

Chapter 2

2 The Publics in Public Relations

- Public defined
- What publics refer to?
- Reasons for defining publics
- Consequences for not defining publics
- Ten basic publics
- Analysis of the ten basic publics
- Types of publics
- Three practical examples of publics

Objectives

At the end of this chapter students should be able to:

- Understand and define publics
- Understand what publics refers to
- Explain what would happen if publics were not identified
- Have clear understanding about examples of publics

2.1 PUBLICS DEFINED

There are various definitions of public relations. To further understand, let us look at the various definitions of publics:

“Publics can be defined as those groups of people, internally or externally with whom an organization communicates.”

According to Frank Jefkins (1998), Author



“Public refer to any group whose members have a common interest or common values in a particular situation”

According to Marsh Charles, Guth David W., Public Relations Value Driven Approach (2005)

2.2 WHAT PUBLICS REFER TO?



Usually public relations activities are not directed at ‘the general public’; they have their own targeted publics and are aimed at carefully selected group of people who are the subdivisions of the great general publics.

Every organization has its own publics with whom it has to communicate internally and externally. Members of the publics (in plural form), in the context of public relations are not general public or people outside the organization. Publics are anybody and everybody, whom the Public Relations officers or Managers have contact or have matters to deal with. The publics can be organizations, outsiders or staff within the organization itself.



Basically, public relations target at certain specific group of people, who form subdivisions within the community or general publics. This further means that, public relations activity is aimed at particular segments of the community and not at the general mass market. Each of an organization will have their own targeted or specific publics to be targeted through the use of their PR activities.

For example, the public relations of a private college will target more towards the young teenagers rather than the members of the public. But there may be certain areas of activities within the private college such as awards, winning and quality aspects which they want to be targeted to the outsiders.

2.3 REASONS FOR DEFINING PUBLICS

Before engaging or planning for any public relations activity, it is important for the PR manager or practitioners to carefully define their targeted publics. This is to ensure that PR people know how to target the audience since the information cannot reach all of the publics or all publics generally. There are so many reasons why PR people need to define the publics.

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The major reasons for defining publics are as follows:

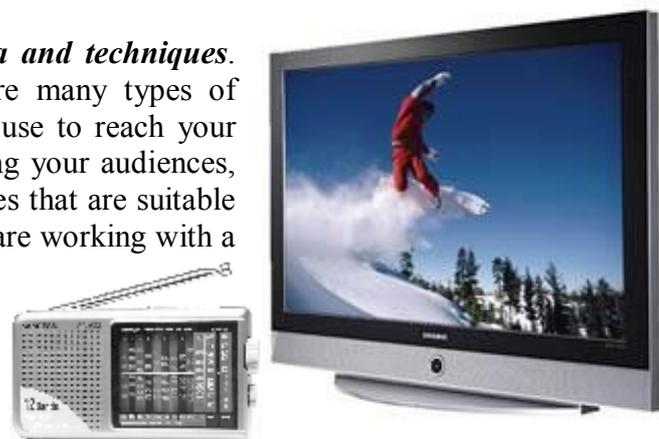
- (a) ***To establish priorities within the scope of the budget and resources.*** In other words, to identify which are the most important publics that need to be achieved within the allocations of budgets? For example, let say you are preparing for exhibitions, you need to know what is your target audiences in order to prepare materials for the exhibitions or maybe to allocate resources at the exhibitions.



- (b) ***To identify all groups of people relative to a PR programme.*** For example, you work for a baby food manufacturing company. You are given a task by your boss to provide information about your new products to the consumers. In relation to the situation, you need to identify the publics that related to your programme. Your target audiences would be mothers with young infants who have the purchasing power.



- (c) ***To select proper and suitable media and techniques.*** In public relations activity, there are many types of medias and techniques that you can use to reach your audiences. By identifying and defining your audiences, you will choose medias and techniques that are suitable to your audiences. For example, you are working with a voluntary body (Malaysia Red Crescent Society) and you want to inform at least 50% of Malaysian citizen about your society's non-smoking campaign and the dangers of smoking. Your target audience teenagers around the age of 16-29. What is the best medias that you should use? This would definitely be televisions, phone (SMS), radios or other medias and techniques for example the Internet.



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the best medias that you should use? This

(d) *To prepare and write message in acceptable and effective forms.* Once you have identified your audiences, then you are able to prepare and write messages in acceptable form. For example, you are trying to inform the public about the goodness of the ingredients in your baby products. You cannot assume that all mothers with infants know terms used in the message. Therefore, the sentences should be brief and the words should not be complicated.



Figure 1: The importance of defining publics before handling PR activity

2.4 CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DEFINING PUBLICS

Defining the different publics is of utmost importance and should be the first step before any programme is mapped out and implemented.



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- i. The same message would be issued irrespective of its suitability to different groups of people. Imagine that when you buy an advertising space in the paper and not knowing who the target audience is. If the product is very specialized in nature (example about Information Technology (IT), an advertising space in the local newspaper which reaches out to all the readers, would not be an effective one. The product may be more effective if published in a specialist magazine for example PC Magazines or ‘Computimes’. If the publics are not well defined, the success of the programme will be jeopardized and extra cost has to be incurred by the company.



- ii. From the above scenario, if the publics are not carefully identified, you may need to put another advertisement in the PC Magazines or ‘Computimes’ and this leads to wastage of efforts and funds.



- iii. The objective of the programme must be clearly defined. For example, if the message of the programme is about the dangers of smoking, the main objective of the programme is to educate teenagers. If the objectives are not well defined and identified, the programme will not be successful because it targeted the wrong publics.



fail

- iv. Work cannot be timed to make the most cost-effective use of working hours, materials and equipment. Records also cannot be made for future reference. Proper records of the budgets involved and how many resources needed in the programme cannot be properly filed for the same programme in the future.



- v. Management as well as clients will feel dissatisfied with the lack of results, and would be justified in regarding PR as being intangible and a waste of effort and money. They may also regard PR practitioners as being incompetent and as a result, the PR practitioners or PRO might lose their job or the contract.

2.5 TEN BASIC PUBLICS

An organization’s reputation, profitability, and even its continued existence can depend on the degree to which its targeted “publics” support its goals and policies. Public relations involve two-way communication between an organization and its public. It requires listening to the constituencies on which an organization depends as well as analyzing and understanding the attitudes and behaviours of those audiences. Only then can an organization undertake an effective public relations campaign. Although the publics of one organization differ from one another, it is possible to identify the publics from which other publics may derive, such as in the following figure:

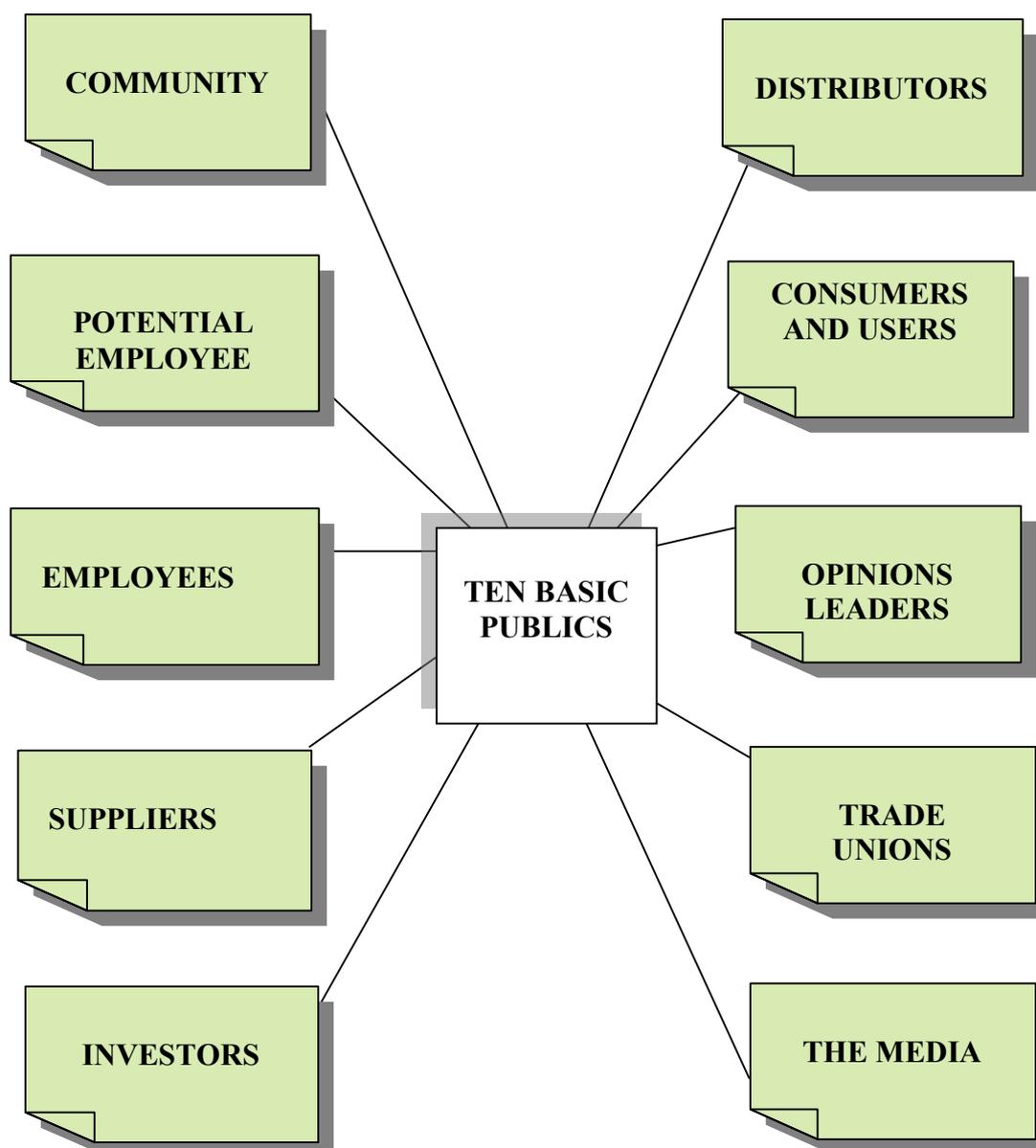


Figure 2: Ten basic publics

2.5.1 Analysis of the ten basic publics

The analysis in Figure 2 of the ten basic publics explains the followings:

- **The community** – this community will depend largely on the organization. It will be different for each local authority, department, nuclear power station, research laboratory, factory, hotel, seaport, airport, hospital, prison and many more. Even when different organizations share the same are located at the same location, each will have their own communication needs and problems. For example, KOMAG (M) Industries, Penang, has taken an initiative in community relations by conducting Tsunami Relief to raise fund to help victims of Tsunami. In addition to donating funds to the Tsunami relief efforts, KOMAG’s employees also donated their time to assisting with local tsunami relief programs. A few sample outreach projects included:



- ✓ Supporting the Malaysian Red Crescent Society for local and international Tsunami relief work.
- ✓ Replacing destroyed fishing nets for 50 fishermen at Pulau Betong Village Committee (a rural fishermen village).
- ✓ Contributing to children’s educational support at Kuala Muda, Kedah.

- **Potential employees** – this type of publics may exist in other organizations or can be recruited from colleges, schools, from overseas, or from universities. They are not likely to seek employment with organizations that they do not regard as a good employer. For example, school leavers may think that working in a bank is dull and boring, so banks have to make videos for schools, showing how attractive it is to work in the banking sectors.



- **Employees** – This public may consists of many kinds namely, laboratory, factory and warehouse workers, management and executives, sales and servicing staff, office staff, and transport staff. They represent many different salaries, social and ethnic groups, and wages. For example, workers (management team, lecturers, managers, finance team and many more) who work in Cosmopoint Sdn. Bhd. are considered as the internal publics of Cosmopoint Sdn. Bhd.



- **Suppliers** – Suppliers can be divided into two categories, those who supply services such as water and energy and those who supply components, raw materials, packaging and professional services. For example, in Malaysia, the only company that supply services such as water and energy are Syabas and Tenaga Nasional Berhad. Besides, other suppliers would depends on the company's nature of business.



- **The financial publics** – refers to the local banks and if it is a public company, its share being sold in the Stock Exchange. In other words, financial publics refer to the publics that buy shares to provide capital for the organization. Investors consist not only of personal buyers of securities but also includes investment analyst, who provide advice on share buying and big share buyers. For example, financial publics buy shares of MAAKL Mutual which have their shares being sold in the Bursa Saham Kuala Lumpur.



- **Distributors** – This refers to the public who handles the goods in bulk between consumer and producer. Distributors may include factors, commission agents, wholesalers, credit salesmen or tally men, direct or doorstep salespeople, incentive scheme promoters and many more. The example of distributor is Mydin Wholesale Emporium who sells their goods in bulks.



- **Consumers and users** – the people who buy and use the products or services being produced by the producers. For example, Avon Cosmetics Sdn. Bhd., one of cosmetic producers, the company’s products being used by both women and teenagers.



- **Opinion leaders or formers** – this public comprise of all those people whose expressed opinion can harm or help an organization. Opinion leaders can be ever-changing, numerous, and ranging from politicians to parents, priests to

protestors. Consumers, environmentalists, newspaper columnists, televisions presenters, social reformers and also opinion leaders. An example of opinion leader is Datuk Dr. Fadhillah Kamsah whose opinion can harm or help an organization. Besides, television presenters, singers such as Siti Nurhaliza, also has the power to influence others.

- **Trade unions** – these publics exert and have a powerful influence on industrial and political and commercial life. Trade unions employ specialist in every field, just as businesses do, accountants, lawyers, analyst, representatives and lobbyist. For example, Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (FOMCA) is a trade union which has a very powerful influence in foreseeing the prices of goods and services in Malaysia.



- **The media** – this public needs treatment completely different from other publics since the media is the organization’s direct route to the publics. Moreover, the media has total control of what the public hears and sees in their media. Examples of public media in Malaysia are TV3, 8TV, 9TV, TV1, TV2, (television); Hitz FM, Era Radio, Mix FM and many more (radios); News Strait Times, Tamil Nesan, Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Nan Yang Siang Pau (newspapers) and many others.



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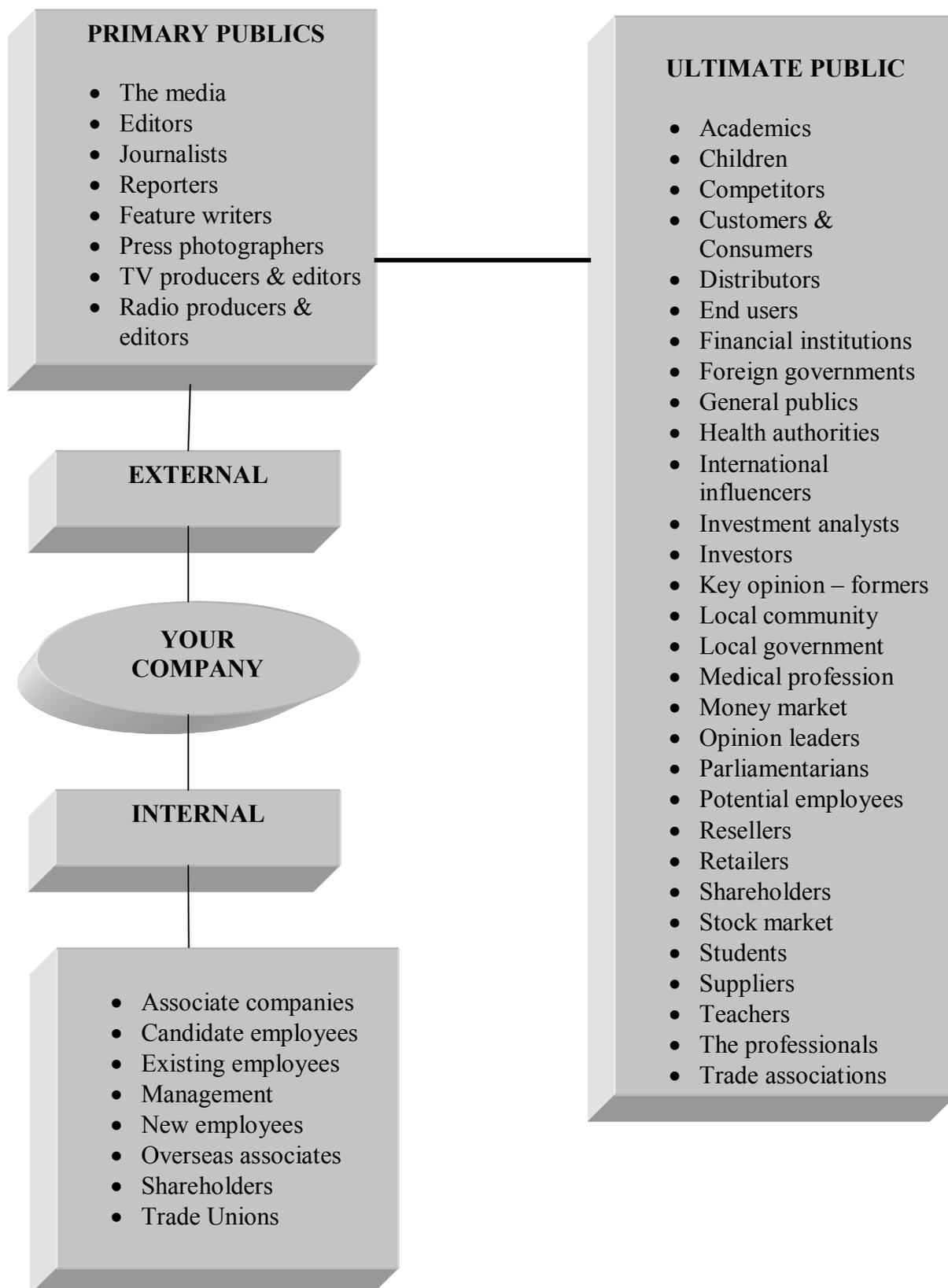


Figure 3: Figure depicting provides types of publics of a company

2.6 TYPES OF PUBLICS

There are two main types of publics in public relations, namely:

1. **External Publics** – consist of Primary publics as well as ultimate publics

2. **Internal Publics** - consist of people who deal with the company

Figure 3 provides extra examples of both internal and external publics of public relations.

The following points will explain further:

- The primary publics consist of the publics of the media that the company must take into consideration because they are the people who can help the organization to succeed in the PR activity being conducted. For example, if the company is having a press conference, but at the same time the organization does not build a good rapport with the media people such as editors, journalist, reports, feature writers, press photographers, TV producers and many more, this can jeopardize the effort.
- The ultimate publics consist of publics who buy and use the products or services of the organization. These people contribute life long to the organization since they are the consumer of the products or services. There are several examples of ultimate publics as shown in the Figure 3; they are academics, children, competitors, customers & consumers, distributors, and many more. Without ultimate publics, the organization will not last long in the business fields.
- The internal publics consist of people that deal with the organization directly. For example, associate companies, candidate employees, existing employees, management, new employees, and many more.



2.7 THREE PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF PUBLICS

These are three practical examples of publics for three contrasting organizations:

- ❖ A charity organization
- ❖ A national tourist board
- ❖ A food manufacturer organization

(a) *Publics of charity:*

- Members, donors, voluntary workers, collectors
- Beneficiaries and users of the service
- Potential supporters and helpers
- Suppliers of services and materials
- Politicians, political parties and groups
- Central and local governments officials
- Medical and health professionals
- Other charities
- Opponents
- Opinion leaders
- Media



Publics of charity-Avon Malaysia

(b) *Publics of a national tourist board:*

- Own government officials, MPs
- Distributors – package tour operators, travel agents, convention organizers
- Transport operators – rail, sea, air, road
- Banks, credit card and travellers' cheque operators
- Hotel owners including international hotel groups
- Motoring organizations
- Visitors – holidaymakers, business people, students, conference delegates, sportspeople, motorists, caravanners, and campers.
- Opinion leaders – travel writers, politicians, teachers.



Public of national tourist board-Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH)

(c) Publics of a food manufacturer:

- Community in vicinity of the factory
- Potential staff – local factory or office labour, technicians from local colleges or other firms, management and sales staff from other firms
- All grades of management, office, factory, warehouse, transport, sales staff
- Suppliers of local services. Eg. Public services and suppliers of raw materials, packaging, advertising and other professional services.
- The stock market – city editors, investment analyst, institutional buyers and shareholders.
- Distributors – wholesalers, bulk buying chains and supermarkets, cash and carry warehouses, hotels and restaurants, retailers, and exporters.
- Consumers – present and potential including school children
- Minister and government departments concerned with food prices, health regulations and dietary matters; also politicians concerned with import of ingredients, export of products.
- Trade unions and trade associations
- Opinion leaders – dieticians, food writers, doctors, dentists, health authorities.



Publics of a food manufacturer-Yeos Malaysia

2.8 SUMMARY

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Public refers to groups of people internally or externally with whom an organization has to communicate. It is important for the organization to identify and understand its publics in order to plan for the PR activities. Each organization has its own publics with whom it has to communicate internally or externally. Since the publics are too wide, by identifying targeted publics, effort and money will not be wasted and messages will be reached to the correct publics. There are several reasons why publics need to be defined, it is because by defining them, a company will be able to establish priorities within the scope of budgets and resources, able to identify or target all groups of people that are related to a PR programme. Besides, by defining publics, an organization can select proper and suitable medias to be used in the PR programme as well as follow the effective methods to prepare the message in acceptable and effective forms according to the targeted audiences.

If the publics are not properly defined, efforts and funds will be wasted, the same message will go irrespective of its suitability to different groups of people, the objectives planned cannot be achieved, and management as well as client would feel dissatisfied.

There are ten basic publics namely the community, potential employees, employees, suppliers of services and materials, investors – the money market, distributors, consumers and users, opinion leaders, trade unions, and the media. These are publics that have their own interest towards the company.

There are two types of publics namely internal publics and external publics. Internal publics are the people who directly communicate and have an exact interest towards the company. External public consists of ultimate publics and primary publics. Primary publics are public media that the company directly works with in order to ensure the success of the PR activities. These publics help the organization in promoting and realizing their PR activities. They consist of editors, journalists, children, competitors, customers and consumers, distributors, end users, general publics and many more. These people buy and use products and services produced by the organization. These publics contribute lifelong to the company in the business market.

2.9 QUESTIONS

Section A: Short answer questions

1. How would you define 'publics'?
2. How do publics differ from target audience in advertising campaigns?
3. What are the main reasons for identifying publics?
4. What would happen if the publics are not properly identified?
5. List ten basic publics and provide brief explanations.
6. What are the different types of publics that are in today's business environment?

Section B: Essay questions

1. In your opinion, do publics help in the development of the organization? Explain how the publics can help the organization to survive in the business world.
2. You are working as a secretary in ABC Company and this company currently produces snack foods. You are required to help the management to identify the publics for the new products to be launched by your company. Define the publics that you must focus and target, and explain what is the relationship with the correct selections of medias and techniques?