

NEW STUDY SHOWS PUBLIC IS BOTH CONFIDENT & SKEPTICAL OF THE NEWS MEDIA

6,000 people nationwide (1/2 public, 1/2 journalists) each answered 106 questions asked in an LA Times Poll.

A high 94% of the general public says the media is doing a "good" job. Only 5% say "bad." This contradicts how the media view themselves -- 39% say they think the public perceives them as doing a good job; but 58% think they're perceived as doing a bad job.

Conservatives' argument about a "liberal media elite" are founded. 55% of newspaper journalists say they are liberals -- a higher percentage than the public's (24%) or college educated (37%). Still, readers say the views of the newspapers they read are "middle-of-the-road" (28%), "don't know" (28%), liberal (31%), conservative (13%).

But when asked to identify themselves as liberal or conservative on single issues, e.g., abortion, prayer in schools, 43% of the public chose liberal. So despite stories about the conservative trend in America, more people are taking liberal positions on major issues. This may help explain why the public rates the press as highly as it does. Public & press share more common ideological ground than is generally perceived.

"This poll does not prove or disprove the charge that the media is politically biased, but it does show that if there is any bias, it hasn't crept into the news coverage to the extent that the public feels aggrieved by it. The potential for bias is there, but so far, readers seem to feel only a healthy skepticism toward the media, not widespread disgruntlement," says William Schneider, the Times political analyst & a resident fellow at American Enterprise Institute.

READERSHIP APPEAL OF VARIOUS NEWSPAPER SUBJECTS

Myths (or old research) about what people read need updating. One example, editorial pages used to rate badly. Now, with countless name columnists & op-ed material, they rank highly. They beat out the comics, formerly considered #1.

Category	% Who Usually Read
News about local community	88.5%
News about the economy	86.0
International or world news	83.7
News about the President or Congress	78.0
News briefs, summary of news items	77.2
News about local politics or gov't	74.0
News about celebrities/famous people	71.0
TV program listings	67.3
Advice columns (Dear Abby, etc)	64.8
Supermarket ads	63.7
Store ads for clothing	62.0
Calendar of local events	61.0
Letters to the editor	60.2
Classified or want ads	60.2
Food pages	58.7
Editorials, editors' opinions	58.1
Comic strips	57.4
Movie ads	55.7
Obituaries	52.9
Sports news about local schools, colleges or clubs	50.7
Business & financial news	49.6
Sports news about professional teams	48.6
Political opinion columns	47.1
Book reviews	28.9
Crossword puzzles	23.4

-- Source: Newspaper Readership Project (1977-83) released in July.

pr reporter

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CONSERVATIVES' UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS SAID TO BE REASON FOR DOMINANCE OF THEIR IDEAS IN PUBLIC POLICY; BOOKS, SCHOLARSHIP & INTELLECTUALS ARE MORE PERSUASIVE THAN BALLYHOO

Policy debates are won or lost thru the battle of ideas. Therefore, targeting thought leaders on their own grounds -- rather than lecturing or propagandizing them -- is a highly effective technique. To promote its philosophy, conservative think tank, Manhattan Institute, funded & publicized the work of an unknown scholar, Charles Murray. His argument: to really help the poor, abolish poverty programs.

Book, Losing Ground, became the idea behind which the Institute and those it represents advocate change. "We want to be participants in the public debate, to gain access to the public forum. The most substantial way of doing that is with a well-argued, articulate, factual book. It then becomes the basis for op-ed pieces, news programs, magazine articles, even cocktail party talk," Institute's prez Bill Hammett told pr.

"It connects the scholarly world with the general world. Academics are reading it & using it in their research. It's being listed in card catalogs. It's part of the literature. A book that transcends traditional market lines is unusual. Rachel Carson, Michael Harrington & Ralph Nader did this within the last generation." But Hammett ventures this is the major conservative success.

30,000 copies are in print. Hammett says 30-40,000 people may have read the book but probably 200,000 influentials know the argument from reading or hearing about it thru other sources. According to Washington Post columnist Meg Greenfield: "No matter what kind of government effort you may argue for these days, in the poverty area...you are likely to be 'Charles Murrayed,' and that will be the end of the argument. The simple invocation of the book's existence will be taken as an answer to the question."

Institute has promoted its ideas with 15 other books. The well-known Wealth & Poverty by George Gilder, written in 1980, is one. But none has had Losing Ground's impact, reports Hammett. Several more books are in the process of being written: 1) another by Murray, this time on happiness -- "value of freedom"; 2) historical & future look at property rights -- "air rights, cable, who owns the embryo in invitro-fertilization, intellectual copyrights"; 3) how to depoliticize money -- "taking it away from federal government & privatizing it." If these have the impact of Losing Ground, could they affect your organization & its operating environment?



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How Did It Reach This Influential Position?

"We have a zero advertising budget. I don't believe in advertising nonfiction books," says Hammett. The Institute did have a well-funded, well-planned promotional campaign. It's a case study in "how conservative intellectuals have come to dominate the policy debates of recent years," writes The New Republic.

1) 1,000 free copies were sent to academics, journalists, public officials all over the world -- including members of Margaret Thatcher's cabinet. 2) TV appearances (e.g., Phil Donahue show), meetings with editors & academics were lined up for Murray to air his audacious position. 3) Intellectuals & journalists thought to have some effect on the debate were brought to a seminar. Expenses plus honoraria ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 were paid by the Liberty Fund -- an obscure foundation that usually funds projects like documentaries on the life of Adam Smith.

Liberal foundations & publishing houses aren't as attuned to the way political ideas get into circulation as are organizations like the Manhattan Institute, says The New Republic. "The more traditional outfits just send out press releases & review copies and wait (pray, really) for good ideas to be recognized. The Manhattan Institute's canny innovation is to rely as little as possible on chance -- and as much as possible on marketing (read "public relations"). Of course, money helps, too."

¶Perhaps this is the era of books -- despite the shibboleth that people don't read anymore. Consider the "Excellence" volumes. Or what "Iaccoca" did for the author's influence.

TRY THESE PERSUASION TECHNIQUES: WRITING IT DOWN, CONSISTENCY THEORY, EVEN THE OLD FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR

There is a magical pull to believe & commit thru actions what you've put in writing, according to Robert Cialdini in his book Influence: How & Why People Agree To Things (William Morrow & Co, 1984).

One tactic for applying this strategy to employee morale is honesty tests. These paper-and-pencil tests are being used to solve crimes, to screen potential hirees, & to gauge morale & loyalty on the job. 2.3 million people were given them when applying for jobs last year. "More & more employees today have a negative attitude toward their employers. And there's a direct correlation between low morale & high theft," says E. John Keller, security consultant at Arthur Andersen Co.

Most honesty tests are designed to probe for work-related hostilities. The Stanton Inventory assesses employee attitudes. Asks 96 questions, most of them requiring written responses -- a tactic that encourages commitment by the writer to the attitudes he or she expresses. Questions include: "How would you rate this company as a place of employment?" "How does your nearest loved one feel about you working here?" The Stanton test doesn't ask employees to identify themselves, but significantly most do.

Another technique is the old foot-in-the-door. Cialdini uses the example of Chinese Communists' treatment of American prisoners during the Korean War. They relied heavily on commitment & consistency pressures to gain desired compliance. Their theory was to start small & build. Prisoners were asked to write mild anti-American or pro-Communist statements -- "The US is not perfect." Once a statement was made, prisoners were then pushed to add to it, and then to read their lists to the other prisoners. Tactic of starting with a little request to gain compliance for related larger requests is the foot-in-the-door technique.

A convenience food store chain gave the test to its employees and had them correct their own tests. Result was a 2/3rds reduction in inventory theft. Apparently employees felt trusted, which encourages loyalty.

Consistency Theory "If I can get you to make a commitment (that is, to take a stand, to go on record), I will have set the stage for your automatic and ill-considered consistency with that earlier commitment. Once a stand is taken, there is a natural tendency to behave in ways that are stubbornly consistent with that stand," writes Cialdini.

In an experiment to show how technique works, psychologists Jonathan Freedman & Scott Fraser asked people to sign a petition that favored "keeping California beautiful." Since it's an issue few are against, nearly everyone signed. 2 weeks later a volunteer went to these people's homes asking them for permission to erect a "Drive Carefully" sign on their lawns. About half consented. People who hadn't seen or signed the petition were also asked to display "Drive Carefully" signs on their lawns. Only 17% consented.

Why was the consent rate so high for those who had signed the petition? According to Freedman & Fraser, "Signing the beautification petition changed the view these people had of themselves. They saw themselves as public-spirited citizens who acted on their civic principles. When, 2 weeks later, they were asked to perform another public service by displaying the 'Drive Carefully' sign, they complied in order to be consistent with their newly formed self-images."

ITEMS PRACTITIONERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

¶Restructuring an industry does mean some units may disappear. Over 80 banks have failed this year, according to federal regulators -- a record. Hospitals, universities, as well as manufacturing and other sectors take note. The threats practitioners give management -- indicating that failure to adopt a public relations philosophy & hard-hitting marketing -- are real.

¶Cleaning your files isn't just good for the soul. It turns up important, overlooked material. To wit: anyone who questions the absolute essentiality of building viable public relationships in present-day society, please heed James Reston's column, written just before last November's elections. "There is no relationship today -- whether nation to nation, church to state, region to region, management to labor, parents & teachers to children -- that is not under stress. These things are not likely to be handled effectively by old slogans...or by old minds."

¶Educating ourselves is a major current motivation. 40% of adults are interested in furthering their schooling, according to recent survey. That's 4% more than last year and 16% more than '82. Vocational/technical schools & 2-yr public community or junior colleges have increased appeal.

¶Strong support for retaining federal tax deductions for gifts to charities & educational institutions were revealed in the same survey done for Council for the Advancement & Support of Education by Opinion Research Corp. By a 77% to 22% margin, Americans favor retaining the current federal tax deduction.

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