

A public relations strategy for the promotion of South Africa as a tourist destination in a 'non-user' country

Berendien Lubbe

SUMMARY

The objective of this study was to formulate a public relations strategy for a tourist-generating country which could be described as a 'non-user' of South Africa's tourist product. The aim of this strategy is to provide a catalyst for the establishment of a tourism relationship between a tourist-generating country and a tourist destination. This study shows that a tourism relationship begins when awareness of a tourist destination reaches a level at which a primary image of the destination is constructed by relevant publics in the tourist-generating country.

Public relations is viewed from the perspective of a communications function concerned with image development. In this study an existing communication effects theory was adapted to represent the process of formulating a public relations strategy.

The concept of destination image was explored with the construction of primary image forming the proposition for the empirical testing. It was shown that by using a qualitative research design, certain 'push' and 'pull' factors could be identified and links between these factors established. It was also determined that in the same tourist-generating country these 'push' and 'pull' factors can differ substantially between various identified publics and that cultural context is an important determinant of these differences. The impact of these results became evident in the formulation of the public relations strategy where different communication strategies were required for each public.

OPSOMMING

Die oorkoepelende doel van hierdie studie was om 'n openbarebetrekkingsstrategie vir 'n toeristegenererende land wat tans as 'n 'nie-gebruiker' van Suid-Afrika se toeristeproduk beskryf kan word, te formuleer. Hierdie strategie het ten doel om 'n toerismeverhouding tussen 'n bepaalde toeristegenererende land en 'n bepaalde toeristebestemming te inisieer. Die studie toon dat 'n toerismeverhouding begin wanneer relevante publieke in die toeristegenererende land 'n vlak van bewustheid oor die toeristebestemming bereik waar 'n primere beeld gekonstrueer kan word.

Openbare betrekkinge word beskou vanuit die perspektief van 'n kommunikasiefunksie wat met beeldontwikkeling gemoeid is. In hierdie studie word 'n bestaande kommunikasie-effekteorie aangepas om die proses van formulering van 'n openbarebetrekkingsstrategie te verteenwoordig.

Die konsep 'bestemmingsbeeld' is ondersoek en die konstruering van primere beeld vorm die proposisie vir die empiriese toetsing. Daar is getoon dat deur die gebruikmaking van 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp, sekere 'druk'- en 'trek'-faktore geïdentifiseer kan word en verbindings tussen hierdie faktore daargestel kan word. Daar is ook bepaal dat, in een toeristegenererende land, hierdie 'druk'- en 'trek'-faktore aansienlik kan verskil onder verskeie geïdentifiseerde publieke en dat kulturele konteks 'n belangrike determinant van hierdie verskille is. Die impak van hierdie resultate het duidelik geword in die formulering van die openbarebetrekkingsstrategie waar verskillende kommunikasiestrategiee vir elke publiek vereis is.

1 INTRODUCTION

There are established tourism relationships between South Africa and countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, which are regarded as the most valuable tourist markets for South Africa (Satour 1994). South Africa is vigorously promoted as a tourist destination in these countries, which is reflected by the fact that these countries produce the largest number of tourists to South Africa. These countries are also popular destinations for South African tourists. However, certain other countries in regions such as the Middle East and Asia have no tourism relationship with South Africa. In many of these countries person-to-person and trade sanctions were strictly applied against South Africa and there was no opportunity for the establishment of tourism relationships. Marketing, promotional or public relations activities were non-existent and reports on South Africa probably provided an adverse image. As a result some significant tourist-generating countries have had no, or negligible, tourism interaction with

South Africa and can be termed non-user¹ countries of South Africa's tourism product. For these countries to become potential users a tourism relationship must be initiated.

The country selected for this study was Saudi Arabia since it is one of the world's top tourism expenditure countries and has had virtually no tourism flow to South Africa. Currently there are no direct air links between South Africa and Saudi Arabia and no tourism representation. At the time of the study there were no diplomatic ties between the two countries.

A tourism relationship begins when individuals from the tourist-generating country become sufficiently aware of the tourist destination to perceive it as a potential choice for visitation. This awareness of a tourist destination is reflected in its image. Since public relations is essentially a communications function concerned with image and image development, the aim of this study was to formulate an appropriate public relations strategy aimed at destination image development in a so-called 'non-user' country. To formulate a public relations strategy grounded in established public relations principles and to provide an appropriate foundation for the empirical research, a theoretical framework was derived.

2 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS IN DESTINATION IMAGE DEVELOPMENT

A framework was derived for the formulation of a public relations strategy from the theoretical foundations of the processes of public relations, diffusion and adoption. This framework can be called a destination image development process and is presented in figure 1.

In this figure the existing destination image is depicted as the start of the process. This is determined during the research phase of the public relations process and indicates the current attitudes and

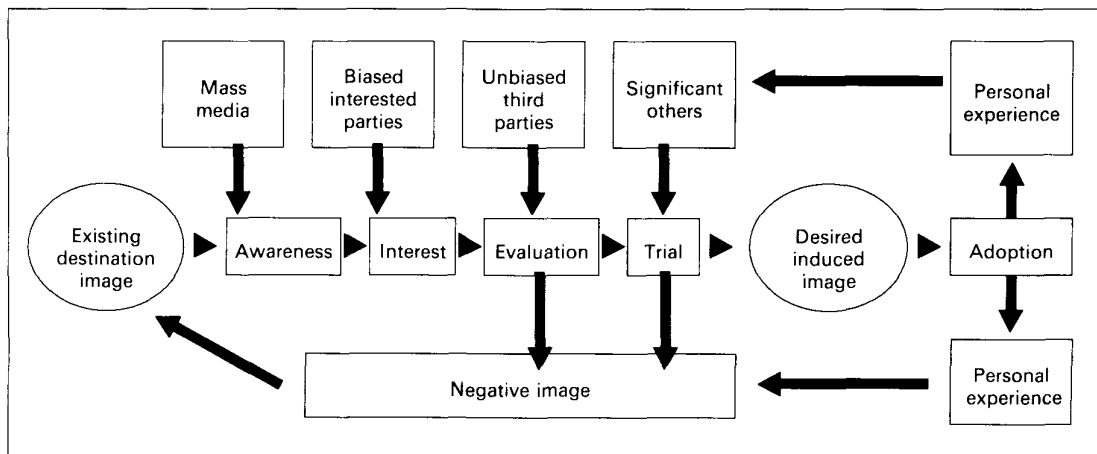
opinions of the tourist destination held by relevant publics. During this phase initial differentiation of the relevant publics is done. Identifying relevant publics is of fundamental importance as it lays the foundation for goal and objective setting as well as the correct selection of communication strategies. The research effectively covers the problem definition phase which Broom and Dozier (1990:23) describe as research and fact-finding where, in essence, the following question is asked 'What's happening now?' The actual planning phase in which a public relations strategy is developed can begin once this question is answered. The following question should guide the planning phase: 'What should we do and why?' To answer this question the first step is to set an overall goal. A goal is a statement indicating the more general and ultimate outcome that the total programme is designed to achieve. In destination image development a desired destination image can be seen as the overall goal of the public relations strategy. A desired destination image means that awareness is created to the extent that target publics perceive the destination as a potential choice. Objectives, on the other hand, can be described as the specific results to be achieved by a specified date for each of the well-defined target publics. The objectives that are set for each public must, according to Broom and Dozier (1990:40):

- give focus and direction to developing program activities,
- provide guidance and motivation to those working in the program
- spell out the criteria for assessing program impact

The objectives set for target publics also provide the criteria for evaluation once the strategy has been implemented. The objectives can be described in terms of specific communication strategies. When public relations is used to change a latent public into an aware public, the strategy to be formulated relies on the processes of

Figure 1

Process of destination image development



adoption and diffusion. The adoption process (defined as the way in which new ideas are adopted in society) consists of five stages:

- *Awareness*: People are aware of the idea or practice, although their knowledge is limited.
- *Interest*: People begin to develop an interest in the idea and seek more information about it.
- *Evaluation*: People begin to mentally apply the idea to their individual situations. Simultaneously, they obtain more information and make a decision to try the new idea.
- *Trial*: At this point, actual application begins, usually on a small scale.
- *Adoption*: Once the idea is proven worthwhile it is adopted.

At each of these stages channels of communication are used to influence target publics to adopt new ideas, varying from mass media to interpersonal communication (this is called the diffusion process). Mass media are most effective at creating awareness; specialised media such as brochures are effective at creating knowledge; interpersonal communication channels are best to influence attitude change; and finally, interpersonal support provides reassurance (Baskin & Aranoff 1992).

In applying the adoption process to the promotion of a new tourism destination, the fourth step may appear inconsistent since potential tourists cannot 'try out' a new destination. However, although primary publics (the target markets) cannot 'try out' a new destination, the intervening² publics (those groups who have influence over the primary publics) can and should personally experience the new destination on a familiarisation basis in order to provide word-of-mouth recommendations (personal support). These intervening publics are those referred to in figure 1 under the channels of influence as biased intermediaries, unbiased third parties, or significant others. Other channels of influence are mass media and personal experience. Personal experience, as referred to in this particular study, therefore has two connotations, the first being the personal experience of intervening publics during the trial stage, and the second being the personal experience of the primary publics once the idea (the new destination) has been adopted. Marx and Van der Walt (1993:228) note that each type of communication channel has a specific role to play during the transfer of information and that the channels are complementary. The importance of the various channels varies according to the risks experienced by the individual, with factors such as complexity of the new idea, price and lack of comparable information by which to evaluate the idea all playing a role. In figure 1 the stage of adoption is depicted after the public relations goal has been achieved. The public relations goal is to achieve a desired image, while the task of marketing is to ensure adoption through final selection of the destination among the alternatives and to ensure visitation of the destination.

Since public relations is an open system and a continuous, cyclical process, the destination image must be constantly monitored and evaluated so that adjustments to the public relations and communications strategies can be made. As shown in figure 1 the image achieved may not be as desired, which would mean an adjustment has to be made. Furthermore, once the destination has been visited, either on a trial basis by biased or unbiased third parties or tourists, these individuals become members of the 'significant others' channel of communication and they wield an influence over the attitudes and opinions of the relevant publics. A negative image has to be corrected by utilising the correct channels of influence recommended in an adjusted public relations strategy. A public relations strategy must therefore develop criteria for evaluation of the success of its implementation.

The three main elements depicted in figure 1, namely the existing destination image, the desired destination image and the communication strategies provided the three main research areas. First, research had to be conducted into the views of relevant publics on the image of South Africa as a tourist destination. The results of this research would provide necessary information for a public relations strategy for a specific 'non-user' country. Second, because the overall purpose of a public relations strategy is to create sufficient awareness of the destination so that it becomes a potential choice for tourists, research had to be on what the desired destination image should be. Third, research had to be done on what the appropriate communication media and messages are for creating tourist destination awareness in a specific tourist-generating country.

Since the concepts of travel motivation and destination image are central to the way in which the research had to be done, these concepts are discussed more fully.

3 TRAVEL MOTIVATION AND DESTINATION IMAGE

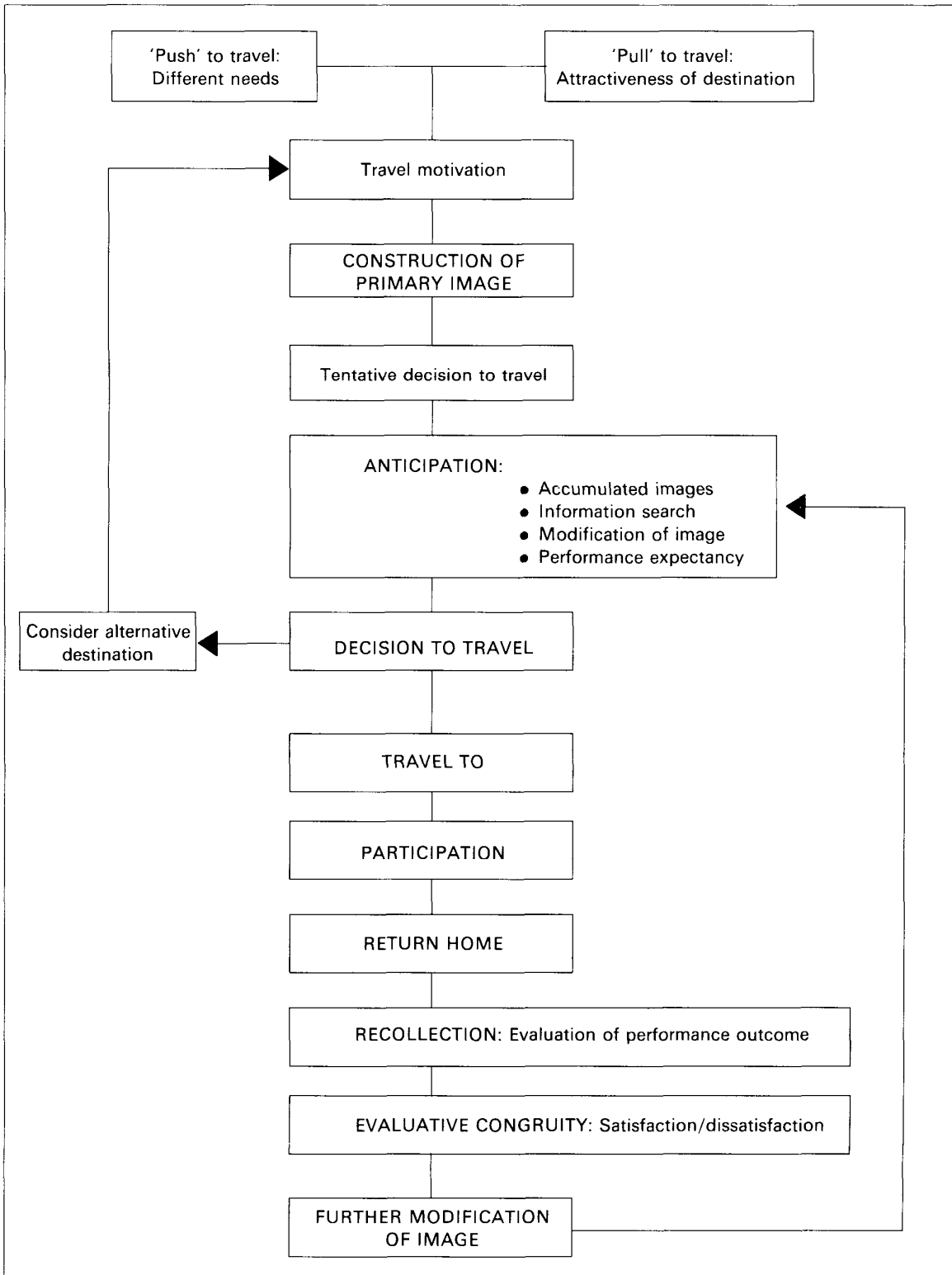
The process by which an individual becomes a potential tourist and constructs an image of any particular destination can be described through the traveller buying process as is illustrated in figure 2.

The individual follows the various stages until he finally makes a decision to travel, considers the various alternatives and ultimately undertakes his travel experience. As illustrated in figure 3, the motivation to travel begins when an individual becomes aware of his needs and he perceives that certain destinations, products or services may have the ability to satisfy those needs.

Chon (1989) describes these needs and motives as 'push' factors and suggests that they fit into Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Mill and Morrison (1985), in accordance with Chon's view, also suggest that travel motivations can fit into Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which includes the following:

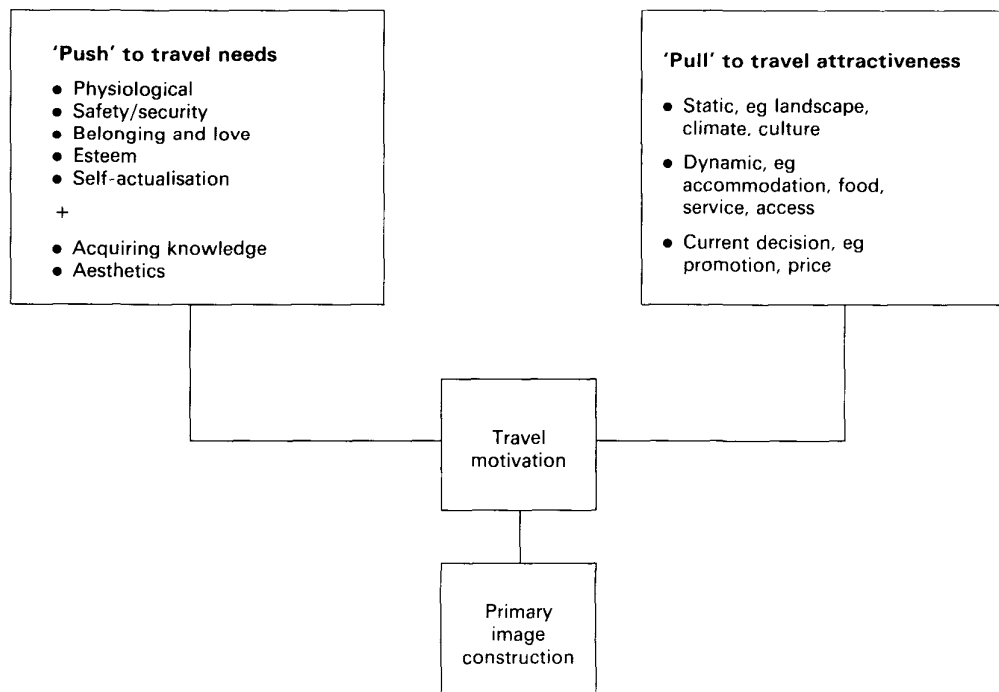
Figure 2

Relationship of destination image and traveller buying behaviour



Source: Chon (1990:6)

Figure 3
Travel motivation



- 1 Physiological - hunger, thirst, rest, activity
- 2 Safety - security, freedom from fear and anxiety
- 3 Belonging and love - affection, giving and receiving love
- 4 Esteem - self-esteem and esteem for others
- 5 Self-actualisation - personal self-fulfilment

To this original list they add two intellectual needs:

- 6 To know and understand - acquiring knowledge
- 7 Aesthetics - appreciation of beauty

They state that an individual is motivated to satisfy a particular need in a particular way on the basis of three factors. First, an objective will be set if the individual perceives that the objective will satisfy his or her need: if he or she feels that taking a cruise will result in him or her returning relaxed and refreshed and if it is important to himself or her that he or she do something to relax and refresh himself or herself, then he or she is more likely to take that cruise. Second, a particular action will be taken if the individual has learned that that action will satisfy that need: if he or she has taken a cruise that has resulted in him or her returning home refreshed, he or she will be more inclined to take it again. Third, the decision as to what action to take to satisfy a need must be taken within the limitations of the individual's external environment: he or she may perceive that a cruise will satisfy his or her need or he or she may have learned that a cruise will satisfy his or her need, but if he or she does not have enough time or money or

if there are strong social or cultural factors that inhibit this option, he or she may not be able to take the cruise.

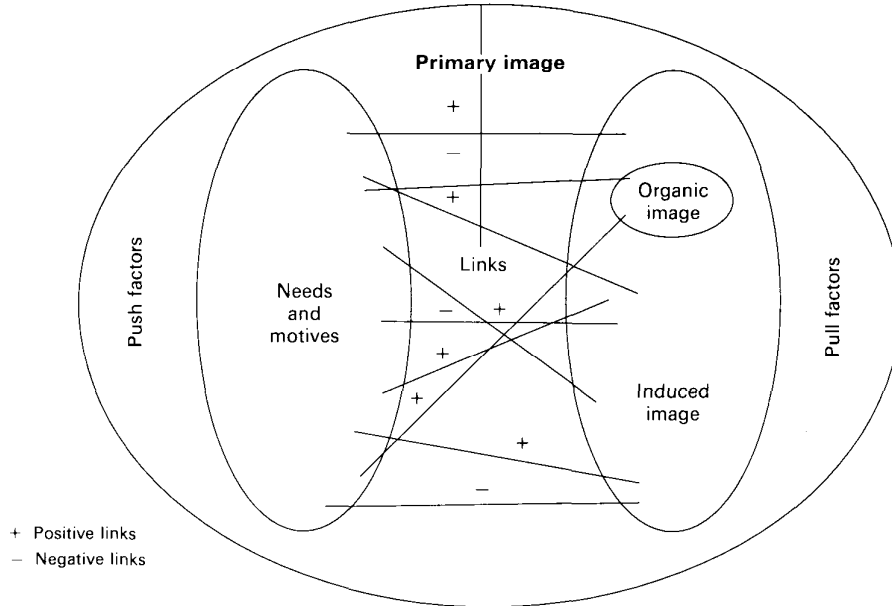
Mill and Morrison also provide an indication of some of the links between recreational travel and these needs and motives by citing references in tourism literature to what destinations offer that is attractive to potential tourists. For example, those who say they travel 'to escape' or 'to relieve tension' can be seen as seeking to satisfy a basic physiological need and the motivation may be physical or mental relaxation.

The attractiveness of a region and its various elements Chon describes as the 'pull' factors. Meinung (Witt & Moutinho 1989) divides the elements of a destination that may contribute to its attractiveness (the 'pull' factors) into three basic categories. These are:

- *static factors*, which include the natural and cultivated landscape, the climate, means of travel to the region and in the region, and historical and local cultural attractions
- *dynamic factors*, which include accommodation, catering, personal attention and service, entertainment and sport, access to the market, political conditions and trends in tourism
- *current decision factors*, which include the marketing of the region and prices in the region of destination as well as in the country of origin

Figure 4

The links between push and pull factors of recreational travel motivation and the construction of a primary image



He emphasises that this attractiveness depends on the relationships and interactions of the determinants as well as the qualities associated with them. He states:

There are different determinants of the attractiveness of tourism regions, which apply equally to whole countries and continents. Their relationships and interactions are determined by their own intrinsic nature and the qualities associated with them (Witt & Moutinho 1989:99).

According to Chon, 'push' and 'pull' factors acting together function as antecedent events for an individual's travel motivation and at this point an individual becomes a potential tourist. The moment the potential tourist selects a number of destinations as possible choices Chon says he has constructed a primary image. Where two countries have no tourism relationship it is clear that the purpose of a public relations strategy must be to establish sufficient awareness of the destination to enable a primary image to be constructed.

Crompton (Pearce 1982), in his analysis of travel motivation, agrees that travel consumers are not motivated by the specific qualities and attractions of the destination but by the broad suitability of the destination to fulfil their particular psychological needs. He states that conceptualising holiday destinations according to their capacity to fit human needs may produce some strange and novel mental maps of travel destinations: instead of distance

culture and climate being used to classify destinations, one can envisage clusters of vacation centres which are predominantly self-exploration, or social interaction or indeed sexual arousal and excitement (Pearce 1982:65).

The implication of this for Chon's 'push/pull' theory is that whereas he refers to the co-existence of the 'push' and 'pull' factors in the construction of a primary image, it does not necessarily mean that specific 'push' factors are linked with specific 'pull' factors. It is a complex set of associations which is not easily explained. Therefore, for a destination to become a potential choice, an awareness of that destination in terms of its attributes as well as its ability to satisfy potential tourists' needs and motives must be created. Only then will a primary image be constructed by a potential tourist.

The construction of a primary image can be illustrated as depicted in figure 4 in terms of links between the 'push' and 'pull' factors.

It can be argued that where there are sufficient positive links the destination will become a potential choice. By the same token where there are more negative links than positive ones the potential tourist will eliminate certain destinations as suitable for his purposes. Where there are insufficient links because of a lack of knowledge, a destination is unlikely to be included as a potential choice. In the latter two cases the individual has not established sufficient positive links between the 'push' and 'pull' factors

for certain destinations to construct primary images. As can be seen in figure 4, a primary image can be constructed based on an organic image or an induced image, or elements of both. As far back as 1972, Gunn (1972) divided images into two distinct categories, namely organic and induced. An organic destination image is the product of non-touristic communication such as reports of world events in newspapers, geography books, fiction and non-fiction. An induced destination image has the organic destination image as its starting point, and is the product of a planned programme of image development through publicity, advertising and promotion. Where there is no tourism relationship between countries and no promotion has occurred, it can be assumed that there is an organic image of the destination. The emphasis in this study is therefore not on a destination's attractiveness in terms of its attributes but on the links that are established between certain destinations and their attributes and an individual's needs and motives, since this is the foundation for an effective public relations strategy.

4 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A suitable research methodology had to be found to empirically test all three research areas, namely the existing destination image, the desired (or primary) image and appropriate communication strategies. The concept of primary destination image was particularly important since the information obtained had to provide the links between the needs and expectations of potential tourists and the perceived attributes and characteristics of destinations. While this study did not attempt to explain travel motivation from a psychological viewpoint, the way that primary destination image is constructed required a method that would provide for an emergence of factors that relate to a destination's perceived attributes and a potential tourist's travel motivations. The emphasis in this study is therefore not on a destination's attributes (as most studies on destination image are) but rather on the links that are established between certain destinations and their attributes and an individual's needs and motives. The research method therefore had to provide for a spontaneous emergence of information. Furthermore, because the factors that emerge may be 'culture-specific' the research method selected had to provide for obtaining and interpreting the information in such a way that it remained faithful to the motivations and meaning constructs of the participants. For these and other reasons a qualitative research method proved most appropriate for this study.

A non-directed controlled depth interview was applied to a specifically selected sample of travel agents in the cities of Riyadh and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, after pre-testing had been done in Bahrain.

In the analysis of the data on the first research question about the existing destination image, scales of familiarity and favourability were used to indicate the nature of the existing images held by three identified publics,

namely the travel agents, the Saudi nationals and the expatriates.

For the second research question about primary image construction two techniques were employed to reduce the data to meaningful and analysable units, namely producing a conceptually clustered matrix and factoring. Thereafter the results were interpreted by using a continuum to indicate the 'push/pull' orientation of Saudis versus expatriates.

The results for the third research question, which focused on acceptable communication channels and messages for each identified public, were analysed by summarising the most important points. The nature of the restrictions and the types of channels used in Saudi Arabia were determined by summarising and listing the comments under the following two categories:

- the way in which the most popular destinations are promoted in Saudi Arabia
- the informants' opinions on how South Africa should be promoted in Saudi Arabia

For the purposes of this research a scientific analysis was not required. In subjectively assessing the summaries, however, it did become evident that greater importance was accorded to certain communication channels within the Saudi nationals public. Although not scientifically based, these results were consistent with the characteristics of the Saudi nationals public, and certain conclusions were drawn.

5 A PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S IMAGE AS A TOURIST DESTINATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Using figure 1 as the theoretical framework, a public relations strategy can be formulated for the development of South Africa's image as a tourist destination in Saudi Arabia. The strategy is based on the results of the empirical research from which specific conclusions were drawn about relevant intervening and primary publics in Saudi Arabia. This public relations strategy is presented in figure 5. As has been explained, the public relations strategy is essentially part of the planning phase of the public relations process, which consists of the phases of research, planning, implementation and evaluation. In this study the focus has been on the research and planning phases but since the public relations process is an interactive, cyclical process, the strategy must make provision for specific communication strategies, and criteria for evaluation of the strategy and its implementation. Since it is outside the province of this study to design the specific communication strategies the strategy includes only broad objectives and guidelines relating to the communication media. This should serve to guide tourist organisations in formulating specific campaigns. In as far as the evaluation criteria are concerned, the strategy depicted in figure 5 makes provision for a feedback mechanism in which specific criteria for evaluation can be implemented, which will be briefly discussed in an ensuing section.

THE ORGANIC IMAGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

The process illustrated in figure 5 begins with the current level of awareness of South Africa as held by three identified publics: two primary publics, namely Saudis and expatriates, and one intervening public, namely travel agents. From the results of the empirical research the existing destination image of South Africa can be described as an organic image. Conclusions about the levels of familiarity and favourability, which indicate the nature of the destination image, were as follows:

- There is a low level of familiarity of South Africa as a tourist destination in Saudi Arabia, which is consistent with the assumption that there is only an organic image of South Africa in Saudi Arabia. This result applies to both expatriates and Saudis with only the travel agents in Jeddah indicating a slightly higher level of familiarity (this is to be expected since the nature of their activities exposes them to a greater level of information on various destinations).
- There is currently a low level of favourability of South Africa as a tourist destination in Saudi Arabia, although this must be qualified by stating that there are positive expectations among the publics under study. This means that the nature of South Africa's image in terms of the level of favourability can be described as consisting of negative perceptions of the political situation, but tempered with positive expectations relating to its tourist attributes and its ability to fulfil the recreational needs of potential tourists.

The overall conclusion reached in terms of the organic image as it exists in Saudi Arabia also provides the reason for viewing Saudi Arabia as a viable new tourist-generating market for South Africa.

In viewing the conclusions reached in terms of the levels of familiarity and favourability it is evident that only an organic image of South Africa currently exists in Saudi Arabia. This is based on the lack of knowledge of South Africa's tourist attributes as well as the current negative attitudes towards aspects of safety and security. It is evident, however, that there is an underlying conviction that South Africa has the ability to provide a satisfying recreational experience for potential tourists from Saudi Arabia.

Since very little differentiation was found between Saudis and expatriates in terms of the image of South Africa, the level at which the public relations strategy begins is the same for both primary publics. Thus, Saudis and expatriates are shown to have the same organic image of South Africa. The reason for presenting the expatriates in the upper section of the circle shown as the organic image and the Saudis in the lower section is to make differentiation possible in the further discussion of figure 5.

THE PRIMARY IMAGE OF SOUTH AFRICA

As explained, a public relations strategy for image development must begin with the setting of an overall goal. It has been shown in this study that a tourism relationship between South Africa and Saudi Arabia can only be achieved once the relevant publics have constructed a primary image of South Africa as a tourist destination. The desired destination image can therefore be referred to as a primary image. The overall goal must therefore encompass the construction of a primary image and can be stated as follows: to increase awareness of South Africa as a tourist destination to the extent that potential tourists from Saudi Arabia construct a primary image of South Africa.

In viewing the nature of the primary image as presented in figure 5, it can be seen that a differentiation is made between the primary images constructed by expatriates and by Saudis. This differentiation is based on the results of the empirical research and also forms the basis of the specific objectives that have to be set for each public.

From these results it can be concluded that there are certain significant differences between the expatriate and Saudi publics in terms of their motivations for selecting destinations. It can therefore be stated that the expatriate and Saudi publics (potential tourists) construct primary images of destinations based on different 'push' and 'pull' factors and that these differences should be taken into account in the formulation of a public relations strategy aimed at increasing awareness of South Africa as a tourist destination for the publics of Saudi Arabia. The main difference is that expatriates (in particular Western expatriates) are more 'adventurous' than Saudi nationals and their selection of destinations for recreational travel is often based on a desire to see and experience 'new' places. The Saudis, on the other hand, are generally motivated to seek their travel experiences in places in which they feel 'comfortable' and where the language, culture and food are familiar to them.

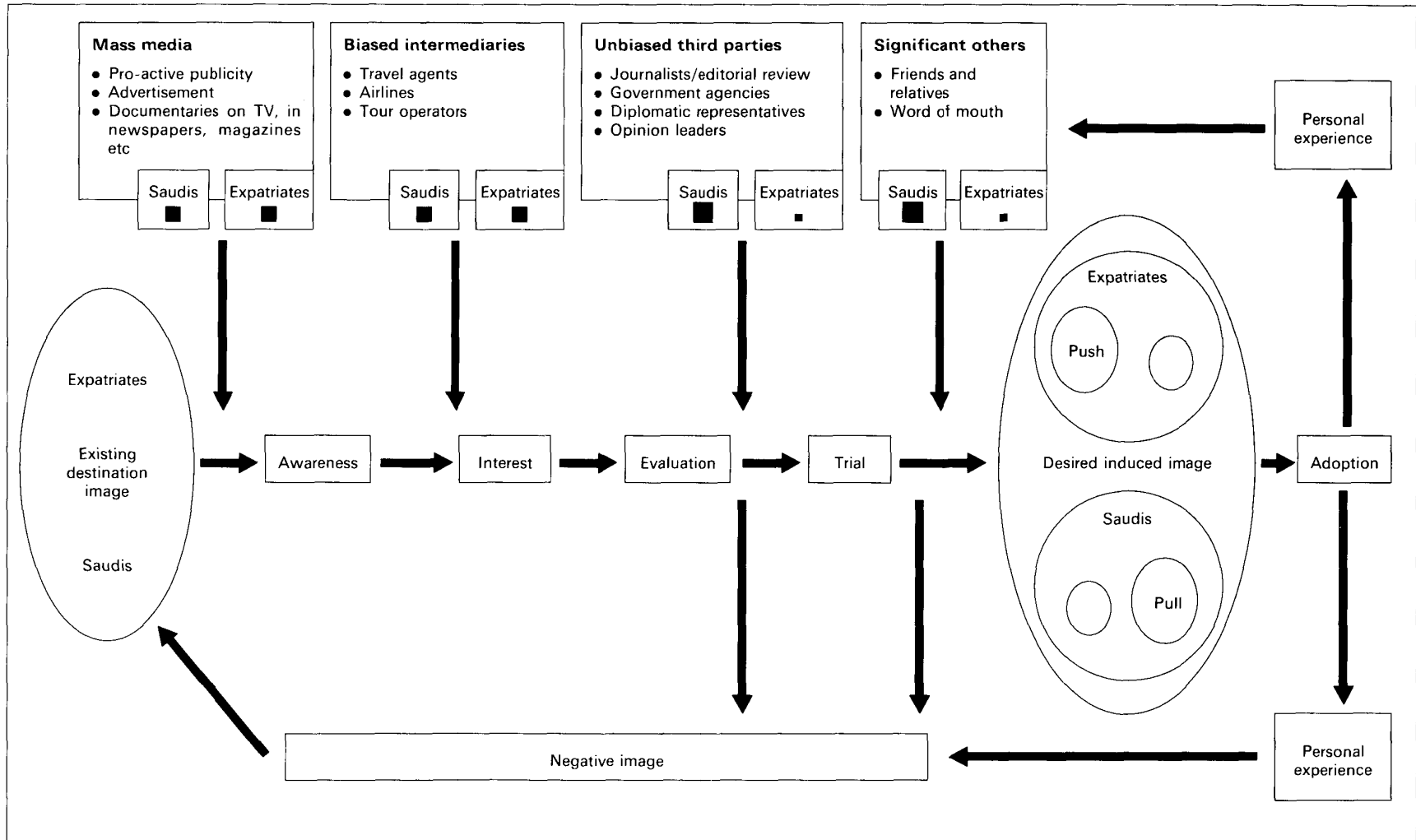
While the most significant difference becomes evident when reviewing the factors of adventure (among expatriates) and familiarity (among Saudis) which appear to be two opposing motivations in terms of the selection of destinations, supported by the orientation of adventure as a 'pull' factor and familiarity as a 'push' factor, other noteworthy conclusions were:

- Saudis in both Riyadh and Jeddah do not appear to lend the same importance as expatriates to the historical and cultural features of a destination.
- Saudis in Riyadh and Jeddah appear more interested than expatriates in the casinos and nightlife of tourist destinations.

Based on these conclusions, the objectives for Saudis and expatriates must reflect the most significant differences that were found in relation to the construction of primary

Figure 5

Public relations strategy for image development in Saudi Arabia



images. The differences are depicted in figure 5 by illustrating the relative importance of the 'push' and 'pull' factors as they co-exist to form a primary image. In the upper section of the primary image item where the expatriates are indicated, the 'push' factors are shown as being relatively more important than the 'pull' factors. This is based on the conclusion that expatriates tend to select destinations more from a sense of adventure than from what the destination's attributes are perceived to offer. In the lower section of the primary image item where the Saudis are indicated, the 'pull' factors are shown as being relatively more important than the 'push' factors. This is based on the conclusion that Saudis tend to select destinations more from their perception of the familiarity of destinations than from a sense of adventure. It is important to note that there are also similarities between the two publics and this is depicted by the way in which the 'push' and 'pull' factors co-exist to form the primary image.

Two major objectives can be derived as a result of the differentiation between the expatriates and the Saudis based on the nature of each group's construction of a primary image. These objectives can be stated as follows:³ first, to increase awareness of South Africa as a tourist destination to enable Saudi nationals to construct a primary image, by providing comprehensive, correctly formulated and channelled information on the tourist attributes of South Africa to increase familiarity with the destination.

If this objective is viewed against the criteria suggested by Broom and Dozier (1990) it can be seen that it is more specific than the overall goal, since it does give focus and direction to the development of specific communication campaigns in so far as it lays the foundation of what is important to Saudi nationals. It also provides guidance and motivation to those working on the programme through its emphasis on the accuracy of the information to be provided. The third criterion suggested by Broom and Dozier (1990) is related to programme assessment and, although not specified in this objective, it does imply that the increase in the level of awareness as well as the extent to which primary images have been constructed by Saudi nationals can be assessed. The detail of such an assessment must be specified once the specific campaign is formulated by the executing organisations.

In the same way an objective can be formulated for the expatriate public: to increase awareness of South Africa as a tourist destination to enable expatriates in Saudi Arabia to construct a primary image by providing correctly formulated and channelled information on South Africa that reflects it as a 'new' and 'adventurous' destination.

As can be seen when comparing the two objectives, the differences between the two publics are acknowledged and reflected. The emphasis on what type of information should be provided is different in each objective (the Saudis require comprehensive information whereas this is not part of the expatriate objective), as are the aspects relating to South Africa (the Saudis require more information on the tourist

attributes of South Africa while the expatriates can form an overall opinion of South Africa as a tourist destination).

The process of attaining the stated goal and objectives through communication strategies is presented in figure 5 by depicting the five stages of the adoption and diffusion process.

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The results obtained on the utilisation of the various channels of communication in the empirical research can be regarded as serendipitous findings, since it became evident during pre-testing and initial interviews that there are certain cultural and religious restrictions on promotional material and activities in Saudi Arabia. Questions were thus included in the interviews to determine the nature of the restrictions and the types of communication channels used. Since this particular research study did not attempt to determine aspects such as the effectiveness of various channels at various stages of the adoption process, the established theory of the primary path of influence is assumed to apply. This path suggests that in the early stages of awareness and interest mass media are most effective, while at the critical stages of evaluation and trial the emphasis shifts to significant others with personal experience as the primary channel at the point of adoption. However, this area requires further research before targeted promotional campaigns to specifically sub-divided market segments in Saudi Arabia are undertaken.

Conclusions reached from the research results were the following:

- Although the communication media used are generally similar for the expatriates and the Saudi nationals, the importance and influence of each channel may differ according to the needs, motivations and cultural prescriptions of each group. The most evident differences in the utilisation of the various channels of influence are found in the greater importance that can be associated with unbiased third parties, significant others and personal experience (through initial familiarisation tours by intervening publics) as channels of influence on the Saudi nationals.
- Promotional material and literature must be utilised with special sensitivity, and should not be designed or distributed without the close co-operation of a Saudi Arabian partner.

The differences between expatriates and Saudis in relation to the channels of influence are depicted in figure 5 by the size of the smaller frames attached to each particular channel. According to the results, unbiased third parties and significant others exert greater influence over Saudis than over expatriates. The communications strategy should thus indicate that greater emphasis be placed on these channels when designing specific communications campaigns for the Saudi nationals. Further research can also be done on the influence of specific media within each channel before specific communication campaigns are launched.

Message content is an important consideration in a communications strategy, and although specific messages are designed for each target public once specific communications campaigns are launched, certain guidelines, based on the results of research, are necessary. Two aspects had to be taken into account in the communications strategy for Saudi Arabia. The first relates to the nature of the information on the destination itself, and the second relates to the restrictions placed on promotional material.

In the formulation of the objectives for each public, message content was covered by references to the needs and motivations of Saudis and expatriates respectively. In the objective formulated for Saudis it was suggested that they require comprehensive information on the attributes of the tourist destination. In the objective formulated for the expatriates it was suggested that information can be of a more general nature and include messages relating to the 'newness' of the destination as a destination to be discovered.

The restrictions placed on the message content can best be described as follows:

- Promotional material and literature *are* strictly censored with restrictions on advertising and commentary in terms of the following:
 - Liquor - no mention is allowed.
 - Women - advertisements including pictures of women are of a particularly sensitive nature with women being completely covered, if shown at all.
 - Gambling, casinos - these are prohibited and no mention of them in any other destination is allowed. This is interesting since the results indicated that the Saudis have a greater preference for casinos and gambling than expatriates do.

The overall conclusion which was reached in terms of message content was as follows.

As a result of cultural and religious prescriptions promotional material and literature must be created and used with extreme sensitivity among expatriates and Saudis, and should be designed and distributed with the close co-operation of a Saudi Arabian partner.

A further aspect which became evident during the research was the necessity of selecting language according to the needs of the publics. Promotional material and literature directed at the Saudis should be in English and in Arabic, *not* English with Arabic captions.

Feedback

The discussion on the public relations strategy can be concluded by explaining how evaluation of the strategy and the effectiveness of its implementation can be conducted. Rossi and Freeman (Cutlip, Center & Broom 1994:410) use the term 'evaluation research' to represent the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualisation, design, implementation and utility of social intervention programmes.

According to this definition of evaluation research, programmes can be evaluated in the planning, implementation and impact phases. Therefore, the public relations strategy which was conceptualised and designed in this particular study can be evaluated by asking some basic questions such as:

What is the extent and distribution of the problem, and/or population?

Is there a coherent rationale underlying the strategy?

What are the costs and what is their relation to benefit (this aspect cannot be dealt with in this study but falls within the province of the executing organisations)?

In terms of this study these questions about the strategy conceptualisation and design phase of evaluation research are relevant, and must be answered in the affirmative since the strategy has a scientific foundation.

Monitoring the implementation of the strategy through the subsequent specific communications campaigns (to be designed by interested organisations), must be done by assessing the following:

- Are the programmes reaching the specified target population or target area?
- Are the efforts being conducted as specified in the strategy and communication designs?

This requires constant monitoring of activities during the implementation phase.

Finally, the impact of the programme can be assessed by asking the following questions:

- Is the programme effective in achieving its intended goals?
- Can the results be explained by some alternative process that does not include the programme?
- Is the programme having some effects that were not intended?
- What are the costs of delivering services and benefits to programme participants?
- Is the programme an efficient use of resources compared with alternative uses of resources?

Constant research into the level of awareness of the relevant publics and determination of the current destination image are necessary. As shown in figure 5, the image achieved may not be as desired, and will therefore mean that no primary image is constructed by the publics. As a result no tourism relationship can be established between the tourist-generating country and the tourist destination. Furthermore, if the 'personal experience' of relevant publics and tourists provides feedback which has a negative impact on the destination image, the primary image will have to be 'deconstructed'. A negative image has to be corrected by reformulating and ultimately implementing the correct communications strategy in the public relations strategy or

by adjusting any of the elements in the system.

6 CONCLUSION

The construction of primary image was researched in this study following the theoretical propositions of Chon (1989) regarding the co-existence of the so-called 'push' and 'pull' factors. In this particular research the first step was taken in distinguishing factors that are important in two different cultural groupings and the conclusions reached served to open the way to more in-depth qualitative and quantitative probing into the nature of these factors and variables that may have an effect on them. The orientation of the factors as related to each public were indicated, but further research could establish

relationships between the characteristics of the publics and specific 'push' and 'pull' factors, thereby extending the theory on the construction of primary image.

Two important areas were drawn together. The first was the theoretical framework for destination image development which was derived from established theoretical foundations. The second was empirical research, the results and conclusions of which provided the basis for the recommendations on how a public relations strategy could be formulated for Saudi Arabia. Although the recommendations relate mainly to the planning phase of public relations, they must be seen as guidelines for the development of target-oriented communications campaign: for public relations and marketing.

NOTES

- 1 In a marketing context, in simple terms 'non-user' normally means an individual who does not exhibit a need for or is unwilling to purchase a product or service (no matter what brand), while a 'potential user' is someone who is considering the purchase of a product or service or may change the brand already used. However, in the context of this study, the term 'non-user' is preferred as the premise is that there is a negative image of South Africa, which must be overcome before the status of 'potential user' can be achieved.
- 2 According to Baskin and Aranoff (1988) a primary public is the group at which the action is ultimately directed and an intervening public is the group who have contact with the primary public and can pass messages along to them.
- 3 These objectives are examples of the types of objective that should be formulated. These objectives could be more specifically formulated when developed in conjunction with the executing bodies such as Satour.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baskin, O & Aranoff, C 1988. *Public relations: the profession and the practice*. 3rd ed. Dubuque: Brown.
- Broome, G M & Dozier, D M 1990. *Using research in public relations*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Chon, K 1989. Understanding recreational traveler's motivation, attitude and satisfaction. *The Tourist Review*, 1:3-7.
- Chon, K 1990. The role of destination image in tourism: a review and discussion. *The Tourist Review*, 45(2):2-9.
- Gunn, C A 1972. *Vacationscape: designing tourist regions*. Austin: University of Texas.
- Marx, S & Van der Walt, A 1993. *Marketing management*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Mill, R C & Morrison, A M 1985. *The tourism system: an introductory text*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Pearce, P L 1982. Perceived changes in holiday destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 9:145-146.
- Satour 1994. *International strategic focus and marketing plan 1994-1996*. January 1994.
- Witt, S F & Moutinho, L 1989. *Tourism Marketing and Management Handbook*. Cambridge: Prentice Hall.