

**Stakeholder Involvement in the Place Branding Process and the Effect on Brand  
Citizenship Behavior: A Case Study of the Drechtsteden Region and the Smart Delta  
Drechtsteden Brand**

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### **Abstract**

This study has investigated the effect of involving stakeholders in the place branding process and the outcomes of this process in the form of brand citizenship behavior. It has done this through a quantitative survey and a quantitative content analysis of brand-related documents. The findings of this research show that the involvement of stakeholders in the place branding process leads to more brand citizenship behavior of stakeholders in the form of investment in the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. Moreover, the related factors of place identification and place dependency were investigated, and it was shown that participation in the network significantly mediates the relationship between place identification and brand citizenship behavior.

*Key words:* place branding, interactive governance, stakeholder involvement, brand citizenship behavior

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With a thesis about place branding, I have to make a last small reference and word of thanks to all the places this thesis has brought me and my laptop. My thesis has been written from many different places: From the more obvious places like the university, my desk at home, and the municipality's office in Dordrecht, to the canteen of Varkenoord, in the metro, my local Bagels & Beans, the garden at my parents' house, and the Pavilion. All these places have indirectly contributed to the thesis you see before you right now, and that you will hopefully read with much interest.

Enjoy reading!

## Introduction

“I Amsterdam”, Paris, the city of love, and “I love New York”. What these slogans have in common is that associations come to mind. Paris is known for its romantic atmosphere, while “I Amsterdam” creates a feeling of belonging to the city with its focus on the phrase “I am”. Another example closer to home, although a bit less well-known, is Brainport Eindhoven in the Netherlands: A region around the city of Eindhoven known for its many technology companies and high-quality manufacturing industry. This region and the cities mentioned above are all examples of places that have been branded. In general, branding means that a – usually positive – value or meaning is added to something such as a person, tangible good, or place (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). For years, businesses in the private sector have used branding, and recently its use in the public sector has been increasing as well. In the public sector branding is used as an effective governance strategy to brand e.g. politicians, policies and places (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). One of the main forms of branding is place branding, which this research paper will focus on.

Place branding deals with establishing a brand and identity for a certain city, region, country, or other place. A place brand communicates certain physical and/or emotional attributes of the place (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). In that way, associations with the place are created in the minds of users and stakeholders. This is one of the main goals of place branding. From a governance point of view, other goals of place branding include distinguishing the branded place from other places and attracting certain target groups to the area (Klijn et al., 2012). This is especially important in a time where globalization has opened up many possibilities for travel, business, and education. Because of these countless possibilities, the competition between different countries, regions, and cities has increased (Acharya & Rahman, 2016). Thus, branding can be useful for promoting a certain place to its target audience, which may include tourists, investors, residents, migrant workers, businesses, students, and so on. Moreover, place brands can be used as a tool for the development of places in an economic, political, cultural and social sense (Go & Govers, 2010).

Several scholars have approached place branding as an interactive governance process or strategy, where different parties are involved in the place branding process (e.g. Kavartzis, 2012; Klijn et al., 2012; Stevens et al., 2020). Klijn et al. (2012) describe the link between governance and place branding as follows: “Place branding has a strong governance character in that it involves many different actors and the government is one of the parties in the branding process” (p. 1). Governance in this case refers to network governance, where several actors are dependent on each other for the delivery of services, resources, and decision-

making (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). One characteristic of place branding is that the branding process takes place in such complex network settings, where the government is often dependent on other actors. Other actors can include – among others – businesses, residents, and societal organizations. These other stakeholders hold the power to influence the branding process and sometimes even co-produce the brand together with governmental actors (Klijn et al., 2012). Involvement and collaboration of stakeholders in these governance processes has shown to be important and effective in different places and contexts (Eshuis & Edelenbos, 2009; Kavartzis, 2012; Klijn et al., 2021; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012). Stakeholder collaboration can lead to favorable brand outcomes such as effectiveness in terms of attracting target audiences (Klijn et al., 2012). Another outcome is achieving output legitimacy (i.e. acceptance of the place brand), although place dependency and place identity also play a role in this (Klijn et al., 2021). A third example of a brand outcome is increased support by stakeholders for the brand (Eshuis & Edelenbos, 2009). Support for the brand can be measured in different ways, one of which is brand citizenship behavior (BCB).

This paper will specifically look at the inclusion of internal, non-citizen stakeholders in the branding process: businesses, educational institutions, governments, and societal organizations. This will be done in the context of the Drechtsteden region and the place brand Smart Delta Drechtsteden, which was officially launched in November 2021. The choice to not focus on residents as a group of stakeholders can be explained by the context of the study: Because the regional brand has only existed for a relatively short period of time, it has not been used in communication towards residents of the region. Residents have not been actively involved in the branding process of Smart Delta Drechtsteden and additionally might not be as aware of the brand yet, because the focus of the brand so far has been on communication with professional stakeholders instead of residents.

This research aims to empirically test whether internal stakeholders who were (actively) involved in the branding process display brand citizenship behavior, which can be measured by the investment of resources of stakeholders in the brand. An additional research aim is for the results of this research to inform theory on stakeholder involvement in regional branding processes and the outcomes of these processes, in this case brand citizenship behavior. This study will also investigate stakeholders' identification with and dependency on the region, and how this could possibly influence brand citizenship behavior.

To investigate these research aims the following research question is proposed: What is the effect of stakeholder involvement in the place branding process in the Drechtsteden region on stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior? If stakeholder involvement will be shown

to affect brand citizenship behavior, this study will further look into other factors that could influence brand citizenship behavior. To aid in answering the research question, the following sub questions are presented:

- What is stakeholder involvement in a place branding process?
- What is brand citizenship behavior?
- To what extent does stakeholder involvement in the Drechtsteden regional network and branding process lead to brand citizenship behavior?
- To what extent do place identification and place dependency have an effect on brand citizenship behavior?

### **Academic Relevance**

In the place branding literature many previous studies focus on describing a specific place branding case instead of understanding and explaining the underlying phenomena of place branding or place marketing (Vuignier, 2016). This study will test whether internal stakeholders who were involved in the branding process display brand citizenship behavior, and it wants to add to the existing literature with empirical findings and explanations for these findings. In the governance literature on branding, stakeholder involvement and the network around brands have been gaining attention (Klijn et al., 2021; Vuignier, 2016). Previous studies show the importance of the involvement of various stakeholders in the branding process, making it an interactive governance process (Kavaratzis, 2012; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012). However, the importance of collaboration between stakeholders in regional branding processes, and the effect that this has on brand outcomes is not widely researched yet (Vuignier, 2016). This research aims to make a contribution to the literature and fill these gaps. To do this, the present research will look deeper into stakeholder involvement and its effect on the brand outcome of stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior. The concept of brand citizenship behavior has so far mainly been applied in marketing literature on branding but has not been used much in governance literature. Brand citizenship behavior shows stakeholders' support for and investment in the brand and is an important concept for measuring the success of a brand. Therefore, this effect of place branding will be measured in the present study.

### **Societal Relevance**

The involvement of stakeholders in the branding process can – just as in other governance processes – help make sense of the complexity of society. In our contemporary society complex network settings can be found everywhere, and place branding also takes

place within such networks. Here, interdependent actors from government, business and society collaborate to achieve positive brand outcomes (Klijn et al., 2012). Positive effects including a clearer brand concept, increased effectiveness of the governance process, and contribution to the sustainable development of the place (Klijn et al., 2012; Ripoll González & Gale, 2020). These brand outcomes can in turn be beneficial for the place that is being branded. For instance, it can lead to the further development of places in an economic, social, political or cultural way (Go & Govers, 2010). This shows the societal relevance of researching this topic.

To answer the research question and sub questions and fulfill the research aim, this paper first outlines and critically discusses the most relevant theory on stakeholder involvement in place branding processes, brand citizenship behavior and place identification and place dependency. This is followed by a description and justification of the methods that will be used to answer the research question. Then, the results will be presented and this paper will end with a discussion and conclusion.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Place Branding**

Previous research on place branding is multidisciplinary in nature and has been conducted from, among others, marketing, tourism, geography, and public management perspectives (Vuignier, 2016). A range of studies have attempted to define a terminology of place branding (see e.g. Anholt, 2010; Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Vuignier, 2016) and distinguish it from place marketing, two terms that have sometimes been used interchangeably in the literature. Vuignier (2016) states that public branding is a specific element within place marketing (taken from Eshuis et al., 2014). This paper adopts the definition of place branding of Stevens et al. (2020), who conceptualize place branding as follows: “The development of brands for geographic locations with the aim of triggering positive associations about the area and distinguishing a place from other places” (p. 752). Furthermore, a governance perspective to place branding will be adopted, because this research will approach place branding as a governance process and focus on the relationship between stakeholder involvement in the network around the brand and the branding process.

A brand is not the place itself, but it is “what gives (additional) meaning and value to the product, defines its identity, and very importantly distinguishes it from other products, policies, or services” (Klijn et al., 2021, p. 1). So, branding is about creating value and attributing it to something, in this case a place (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). Brands are a tool to affect and manage the perceptions of stakeholders of the place, and it can be used to build an

image for internal as well as external stakeholders (Govers, 2013). Certain associations with the brand are created in the minds of its users, which can in turn influence their behavior (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). Because branding is a way to alter perceptions, it can be regarded as a soft governance strategy (Klijn et al., 2012).

### **Stakeholder Involvement in the Branding Process**

Branding is a relatively new concept in the governance literature and also in practice, where it is used as a strategy for governance (Stevens et al., 2020). Branding shares many characteristics with network governance processes (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Klijn et al., 2021). In a world where complexity is increasing and networks are of growing importance, there is a need to approach (place) branding as a governance process (Go & Govers, 2010; Klijn et al., 2012; Stevens et al., 2020). Networks around a place brand agenda often consist of actors from different sectors of society, such as government, citizens and businesses. These actors are interdependent, which stems from the resources that each of these parties have. Thus, stakeholders need each other to achieve their goals and solve problems. Actors have to integrate their resources to co-create value, which can be attributed to a place to build a brand. However, involving stakeholders can have disadvantages as well. The main downside is that it can be hard to reach consensus and make decisions, because there are many different perspectives to take into account (Henninger et al., 2016). Moreover, the tackling of problems in a network setting is complex, because all these different actors may have their own view of what the problem exactly is and what the best way is to solve it. In branding processes, this might even be complicated further because actors can have different associations with or perceptions of the brand (Klijn et al., 2012; Zenker & Braun, 2017). Because one of the main goals of a brand is to create an association in the minds of its users and stakeholders, conflict can arise when actors do not have the same associations of the brand, and thus perceive it differently (Klijn et al., 2012). The brand initiator, owner or manager should take these different perceptions into account, while simultaneously keeping in mind that these perceptions may differ from the initial meaning that the brand owner wants to communicate to the outside world (Klijn et al., 2012). A final characteristic of network governance that is found in branding processes is the complex nature of interactions between stakeholders. It is important that parties agree with the associations of the brand. If not, this can have serious consequences, for example in the form of counter branding efforts, which can arise when parties do not agree with the communicated associations or values of the brand (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Network management strategies may be applied in networks around brands to



effectively manage the different interests, perceptions and strategies of all stakeholders within a network (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

Until approximately a decade ago, the role of stakeholders in the branding process had not been given much attention in the literature. An exception is Hankinson (2004), who discusses multiple perspectives on brands: From the traditional perspective where a brand owner constitutes the brand and communicates it to the target group, to the perspective of brands as a relationship (relational approach). The latter views a brand as an ongoing relationship between the owner and a wider array of stakeholders, not just consumers. In that case, the branding process will be interactive and collective as stakeholders work together with the brand owner or creator to establish and implement the brand on an ongoing basis. The involvement of stakeholders can be regarded as a necessity, because of the public and political nature of the branding process (Kavaratzis, 2012). Both individually and collectively, stakeholders of a brand attribute meaning to the brand, essentially (co-)creating it. In other cases stakeholders do not just co-create or co-develop the brand, but they own it themselves (Kavaratzis, 2012). When the involved stakeholders are regarded as co-creators of the brand, as opposed to having a branding strategy imposed on them in a top-down manner, this can have multiple advantages. For instance, residents of local communities can become advocates for the brand when they are involved in the branding process from the start and along the way (San Eugenio-Vela et al., 2020). Moreover, the legitimacy of the branding process is more likely to increase (Stevens et al., 2020). Legitimacy is not only important during the branding process, but also at the end of it. Output legitimacy of an interactive branding process can be achieved by combining the cooperation of stakeholders with other conditions such as place identity and place dependency (Klijn et al., 2021). Not involving (relevant) stakeholders in the branding process can bring along certain risks and limits, ranging from legitimacy problems to conflict between stakeholders and limitations to effectiveness (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012)

In this study, stakeholder involvement will be measured by two concepts: the degree of actor-network interaction and the degree of participation in the network. The first concept refers to the degree of interaction that actors have had during the branding process with other parties in the network, i.e. other internal stakeholders of the brand. The second concept refers to how much actors participate in the regional network around the brand, e.g. by attending events or following the news about the brand.

### **Brand Citizenship Behavior**

The abovementioned studies show the importance of the involvement of various stakeholder groups in the branding process, making it an interactive governance process.

However, not much research has been conducted on the outcomes of branding processes where internal stakeholders were involved. Examples of previous studies include Klijn et al. (2021), who focused on achieving output legitimacy in the branding process; and Eshuis and Edelenbos (2009) who found that collaboration of stakeholders leads to more support for the brand. However, more research that further investigates the effectiveness of the interactive branding process is needed. One way in which such effectiveness can be measured is through stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior (BCB).

Brand citizenship behavior is a concept that finds its origins in the marketing literature, more specifically in the theory of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Brand citizenship behavior refers to the behavior of employees that are outside the scope of their official job tasks and responsibilities (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2020). These behaviors are based on the internalization of brand values. Within the brand management literature, brand citizenship behavior is described as one of the main outcomes of internal branding processes (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2020) and internal brand management (Piehler et al., 2016). Internal branding focuses on employees as well as external actions.

Employees, the internal stakeholders, are important to the brand because they are in part determining the brand experience that people outside the brand, such as customers or other external stakeholders, will have (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2020). Their actions are influential because those actions can help strengthen the brand internally as well as externally. If employees support the brand and show enthusiasm towards it, this will be visible to external stakeholders as well. In that way, internal stakeholders can become brand promoters through their actions.

This marketing perspective on brand citizenship behavior, where employees are regarded as the internal stakeholders of a company, can be adjusted in order for it to be applicable in a place branding context. Instead of taking a company as the unit of analysis and regarding employees as the internal stakeholders, the place brand can be used as the unit of analysis and internal stakeholders will then include the actors in the network around the place brand. From a governance perspective, brand citizenship behavior can be linked to resource dependency between actors. Resource dependency exists when parties are dependent on each other for the exchange and investment of resources in something, in this case the place brand. That is the perspective that this study will take. In this research, brand citizenship behavior is conceptualized as the investment of resources into the brand by the brand's internal stakeholders, i.e. the actors in the regional network. Branding and governance literature emphasizes that brands will be stronger and more effective when they are not imposed top-

down, but created together by multiple stakeholders (see e.g., Stevens et al., 2021). For instance, Klijn et al. (2021, p. 3) argue that “the brand message will be accepted more easily when actors are involved in the branding process.” When the brand message is accepted by stakeholders, actors are more likely to support the brand and communicate about it (Zenker & Braun, 2017). Stakeholders can positively contribute to, promote, and support the brand, both internally to the network and externally to other, external stakeholders. In this study, brand citizenship behavior will be measured by the amount of resources that stakeholders invest in the brand. Investment in the brand can take multiple forms, such as spending money, providing expertise, supporting the brand, promoting it, communicating to others about it, and embracing it.

### **Place Identification and Place Dependency**

Place identification and place dependency have been shown to play a role in collaboration of stakeholders in place branding processes (Klijn et al., 2021; Zenker et al., 2017). These concepts are similar, yet measure different things. Previous literature has often taken them together as the concept of place attachment, but both dimensions have different origins and a different type of connection to the place (Klijn et al., 2021; Raymond et al., 2010). Therefore, they will be treated as separate concepts and variables in this study. Conceptual confusion exists about place identity and place identification (Kalandides, 2011). Place identity can be explained as a distinctive feature of a place (Vuignier, 2016) or “sense of place” (Kalandides, 2011). Kalandides (2011) also mentions that the term place identity is used to mean “identification of a group with a territory” (p. 30). In this study, we will conceptualize place identification in that way. Place identification is explained as the identification of actors with a place (a psychological connection) as well as with the community of actors that exists in the place (a societal connection). This is similar to how Klijn et al. (2021) conceptualize the concept, although they refer to it as place identity.

Place dependency concerns itself with the physical connection to a place and to what extent the actor needs the place for a certain use (Raymond et al., 2010). An example is a company that is dependent on the place to execute its business activities. Klijn et al. (2021) state that stakeholders may need at least a bit of place dependency and/or place identity for them to make an effort to be involved with the brand, support it, and communicate the brand message to other actors. However, it is still unclear how these concepts exactly relate to stakeholder involvement in branding processes and outcomes of these processes. Klijn et al. (2021) conclude that it is important that the conditions of place identity and place dependency are explored in more depth in relation to the collaboration of stakeholders in the branding

process. In this research, both place dependency and place identification will therefore be regarded as variables that could have a possible effect on stakeholders' participation in the network and on their brand citizenship behavior.

### **The Effect of Stakeholder Involvement on Brand Citizenship Behavior and Hypotheses**

Previous studies suggest that it is expected that the involvement of stakeholders in the branding process will lead to better brand outcomes, e.g. in the form of increased legitimacy, a stronger brand, supportive behavior, and being effective in increasing target groups (Ahn et al., 2015; Eshuis & Edelenbos, 2009; Klijn et al., 2012; Klijn et al., 2021). Moreover, when internal stakeholders engage with the brand and support it openly, it contributes to the consistency of the brand in the long term (Ahn et al., 2015; Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2020). Local governments should therefore work with internal stakeholders to build a successful place brand, based on a commonly established identity and core values of the city (Ahn et al., 2015).

Based on the beforementioned studies which show the importance of the involvement and collaboration of stakeholders, it is expected that stakeholders' involvement in the network around the brand leads to them showing more brand citizenship behavior, measured by stakeholders' investment in the brand. The involvement of stakeholders is measured by two separate concepts. The first concept is the degree of actor-network interaction, which refers to stakeholders' interaction with other internal stakeholders during the branding process. The second concept refers to the degree of stakeholders' participation in the regional network in general. Based on these concepts, the following hypotheses were established. First of all, it is expected that stakeholders who interact more with other actors during the branding process and who themselves are involved in this process will display more brand citizenship behavior (H1). Secondly, it is expected that stakeholders who participate more in the network around the brand display more brand citizenship behavior (H2). Then, it will be investigated if actor-network interaction can also have an effect on brand citizenship behavior through participation in the network. This expectation will be investigated to get more insight into the relationship between the two variables that are conceptualized as stakeholder involvement. Thus, it is expected that more interaction between actors leads to more participation in the network, which in turn has a positive influence on stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior. In other words, it is expected that the relationship between actor-network interaction and brand citizenship behavior will be mediated by stakeholders' participation in the network (H3).

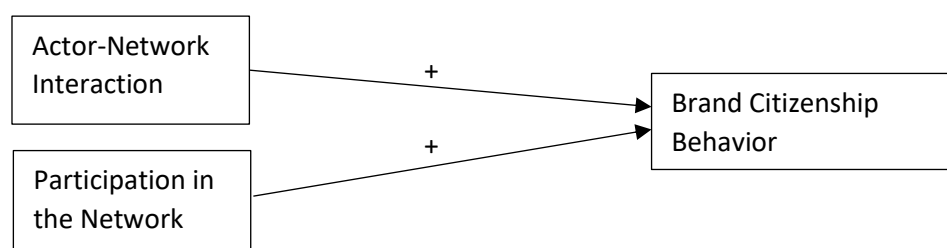
Furthermore, the roles of place identification and place dependency will be investigated in this research. Klijn et al. (2021) state that a minimum level of place

dependency and/or place identity (identification) may be needed for stakeholders to support the brand and communicate with others about it. Because their research is so recent, it would be interesting to gather more insight into this potential relationship. Supporting the brand and communicating about it can be regarded as types of brand investment, the way in which brand citizenship behavior is conceptualized in this study. Therefore, both place dependency and place identification are regarded as variables that could influence stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior. Moreover, it is expected that participation in the network will mediate the relationship between place identification and brand citizenship behavior. If the organization that a respondent represents identifies itself with the region, it is expected that actors will participate more in the regional network because they feel identified with the place as well as the community. In turn, this is expected to lead to more brand citizenship behavior. This leads to the following hypothesis: The relationship between place identification and brand citizenship behavior will be mediated by stakeholders' participation in the network (H4).

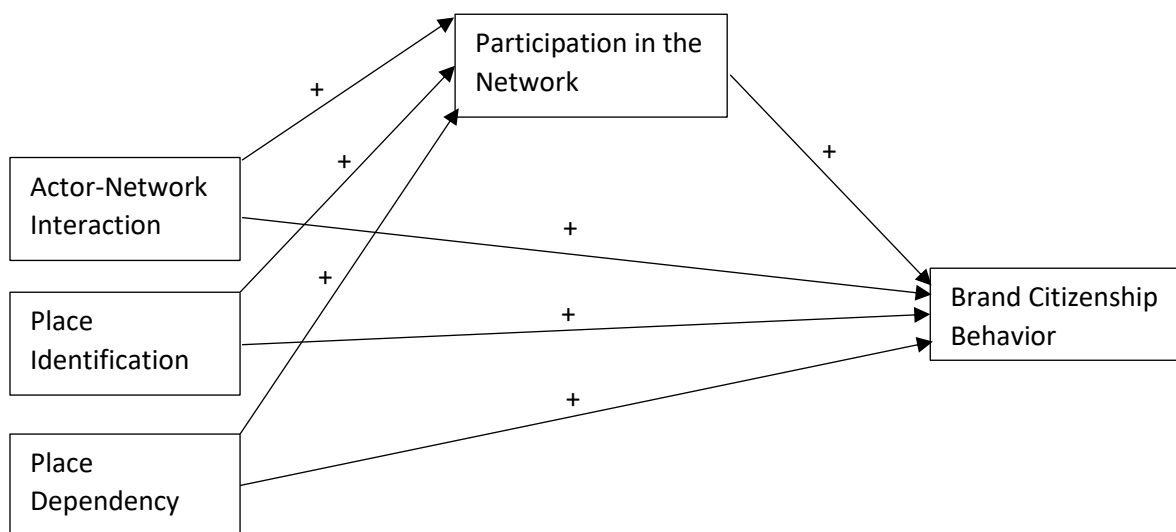
Lastly, it is expected that place dependency will have an effect on stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior, because stakeholders who are dependent on the place will have a bigger interest in (the success of) the brand and may thus want to support the brand and invest resources in it. Again it is expected that participation in the network could mediate this relationship. When the organization is dependent on the region in a functional way, this may cause stakeholders to participate more in the regional network around the brand because they think it is beneficial for their organization. In turn, more participation in the network is expected have a positive influence on brand citizenship behavior. This leads to the following hypothesis: The relationship between place dependency and brand citizenship behavior will be mediated by stakeholders' participation in the network (H5). The conceptual models that will be investigated are found in Figure 1.

### Figure 1

*Conceptual models (own elaboration)*



*Note.* Model 1: Model between actor-network interaction (H1), participation in the network (H2) and brand citizenship behavior.



*Note.* Model 2: Three separate mediation models between actor-network interaction (H3), place identification (H4), place dependency (H5), and brand citizenship behavior with participation in the network as a mediator.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Procedure

#### *Instruments*

A quantitative online survey and quantitative content analysis were used to answer the research question and test the hypotheses. A quantitative survey is an effective instrument for collecting data about experiences and opinions of the study's target population (Babbie, 2012). Additionally, it is an efficient way to measure multiple variables at once, and the collected data can be used to quantitatively test the relationships between these variables. Furthermore, previous studies on stakeholder involvement in place branding have shown that a quantitative survey is an effective method for studying stakeholder involvement in (place) branding processes (Klijn et al., 2012; Konecnik Ruzzier & Petek, 2012).

This research uses methodological triangulation: The quantitative survey is combined with quantitative document analysis. Content analysis was chosen as a complementary method to the survey, because it allows for further insight into the involvement of stakeholders in the branding process and in which ways they participate in the network. The data that was gathered through the analysis is used to back up the findings of the survey and also explains certain findings of the survey in more depth. In this way, a more complete picture of the case can be provided. An advantage of mixed-methods research is that findings

can be verified and strengthened, and potential weaknesses in the data of one research method can be compensated for by the data gathered through the other method (Fielding, 2012; Payne & Payne, 1944). This increases the validity and reliability of the results.

The survey design is cross-sectional, because the data was collected at a specific point in time, namely from April to June 2022. The data used here is sourced from a survey which is part of the international BRANDSUS research project on international branding, which is conducted by three professors from Erasmus University Rotterdam. The survey was set up in Dutch, because the target population resides in the Netherlands. The target population included professionals who work for a government, company, educational institution, or other public or societal organization in the Drechtsteden region. In the introduction of the survey, the purpose of the study was explained. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point. Moreover, the privacy and anonymity of participants is guaranteed. The survey is compliant with the Dutch standards for ethics and privacy in academic research, and was approved by the Ethical Committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam (approval number: 21-014). The content of the survey was designed in collaboration with the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden, who supported the distribution of the survey.

### ***Data collection***

The online survey was available on RISBO's platform. The link to the survey was distributed via multiple channels, so that a large number of respondents could be reached. Ways in which the survey was distributed included emails to the list with email addresses of the brand's newsletter, multiple posts on the social media channels (Twitter and LinkedIn) of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Moreover, people were asked personally to fill in the survey at events organized by partners of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. These distribution channels were accessed through the researcher's internship position at the Drechtsteden regional government.

The type of content that was analyzed consists of documents concerning the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. Documents that were analyzed include the brand's implementation plan, a press release about the launching of the brand, and online blog posts about the brand and events that are organized in the network (for a complete overview, see the reference list). It was expected that these documents would include information about the branding process, the (type of) actors involved in this process, and how the brand and its message were received by stakeholders in the regional network. Moreover, it was expected to find information about the ways in which stakeholders contributed to the branding process and the brand in general. For instance, this includes investing time or money, supporting the brand publicly, or

communicating about it to others. The data that was expected to be found in these documents was used to further understand the data that was gathered by the quantitative survey. The documents used for the content analysis were accessed and collected in two different ways. Several blog posts about the development and launching of the brand are publicly available on the website of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Other documents, such as the implementation plan and annual report, were accessed through the internship position of the researcher. She has received permission from the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden to use and analyze these documents in this research.

### ***Limitations***

Using the abovementioned sampling method for the survey allowed the researcher to reach most internal stakeholders in the network. However, it could be that stakeholders who are already active in the network around the brand (e.g., signed up for the newsletter, following the social media pages, attending the events) are more likely to fill out the survey than stakeholders who are not as involved. This could have an influence on the results, because actively involved stakeholders may have different views of the brand than stakeholders who are less involved. This could potentially be a weakness of the sampling method and affect validity. To control for this, multiple survey links were used. This allowed the researcher to check from which channel the respondents found the survey. Several different links were sent out apart from the main one, which was sent out by the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden through the distribution channels mentioned before. The second link was sent out by Deal, the marketing and acquisition organization of the region, to their network. This link was included because Deal's network consists of many companies in the region, not just stakeholders who are already involved in the branding process. It was intended that by using their network, this potential weakness would be compensated for. However, this link yielded only three responses and was thus not an effective way of reaching actors such as small to medium enterprises, who were expected to be less actively involved in the network around the brand and branding process. The second separate link was sent out by the Duurzaamheidsfabriek, a place in the Drechtsteden region where students and start-ups are able to meet and work together on innovation. The Duurzaamheidsfabriek was included to represent the educational institutions of the region, and because it was thought that through their network other educational institutions could be reached. However, only one respondent filled in the survey through this link. Because of the low response rates of these two links, the decision was made to exclude these four cases from the analysis. By doing this, the power of analysis will be higher because the sample is more



relevant, since only respondents that were reached through the network of Smart Delta Drechtsteden were included in the dataset.

Another limitation is that there is a possibility of bias due to the internship position of the researcher. This internship position places them at an organization which is part of the network that is being researched. When writing the code book for the content analysis and analyzing the data of both the content analysis and the survey, there is a possibility of minor bias because the researcher was participating in the same network that her research investigated.

## **Materials**

### ***Survey***

**Items and Scales.** The online quantitative survey is made up of several scales including multiple questions or statements that measure the different variables. A complete overview of all questions and statements included for each scale can be found in Appendix A. The overarching term of stakeholder involvement is measured by two independent variables. The first variable is the degree of interaction that actors have with other actors in the network (actor-network interaction) and measures if stakeholders have been involved in the branding process, if they have interacted with other parties during this process, and if they have interacted with the brand's communication team. This scale included three statements and each statement consists of two opposing sentences: A negatively phrased statement on the left side and a positively phrased statement on the right side. For example: "My organization has hardly been involved in the decision-making process around the brand Smart Delta Drechtsteden in the past half year" on the left side, versus "My organization has intensively been involved in the decision-making process around the brand Smart Delta Drechtsteden in the past half year" on the right side (statement 1). Participants could answer on a slider scale from 1 "totally agree with the left statement" to 10 "totally agree with the right statement".

The second independent variable that measures stakeholder involvement is actors' degree of participation in the network. This scale asked respondents seven questions about the frequency in which their organization has done things such as follow the news about Smart Delta Drechtsteden, attend meetings or events of Smart Delta Drechtsteden, and participate in decision-making. An example of a statement is "In our organization there are people who have attended meetings or events of Smart Delta Drechtsteden (online or offline)" (statement 3). Participants could answer these statements on a slider scale from 1 "completely disagree" to 10 "completely agree".

The dependent variable, brand citizenship behavior, was measured by the degree that the organization the respondent belongs to invests resources in the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. Respondents were provided with statements about ways in which their organization has invested e.g., time, money, expertise, and support in the brand. This was measured in a similar way as described above, with a negatively phrased statement on the left and a positively phrased statement on the right. An example item is: “My organization has not invested money in developing and/or promoting Smart Delta Drechtsteden” on the left side, versus “My organization has invested a lot of money in developing and/or promoting Smart Delta Drechtsteden” on the right side (statement 6). Participants again answered on a slider scale from 1 “totally agree with the left statement” to 10 “totally agree with the right statement”. One item of this scale (number 5) was reversely phrased, and the scores of the data were reversed before starting the analysis to ensure correct interpretation of the scores.

For actor-network interaction, participation in the network, and investment in the brand, a “don’t know” option was included as an answer option. This option was added because the brand is relatively new and it was expected, based on conversations with brand experts who work for the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden, that not all stakeholders would be able to answer all questions because they are not familiar (enough) with the brand to do so, or do not know how their organizations is precisely involved with the brand. To encourage respondents to fill in as many of the questions as possible this option was added. By providing participants with this option, they could skip questions that they did not know the answer to but still fill in the rest of the survey.

The independent variable of place identification was measured by six items. The statements of this scale measured the level of identification of the organization the respondent represents with the Drechtsteden region. An example of a statement is: “Our organization identifies itself very strongly with the Drechtsteden region” (statement 5). Respondents answered if they agreed or not with these statements on a 10-point slider scale ranging from 1 “completely disagree” to 10 “completely agree”.

The last independent variable of place dependency was measured by a scale including five items asking about the degree of dependency of the organization on the Drechtsteden region. Degree of dependency on the place means that the organization is attached to the region in a functional way, for instance because they develop their main activity there. An example item is: “In the Netherlands there is not a good place for our organization’s activities outside of the Drechtsteden region” (statement 1). Respondents answered on a 10-point slider scale where 1 means “completely disagree” and 10 means “completely agree”.

Furthermore, several variables were measured because they were intended to be controlled for in the analysis. The first variable is brand awareness, which was measured by one question. First, pictures of the logos of the brand were shown, together with an image of the region that is frequently used in communication efforts of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. After showing the logos and picture, respondents were asked if they had seen the brand before. Other variables measured the demographics of participants, such as age, educational level, gender, and the type of organization they work for.

**Reliability and Validity of Scales.** In order to check the reliability and validity of the scales, several tests were carried out. Scale reliability (internal consistency) was assessed by Cronbach's alpha, which shows good to excellent scores for all scales. The scales for actor-network interaction ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ), investment in the brand ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ) and place dependency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) all scored good on reliability. Furthermore, the scales for participation in the network ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) and place identification ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) score excellent on internal consistency. Exploratory factor analyses and Pearson's correlations were executed to check the validity of the scales. In a good factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) statistic should be  $> 0.50$  and Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant at  $p < .050$  (Field, 2013). These criteria were met for all scales. Moreover, the Eigenvalues (EV) and Scree Plots of each scale were inspected. The number of components for each scale was based on Kaiser's criterion, which states that only factors with Eigenvalues higher than 1 should be retained, because those are the components that actually measure underlying factors. Kaiser's criterion was complemented by an inspection of the Scree Plots. The factor analyses showed that the scales were all measured by one component, because there was only one  $EV > 1$ . This was also shown in the Scree Plots. Therefore, there was no reason to adjust the scales from how they were originally set up. Pearson's correlations showed significant correlations for each scale, with one notably high correlation. In the scale for actor-network interaction items 1 and 2 were found to be very highly correlated ( $r = 0.96$ ). However, the Eigenvalue and Scree Plot showed that there is only one component in this variable. Therefore, the decision was made to keep both items in the scale.

### ***Content Analysis***

In addition to the survey, quantitative content analysis was performed. The type of content that was analyzed consisted of eight documents concerning the brand, regional network, and branding process of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Specifically, the analyzed documents include the implementation plan for the brand, an annual report of the Drehtsteden regional government, blog posts that were published on the website of Smart

Delta Drechtsteden, and a press release about the launching of the brand. This press release was published on the website of Smart Delta Drechtsteden and used by multiple (online) newspapers to report about the event in November 2021 where the brand was launched. An overview of the documents can be found in the reference list. Part of the analyzed documents are public, and others were accessed through the researcher's position as an intern at the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden. Some of these documents were produced by the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden, which is the team that informs others about the brand, promotes it, and communicates about it, e.g. in the form blog posts on the website of the brand and monthly newsletters.

## **Approach to Analysis**

### ***Survey***

Once the data collection was complete the data was exported to IBM SPSS Statistics 25, where it was cleaned using the previously described criteria. Cases where the “don't know” option was selected or the slider was not moved were changed into missing values, because the question was not completed. After cleaning the data was tested for normality and outliers. The data was found to be non-normally distributed. However, the central limit theorem holds because the sample size is bigger than 30 (Field, 2013). Moreover, because linear regression tests do not require a normal (Gaussian) distribution, the data not being normally distributed does not form a problem in this case (Field, 2013). One outlier was found in the data through looking at the Casewise Diagnostics. After closer inspection of the case, it seemed that this respondent answered “no” to the first question of brand awareness, which could possibly explain the outlier. However, this case seems to be a legitimate observation that is part of the population. Furthermore, Cook's distance for this outlier was 0.86. If Cook's distance is below 1, the case is not overly influential (Field, 2013). Because of these reasons, the choice was made to not exclude this outlier.

After performing reliability and validity tests (Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlations, exploratory factor analyses) and ensuring the scales were reliable and valid, the assumptions for linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, normal distribution of the residuals, and multicollinearity were checked. Once it was established that all assumptions were met, the data was first explored using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations. Then, independent sample t-tests were executed for all variables that were supposed to be included as control variables (age, gender, educational level and position). This was done to ensure that they would not influence the main variables in the linear regression analysis and mediation analyses. The variable of position was recoded into a dummy variable (0 = not

working for a governmental institution, 1 = working for a governmental institution) to investigate if governmental stakeholders (including municipalities in the Drechtsteden and other governmental bodies) would score differently than non-governmental stakeholders (business, education, societal organizations, etc.).

Following those tests, several statistical tests were performed to test the hypotheses: Linear regression analysis and three different mediation analyses. A linear regression analysis was carried out with actor-network interaction and participation in the network and brand citizenship behavior to explore the relationships between the variables and test hypotheses 1 and 2. Mediation analyses were used to test hypotheses 3, 4 and 5. Hayes' PROCESS version 4.1 was used to run the mediation analyses. This is a statistical tool specifically designed to carry out this type of analysis (Hayes, 2013). While checking the assumptions of linearity with actor-network interaction and place identification as the predictor variables and participation in the network as the outcome variable, slight heteroscedasticity was found in the data. For all other relationships in the mediation models the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. To overcome the violation of this assumption, the homoscedasticity interference model HC3 (Davidson-MacKinnon) was applied to the mediation models. The use of the HC3 homoscedasticity interference model over earlier HC models is suggested by Hayes and Cai (2007).

To measure the mediation model the four conditions of mediation were tested (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Field, 2013). These four conditions include that the independent variable should significantly predict the mediator (path a) and should not be zero (i.e.  $\text{path a} \neq 0$ ); the mediator should significant predict the dependent variable (path b) and should not be zero (i.e.  $\text{path b} \neq 0$ ); the independent variable should significantly predict the dependent variable when the mediator is not present in the model (path c) and should not be zero (i.e.  $\text{path c} \neq 0$ ); and the independent variable should predict the dependent variable less strongly when the mediator is included in the model than when it is excluded in the model ( $\text{path c}' < \text{path c}$ ). Even though this method of measuring mediation has been widely used in the past decades, there are certain limitations to it (Pardo & Román, 2013). A more recent method of establishing if mediation has taken place or not is to use bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Bootstrapping specifies confidence intervals that can be used to determine the significance of the indirect effect (path a \* path b). In this research, the presence of a significant mediation effect is assessed by looking at the four conditions of mediation as well as inspecting the significance level of the mediation effect, which is shown by the bootstrapped confidence interval of the indirect effect. If this confidence interval does not

contain zero we can be confident that the mediation effect is significantly different from zero, i.e. that there is a mediation effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

For significant mediation models, the effect size was reported to gain insight into the size of the mediation effect (Field, 2013). This was calculated by dividing the total effect by the indirect effect. The effect size explains the proportion of the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable that operates indirectly, i.e. through the mediator.

### ***Content Analysis***

The blog entries on the Smart Delta Drechtsteden website were selected by using the search term “merk” (brand) and “nieuwe merk” (new brand) to specifically filter articles that focus on the communication about the brand in its earliest stages: During the introduction, launching, and implementation. Of these results, four news entries and one press release were selected for analysis. The others were excluded because they were not relevant for the research aim, for instance because the content was not about the branding process or the network. The blog entries that were selected describe the launching of the brand and the quarterly events where stakeholders from business, education, and government are present. These entries were written by members of the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden and published online on the brand’s website. In addition, three other documents were analyzed: The brand’s implementation plan, the annual report of the Drechtsteden regional government of 2021, and a factsheet about the brand.

In order to look for relevant information in these texts, a code book was created (see Appendix B). Elements in the texts that cover participation of stakeholders in the network, involvement in the branding process, and their investment in the brand in terms of promotion, communication and support were selected and coded accordingly. Codes for place identification and place dependency were not established, because it was not expected to find specific references to these concepts in the data. The Drechtsteden region is mentioned often in the analyzed documents, but not necessarily in relation to words or sentences that indicate a psychological or functional attachment to the region. An elaborate overview of the dimensions and codes is presented in Appendix B. The documents were imported into ATLAS.ti, where they were analyzed according to the codebook. During the coding process, a few new codes were added to more accurately describe the data. These codes and the reason for adding them are described in the Results section.

### **Case of the Drechtsteden region**

The Drechtsteden region is a region located in the South-West of the Netherlands, consisting of seven municipalities: Dordrecht, Zwijndrecht, Hendrik-Ido-Ambacht,

Alblasserdam, Papendrecht, Sliedrecht and Hardinxveld-Giessendam. In the past, these municipalities collaborated on a regional scale and decisions on e.g. policy were taken in a council consisting of aldermen of all municipalities (Dutch name: *Gemeenschappelijke Regeling Drechtsteden, Drechtstraad*). From 1 January 2022 onwards, this cooperation was dissolved and Dordrecht, the largest municipality, became the service municipality for the other six municipalities. However, there still exists a need to collaborate regionally on certain spatial-economic issues, such as the built environment, transportation, economy, education, and the energy transition (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2022). To respond to this need the seven municipalities started a branding process in 2021, supported by a managerial and governmental sounding board who provided advice and expertise (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, n.d.-b; Smart Delta Drechtsteden, n.d.-c). Simultaneously, there has been a call to not only collaborate within the governmental network of the seven municipalities, but also with other parties in the region, such as businesses and educational institutions. When the government works together with business and education, this is also called a triple helix collaboration. This triple helix collaboration was expected to be beneficial for the development of the region. In this light, it was decided to set up a regional brand that not only includes the seven municipalities, but also educational institutions and businesses in the region. The common goal of this collaboration is to improve the spatial-economic position of the region, and to work together in the regional network to achieve these goals (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, n.d.-c). The logo and slogan of the brand were officially launched at a meeting with actors from government, society, education, and business in November 2021. In the months that followed, non-governmental partners were involved in the brand to a further extent. These partners, consisting of private sector companies, educational institutions, and societal organizations, are working together with the municipalities to further develop the brand and give meaning to it.

### **Sample**

The target population of this research includes the internal stakeholders of the regional network around the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. The target audience consists of people who work at organizations which are involved in the brand in one way or another: They contribute to, participate in, or work with the brand. Therefore, the opinion of these respondents is relevant for this research. External stakeholders of the brand, such as residents who live in the Drechtsteden region, are not included in this research. This is because the brand is relatively new and has not been used in communication towards residents (yet). Thus, residents who do not work for one of the organizations which are part of the internal

stakeholders of the brand are expected to be too unfamiliar with the brand to answer the survey properly. Therefore, they were not part of the target audience of the survey.

A total of 155 respondents filled in the survey, but many responses were (partly) incomplete. Respondents who filled in the survey less than halfway or completed it in under three minutes were removed from the dataset. Moreover, as mentioned before, three respondents who answered through the link distributed by Deal and one respondents who answered through the link distributed by the Duurzaamheidsfabriek were removed. The decision was taken to remove these few respondents because it would make the sample more relevant, since only respondents who were reached through the network of the brand were included in the research.

After cleaning the data, there were 81 respondents left ( $N = 81$ ). Of these 81 respondents, 74 (91.4%) had seen the brand before and thus have brand awareness. A majority of 48 respondents (59.3%) works at a municipality in the Drechtsteden region. 11 respondents (13.6%) work for other governmental institutions, such as the provincial government. Thus, the majority of respondents (72.9%) works at a governmental body. The sample includes 10 respondents working for small and medium enterprises (12.3%) and 2 working for big enterprises (2.5%). Moreover, 7 respondents (8.6%) work at an educational institution and 5 (6.2%) at a societal organization. There were 9 respondents (11.1%) who answered "other". An important note is that respondents could fill in multiple answers for this question, so there might be respondents who are, for example, working for both a private corporation and a societal organization. With regards to gender ( $N = 64$ ) 35.9% of the respondents is female ( $N = 23$ ), 62.5% is male ( $N = 40$ ), and 1.6% preferred not to state their gender ( $N = 1$ ). When it comes to educational attainment ( $N = 64$ ), almost all respondents completed some form of education after high school. The majority (37%,  $N = 30$ ) obtained a degree from a university of applied sciences (HBO education), closely followed by 34.6% of respondents who hold a university degree ( $N = 28$ ). The average year of birth of the respondents was 1969 ( $N = 63$ ), corresponding to an age of 53, with the youngest respondent being 26 and the oldest respondent being 73.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Frequencies

The means, standard deviations and correlations between the main variables and control variables are shown in Table 1. In general, the main variables all show relatively high scores, i.e. above the midpoint of 5. Participants reported the lowest scores for the degree of actor-network interaction ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 2.86$ ,  $N = 75$ ). The highest scores were reported for



place identification ( $M = 7.34$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ,  $N = 76$ ). Correlations between the variables were found to be in the expected direction and were all positive and significant. The correlations between actor-network interaction and both participation in the network and investment in the brand are quite high ( $r > .80$ ). However, multicollinearity was not observed as a problem because the correlation is under .90 (Field, 2013). Moreover, the VIF (VIF = 3.07) and tolerance (tolerance = 0.33) scores were checked. A VIF score between 1 and 5 indicates that there is moderate correlation between the two independent variables, but because the tolerance is above 0.10, it does not form a problem (Field, 2013). Other strong positive correlations ( $.70 < r < .89$ ) were observed between participation in the network and investment in the brand. Moderate positive correlations ( $.50 < r < .69$ ) were found between place identification and all other variables. Low positive correlations ( $.26 < r < .49$ ) were observed between place dependency and the participation in the network, and between place dependency and investment in the brand. Moreover, position has a low positive correlation with actor-network interaction, participation in the network, and brand investment. Low negative correlations ( $-.26 < r < -.49$ ) were observed between brand awareness and actor-network interaction, participation in the network, and brand investment.

**Table 1**

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for the Observed Variables*

Variable	M	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Actor-network interaction	5.97	2.86	75	1						
2. Participation in the network	6.74	2.46	77	.82**	1					
3. Brand investment	6.59	2.00	77	.81**	.79**	1				
4. Place identification	7.34	2.12	76	.52**	.50**	.50**	1			
5. Place dependency	6.23	2.51	74	.24*	.35**	.27**	.56**	1		
6. Brand awareness <sup>a</sup>	1.09	0.28	81	-.28*	-.33**	-.44**	-.07	.00	1	
7. Position <sup>b</sup>	0.72	0.45	81	.45**	.48**	.44**	.18	.20	-.20	1

<sup>a</sup>Brand awareness was coded as: (1 = yes, 2 = no)

<sup>b</sup>Position was coded as: (0 = not working for a governmental institution, 1 = working for a governmental institution)

\*Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at  $p < .01$  (two-tailed)

### **Independent Samples T-Tests**

Independent samples t-tests were executed for the following variables: age, gender, educational level, position, and brand awareness. This was done in order to inspect if these variables should be controlled in the main analyses. For age, gender, and educational level no significant difference in the means of the groups was found for the main variables (actor-network interaction, participation, brand investment, place identification and place dependency). Therefore, these variables do not need to be controlled for in the linear regression analysis and mediation analyses. Position was coded as a dummy variable with 0 “not working for a governmental institution” and 1 “working for a governmental institution”. For position, respondents working at a non-governmental institution ( $n_1 = 23$ ) scored significantly lower than respondents working at a governmental organization ( $n_2 = 54$ ) on the following variables: Actor-network interaction ( $M_1 = 4.06$ ,  $M_2 = 6.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ), participation in the network ( $M_1 = 4.97$ ,  $M_2 = 7.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and brand investment ( $M_1 = 5.24$ ,  $M_2 = 7.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Because of the statistically significant difference between these two groups, the variable of position was added to the linear regression and mediation analyses as a control variable. However, it should be kept in mind that the group of people that work for a governmental institution ( $n_2 = 54$ ) is more than twice as large as the group of people that do not work for such an institution ( $n_1 = 23$ ).

### **Linear Regression**

After checking the assumptions for linear regression and establishing that they were met, a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to test H1 and H2. Hypothesis 1 expected that stakeholders who interact more with other actors during the branding process and who themselves are involved in this process will display more brand citizenship behavior. Hypothesis 2 expected that stakeholders who participate more in the network around the brand display more brand citizenship behavior. The hierarchical multiple linear regression included the control variables position and brand awareness in the first block, and then the independent variables actor-network interaction and degree of participation in the network in the second block of the regression. Brand investment was measured as the dependent variable. Table 2 shows a summary of the findings.

The regression model statistically significantly predicts brand investment,  $F(4, 68) = 47.36, p < .001$ . In the first model, which only includes the control variables, 32.6% of the variance in brand investment can be explained by the respondent's position and brand awareness ( $R^2 = .326$ ). When adding the independent variables in the second model, including both the control variables and independent variables, this increases to 73.6% ( $R^2 = .736, R^2 \text{ change} = .410$ ).  $R^2 \text{ change}$  shows that 41% of the variance in brand investment is accounted for by the degree of actor-network interaction and participation in the network when the position and brand awareness of the respondent are controlled for. This change in  $R^2$  demonstrates that the control variables have a big influence on the variation in the dependent variable, namely 32.6%.

The standardized coefficients show how strongly each independent variable uniquely contributes to the model and predicts the dependent variable. Actor-network interaction ( $b = 0.48, p < .001$ ) has a higher unique contribution to the model than participation in the network ( $b = 0.30, p = .009$ ), but they both statistically significantly contribute to the model. Thus, these two variables significantly predict brand investment. If there is a one unit increase of actor-network interaction, the participant's brand investment increased with 0.48 units, and for a one unit increase of participation in the network, brand investment increased with 0.30 units. The contribution of the respondent's position was not found to be statistically significant ( $b = 0.04, p = .536$ ). The other control variable of brand awareness was found to be significant ( $b = -0.19, p = .005$ ), meaning that for each unit increase in brand awareness, brand investment will decrease by 0.19 units. This can be explained by the fact that brand awareness was coded as 1 "aware of the brand" and 2 "not aware of the brand". Respondents who are not aware of the brand thus have a lower degree of brand investment compared to respondents who are aware of the brand.

In short, the model is a good fit for the data and there is a statistically significant impact of the independent variables of actor-network interaction and participation in the network on brand investment. Brand awareness also statistically significantly influenced the model, but the respondent's position did not. The results of this linear regression show support for H1 and H2.

## **Table 2**

### *Results of Linear Regression*

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>b</i></b> <b>(standardize d coefficient)</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>	<b><i>N</i></b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>t</i></b>
Actor-network interaction (H1)	0.48	.000	75	47.36	4.41
Participation in the network (H2)	0.30	.009	77	47.36	2.69
Position (control)	0.04	.536	81	47.36	0.62
Brand awareness (control)	-0.19	.005	81	47.36	-2.92

### Mediation Analyses

Hayes' PROCESS tool (model 4) was used to carry out three mediation analyses to test hypotheses 3, 4, and 5. Each analysis measured brand investment as the dependent variable, position and brand awareness as covariates, participation in the network as the mediator, and included the appropriate independent variable for the hypothesis that was tested.

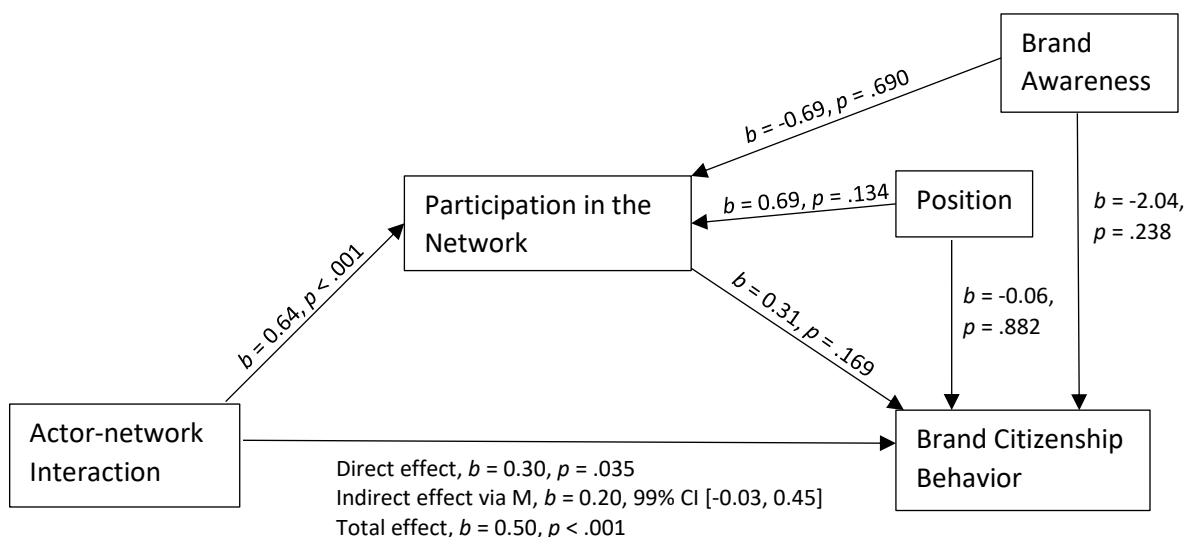
The first mediation analysis tested the expectation that participation in the network mediates the relationship between actor-network interaction and brand investment (H3). Bootstrapping was applied in order for the test to be more robust (Field, 2013). The reported 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect are thus based on the bootstrapped estimates. Moreover, the homoscedasticity interference model HC3 (Davidson-MacKinnon) was applied to this model because slight heteroscedasticity was found in the data. The mediation model is found in Figure 2 and includes the coefficients and significance levels for all paths, and for the direct, indirect and total effects.

This mediation analysis examined the four conditions for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Field, 2013). Figure 2 shows that neither of the paths in the model are equal to zero. For the first two conditions, the analysis demonstrated that actor-network interaction statistically significantly predicts participation in the network ( $b = 0.64, p < .001$ ), but participation in the network does in turn not statistically significantly predict brand investment ( $b = 0.31, p < .169$ ). The covariate of position did not significantly predict the mediator ( $b = 0.69, p = .134$ ) nor the outcome variable ( $b = -0.06, p = .882$ ). The second covariate of brand awareness was also not significant for either the mediator ( $b = -0.69, p = .690$ ) or outcome variable ( $b = -2.04, p = .238$ ). The direct effect ( $b = 0.30, p = .035$ ) is significant and is smaller than the total

effect ( $b = 0.50, p < .001$ ), which are the other two conditions for mediation. The indirect effect seems to be significant at a confidence level of 95% (95% CI 0.01, 0.40). Because the lower limit of the confidence interval is so close to zero, the mediation analysis was run again with a 99% confidence level (99% CI -0.03, 0.45). Because this 99% confidence interval contains zero, the indirect effect does not significantly differ from zero at  $p < .010$ . The indirect effect should be significant as well for (partial) mediation to occur. Therefore, a significant mediation did not occur and participation in the network is thus not a significant mediator of the relationship between actor-network interaction and brand investment. These findings do not support hypothesis 3.

## Figure 2

Mediation Model for Hypothesis 3



*Note.* Mediation model for actor-network interaction and brand citizenship behavior with participation in the network as the mediator ( $N = 73$ ).

For the second mediation analysis, place identification was measured as the independent variable, while the dependent variable (brand investment) and mediator (participation in the network) stayed the same. This analysis tested if the degree of participation in the network mediates the relationship between place identification and brand investment ( $H_4$ ). Again, the homoscedasticity interference model HC3 (Davidson-MacKinnon) was applied to this model because slight heteroscedasticity was detected. Figure 3 displays the mediation model including the results.

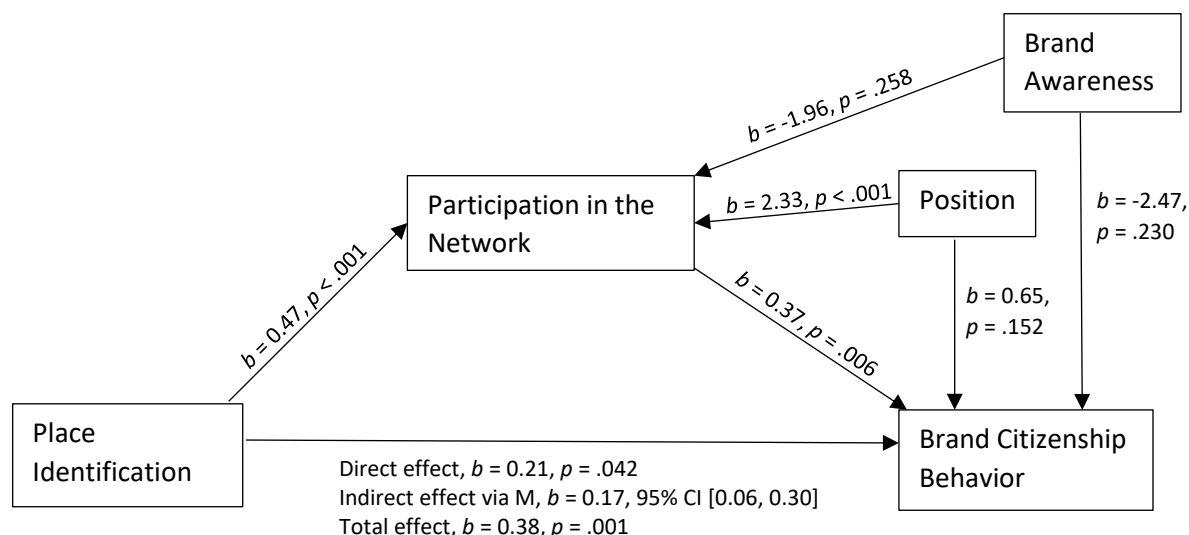
The mediation analysis showed that place identification statistically significantly predicts participation in the network ( $b = 0.47, p < .001$ ), and that this in turn statistically significantly predicts brand investment ( $b = 0.37, p = .006$ ). Since these paths are different

from zero as well, the first two conditions for mediation are met. The covariate of position significantly predicted participation in the network ( $b = 2.33, p < .001$ ), but it did not significantly predict brand investment ( $b = 0.65, p = .152$ ). This means that for every one unit increase in the type of position of the respondent, brand investment increases by 2.33 units. Since position is coded as 0 = not working for a governmental organization, 1 = working for a governmental organization, this can be interpreted in the way that respondents who work for a governmental organization have an increase of 2.33 units in their brand investment.

Furthermore, the direct effect between place identification and brand investment was statistically significant ( $b = 0.21, p = .042$ ) and smaller than the total effect ( $b = 0.38, p = .001$ ). This meets the third and fourth condition for mediation. Lastly, the indirect effect was shown to be significantly different from zero as well ( $b = 0.17, 95\% \text{ CI } 0.06, 0.30$ ). Thus, participation in the network significantly partially mediates the relationship between place identification and brand investment. Place identification leads to more participation, and this in turn leads to more brand investment. The effect size of the mediation effect is 0.44 or 44%. This is the ratio of the indirect effect compared to the total effect. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 4.

### Figure 3

Mediation Model for Hypothesis 4



*Note.* Mediation model for place identification and brand citizenship behavior with participation in the network as the mediator ( $N = 71$ ).

The third mediation analysis tested if the relationship between place dependency and brand citizenship behavior is mediated by the degree of participation in the network ( $H_5$ ). In

this model, the assumption for homoscedasticity was met, thus no homoscedasticity interference model was applied. This mediation model and the results are found in Figure 4.

Place dependency significantly predicts participation in the network ( $b = 0.26, p = .009$ ) and this variable in turn significantly predicts brand investment ( $b = 0.46, p < .001$ ). Because these two paths are significantly different from zero as well, the first two conditions for mediation are met. The covariate position significantly influences participation in the network ( $b = 2.41, p < .001$ ), but not brand investment ( $b = 0.53, p = .172$ ). This means that for each unit increase in the position of the respondent, brand investment increases by 0.53 units. The way in which position is coded (0 = not working for a governmental organization, 1 = working for a governmental organization) offers an explanation for this: The degree of brand investment of respondents who work for a governmental organization increases by 0.53 units compared to respondents who do not work for a governmental organization. The second covariate shows the opposite: Brand awareness does not significantly predict network participation ( $b = -2.16, p = .051$ ), but its relationship with brand investment is significant ( $b = -2.28, p = .001$ ). This means that for every unit increase in brand awareness, brand investment will decrease by 2.28 units. This can be explained by the way in which brand awareness is coded (1 = brand awareness, 2 = no brand awareness). So, a respondent with no brand awareness invests 2.28 units less in the brand than a respondent who does have brand awareness.

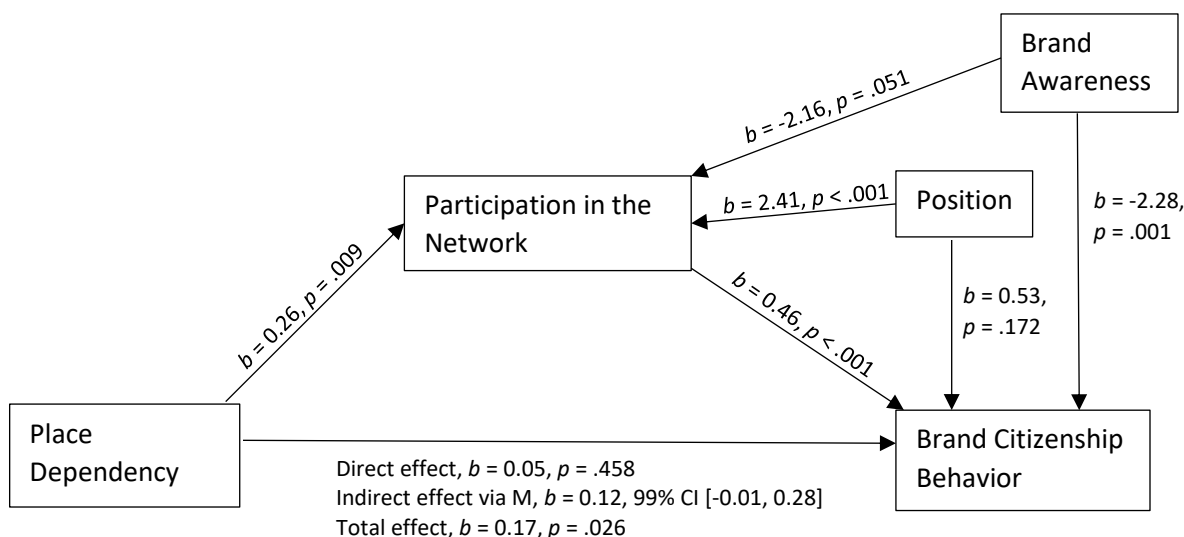
The total effect is significant ( $b = 0.17, p = .026$ ) and larger than the direct effect ( $b = 0.05, p = .458$ ). A possible explanation of the insignificant direct effect could be the addition of the mediator to the model. Because of the added variable, the mediator explains more of the relationship between place identification and brand investment, that the direct effect between these two variables becomes statistically non-significant. So, when the mediator is added to the model the direct relationship between place identification and brand investment is not significant anymore.

All four conditions for mediation are met in this model. At a first glance, this would point to mediation, also because the indirect effect is significant at a confidence level of 95% ( $b = 0.12, 95\% \text{ CI } 0.02, 0.24$ ). However, because the lower limit of the confidence interval is so close to zero, the mediation analysis was run again with an increased level of confidence. This shows that the indirect effect is not significant at a higher confidence level (99% CI - 0.01, 0.28). Because this 99% confidence interval contains zero, the indirect effect does not significantly differ from zero at  $p < .010$ . Even though the two separate paths that make up the indirect effect are statistically significant, the indirect effect is not. This could possibly be

explained by the fact that there is no causal chain of relationships between the predictor, mediator and outcome variables. When the mediator is left out of the model, the relationship between place dependency and brand investment is significant. So, when stakeholders' place dependency increases, their brand investment increases as well. Because the indirect effect is not significant, it cannot be established that (partial) mediation has occurred. Even though the other four conditions for mediation are met, the indirect effect should be significant as well for (partial) mediation to occur. Because this did not happen, participation in the network is thus not a significant mediator of the relationship between actor-network interaction and brand investment. These findings do not support Hypothesis 5.

#### Figure 4

Mediation Model for Hypothesis 5



*Note.* Mediation model for place dependency and brand citizenship behavior with participation in the network as the mediator ( $N = 69$ ).

#### Content Analysis

A total of eight documents were analyzed using the codes that were established before coding and written down in the code book. The codes and their explanation can be found in Appendix B. The codes that were most frequently used include “investment of time” (15 times), “intensively involved” (11 times), and “medium participation” (11 times). Codes that were least frequently used were “no/little participation” (4 times), “political support” (4 times), and “investment of money” (5 times). The document that provided the most information about the branding process was the implementation plan for the brand (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021). This document was written by government



officials to prepare the implementation and launching of the brand. The following sections will elaborate on the codes per variable and the content of the texts that were analyzed.

### ***Involvement of Stakeholders in the Branding Process***

For the involvement of stakeholders in the branding process three different codes were created beforehand, ranging from “little/no involvement in the process” to “intensively involved in the process”. During coding, a fourth one was added: “the intention for (much) involvement”. In total, codes about the involvement of stakeholders were applied 28 times. In the analyzed documents multiple references were made towards an intention of the government to involve other stakeholders. For example, it was mentioned that parties will be asked to join the collaboration and become a partner, in order to collectively show support for and communicate about the brand to external parties (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021). Multiple documents mention that the government wants to start a conversation with (potential) partners about the further development of the brand and the collaboration. This shows the intention of the government to actively involve other stakeholders in the branding process, but it also demonstrates that this has not happened (yet). So, there is an intention to actively involve non-governmental stakeholders after the implementation of the brand, but not so much an intention to involve them during the branding process.

During this process, governmental actors were the most intensively involved party. They were the initiators and executors of the branding process (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021). This is corroborated by the way in which the implementation plan was written. For example, it is stated that “we will officially start using the brand and present it to the whole network and outside of that” (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021). This quote reveals that the government, who wrote the document, views other stakeholders as parties that have to be informed, but not involved in the branding process. Other parts of the same document mention the collaboration with other parties, but not their active involvement in the decision-making about the brand. The analyzed documents rarely mention stakeholders from other, non-governmental organizations who have been actively involved in the branding process. The exception to this is the so-called “regiegroep”, a group of important internal stakeholders from government, business and education (triple helix) who serve as a sounding board. This group has been intensively involved in the branding process. For example, the opinions and advice of this group will be used in the implementation of the brand (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021).

### ***Participation of Stakeholders in the Network***

For the participation of stakeholders in the network around the brand, codes were applied to the analyzed texts 28 times. Three different codes were created beforehand, ranging from “little/no participation” to “a lot of participation”. Similar to the variable of involvement in the branding process, a fourth code was added during the coding process: “the intention to participate”. This code was added because the content shows an intention to work together with other stakeholders in the network. An example is found in one of the blog entries about a quarterly event organized in the Drechtsteden: “The conclusion is that both entrepreneurs as well as representatives of education and government, are open to cooperate on the most important challenges of the region” (Smart Delta Drechtsteden, n.d.-c). This quote shows an intention for future collaborations within the network. In general, the documents demonstrate that there is medium to high participation of different parties within the network. Actors in the network participated in different ways: They attended events, provided advice and expertise during the branding process, became a partner of the brand, discussed with other stakeholders about the brand, and worked together on regional challenges. However, there are differences in the level of participation. Stakeholders who were part of the sounding board of the brand, for example, have participated more intensively in the network than stakeholders who only attend a couple of events per year or followed the news via the newsletter or website.

### ***Brand Investment***

For the variable of brand investment, multiple codes were created that convey different types of investment in the brand. These codes are based on the types of brand investment that were measured by the survey. The most often coded type of brand investment is “time” (15 times), followed by “expertise” (9 times) and “communicating about the brand to others” (7 times). The total amount that all codes regarding brand investment were applied was 47. Other ways in which stakeholders have invested in the brand has been in the form of money, public support for the brand, and political support for the brand.

Actors often invest expertise, time and money at the same time within one action. For example, the municipal government has organized activities for other stakeholders and worked on developing the brand: “. At these quarterly events, time, money and expertise were invested. When taking a closer look at the code money, the documents reveal that only governmental stakeholders have invested money in the brand so far. They have also invested the most time and expertise, although non-governmental stakeholders have invested this as well. Moreover, support for the brand (both political and public) has only been given by governmental stakeholders. In short, the analyzed documents show that governmental

stakeholders have invested the most and in most different ways, compared to non-governmental stakeholders.

### **Discussion**

In the past years, place branding has made an uprise in practice as well as research in the field of Public Administration and governance. In our contemporary network society there is a need to approach place branding as a governance process (Klijn et al., 2012; Stevens et al., 2020). In networks around place branding processes, actors from different domains of society are involved, such as the government, companies, and societal actors, as we have also seen in the present study. Interactive place branding shares characteristics with network governance processes, such as an interdependency of governments on other actors and the exchange of resources.

This research has aimed to make a contribution to the literature on (regional) place branding from a governance perspective. It was investigated whether the involvement of stakeholders from government, business, education and society in the Drechtsteden region has led to brand citizenship behavior of stakeholders in the form of investment in the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. This was done with both a quantitative survey and quantitative content analysis. Involvement of stakeholders can be specified a bit further and divided into two concepts: The degree of interaction that actors have had with other stakeholders during the place branding process and the degree of participation of stakeholders in the network around the brand.

The results show that stakeholders who had much interaction with other actors in the network during the place branding process display more brand investment. This finding provides support for H1. The content analysis gives some further insight into these results. In the analyzed documents it was found that governmental actors were the most actively involved type of stakeholders in the branding process. This can be linked to the results of the independent samples t-test that was executed, which show that respondents working for a governmental organization have higher levels of actor-network interaction. Moreover, the documents mention that the brand was initiated by governmental actors. Even though there was an intention to also involve non-governmental stakeholders (more), this was mainly intended to happen only after the brand was already launched, and not during the branding process. Non-governmental stakeholders are described as actors who need to be informed about the outcome of the decision-making process, rather than be included in it (Brand Implementation Smart Delta Drechtsteden, 2021). However, there is an exception: A

sounding board made up of partners from government, business and education who provide advice and have been actively involved in the branding process and brand implementation.

The second hypothesis expected that stakeholders who participate more in the network around the brand will display more brand citizenship behavior. The results from the statistical analysis show support for this hypothesis. When stakeholders participate more in the network, this leads to an increase in brand citizenship behavior in the form of e.g., public support, promotion of the brand, or investing other resources. This is in line with previous research by Eshuis and Edelenbos (2009) who found that collaboration of stakeholders leads to more support for the brand. The findings of the content analysis provide further insight into these results. Medium to high participation of different actors within the network was found in the documents. Contrary to the branding process, the network level shows that actors from government, as well as business and education, are actively participating in the network. They do this, among other things, through attending events or following the news about Smart Delta Drechtsteden. However, even though stakeholders from different sectors are active in the network, it is suggested by the results of the t-test that actors from the government participate the most. The support for these first two hypotheses contributes to previous literature that emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement in place branding processes (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012; Kavartzis, 2012; Klijn et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2020). The findings of this study add to the literature because they show how involvement of stakeholders in the branding process can lead to a positive brand outcome, namely brand citizenship behavior of stakeholders in the form of investment in and support for the brand. A final important thing to mention is that actor-network interaction contributes a bit more to stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior than participation in the network. This finding demonstrates that active communication with other actors and involvement in the branding process are more important influencers on brand citizenship behavior than participation in the network. Of course, it also matters how actively a stakeholder participates in the network. Some will only follow the news about Smart Delta Drechtsteden, while others attend events and have been involved in the decision-making process of the brand, for instance.

After it was found that these two components of stakeholder involvement significantly influence stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior, a closer look was taken at related factors that could influence brand citizenship behavior in other ways. To do this participation in the network was investigated as a mediator. Hypothesis 3 expected that the relationship between network-actor interaction and brand citizenship behavior would be mediated by participation in the network (H3). Thus, it was expected that more interaction between actors would lead to

more participation in the network, which in turn would have a positive influence on stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior. The results did not support H3. Even though actor-network interaction leads to more participation in the network, participation did not lead to more brand citizenship behavior. A possible explanation for this non-significant mediation is that there are other variables that influence this relationship that were not studied in the present model, or that participation in the network was not a suitable concept to mediate this relationship. Both factors of stakeholder involvement have been shown to individually contribute to brand citizenship behavior, as shown by the support for hypotheses 1 and 2. These two separate concepts both influence brand citizenship behavior, but not in the way that participation significantly mediates the relationship between actor-network interaction and brand citizenship behavior. A possible explanation for this unexpected effect is that even though actors participate in the network, the importance of the brand for their organization might not be clear (enough) to them. This could be due to the fact that the brand has been launched fairly recently. Therefore, stakeholders may be cautious to invest their resources in the brand before they know if the brand will be beneficial for their organization.

Moreover, it was expected that both psychological factors (identification of the organization with the place) as well as functional factors (dependency of the organization on the place) of place attachment would play a role in the relationship between stakeholders' interaction with others in the network during the place branding process and their brand citizenship behavior. Hypothesis 4 stated that the relationship between place identification and brand citizenship behavior is mediated by stakeholders' participation in the network (H4). In other words, place identification leads to more participation, and this in turn leads to more brand investment. The findings show support for this hypothesis. This is in line with recent research of Klijn et al. (2021) who state that a certain amount of place identity is needed for stakeholders to make an effort to be involved with the brand and support it. Stakeholders who identify themselves more strongly with the Drechtsteden region were more involved in the network. For instance, they followed the news about Smart Delta Drechtsteden or attended events. If stakeholders are actively involved in the network, they are also more likely to display brand citizenship behavior and invest resources in the brand. This support could be financial, but also includes promoting the brand, investing time in it, or publicly supporting it.

The organizations that respondents represented can not only be attached to the region for psychological reasons, but also for functional ones. When organizations are dependent on the region, they need the place (at least to a certain extent) to successfully operate. This could be a motivation for stakeholders to be more active in the network and interact with other

actors in the region. And when stakeholders are actively involved in the regional network around the brand, they are more likely to see the value of the brand for their organization. Thus, they are expected to have more brand citizenship behavior in the form of investment in the brand. Even though the results show that place dependency leads to more participation in the network, and this in turn leads to brand investment, the overall mediation effect is not significant for this relationship. An explanation for this could be that a different type of relationship is present, instead of a causal chain between these three concepts. The results show that if respondents' organizations are more dependent on the place, their investment in the brand investment increases. However, participation in the network has not shown to play a significant role in this relationship. Thus, no support for H5 was found.

When comparing the three mediation models that were tested, the results show that place identification is the only significant predictor for brand investment when the mediator of participation in the network is present. This is an interesting finding in the light of the concept of place attachment, which often takes place identification and place dependency together.

### **Limitations**

Apart from the contributions this study has made there are also several limitations. First of all, the sample of the survey consisted mainly of respondents who work for a governmental organization, either a municipality in the Drechtsteden or another governmental body. This sample is not representative for the whole regional network, although it maybe is representative for the organizations who have contributed the most so far to the branding process. The unequal distribution of governmental versus non-governmental stakeholders was controlled for by adding it as a control variable in the statistical models, but it would have been more beneficial to the research to have a more equal distribution in the type of organizations that respondents work for.

A second limitation of this research is that the brand that was studied is relatively new: It was officially launched in November 2021. Because of this, not all stakeholders were familiar with the brand yet. The research tried to compensate for this by supplementing the findings of the survey with a content analysis of brand documents. Moreover, a "don't know" option was added for some of the questions in the survey. This "don't know" option was used by respondents while answering the survey, and the amount of times it was used showed that respondents were indeed not able to answer all questions about the brand. Future research could avoid this by waiting a bit longer after the development and launching of a place brand before conducting research on the brand outcomes.

Thirdly, this paper only studied one case of a regional brand. Even though the results build upon earlier findings in the place branding literature, it is still a single case study of one region and brand. Therefore, it is hard to generalize the results to other contexts.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

First of all, building on the third limitation that was mentioned above, it would be an interesting avenue for future research to look into the comparison of multiple (regional) place brands in one single study. Previous studies, and the present study as well, have looked at single case studies of places.

A second suggestion for future research would be to further investigate place identification and place dependency as antecedents for brand citizenship behavior. This research has shown that both concepts are positively correlated with brand investment, network-actor interaction and participation in the network. Moreover, place identification and place dependency both lead to brand citizenship behavior, even though the indirect effect through mediation was not significant for place dependency. This offers some insight into the possible relationships that exist between these concepts, but there is more to explore. It would be interesting to test these two concepts in other contexts as well. Furthermore, it would be valuable to study these dimensions of place attachment separately. This research has shown that they can yield different results, at least in this context, and should therefore be measured separately.

### **Recommendations**

A first recommendation is to involve stakeholders in the place branding process. As this research has shown, their inclusion can lead to a beneficial brand effect in the form of brand citizenship behavior. When stakeholders are active in the regional network and feel more included in the process, they will want to invest their resources in the brand and promote it towards others. This is an important finding, because brand initiators and owners can use this to their advantage when developing a place brand.

A second recommendation is to apply network management strategies in interactive branding processes. As this study has shown, it is advantageous to include relevant stakeholders in the branding process. However, there are certain things that one has to take into account when including multiple stakeholders in the process. Actors may have differing or even conflicting perceptions of the brand, or they may have other associations with the brand (Klijn et al., 2012; Zenker & Braun, 2017 in Klijn et al., 2021). This can complicate or hinder collaboration. Thus, it is recommended for the brand owner or manager to apply

network management strategies to deal with different perspectives, associations and perceptions of stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

This study has aimed to answer the following research questions: What is the effect of stakeholder involvement in the place branding process in the Drechtsteden region on stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior? To conclude, this study has shown that stakeholder involvement in the place branding process, consisting of actor-network interaction and stakeholders' participation in the network, positively influences stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior in the form of investment in the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand. Of these two concepts, actor-network interaction contributes a bit more to stakeholders' brand citizenship behavior than participation in the network. Moreover, the influence of place identification and place dependency were examined, and it was shown that participation in the network did not significantly mediate the relationship between place dependency and brand citizenship behavior. For the relationship between place identification and brand citizenship behavior, it was shown that stakeholders' participation in the network is a significant mediator. This means that stakeholders who feel a strong sense of identification with the Drechtsteden region were more involved in the network, and in turn they were more likely to display brand citizenship behavior and invest resources in the brand.

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## **Appendix A: Operationalization Table and Survey Items**

Variable	Type of variable	Based on scale	Measurement scale	Questions <span style="float: right;">45</span>
Degree of actor-network interaction	Independent variable	Klijn et al. (2020)	10-point scale (slider) with 1 = <i>completely agree with left statement</i> and 10 = <i>completely agree with right statement</i>  Option: "Don't know"	<p>1. Mijn organisatie is <b>nauwelijks betrokken</b> bij het besluitvormingsproces over het merk Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het afgelopen halve jaar            --- Mijn organisatie is <b>intensief betrokken</b> bij het besluitvormingsproces over het merk Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het afgelopen halve jaar</p> <p>2. Mijn organisatie heeft <b>zeer weinig interactie met andere partijen</b> die betrokken zijn bij de ontwikkeling van Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het afgelopen halve jaar            --- Mijn organisatie heeft <b>zeer veel interactie met andere partijen</b> die betrokken zijn bij de ontwikkeling van Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het afgelopen halve jaar</p> <p>3. Mijn organisatie heeft <b>weinig contacten met het communicatieteam</b> Smart Delta Drechtsteden (dit is het team dat momenteel de implementatie van Smart Delta Drechtsteden coördineert)            --- Mijn organisatie heeft <b>veel contacten met het communicatieteam</b> Smart Delta Drechtsteden (dit is het team dat</p>

				momenteel de implementatie van Smart Delta Drechtsteden coördineert)
Degree of participation in the network	Independent variable	Inspired by Verba et al. (1995), Gibson and Cantijoch (2013), and Marcus (2000, 2001)	Frequency: 10-point scale (slider) with 1 = <i>completely disagree</i> and 10 = <i>completely agree</i>  Option: "Don't know"	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Het nieuws over Smart Delta Drechtsteden hebben gevolgd</li> <li>2. Zich op de hoogte hebben gehouden over SDD via een nieuwsfeed/nieuwsbrief/social media</li> <li>3. Vergaderingen of bijeenkomsten hebben bijgewoond van Smart Delta Drechtsteden (online of offline)</li> <li>4. Contact hebben opgenomen met mensen uit het netwerk van Smart Delta Drechtsteden om onze visie te geven (via telefoon, e-mail, post, face-to-face)</li> <li>5. Een bijdrage aan een krant/blog/website hebben geschreven over Smart Delta Drechtsteden</li> <li>6. Een reactie hebben geschreven op (officiële) voorstellen/plannen voor Smart Delta Drechtsteden</li> <li>7. Hebben meebeslist over de merkstrategie voor Smart Delta Drechtsteden</li> </ol>
Degree of investment in the brand by the organization (Brand Citizenship Behavior)	Dependent variable	Not based on an existing scale.  Inspired by literature on organizational investment.	10-point scale (slider) with 1 = <i>completely agree with left statement</i> and 10 = <i>completely agree with right statement</i>  Option: "Don't know"	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investeert <b>geen tijd</b> in het ontwikkelen en/of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden ---- investeert <b>veel tijd</b> in het ontwikkelen en/of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden</li> <li>2. <b>Omarmt</b> het merk Smart Delta Drechtsteden <b>niet</b> ---- <b>omarmt</b> Smart Delta Drechtsteden zeer sterk</li> </ol>

				<p>3. Geeft <b>geen enkele politieke steun</b> aan Smart Delta Drechtsteden in bestuurlijke netwerken ---- geeft <b>veel politieke steun</b> aan Smart Delta Drechtsteden in bestuurlijke netwerken</p> <p>4. Levert <b>geen enkele expertise</b> voor het ontwikkelen of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden Levert <b>zeer veel expertise</b> voor het ontwikkelen of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden</p> <p>5. Heeft bestuurders/directieleden die Smart Delta Drechtsteden vaak in het <b>openbaar steunen</b> ---- Heeft geen bestuurders/directieleden die Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het openbaar steunen</p> <p>6. Heeft <b>geen geld geïnvesteerd</b> in het ontwikkelen en/of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden ---- heeft <b>veel geld geïnvesteerd</b> in het ontwikkelen en/of uitdragen van Smart Delta Drechtsteden</p> <p>7. <b>Draagt</b> het merk Smart Delta Drechtsteden in het geheel <b>niet uit</b> --- - <b>Draagt</b> Smart Delta Drechtsteden veelvuldig <b>uit</b></p>
Place identification	Independent variable	Klijn et al. (2021)	10-point scale (slider) with 1 = <i>completely disagree</i> and 10 = <i>completely agree</i>	<p>1. Onze organisatieactiviteiten staan onder druk als er niet wordt geïnvesteerd in de Drechtsteden regio</p> <p>2. De Drechtsteden regio is heel speciaal voor onze organisatie</p>

				<p>3. De Drechtsteden regio betekent veel voor onze organisatie</p> <p>4. Onze organisatie voelt zich sterk verbonden met de Drechtsteden regio</p> <p>5. Onze organisatie identificeert zich heel sterk met de Drechtsteden regio</p> <p>6. De Drechtsteden regio is onderdeel van onze organisatie-identiteit</p>
Place dependency	Independent variable	Klijn et al. (2021)	10-point scale (slider) with 1 = <i>completely disagree</i> and 10 = <i>completely agree</i>	<p>1. In Nederland is er buiten Drechtsteden geen goede plek voor onze organisatieactiviteiten</p> <p>2. Buiten Nederland is er geen goede plek voor onze organisatieactiviteiten</p> <p>3. Wij zouden geen ander gebied willen kiezen voor de activiteiten van onze organisatie.</p> <p>4. Opereren in Drechtsteden is belangrijker voor ons dan het uitvoeren van dezelfde activiteiten in een ander gebied</p> <p>5. Drechtsteden is de beste omgeving voor onze organisatieactiviteiten.</p>
Brand awareness	Control variable	n/a	Binary: yes/no	Heeft u dit merk eerder gezien?
Position/background respondent	Control variable	n/a	Multiple choice	<p>In welke branche werkt u? (meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)</p> <p>1. Gemeentelijke overheid in de Drechtsteden</p> <p>2. Andere overheid (regio / provincie / rijk / waterschap)</p> <p>3. Zorginstelling</p> <p>4. Onderwijsinstelling</p> <p>5. Maatschappelijke organisatie</p>



				6. Midden- en kleinbedrijf 7. Groot bedrijf 8. Anders, nl., ...
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### Appendix B: Code Book for Content Analysis

Variable/dimension	Codes	Explanation
Involvement of stakeholders in the branding process:	1 = not/hardly involved	1 = not/hardly involved in the decision-making process about the Smart Delta Drechsteden brand;
1. Involvement in the decision-making process about the brand	2 = a little involved	no/little interaction with other parties involved in the development of Smart Delta Drechsteden in the past six months; no/little contact with the communication team of Smart Delta Drechsteden
2. Interaction with other parties who were involved in the development of Smart Delta Drechsteden	3 = intensively involved	2 = some involvement in the decision-making process about the Smart Delta Drechsteden brand; medium interaction with other parties involved in the development of Smart Delta Drechsteden in the past six months; some contact with the communication team of Smart Delta Drechsteden
3. Contact with the Smart Delta Drechsteden communication team	4 = intention for (much) involvement	3 = (intensive) involvement in the decision-making process about the Smart Delta Drechsteden brand; a lot of interaction with other parties involved in the development of Smart Delta Drechsteden in the past

		<p>six months; a lot of contact with the communication team of Smart Delta Drechtsteden</p> <p>4 = intention to involve actors who have not been involved (yet)</p>
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<p>Participation of stakeholders in the network</p> <p>(Codes inspired by Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969) and the survey)</p>	<p>1 = no/little participation</p> <p>2 = medium participation</p> <p>3 = intensive/ much participation</p> <p>4 = intention to participate</p>	<p>1 = no/hardly any participation in activities; informed without participation in the process. For example: have followed the news about Smart Delta Drechtsteden</p> <p>2 = consultation and involvement of stakeholders. Their opinion was asked, but not (always) used. For example: attended (online/offline) meetings or gatherings; have written a response to (official) proposals/plans for Smart Delta Drechtsteden; have contacted people from the network around the brand to share our vision (by phone, email, post, face-to-face)</p> <p>3 = a lot of participation, collaboration with other stakeholders and joint decisions. For example: stakeholders have co-decided on the brand strategy for Smart Delta Drechtsteden; have written a contribution to a newspaper/blog/website about Smart Delta Drechtsteden</p> <p>4 = intention to work together with other stakeholders in the network who have not been participating (yet)</p>
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Investment of time in developing or communicating about the brand to others	1 = no time 2 = a little time 3 = a lot of time	Investing time in the development and/or promotion of Smart Delta Drechtsteden
Embracing the brand	1 = no embracement 2 = a little embracement 3 = (very) strong embracement	The organization embraces the brand Smart Delta Drechtsteden
Politically supporting the brand in governmental networks	1 = no political support 2 = a little political support 3 = much political support	Political support for Smart Delta Drechtsteden in political networks
Supply expertise for developing or communicating about the brand to others	1 = no expertise 2 = a little expertise 3 = a lot of expertise	Providing expertise for developing or promoting Smart Delta Drechtsteden
Publicly supporting the brand (by managers/politicians/board members)	1 = never support 2 = sometimes support 3 = often support	The organization has directors/board members who often support Smart Delta Drechtsteden in public
Investing money for developing and/or promoting the brand to others	1 = no money 2 = a little money 3 = a lot of money	The organization has invested money in developing and/or promoting Smart Delta Drechtsteden
Investing time in developing and/or promoting the brand to others	1 = do not promote 2 = promote sometimes 3 = often/always promote	The extent to which the organization promotes the Smart Delta Drechtsteden brand

