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The necessity of collaboration in branding: analysing the conditions for output legitimacy through qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the conditions for achieving output legitimacy in branding processes. Branding is a governance strategy that, according to branding and governance theory, relies heavily on involving, and collaborating with, actors. This research, based on a qualitative comparative analysis of 30 companies involved in a place branding campaign, shows that, although collaboration in branding is important, it is not a necessary condition for achieving legitimacy. The analysis shows the importance of studying collaboration together with more perceptual conditions such as place identity and place dependency to explain output legitimacy.


KEYWORDS Branding; legitimacy; governance; collaboration; stakeholder involvement

Introduction: is collaboration in branding a necessary condition for legitimacy?

Public actors increasingly use brands and branding as a governance strategy to achieve public goals. Brands can be defined as ‘a symbolic construct that consists of a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, created deliberately to identify a phenomenon and differentiate it from similar phenomena by adding particular meaning to it’ (Eshuis and Klijn 2012, 19). A brand is not the product, policy, or service itself, although of course the brand is related to it. The brand is what gives (additional) meaning and value to the product, defines its identity, and very importantly distinguishes it from other products, policies, or services (Aaker 1991; Kapferer 1992). Brands contain typical brand elements such as logos, slogans, symbols, and other visual (and sometimes auditive) elements (Arvidsson 2006).

Examples of public branding can be found everywhere (Eshuis and Klijn 2012). Political branding, using slogans, images, and other brand elements to communicate political messages and reach and bind a wide audience, has been ‘business as usual’ for decades (Needham 2006; Lees-Marshment 2009). One can think of Blair’s New Labour, where he positioned himself and his Labour party as distinctive from old Labour and the conservatives (White and Chernatony 2002). Bill Clinton, using the Fleetwood Mac

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song ‘Go your own way’ in his 1992 presidential campaign to identify himself as a young dynamic new leader, is another clear example of using branding (and brand elements) to create an identity and communicate a message to a wider audience. Public branding is not, however, limited to branding political leaders. Public branding has been used for policy (policies for instance labelled as sustainable or interactive as opposed to created and implemented top down), organizations, and last but not least places. Many large and medium-sized cities all over the world have used place branding to attract new economic activities, market their cities to promote tourism, or strengthen their city’s image to retain inhabitants. IAmsterdam and I Love New York are well-known examples of these kinds of branding campaigns for large cities, but many smaller cities also use place branding (Braun et al. 2013).

Branding as governance strategy

Branding is said to be a ‘soft’ governance strategy because it does not force compliance (like using judicial instruments do) or seduce actors by financial incentives (like in the case of subsidies) (Eshuis and Klijn 2012).¹ We use the governance concept then as collaborative or network governance, so a process where decision making and service delivery take place through a web of relations between government, business, and societal actors (Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). Thus, as many authors emphasize (Rhodes 1996; Pierre and Guy Peters 2000), governance not only focuses more on the governing process than on government structure, but is also multi-actor in nature characterized by complex interactions between mostly interdependent actors.

Branding displays all the characteristics of collaborative and network governance mentioned in the literature (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016):

- *Many actors involved*: just as in other forms of governance, many different actors are involved (like in the case of place branding, companies, citizens groups, local tourist organizations, and so forth).
- *Interdependence*: the governance literature argues that the most important characteristic of governance processes is that actors are dependent on one another’s resources to tackle problems. Branding campaigns and decision processes show the same interdependence between actors, as the effects of branding campaigns are related to the way other actors not only agree with the brand but also communicate the brand and act on it.
- *Various perceptions on problems and solutions*: in governance processes, various actors have different perceptions on the nature of the problem and the desirability of certain solutions, thereby making processes more complex. This is also the case in branding processes. Furthermore, in branding, authors emphasize that, although brand initiators try to communicate a clear brand, various actors – usually involved actors – still have different associations with the brand or at least different appreciations of it (Zenker and Braun 2017).
- *Complex interactions*: because of different perceptions and interests, actors’ interactions are complex. In the governance literature, authors emphasize that conflicts may emerge between actors (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). In the branding literature, authors emphasize that

counter branding can emerge if actors do not agree with the brand associations or the brand values communicated (Eshuis and Klijn 2012; Zenker and Braun 2017).

However, branding is a strategy that differs significantly from most other well-known governance strategies, as it relies more on visual images, on associations that actors have with the brand, and last but not least on emotions rather than logical or financial arguments (as with strategies like subsidies, laws and regulations, or more collaborative strategies) (Eshuis and Klijn 2012; Eshuis et al. 2018). The aim of branding is mainly to create associations and images in actors' minds (Hankinson 2004; Hanna and Rowley 2011). Hence, branding aims to create support (and legitimacy) by binding actors to an idea and creating identity.

Branding is a strategy that can be employed top down as well as interactively with actors (Eshuis and Klijn 2012; Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015). In the first case, the brand is created and communicated by the brand initiators, and actors are more or less passive users/target groups of the brand. In the second case, brands are developed (and communicated) together with actors in collaboration. The assumption fairly strongly emphasized in recent branding literature is that the brand message will be accepted more easily when actors are involved in the branding process. In this case, actors' support and communication of the brand will increase (Zenker and Braun 2017; Eshuis et al. 2018; Ind and Schmidt 2019).

This article: looking at conditions that influence legitimacy

The assumption in recent branding literature about the importance of collaboration (and co-production) for the legitimacy of outcomes (in this case acceptance of the place brand) is of course also emphasized in most network and collaborative governance literature. An interesting question therefore arises as to whether a collaborative approach in branding is a necessary (or sufficient) condition for achieving output legitimacy. Output legitimacy is usually connected with the performance dimension of policy and governance processes and concerns the acceptance (or recognition) of that performance by various actors involved in, or affected by, that decision as just or good (Scharpf 1997; Bekkers and Edwards 2007, 37–39; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2016). In the theoretical section (second section), we elaborate both the idea of output legitimacy and why this was chosen as the dependent variable.

We explored the research question: *Is collaboration a necessary and/or sufficient condition² for output legitimacy in place branding processes?* by looking at **30 companies** involved in a place branding campaign in Rotterdam called 'Rotterdam Makers District' to rebrand the Merwe-Vierhavens neighbourhood (MH4 area) and the Rotterdam Droogdokken Maatschappij area (RDM area) as Rotterdam Makers District. So, for each company (= each case) we assessed:

- (1) The degree of output legitimacy for that company
- (2) The degree of collaboration (is the company involved in the creation of the brand?)
- (3) Other possible conditions that could be important.

Regarding issue 3, in our analysis we focused on two conditions that are considered important in the place branding literature: place identity and place dependency (Raymond, Brown, and Weber 2010; Braun et al. 2013; Baker 2007; Zenker and Braun 2017) and on one condition relating to the character of the company: whether the company had an international orientation (with mainly international customers) or a national orientation (with mainly national customers). The conditions are elaborated and explained in the theoretical section. For the analysis, we used fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), which allowed us to analyse the combined impact of the various conditions on output legitimacy. In the methodological section (third section), this method and the way in which the conditions were operationalized are explained.

Our research contributes to the ongoing discussion about the importance of collaboration in governance processes and assesses this for a relatively new area of governance: branding. We also analyse this for a situation where we have limited research results: the relation between governmental agents and companies, given that most research about collaboration is aimed at citizens or various societal groups.

Branding and output legitimacy: a theoretical framework

Brands try to evoke associations that make the product, service, or person(s) more attractive to consumers, citizens, and voters. An important aim of brands and branding as a process is thus first of all to influence actors' perceptions about a policy, place, or person and second to influence behaviour. Perception is influenced by creating the right associations with other actors attached to the brand (Arvidsson 2006), on the (implicit) assumption that changing people's minds about something (and creating different associations) has behavioural consequences (Hanna and Rowley 2011; Eshuis and Klijn 2012; Zavattaro 2018). Hence the remark in the introduction that branding is a 'soft' governance strategy strongly aimed at influencing actors' perceptions; but it is also a governance strategy that builds strongly on other actors' involvement to achieve legitimacy.

In the rest of this theoretical section, we first discuss (output) legitimacy, what it is, and how we can assess this in the case of branding. Then, we discuss the various conditions that we explore in relation to output legitimacy: stakeholder collaboration, place identity, place dependency, and the orientation of the companies involved. We finish with some expectations about the relations between the various conditions.

Legitimacy and branding

Legitimacy is a fuzzy concept (Bekkers and Edwards 2007; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2016). Luhman (1975, 25) defines legitimacy as 'a general preparedness to accept, within a certain margin, a decision whose content is not yet known'. If we follow Luhman and others, legitimacy is related to actors' acceptance of decisions (Scharpf 1997; Bekkers and Edwards 2007; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2016). Luhman's definition focuses strongly on input legitimacy (a content not yet known). Usually, a distinction is made between input and output legitimacy (Scharpf 1997; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2016).

- Input legitimacy relates to the legitimacy gained from the government process, that is, following due (democratic) process (Scharpf 1997, 14). In a representational democracy, this clearly relates to the rules of (free) voting, but also to other basic principles of democracy like transparency, accountability at the start, and so on (Bekkers and Edwards 2007).
- Output legitimacy refers to the effectiveness and problem-solving quality of the decision-making process). Output legitimacy is thus more tied to the performance of public policy. Relevant norms on which actors base their judgment of output legitimacy include the effectiveness and efficiency of performance, how accountability is organized during the process, and giving account of the outcomes (Bekkers and Edwards 2007, 43–46; Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen 2016; Scharpf 1997).

In this article, we focus only on output legitimacy, principally because we want to look at the influence of collaboration on legitimacy. Indicators for input legitimacy are difficult to separate from indicators for collaboration. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen (2016), for instance, remarks that input legitimacy has to do with the inclusiveness of participation; and, although with collaboration we look at actual stakeholder participation, this still touches on inclusiveness, and thus it is better for this research to use a more restricted conceptualization of legitimacy as output legitimacy and as acceptance of those outputs.

What would output legitimacy mean in the case of branding processes? If we translate the output legitimacy concept that emphasizes acceptance resulting from the performance dimension to branding as a governance strategy, it would first of all be apparent in actors' agreement with the aims of the branding campaign and actors' willingness to promote the brand (Hanna and Rowley 2011). Both dimensions show 'perceptual acceptance' of the brand. This is in line with ideas from (collaborative and network) governance (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016), which also emphasize involved actors' satisfaction with results achieved.

Additionally, output legitimacy has to appear in a direct behavioural consequence, like communicating the brand to others. In the branding literature, this is called *word of mouth* (Arvidsson 2006; Hanna and Rowley 2011). In various branches of branding and marketing theory, it is emphasized that citizens, or other actors, actually become ambassadors for the brand if they actively communicate it further (Hankinson 2004; Braun et al. 2013; Zenker and Braun 2017; Ind and Schmidt 2019). In that sense, the core idea and purpose of the public brand is communicated further by actors who are either target groups (like tourists, citizens, and so on) or actors that actively have to promote and act on the brand (like companies, voters) or groups that are both (Hanna and Rowley 2011). Communication by actors themselves is considered effective because that communication is not driven by self-interest but by the (positive) experience of actors themselves (Baker 2007; Hanna and Rowley 2011). Hence, word of mouth is an important objective in branding campaigns and considered a central variable in many branding models (Hanna and Rowley 2011). It is, however, also an affirmation of the legitimacy of the brand by involved actors (Baker 2007; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Zenker and Braun 2017). In the third section, we explain how we operationalized our three indicators of legitimacy (support for the aims of the brand, willingness to promote the brand, and word of mouth). Of

course word of mouth can also be damaging for the brand when involved actors communicate negative about the brand or even are engaged in counter branding (Eshuis and Klijn 2012). From a governance perspective this is also interesting because it is an active form of participation and (citizens) protest.

Conditions explored in this research

In the research, we looked at four conditions that might influence output legitimacy. Our core condition to explore in our search for output legitimacy is collaboration. This condition is seen as crucial in virtually every collaborative and network governance publication over the past decades; and it is interesting to test the importance of collaboration for branding processes because this has not been done often, despite the growing importance of branding as a governance strategy (Eshuis and Klijn 2012).

Branding literature tends to focus on the strength of the message and how it is communicated (Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis 1986; Eshuis and Klijn 2012; Hanna and Rowley 2011), but more recently a lot of attention has been given to stakeholder involvement and the network built around the brand (see for instance Hankinson 2004; Klijn, Eshuis, and Braun 2012; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Braun et al. 2013). Thus, collaboration is also an interesting and attractive condition from a branding point of view. The place brand literature also mentions place attachment and place identity (Raymond, Brown, and Weber 2010; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Zenker and Braun 2017). Both these perceptual characteristics relate to the phenomenon itself (in this case the place) and are interesting to analyse in our research, especially to compare their importance with our main condition, collaboration. As a fourth condition, we looked at the character of the companies involved in the branding process, that is, whether they have an international or a national orientation. This may be important for how they view the legitimacy of the brand. We discuss the conditions below.

Condition 1: degree of collaboration

What the literature on both branding and collaborative and network governance have in common is their emphasis on stakeholder involvement (Hankinson 2004; Klijn, Eshuis, and Braun 2012; Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). Stakeholder involvement is mentioned in the governance literature as an important condition for the support and success of policy proposals (Pierre and Guy Peters 2000; Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016).

The argument is that, given that actors are interdependent in solving societal problems, they accept policy proposals more easily when they are involved in the development of these proposals (Fischer 2003; Ansell and Gash 2008; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). Furthermore, involving actors in the resolution of policy problems (or a public service) allows for more innovation and better tailored solutions (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Huxham and Vangen 2005; Ansell and Torfing 2014). After all, in a situation where knowledge is spread among various actors, involving actors allows more knowledge to flow in the process (Klijin and Koppenjan 2016); but it is also argued that the use of veto power is diminished if actors are involved in collaboration (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016).

These arguments are also mentioned in the literature on branding, although they have a slightly different flavour (Hankinson 2004; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Klijn, Eshuis, and Braun 2012). Recent brand literature in particular strongly emphasizes stakeholder involvement at least in communicating brands, but also in developing brands (Hankinson 2004; Braun et al. 2013). The brand literature emphasizes that, if the brand initiator succeeds in building a brand community that supports, experiences, and communicates the brand, the brand will be much more effective (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Braun et al. 2013; Zavattaro 2018), precisely because it is more supported and actors tend to communicate about the brand (Baker 2007; Hanna and Rowley 2011). The last argument of course provides a direct possible causal effect of word of mouth as an indicator of output legitimacy, but, in line with the innovation argument from the collaborative and network governance literature (Ansell and Torfing 2014), the brand literature argues that involving actors and building brand communities enhance the possibility that the developed brand will suit the situation and targets groups (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Kavaratzis and Kalandides 2015). Actually, empirical evidence already suggests that stakeholder involvement has a positive impact on brand effectiveness (Klijn, Eshuis, and Braun 2012; Eshuis et al. 2018). So, we also expect a positive influence on brand legitimacy.

Thus, the conclusion is that the degree of collaboration between the brand initiator and its main actors is considered to be a key feature in explaining output legitimacy. For that degree of collaboration to be high, we need proof of actual stakeholder involvement in the development of the brand and a reasonably intensive degree of contact between the brand initiator and the actors.

Conditions 2 and 3: place attachment and place dependency

Other important conditions especially mentioned in the branding literature are place identity and place dependency. Although sometimes the two concepts are taken together, most authors emphasize that they are different conditions. Place identity refers to how actors identify themselves with the place (Raymond, Brown, and Weber 2010; Zenker and Braun 2017), whereas place dependency is defined as the 'functional or goal-directed connections to a setting' (Raymond, Brown, and Weber 2010, 423). Thus, place dependency relates more to the physical conditions that more or less facilitate the use that an actor has intended, and it captures whether actors, in this case companies, can transfer their activities to another place. Place identity has both an almost psychological dimension, that is, how actors identify themselves with the place, and an interaction dimension, that is, how actors interact with other actors, the community, in the place (Hankinson 2004; Hanna and Rowley 2011; Raymond, Brown, and Weber 2010). Thus, it captures the psychological and societal connection to a place.

Condition 4: companies' orientation

Of course, firm characteristics could also influence output legitimacy in combination with the other conditions. Most of the companies in the area are start-ups and relatively small (half of the companies have fewer than 10 employees), but an important characteristic could very well be their customer orientation. If their customers are mainly in the Netherlands, their attachment to the place might be greater, as also their interest and willingness to support the brand, than if their customers are mainly in other countries (Europe or worldwide).

Conclusion: the importance of the conditions

Given the literature, we expect degree of collaboration to be a very important, maybe even a sufficient, condition for achieving output legitimacy, but we would certainly expect collaboration to be a prominent element in the combinations of conditions that ensure high output legitimacy, and we expect the absence of collaboration to be related to the absence of output legitimacy. After all, both the governance literature and the branding literature emphasize its crucial importance.

However, place dependency could very well be as necessary a condition as could place identity because, if companies do not have a place dependency, why would they be interested in supporting the brand (and endorsing its goals) or communicating the brand message to others. So, we expect place dependency to be another important condition and probably to form an important path together with collaboration to high output legitimacy. It is even likely that place dependency and place identity might be very important for collaboration to be present because only companies with a minimum level of place dependency and/or place identity would probably make the effort to be involved in the brand anyhow. Therefore, it may well be that the achievement of high output legitimacy requires the presence of all three conditions: place dependency, place identity, and collaboration, or at least two of these three conditions. The role of firm orientation is less evident. Probably orientation to the Netherlands will enhance the likelihood of support for the brand and communication of the brand.

The Rotterdam makers district branding campaign

The branding campaign promoting the idea of creating a new image of part of the old Rotterdam harbour district was launched by the Municipality of Rotterdam in 2017. Following a position paper published by the Municipality of Rotterdam and the harbour authority (2017), the until-then individual neighbourhoods of the harbour district, the MH4 area and the RDM area, were 'marketing-wise' merged into the Rotterdam Makers District, which was also the name of the brand to be developed. In the municipality's vision, the district would become an area for creative and innovative entrepreneurs, with crossovers between four key sectors of the region: maritime, clean tech, food, and medical; and the brand should incorporate those values and help to promote the area, attract new companies, and support the existing companies in their economic activities. Although smart, innovative manufacturing had been part of the new identities of the two areas since the 2008 policy strategy *Creating on the Edge*, the Rotterdam Makers District branding campaign embodied the 'Makers' concept.

In the branding campaign, emphasis was laid on the Makers concept. Makers are mostly regarded as innovative manufacturing industries that focus on new technologies such as additive manufacturing (including 3D printing), robotization, and material science. The Makers became the target audience of the district (and the branding campaign) because of their willingness to embrace the New Economy and work and live in raw, urban areas (which fit the image of the MH4 area quite well) (Programma bureau Stadshavens Rotterdam, 2017). According to the programme office, businesses in the district would receive special treatment, including easy access to innovation networks, knowledge institutions, students and researchers, and shared facilities. Thus, the Makers District brand attempted to attract start-ups through cost-reducing

instruments and facilitated innovation by initiating networking activities, like online showcases, decision-making processes regarding the spatial development plans, and cultural activities, thus offering a strategic advantage over other business locations. During the campaign, the municipality tried to involve the companies in the area in the process by organizing a wide variety of activities like sessions to discuss the brand and events that should promote the area and connect the various firms. All companies were invited but of course since there is some dynamics in the coming and going of companies in the area it is not certain that all were reached. The degree to which various companies became involved in these activities and in developing the brand shows significant variation. That makes it interesting for our research because various companies displayed different level of engagement and collaboration with the municipal actors who initiated the brand, thus enabling us to distinguish between firms that were highly connected and collaborated with the municipality and companies that did not do so.

However, the ultimate goal of the place branding campaign was to revitalize the two neighbourhoods, especially the MH4 area. In the MH4 neighbourhood, a lot of space is available for new companies to settle. For many years, this area was used for fruit throughput. The juice industry in the MH4 neighbourhood is still very much alive, but fruit throughput in the harbour area has largely disappeared as a consequence of containerization. Currently, some small-scale developments are already taking place in the available buildings, particularly in the core area. The former Oranjelijn departure hall, for example, has been a source of creative activity for some time now. Moreover, pioneering and traditional manufacturing companies have found accommodation in the Keilewerf or use the Fair Design Plein facilities. In addition, creative businesses, such as Studio Roosegaarde and Atelier Van Lieshout, and companies in the circular manufacturing industry, such as Rainmaker Holland, have settled with their studios in the area. By branding the area, the Municipality of Rotterdam and Rotterdam harbour thus aimed to make the combined MH4 and RDM a more competitive business area in comparison to their status in the previous 20 years.

Research design: qualitative comparative analysis to analyse the cases

We used qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to assess the impact of the degree of collaboration, place attachment, place dependency, and firm orientation on output legitimacy. With this method, which is very suited to analyse how various conditions combine, we looked for combinations of these four conditions that resulted in either high or low output legitimacy.

Data collection

Data were collected for 30 companies active in MH4 and RDM. We selected the companies from a long list of companies present in the area targeted by the branding campaign, Rotterdam Makers District by the project bureau. Names of firms (and respondents) were thus acquired from the project bureau (in total about 250 companies were active in 2019 in both areas³). We selected a representative group of companies looking primarily at the size of the companies and the sectors they are in. Although the last was slightly more difficult because of the variety among the

companies in the area. We also chose companies that were present for some time in the area so that they could provide meaningful answers on the brand process (and thus exclude companies that had only recently come to the area).

The CEO/initiator of each company was first sent a questionnaire to collect data about the firm and its attitude towards the brand. Then, we conducted an interview with the person who had filled in the questionnaire. Given that almost all companies were relatively small (innovative) start-ups (50 per cent of the companies has fewer than 10 employees), we can be reasonably certain that our interviewees were representative of the views of the whole firm. The main interview topics were the companies' perception of the brand, their degree of collaboration, and the process of brand construction and brand management, besides some questions about each firm (number of employees, customer orientation, and so on).

The scoring of the conditions was based on the survey data and the interviews (see [Table 1](#) and the explanation of the calibration process). The unit of analysis was thus the firm level, as we explored for each firm what set of conditions (the degree of the firm's collaboration in the branding process, the firm's place identity, place dependency, and orientation) was sufficient to achieve output legitimacy. This means that we had 30 cases – a good size for an analysis technique like QCA, which is considered suitable for a medium-sized number of cases (Rihoux and Ragin 2009).

Qualitative comparative analysis

We employed the set-theoretic fsQCA method. An fsQCA allows for different degrees of set membership. An iterative dialogue between theoretical and substantive knowledge determines the degree to which cases are members of a certain set. Thus, we established qualitative rather than quantitative differences between cases.

In an fsQCA, relations are discussed in terms of necessity and sufficiency. A condition is necessary if performance cannot be produced without it; a condition is sufficient if it can produce the outcome by itself without the help of other conditions (Rihoux and Ragin 2009; Schneider and Wagemann 2012). The two main parameters of fit used to analyse results of an fsQCA are coverage and consistency. The first states how well the available empirical information is explained by the condition(s). For necessary conditions, the relevance of necessity (RoN) explains whether a condition is trivial. If a condition is trivial, the necessity of this particular condition does not mean much. Low RoN values indicate trivialness and high values indicate relevance. The latter indicates the degree to which empirical evidence is in line with the statements of necessity or sufficiency. The proportional reduction in inconsistency (PRI) indicates the degree to which a given configuration is not simultaneously sufficient for both the occurrence and the non-occurrence of the outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2012).

Calibrating the conditions

In this section, we conceptualize and calibrate the conditions discussed in the theoretical section. ([Table 1](#)) provides an overview of the calibration method. As can be seen, in most cases, survey data were used to calibrate the conditions but, in the case of collaboration, we used the interview data. The data matrix, the result of the calibration procedure, is displayed in (Supplementary/Appendix A, [Table A1](#)).

Table 1. Overview of the calibration method.

Condition	Components	Main data source	Range	Descriptive average	Inclusion cut	Principles guiding the calibration
Output legitimacy (LEGI)	Goal agreement: degree to which companies agree with the goals of the branding campaign Word of mouth: degree to which companies use brand in communication Willingness to promote: degree to which companies are prepared to promote the brand	Survey data: 5 items on goals Survey data: 6 items on communication outlets Survey data: 1 item on preparedness to help in promotion	1–10 1–7 1–10	38.0 14.1 7.2	40.0 or higher 18.0 or higher 7.0 or higher	Different dimensions of legitimacy included set membership: 1 = all three dimensions are set members; 0.67 = two dimensions are set members; 0.33 = one dimension is a set member; 0.00 = zero dimensions are set members
Collaboration (COL)	Coproduction: involved in programme activities organization and developing brand Frequent communication: contact between firm and programme organization	Interview data Survey data: 2 items on contact with programme organizations Survey data: 2 items on meaning of, and identification with, area	- 1–8 1–10	5.00 15.4 18.9	If firm participates in brand development 4.0 or lower 14.0 or higher 20 or higher	Different dimensions of collaboration included 1 = both dimensions are set members; 0.67 = only coproduction is a set member; 0.33 = only frequency is a set member; 0 = neither dimension is a set member Set membership if average score is at or higher than 7. 1 = a score of 16 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 15–13; 0.33 = a score of 12–10; 0 = a score of 9 or lower Set membership if average score is slightly less than 7. 1 = a score of 25 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 24–20; 0.33 = a score of 19–15; 0 = a score of 14 or lower
Place identity (PID)	Firm identifies with area	Survey data: 3 items on relative importance of area vis-à-vis other areas	1–10	18.9	20 or higher	Set membership if average score is slightly less than 7. 1 = a score of 25 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 24–20; 0.33 = a score of 19–15; 0 = a score of 14 or lower
Place dependency (PDE)	Firm depends on area for implementing its activities	Survey data: 3 items on relative importance of area vis-à-vis other areas	1–10	18.9	20 or higher	Set membership if average score is slightly less than 7. 1 = a score of 25 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 24–20; 0.33 = a score of 19–15; 0 = a score of 14 or lower
International orientation (INT)	Where customers come from	Survey data	-		If customers come from EU or worldwide	1 = international customer orientation of firm; 0 = national customer orientation of firm

Output legitimacy

The output legitimacy condition is calibrated by:

- goal agreement, that is, whether companies agreed with the goals of the branding campaign;
- word of mouth, that is, whether companies communicated the brand to others;
- promotion, that is, whether companies were prepared to promote the brand nationally and/or internationally.

Interestingly, the scores for goal agreement and promotion were much higher than for word of mouth. It is obviously easier to achieve output legitimacy in terms of intention than in actual behaviour.

Goal Agreement as Conceptualization of Output Legitimacy: Set membership of agreement with the goals of the branding campaign was determined by taking into account each respondent's agreement on a 10-point scale with five key aims of the campaign: (1) attracting innovative economic activity with the accent on creating industry; (2) creating employment for all inhabitants; (3) realizing open innovation environment with companies and educational organizations; (4) realizing urban living environment on and around the Merwede square; (5) developing the area as testing ground and showroom for circular future of the city. The final set membership score was determined by taking the total sum of points into account. Set membership was accomplished when the total points exceeded the threshold of 40 points. This implies that companies that were set members had given each sub-element on average a score of 8 points or higher.

Word of Mouth as Conceptualization of Output Legitimacy: Set membership of the word of mouth condition was determined by asking the respondents whether they had communicated information about the brand in six of their communication channels (Twitter, newsletter, website, annual report, events, and advertisements). Each of these channels could receive a score between 1 (very little) and 7 (very often). Set membership was accomplished if the total sum of points exceeded the threshold of 18 points. This relatively low threshold allowed set membership by companies that relied heavily on only a selective number of communication outlets to communicate branding information.

Willingness to Promote as Conceptualization of Output Legitimacy: Set membership of the willingness to promote the brand condition was determined by asking the respondents how willing they were to promote the brand on a 10-point scale. Set membership was accomplished if the respondents gave the item a score of 7 points or more.

Degree of collaboration

In calibrating the degree of collaboration condition, we combined interview data on whether the firm was involved in co-producing the brand with survey data on the frequency of communication between the programme organization and the firm. In order to determine whether companies were involved in a process of co-producing the brand, and were thus set members, we used the interview answers to the questions about whether the companies were involved in developing and organizing the Rotterdam Makers District brand concept, and whether the companies were involved in various events set up to guide and to communicate the brand. With regard to the survey data, we used the frequency of the companies' contact with the MH4 and RDM programme organization to calibrate the degree of collaboration. Frequency for the

two organizations was measured on a scale of 1 (once a week) to 8 (never). Set membership for contact frequency was achieved if companies had regular contact with the programme organization(s): a score of 4 or lower. With these two subset scores on degree of collaboration (that is, level of involvement and frequency of contact with the project organizations), we constructed the total set membership score of degree of collaboration. If both scores indicated set membership, we scored the degree of collaboration as 1. If only collaboration was a set member, we scored the degree of collaboration as 0.67. If only contact frequency was a set member, we scored the degree of collaboration as 0.33. If neither dimension was a set member, then we scored the degree of collaboration as 0.

Place identity and place dependency

Set membership of the place identity and place dependency conditions were determined by adapting items from Raymond, Brown, and Weber's (2010) validated scale to match this particular research case. We used two items to define the place identity condition: (1) the MH4 area and/or RDM area mean a lot to our firm and (2) our firm identifies itself strongly with the MH4 and/or RDM area. The items were measured on a 10-point scale ranging from totally disagree to totally agree. Set membership was achieved if the average score of the two items was at or higher than 7. To be more specific, 1 = a score of 16 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 15–13; 0.33 = a score of 12–10; 0 = a score of 9 or lower.

Place dependency was measured by three items on a 10-point scale ranging from totally disagree to totally agree: (1) in Rotterdam, there is no better place to implement our firm's activities; (2) in the Netherlands, there is no better place to implement our firm's activities; (3) operating in the MH4/RDM area is more important for us than implementing the same activities in another area. Set membership was determined by computing the three scores. If respondents scored the three items on average slightly less than 7, the firm achieved set membership; specifically, 1 = a score of 25 or higher; 0.67 = a score of 24–20; 0.33 = a score of 19–15; 0 = a score of 14 or lower.

International orientation

For the international orientation condition, we used a simple dichotomy where we coded companies that indicated that most of their customers were from the Netherlands as 0 and companies that indicated that most of their customers came from European countries or worldwide as 1.

Results

The results of the set-theoretic fsQCA method are discussed in this section (software: R packages QCA and SetMethods). The first analysis performed was the analysis of necessity, see (Table 2). This analysis tested whether any conditions were necessary (consistency score >0.9; RoN score⁴ >0.55) to achieve output legitimacy (Ragin 2000; Schneider and Wagemann 2012). (Table 3) shows that none of the conditions met the criteria. Consequently, our expectation, of course especially based on the importance of collaboration in the governance literature, that collaboration especially might be a necessary condition is not fulfilled. However, the collaboration and place identity conditions come closest to necessity with adequate scores on one of the two required

scores (collaboration with a consistency score of 0.813 (not enough) and RoN of 0.636 (enough) and place identity with a consistency score of 0.930 (enough) and RoN of 0.398 (not enough).

The second analysis performed was the analysis of sufficiency for the output legitimacy condition. Based on the consistency and PRI values in the truth table displayed in (Supplementary/Appendix A, Table A2), we set the consistency threshold for the analysis at 0.800.

QCA then looks at (combinations of) conditions that are sufficient for achieving output legitimacy. The results from the analysis of sufficiency are displayed in (Table 3). The solution shows that two configurations of conditions are sufficient for achieving output legitimacy (COL*PID*pde*int + col* PDE*INT). The results show that companies with a Dutch customer orientation that are involved in the branding collaboration process, that identify strongly with the place but are not dependent upon the place, show high levels of output legitimacy. Moreover, companies with an international customer orientation that are dependent upon the area, but did not collaborate with the programme organization to construct the brand, show high levels of output legitimacy.

It looks like internationally oriented companies are maybe more pragmatically oriented than Dutch-oriented companies, in the sense that only place dependency seems to be important to create output legitimacy, whereas in the case of Dutch-oriented companies place identity and collaboration are both important (combined with the absence of place dependency).

Table 2. Analysis of necessity.

Condition	Total Legitimacy		
	Con	Cov	RoN
Collaboration (COL)	0.813	0.636	0.636
Place identity (PID)	0.930	0.517	0.398
Place dependency (PDE)	0.649	0.620	0.725
International orientation (INT)	0.488	0.467	0.652
Absence of collaboration (~COL)	0.541	0.440	0.274
Absence of place identity (~PID)	0.550	0.255	0.185
Absence of place dependency (~PDE)	0.600	0.627	0.360
Absence of international orientation (~INT)	0.489	0.512	0.345

Table 3. Sufficient condition for the output legitimacy outcome (LEGI) (enhanced conservative solution).

Configuration ->	Total Legitimacy	
	Path 1	Path 2
	COL*PID*pde*int	col*PDE*INT
Consistency	0.800	0.845
Raw coverage	0.279	0.255
Unique coverage	0.279	0.255
Solution consistency	0.821	
Solution PRI	0.689	
Solution coverage	0.534	

Inclusion cut 0.800, parsimonious solution; row 14 was excluded from the enhanced analysis because of a simultaneous subset relation.

Table 4. Sufficient conditions for the absence of the output legitimacy outcome (~LEGI) (conservative solution).

Configurations ->	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3
	pid	col*int	pde*INT
Consistency	0.848	0.866	0.817
Raw coverage	0.360	0.149	0.192
Unique coverage	0.042	0.149	0.192
Solution consistency	0.804		
Solution PRI	0.667		
Solution coverage	0.701		

Inclusion cut 0.800, parsimonious solution.

The third analysis performed was the analysis of sufficiency for the absence of the output legitimacy outcome condition. Using the consistency and PRI values in the truth table displayed in (Supplementary/Appendix A, Table A3), we set the consistency threshold for the analysis at 0.800. The results from the analysis of sufficiency are displayed in (Table 4).

The conservative solution term shows that three configurations are sufficient for the absence of output legitimacy. The first condition (pid) suggests that companies that do not identify with the area typically show low output legitimacy. The second configuration (col*int) shows that companies with an orientation towards the Dutch market that were not part of the brand creation process (thus score low on collaboration) typically show low output legitimacy. The third configuration (pde*INT) shows that companies with an international customer orientation that are not dependent on the place show low output legitimacy. These results resemble the analysis of the companies that do show high legitimacy. The last configuration is the opposite of the configuration that showed high legitimacy in the previous analysis; but now place dependency is absent. The other two configurations show the absence of conditions that were important in the previous analysis, which looked at the presence of output legitimacy: place identity and collaboration as involvement in the brand process.

So, the conclusion that results from the analyses performed is that, although collaboration and also place identity as conditions are not necessary, they do seem to be important in paths that lead to the presence or absence of output legitimacy.

Conclusion

In this article, we analysed the importance of collaboration in brand development, together with companies' place dependency and place identity conditions, in achieving output legitimacy. For this, we analysed data for 30 companies involved in a branding process for the Rotterdam Makers District.

We conceptualized and measured output legitimacy as: 1, agreement with the aims of the branding process; 2, willingness to promote the brand; and 3, actual communication of the brand by companies. Our assumption, based on both the (collaborative and network) governance literature and the branding literature, was that collaboration in the development of the brand was an important condition, maybe even a necessary condition, for achieving output legitimacy. We, at least, expected collaboration to be a sufficient condition to achieve output legitimacy in combination with one or both of the other conditions (place dependency and/or place identity).

If we scrutinize the results critically, we must actually answer no to our question: is collaboration necessary for output legitimacy? We found only one path that includes collaboration, but that path also contains place identity. So, only the two together form part of a configuration that is sufficient for output legitimacy. Moreover, we found one path where the absence of collaboration for Dutch companies was sufficient for the absence of output legitimacy, but we also found other paths that were sufficient for the absence of output legitimacy. Those paths show the absence of place identity and, in the case of companies with an international customer orientation, the absence of place dependency. So, collaboration does matter, but mainly for Dutch-oriented companies and is certainly not the only condition that matters. Actually, this research shows that, in some cases, companies may show output legitimacy for very pragmatic reasons like place dependency in the case of internationally oriented companies and place identity in case of Dutch-oriented companies – characteristics related to companies' perceptual orientations towards the place branded.

We believe that these findings contribute to the discussion on the importance of collaboration. Usually, the literature about collaboration tends to present this as essential and crucial to achieve outcomes (see for instance Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Our research results show, however, that, in some cases, collaboration may not be as important as suggested in (some of) the literature. It shows that collaboration is a complex phenomenon which has to be looked at in more detail and as we did in relation with other conditions. Our findings also point to the importance of exploring those other conditions together with collaborations. The findings on the importance of place identity and place dependency actually point to looking with actors for more perceptual conditions that are related to identity on the one hand and the good old idea of dependency (Pfeffer 1981) on the other hand. Of course, dependency has always been emphasized strongly in collaborative and network governance theory, finding inspiration in classical inter-organization theory (Pfeffer 1981). The difference is that, there, dependency on other actors and their resources was emphasized and now, inspired by branding theory, we find dependency on a place, although we must not forget that an element in place identity is companies' societal ties with other companies. In that sense, this fits very well with collaborative and network governance theory, which also tends to emphasize ties with other actors (Lewis 2011).

Therefore, the combination of collaborative and network governance literature with branding, which focuses strongly on identity and images, seems to be a fruitful one that should be explored further. Of course, these conditions are fairly specific to the phenomenon that we studied, that is, place branding; but it may very well be that, in other situations (whether it is a policy or a governance process), we will find similar conditions that relate to perceptual identification (with the content of a policy for instance) or dependency (on the outcomes of a governance process). Of course, there are limitations to this research. First of all, the data for our 30 companies come from one branding campaign. Although this had the advantage of enabling us to look at the companies' characteristics rather than at characteristics of the branding process as explanatory conditions, we still have only one branding process. Another limitation is that we could look only at a limited number of conditions. And of course we only looked at output legitimacy and not on other forms of legitimacy. And although we tried to use multiple indicators to measure output legitimacy, including a more behavioural indicator (word of mouth) output legitimacy is also a complex concept not easy to measure.

Nevertheless, we think that the research shows some interesting results and can contribute to the ongoing discussion about the importance of collaboration to achieve results (in our case output legitimacy) and emphasizes that collaboration probably allows for ‘beneficent’ effects only together with other conditions that have to be explored in more depth.

Notes

1. This point needs additional explanation, as governance has been defined in many ways. Rhodes in his famous 1996 article mentioned seven different ways in which governance has been defined, and Levi-Faur (2012) in his handbook of governance also mentions a wide variety of meanings of governance. Some of these definitions even include new public management as a form of governance. We do not think it is very useful to use a definition of governance that includes almost everything (like good governance, new public management, and market governance). In that case, governance is virtually everything and thus nothing. That is why we reserve governance for more or less horizontal interactions between governments and all kind of societal actors (for a more elaborate argumentation of this, see Klijn and Koppenjan 2016, 4–9).
2. A condition is necessary if the outcome cannot emerge without it, and a condition is sufficient if the condition alone can achieve the outcome.
3. See monitor <https://m4hrotterdam.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Toelichting-Monitor-M4H-in-cijfers-2019.pdf>
4. RoN measures the trivialness of a condition.

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