) seemed to have a lower number of individuals reporting an income of over $150,000, while more individuals reported earning salaries in this range in treatment group 4 (character text). Finally, treatment group 5 (character graphic) included fewer individuals with incomes between $75,000 and $100,000 and more individuals with incomes between $100,000 and $150,000.

Table 11 – Gender composition of each experimental group

Gender	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
Male	30.95%	33.78%	32.47%	31.11%	25.30%
Female	69.05%	66.22%	67.53%	68.89%	74.70%
Total Participants	84	74	77	90	83

Table 12 – Age composition of each experimental group

Age	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
20-24	2.25%	0%	0%	2.13%	0%
25-34	12.36%	12.35%	13.75%	20.21%	5.62%
35-44	20.22%	29.63%	21.25%	18.09%	22.47%
45-54	28.09%	19.75%	13.75%	28.72%	26.97%
55-59	13.48%	13.58%	20.0%	10.64%	16.85%
60-64	5.62%	4.94%	16.25%	7.45%	14.61%
65-74	14.61%	12.35%	12.50%	12.77%	12.36%
75-84	2.25%	6.17%	2.5%	0%	1.12%
>84	1.12%	1.23%	0%	0%	0%
Total Participants	89	81	80	94	89

Table 13 – Education level composition of each experimental group

Education	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
9th to 12th, no degree	1.12%%	1.23%	2.47%	2.13%	3.37%
High school degree	16.85%	20.99%	13.58%	20.21%	17.98%
Some college, no degree	23.60%	14.81%	28.40%	18.09%	21.35%
Associate degree	12.36%	12.35%	11.11%	12.77%	10.11%
Bachelor's degree	29.21%	29.63%	29.63%	21.28%	26.97%
Graduate degree	15.73%	20.99%	13.58%	25.53%	19.10%
Other	1.12%	0%	1.23%	0%	1.12%
Total Participants	89	81	81	94	89

Table 14 – Ethnicity composition of each experimental group

Ethnicity	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
White	83.15%	77.78%	81.25%	77.42%	86.36%
Black or African American	8.99%	8.64%	11.25%	7.53%	7.95%
Hispanic or Latino	2.25%	8.64%	5.0%	4.30%	2.27%
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.49%	3.70%	1.25%	8.60%	3.41%
Other	1.12%	1.23%	1.25%	2.15%	0%
Total Participants	89	81	80	93	88

Table 15 – Political view composition of each experimental group

Political View	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
Very Conservative	11.24%	4.94%	6.17%	8.51%	13.64%
Moderately Conservative	20.22%	18.52%	22.22%	19.15%	17.05%
Middle-of-the-Road	38.20%	38.27%	28.40%	48.94%	38.64%
Moderately Liberal	15.73%	18.52%	20.99%	15.96%	19.32%
Very Liberal	14.61%	19.75%	22.22%	7.45%	11.36%
Total Participants	89	81	81	94	88

Table 16 - Household income level composition of each experimental group

Household Income in 1,000s	Control Group	Academic Success – Text	Academic Success – Graphic	Character Development – Text	Character Development – Graphic
>10	2.25%	4.94%	2.50%	5.32%	5.62%
10-25	8.99%	18.52%	15.0%	13.83%	10.11%
25-50	24.72%	19.75%	28.75%	22.34%	29.21%
50-75	24.72%	17.28%	20.0%	24.47%	22.47%
75-100	14.61%	14.81%	17.50%	15.96%	10.11%
100-150	12.36%	7.41%	8.75%	3.19%	15.73%
>150	4.49%	7.41%	2.50%	11.70%	3.37%
Total Participants	89	81	80	94	89

In order to ensure appropriate demographic distribution for every group, a likelihood-ratio Chi-square (LR2) was used. As these tests illustrated, there was no significant variation among the five experimental groups with regards to gender (LR2=1.62, df=4, p=.804), level of education (LR2=16.57, df=24, p=.866), ethnicity (LR2=14.68, df=16, p=.548), political views (LR2=20.10, df=16, p=.216), and level of household income (LR2=34.33, df=28, p=.190). However, the data collected do show significant variation among the groups in terms of age (LR2=49.29, df=32, p=.026). The likelihood-ratio tests indicated that with the exception of age, the randomization of the participants in the different groups was handled adequately. Taking into consideration the compelling variation among groups in terms of age, this variable will be included as a control variable in the model.

1.1. Experiment manipulation test

Before discussing the analysis of the effect of branding on citizen attitudes and behaviors, it is first important to discuss the effectiveness of the experimental treatments. As mentioned above, this study used a 2x2 factorial experiment simultaneously testing two components of branding: 1) the school's trajectory (academic success vs. character development) and 2) the role of graphic design. The success of the manipulation employed was predicted to result in a significant distinction among the participants as to the orientation pursued by the school as well as the ability to recognize the school's graphic element.

With regard to the orientation pursued by schools, survey participants were asked to evaluate the school's trajectory, taking into consideration the information they had read. A 7-point scale question, with 1 being character development, 7 academic success, and 4 neither, was used to measure perceptions about the school's main objective. On the one hand, participants exposed to the academic trajectory (group treatment 2 and 3) were expected to perceive that the school concentrated on academic success, whereas, on the contrary, participants exposed to character development were expected to sense the main objective of the school to be the character development of children. On the other hand, participants in the control group, having not seen any particular perspective, were not expected to acknowledge either of the two perspectives. Table 17 below displays the mean of the school's main orientation as per the school's trajectory treatment group, with 1 being character development and 7 being academic success.

Table 17 – Description of each group's evaluation of school trajectory

	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	4.55	.122
Academic Success – Text	5.0625	.150
Academic Success – Graphic	4.9	.140
Character Development – Text	3.68	.129
Character Development – Graphic	3.98	.128

At first glance, the experimental treatments in connection with school trajectory seem to not have worked. Indeed, the average in each group is relatively high, greater than 3.5, and we could have expected less for individuals exposed to the character development trajectory. However, the differences in each group seem consequential. In particular, a large number of the participants in each group perceived that the school they had received information about concentrated on both academic success and character development. More specifically, 48 percent of participants in the control group, 43 percent in the academic trajectory treatment group, and 62 percent in the character development trajectory treatment group expressed that the school's focus related to both academic success and character development. However, it should be noted that the distribution for the academic trajectory treatment group and for character development treatment group tended to be skewed toward academic success and toward character development, respectively.

A likelihood-ratio Chi-square test (LR2= 83.45, df=12, p=0) indicated that the variation among the three school trajectory groups (control vs. academic success vs. character development) was statistically significant. This result was supported by a Kruskal-Wallis test (Chi-square= 58.06, df=2, p=0), which indicated a statistical difference among school trajectory groups at the .01 level. To broaden the understanding of the effectiveness of the treatments, an ordinal regression was conducted. This type of logistic regression aids in determining the tendency of a participant to eventually become part of a particular category. Table 18 shows the ordinal regression results and reveals that this relationship was found to be statistically significant at the .01 level. Furthermore, participants exposed to the academic success trajectory were 1.73 times more inclined to evaluate the school's main objective concerning academic success in comparison to participants in the control group. This relationship was statistically significant at the .05 level (p=.024). On the contrary, participants in the character development trajectory were 3.73 times less likely to believe that the school concentrated on academic success compared with participants in the control group. This relationship was statistically significant at the .01 level (p=0).

Table 18 – Ordinal regression with odds ratios of school's trajectory

	Odds Ratios	Z
Control Group (base group)		
Academic Success	1.73 (.424)	2.25**
Character Development	.268 (.070)	-5.06***

N= 431 – LR chi2=74.48 – Prob>chi2=0
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

In sum, although the treatments do not seem to have induced the expected effects on all participants, their effectiveness was statistically supported. Overall, the treatment pertaining to the school's trajectory produced the desire effects.

In regard to the second tested component, while the survey did not include a direct question to assess the manipulation of the effectiveness of graphic design, participants were asked to evaluate their ability to "picture" the school presented. Like the academic trajectory treatment, it was expected that the treatment groups exposed to the graphic design would be more likely to picture the school and its attributes. A negative 5-point scale question was used. Table 19 highlights the mean responses for each experimental group.

Table 19 – Description of each group's assessment of the effects of the graphic design treatment

	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	2.865	.106
Academic Success – Text	2.567	.120
Academic Success – Graphic	2.593	.130
Character Development – Text	2.628	.104
Character Development – Graphic	2.60	.114

As Table 19 shows, although the distribution is unclear among the five groups, participants in the control group (mean= 2.87) were on average more likely to not picture the school and its attributes. Considering the nature of this ordinal outcome, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," the effectiveness of the manipulation of this treatment was monitored via a Kruskal Wallis test. The Kruskal Wallis test, which is appropriate in the case of one independent variable with two or more levels and an ordinal variable, indicated that there was significant variation between the control group, non-graphic design treatment group, and graphic design treatment at the .1 level (chi-square=4.83, df=2, p=.09).

More specifically, an ordinal logistic regression was conducted to establish the degree of to which the treatment had an effect. This type of logistic regression aids in determining the likelihood that a participant will eventually become part of a particular category. Table 19 below depicts the results for this ordinal logistic regression, which found the data to be a good fit. As shown, participants in the control group were 1.67 times more likely to "strongly agree" with their inability to picture the school in comparison with participants exposed to a graphic designed prospectus. This relationship was statistically significant at the .05 level (p=.03). On the other hand, individuals in the control group were 1.55 times more inclined to “strongly agree” with the statement that they are not able to picture the school in comparison to individuals in presence of treatment in a text form. The distinction between the two groups was statistically significant at the .1 level (p=.06).

However, the data included in Table 20 imply that the treatment effect for the graphic brand component does not seem to operate within the treatment groups. Indeed, although individuals exposed to a text prospectus are more likely to be strongly agree on their inability to recognize or picture the school as compared to individuals exposed to graphic prospectus, this relationship is not significant. It is expected that this situation results from the presence of brand graphic elements in the text prospectus, such as the school’s name and slogan.

Table 20 – Ordinal logistic regression for not picturing the school and its attributes

	Odds Ratios	z
Control Group	1.665 (.391)	2.17**
Text	1.076 (.211)	.38
Graphic (base group)		

N=434 – LR chi2= 5.12 – Prob>chi2=.077
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Overall, the manipulation checks suggested that the two types of treatment, in the case of this experiment, were somewhat effective and understood as expected.

1.2. The comprehensive effect of branding on citizens attitudes and behaviors

In order to assess the effects of branding on citizen attitudes and behaviors, the model developed included two outcomes, namely word-of-mouth and citizenship behavior. As a reminder, word-of-mouth was defined in this study as “all informal communications between an [individual] and others concerning evaluations of goods or services [or organizations]" (Henning-Thurau et al. 2002, 231-32). In the framework of this dissertation, word-of-mouth was measured using two 5-point scale questions. The composite variable of word-of-mouth was reliable, displaying a Cronbach's alpha of .724.

Citizenship behavior refers to behavior that citizens may engage in to support or benefit government institutions (Bartikowski and Walsh 2011). Citizens can support an organization by getting involved or providing feedback concerning the services offered. This category was measured using a series of three questions with a 5-point scale that referred to basic activities in which citizens may participate within a particular school district. The integrated variable had a Cronbach's alpha of .889, which indicated that the variable was reliable for measuring citizenship behavior.

Table 21 – Descriptive statistics of outcomes per experiment group

	Word-of-Mouth		Citizenship Behaviors	
	Mean	**Std. Err.**	**Mean**	**Std. Err.**
Control Group	3.466	.066	2.895	.116
Academic Success – Text	3.722	.085	3.128	.109
Academic Success – Graphic	3.691	.098	3.058	.124
Character Development – Text	3.718	.089	3.184	.107
Character Development – Graphic	3.871	.082	3.225	.116

Table 21 shows the description of the outcome variables – word-of-mouth and citizenship behavior – for each group. As the table displays, the results of the analysis reveal that overall individuals were likely to speak well of the public high school. Indeed, for every experimental group, the group average was greater than 3.45 on a scale from 1 to 5.

However, participants in treatment groups tended to have a higher mean in comparison to individuals in the control group. Similarly, with regard to citizenship behavior, individuals were likely to be engaged in favorable behaviors towards the school, as the mean for every group was greater than 2.75 on a scale from 1 to 5. Unlike word-of-mouth, the variation between the treatment groups and the control group seems less important.

To ascertain whether the variations among groups for the selected two outcomes were compelling for the overall analysis, a MANCOVA analysis was conducted, as age was included as a covariate variable. MANCOVA is suitable for comparing two or more continuous response variables (e.g., citizenship behavior and word-of-mouth) by levels of a factor variable (e.g., experimental group) and controlling for a covariate variable (e.g., age). Indeed, the outcome variables were index variables, comprising several questions in the survey. The Pillai's trace (trace=.0397, F=1.73, p=.07) test indicated that the outcome variables representing citizen attitudes and behaviors differed by the level of the factor selected. In other words, there was significant difference among the groups as per the model. Further, a univariate analysis for each outcome was conducted to determine whether the predictor variable altered each response variable more specifically. The two one-way ANOVA tests (word-of-mouth: F=1.55; citizenship behavior: F=.097) revealed that there was significant difference among the groups for both outcome variables with a 90 and 95 percent level of confidence for citizenship behavior and word-of-mouth, respectively. These results imply that the effects of strategic branding communication are compelling with regard to the likelihood that citizens will display favorable citizenship behaviors and be willing to take interest in disclosing positive beliefs about the school.

Furthermore, the inference relationship between branding strategy and the selected outcomes was also of interest. Owing to the two comprehensive variables used to measure the outcomes – word-of-mouth and citizenship behavior, a multivariate regression analysis with comparison to the control group was chosen as the preferred method. This type of regression allows for determining the effect of each experimental treatment on multiple outcome variables. The model controlled for age, as the variation between each group was significant, as mentioned above. The results of the multivariate regression are shown in Table 22 below.

Table 22 – Multivariate regression results for citizen attitudes and behaviors outcomes

	Word-of-mouth		Citizenship behavior	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Control Group (base group)				
Academic Success – Text	.257 (.121)	2.12**	.236 (.163)	1.45
Academic Success – Graphic	.218 (.121)	1.79**	.150 (.163)	.92
Character Development – Text	.248 (.117)	2.12**	.270 (.157)	1.72**
Character Development – Graphic	.407 (.118)	3.45***	.343 (.159)	2.16**
Age	-.013 (.022)	-.59	-.059 (.030)	-1.97**
	N=433, R-square=.028, F=2.5, p=.030		N=433, R-square=.021, F=1.88, p=.097	

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

As the results illustrate, the regression confirmed that the model, for which “branding strategy” was the unique predictor, fit the data well with regards to citizenship behaviors. The F-test for citizenship behavior of 1.88 was significant at the .1 level (p=.097). Although the level of confidence was lower than the accepted 95 percent, I argue that the level of confidence is still satisfactory to support the validity of the results obtained. The model explained 2.15 percent of the variation of the outcome citizenship behaviors, as the R-square is .0215. It should be noted that the nature of the actions described in the survey (e.g., volunteer for the school, attend board meeting, and serve on the board) involves additional factors apart from those concerning perceptions of the school, such as time availability. This could explain the low level of R-square.

Similarly, the model fit the data well with respect to word-of-mouth, the willingness of citizens to say good things about the school. The F-test for word-of-mouth of 2.50 was significant with a 95 percent level of confidence (p=.03). The R-square reached .0284, which means that about 3 percent of the variance in the variable “word-of-mouth” was explained by the predictor variable. At first glance, this level may appear really low, even considering only one explanatory variable; however, considering both the static nature of such attitudes and the short-lived nature of a unique prospectus in establishing a brand, this level of variance was satisfactory for analysis.

Additionally, as Table 22 describes while controlling for age, all treatment groups were found to be more likely to become more engaged with the school. More specifically, individuals exposed to a school prospectus emphasizing academic success in a text version (treatment group 1) or in graphic design format (treatment group 2) were 24 percent and 15 percent more chance to get engaged with the school, respectively, than the individuals in the control group. However, these relationships were not statistically significant (treatment group 1: p=.148 and treatment group 2: p=.359). On the other hand, individuals exposed to a school’s prospectus promoting character development in text format (treatment group 3) were 27 percent more likely to become engaged with the considered school as compared with individuals exposed to elementary information (control group), given that all of the other variables in the model were held constant. This relationship was statistically significant at the .1 level (p=.086). Similarly individuals who viewed the prospectus advocating character development in a graphic design format were 34 percent more likely than individuals in the control group to participate, while holding constant all other variables in the model. This relationship was statistically significant with a 95 percent level of confidence (p=.031).

Regarding citizen aptitude to share favorable information about the school, all treatment groups have, on average, a higher likelihood of becoming engaged in such behaviors in comparison to individuals exposed to an informational communication of the school. More specifically, in relation to a branding strategy advocating for academic success, the treatment in text format increased the chances of positive comments being made by 25 percent on average, while the treatment with graphic design increased this likelihood by 22 percent when compared to the control group. These inferences were statistically significant at the .5 (p=.034) and .1 level (p=.074), respectively. Likewise, individuals who were presented with a prospectus emphasizing character development in a text and graphic design format were 25 percent and 41 percent more likely to share favorable views about the school, respectively, in comparison to individuals who viewed basic information, given that all of the other variables in the model were held constant. The relationship was statistically significant at the .05 level (p=.034) for the text version, whereas it was significant at the .01 level (p=.001) for the graphic design version.

These results revealed the direct influence of branding techniques on citizen attitudes and behaviors. Although there is mixed evidence with respect to the ability of branding communication to influence citizenship behaviors, the data clearly attest the capability of branding communication to directly improve the likelihood of citizens to comment favorably by word-of-mouth about the school. These results support Hypothesis #4, which was exposing citizens to a government institution's brand will favorably prompt their attitudes and behaviors.

Table 23 – Factorial analysis for citizen attitudes and behaviors outcomes

	Word-of-mouth		Citizenship behavior	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Brand Trajectory (academic success = 0; character development = 1)	-..010 (.125)	-.08	.044 (.160)	.27
Brand Graphic Elements (text = 0; graphic design = 1)	-.039 (.130)	-.30	-.089 (.166)	-.54
Brand Trajectory * Brand Graphic Elements	.200 (.179)	1.12	.149 (.228)	.65
Age	-.016 (.027)	-.59	-.034 (.034)	-1
	N=344, R-square=.009, F=.76, p=.55		N=344, R-square=.008, F=.64, p=.633	

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Moreover, looking at the role of each independent variable (brand trajectory and brand graphic elements), a factorial analysis was conducted for participants exposed to a treatment prospectus. Table 23 above presents the results for both citizenship behaviors and word-of-mouth. Interestingly, these results indicate that neither the effects of brand trajectory nor brand graphic elements nor their interaction are statistically significant on both word-of-mouth and citizenship behaviors. Hence, these findings infer that neither an academic success nor a character development brand trajectory is more effective than the other in influencing citizen attitudes or behaviors. Similar conclusions can be stated for the influence of graphic design versus text format – i.e. graphic design brand is not more effective than a brand presented in the text format.

While the outcomes of this initial evaluation provide insightful conclusions on the direct effect of strategic branding communication on citizen attitudes and behaviors toward a considered public school institution, they demonstrate that the singularity of each brand component (academic success vs. character development; and graphic design format vs. text format) does not have any particular influence on citizen attitudes and behaviors. The following section broadens the model to consider the mechanisms in place.

2. An initial model of branding effects on stakeholder attitudes and behaviors

2.1. Reputation as an organizational objective

The preceding section discussed the direct effects of the strategic branding communication of a public high school on citizen attitudes and behaviors. Beyond the insightful results highlighted, this study attempted to widen the understanding of the mechanisms through which variable branding communication affects citizen attitudes and behaviors. One of the factors underscored in the study was the role of a particular public institution's reputation as perceived by citizens. As stated previously, reputation is understood in the broad sense of the term, which combines both an effective and a cognitive component (Hall 1992; Schwaiger 2004). As such, reputation should not only integrate a subjective assessment of an organization's attributes (i.e., the success of the organization or the high quality of services), but also an intrinsic evaluation of these attributes (i.e., "this organization is not performing properly but I like it anyway").

Therefore, this research used the two factors developed by Schwaiger (2004) to measure reputation: scilicet sympathy and perceived competence. To capture the two dimensions of reputation, the post-intervention survey included a series of four 5-point scale questions – two related to likeability and two related to competence. The composite variable of reputation was reliable, displaying a Cronbach's alpha of .899.

Table 24 – Multivariate regression of reputation on citizen attitudes and behaviors

	Word-of-mouth		Citizenship behavior	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Reputation	.750 (.033)	22.87***	.465 (.061)	7.61***
Age	-.015 (.015)	-.98	-.062 (.028)	-2.19**
	N=433, R-square=.549, F=261.83, p=0		N=433, R-square=.127, F=31.16, p=0	

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

To evaluate the role of reputation in the varied citizen attitudes and behaviors, a multivariate regression was conducted with reputation as the predictor factor and age as control variable. Table 24 displays the results for both outcomes considered. This model fit the data well for both dependent variables, namely word-of-mouth and citizenship behavior.

Concerning the former, the F-test of 261.83 was significant (p=0). The R-square for the model was .5491, which implies that 55 percent of the variance of the outcome "word-of-mouth" was explained by the predictor "reputation." The R-square level indicated the critical importance of reputation as driving certain citizen attitudes and behaviors toward public institutions. Concerning the coefficients presented in Table 24, it can be concluded with a 99 percent level of confidence (p=0) that for a one unit increase in reputation on a scale from 1 to 5, a .75 unit increase in word-of-mouth is predicted, holding all other variables constant in the model.

Regarding the later, the F-test ratio of 31.16 was significant at the .01 level (p=0). The R-square was .127, which signals that about 13 percent of the variance in citizen willingness to become engaged was due to their perceptions of the institution's reputation. This finding tends to support previous findings to the effect that the decision to participate may depend on considerations beyond the organization's attributes alone. In accordance with the regression coefficients, it may be concluded that an increase of one unit in reputation, on a scale from 1 to 5, is predicted to increase the degree of citizenship behavior by .47 units. This relationship was found to be statistically significant at the .01 level (p=0).

Table 25 – Multivariate regression of reputation dimensions on citizen attitudes and behaviors

	Word-of-mouth		Citizenship behavior	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Sympathy	.476 (.050)	0.61***	.483 (.092)	5.24***
Competence	.274 (.049)	5.64***	-.016 (.090)	-.017
Age	-.010 (.015)	-.68	-.051 (.028)	-1.83**
	N=432, R-square=.555, F=178.26, p=0		N=432, R-square=.142, F=23.65, p=0	

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

A further analysis of the two dimensions of reputation – scilicet sympathy and perceived competence demonstrates the compelling role of the affective dimension of reputation in the formation of citizen attitudes and behaviors. As shown in Table 25, this model fit the data well for both dependent variables. The F-test of 178.26 and of 23.65 respectively for word-of-mouth and citizenship behaviors were statistically significant (p=0). In details, the findings indicate that with a 99 percent level of confidence (p=0) that for one unit increase in sympathy, a .48 unit increase in both word-of-mouth and citizenship behaviors is predicted, holding all other variables constant. On the other hands, the findings attest that a one unit increase in perceived competence is predicted to increase word-of-mouth by .27. This relationship is statistically significant at the .01 level (p=0). However, perceived competence does not have a statistically significant effect on citizenship behaviors (p=.864).

These results highlight the critical function reputation, and specifically its affective dimension, plays in prompting favorable attitudes and behaviors on the part of citizens with respect to a public institution. Although the degree of influence on citizenship behavior seems limited, reputation definitely plays a distinctive role in the willingness of citizens to express favorable opinions about the institution. These findings support Hypothesis #4, which posited that the influence of a government institution's brand on citizen attitudes and behaviors occurs by heightening brand image and organizational reputation.

Concerning the capacity for a public entity branding communication to affect reputation, Table 26 shows the mean responses about reputation for each experimental group. As the table highlights, all groups on average viewed the reputation of the school presented as being good, as for every group the average reputation was greater than 3.40 on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 inferring a low and 5 a high level of reputation. Nevertheless, at first glance, participants in treatment groups tended to view the schools as having a better reputation than individuals in the control group. This would suggest that branding enhances the reputation citizens hold about a public institution. However, taking into account the averages, the variation between each group was not significantly clear. In order to determine the significance of that initial finding, further analysis was required.

Table 26 – Opinions about reputation by experimental group

	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	3.424	.074
Academic Success – Text	3.731	.085
Academic Success – Graphic	3.735	.096
Character Development – Text	3.697	.082
Character Development – Graphic	3.857	.077

With the aim of ascertaining whether the variations among the experimental groups were analytically significant, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted. Based on the one-way ANOVA test (F=3.02), with a 95 percent level of confidence, one can conclude that there was significant difference among the experimental group for the outcome variable "reputation." The results of the one-way ANOVA test implied that "branding strategy" had a significant effect on the view of reputation that citizens have about public institution. A linear regression was selected to assess the level of inference between the predictor variable and the outcome included in the model. This type of regression aids in determining the unique effect on the outcome variable of each experimental treatment when compared with the control group. Our model controls for age, as the variation among each group was significant, as mentioned above. The results of the linear regression with coefficients are shown in Table 27 below.

Table 27 – Results of linear regression for reputation

	Reputation	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Control Group (base group)		
Academic Success – Text	.307 (.119)	2.58***
Academic Success – Graphic	.310 (.119)	2.59***
Character Development – Text	.273 (.114)	2.38**
Character Development – Graphic	.432 (.116)	3.72***
Age	.002 (.022)	.1

N=433, R-square=.034, F=3.02, p=.01
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

The linear regression confirmed that the model in which "branding strategy" was the only predictor variable fit the data well. The F-test of 3.02 was significant at the .05 level (p=.011). As such, the linear regression supported the information delineated from the one-way ANOVA test. The pseudo R-square for the model was .034, which means that the model explained only 3.4 percent of the variations in reputation. This degree of explanation was somewhat low, even considering that the model only included one predictor variable. However, it should be noted here that reputation was treated as a stable and sustainable construct. As Gray and Balmer (1998) argued, reputation is built over time via stakeholder interaction with a particular organization. Taken in the context of this dissertation, the treatments reflected a very temporary iteration of a brand communication via a one-time exposure to a prospectus. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the influence of brand strategy on reputation.

In view of the results shown in Table 27, individuals in all treatment groups were more likely to have a favorable opinion about the public school's reputation than those in the control group. More precisely, citizens exposed to a school prospectus emphasizing academic success in a text version were 31 percent more likely on average to have a higher opinion of the school's reputation when compared to citizens who saw basic information about the school, given that all of the other variables in the model were held constant. This finding was statistically significant at the .01 level ($p=.010$). Similarly, with a level of 99 percent confidence ($p=.010$), individuals exposed to a school's announcement promoting academic success in a graphic format were found to be 31 percent more likely have a higher opinion of the school's reputation than individuals in the control group, while holding constant all other variables in the model.

Concerning individuals exposed to a school prospectus advertising for character development, those with a text format and those with the graphic design were found to be 27 and 43 percent more likely to have a higher opinion of the school's reputation, respectively, than the individuals presented with only brief information. These relationships were statistically significant at the .05 level ($p= .018$) in the case of a prospectus in a text format and at the .01 level ($p=0$) in the case of a prospectus in a graphic design format. These results indicate the positive role of "branding strategy" on the management of a public institution's reputation, especially in terms of long-term development. As such, the results support Hypothesis #3 that contends that a strategic branding communication favors the brand image and the reputation that citizens have about this organization.

In the pursuit of understanding the influence of each instance for both brand trajectory and brand graphic elements, a factorial analysis was conduct. Table 28 displays the results of this analysis on reputation. Surprisingly, these results attest that the model does not fit well the data, as none of the brand components statistically affect reputation.

Altogether, these results tend to indicate that the individuality of both brand trajectory and graphic brand element does not influence the reputation citizen hold about a particular organization. Hence, although the essence of the two brand components – brand trajectory and graphic brand element – influences public institution reputation, their particular occurrence does not differ from one another.

Table 28 – Factorial analysis for reputation

	Reputation	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Brand Trajectory (academic success = 0; character development = 1)	-.034 (.121)	-.29
Brand Graphic Elements (text = 0; graphic design = 1)	.002 (.125)	.02
Brand Trajectory * Brand Graphic Elements	.157 (.172)	.91
Age	0 (.026)	.01
	N=344, R-square=.006, F=.52, p=.718	

*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

2.2. The opportunity for branding strategy to influence individuals' perceptual processing

In the theoretical framework developed for this dissertation, the effects of branding on reputation and other governance objectives were approached as an opportunity for branding to influence individuals' perceptual processing to stimulate their awareness of the organization as well as their attention to non-ordinary elements of the services or the organization. This process, as mentioned previously, relates to the knowledge and perception structures in the minds of citizens (Keller 1993, 2001; Keller and Lehman

2006). This process was captured on two levels: 1) the ability of citizens to recognize and recall the organization and its attributes (brand awareness) and 2) the likelihood that they focused on singular considerations in their assessment of the institution. This section first addresses these two elements of perceptual processing as a predictor of reputation and then as an outcome of branding strategy.

Applied to government agencies, the concept of brand awareness may be understood as the ability for stakeholders to recall and differentiate the organization or the elements affiliated to its brand. This study included three questions, each measured with a 5-point scale question. The composed index variable had a Cronbach's alpha of .7236, which indicated that this index variable was reliable for measuring "brand awareness."

In terms of the propensity of citizens to select specific factors in their assessment of the public entity, this study asked participants to rank six attributes of schools that often matter to people – curriculum, graduation rate, test scores, child personal development, diversity of the student body, and community involvement – in order from 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important. This process resulted in creating 6 nominal categorical variables.

With the aim of evaluating the influence of both brand awareness and the selection of attributes on reputation, a linear regression was conducted with brand awareness and the six categorical variables as predictors and age as a control variable. Table 29 below shows the results of this regression. The model fit the data well, as the F-test of 15.38 was significant ($p=0$). The model was relevant for analysis, as brand awareness and the six attribute variables explained 22.1 percent of the variation of reputation, as the R-square equaled .221. The level of R-square implied that the opinions concerning reputation that citizens expressed about a public institution were largely influenced by the brand equity each individual associates with the organization.

Table 29 – Linear regression on reputation

	Reputation	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Brand Awareness	.472 (.047)	10.10***
Curriculum		
Character Development	.041 (.088)	.47
Graduation Rate	.127 (.100)	1.27
Diversity	.067 (.128)	.52
Test Score	-.193 (.155)	-1.24
Community Involvement	-.043 (.192)	-.23
Age	.040 (.021)	1.94**

N=388, R-square=.221, F=15.38, p=0
*p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

With respect to the coefficients displayed in Table 29, it came to light that brand awareness was the only predicting variable that had a statistically significant effect on reputation (p=0). More precisely, it can be inferred with a 99 percent level of confidence (p=0) that for one unit increase in brand awareness, a .47 unit increase in reputation can be predicted, given that all of the other variables in the model are held constant. These results indicate that reputation is more conditioned by the ability of citizens to identify the organization and to distinguish it from other similar organizations, rather than on the attributes citizens consider as important for the school to pursue. In order to explore the role of brand awareness in the varying findings on reputation, a linear regression with brand awareness as the unique predictive variable was conducted.

Table 30 – Linear regression on reputation with brand awareness as unique predictor

	Reputation	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Brand Awareness	.480 (.044)	10.93***
Age	.024 (.020)	1.22

N=433, R-square=.218, F=59.75, p=0
p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

Table 30 displays the results of this linear regression. As reflected by the analysis, the model fit the data well, since the F-test of 59.75 was significant with a 99 percent level of confidence. The R-square reached .2175, which implies that the variance of reputation explained by only brand awareness was about 22 percent. In comparison to the previous model, the R-square supported the argument that the attributes citizens consider as important in their assessment of a public institution do not play an important role in determining their views about the reputation of the particular organization. Looking at the coefficients, it can be deduced with 99 percent confidence that an increase of one unit in brand awareness would lead to a .48 unit increase in reputation. Interestingly, the results suggest that the subjective assessment of the value of a public institution and the intrinsic evaluation of this organization (i.e., the organization reputation) was for a most part contingent on the strength of the organization to provoke awareness and discrepancy in minds of citizens.

Although the previous models have demonstrated the critical role of individuals' perceptual processing in the development and the sustainability of the reputation of public organization, I turn now to the analysis of the influence of "branding strategy." Considering the nature of the two components of brand awareness and attribute selection, two types of analysis were selected. I start with the analysis of the effects of "branding strategy" on brand awareness.

Table 31 displays the mean responses about brand awareness for each experimental group. As indicated by these findings, all groups on average had a positive assessment of the school's characteristics, as the mean in every group was greater than 2.9 on a scale from 1 to 5. At first sight, individuals in the treatment groups appeared to have a higher assessment of the school's brand awareness than those in the control group and the variation among the treatment groups and the control group seemed significant.

Table 31 – Average views on brand awareness per experimental group

	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	2.914	.077
Academic Success – Text	3.237	.076
Academic Success – Graphic	3.22	.094
Character Development – Text	3.351	.072
Character Development – Graphic	3.408	.083

With the aim of establishing the significance of the variations among the experimental groups, a one-way ANOVA analysis was carried out. The one-way ANOVA test (F=5.40) found that the difference among the experimental groups for brand awareness was significant with a 99 percent level of confidence. The one-way ANOVA test suggested that "branding strategy" had significant effect on the public organization's brand awareness, the ability for citizens to recall and acknowledge the organization. A linear regression was conducted to analyze the degree to which "branding strategy" influenced brand awareness in comparison to the control group. The model controlled for age, as it did with previous models. The results of the linear regression are shown in Table 32.

The linear regression confirmed that our model fit the data well when "branding strategy" was the only predictor variable. The F-test of 5.40 was significant with a 99 percent level of confidence (p=.001). As such, the linear regression supported the findings of the one-way ANOVA test. The pseudo R-square for the model was .06, which implies that the model explained only 6 percent of the variation in brand awareness. This degree of explanation is somewhat low, but satisfactory considering that the model only included one predictive variable.

Table 32 – Results of linear regression for brand awareness

	Brand Awareness	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Control Group (base group)		
Academic Success – Text	.325 (.115)	2.84***
Academic Success – Graphic	.306 (.115)	2.66***
Character Development – Text	.424 (.111)	3.84***
Character Development – Graphic	.503 (.112)	4.5***
Age	-.039 (.021)	-1.85*

N=433, R-square=.060, F=5.4, p=0
p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

In light of the results exhibited in Table 32, individuals in all treatment groups displayed a higher level of brand awareness than those in the control group. More specifically, in the case of a school prospectus advocating for academic success, individuals who were presented with a text format were found to have a brand awareness level that was on average 32 percent higher than those in the control group, whereas those exposed to a graphic design were more likely to have a level of brand awareness that was 30 percent higher than those in the control group, given that all the other variables in the model were held constant. These relationships were statistically significant at the .01 level (text treatment group: p=.005; graphic design treatment group: p=.008). Similarly, in the context of the prospectus promoting character development, individuals in the group with text format on average presented a level of brand awareness that was 42 percent higher than those in the control group. This relationship was statistically compelling at the .01 level (p=0). Finally, individuals in treatment group 5, with a character development school trajectory in a graphic design format, on average had a level of brand awareness that was 50 percent higher than individuals in the control group, holding all other variables constant. This finding was statistically significant with 99 percent confidence.

Altogether, these results revealed the critical role of "branding strategy" on individuals' perceptual processing via the enhancement of public organizations' brand awareness. This finding supported Hypothesis #1.

Figure 33 – Factorial analysis for brand awareness

	Brand Awareness	
	Coef. (Std. Err.)	t
Brand Trajectory (academic success = 0; character development = 1)	.105 (.115)	.92
Brand Graphic Elements (text= 0; graphic design = 1)	.070 (.112)	.532
Brand Trajectory * Brand Graphic Elements	-.091 (.163)	.577
Age	-.024 (.024)	.327

N=344, R-square=.014, F=1.21, p=.305
p<.1; **p<.05; ***p<.01

The results of the factorial analysis on brand awareness presented in Table 33 above, provide interesting insights concerning the characteristics of the two brand components tested in the experiment, namely brand trajectory and graphic brand elements. As for the previous factorial analysis, the results imply that the model does not fit the data well. The F-test of 1.21 is not statistically significant. Hence, with regard to brand trajectory, these results infer that a prospectus that advocates for academic success is not more effective than one that promotes character development. Similarly, a brand displayed in a text format does not further influence brand awareness than one including graphic brand elements.

To conduct this analysis, six attributes (curriculum, child character development, graduation rate, diversity of the student body, test score, and community involvement) were considered as isolated ordinal variables and ranked according to a scale in which 1 was assigned for the least important attribute and 6 for the most important one. Table 34 provides a description of the rankings of the six attributes for each experimental group. Overall, curriculum appears to be the most important element for citizens to take into consideration when it comes to evaluating a school. In contrast, the involvement of the school in the community appears as the least important element considered by citizens. The ranking of these six attributes was relatively similar for each experimental group. This situation could lead to the assumption that “branding strategy” does not have any particular effect on the attributes selected by citizens to evaluate public institutions.

Table 34 – School attribute by experiment group

	Curriculum		Diversity	
	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	5.026	.130	3.333	.191
Academic Success – Text	4.820	.146	3.25	.196
Academic Success – Graphic	4.920	.141	2.851	.170
Character Development – Text	4.871	.116	3.071	.181
Character Development – Graphic	4.937	.125	3.013	.181
	Character Development		**Test Score**	
	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	4.372	.156	2.449	.154
Academic Success – Text	4.097	.199	2.653	.183
Academic Success – Graphic	4.095	.192	3.014	.183
Character Development – Text	4.224	.187	2.776	.145
Character Development – Graphic	4.405	.177	2.962	.168
	Graduation Rate		**Community Involvement**	
	Mean	Std. Err.	Mean	Std. Err.
Control Group	3.372	.185	2.449	.148
Academic Success – Text	3.625	.200	2.556	.144
Academic Success – Graphic	3.566	.209	2.554	.153
Character Development – Text	3.694	.185	2.365	.139
Character Development – Graphic	3.215	.196	2.468	.139

Considering the nature of the six ordinal variables described above, six separate Kruskal-Wallis tests, the results of which are displayed in Table 35, were conducted. As per these results, it appears that overall "branding strategy" does not have any considerable impact on the importance of school attributes from the perspective of citizens. These results, which uphold the initial observations, suggest the incapacity for "branding strategy" to fully influence individuals' perceptual processing by directing their attention to desired elements about the organization.

Table 35 – Kruskal-Wallis test for each school attribute

Attribute	Chi-square	Df	p
Curriculum	1.826	4	.7676
Character Development	1.966	4	.7420
Graduation Rate	4.109	4	.3914
Diversity	3.717	4	.4456
Test Score	7.239	4	.1238
Community Involvement	1.208	4	.8767

A thorough analysis of the data collected demonstrates that "branding strategy" under specific conditions has an apparent influence on the selected attributes when it comes to the distinction between the most and other important attributes. The subsequent analysis further explores the relationship between "branding strategy" in two specific contexts, namely the most and the second most important attribute. In order to do so, a multinomial logistic regression was used. Table 36 displays the results of this multinomial regression only for the comparison between curriculum and character development, the two attributes supposed to refer to the involved brand trajectories tested (e.g. academic success and character development).

Table 36 – Results for the multinomial regression for the most and the second most important attribute

	Most important attribute		Second most important attribute	
Curriculum (base outcome)	Coef. (Std. Err.)	Z	Coef. (Std. Err.)	Z
Character Development				
Control Group (base group)				
Academic Success – Text	.671 (.429)	1.57	-1.183 (.430)	-2.75***
Academic Success – Graphic	.333 (.425)	.78	-.636 (.428)	-1.49
Character Development – Text	.981 (.415)	2.37**	-1.305 (.407)	-3.21***
Character Development – Graphic	.809 (.409)	1.98**	-1.104 (.408)	-2.71***
Age	.024 (.077)	.31	.021 (.079)	.26
	N=388, Pseudo R-square=.031, LR Chi-square=36.91, p=.059		N=388, Pseudo R-square=.038, LR chi-square=45.34, p=.008	

The results indicate that the two models fit well the data. In regard to the most important attribute, the Likelihood Chi-square ratio of 36.91 was significant with a 90 percent level of confidence (p=.059). On the other hand, for the second most important attribute, the Likelihood Chi-square ratio of 45.34 is statistically significant at the .01 level (p=.008). Overall, the results indicate that individuals exposed to a prospectus advocating for character development either in a text or graphic design format are more likely to consider character development as the most important attribute in comparison to individuals in the control group. Additionally, the results indicate that a brand trajectory promoting academic success does not have any particular impact on selecting character development at the expense of curriculum in comparison to individuals in the control group. Similarly, the results highlight that individuals who have seen a character development brand trajectory as compared to individuals in the control group are less likely to select character development as the second most important attribute.

These results indicate the capacity for “branding strategy” to influence the hierarchy of the attributes that are considered when assessing a particular public institution to some extent. Indeed, in most cases, “branding strategy” enabled citizens to consider additional attributes and not solely those that were most apparent. Attention to the particular case of character development supports such a conclusion. Hence, it could be concluded that a public organization’s brand strategy emphasizing a particular brand trajectory influenced the importance of the attributes citizens consider when assessing that particular institution. These results supported the previously made argument to the effect that “branding strategy” has the capacity to frame individuals’ perceptual processing as to they focus their attention on selected non-ordinary elements. Hence, the findings validate hypothesis #2, which states the capacity for branding communication to prompt individuals’ brand meaning.

In sum, “branding strategy” appears as a promising and relevant means through which public institutions both enhance the image and reputation citizens have of them and also encourage citizens to display positive attitudes and behaviors towards them. In the context of increasing accountability towards the public sector, by leveraging individuals’ perceptual processing, “branding strategy” enables public institutions to enhance the extent to which citizens are aware of them and see them as distinctive, as well as to strengthen the public’s attention to non-ordinary elements when assessing that particular institution.

Chapter 6 – Discussion and Conclusion

While the previous two chapters introduced the results of both the qualitative and the quantitative phases of this dissertation study, this chapter builds upon these results to evaluate the role of strategic branding communication in the capacity of public institutions to create brand equity. In the public sector context, the concept of brand equity may be understood as a combination of three potential dimensions, namely awareness, perceived quality, and memory associations. In other words, brand equity refers to the opportunity to prompt awareness and distinctiveness from the perspective of citizens. This research argues that brand equity results from the compelling individual perceptual processing of public institutions strategic branding communication. With the aim of assessing whether a local agency can favorably influence the attitudes and behaviors of their constituents by managing the image and reputation citizens associate with the particular institution, this dissertation not only contributes to new core knowledge by expanding the scope of the field of public management into new directions, but also provides relevant contributions to both academic and practitioner communities.

With respect to the research inquiry, this study asserts that the strategic communication of a public institution brand supports the expression of favorable attitudes and behaviors by citizens in direction of that particular organization. More specifically, in regards to the propositions made within the framework of this study, results evidently assert that in the context of strategic communication, tangible graphic/visual elements of a public institution brand have positive effects on citizens' brand awareness. Hence, the results tend to advocate in support of proposition #1. Similarly, the presentation of a particular brand trajectory tends to determine the attributes utilize by citizens when it comes to assess the utility of a particular public entity. As such, the results, which supports proposition #2, reveal that the display of a singular brand trajectory prompt the meaning citizens hold about the brand. Finally, the findings contend that the application of branding technique by a public organization enhance the image and the reputation citizens hold about that singular institution. Therefore, the findings validate proposition #3. Although the results support the propositions advanced for this study, the findings infer that the individuality of neither brand trajectory component nor graphic/visual elements have a distinctive effect on the aforementioned concept of brand awareness, brand meaning, reputation, and citizens attitudes and behaviors.

With respect to current literature, this study conveys public administration literature towards new perspectives in the management between government and citizens, and more broadly stakeholders. This study reinforces the concept of organizational reputation as a fundamental element in the management of stakeholder relationship. More specifically, this study apprehends reputation as a multi-facet construct that includes not only a cognitive but also an affective component. Hence, this study offers new windows opportunities in approaching government and stakeholder relationship. In addition, this study approaches the analyze of new managerial strategies in the form of marketing and branding strategies, which appear to have already multiple practical applications.

1. Reputation: the ‘fit approach’ to enhancing governance objectives

Reputation management is a recent, but promising concept approached in the field of public administration. Considering the dissatisfaction combined with requirement to be accountable for their decision and achievements, stakeholder impressions are more than ever a critical element to take into account by public managers. Although the concept, within its political paradigm, was originally perceived as a requisite for public institutions to gain autonomy and legitimacy from political authority, it has in a more recent time emerged as a governance objective per se. This new paradigm, in which scholarship intends to understand the mechanisms and antecedents of reputation, has essentially aimed its attention on marketing and communication strategy. With respect to the prevailing work on reputation and brand management in the public sector, the contribution of this dissertation, by considering individual perceptual processing, is fourfold: 1) it embraces individual perceptual processing onto the different facets of reputation by considering two stages – awareness and assessment; 2) it acknowledges not only the traditional cognitive but also the affective dimension of reputation; 3) it approaches strategic communication of brand image as a notable management opportunity and 4) it occurs in a more generic approach.

Within this framework, corporate branding has emerged as a compelling strategy. Evidence, especially in the context of service, has alleged the aggregation of organizational identity, organizational culture, and organizational image. Existent literature has to this day essentially focused on organizational identity and organizational culture, and has asserted the challenges for public organization to strictly apply the techniques from their private counterparts. Scholars have advanced that brand image is frequently transfer to stakeholders through their experience with an organization. On the other hand, strategic communication presents to some extend the opportunity to provide selected information to stakeholders, and therefore influence their perception to create brand equity.

The scope of this dissertation encompasses the critical role of individual perceptions as a fundamental determinant of their judgments, attitudes, and behaviors. By its very nature, the reputation stakeholders have about a certain institution is an expression of these perceptions. This dissertation takes into full account the recent scholarship that focuses on the emerging role of reputation in the management of public organizations. The statements of the various superintendents interviewed attest to the essential function of reputation when assessing their respective organizations and their achievements. Hence, this dissertation in accordance with the current literature asserts that reputation must be considered as a distinct objective in the management process. Moreover, this dissertation advocates in favor of the dynamic management of reputation beyond solely achievements and public relations by also including a thoughtful plan of action as an organizational objective. With these elements in mind, this section addresses the direct effects of reputation management on the attitudes and behaviors of citizens and offers a practical perspective in the context of public schools.

1.1. The direct effect of reputation on citizen attitudes and behaviors

The results obtained from the experiment support reputation as a factor that prompts supportive attitudes and behaviors from citizens. In particular, the results obtained through the experiment show the capacity for reputation to favorably influence citizen attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, reputation can effectively enhance citizen engagement with an organization and support its activity and development. Similarly, reputation plays a distinctive role in the willingness of citizens to share favorable opinions and recommendations about the institution. When feeling connected or perceiving that the organization is performing well, citizens have a better chance of promoting and advocating in the organization's favor. This is concordant with the prevailing literature on the organizational perspective of reputation management

More importantly, existing literature undermines the multi-facet dimension (i.e. awareness vs. assessment) of reputation as well as its affective attribute (i.e., "this organization is not performing properly but I like it anyway"). Reputation, in the framework of this dissertation, is approached in the broad sense of the term, which includes two dimensions – effective and cognitive (Hall 1992; Schwaiger 2004). Hence, reputation results as the aggregate of both the subjective appraisal of the organization's attributes (i.e., the quality of the service, the performance of the organization) and the intrinsic evaluation of the organization (i.e., "this organization is not performing well, but I like it anyway"). As such, this study asserts that citizen attitudes and behaviors are not only framed by the perceived performance of the organization, but also and mostly by the specific connection that exists between it and its stakeholders. While the analysis of this connection goes beyond the scope of this study, this emotional factor reflects the capacity for citizens to connect and to value a particular organization. In other words, a public organization could be perceived as having a good reputation merely from the fact that it appears distinctive or unique. This would, to a certain degree, explain the "innate conception," from which some organizations benefit, like fire departments or defense departments. From the information gathered, it could be assumed that likeability and distinctiveness are at least two facets of an organization affiliated with this emotional factor. This is especially noteworthy when citizens have poor interaction with or knowledge about the organization.

In the current context of mistrust and skepticism concerning the ability of public organizations to address public issues and to produce public value, reputation emerges as an essential component public managers should take into account. In this regard, this dissertation reiterates the opportunity for public managers to actively develop and implement an articulate plan of action that includes, among others factors, communication, interaction with stakeholders, and even policy development and implementation. Undeniably, reputation is the result of coherence between the perceptions that citizens have of and their experience with an organization and its activities in the long run. Hence, to be effective, reputation management should not be limited to the organization identity, but instead the aggregation of its identity, image, and culture, in which brand image communication plays an integral role. In sum, one matter underscored by this dissertation departs from the widespread fix approach that views reputation as a passive exercise circumscribed to make public entities perform more like businesses and also be more open and transparent. Rather, reputation management should strengthen the interpretation of what the organization stands for and the capacity to recognize it by directly influencing the awareness and the associations stakeholders have of an organization.

1.2. Reputation management in practice

From a practical perspective, the findings of this dissertation tend to support current scholarship on organizational reputation in that, from the perspective of organizational stakeholders, awareness and knowledge enable an organization to strengthen its reputation. The information gathered from the school superintendents echoes the more significant role of reputation as part of the accountability process. Superintendents acknowledged reputation as a factor considered by their constituents in the assessment of public institutions, thereby stressing the need for public managers to take into consideration not only stakeholder expectations, but also the process through which they learn and construct their opinions. Hence, reputation should be viewed as an intrinsic component of an organization that positively intervenes in support of achieving both general and governance objectives. On the one hand, reputation is viewed as a means of connecting with citizens and gaining their support. This materializes not only in the form of parent involvement in the education of their children and in the activities offered by the district, but also in voting on the school budget, when and where applicable. On the other hand, reputation produces indirect benefits for the school district and its community. For instance, a district's reputation is reflected by the broader community's reputation and its attractiveness in general, which prompts citizens to move into the jurisdiction. From a different angle, school reputation influences whether and how students apply to colleges.

Acknowledging that reputation is an important element of organizational management and can influence stakeholder behavior, superintendents are aware of maintaining and promoting their district reputation and use a multitude of initiatives implemented at either the school or district level. From daily communication to the organization of events to the development of particular programs and curriculums, reputation management in public school districts is innovative and diversified. Hence, the evidence asserts the capacity for practitioners to capitalize on the diverse medium available to influence corporate image and reputation. This is especially true for the range of existing limitations that shape the capacity of public institutions to allocate funding for branding and communication. More specifically, the findings from the interviews point to an awareness of the role of communication in the formation of a district's reputation. However, the communication approach is often passive and encompasses the broader purpose of keeping citizens informed and connected. Hence, communication is a bit too devoted to advertising and promoting schools and their values with the aim of influencing favorable attitudes and behaviors.

In addition, the search for a deliberative and coherent plan of action to constitute, enhance, and maintain reputation implies that public managers must allocate adequate resources. Regrettably, the analysis of the interviews revealed the frequent lack of expertise, financial capacity, and human capacity dedicated to communication and reputation management, in particular. The current incapacity of public institutions to allocate the necessary resources stands out as the preeminent factor to explain the ineffectiveness of the actions they are carrying out. Conversely, successful districts that implement effective strategies rely predominately on outsourced professionals. In light of these factors, public organizations of any kind, in order to conduct reputation management, must assess their capacity, identify the opportunities available, and then define the most adequate strategy. In this regard, giving consideration to public branding appears to be an opportune alternative.

2. Stakeholder perception: the role of brand awareness and brand meaning

The core aim of this dissertation was to explore the extent to which the strategic communication of a local government agency brand influences citizen attitudes and behaviors toward that particular institution. In this research, I analyzed the opportunity for branding to achieve this aim via its influence on individual perceptual processing to increase awareness as well as promote desired brand meaning. More specifically, the results reached suggest that strategic communication of branding influences citizen perceptual processing through two mechanisms: 1) the ability of citizens to recognize and recall the organization and its attributes (brand awareness) and 2) the likelihood that the individuals focused on singular considerations in their assessment of the institution. In essence, the results of this study support a powerful and compelling means for public managers to manage their institution's reputation in the pursuit of governance objectives. The subsequent sections discuss the functions of both components of individual perceptual processing in detail.

2.1. Brand awareness

Considering the role of brand awareness in the ability for individuals to recall and recognize what the organization stands for, this element appears as the ultimate prerequisite for individuals to construe any sort of perception about a given organization. Based on the results of the analysis, brand awareness explains up to almost a quarter of the opinions on reputation expressed about a specific entity. These results advocate in favor of focusing reputation management on enhancing what an organization stands for and the capacity of individuals to recognize it. In details, public organizations' strategic communication before any further purpose should carry the necessary cues that enable their stakeholders to identify and recall the brand.

In details, public organization's strategic branding communication materialize a potential apparatus for public managers to strengthen organizational brand awareness. Albeit the findings did not reveal specific influence of the two occurrences for each of the two brand components – brand trajectory and graphic brand elements, the findings indicate that the absence of these two features do not enable an organization to add value to itself and its name; in other words, does not support the development of brand awareness. Although the results of the study highlight a somewhat low influence of branding strategy on brand awareness (6 percent of the variance), this study asserts the paramount role of strategic communication in providing decisive cues to enable stakeholders to identify and recall the organization and its brand. Furthermore, it should be noted once again that, as with reputation, only the recurrence of a coherent and consistent brand strategy developed over the long-term could alter the structure of brand image. With regard to the ephemeral nature of this study, the results obtained are promising and justify increased attention to strategic communication of brand image.

In addition, in view of the results, the tested illustrations of neither brand trajectory nor brand graphic elements seem to have any impact on brand awareness. On the one hand, these findings although tend to diverge from current literature that advances of the prominence of graphic/image elements within individual perceptual processing, they suggest that the presence of the organization's distinctive name and/or slogan is a sufficient cue for citizens to become aware of the organization. On the other hand, acknowledging the essence of the brand trajectory, it could be assumed that the objective of such brand component is not directly to enhance brand awareness, but rather to influence brand meaning.

Interestingly, the analysis of current practices in public school districts demonstrated the lack of expertise and a misunderstanding of both the techniques and the capability of branding strategies. Although superintendents definitely expressed consideration for the potential for such techniques, the majority of public school districts reported applying elementary marketing and branding techniques. The schemes implemented were aimed solely at maintaining interaction with the community through informal communication about the district and the conventional activities and events taking place. In only a few cases, the administration intentionally tried to advertise the institution as unique or exceptional. On the other hand, with regard to reputation management, the capacity for the organization to devote adequate financial, human, and proficiency resources was found to be the major determining factor for the elaboration and the effectiveness of the strategy deployed.

2.2. Brand Meaning

Another important component of brand equity relates to the opportunity for stakeholders to associate an explicit meaning with the organization brand. Within the framework of individual perceptual processing, the aims for the organization via its strategic communication is to enhance the likelihood for individuals to focus their attention on single attributes. In reference to individuals' utilitarian motivational function, branding strategy, by influencing the propensity of citizens to select specific factors in their assessment of a public entity, prompts not only the subjective assessment process of the organization but also the intrinsic evaluation of the organization. This study demonstrated that the character and importance of the attributes that citizens perceived as important had no impact on the reputation of the organization nor on citizen attitudes and behaviors towards the organization. However, it should be noted that such details were not employed in the intrinsic evaluation of the organization. Being that the scope of the study did not include the evaluation of the subjective assessment process, no decisive conclusions on this element can be made.

On the other hand, within the perspective of the utilitarian motivational function, branding strategies clearly have the potential for public organizations to focus and accentuate stakeholder attention on non-ordinary utilitarian feature of the brand that stakeholders either strongly anticipate or even may not have taken into account. In the case of experienced-stakeholders, this study asserts that the strategic communication of a desired brand image enhance the prospect to strengthen and frame stakeholder brand image on subsequent experience with the organization. In details, findings suggest that the attributes that were found by the control group as the most important, were of lesser importance to the experimental groups exposed to branding. More importantly, the trajectory promoted by the branding strategy drove citizens to favor that specific trajectory as the most important attribute to be considered. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate that branding strategy offers an opportunity for public organizations to standardize the expectations of diverse stakeholders group to focus their utilitarian needs on specific organizational aspects and attributes for which public entities excel and less attention on the ones for which they are less competent. In addition, the findings further suggest that branding strategies enable public organizations to enhance knowledge and to influence the expectations expressed by stakeholders.

In practice, the brand components advertised by public schools clearly tend to suit the expectations of the stakeholders in the community. This phenomenon reiteratively pinpoints the passive approach taken by public managers to manage individual perceptual processing, and thus reputation. The brand performance facet, which is the most frequently used, promotes those elements that administration interpret as being important to the community. The brand emotional facet seems to be the victim of the unawareness of the managers to participate in the perceptual processing undertaken by individuals. Matters related to academics, such as curriculum, graduation rate, test scores, and particular academic programs, are at the forefront of the communication and the branding strategy deployed by public schools.

In sum, strategic communications of branding provide public institutions with a means of endorsing and upholding not only the organization itself but also the values and qualities they believe will benefit their community in pursuit of their mission and duties. Hence, strategic communication about branding refers to a deliberate strategy employed by public institutions to influence stakeholder perceptual processing, not only in terms of appearing distinct, but also by prompting stakeholder attention to singular considerations and promoting and upholding public qualities and values to the benefit of the community.

3. Limitations of the study

There are three limitations of this study: 1) the sample, 2) limited perspective on public branding, and 3) the exploratory nature of the study.

Given the exploratory qualitative character of the study, the sample was mostly limited to the superintendents of public school districts located in a certain geographic region, the tri-state area (i.e., New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut). Hence, this focus on a particular region may limit the capacity to generalize the findings to public school districts in other regions. The methodology employed did not enable analysis at the school level, as it considered the school district as one entity. As such, this study did not take into consideration the techniques and strategies that each specific school has developed or could develop. Likewise, narrowing the population that participated in the interview process to the superintendents of the districts limited the capacity of the study to include the perspectives of other parties within the organization on the matter of communication and marketing strategies. This, as well as the inability to include a sufficient number of marketing professionals in the interview process, remain especially important. With respect to the role of external parties in the development and implementation of communication and marketing strategies for public school districts, the low number of marketing professionals that participated in the study limited the capacity to capture more precise details on current practices. Finally, this study only concentrated on a unique category of organizations, namely public schools. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to other types of public institutions.

The second limitation of this study relates to the very essence of branding. First, as mentioned before, many of the components included in the theoretical model used for this study are stable and sustainable over time and change only in the long run. On the other hand, branding as conceptualized in this study, covers only the short-term, one-time materialization of what an exhaustive branding strategy may actually encompass. Therefore, the conclusions made in this study do not reflect the overall contribution of branding strategy to the public sector. Similarly, a full-scale branding strategy encompasses several trajectories; however, this study only focused on the medium of communication as a means of conveying and revealing an organizational brand.

Additionally, the choice to use an experimental design for the quantitative phase of this dissertation limited the capacity to test a full and inclusive range of components that comprise an organization’s brand. The effectiveness of this study namely relied on the combination of two brand components (i.e., brand trajectory and graphic design), which were tested. Considering Keller's nomenclature of nine brand components, it should be said that this study partially touched upon the capacity of branding in public organizations. Similarly, the use of an imaginary public high school hindered the ability for this research to include some contextual elements. For example, this study did not address any emotional brand components, which for the most part relate to the environment in which an organization evolves. Finally, the lack of expertise of the researcher in marketing may have limited the capacity to develop a thoroughly prospectus.

The third and last limitation pertains to the exploratory nature of this study. Concepts such as branding, communication, and reputation essentially draw from and are identified with the private business sector. Albeit the theoretical model developed for this study relied on previous scholarship, the concepts of branding, communication, and reputation were adapted based on the information collected throughout the qualitative phase, and it should be said that that model remains introductory and may not encompass all the mechanisms in place. Finally, this study exclusively focused on the effects of branding strategy on a specific stakeholder group, namely citizens. Thus, the methodology used in this study may not apply to other categories of stakeholders in the same way, nor may not lead to the same conclusions.

4. Future perspectives

Future study could expand this exploratory work in several ways. First, in accordance with the aim of analyzing the effects of branding strategy in the educational system, future studies may broaden the analysis to different stakeholders linked to public schools, such as students, staff members, and even elected officials. Similarly, future studies may include contextual components of the organization in order to incorporate the emotional component of branding. In addition, future studies should take on the long-term perspective of public branding strategy to capture the effects of public branding in a more suitable manner. Finally, in the context of public schools, scholars should assess the role of other brand components both separately and taken together.

With respect to corporate branding, *per se*, future studies may apply the model to different types of organizations in the public sector, categorized by the particular issue or area addressed by the organization and/or the level of government. Future studies may also be interested in using the model for studies of the nonprofit sector. In addition, future scholarship may focus attention on additional attitudes and behaviors, which public institutions would pursue as governance objectives. Among others, trust and satisfaction may be of interest.

With regards to the model, future studies should attempt to expand the model to assess the specific mechanisms through which public branding produce the effects observed. In reference to individual motivational function, future work may aim attention to analyze the influence of other constituting function available in the management of brand image. As a complement, specific attention should be given to the role of citizen expectations in the process.

5. Contributions

This research adds to current scholarship many interesting and insightful contributions, of which three stand out: 1) the attention to individual perceptual processing onto the two-stages of reputation management, 2) the prominence of strategic communication in the occurrence of corporate branding in the public sector, and 3) the introduction of generic model to study brand image management in the public sector.

First, this research helps to advance the fundamental need in the public sector to take into account the management of reputation. This study advocates in support the prevailing scholarship on reputation management in its organizational dimension. Hence, this study strengthens sustenance to the fit approach of reputation management, which advocates in favor of analyzing the opportunities and/or strategies for public organizations to enhance what they stand for and the capacity for stakeholders to recognize it, to the detriment of the fix approach (Luoma-aho 2007). In this vein, this study further explores the construe of reputation in the mind of public organizations' stakeholders by specifically unveiling the role of individuals perceptual processing. More specifically, conceptualizing the reputation as a two-stages construct (awareness and assessment), this study points out the functions of not only the cognitive, but also the affective component of association formation and perceptions. Therefore, this study advocates advancing the conceptualization of reputation not as the simple subjective appraisal of public institutions' attributes, but as its aggregation with the intrinsic evaluation of the organization.

Second, within the organizational perspective of reputation management, this study appends to the emerging literature on corporate branding and marketing in the public sector. Although in reference to Hatch and Schultz (2003) model, existing work has essentially concentrate attention on two components of corporate branding, namely brand identity/vision and culture, this study focuses on the particular occurrence of brand image, and more specifically in the context of strategic communications. More specifically, this study supports previous evidence on the measured application of strategic communication to enhance corporate brand awareness and meaning. Nonetheless, albeit the individuality of the brand components does not have the quality to affect the opportunity for public organizations to prompt added value to their brand, the essence of those components are a requisite to the materialization of any brand equity associated with the organization. In addition, this study asserts the critical utilitarian function of strategic communication, which by influencing the propensity of stakeholders to select specific factors in their assessment of a public entity, prompts not only the subjective assessment process of the organization but also the intrinsic evaluation of the organization. Hence, in the case of experienced-stakeholders, this study contends the fundamental role of strategic communication in the ultimate reputation formation. Finally, this study reinforces the fundamental function of identification in the development of brand equity for public organizations.

Furthermore, at the difference of the current literature on reputation management, which has approached the analysis of the concept mainly within a case-based perceptive, this study offers an preliminary generic model to assess the mechanisms influencing the reputation stakeholders hold about a singular public entity.

Ultimately, this study provides insightful pragmatic contributions to public managers in the governance of public entities. This study advances the need for public managers to consider reputation management as a means of enhancing the interpretation of what their organization stands for and the capacity to recognize it. With this aim in mind, public managers should formulate a dynamic action plan to directly influence the associations and the imagery constructs stakeholders have about their institution. Within this framework, coporate branding strategy appears as a feasible and compelling approach to promote positive reputation.

Also, this research stresses the ways that public managers may benefit from the development and the implementation of public branding strategy. Through its direct utilitarian function on individuals' perceptual processing, branding strategies are capable of enhancing the efforts of public organizations to develop and sustain a positive reputation and uphold favorable attitudes and behaviors of citizens towards the institution.

Finally, this study provides a pragmatic overview of the arrangements used to employ public branding strategies in real environments. This study captures public managers' conceptions about marketing and branding techniques as well as describes current practices. The study also provides insightful material to explain present circumstances faced by local organizations and in their administration.

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APPENDIX A – IRB forms

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
ASB III, 3 Rutgers Plaza, Cook Campus
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

July 22, 2014

P.I. Name: Deat
Protocol #: 14-793M

Felix Deat
School of Public Affairs and Administration
111 Washington Street
Newark Campus

Dear Felix Deat:

√
(Initial / Amendment / Continuation / Continuation w/ Amendment)

Protocol Title: "Brand Performance and Imagery Strategy in the Context of a Local Public Agency"

This is to advise you that the above-referenced study has been presented to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, and the following action was taken subject to the conditions and explanations provided below:

Approval Date:	7/17/2014	**Expiration Date:**	7/16/2015
Expedited Category(s):	6,7	**Approved # of Subject(s):**	125

This approval is based on the assumption that the materials you submitted to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) contain a complete and accurate description of the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research. The following conditions apply:

- **This Approval-**The research will be conducted according to the most recent version of the protocol that was submitted. **This approval is valid ONLY for the dates listed above;**
- **Reporting-**ORSP must be immediately informed of any injuries to subjects that occur and/or problems that arise, in the course of your research;
- **Modifications-**Any proposed changes MUST be submitted to the IRB as an amendment for review and approval prior to implementation;
- **Consent Form(s)-**Each person who signs a consent document will be given a copy of that document, if you are using such documents in your research. The Principal Investigator must retain all signed documents for at least three years after the conclusion of the research;
- **Continuing Review-**You should receive a courtesy e-mail renewal notice for a Request for Continuing Review before the expiration of this project's approval. However, it is <u>your responsibility</u> to ensure that an application for continuing review has been submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to the expiration date to extend the approval period;

Additional Notes: **Expedited Approval per 45 CFR 46.110;**

Failure to comply with these conditions will result in withdrawal of this approval.
Please note that the IRB has the authority to observe, or have a third party observe, the consent process or the research itself. The Federal-wide Assurance (FWA) number for the Rutgers University IRB is FWA00003913; this number may be requested on funding applications or by collaborators.

Respectfully yours,

Michelle Watkins

Acting For--
Dr. Beverly Tepper, Ph.D.
Professor
Chair, Rutgers University Institutional Review Board

cc: Suzanne Piotrowski

(MW:bk)

APPENDIX B – Invitation email to participate to the interviews

Dear <Superintendent Name>

I am a Ph.D. candidate, instructor, and researcher at the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University – Newark.

Currently, my research focus is on the interdependence that exists between public agencies and their stakeholders, with a particular attention to the degree to which active communication from public entities towards their stakeholders promotes good image and reputation.

To that end, I would like to invite your school district to participate in this study.

I am recruiting public managers working in local public school district to participate in interviews. Participation, which is anonymous, includes answering some questions regarding your involvement in your district's communication process and its characteristics. This interview is designed to be approximately a half hour in length.

The results of this study will be included in my dissertation (May 2015). The identity of all participating school districts and individuals as well as all transcripts from the interviews will remain anonymous. I have obtained the University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB #14-793) approval for this research and will follow all University research protocols.

My research may be of use to you in the area of managing communication with your stakeholders and enhancing the reputation of the districts and the schools that comprise it. I would be happy to offer an additional follow-up report and consultation with you and/or your board committee, as my expression of thanks to your district for participating in this study.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please contact me at fdeat@rutgers.edu or 973-353-5052. I will follow in a week to see if you have any question.

Sincerely yours,

Felix Deat

APPENDIX C – Consent forms

Oral Assent Form

I am a doctoral student in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University, and I am conducting interviews for a study that seeks to capture the effects of communication by local public agency on citizens' attitudes and behaviors.

During this interview, you will be asked to answer some questions as to your involvement in local public agency's communication process. This interview was designed to be approximately a half hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code number that will be used on each interview transcript. Your name will appear only on a list of subjects, and will not be linked to the code number that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept for 3 years.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You have been told that the benefits of taking part of this study include helping to strengthen the use of communication strategy between government and citizens. However, you may receive no direct benefit from taking part in this study. You are aware that your participation in this interview is voluntary. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.

You understand if you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful to you or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the tape and record over such information or ask that certain text be removed from the transcripts. The interviewer will then ask you if you would like to continue the interview.

The recording(s) will be used solely for the purpose of analysis by the researcher. The recording(s) will include any such identifiers as voluntary provided by the participant, including name, position title, organization affiliation, and responses to the questions in the form of audio. The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact myself at Felix Deat, School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers University, 111 Washington St., Newark, NJ 07102; P: 973-353-5052 or at fdeat@rutgers.edu or you can contact my advisor at Professor Piotrowski, School of Public Affairs and Administration, Rutgers University, 111 Washington St., Newark, NJ 07102; P: 973-353-5199 or at spiotrow@andromeda.rutgers.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview. Do you have any questions? Then by participating in this study, do you agree to be a study subject? …

Audiotape Addendum Form

You have already agreed to participate in this research conducted by Felix Deat, Ph.D. candidate at the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio tape you as part of this interview. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in this study.

The recording(s) will be used solely for the purpose of analysis by the researcher. The recording(s) will include any such identifiers as voluntary provided by the participant, including name, position title, organization affiliation, and responses to the questions in the form of audio. The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet with no link to subjects' identity and will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

By participating in this study, you agree to be a study subject and you grant the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

APPENDIX D – List of school district participating in the interviews

1) Berlin Central School District
2) Caldwell – West Caldwell School District
3) Herricks Union Free School District
4) Hopewell Area School District
5) Middletown Public Schools
6) North Bergen School District
7) New York City – District 15
8) Pinelands Regional School District
9) Regional School District 12
10) York Central School

APPENDIX E – List of school district participating in the website evaluations

1) Allegany-Limestone Central School - http://www.alcsny.org/alli
2) Babylon School District - http://www.babylon.k12.ny.us
3) Berlin Township Schools - http://www.btwpschools.org
4) Delaware Township School District – http://www.dtsk8.org/www/dtsk8/site/hosting/pd/index.html
5) Delsea Regional School District - http://delsearegional.us
6) Gouverneur Central School District – http://www.gouverneurcentralschool.org/academics/guidance/
7) Hauppage School District – http://www.hauppauge.k12.ny.us/site/default.aspx?PageID=1
8) Herricks Union Free School District - http://www.herricks.org
9) LaFargeville Central School - http://www.lafargevillecsd.org
10) Lawrence Township Public Schools - http://ltps.org
11) Maryvale School District - http://www.maryvaleufsd.org
12) Middleburgh Central School District - http://middleburghcsd.org
13) Middletown Public Schools - http://www.middletownschools.org
14) Mountain Lakes School District – http://www.mlschools.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=1
15) New Brunswick Public School - http://www.nbpschools.net
16) North Bergen School District - http://www.northbergen.k12.nj.us/Page/1
17) North Warren Regional School District - http://www.northwarren.org
18) Oysterponds Union Free School District - http://www.oysterponds.org/home
19) Pelham Public Schools – http://www.pelhamschools.org/pd/pelhamschools/index.html
20) Pinelands Regional School - http://www.prsdnj.org/index.html
21) Piscataway Township Schools - http://piscatawayschools.org/home
22) Poland Central School - http://www.polandcs.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=1
23) Port Byron Central School District - http://www.pbcschools.org
24) Roxbury Public Schools - http://www.roxbury.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=1
25) Schalmont Central School District - http://www.schalmont.org/index.cfm
26) Spotswood Public Schools - http://www.spotswood.k12.nj.us
27) Stamford School District - http://www.stamfordpublicschools.org
28) Summit Public Schools - http://www.summit.k12.nj.us
29) West Cape May School District – http://wcm.capemayschools.com/pages/West_Cape_May
30) York Central School - http://www.yorkcsd.org

APPENDIX F – Website Evaluation Sheet

#	Attribute	Item	Measures	Description
1	Brand Performance	Primary characteristics	Does the organization promote a unique value proposition in coherence with its core values and mission?	
2	Brand Performance	Secondary characteristics	Does the organization promote value propositions in coherence with its core values and mission?	Athletics; Special Education;
3	Brand Performance	Performance Reliability	Does the organization promote consistency of performance over time and from usage?	State Report Cards
4	Brand Performance	Service Effectiveness	Does the organization promote how the services provided satisfy citizens' functional needs and expectations?	Motto (vision, mission)
5	Brand Performance	Service Efficiency	Does the organization promote to the methods used to deliver the service?	Budget information;
6	Brand Performance	Service Empathy	Does the organization reinforce that the organization acts in the interests of citizens?	
7	Brand Performance	Style and design	Dose the organization promote a unique aesthetic style - e.g. name, shape, logo, materials, color?	
8	Brand Imagery	User Profiles	Does the organization promote a connection with a particular group of users?	
9	Brand Imagery	Usage Situations	Does the organization refer to specific conditions or situations for usage?	
10	Brand Imagery	Personality & Values	Does the organization promote unique personality traits and/or values?	Beliefs,
11	Brand Imagery	History, Heritage, and Experiences	Does the organization promote past behaviors and experiences or noteworthy events in the history of the organization?	History; Community connection

APPENDIX G – Interviews questionnaire

Interviews of School Administrators

1) What is your role in the organization?
2) How long have you been in this position?
3) How does your school communicate with its community (e.g. teachers, parents, elected officials) about the school?
4) What is the main message your school is communicating within the community?
5) Discuss the effectiveness of your school's communication with citizens?
    a. What works well?
    b. What could be improved?
6) How do you rate the importance of communicating with the community for the management of K-12 schools in general on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being not important and 5 being very important?
7) To what extend do you consider reputation as a managerial objective for your school district?
8) What is, if any, the role of marketing strategies within your communication process?
9) Does branding play any role on these marketing strategies? If so, how?
10) If branding plays a role, what is the primary characteristic your school promotes about its brand to the community?
    a. You mentioned ____. Why is this important?
    b. What does promoting ____ do for the school?
11) Are there any other characteristics your school is communicating within the community?
    a. You mentioned ____. Why is this important?
    b. What does promoting ____ do for the school?
12) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interviews of Marketing Consultants

1) What types of public organizations have you been involved with branding?
2) What types of public organizations are the most advanced in branding themselves?
3) How would you describe the practice of branding by K-12 schools?
4) What are some of the major motivations behind branding for K-12 schools?
5) How do you characterize a successful branding for K-12 schools?
6) What are some of the key elements that condition the success of branding for schools? Its failure?
7) What are some of the most common characteristics of their brand, K-12 schools promote to citizens
    a. You mentioned ____. Why is this important?
    b. What does promoting ____ do for the school?

APPENDIX H – Invitation email to participate to the survey

Dear panel member,

You're invited to participate in a new survey about K-12 schools. It should take only about 10 minutes of your time, and you will get a chance to win an Amazon.com gift certificate.

Go here to begin the survey

ABOUT THIS SURVEY: This survey is part of a Rutgers University doctoral dissertation about how people perceive and evaluate public K-12 schools. Summary results will appear in the final dissertation and may also be published in a public affairs and administration journal.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE? The estimated time to complete this survey is 10 minutes.

ABOUT THE INCENTIVES: One Amazon gift certificate worth $100 and ten Amazon gift certificates worth $20 will be awarded to randomly selected participants after the survey closes.

ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND PRIVACY: Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Your survey responses are confidential and will be reported only in the aggregate. For more information, please visit http://civicpanel.org/privacy

QUESTIONS? If you have questions at any time about this survey or your participation in CivicPanel, please send us an email at civicpan@rutgers.edu

Thank you for your participation!

The CivicPanel Team
Rutgers University
School of Public Affairs and Administration
CivicPanel.org

APPENDIX I – Experiment questionnaire

Pre-treatment questions

How interested are you in politics and local affairs? *[Not interested at all; Only slightly interested; somewhat interested; Very interested]*

How interested are you in K-12 schools? *[Not interested at all; Only slightly interested; somewhat interested; Very interested]*

How much knowledge would you say you have about K-12 schools? *[None; A little; Some; A lot]*

Have you ever worked for a K-12 school? *[Yes; No]*

Do you have any children in a K-12 school? *[Yes; No]*

Overall, how satisfied are you with the services provided by government? *[Very dissatisfied; Dissatisfied; Neutral; Satisfied; Very satisfied]*

These questions concern your confidence in current government authorities. How much confidence do you have in… *[None at all; Very little; Some; Quite a lot; A great deal]*

a) Local government
b) State government
c) Federal government

Post-treatment questions

Below are some attributes of schools that often matter to people. Use your cursor to re-order these items <u>as you see things</u>, from 1=most important to 6=least important

a) Curriculum
b) Child personal development
c) Graduation rate
d) Diversity of student body
e) Test scores
f) Community involvement

Taking into consideration the information you have read, would you say the Academy high school concentrates mostly on academic success, or mostly on character development? Please indicate where you think the focus of the high school lies. *[Mostly Character Development; Both Equally; Mostly Academic Success]*

Based on what you have read, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Academy high school. The Academy high school is… *[Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree not Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree]*

a) a place that I could connect with
b) an attractive school
c) a top performing high school
d) an asset to the community

And to what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements: *[Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree not Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree]*

a) I would say good things about the Academy high school
b) I would recommend the Academy high school to my friends and relatives

From reading about the Academy high school, how likely would you be to … *[Very Unlikely; Unlikely; Neither Unlikely nor Likely; Likely; Very Likely]*

a) volunteer at the school
b) attend a school meeting
c) serve on the school's governing board

Finally, to what extent do you agree or disagree with these last statements about the Academy high school: *[Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Neither Agree not Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree]*

a) I have difficulty picturing the Academy high school
b) I can readily recall characteristics of the Academy high school
c) I can picture the logo of the Academy high school
d) I could distinguish the Academy high school from other school

Demographics question

Are you …*[Male; Female]*

What is your age? *[Under 20; 20-24; 25-34; 35-44;45-54; 55-59; 60-64;65-74; 75-84; 85 and over]*

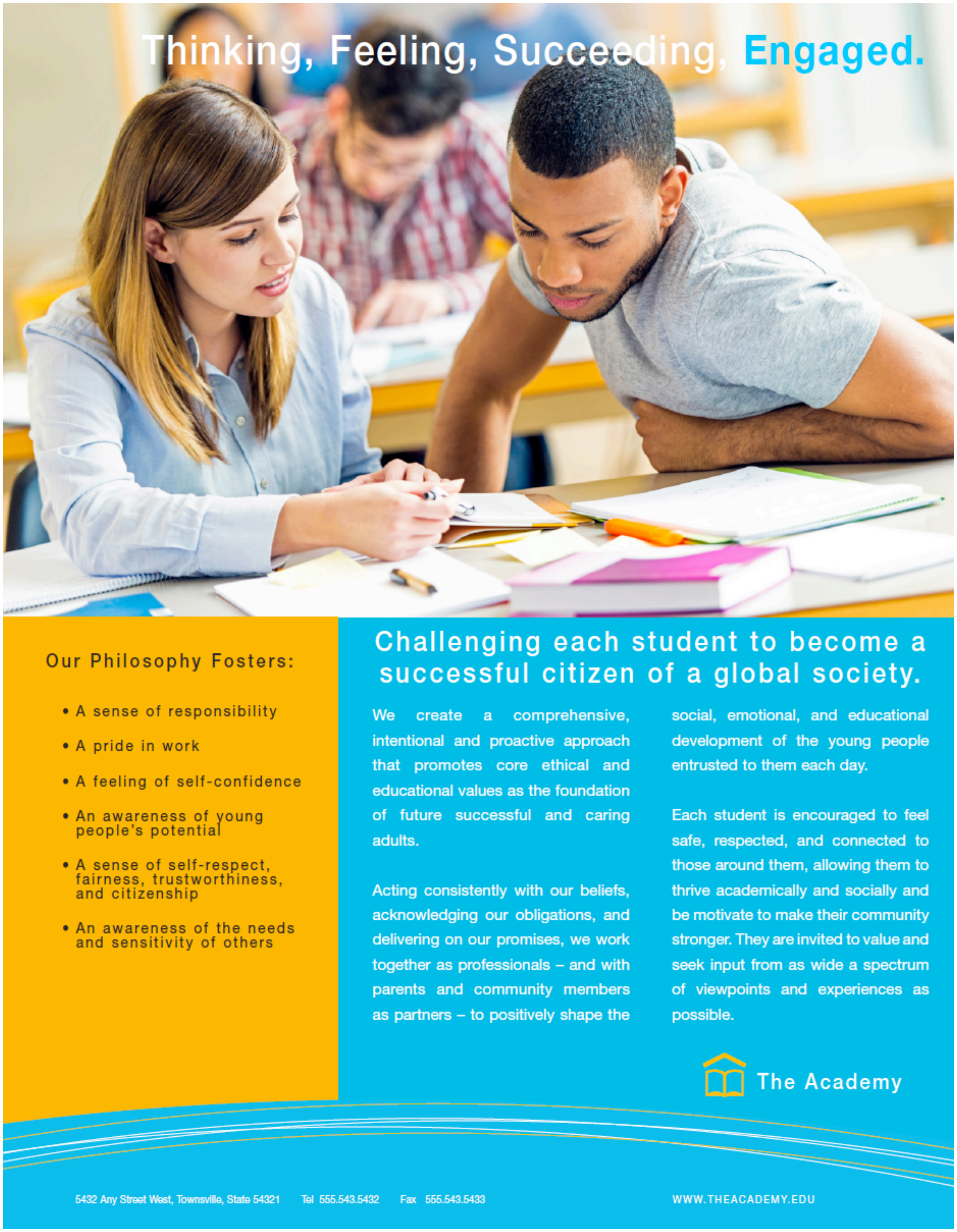
What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received? *[Less than 9th grade; 9th to 1éth grade, no diploma; High school graduate* *(includes equivalency); Some college, nor degree; Associate degree; Bachelor's degree; Graduate or professional degree; Other, please specify]*

Do you consider yourself to be primarily? *[White; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino (of any race); Asian or Pacific Islander; Other, please specify]*

Would you describe your political views as generally…*[Very conservative; Moderately conservative; Middle-of-the-road; Moderately liberal; Very liberal]*

Last year, what was your total household income from all sources, before taxes? *[Less than $10,000; $10,000 to under $25,000; $25,000 to under $50,000; $50,000 to under $75,000; $75,000 to under $100,000; $100,000 to under $150,000; More than $150,000; Prefer not to answer]*

APPENDIX J – Experiment treatments documents



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