

# Chapter 3

## 3 Publics and Public Opinions

- What is public opinions?
- How are attitudes influenced?
  - Factors that influence attitude
- Motivating attitude change
  - How does the theory work and how does it related to PR
- What kinds of “evidence” persuades people

### Objectives

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

- Understand and explain what public opinion is
- Understand the characteristics of an attitudes and the influences
- Understand the level of motivations that relates to the public opinions
- Understand and able to explain several kinds of evidence techniques to persuade people
- Have clear understanding on the influencing of publics opinion

### 3.1 WHAT IS PUBLIC OPINION?

Public opinion like public relation is not easily explained. Public opinion consists of two components namely public and opinion. Public refers to group of people who share a common interest in a specific subject while opinion is the expression of an attitude on a particular topic. When attitudes become strong enough, they surface in the form of opinions. When opinions become strong enough, they will lead to verbal or behavioural actions. Thus, public opinion is the sum of individuals' opinions on an issue affecting those individuals.

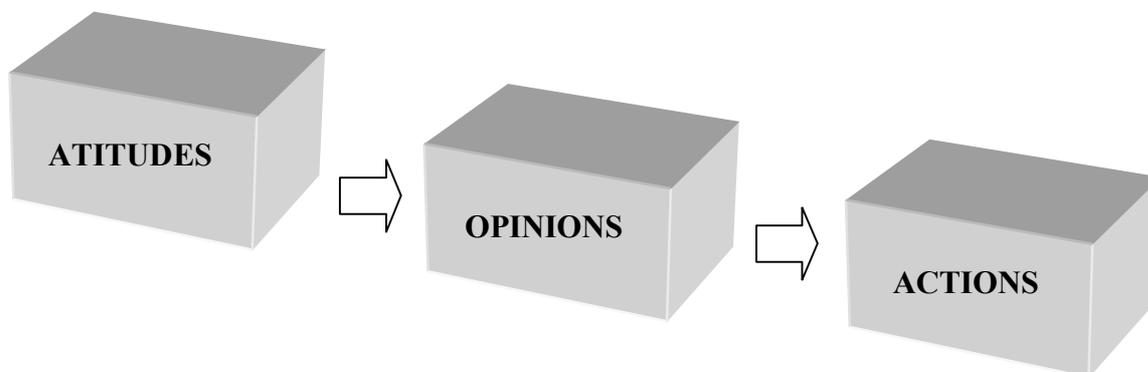
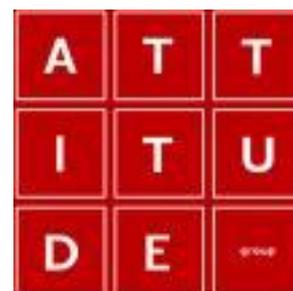


Figure 3.1: How the public's opinion is formed

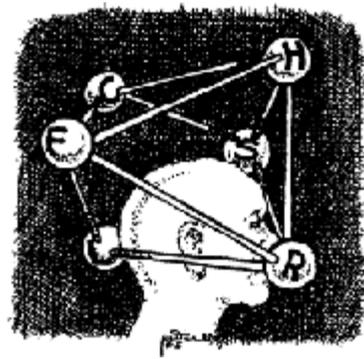
#### 3.1.1 Attitudes

- Attitude refers to the way a person carries oneself, the manner in which they walk, talk and etc.
- Attitude is a concept in psychology. Attitudes are positive, negative or neutral views of an "attitude object": i.e. a person, behavior or event.
- Attitudes are expected to change as a function of experience. A person will change their attitudes based on their experiences. For example, Puan Ramah likes to use ABC detergent. This is referring to the attitude.



### 3.1.2 Opinions

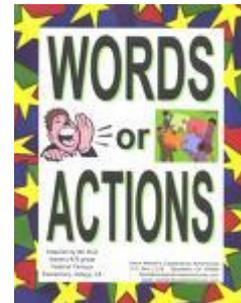
- Opinions refer to a personal views, attitudes, or appraisal.
- When an attitude becomes strong, they will surface in the forms of opinions. For example, Puan Ramah has been using ABC detergent for so long. As a result she has formed her opinions that the detergent is very good in quality and also effective.



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### 3.1.3 Actions

- Actions refer to a state or process of acting or doing.
- Action is also considered as a conduct; behaviour; something done; a series of acts.
- As in the above scenarios, as a result of the opinions formed by Puan Ramah, the action is that she will be a loyal customer of ABC detergent and perhaps she will not buy any other detergent other than ABC detergent. Besides, she will also advise her friends to buy ABC detergent.



## DISCUSSIONS

- In group of three or four, try to formulate one example of formulations of public opinion based on the real time scenario. Prepare and present the formulations in front of your friends.



### 3.2 HOW ARE ATTITUDES INFLUENCED?

To improve communication, PR specialists establish and maintain cooperative relationships with representatives of community, consumer, employee and public interest groups, and with representatives from print and broadcast journalism. Informing the general public, interest groups and stockholders of an organization’s policies, activities and accomplishments is an important part of a PR specialist’s job. The work also involves keeping management aware of public attitudes and the concerns of the many groups and organizations with which they interact.

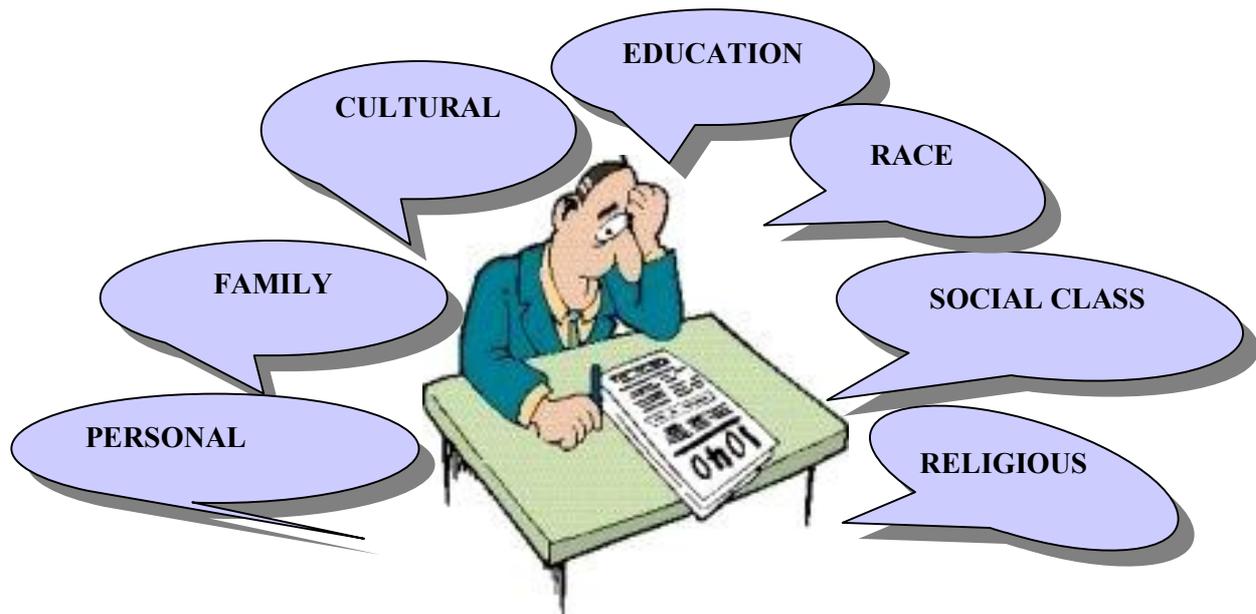
PR specialists handle organizational functions such as media, community, consumer, industry and governmental relations; political campaigns; interest-group representation; conflict mediation; or employee and investor relations. They help an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. However, public relations are not only about 'telling the organization’s story.' Understanding the attitudes and concerns of consumers, employees, and various other groups also is a vital part of the job.

Attitude refers to the way a person carries oneself, the manner in which they walk, talk and etc. It can either be a positive experience or negative experience. Someone with a poor attitude is usually a “downer” to be around or someone who think they are entitled to certain things, etc.



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### 3.2.1 Factors that influence attitudes



**Figure 3.2: Factors that influences attitudes**

*Attitudes are based on numbers of characteristics:*

1. **Personal** – this characteristic is a blend of physical and emotional ingredients of individuals including their age, size, and social status
2. **Cultural** – it refers to the lifestyle and environment of a particular country or the geographic area. Example, Malaysia consists of different races and cultures that is Chinese, Malays, Indian and many more.
3. **Educational** – refers to the level and quality of a person’s education. As a result of an increased number of college graduates in the Malaysia today, public communications and public awareness have become more sophisticated.
4. **Family background** – refers to the people’s root. Children inherent their parents’ biases, taste, political partisanships, and a host of other characteristics.
5. **Religious** – refers to system of belief about God or the supernatural
6. **Social class** – refer to person’s position within society. As people’s social status changes, so do their attitudes.
7. **Race** – refers to the ethnic origin, which today increasingly helps shape people’s attitudes. For example, Malay, Indian, Chinese, and so on.

### 3.3 MOTIVATING ATTITUDE CHANGE

People are motivated by different factors, and no two people respond in exactly the same way to the same set of circumstances. Each of us is motivated by different drives and needs.

The most famous delineator of what motivates people was Abraham Maslow. His hierarchy of needs helps define the origins of motivation, which, in turn, help explain attitude change. Maslow postulated a five-level hierarchy:

1. The lowest order is physiological needs: a person's biological demands – food and water, sleep, health, bodily needs, exercise and rest and sex
2. The second level is safety needs: security, protection, comfort and peace, and orderly surroundings
3. The third level is love needs: acceptance, belonging, love and affection, and membership in a group.
4. The fourth level is esteem: recognition and prestige, confidence and leadership opportunities, competence and strength, intelligence and success.
5. The highest level is self-actualization, or simply becoming what one is capable of becoming; self-actualization involves self-fulfillment and achieving a goal for the purpose of challenge and accomplishment.

According to Maslow, the needs of all five levels compose the fundamental motivating factors for any individual or publics.



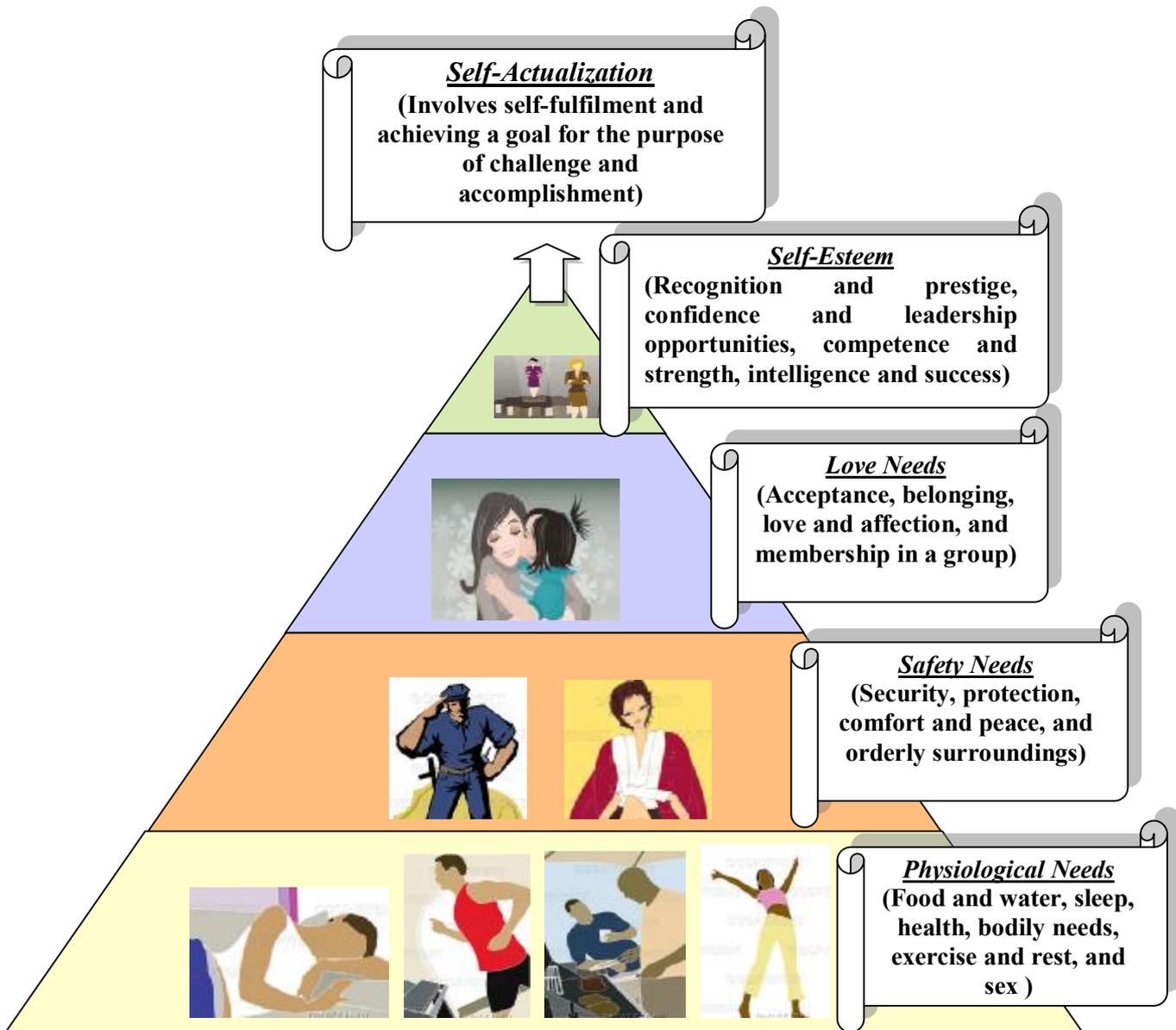
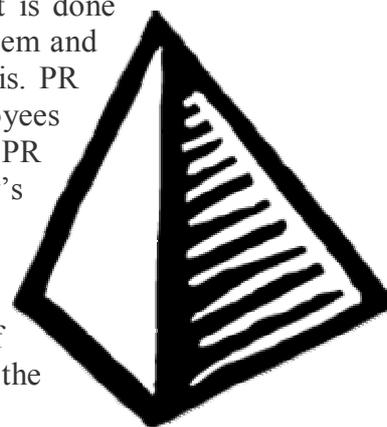


Figure 3.3: Maslow five-level of hierarchy needs

### 3.3.1 How does the hierarchy work and how does it relates to PR

- A person starts at the bottom of the hierarchy (pyramid) and will initially seek to satisfy basic needs (e.g. food, sleep, exercise, rest, shelter and many more). PR practitioners will use the first level to help change the attitude of their publics towards their company. PR practitioners may relate the products or services with the first level of Maslow theory. E.g., you working with medicine company. Currently your company is launching a new products, by mentioning that your product can help to maintain the good health of the consumers, it can motivate consumers to buy your products.
- Once these physiological needs have been satisfied, they are no longer a motivator. The individual moves up to the next level that is the second level (Security, protection, comfort and peace, and orderly surroundings). E.g., your company produces electricity appliances and your company's products have been approved by SIRIM. The consumers will be secured by the guarantee and this will lead to the change of attitude in the buying pattern of the consumers.
- Safety needs at work could include physical safety (e.g. protective clothing) as well as protection against unemployment, loss of income through sickness etc). The PR practitioners can suggest to management to provide better working surrounding to ensure employee loyalty to the company.
- Social needs recognized that most people want to belong to a group. These would include the need for love and belonging (e.g. working with colleague who supports you at work, teamwork, communication). The PR practitioners can encourage the staff to work together through teamwork and cooperation.
- Esteem needs are about giving recognition for a job that is done well. They reflect the fact that many people seek the esteem and respect of others. A promotion at work might achieve this. PR practitioners may help the management to publish employees recognitions in the company's newspapers since PR practitioners are the people who prepare company's newsletter.
- Self-actualization is about how people think about themselves - this is often measured by the extent of success and/or challenge at work. PR practitioner can help the management in motivating employees to do their job well.



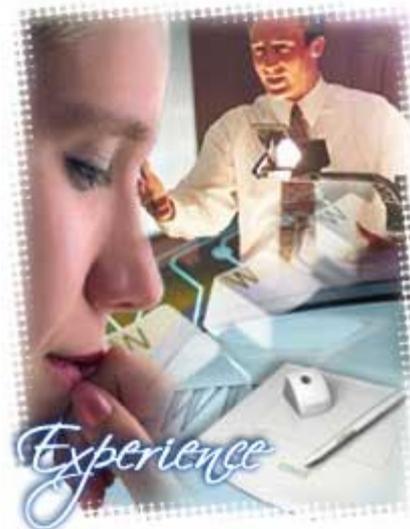
### 3.4 WHAT KINDS OF “EVIDENCE” PERSUADE PEOPLE?

There are several kinds of “evidence” that you can use as techniques to persuade people to change their attitudes and opinions. They are:

1. **Emotion** – People do respond and react to emotional appeal such as love, family, peace, patriotism. For example, people tend to donate when they watch ‘Bersamamu’ on TV3. The main intention of the show is to raise funds for unfortunate people. If a company participates and engages in charity and community services, the public will feel that the company really cares about other people and as a result people will support the company by buying their products or services. An example HSBC presents half a million ringgit to 15 charities in Malaysia as a charity activity.



2. **Personalizing** – People do respond and react to their personal experience. People who feel unsatisfied with the services or products produced by a particular company will never buy the products or services any more. This attitude is a result of personal experience regarding lack of quality of the company’s services or products.

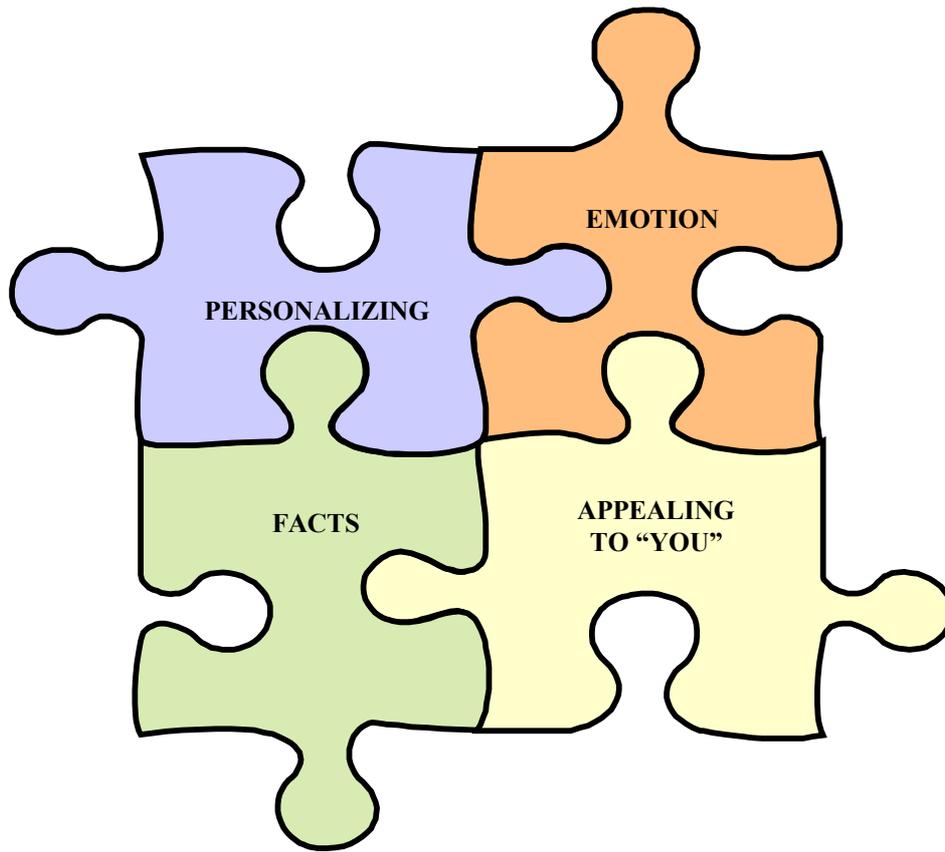


3. **Facts** – Facts are indisputable. This is why any good public relations program will always start with research – the facts. Facts refer to knowledge or information based on real occurrences; a thing that has been done; something shown to exist; something known to have existed; a real occurrence; something believed to be true. People will believe if they see things happen to themselves. In order to gain people’s believe about the products or services, the company may include facts to support their claims. For example, if the company wants to invite more people to buy the company’s shares, they should prove that the company is financial stable. The company can provide facts such as their company financial statement to those who are interested to buy their shares.



4. **Appealing to “you”** – In order to persuade people, constantly think in terms of the audience and constantly refer to “you”. Publics should be prioritizing in order to persuade and get their support. For example, you are giving information about your new launched products “All in One Blender”. Instead of explaining how the product can functions, focuses more on how the products can simplify the life of the users. Also not to forget to emphasize the functions too.





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Figure 3: "Evidence" to persuade people

### 3.5 SUMMARY

Public refer to groups of people with whom an organization has to communicate internally or externally. 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. Public opinions like public relations are not easily defined. Public opinions consists of two components namely public and opinion. Public refers to a group of people who share a common interest in a specific subject while opinion is the expression of an attitude on a particular topic. When attitude become strong, they surface in the form of opinions. When opinions become strong enough, they will then lead to verbal or behavioural actions.

Attitude refers to the way a person carries oneself, they way they talk, walk, and act. It can either be as a result from positive or negative experience. Attitudes are based on several characteristics such as personal, cultural, educational, family background, religious, social class and race. There are several techniques that can be used to motivate the change of attitude. Maslow five-level hierarchy proposed that a person starts at the bottom of the hierarchy (pyramid) and will initially seek to satisfy basic needs (e.g. food, sleep, exercise, rest, shelter and many more). PR practitioners will use the first level to help change the attitude of their publics towards their company. PR practitioners may relate the products or services with the first level of Maslow theory. Besides, the PR practitioner may use different kinds of “evidence” and relate them with the individual in order to persuade people to change. They are emotion, personalizing, facts, and appealing to “you”.

### 3.6 EXERCISE

#### Section A: Fill in the blanks

1. Public opinion is the aggregate of individual \_\_\_\_\_ or beliefs held by the adult population.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is the conviction of the truth of a proposition.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ consists of two components namely public and opinion.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the way a person carries oneself, the manner in which they walk, talk and etc.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to a state or process of acting or doing.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to group of people who share a common interest in a specific subject while opinion is the expression of an attitude on a particular topic.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the lifestyle and environment of a particular country or the geographic area.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ refers to system of belief about God or the supernatural.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ refer to knowledge or information based on real occurrences; a thing that has been done; something shown to exist; something known to have existed; a real occurrence; something believed to be true.
10. According to \_\_\_\_\_ we are all trying to work our way up to the top of this triangle.

#### Short Answer questions

1. What are the famous five-level hierarchy of needs as proposed by Abraham Maslow?
2. Explain the characteristics of attitudes?
3. What are some “evidences” that are used to persuade people to change?
4. How do you motivate attitude change? Briefly explain the basic theories in motivating attitude change?
5. What do you understand by physiological needs?

**Section B: Essay questions**

1. In groups of three to four, explain how Abraham Maslow Five-Level Hierarchy can help PR practitioner in motivating attitude change of the employees?
2. You are the PR officer in your organization and your company received many complaints from your customers, try to suggest ways to handle the problems and suggest how to change attitudes of the consumers?

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