

NEW LOOK AT INACTIVE PUBLICS THEORIZES THEY CAN BE & MUST BE REACHED -- REGARDLESS OF THE DIFFICULTY

Practitioners' conventional focus has been on *active publics* -- strategic constituencies that can directly and immediately impact an org'n. Many scholars & practitioners have probed the possibility of engaging & motivating *inactive publics* -- which usually account for about 90% of stakeholders.

Kirk Hallahan of Colorado State, a rising research star after a career as a practitioner, assesses the environment in which publics form & operate by looking at these elements:

- **When does a public become a public?** When it senses a problem, recognizes the problem creates issues & organizes to take action (Grunig's paradigm, [prr 10/15/98](#)). If these steps don't occur, no public has been formed -- even if the people involved are stakeholders. People must feel "connected", the issue must have personal relevance or consequence (enduring or situational). [*It can be a major error to assume publics will form before there is evidence they have or will*]

People enter into relationships that vary in importance, as shown by two prevailing theories:

Resource dependency theory -- they seek needed resources

Social exchange theory -- they compare benefits to costs

Publics are influenced by 2 factors, involvement & knowledge

	<i>Low Involvement</i>	<i>High Involvement</i>
<i>High Knowledge</i>	Aware Publics	Active Publics
<i>Low Knowledge</i>	Inactive Publics	Aroused Publics



BASED ON THESE FACTORS HE RECLASSIFIES PUBLICS INTO 5 GROUPINGS:

- 1 High knowledge + high involvement = **Active Publics**, the stakeholders who care about the subject i.e. find it very relevant to their situation now or in the near future -- usually about 10%
- 2 High involvement + low knowledge = **Aroused Publics**, likely to be dangerous & a prime target for risk communication strategies

High knowledge + low involvement = **Aware Publics**, with latent readiness to get involved

- 4 Low knowledge + low involvement = **Inactive Publics**, but now far less than the traditional 90%. An early scholar called them "the obstinate audience" since they are unlikely to seek information

A fifth group, with no knowledge & no involvement, is a **Non-Publics**, even if they may technically be stakeholders, i.e. people would be impacted & therefore should care.

Hallahan is working on a study of how groups proceed thru these classifications, i.e. the boxes in the chart. He is concerned that pr theory has not gone deeply enough into com'n processes -- advertising has explored them in detail -- to devise "actionable strategies" practitioners can pursue for dealing with aroused, aware & especially inactive publics.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Inactive publics are large, potentially important constituents for most org's -- & many pr programs are aimed primarily at them, e.g. to sell products or gain voters. Therefore, they can be just as important as highly active relationships.

- But org's must seek out these groups because of their "unrecognized or marginal" interest levels
- They are, after all, the ground from which aroused, aware & active publics spring

Hallahan feels a potential way to engage the inactive-public can be the M-A-O model -- enhancing their Motivation, Ability & Opportunity to process messages, thus creating awareness. pr will summarize his review of the tactics researchers have identified in these 3 categories in a forthcoming t&t.

CLOUT OF GAY PUBLIC MOVES TO FOREFRONT WITH TARGETED APPEALS, BUT SEGMENT WANTS CHANGES NOT PITCHES

The gay public, long ignored by the marketing efforts of mainstream firms, is finding itself the focus of targeted appeals. *Wall Street Journal* reports ads tested in gay publications such as the U.K. magazine, *Attitude*, are now being seen in mainstream venues. The advertisers are big players like American Express, Absolut Vodka & IKEA.

Other marketers, such as Anheuser Busch & Miller Brewing, don't necessarily feature supposedly gay people or gay-oriented messages in their ads, but are spending hefty sums to place regular ads in gay-oriented magazines. Anheuser Busch, for example, spent \$260K last year in *Out* & the *Advocate*. Coors began courting gays after fighting off the long-running boycott against the company in '84.