

"unbiased" information on the merits or debits of free trade. Some saw business people as having a special interest, depending on the effect of free trade on their particular business. Several thought academic economists were too "academic" and "paper oriented" and did not have a practical enough orientation for the average Canadian.

A considerable number thought that it would be best to listen to the views of business people. They were seen by these participants as dealing "directly with the dollars and cents" and likely to have a clear understanding of the effects of free trade for them. Some thought that the best information source would be "businesses which are successful in their own right." Such business spokesmen could prove to be an effective feature of a regionally focused strategy of recruiting business representatives to speak in support of the benefits of free trade to their region. Many others identified the media as a good information source, though many others saw them as biased.

The main implication of these results for communication strategy is that the proponents of free trade would be advised to recruit and present to the public a diversified and varied range of different groups and spokespersons, to speak out on the benefits of a free trade deal. Priority should be placed during the period leading up to an agreement on efforts to recruit such groups to perform this function.

The essential aim of recruiting a diverse range of spokespersons and groups to speak out on the benefits of a free trade deal would be to avoid the emergence of a public perception that there are only one or a few groups in favour of it, or that it is only a "government" issue. Having the message of the proponents of free trade enunciated and reinforced by spokespersons and groups (other than government and media personnel), which may have considerable public credibility on the issue as well, would obviously be likely to enhance the prospects of that message being positively received by the public.