Perceptions of Prestige: A Comparative Analysis of School Online Media Marketing

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Abstract: Marketing and branding in public education are becoming increasingly widespread practices. The purpose of this paper is to outline a framework for comparing the online marketing practices, including Web sites, social media, and YouTube, of different types of schools. Drawing on existing literature from the business sector regarding marketing, the authors argue that, in particular, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) are engaging in "prestige" rather than "informational" marketing (Ackerberg, 2001), which can influence the perception of school quality for parents and potential investors.

Key Word: Marketing, Choice, Charter Management Organizations (CMOs)

Marketing and branding in public education is becoming an increasingly widespread practice (DiMartino & Jessen, 2014; Foskett, 2002; Lubienski, 2007; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004). Because these practices are relatively new, however, they have gone largely unevaluated. Diverse schools—traditional public, charters, and magnets—use varying degrees of marketing techniques to inform parents about their schools, target particular types of students (gifted, artistic, athletic, musical, etc.), build name recognition, and attract potential funders.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a framework for comparing the online marketing and branding practices, including Web sites, social media, and YouTube, of different types of schools in a variety of choice settings. Studies of marketing and branding in public education tend to be in-depth cases of single markets, schools or school types, i.e., charters or magnets (Cucchiara, 2013; Drew, 2013; Jabbar, 2016; Lubienski & Lee, 2016; Wilkins, 2011). This paper, in contrast, examines marketing and branding practices across two large urban markets. Additionally, while earlier studies looked at traditional educational marketing mechanisms, such as school brochures (Symes, 1998, Lubienski, 2007) and, more recently, Web sites (Drew, 2013; Hernandez 2016; Wilkins, 2011), we include an exploration of social media outlets—Facebook, Twitter and YouTube—to promote schools. Furthermore, by conducting a document evaluation of Web sites and social media outlets from a variety of school types in two major urban areas, we examine the quality of the content of marketing and branding. Distinctions are drawn not only between types of schools, but also between the ways in which schools market different "qualities" of their educational institution.

Because there exists a great deal of literature on marketing, branding, and advertising in the business world, we build on that knowledge base. Drawing on existing literature from the business sector regarding advertising and marketing, we contend that Charter Management

Organizations (CMOs), in particular, engage in "prestige" rather than "informational" marketing. With "prestige marketing," schools focus more on style than substance to convey quality of product and to win over not only parents but also funders.

LITERATURE

For this paper, we divide the research into two categories. The first examines the literature derived from the educational research world. These studies point to the inequities for students exacerbated through "glossified" marketing campaigns and the need for "choice advisors" to help parents sift through marketing materials (Wilkins, 2012). The second area reviewed for this paper comes from the business sector. This research on marketing, advertising, and its effects on consumer behavior indicates that perceptions of the quality of a product can be shaped considerably by investments in marketing and advertising.

Educational Literature

Marketing and branding practices exist widely today in public education (DiMartino & Jessen, 2014; Lubienski, 2007; Oplatka, 2007). School logos, insignias, and mascots have long been used to cultivate school identity, build school pride, and signal selectivity. However, the rise of market-based reforms and, resulting, choice-based legislation, starting with the choice options embedded within the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, have increased the need for and use of marketing and branding (DiMartino and Jessen, 2014; Foskett, 2002; Lubienski, 2007; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2004).

By definition, choice policies allow students to select from a portfolio of school options. In doing so, families must gather information on the available school options, creating the

incentive for schools to market themselves to differentiate one school from another as they compete for students (Beal & Beal, 2016; Jabbar 2016; Jennings, 2010; Lubienski, 2007). This ultimately puts schools with a greater degree of marketing resources or capabilities at an advantage.

Recent studies highlight the growth of "brand communities" (Beal & Beal, 2016). In these schools, logos and symbols become key images around which the community coalesces. Researchers have found that shared personal values and life experiences–usually gleaned from personal interactions and word-of-mouth recommendations—attract parents to particular schools rather than the actual academic performance of the schools (DiMartino & Jessen, 2014; Kimelberg & Berg, 2012; Lubienski & Garn, 2010). Additionally, proximity to home and after-school opportunities are key factors in parents' decision-making processes (Oplatka, 2007; Stewart & Good, 2016).

The most concerning effect of marketing and branding is the inequitable sorting of students into schools. Combined with high-stakes standardized testing policies, marketing and branding can have detrimental effects on public education, incentivizing targeted marketing campaigns to attract "better" students in an effort to improve test and/or graduation outcomes, thereby increasing stratification between schools and accelerating the re-segregation of public schools (Foskett, 2002; Gewirtz, 2002; Gewirtz et al, 1995; Hernandez, 2016; Jabbar, 2016; Lubienski, 2005; Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). Targeted marketing campaigns from schools can also be used to drive away students with special needs (Jennings, 2010; Jessen, 2013) or to project an "elite" image to attract a population of higher achieving students and their parents (Drew, 2013; Hernandez, 2016; Jabbar 2016). In examining Web-based marketing materials for CMOs, Hernandez (2006) found that two CMOs negatively portrayed the black and Latino

communities that they served in order to show how "their" schools would reverse the "negative patterns" of poverty and low-achievement in the surrounding communities (p. 48).

With increased emphasis on marketing and branding, schools are tasked with investing both time and financial resources into navigating educational markets with marketing campaigns. Allocating a greater proportion of school finances towards marketing practices may leave less for programmatic purposes (Beal & Beal, 2016; Jessen, 2011; Lubienski, 2005). Such shifts in budgets are often justified with the belief that marketing will yield increases in student applications and enrollment, and subsequent tuition dollars along with them (Beal & Beal, 2016; Jabbar, 2015). For CMO-run charter schools, however, the ability to raise money to contribute to expansive and "glossified" (Gewirtz, 2002) marketing campaigns not only puts public schools at a disadvantage, it also potentially increases inequitable sorting between schools (Hernandez, 2016; Jennings, 2010; Wilson & Carlsen, 2016).

Finally, educational research shows that an emphasis on recruiting and marketing campaigns potentially changes the roles in which educators find themselves. At the principal level, attention necessarily turns from internal school matters to external concerns about image management (Anderson, 2009; Beal & Beal, 2016; Jabbar, 2015; Oplatka, 2002). For teachers, education can become the delivery of a branded model of education, allowing less room for personalization of teaching practices (Jessen, 2011; Oplatka, 2006; Foskett, 1998).

Business Literature

Business literature has long examined the effects of advertising and marketing on consumer preferences. Marshall (1919) distinguished between "constructive" advertising, which primarily relayed information to the consumer, and "combative" marketing, which focused on

saturating a market with a brand. Later on, models were developed to examine the ways in which companies create widespread market knowledge about their new products (Stigler, 1961; Butters, 1977).

There are several prominent, long-standing theories about how advertising and marketing campaigns signal value of their product to consumers, particularly in instances where the product is an experienced good (one for which the quality can only be experienced), like education. Milgrom and Roberts (1986) argued that in the case of experienced goods, advertising and marketing are used to implicitly signal to the consumer the quality of the product. They argue that among these "signals" is simply the perceived amount of money spent on the marketing campaign is enough to communicate to consumers that the product itself is of high quality. Galbraith (1976) argued, similarly, that advertising in and of itself can convey prestige. Ackerberg (2001) states that "firms signal better quality or taste with high levels of advertising expenditures" (p.319). Becker and Murphy (1993) contend that part of the reason for this effect is that consumers want to associate themselves with particular brands, or highly-recognized ones. In addition, researchers have argued that the more frequently consumers see an ad for a particular product, the more likely they are to assume that a great degree of money has been spent on that product. Therefore, frequency of contact with an ad or marketing campaign translates into perceptions of quality (Nelson, 1974).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to frame this analysis, we use an economic principle—the subjective theory of values or goods (Menger, 1976). Menger's reconceptualization of the value of goods was that the perceived value of a good was subjective in nature—that value was placed on the good based on

the perception or desires of the consumer. Marketing is, thus, in effect, entirely an arena revolving around conveying (or creating) subjective value of goods in order to attract consumers. Hence, when marketing educational institutions, it becomes necessary for schools to convey a school's value as distinguishably *more valuable* than other schools in the market. This is where the quality and content of marketing and branding materials becomes an essential conveyer of value.

Economic theory also outlines the concept of "experienced goods." In marketing research, a product is deemed valued by consumers if it is repeatedly purchased. "Experienced goods" are products or services whose value is understood once the experience is completed. Schooling is such a good (Buckley and Schneider, 2007). Evaluating the experience of a school may not be possible until one has long since graduated. One can argue that it is hard to perceive the value of education until well into adult life. In addition, public schooling is not something that can be re-purchased.

Additional layers of confusion about the role of school marketing may be raised with respect to the fact that parents are doing the choosing, as parents themselves do not attend the schools. A body of literature on consumer choice indicates that in situations where the person doing the choosing does not experience the "good," they have to rely on other *indicators* to judge its value (Duarte & Hastings 2010). Duarte and Hastings (2010) write that the phenomenon of people making decisions using what they call "suboptimal information," relying primarily on marketing or branding, "calls into question the extent to which increased choice and privatization can lead to increased efficiency in traditionally publically provided markets like social security, education, and health care" (p.2).

This is where marketing and branding becomes centrally important in educational settings— conveying the value of the goods to the parents who cannot directly experience the schools they are selecting. With the creation of markets in education, educational choice becomes primarily about perceived value of a school versus the actual value of the education provided within its walls.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a document analysis. Documents used in qualitative research can include, but are not limited to, public and government records, materials, data, artifacts, communications, or personal documents (Merriam, 1998; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). In coding the document data, we began by using a combination of Knight & Hesketh (1998) and Lubienski's (2007) analyses of school choice documents. Knight & Hesketh (1998) develop a categorization of documents, which looks at phrases, words, and other textual indicators commonly brought up in choice documents, and categorizes them under three different topics: context, content, and target audience.

Lubienski's (2007) study provides a linguistic lens into how different types of schools— from private to public to charter—portray themselves in informational documents. Lubienski looked at a district in Michigan that had a high concentration of school choice options, both public and private. Lubienski examined the way that each school represents itself through brochures, informational packets, Web sites, etc. He found that different types of choice schools produced different types of informational materials. His findings indicated that public schools, which were required to provide certain types of information by the state, tended "to be relatively active in providing information organization outputs and student characteristics" (p.129)

primarily through annual reports published through the district or state. Private school promotional materials focused less on organizational outputs, and more on "emotional themes such as community, religious values, and patriotism" (p.129). Finally, charter schools enter the marketplace in a more commercialized way, and "stress academic programs, themes, often differentiating themselves from (perceptions of) public schools or equating themselves with private schools: character education and morality, safety, uniforms, patriotism, and their tuition-free nature" (p.130).

The data for this paper come from publicly available online content, primarily consisting of Web sites, social media campaigns, and (where applicable) YouTube videos of fifty schools in two metro areas (Boston and New York City). School Web sites and social media are key sources of marketing and advertising today—not just for parents, but for the broader public. In addition to the fact that online media is one of the primary ways of reaching the public today, there are various degrees of controls that schools can have over media content beyond Web sites, including social media and YouTube channels. We look for the presence and quality of these, as well.

Within these metro areas, schools were selected based on their school type, location, and their meeting of certain criteria [Table 1]. For example, charter schools were grouped into charter schools belonging to networks or managed by CMOs, and individual stand-alone charter schools. They were then further subdivided into schools in urban and suburban locations—as were the non-charter public. Non-charter public schools were additionally divided by whether or not they were schools of choice. We also included local-area private schools in our review in order to compare content, as well as two examples of for-profit or new types of private educational management organizations, which will be discussed later.

TABLE 1
Number and Types of Selected Case Schools

School Category Type	Location	Organizational Type	Metro Area	
			Boston	New York City
Charter School	Urban	CMO	Phoenix Charter Academy; Uncommon Schools, Roxbury Prep; KIPP Academy Boston; Match Academy Boston; Excel Academy Boston	Achievement First East New York; Success Academy Cobble Hill; Democracy Prep Charter High School
		Non-CMO	Codman Academy; Neighborhood House Charter School	Community Roots Charter School; Amber Charter School; University Prep Charter HS
	Suburban	CMO	KIPP Lynn Academy Collegiate; City on a Hill New Bedford	Leadership Prep Canarsie (Uncommon Schools)
		Non-CMO	Christa McCauliffe Charter School; Marblehead Community Charter School	Roosevelt Children's Academy Charter School; Evergreen Charter School
Public School of Choice (Not a Charter)	Urban	N/A	Eliot K8 Innovation School; Boston Teachers Union School; New Mission High School; Mission Hill School	The Urban Assembly New York Harbor School; M.S. 51; Astor Collegiate Academy; Bronx Aerospace HS
	Suburban	N/A	Chandler Magnet School; Worcester Arts Magnet School	Long Island HS for the Arts; Jack Abrams STEM Magnet School
"Traditional" Public School	Urban	N/A	East Boston High; Charlestown HS	P.S. 005; P.S. 107; Truman High School
	Suburban	N/A	Wellesley HS; Framingham HS	Huntington HS; Dobbs Ferry HS
Private/ Independent School	Urban	N/A	Cambridge Friends School; Commonweath School	The Spence School; Collegiate School
	Suburban	N/A	St. Mark's School; Concord Academy	Hackley School; Dwight-Englewood School
Other	Urban	For-profit or private-managed	N/A	BASIS Private School

Although this represents a very small portion of the schools in these two metro areas, the selection of case schools, most notably of particular types, proved to be somewhat challenging.

Because of the lack of CMO-affiliated charter schools in the suburbs, for example, or even "traditional" public schools in urban areas, many times our pool of school candidates was extremely limited. We also struggled with definitions of "suburban" versus "urban." In several instances, particularly in the case of charter or magnet schools, there were not enough schools located in what might be considered by many to be a suburban context. Often, we found schools within these category types that might be considered to be in smaller metro areas of their own, located in the region of Boston and New York City. For example, several of the suburban magnet schools in the Boston Metro sample were located in Worcester, which is, by definition, a small city.

Also of note is that it became clear when taking a wide geographic sweep of these metro regions that schools of choice tend to be located in communities whose student demographics show a lower-income and higher-non-white representation. In higher-income suburbs, for example, we found no shortage of "traditional" public schools and private schools from which to select for this sample. This is consistent with the literature on school choice and, often, the stated purpose of charter schools to address inequities in high-need regions, but speaks to persistent questions of access.

In addition, we tried, where possible, to vary the case selection by the CMO that managed the charter schools in each city in order to get a broader sweep of the landscape of CMO charters. In the case of more widely adopted national chains, like KIPP, this, again, limited our case selection. Finally, it is important to distinguish between the national and larger CMO brands and the smaller, more localized CMOs. In some cases, particularly with suburban CMO charters, these management organizations were operating four or five charters in the area, which

technically classifies them as a CMO, but does not put them on the same organizational scale as KIPP, for example.

Using the rubric developed by the authors, we evaluated Web sites for the presence or degree of certain types of marketing or branding [Table 2]. Rubric categories include, but are not limited to, presence of mission statement, presence of slogan, slogan language type (e.g., values, academic), the use of an autonomous Web site (i.e., not embedded within a district page), a "glossified" Web site (including high-resolution pictures, videos, and flash or interactive graphics), presence of social media campaigns, existence of a school-owned YouTube channel, branded school names including partner name or academic theme, and school name or mission statement with academic language cues.

Table 2
Rubric Categories and Data Descriptions

Online Source		Description
Website		Presence of website?
		Autonomously managed website
		Flash graphics
		High-resolution "glossy" pictures and graphics
		Presence of logo
		Presence of mission statement
		Professional videos
		Presence of slogan
		School name that includes corporate or branded identity (example: KIPP, or College Board)
		School name that includes academic focus indicators (example: science)
		School name that includes academic outcomes cues (example: "college" or "prep")
		Visible school uniforms
		Clear branded colors
YouTube Channel		Autonomously managed YouTube Channel
		Professionally developed videos
		Branded colors or logos present
Social Media	Twitter	Existence of/Autonomously managed
		Branded Colors/Logos
		Average # Followers
	Facebook	Existence of/Autonomously managed
		Branded Colors/Logos
		Average # Likes

In addition to gathering these data, we also looked at mission statements on Web sites and social media. For these mission statements, we conducted language analysis, framing our interpretation of the data using Lubienski's (2007) categorizations of schools from Michigan [See Appendix A

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for codes]. Using these codes, where possible, we drew overarching categorizations about the content of the mission statements.

FINDINGS

Variation exists within and across school type and location depending on the competitive nature of the school market in which it is located and the school's accompanying network or partner. Overall, however, data reveal that schools affiliated with high-status and well-funded organizations, particularly CMO charter schools, such as the Success Academy, Urban Assembly, or KIPP networks tend to have highly glossified Web sites, and very active social media and YouTube outlets. In short, CMO charters are much more in control of the marketing message than other schools— even autonomous charter schools—and are attempting to create a perception of quality through marketing.

Web site Analysis.

Across the board, CMO charters project singularity and prestige. It is clear that an orchestrated marketing effort has been made, and money has been put into developing the Web site and corresponding materials, including social media content outlets.

Table 3
Web site Analysis

	CMO Charters	Non-CMO Charters	School Type Public Schools of Choice	Public Schools, Not Choice	Private Schools
Presence of Web site?	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Autonomously managed Web site	0%	100%	55%	55%	100%
Flash graphics	100%	40%	18%	11%	75%
High-resolution "glossy" pictures and graphics	100%	40%	18%	0%	88%
Presence of logo	100%	80%	45%	56%	88%
Presence of mission statement	100%	80%	55%	56%	88%
Professional videos	36%	10%	0%	0%	38%
Presence of slogan	100%	30%	9%	33%	33%
School name that includes corporate or branded identity (e.g., KIPP or College Board)	100%	0%	27%	0%	13%
School name that includes academic focus indicators (e.g., science)	0%	10%	55%	0%	0%
School name that includes academic outcome cues (e.g., "college" or "prep")	55%	10%	9%	0%	13%
Visible school uniforms	100%	40%	9%	0%	13%
Clear branded colors	100%	30%	27%	0%	25%
Average Marketing Score	**76%**	**44%**	**33%**	**24%**	**52%**

Like the private schools in our case set, CMO-operated charter schools have Web sites with highly interactive graphics, glossy pictures, and high-quality videos. In more cases than all other school types, they also have logos, slogans, and mission statements.
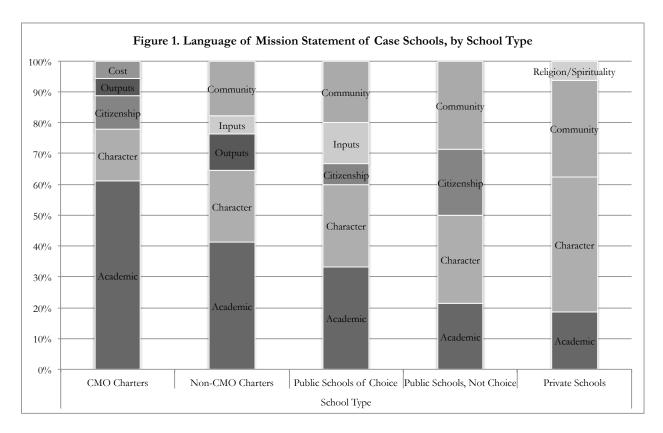
Interestingly, CMO charter schools do this without giving any of the schools in the data set their own, autonomous Web site. The individual schools were mostly clearly embedded within the heavily branded CMO Web site. This gives the CMOs branded imagery that crosses geographic boundaries and conveys a unified vision. For example, all KIPP schools have the

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blue "KIPP" brand name in the title and use blue coloring in everything from Web sites and uniforms, whereas Success Academy uses orange.

By contrast, schools—traditional public and charter—in those markets that are not affiliated with networks or management organizations had significantly less glossy and sophisticated Web sites. On these Web sites, picture quality, site design, and usability lagged behind their well-networked peers. More often than not, schools affiliated with districts would simply have a single Web page, perhaps with a logo or a mission statement, embedded within the district page. Autonomous charter school commonly had their own Web site, but, with some exceptions, these schools frequently had low- to medium-quality graphics and branding organization.

The intensity of marketing tactics found on CMO charter Web sites echo those of elite private schools in interactive quality and imagery, but, in contrast, focus more on academic signals than values language to sell their product (Lubienski, 2007). In New York City, for example, the motto for the Spence School, an elite private school's is "Not for school, but for life we learn." In contrast, local CMO managed schools have more academically oriented mottos. This is probably best exemplified by the Achievement First charter school chain whose motto is embedded in its name. While their mottos may differ in focus, their highly cultivated Web sites signal that a great deal of financial investment has been made in building a brand image and marketing campaign.

Beyond their presence, the language of the mission statements themselves is worth noting. As mentioned, using Lubienski's (2007) codes for marketing analysis, we found that the vast majority of CMO-operated charter schools focused heavily on academic messaging, particularly regarding college acceptance. Figure 1 illustrates these findings.

Figure 1. Language of Mission Statement of Case Schools, by School Type

Although all of the schools exhibit an emphasis on academic language in their mission statements, CMO charters stand out. These mission statements were largely focused on "achievement" and "excellence," along with indicators of college aspirations. Interestingly, none of the CMO charters mentioned "community" in their mission statements. For each of the other school types, "community" references are consistent. Private schools, which had similar heavy marketing strategies, emphasized "character" more than other school types, echoing Lubienski's (2007) findings that private institutions focused more on values statements in their marketing literature.

Finally, it is worth noting that several schools mentioned "citizenship" in their mission statements. On the whole, for traditional public schools that are not of choice, "citizenship" was mentioned much more frequently in these mission statements. Democracy Prep was the only charter that emphasized this theme. This is particularly significant given debates over divergent

purposes and goals of charter and non-charter schools within public education as a whole (Labaree, 1997; Lubienski, 2001).

YouTube and Social Media Analysis.

In addition to "glossified" Web sites, CMO charters have several other means of utilizing online marketing and advertising to highlight their schools. Many CMO charters have high-quality, professionally developed, emotionally appealing videos—often linked to a CMO-controlled YouTube channel, where many more such videos can be found. Table 4 shows the data from the YouTube channels of the case schools in this study.

Table 4
YouTube Analysis

	School Type				
	CMO Charters	Non-CMO Charters	Public Schools of Choice	Public Schools, Not Choice	Private Schools
Autonomously managed YouTube Channel	91%	26%	9%	11%	50%
Professionally developed videos	73%	0%	9%	0%	13%
Branded colors or logos present	82%	20%	9%	0%	38%
Average Marketing Score	**82%**	**15%**	**9%**	**4%**	**33%**

Although multiple schools throughout the sample had YouTube channels, many were unbranded, and most had videos posted by individual users of events, like band concerts or graduations. CMO charters were way ahead in the use of this media for marketing purposes. For example, Success Academy possesses its own YouTube channel with over 131 discrete YouTube videos, the majority of which were professionally produced, ostensibly, with the aim of attracting applicants and supporters. While some videos focus on the parent and student experiences at

Success Academy schools, others are solely promotional videos highlighting the attributes of the organization as a whole. All of the videos are professionally produced; none are "homemade" uploads by members of the school community.

Such videos come with a clear financial price tag. Given that assumed price tag, surprisingly, only one of the eight private schools included in this sample had a YouTube channel developed to the degree of the vast majority of the CMOs. St. Mark's School was the only non-CMO school in the entire sample to have the combination of an autonomously managed YouTube channel, professionally developed videos, and a clearly branded identity on that YouTube channel. This suggests that CMO charters are not only able to financially support such marketing enterprises, but that they are organizationally prioritizing marketing through this media, in a way that mimics the private sector.

Social media outlets, like Facebook and Twitter, are also extremely active in the case of CMO charters, in particular [Table 5].

Table 5
Social Media Analysis

		CMO Charters	Non-CMO Charters	Public Schools of Choice	Public Schools, Not Choice	Private Schools
				School Type		
Twitter Account	Existence of/Autonomously managed	100%	30%	27%	22%	87%
	Branded Colors/Logos*	100%	100%	66%	50%	100%
	Average # Followers*	12, 653	123	815	93	938
Facebook Account	Existence of/Autonomously managed	100%	80%	90%	77%	100%
	Branded Colors/Logos*	100%	75%	50%	42%	87%
	Average # Likes*	12,042	640	714	1,928	1,429

*Indicates of case schools with accounts.

The CMO-managed charter schools were all linked to very active Facebook and Twitter accounts, all of which were branded and showed very consistent use. In addition, many of these accounts make use of these platforms for political messaging and activism. For example, Success

Academy and KIPP use the hash tag "#lovemycharter" which supports activism for charter schools in general. On the CMO social media sites, there were often professionally developed videos, some of which start up immediately when the user arrives at the account page. A few enterprising CMOs, like Success Academy, have even developed Instagram and Snapchat accounts, which are branded and managed in a manner akin to their other social media outlets.

In terms of number of followers and "likes," the CMO charters are far outstripping the other schools in this case sample. For example, KIPP has over 17,000 followers on Twitter, and each individual school in the network has its own account, with thousands of followers per school. The same is true for most CMO charter schools. Even the private schools, which follow the CMO charters in terms of degree of social media activity, have only a fraction of the followers. This disparity is partly due to the organizational structure of these types of schools. CMO-managed charters, particularly the national ones, have an interest in using social media to give an impression of cohesiveness across geographic boundaries, and, in theory, to reach parents outside of local neighborhoods. Yet, the number of followers for organizations like KIPP reaches beyond the immediate parent and teacher community to a larger network of interested parties, including potential supporters and gatekeepers (Scott and DiMartino, 2009).

While many of the public and charter schools in this sample have Facebook accounts, fewer are branded, and many are seemingly somewhat out of use. Some of these schools have Facebook or Twitter accounts that mainly serve to follow school sports teams. Overall, with the notable exception of Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, which has both Twitter and Facebook accounts that mimic the style of the CMO-charters (albeit with fewer followers), the public schools in this sample do not give the impression of utilizing these accounts for marketing so much as for informational purposes.

Conversely, the private schools in this sample were much more likely to have active social media accounts with branded identities. On many of these sites, however, it was clear that a significant portion of the activity was targeted at the alumni network for the schools. This returns us to the earlier statement about the reach of the social media followers for CMO charters. In accessing alumni networks, private schools, in part, hope to maintain a feeling of connection among graduates, which, ideally, will translate into fundraising capacity. The same is likely true for CMO charters. In documenting activities and engaging in political activism through social media accounts, CMO charters are likely targeting potential donors as much (or more than) maintaining parent and community ties.

Social media outlets as well as YouTube channels frequently are linked by color and logo branding back to their CMO. This again, relates back to perceptions of monetary investment in advertising. Each of these media outlets provides ample access to marketing materials, and, in addition, requires a staff member with some degree of technical skill and PR knowledge to manage them. Keeping social media sites current, information rich and visually appealing is time consuming and requires skilled personnel. These individuals are responsible for maintaining Web sites, blogs, as well as accounts on Facebook, Twitter and other outlets such as Instagram and Pinterest. Management organizations, such as BASIS Independent Brooklyn, hire staff to cultivate and populate their social media sites. BASIS Independent Brooklyn, it is important to note, is affiliated with the national BASIS Charter Management Organization. A recent job posting captures what BASIS looks for in its marketing personnel:

> BASIS Independent Schools is seeking a Manger of Integrative Marketing and Communications to bring their superior writing, editorial skills, and marketing and communication prowess to our schools and to our energetic marketing and enrollment teams. In this role you will be instrumental in building the visibility of our national brand of high performing schools among students, parents

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and families looking for an exceptional college preparatory
education (Basis Education Group, N.D).

In contrast to this investment in personnel whose purpose it is to maintain social media, non-CMO schools—both public and charter—had relatively lower social media or YouTube presence.

Additionally, we found that schools located in affluent, zoned neighborhoods either in urban or suburban areas, had lower marketing indices. These schools had distinguished brands tightly associated with their reputations for high achievement, often conveyed by magazines such as *U.S. News and World Report.* Such distinctions may mitigate the need for intense marketing and branding practices, which relates back to the need for charters to invest in marketing to convey "quality."

Isomorphism in the Marketplace.

Finally, findings from New York City revealed new trends in charter and traditional school management that contribute to a growing marketing and branding culture. Some of the partner support organizations that emerged with the small school movement and then grew under the Bloomberg administration in New York City have changed direction, becoming charter management organizations. For example, New Visions for Public Schools and Urban Assembly, both originally school partners, now formally manage charter schools in New York City. These charter schools embrace branding and marketing practices. Indeed, New Visions for Public Schools had its own branding manual for new school leaders. For-profit independent schools have also increased their presence in New York City. Similar to CMOs discussed earlier, AltSchool, Avenues, BASIS, Léman Manhattan, and Nord Anglia International all emphasize branding and marketing.

CONCLUSION

Investments in marketing campaigns or advertising outlets are clearly intended to convey school quality (Ackerberg, 2001). Such investment can indeed be heavy. In addition to setting aside money to support the hiring of in-house marketing staff, as discussed earlier, management organizations hire outside marketing firms to enhance their brands and build their marketing presence. The Success Academy network, according to their 2010 990 tax forms, spent over $700,000 on public relations firms, which includes political consultants, such as SKD Knickerbocker, market research firms, such as Mundy Katowitz Media, and promotional film companies, such as Big Year Productions (Department of Treasury, 2010).

The example of the Success Academy network in New York City illustrates these findings well. In 2009, Success Academy hired Mission Control Inc., a frontrunner in the targeted direct mail industry, with clients such as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and the House Majority Political Action Committee. According to its 2010 990 tax form, Success Academy paid $418,718 to Mission Control Inc. for its services. Continuing this targeted campaign, during the 2014-2015 school, Success Academy sent direct mailers to families in New York City. This requires buying the list of parents from the Department of Education, designing and printing direct mailers, and paying for postage. The direct mail came as one- page fliers in blue and orange—the organization's colors—introducing residents to the Success Academy brand and, with graphs, showing how its schools outperform public schools in the city and state. These glossy fliers came in three different formats, all sent to prospective parents. In addition, Success Academy sent school applications to prospective parents with paid return envelopes. This coordinated and direct mail campaign to potential applicants speaks to the CEO Eva Moskowitz's stated desire to attract as many applicants as possible to the Success Academy

network (The Brian Lehrer Show interview, March 24, 2015). While an outlier in the public education system nationally, Success Academy speaks to the role of marketing and branding in highly competitive educational marketplaces such as New York City, New Orleans, and Los Angeles.

Schools with more money invested in their Web sites, their promotional videos, and their social media outlets stand to be perceived as being of higher quality by parents, students, and investors alike. CMO-run charter schools present a much more professional face in these online media outlets than other schools in the public sector. CMO Web sites are matched for sophistication and polish only by elite private schools, but with very different messaging. Such investment in marketing raises anew fundamental questions about the perception and reality of public education.

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APPENDIX A

Taken from Lubienski (2007).

Coding Items:

1. Content
   a. Stated Evidence of Organizational inputs
      i. Facilities
         1. Technological resources
         2. Academic facilities
         3. Athletic facilities
         4. Other information
      ii. Human resources
         1. Teacher-student ratio/class size
         2. Teacher expertise
         3. Non-core teachers/ classes
         4. Race/ethnicity of teachers
         5. Other
      iii. Curriculum/ Pedagogy
         1. Curriculum/ Pedagogy—reading
         2. Curriculum/ Pedagogy—math
         3. Other
      iv. Student characteristics
         1. Race/ ethnicity of students
         2. Free/reduced-price lunch
         3. Students receiving financial assistance
         4. Other allusions to variety
         5. Other
   b. Stated evidence of organizational outputs
      i. Raw outputs
         1. Test scores
         2. Graduation rates
         3. Drop-out rate
         4. Honors
         5. Lists of universities
         6. % Going on to college
         7. Post-graduation jobs
         8. Other
      ii. Value-added outputs
         1. Evidence of value-added
         2. Other
   c. Other selling points
      i. Diversity
         1. "Diversity"
         2. Ethnic/ racial breakdown

3. Financial assistance available
4. Other

 ii. Academics
  1. "Traditional"/ "basics"
  2. "Innovative"
  3. College prep
  4. Advance placement classes
  5. "Achievement"/ "excellence"/ "quality"
  6. Individualized
  7. Foreign language
  8. Fine arts
  9. "Alternative"
  10. Other

 iii. Other parental concerns
  1. Character/ moral values
  2. Safety
  3. Extended care available
  4. Convenience
  5. Transportation
  6. Other

 iv. Extracurricular activities/ options
  1. Sports
  2. Clubs
  3. Other

d. Non-text images
 i. Symbols, photos, phrases
  1. School symbol/logo
  2. School motto
  3. Year established
  4. Pictures of kids in uniforms
  5. Religious symbols
  6. Race/ethnicity of students
  7. Race/ethnicity of staff/teachers
  8. Adults as helper
  9. Adults as leaders
  10. Other

2. Indicators of target audience
 a. Exclusivity/ inclusivity
  i. Stated costs
   1. Annual tuition
   2. Application fee
   3. "Tuition fee"
   4. Other
  ii. Implicit costs
   1. Uniform/ dress code
   2. State of faith

         3. Parent involvement (required or expected)
         4. Applicant interviews
         5. Entrance exams
         6. Other
      iii. Community
         1. By educational interest
         2. By other pre-existing characteristics
         3. Other
   b. Themes
      i. Themes from text
         1. Religion
         2. Community
         3. Patriotism
         4. Choice
         5. Other
3. Expected reception
   a. Intended audience defined
   b. Reading difficulty score
   c. Non-English language
   d. Other
4. Production values
   a. Glossy or photocopied?
   b. Unique shapes, styles, formats
   c. Other