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The purpose of this study was to address how being a public organization affected the public's perceptions of the Florida Forest Service's brand. Focus groups were conducted at different sites across the state with rural and urban residents. The major findings were that the public expected the brand of a public organization to be financially responsible (e.g., justify the purpose of the organization, avoid duplication between public organizations, communicating with the public without wasting money, and generating revenue), provide something valuable to individuals or the public at large (e.g., protecting forests, control through regulations, and aid, such as providing information), and to operate with integrity (e.g., being financially responsibly, communicating clearly with the public, and the organization being fair in balancing public and private interests). This research addresses a gap in research regarding the branding of public organizations. Because the study is limited by being a qualitative study addressing one organization in one state, future research should be conducted to address the transferability of the findings to other settings. This research furthers efforts to foster relationships between public organizations and members of the public by providing guidance for the improvement of the brands of public organizations. In the face of increased scrutiny of and competition between public organizations, the findings of this study can be used to help improve the public's perceptions of public organizations.

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Research

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## Abstract

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## Introduction

Forests cover 751.2 million acres in the U.S., with $200 billion produced each year from domestic forestry products (EPA, 2013). Despite the size and economic value of forests, the forestry industry is often plagued by lack of awareness or misunderstanding among the public. While facts are communicated about forestry, individual personal experiences, observations, beliefs, and values have shown to have a greater affect on the public's understanding of the industry (Bliss, 2000). The future of forestry depends on the industry's ability to communicate the social, environmental, and economic benefits of forestry practices (Bliss, 2000). In many cases, state departments of forestry are ideally positioned to communicate these benefits to the public. However, these departments do not have adequate support to communicate effectively.

Public organizations, such as state departments of forestry, depend on public support for viability (Moore, 1995). As a result, public organizations must represent themselves effectively to ensure their

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long-term success. Public organizations have faced increased competition among themselves and from private organizations in recent decades, which has led to the increased use of private-sector techniques to communicate, but the application of private-sector strategies in public organizations is not always well understood, leading to research of private-sector strategies for public organizations (Butler & Collins, 2005; Laing, 2003; Moore, 1995; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2010; Whelan, Davies, Walsh, & Bourke, 2010). One area of marketing that has been underexplored for public organizations is branding (Waeraas, 2008).

Because of its success in the private sector, branding also has the ability to be successful when applied to public organizations (Butler & Collins, 1995; Laing, 2003; Walsh, 1994). However, the theoretical basis for branding and the creation of brand salience and brand differentiation in public organizations has yet to be explored. A general absence exists for branding literature for public organizations like state departments of forestry (Wæraas, 2008). To identify how branding functions within a public organization, this study addressed how the members of the public perceived the brand of a public organization, specifically a state forest service. By identifying the brand perceptions of this public organization, communicators can identify if branding is a viable option to communicate the benefits of forestry to the public.

## Literature Review

### Branding

According to Kornberger (2010), "Branding is at once one of the most artificial and yet most real forces in our society" (p. 6). Though intangible, brands are social constructs (Loken, Ahluwalia, & Houston, 2010) that have value for organizations and the public. The familiarity of the brand serves to reduce the public's perceptions of risk and uncertainty for a product and/or service (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). While members of the organization largely dictate its actions (i.e., internal components of the brand), the public's interactions with the organization and its products and services determine the organization's external brand.

Brand differentiation is the extent a brand separates itself from other brands and is an area of branding that receives significant attention from researchers (Ehrenberg, Barnard, & Scriven, 1997). Brand differentiation explains the mental location of the brand relative to its competitors (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). An example could be differences in products' functions (e.g., Jawbone fitness trackers simply monitor activity, while Garmin fitness trackers also monitor distances and heart rate). While the functions of an organization's brand can be copied easily by competitors, the brand's emotional functions are not so easily copied (de Chernatony, 2001). For example, many computer companies sell products that function similarly, but Apple differentiates itself because it has a better brand image than other computer companies, making Apple a more successful brand (Harris Interactive, 2013). An organization can create differentiation through values, culture, people, programs, and assets (Aaker, 1996).

Salience is the extent a brand is accessible in the mind of the public (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009), which occurs internally through presence in the public's memory or externally through presence in the public's surroundings. According to Romaniuk and Sharp (2004), the increased salience also "provides a sense of assurance that the brand will be appropriate for the situation" (p. 335), which also reduces uncertainty for the public (de Chernatony, 2001; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Tybout & Calkins, 2005). Differentiation can increase salience (Carpenter, Glazer, & Nakamoto, 1994). Franzen and Moriarty (2009) explain this concept, saying "brands become salient because they somehow distinguish themselves from their surroundings. They are noticed

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because they are simply different" (p. 173). The colorful exteriors of Apple computers in the late 1990s when competitors typically had grey computers would be an example of using differentiation to increase salience.

### Public Organizations and Branding

Public organizations increasingly are using private-sector business and communications strategies, but the application of such strategies, including branding, for public organizations is not well understood (Butler & Collins, 2005; Laing, 2003; Moore, 1995; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2008; Whelan et al., 2010). Whelan et al. stated, "while branding has become more prominent in the public sector, its role with stakeholders is under explored" (p. 1165). One area of stakeholder exploration is the relationship between public organizations and the public, which is the external component of brands (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). By improving its brand, such as increasing satisfaction and improving recognition, a public organization can improve its relationship with its stakeholder groups (Whelan et al., 2010).

A concept related to building relationships with stakeholders is Excellence Theory (Grunig, 1989). A key component of the theory is two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and their stakeholders to ensure an equal relationship occurs (Grunig, 2006). Solid relationships with stakeholders help organizations weather crises (Grunig et al., 2002). The theory also supports including communications personnel in the organization's leadership (Grunig, 2006; Grunig et al., 2002).

The application of private-sector strategies in public organizations is complicated because they are typically more complex than private organizations. First, public organizations need approval from the general public, not just those the organizations directly served (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). While having a specific audience is traditionally considered important for communications (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994), it may not be necessary in today's globalized and digitally connected society (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010). Second, public organizations have multiple roles and identities that need to be represented to maintain credibility (Hoggett, 2006; Waeraas, 2008). Third, public organizations' purposes differ from private organizations, such as typically providing services instead of products as well as being authoritative entities (Laing, 2003; Walsh, 1994; Waeraas, 2008).

## Purpose

To better understand how branding functions in a public organization, the purpose of this study was to address the following research question: How does being a public organization affect brand perceptions for a state forestry agency? The research was prompted by a name and logo change of the Florida Forest Service (FFS), who also funded this research. More than 1 million acres of state forests are managed by FFS (FDACS, n.d.).

## Methods

To address the study's purpose, a qualitative approach was used. Qualitative methods seek to provide explanations grounded in real-life situations, as opposed to broad explanations sought in quantitative research (Flick, 2006). Focus groups were the method used to explore FFS's brand. Templeton (1994) defined focus groups as "small, temporary communit[ies], formed for the purpose of the collaborative enterprise of discovery" (p. 4). Through guided group discussion, participants compare and contrast each other's viewpoints (Morgan, 1998b). By guiding the discussion, focus group moderators are able to ensure the group's discussion remains relevant to the research questions (Morgan, 1998b).

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FFS is accountable to all state residents, like all public organizations (Moore, 1995). Therefore, focus groups were conducted in four geographically distributed cities. Four of the focus groups consisted of urban participants. Two were in Orlando, one was in Ft. Myers, and one was in Tallahassee. The two rural focus groups were conducted in Gainesville and Tallahassee with participants from surrounding counties. There were 54 participants in the study, with 7 to 10 participating in each group. Krueger (1998a) recommended focus groups range from six to 12 participants. An external marketing firm recruited participants using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), and participants received a $50 incentive for participation.

The following recommendations from Krueger (1998b) were used to develop the moderator's guide: Questions were asked in a conversational tone; questions were "clear, brief, and reasonable" (p. 4); individuals familiar with focus group methodology and FFS provided feedback about questions to help ensure validity (Ary et al., 2010; Morgan, 1998a); questions were developed over two months to allow for sufficient development; questions were open-ended; general questions were asked before specific questions; and positive questions were asked before negative questions. The moderator's guide addressed the current brand of FFS through a range of topics including forests, forest management, government organizations, and FFS's brand materials. Focus groups were less than two hours each (Krueger, 1998b). The same trained moderator was used for each focus group for consistency (Krueger & Casey, 2009), and an assistant moderator and a note taker also were present.

Analysis was a multistep process. The first three steps occurred at the focus groups (Krueger, 1998a): The moderator team listened to participants to ensure the intent of participants' responses were understood; the moderator summarized each discussion and allowed participants to provide clarifications and extra thoughts; and the focus group team debriefed at the end of the sessions to share their interpretations. The next step was the creation of themes for responses (Creswell, 2007), which was accomplished through Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method using WEFT-QDA, a qualitative data analysis program. Emergent coding was used to limit researcher bias. Emergent coding uses the data as the source for codes, as opposed to having predetermined themes (Creswell, 2007). Focus groups also give participants the ability to determine how they share information, which gives further credence to using emergent coding instead of researcher-determined themes (Krueger, 1998a).

Measures were taken to help ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010). One of the measures for ensuring credibility was through triangulation; data source triangulation occurred by collecting data from different locations and individuals, and theoretical triangulation occurred by using information from both branding and non-branding literature to understand the findings of the study (Thurmond, 2001).

Transferability is the extent the findings can be applied to other settings (Ary et al., 2010). The focus groups were audio and video recorded for transcription purposes, which aids transferability. Transcript-based analysis is considered the most rigorous means of focus groups analysis (Krueger, 1998a). Transcript-based analysis helps maintain a richness in the data (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) and helps ensure accuracy when making interpretations and justifying findings (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006). As much description as is feasible is provided to help the readers make decisions about the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007). Data source triangulation also aids transferability (Thurmond, 2001).

Dependability refers to the extent the results would be similar if the study was repeated, similar to reliability in quantitative research, though the notion of using the same methods to reach the same results does not apply to qualitative research (Ary et al., 2010; Flick, 2006). Dependability relies on

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explaining the process from start to finish (Flick, 2006). The audit trail aids this by ensuring an external party can review the study and details of how the results were found (Ary et al., 2010). Data source triangulation also aids dependability (Ary et al., 2010).

Confirmability refers to the general neutrality of the study (Ary et al., 2010). The ability for external review via the audit trail aids confirmability by allowing the external reviewer "to arrive or not arrive at the same conclusions given the same data and context" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 504; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Corroboration of the findings was possible through the peer debriefing and member checking measures used in the study (Ary et al., 2010).

## Results

There were three major themes of responses impacting the participants' perceptions of FFS's brand: *financial responsibility, providing something valuable, and the integrity of the organization and its employees*.

### Financial Responsibility

This theme specifically dealt with why the organization should receive public funding and how funding should be used. The subthemes were *justify the purpose of the organization*, *duplication of efforts*, *external communications*, and *revenue generation*.

For the first subtheme, participants wanted the organization to *justify the purpose of the organization* because they rely on public funds. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "Make it clear as to what they are up to and why money should keep going there because as they talk about budget cuts and whatnot, I get angrier and angrier about the cuts in education." Part of this justification was providing measurable results. The same participant said:

> If people don't understand the importance of the agency, actually they kind of get lost in the shuffle. That becomes even more important when the [people in the government] are looking at where to cut the budgets and whoever has communicated the best and most effectively what they do, why they are important, and shown the measurable results of their work over a succinct period of time; those are the agencies that stay and continue to get money while the others bite the dust and start to look for careers elsewhere.

The second subtheme was participants not wanting to perceive a *duplication of efforts* between different government organizations. Participants were not always able to distinguish clearly between the differences among public organizations. A participant from the second Orlando focus group said, "In order to have all of those things existing, they have to have clearly defined, non-overlapping parameters." This perception that organizations were duplicating each other's efforts stemmed, in part, from participants not understanding the hierarchy and management of public organizations at the state and national levels. A suggestion related to this hierarchy was offered by one of the participants in the urban Tallahassee focus group, who said:

> It seems like you could have one particular regulatory agency. They could probably include all of the state ones there, and the federal ones with another one, and I think probably you could lump some of these as just subdivisions of one big one.

The third subtheme was *external communications* of the organization. Participants' views of how

FFS should communicate were affected by their perceptions of it being a public organization. Many of the participants wanted the organization to communicate its purpose. A Ft. Myers participant said, "Let the community or public know exactly what your services are because obviously we didn't know all that they did for us." On the other hand, some participants did not want a public organization spending money on communicating its purpose, as opposed to spending money accomplishing its purpose. A participant in the first Orlando focus group said: "Isn't their money better spent managing forests than educating us about what they do? I mean, we see the results of what they do, so we don't have to know everything." Some participants favored using websites to lower communication costs. The premise behind this viewpoint for many participants was if someone wanted information about the organization, they could go find the information online. An urban Tallahassee participant said:

> So, killing trees to tell me about them. That would piss me off. (laughter) We are going to stop having mail in about a year or two. Let's just get over it. I really do think electronic communication and in a way that is non-obtrusive. Where … if there is a need to publicize things, just to make it something … not just junk e-mail that you are going to put in your spam filter, but something where there is value to what you are getting from the e-mail so that you don't take yourself off the mailing list.

The fourth subtheme was *revenue generation*. A participant from the second Orlando focus group said: "The public can't support everything, and that is why we are having these cuts. So, agencies need to find clever ways to bring in revenue. They just cannot rely solely on taxes to cover their expenses." A way of creating revenue was mentioned by a Ft. Myers participant, who said, "Like [selling] trees or little bears or whatever they have in the park."

### *Providing Something Valuable*

Participants wanted to ensure public organizations were *providing something valuable* to individuals, the public in general, or natural resources. The subthemes were *protection*, *control*, and *aid*.

The first subtheme was *protection*, which participants valued from government organizations. In reference to police and military, a Ft. Myers participant said: "There would be nothing without them. You know they are there to get your back." Protection also relates to protecting forests. Specifically, participants valued FFS protecting natural resources from misuse. An urban Tallahassee participant said, "You have to have somebody to be the overseer because people will try to take advantage of our natural resources." The participants also valued protecting people and forests from fires. A Gainesville participant said: "They are managing, maybe doing controlled burns and so on. Then we have less worry of major forest fires affecting the area where we may live." Regarding protecting private property, a participant in the first Orlando focus group said, "If they are managing the forests properly, forests won't catch fire and burn down all our neighborhoods like they are in Texas right now." Protection of forests also includes protection from invasive species. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> A good example of forest management, I think would be the Australian pine tree that they had planted all over [the southern part of the state] and then they found out that it had such a negative effect on the environment. … They killed every single one … they could find.

The second subtheme was *control*, which participants expected from public organizations through regulations. In regard to traffic laws, an urban Tallahassee participant said: "If there wasn't any regulations, people would be driving all over the place. But we have streets, lights, and everything." In regard to natural resources, a participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> [Regulation's] a dirty word today to a lot of people, but without regulation, you have got chaos. You saw it in the last decade, where you let people go, I mean, totally different spectrum, but on Wall Street. Greed, unfortunately, greed will trump what are our instincts to preserve natural resources. So, I think you have to have regulation, I really do.

In reference to the timber industry, another participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "To make sure they are replanting in the areas that they are using it, so that they are always keeping it, making sure that the forests are still there." While this control and regulation was something participants recognized as necessary, it was also something that could be perceived negatively. Another urban Tallahassee participant said:

> [Regulation is a] necessary evil. I mean there are so many things that we don't even think about. They protect us, they protect the wildlife, protect the forest, the other natural resources. But then sometimes, the evil part of it just being bogged down in … you know, all us of trying to figure out who's on first and what is on second.

The third subtheme is for public organizations to provide *aid*. When asked to share an example of a government organization that was valued, a participant in the first Orlando focus group said:

> The reason why I said [Florida Department of Children and Families] is because I have four kids, I am a single parent, and they help me a lot with my kids. So, you know, I get a lot of help from them. They give a lot of help. They help you a lot.

Many participants were unaware of the assistance FFS provided for private landowners. A rural Tallahassee participant had received assistance from FFS before and said, "I know that is important, but with the reduced value of forestry products over the last few years, that is not nearly as important as it used to be. … But it is still a needed service." Providing education and information was an aspect of the aid subtheme. Another rural Tallahassee participant said:

> I don't know about the state, but the counties have … I don't know what you call it. They do it with farmers. They talk to farmers about how to grow crops and stuff. And foresters or whatever, forestry management, they can go out and … or people can ask questions on their private property about how to manage the trees, the environment on their own land. I think that is important too.

An urban Tallahassee participant said, "They have got the latest information on what is going on with the forests, from a fire standpoint, drought index, and stuff like that." Another part of this education component relates to educating youth. A rural Tallahassee participant said:

> I would think more towards the ones that are going to be a little bit more impressionable, would be younger teenagers. Give them drastic comparisons. Something that has been taken

care of and still looks great today in comparison to something that has been neglected or destroyed through whatever; oil spills, for example, what can happen if it is not managed properly. And as they are getting older, it is a responsibility that they need to be aware of.

### Integrity

The theme of *integrity* of the organization and its employees relates to a broad level of public organizations being expected to be ethical and moral. The subthemes for the integrity theme were *financial responsibility*, *clear communications*, and *fairness of the organization*.

The first subtheme was *financial responsibility*, which relates to the broader financial responsibility theme. This subtheme also could have been placed within the financial responsibility theme as the integrity subtheme. The choice was made for it to be included in the integrity theme because these responses appeared to be treat financial responsibility of the organization as an outgrowth of the organization's overall integrity. One aspect of this subtheme related to the integrity of the individuals within the organization and how they were compensated for their work. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> I think integrity of the entire organization is a standard that people in general expect. We don't want to find out that the chairman of [state fish and wildlife organization] is pulling in [$180,000] a year and works a 20-hour week, six months of the year.

Another aspect of this subtheme was that participants wanted the organization to put incoming monies toward the purpose of the organization. A different participant in the second Orlando focus group asked: "Doesn't everybody want them to be honest and trustworthy and loyal to the cause? You know, everything that you accumulate [financially] needs to go towards what it is you are fighting for." This also related to some participants' preferences for FFS to not spend money communicating its purpose, which was mentioned in the financial responsibility theme.

The next subtheme was *clear communications*. The different aspects of this subtheme amounted to participants wanting clear dialogue between public organizations and the public. A rural Tallahassee participant said: "Are [the people in the government] listening to the people? Or are they making their own decisions?" In recognition of the challenges of communicating with a broad group of people, another rural Tallahassee participant said:

> The group that is going to get benefits from [what the government organization is talking about], they are going to know. Word is going to get back to them that this is available, but how do you get information to a broad populous?

Rural participants were the only ones to mention specific instances where they wished FFS would have communicated with them directly. A third rural Tallahassee participant wanted to be forewarned of controlled burns, and said:

> My son has asthma. I wish they would let us know when they are going to do a controlled burn. … No notice, except when you drive up the road, you have got a sign there, "Turn your lights on, smoke ahead."

While participants wanted clear communications and many wanted the organization to commu-

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nicate with everyone, not all participants wanted public organizations to communicate with all members of the public. A Gainesville participant said: "I don't see them calling everybody or e-mailing. Just have a website. Times are tough. I don't see them wasting all that money on postage and things like that. They need to spend it on saving forests." Some participants thought public organizations intentionally did not share information. A participant in the first Orlando focus group said: "It seems like it is real hush-hush. Everybody wants to keep it to their own little kingdom. Nobody wants to share," to which another participant said, "As a former federal employee, like you, we experienced all of that first hand in our little fiefdoms."

The third subtheme was *fairness of the organization*, which amounted to balancing multiple interests in its actions. This balancing of interests can be specific to individuals or broader fairness of balancing the wants and needs of businesses and other private parties. For FFS, interests to balance included business and natural resources. Participants perceived one of the major threats to forests was development. A participant in the second Orlando focus group said, "People just look at the immediate benefits of this project or that project and don't look at the long-term effects of deforestation." This balancing of interests related to the protection function participants valued. In response to being provided a definition of forest management, participants were asked how their perceptions of forest management were different than their perceptions before hearing the definition. Another participant in the second Orlando focus group said:

> Well, maybe even more protection, because if you find that there is some kind of natural resource there and then all of a sudden everyone is saying well then, take the forest down and get the natural resource. If it's protected, then keep it protected.

One aspect of fairness in the organization is thinking beyond immediate benefits. A Ft. Myers participant said, "I think planning for the next generation or generations to come." Specific to the forestry industry, a third participant in the second Orlando focus group said: "Forestry is a huge industry. From what I understand, they have [a] 16.6 billion dollar industry in [the state]. I would assume that [FFS] is all over that to make sure that it stays a sustainable industry."

## Conclusions & Implications

An important characteristic of the FFS brand is that it represents a public organization. Participants' perceptions of the FFS brand and how the brand should communicate were affected by FFS being a public organization. The themes that affected brand perceptions were *financial responsibility, providing something valuable,* and *integrity.*

The first theme was an expectation of *financial responsibility*. This included justifying the purpose of the organization and the organization having a distinct purpose from similar organizations. This is important given the political and financial climate that has led to cuts in government spending (Chernew et al., 2010). Among focus group participants, there was a lack of FSS brand salience and differentiation, making it difficult for participants to establish how the organization is distinct from similar organizations. While many participants wanted FFS to increase communications to achieve salience and differentiation, others did not want FFS spending money communicating its purpose. Instead, they wanted FFS to spend money accomplishing its purpose, which is in line with past work (Whelan et al., 2010). Awareness needs to precede brand salience and differentiation. Public organizations are in a difficult situation because they cannot assign as many of resources to improve awareness, which means public organizations will have a difficult time demonstrating a distinct purpose from other organizations. While functional aspects of brands and organizations are easy to copy (de Chernatony, 2001), participants did not want public organizations to overlap in their functions because it was perceived as misuse of public resources. As long as public organizations maintain distinct functions, they can avoid depending solely on emotional differentiation for the success of their brands. They can instead rely on their organizational characteristics to differentiate themselves from similar organizations (Aaker, 1996). The results of this theme indicate public organizations have an increased need to rely on internal brand characteristics, such as functions and services, to improve the brand because the public wants to see clear distinctions among public organizations. This theme also indicates traditional external communications of public organizations are handicapped because of negative perceptions related to communication that is not explicitly tied to the purpose of the organization. Communications can still occur, but they need to be tied to the organization's purpose, which relates to the next theme.

The second theme was *providing something valuable* to individuals, the public as a whole, and/or natural resources. This finding is in line with public organizations' need for public value to be viable (Hoggett, 2006). Protection of people and/or resources was one area that was valued. While this included protection such as that provided by the police, protection that occurred through natural resource management also was valued. Participants held high regard for control through regulation by public organizations, which is a key characteristic of public organizations (Walsh, 1994). While some participants thought regulation could be overdone, they also perceived it was necessary to provide order. Organizations that provide aid, such as helping families, were perceived positively. Valuing the multiple roles of public organizations is reflective of the view that public organizations are complex and need to represent their multiple roles (Hoggett, 2006). Even though not all participants perceived immediate benefits from the FFS's activities, FFS still needs the entire public's approval as a public organization (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). While external communications will be limited to avoid perceptions of financial mismanagement, communication that helps the organization accomplish its purpose is still possible. As it relates to the second theme, communications for public organizations that are geared toward the concepts of protection (e.g., commercials promoting wildfire prevention activities by the public), control (e.g., communicating regulations related to state forests), and aid (e.g., communicating about landowner-assistance programs) should be perceived positively.

There was an expectation for public organizations and their employees to have *integrity*, which was the third theme. Part of this expectation related to the financial responsibility expectation stated earlier. The participants wanted to be sure employees were doing the requisite amount of work to justify their salaries. Participants also wanted to know money going into the organization was being spent accomplishing its purpose, which affected perceptions of external communications. Integrity also related to the overall fairness of the organization. It was expected for public organizations to balance multiple interests. This balancing of interests related to the idea of control through regulation for FFS because it was believed private interests would look at short-term benefits of forestry activities as opposed to the long-term detriments of unrestricted industrial and developmental uses of natural resources. FFS can focus on a message of protecting natural resources to improve brand salience and differentiation, but if the employees and the organization do not work toward this mission, the brand could be hurt by a loss in credibility (Waeraas, 2008, 2010). Credibility improves the chances for brand and communication campaign success (Ehrenberg et al., 1997; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Clear communications between public organizations and the public was desired, though not all participants believed it was necessary for FFS to communicate with the entire public, only those directly interacting with forests, such as landowners. The expectation for communications between the public and the organization was two-way in that it was expected for public organizations to openly communicate to the public, and public organizations were expected to listen to the public. Two-way communications is an important aspect of excellence in public relations and in line with the assertion that public organizations need two-way dialogue to maintain legitimacy (Grunig, 2006; Walsh, 1994). The two-way dialogue is also necessary for public organizations to go beyond providing value to the point of using a positive brand to be responsive to the needs and perspective of stakeholders (Whelan et al., 2010), which improves brand relationships that help organizations weather crises (Grunig et al., 2002).

The overarching implications of this study relate to how public organizations' brands are perceived and how professionals can communicate about them. De Chernatony (2001) likened brands to icebergs: The external part that is seen (e.g., logos, external communications, etc.) is a much smaller component of what a brand is, compared to the inner part not seen below the surface (e.g., the employees, the decisions of organizational leadership, etc.). What the public sees and ultimately interacts with in terms of the external brand of the organization is going to be greatly impacted by the internal components of the brand for all organizations. For public organizations, this disparity is even more pronounced as indicated in this study. External communications of the organization are going to be more limited because of the potential for excessive communication to be perceived as financial mismanagement, limiting the amount of external branding that occurs. This puts more importance on the internal brand of the organization (e.g., the purpose of the organization, acting with integrity, etc.). The external branding that does occur will have more limited opportunities, giving public organizations smaller margins for error when communicating with the public, meaning the external communications that do occur need to be effective and efficient.

## Recommendations

### For Branding Public Organizations

Public organizations face a difficult task to improve their brands. It is paramount for public organizations to leverage existing resources in branding, starting with the organization's employees. More specifically, the organization and its employees need to operate with integrity. Even if a public organization's values and aims are positively received through external communications, the brand will be hurt if the organization and its employees do not embody those values in their actions (Waeraas, 2010).

Internal structures are the largest components of brands and are employee-driven (de Chernatony, 2001). Employees are representatives of the brand through their interactions with the public (de Chernatony, 2001; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). As such, employees must be on the same page as the organization and embody a shared identity. The results of this study indicate FFS's brand lacked salience and differentiation with the public. Increasing interactions between FFS's employees and the public could improve the brand's salience and differentiation, but these interactions need to positively and accurately represent the brand.

An important component of improving the brand of public organizations is to ensure that communications personnel are a part of an organization's leadership, which increases the likelihood of success for the internal and external communications of organizations (Grunig, 2006; Grunig et al., 2002). As it relates to the brand of the organization, having communications personnel in the organizational leadership is important because brand strategy should be an extension and contributor to the organization's overall strategy (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009).

As for promoting the organization's brand to the public, external communications of the orga-

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nization should be geared toward providing a public good, such as public service announcements and informational campaigns, instead of simply promoting the organization, which could be harm the perceived integrity of the organization (Whelan et al., 2010). Public service announcements and informational campaigns promote the brand while also providing a valuable public function without harming the brand's credibility. While the internal component of the brand is important to foster, the external components of the brand, such as differentiation and salience, are still important to the brand's overall success (Ehrenberg et al., 1997; Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). As stated earlier, the FFS brand lacked salience and differentiation. A positive external brand is particularly important for public organizations, given that public organizations need public support to maintain legitimacy (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995). Brands can help improve relationships between public organizations and members of the public (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Whelan et al., 2010). The idea of open communications with the public is in line with Excellence Theory in public relations, which supports a two-way symmetrical communication model between organizations and stakeholders (Grunig, 1989).

### For Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is to address the transferability of the findings, which were limited by addressing one public organization in one state that operated in a specific natural resources context. While the results may apply to other settings, it cannot be made certain until similar studies occur with other organizations. In particular, a lot of variability exists among public organizations, which could cause differences to occur (Laing, 2003).

The second recommendation is to further research perceptions of public organizations' communications. FFS's brand lacked salience and differentiation, which could be improved by increasing communications with the public, but that solution is problematic given the potential for communications promoting the organization to be perceived negatively (Whelan et al., 2010). The participants wanted public organizations to communicate with the public, but certain types of communications might not be well received. Research needs to determine how public organizations can communicate externally to improve brand perceptions without negative effects given public organizations' dependence on public perception (Hoggett, 2006; Moore, 1995).

The third recommendation, which relates to the prior recommendation, is to address the audience public organizations need to be communicating with. With whom public organizations should be communicating garnered differing perceptions from participants, ranging from everyone to only groups the FFS interacts with directly. Communication efforts are affected by audience selection. Generally, audience segmentation is less cost-prohibitive and is considered more effective, but that notion may be outdated in today's globalized and digitally connected society (Kruckeberg & Vujnovic, 2010; Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Related to the first recommendation for research, work also should address audience selection for various organizations, including scope (e.g., national and state) and context (e.g., natural resources and public health), given the differences between types of public organizations (Laing, 2003).

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