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Manipulating Membership: Supply-Side Influences on Group Size

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This article examines those public interest groups that have grown through heavy advertising expenditure and sophisticated marketing techniques, most particularly direct mail solicitations. It suggests that an Olson-style rational choice understanding of this 'mail order' membership must be supplemented by a recognition of the importance of group activity in manipulating the factors considered by individuals in joining decisions. Thus it moves the focus from the demand-side to the supply-side. Active marketing by groups can exploit sympathy for causes and encourage the predisposed potential member to join. Individuals do consider the range of benefits offered (though the list of factors is broader than Olson indicates) in their membership choices, but the group deliberately shapes the way in which these are regarded.

INTRODUCTION: MARKETING INTEREST GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The existence of large 'individual-membership' public interest groups casts a shadow over the argument that stressed the difficulty of mobilizing and sustaining interest groups. Most famously Olson argued that rational individuals will 'not voluntarily make any sacrifices to help their group attain its political (public or collective) objectives'.[1] Godwin and Mitchell summarize the alternative view:

> Olson's model predicts that persons will not join public interest groups such as Common Cause or Environmental Action that supply few selective incentives; yet millions of persons do join … while the argument can be made that joiners are a small proportion of those who value the collective goods, they represent millions of deviant cases for Olson's theory.[2]

Hirschman, while noting the lucidity of Olson's argument, nevertheless highlights the unprecedented expansion in groups as reflecting 'the inconsistency between the triumphant theory and the recalcitrant practice'.[3]

Olson primarily looked to personal material reward as the incentive which produced membership, but even where individuals are seen as rational

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[1] M. Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, first published 1965), p. 126.

[2] R. K. Godwin and R. C. Mitchell, 'Rational Models, Collective Goods and Non-Electoral Political Behaviour', *Western Political Quarterly*, 35 (1982), 161–92, p. 162. Supporters of Olson might argue that the model is valid because it accounts for those who do not join (the overwhelming number). But it may be that they do not join for reasons other than those asserted by Olson.

[3] A. O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982), p. 78.

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maximizers of their interests, the sorts of interests they wish to advance may not be as narrow as Olson set out. This notion of an expanded range of benefits usually subsumes nonmaterial incentives such as 'feeling better about oneself' – an expressive satisfaction in having acted. They can be 'lumped' together in Opp's useful phrase as 'soft incentives'.[4] This article dwells on the supply-side action by the groups: it is a sort of activity that works particularly well with the social psychology that is involved in appreciating soft incentives.[5]

Olson, and the early pluralists from which he dissented, saw membership as individual-centred.[6] This article argues that interest group activities can substantially determine the size of the membership: it needs to be recognized that *groups can, by their marketing strategies, alter the level of demand for membership*. Groups are pro-active. Given the low monetary costs of subscription to most public interest groups, joining/supporting decisions are below a 'threshold of (economic) rationality': i.e., below the 'cost' of exhaustive analysis. As accepted in mainstream economics, once basic needs are satisfied 'luxury' decisions may be taken on grounds other than financial self-interest.[7] This (marketing) part of our general understanding of interest group membership is not necessarily antithetical to the orientation of Olson. Groups reflect a rational choice response to their position. They evolve into low cost and low demand[8] organizations to make it more likely that *rational* individuals will join.[9]

Dunleavy distinguishes between *exogenous* groups, whose members share an 'identity set', i.e., some objective characteristic such as a professional status; and *endogenous* groups, which see the combining of 'like-minded people' where the potential members are spread through the society, i.e., 'cause groups', such as Amnesty International.[10] Exogenous groups are able to make direct contact with their potential membership in a targeted way – all doctors are potential members of the British Medical Association. This article discusses the marketing approach associated with endogenous groups that have no *simple* way of identifying their potential constituencies. For these groups, direct mail and heavy press advertising are an important way of locating potential supporters.

[4] K-D. Opp, 'Soft Incentives and Collective Action', *British Journal of Political Science* 16, (1986), 87–112. There is a methodological problem that almost anything can be regarded as a soft incentive and hence the approach become nonfalsifiable. In effect if membership exists then 'soft incentives' are assumed as existing as the 'explanation'.

[5] Lars Udehn, *The Limits of Public Choice* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 280, assembles a remarkably thorough discussion of the problem of collective action. He argues that the notion that the group theory interpretation depended on self-interest is based on a misreading of the main texts.

[6] Here we use the notions of membership and supportership as interchangeable. In other discussions these terms need to be disentangled.

[7] D. Marsh, 'On Joining Interest Groups: An Empirical Consideration of the Works of Mancur Olson', *British Journal of Political Science*, 6 (1976), 257–71, p. 270.

[8] It has been persuasively pointed out to us by an anonymous reviewer that this point is a confirmation of Olson's approach: groups have deliberately designed themselves that way.

[9] This point made by an anonymous referee. We are grateful for this and other remarks.

[10] P. Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 54–5.

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Olson's main point is that groups will not emerge spontaneously merely because individuals share goals. This is not inconsistent with our view that group prompting rather than spontaneity underpins much membership.

The groups we discuss are essentially *mail order* groups[11] where members have little (if any) by way of a policy-making role. Groups appear to have found more success in niche market differentiation rather than broad claims. 'Saving the Cuddly Thing' is a good marketing pitch in which any particular thing seems a more effective recruiting factor than a general appeal. Even general environmental groups tend to develop *de facto* main strands, if not single strands. Friends of the Earth (FoE) in Britain in the 1980s was very much a rain forest group. So the mobilized member is often 'sucked in' precisely because of the particularist appeal rather than general environmental appeal. Berry notes that if groups are seen as 'policy maximizers' by their supporters then they will be more successful if they are perceived as being narrowly focused: 'A dollar spent on these groups is a dollar spent on their narrow set of issues'.[12]

Large public interest groups are particularly important in the argument about participation because it is such bodies that produce the large numbers of 'members' that appear so impressive in discussions about the decline of party and the creation of alternative modes of participation. Johnson shows that the direct mail strategy in the United States is associated with size. Six out of the seven largest groups in his sample of environment groups used direct mail.[13] Large public interest groups must retain what Hayes calls 'checkbook' members to justify their marketing and recruitment. He argues that some groups guarantee their survival by building up this type of cash-cow membership category:

> The vast majority of new groups in recent years fail to conform to the traditional conception of a mass-based membership group. Many of these groups are staff organizations, lacking any real membership base. Others have a membership consisting of 'checkbook' members, affiliated with the group only by virtue of monetary contributions and lacking any face-to-face contacts with other members in a common setting.[14]

These latter organizations are misunderstood if seen as mass participatory arenas. Instead, they are part of the funding of protest rather than a means for much individual protest and participation. Bosso notes that professional interest representation is not cheap: a full-time staff with policy and managerial expertise is vastly more expensive to recruit and maintain than one comprised

[11] P. A. Mundo, *Interest Groups: Cases and Characteristics* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1992), p. 18.

[12] J. M. Berry, *The Interest Group Society* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown, 1984), p. 56.

[13] P. E. Johnson, 'How Environmental Groups Recruit Members: Does the Logic Still Hold Up?' (paper delivered to the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 1995), p. 15.

[14] M. T. Hayes, 'The New Group Universe', in A. J. Cigler and B. A. Loomis, eds, *Interest Group Politics*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1986), pp. 133–45, at p. 134.

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of the young volunteers who typified environmentalism in the early 1970s.[15] Writing from a European perspective, Koopmans has observed how the new associations that have sprung from new social movements operate like traditional interest groups, have large budgets, professional staff and only rarely mobilize their constituencies.[16]

PROTEST BUSINESSES?

Modern large-scale mail-order groups are essentially *protest businesses*.[17] Toch, in anticipating the supply-side emphasis, proposed that:

> Social movements – *like other advertisers* – must show that they can respond to the needs of their clients. They must demonstrate their ability to furnish solutions which make it worth expending time, energy, and dedication. They must publicize offerings which people can find useful and desirable.[18]

The almost nine-fold increase in membership of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) between 1971 and 1991 (98,000 in 1971, 441,000 in 1981 and 852,000 in 1991) reflects the adoption, and success, of regular high-profile press advertising and increased sophistication in recruitment rather than a change in public attitudes. Group size or income is not simply a matter of the aggregation of individual decisions. Public interest groups have adopted the tactics of merchandising organizations. Roha shows that fund-raising is a major expense for US public interest groups: for Greenpeace it was 23.1 per cent of annual expenditure; for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund 22.1 per cent.[19]

Protest business staff are recruited to membership departments to promote and market a group on the basis of a proven professional marketing track record – not commitment to the cause. Johnson reports one group's entrepreneur as using 'the literature on direct marketing, where the critical concepts are investment and the lifetime value of a member'. He quotes his respondent describing the

[15] C. J. Bosso, 'The Color of Money: Environmental Groups and the Pathologies of Fund Raising', in A. J. Cigler and B. A. Loomis, eds, *Interest Group Politics*, 4th edn (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1995), p. 106.

[16] R. Koopmans, 'New Social Movements and Changes in Political Participation in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, 19 (1996), 28–50, p. 35.

[17] The characteristics of protest businesses include: supporters rather than members are important as a source of income; policy is made centrally and *supporters* can influence policy primarily by their potential for exit; political action is normally by the professional staff rather than the individual supporter or member; supporters are unknown to each other and do not interact; groups actively shape perceptions of problems by providing supporters with partial information; supporters are interested in narrow issue areas. Particularity rather than ideological breadth is the agency of recruitment (see G. Jordan and W. A. Maloney, *The Protest Business? Mobilizing Campaign Groups* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997)).

[18] H. Toch, *The Social Psychology of Social Movements* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 16 (emphasis added).

[19] R. R. Roha, 'Giving Back', *Changing Times* (November 1990).

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group's objective in using an initially unprofitable direct mail campaign to attract members:

> It is like a sort of capital investment. You put your money in and it comes out eventually, over time … You know, its fairly simple, and a lot more secure than a lot of the kinds of investments that people make all the time … like the stock market and that kind of stuff.

Johnson also quotes one respondent who explained a drop in membership in the early 1990s in terms of mismanagement in the membership department:

> They rolled out with a direct mail campaign, a new control, without testing it, and it was not too successful, and then they used it again in another campaign … They stopped doing renewal telemarketing and they cut the last two efforts of the renewal series plus two renewal wraps on the magazines that were sent out.[20]

In other words, the drop in membership was explained by lack of group skill rather than changes in the potential membership. A widespread collective interest does not itself generate a group: 'Rather, to understand the groups that exist, one must understand that there are organizers and recruiting strategies whose efforts must somehow interact with the attitudinal basis of support in the community.'[21]

The stress on marketing in this article attempts to explain the large increases in membership for some public interest groups. As Berry argued over a decade ago, 'For some interest group leaders, then, it may not be the mix of benefits that they offer, but how aggressively they market their organizations, which makes the crucial difference'.[22] To regard environmental groups as protest businesses opens the door to a discussion of group viability: inter-group competition for supporters can be fierce. Imig identified a process by means of which groups attempted to *segment 'their' markets* within the 'Children's Lobby' in the United States: 'as with other public interest groups, children's advocates work to differentiate between themselves in as many ways as possible, including their programmatic foci, their sources of revenue, and the services they offer members'.[23]

MARKETING MEMBERSHIP

Groups are active in their own account in a way not set out by Olson. They are organized to stimulate applications and not simply to respond to spontaneous joining. Groups find themselves adopting two key marketing strategies: (i) they try to lower the cost (see section *ix*, pp. 402–3); and (ii) they attempt to increase the potential members' positive evaluation of the group 'good'. In terms of the

[20] Johnson, 'How Environmental Groups Recruit Members', p. 19.
[21] Johnson, 'How Environmental Groups Recruit Members', p. 28.
[22] Berry, *The Interest Group Society*, p. 82.
[23] D. Imig, 'Advocacy by Proxy: The Children's Lobby in American Politics' (paper prepared for the panel on 'Interest Representation, Issue Networks, and Policymaking in the US', the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, 1994), p. 19.

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marketing literature groups are engaged in *relationship marketing*.[24] This term implies that the groups not only want long-term relationships with members but that they use the relationship to persuade the members to define events in ways that suit the group. If a group, for example, gives a tee-shirt or video free to a member it is not really giving a selective material incentive, but it is using the member as a means to advertise the group: it is investing in a relationship that it assumes will over time be financially advantageous for the group.

Cohen records that membership organizations like Amnesty devote large resources to appeals.[25] He set out the three most common techniques: direct mailing; advertising in newspapers and magazines; and loose-leaf inserts in newspapers and magazines – 80–85 per cent of the annual revenue of Amnesty in Britain comes from these three methods. Since the methods are themselves expensive, the 'profitability' of the solicitations is marginal. In 1993 Amnesty USA sent out 12 million direct mail letters to recruit new members with a take up rate of only 0.5 per cent.[26]

In terms of membership there are a number of group stimulated factors which encourage individuals to join: predisposition to group goals; economic ability; groups' stimulation of consideration of the decision to join; group manipulation of the perception of monetary and time costs, the value of collective goods and collective bads, and perceptions of personal efficacy; and patronage. These factors are discussed in the remainder of this article.

(i) Tapping Existing Predisposition

The discussion of joining interest groups should be connected to the literature of social psychology rather than that of economic rationality. Toch (as early as 1965) demonstrated an appreciation of the role groups play in *creating membership*. He quotes Blumer who stressed the process of agitation by the group on the member:

> The gaining of sympathizers rarely occurs through a mere combination of a pre-established appeal and a pre-established individual psychological bent on which it is brought to bear. Instead, the prospective sympathizer or member has to be aroused, nurtured, and directed, and the so-called appeal has to be developed and adapted.[27]

Godwin argues that marketing taps rather than creates predisposition.[28] The

[24] See R. Christie, G. Oliver and J. Penn, 'Relationship Marketing in Organizational Markets: When is it Appropriate', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 12 (1996), pp. 175–87.

[25] S. Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement: The Impact of Information About Human Rights Violations* (Jerusalem: University of Jerusalem, 1995).

[26] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 121.

[27] Toch, *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*, p. 87.

[28] R. K. Godwin, *One Billion Dollars of Influence* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1988), p. 54.

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RSPB follows up the 'warm names' left on the visitors' log book at their bird observation reserves as a source of new members. Groups also deliberately target individuals predisposed to support similar styles of organization. Groups trade and/or sell the names and addresses of those individuals who respond to one of their appeals. The assumption that is the individual who supports one cause is temperamentally more likely to support another, and has no objection to mail order support.[29]

However, the success rate in terms of recruiting, even in carefully selected target audiences, is low. As Berry points out the group that buys a direct mail list will probably pre-test the list by contacting a sample and checking what percentage of those contacted respond.[30] Cohen discusses the difference between a 0.4 per cent rate and a 0.9 per cent response as being commercially vital.[31] Indeed Greenpeace (USA) cut its mail appeals in half between 1990 and 1992 because of a drop in revenue from that source from 62 per cent to 49 per cent.[32]

Within such tight margins groups have shown a considerable degree of enterprise in recruiting new members. While Dunleavy argues that potential members of endogenous groups are not immediately identifiable, the groups themselves have found that many potential members share some distinguishing characteristics.[33] For example, our survey[34] revealed that FoE had recruited a significant number of members through an application form enclosed with the 'green' washing power Ecover. FoE exploited the predisposition to join reflected in 'green' shopping decisions. Thus, many endogenous groups do have clues in locating their potential members. An Amnesty survey in 1993 found that their members read the quality press: 45 per cent *Guardian*, 40 per cent *Observer*, 36 per cent *Independent*.[35] Hence the almost identical attitudinal and socio-demographic profiles (and overlapping membership) of these organizations is no accident.[36] These groups are *chasing the same cheque-books* and

[29] R. K. Godwin, 'Money, Technology, and Political Interests: The Direct Marketing of Politics', in M. Petracca, ed., *The Politics of Interests* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 308–25, at p. 314.

[30] Berry, *The Interest Group Society*, p. 83.

[31] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 170.

[32] Bosso, 'The Color of Money', p. 117.

[33] Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*.

[34] The membership profiles reported in this article are derived from postal surveys of the Amnesty International British Section (AIBS) and FoE conducted in 1993 (funded by an ESRC grant, R 000 23 3025). Amnesty and FoE were selected for three main reasons: first, public interest groups attracting large-scale membership (more than 100,000) challenge the Olson assumption about the importance of material selective incentives in accounting for membership; secondly, involvement in such groups is itself a form of democratic participation; and, thirdly, both are seen as *relevant policy participants* in the policy-making process. We surveyed 500 AIBS members, and 1,000 FoE supporters. The surveys were carried out between March and July 1993; the analysed response rates were: AIBS = 72.4 per cent ($n = 362$) and FoE = 68.1 per cent ($n = 681$).

[35] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 200.

[36] Our data showed that 17 per cent of Amnesty members are members of FoE, 13 per cent of FoE members are Amnesty members, and 32 per cent of FoE members and 34 per cent of Amnesty members are members of Greenpeace.

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know *where to look for members* – or more accurately *the members they choose to have*.

The argument that many public interest groups have successfully mobilized a *viable* proportion of 'their' predisposed public into membership since the 1960s has two aspects. It means that large numbers are available to be recruited as a consequence of undeveloped predisposition and that low levels of success, in terms of the percentage of predisposed potential members recruited, can be significant in absolute numbers. *A relatively weak solution to the collective action problem can be sufficient*. For example, Greenpeace UK had around 440,000 supporters in 1992 but, arguably, there were thousands (if not millions) more among the general population who were to say the least not antagonistic towards the group. Viewed in this way, one might argue the group has recruited only a fraction of its target group. Nevertheless, 440,000 is a respectable critical mass which provides sufficient financial support and the appearance of representativeness. *Such bodies need only recruit a small proportion of the potential membership to have a viable protest business. A group can be 'big enough' to be policy relevant even though it is well below a feasible size*.

The contribution of selective material incentives for public interest group membership may be about bringing a predisposed individual into membership – selective incentives (for example, a free gift) may reduce members' entry costs. The important point is that the gift will be most appealing to those already interested in that area. The free gift tips the balance of costs and benefits in favour of joining. The group can thereby alter the nature of the decision made by the individual. This is of course an entirely rational manœuvre by the group: but is not the sort of factor elaborated on by Olson.[37]

(ii) Creating Predisposition

Groups also *shape predisposition*: concern at issues such as the depletion of the rain forest or the fate of whales has to be generated. Exploiting predisposition involves drawing the potential member's attention to a 'problem' or capitalizing on natural disasters: groups must stimulate 'demand'. Greenpeace, for example, is regularly contacted by newspapers alerting them to advertising possibilities when an environmental story is being published. Thus, the group will advertise on the same page as a lead story and a picture of environmental damage or stricken wildlife.[38] *Predisposition can be created*. As argued below, Mitchell

[37] The expectation in public choice accounts (such as Olson's) appears to be that group membership is driven by inducements such as discounted hotel accommodation, cheap insurance, private health care and so forth. These sorts of considerations are particularly associated with sectional groups such as unions or trade bodies but public interest groups also offer selective benefits. The WWF-UK offers various incentives, ranging from site visits to newsletters, which may seem trivial, but at low subscription levels they can be significant. If we extend our marketing theme, the 'free gifts' on offer are not simply catering to materialistic 'wants', but are, from a supply-side perspective, 'loss leaders'.

[38] The RSPB Market Research Manager said that following the *Braer* incident 'the RSPB … recruited a few hundred new members at a ROI [return on investment] better than our normal advertisements'.

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TABLE 1 *Level of Education, Income and Class Position*

	FoE new	FoE veteran	FoE lapsed	FoE total	Amnesty
(i) Highest Educational Qualification Gained					
First degree	26.8%	37.0%	29.4%	35.3%	26.0%
Postgraduate	18.5%	19.0%	9.2%	18.9%	26.5%
(ii) Household Income over £20,000					
£20,001–£30,000	22.4%	21.2%	19.7%	21.4%	19.6%
£30,001–£40,000	11.5%	10.3%	13.0%	10.5%	13.8%
Over £40,000	12.5%	12.3%	9.2%	12.3%	19.6%
(iii) Self-Perceived Class Position					
Working-class	23.3%	20.4%	27.7%	20.9%	22.9%
Middle-class	68.1%	74.7%	64.7%	73.7%	71.3%

maintains that 'public bads' are more effective recruiting arguments than collective goods: there is an emotive power that is lacking for more positive messages.[39] A collective bad is of course like a collective good in the sense that the outcome is shared by all in an undifferentiated way whether or not one contributed. Logically, one has the opportunity to free-ride activities to prevent the emergence of a collective bad just as one can free-ride activities to secure a collective good. However, through experience, groups have found that individuals are more likely to contribute to prevention than provision.

(iii) Profiling: Locating an Attainable Membership

Recruitment will be frustrated if the predisposed member cannot afford the subscription. Groups deliberately market themselves among those best able to afford support: groups (like other well-organized businesses) generate *pertinent marketing information*[40] which enables them to identify the shared characteristics of an attainable membership. For some potential members the subscription is a reasonably serious decision, while for others it is not. It is obviously the latter category that interest groups pursue. Cohen notes that 'even the most populist

[39] R. C. Mitchell, 'National Environmental Lobbies and the Apparent Illogic of Collective Action', in C. Russell, ed., *Collective Decision-Making* (Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[40] D. Wring, 'The Political Marketing Mix: A Framework for Election Campaign Analysis' (paper presented at the International Conference on Political Marketing, Judge Institute for Management Studies, University of Cambridge, 1996).

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organizations only reach a restricted sector of the population: well educated, high socio-economic status, more liberal in their political views, already belonging to the "conscience constituency"'.[41] As reported in Table 1 the memberships of FoE and Amnesty are distinctive in socio-demographic terms.

Membership reflects the *recruiting strategy* in a self-fulfilling fashion. Amnesty, for example, advertises in the quality press which is read by a middle-class readership which produces an organizational profile that suggests advertising in the quality press.[42] The relatively high disposable/discretionary income of readers of these papers means they can afford to be members. As Gerhard Wallmeyer, a fund-raiser for Greenpeace in Germany said: 'The more educated the addresses are the more chance we have that they become first time donors'.[43] Groups have overwhelmingly middle-class memberships because this is the target audience.

(iv) Groups Stimulate Consideration of the Decision to Join

For highly political groups the potential member may well have the motivation to take trouble to track down the organization; political parties have in the past been notoriously ill-organized to admit new members. For members of weak political groups – or weakly motivated memberships of strongly political groups – the fact that the group takes the initiative in offering convenient access may be vital. As the conventional wisdom in another marketing-led business states, 'life insurance is *sold*, not bought': the level of public interest group membership then can be shaped by the group presenting *joining opportunities*.

Organizations such as Amnesty in Britain estimate that up to six or seven 'bites' (repeated exposures to adverts, inserts or letters) are sometimes needed before a positive response comes and a member joins.[44] Johnson's recent US study reports that twenty-eight groups who responded to his questionnaire contacted 17.37 million non-members. Members received an average of 8.7 pieces of direct mail each year.[45]

The implication of this industry assumption is that unless the group makes these sorts of joining opportunities available the predisposed members might not

[41] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 119.

[42] Some groups who cannot afford the high costs of advertising have recruited support from 'high-profile' individuals who are able to attract attention to the group cause (Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) recruited Joanna Lumley). Joyce D'Silva, Director of CIWF, said that their campaign against the exportation of calves from Britain in 1994 'really began a year ago with Joanna Lumley crying at a press conference when we showed a film of calves in veal crates … The photographers kept clicking away and the pictures appeared everywhere … *membership soared*' (*Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1995, emphasis added).

[43] *Spiegel Special*, November 1995. We are grateful to Dr Klaus Schubert for drawing our attention to the parallels between our argument and the current debate in Germany.

[44] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*.

[45] Johnson, 'How Environmental Groups Recruit Members', p. 15.

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join. Thus the 'rational' decision sought by the group is more likely the more often it is faced. This argument might lead to the conclusion that groups should advertise continuously. In practice, however, the 'law of diminishing returns' leads to the costs of additional recruits exceeding the income gained. Large mail campaigns will probably not pay for themselves on a one year basis.[46]

(v) Manipulating the Perception of Monetary and Time Costs

Groups seek to manipulate *down* the perception of costs and manipulate *up* the perceived consequences of not joining. Groups reduce 'membership' costs in several ways. They often have a 'tiered' subscription cost that allows low-cost entry to the organization but they attempt to 'convert' their members to a higher cost-type of membership. Group strategy is aimed at providing a variety of options for contribution. This process of segmenting types of members is also important in organizational maintenance. The groups can identify the *segments* with greatest financial potential, i.e., those who can be 'counted on' to respond to solicitations more regularly than annually. Segmentation allows the groups to identify their best customers.[47]

Groups appreciate the role of factors such as inconvenience of form-filling, poor personal organization and so forth in their recruitment and retention strategies. These 'costs' of joining are taken as seriously as the monetary subscription cost. For example, a 1992 Greenpeace direct mailing to lapsed members read: '… 90% of people who fail to renew their subscription to Greenpeace do so *not* because they don't want to, but simply because they don't get round to it' (emphasis added).

Groups also have a strategy of giving lapsed members repeated opportunities to rejoin the organization before they admit defeat. 'Lapsing' can be converted to rejoining by group tenacity. At Olson's level of abstraction, membership is membership is membership: it would not appear to matter which *technique* of payment is adopted. In fact, if the group can 'steer' a member into one practice of payment rather than another it can increase the probability of a 'good' decision. Our data showed that socio-demographically and attitudinally lapsed FoE members were not that different from members. However, in terms of whether they paid by 'direct debit' or a conscious annual subscription, there was a clear distinction: for example, 31 per cent of Veteran members used direct debit, while only 6 per cent of lapsers contributed by that method. Groups

[46] As Johnson, 'How Environmental Groups Recruit Members', p. 19, explains: 'If a group mails 10,000 pieces at $.35 each, at a 1 per cent rate the organization spends $35 dollars to recruit each individual member. The member pays $25 in the first year, so that the group not only loses money on the acquisition but also ends up providing the benefits of the group free during the first year. But the group expects between 30 and 50 per cent of first-year members to renew, and the renewal rate climbs near 100 per cent over the following three years'.

[47] The Royal National Lifeboat Institution has five categories of membership: Shoreline membership (minimum £10 per annum); Joint Shoreline membership (minimum £17 per annum); Governorship (minimum £33 per annum); Life Governorship (minimum £500 one-off payment); and Storm Force membership (under 16s minimum £3 per annum).

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recognize the importance of 'moving' recruits on to an automatic payment scheme. Collecting dues directly from salaries every month helps to manipulate down the perception of the monetary costs of membership.

Olson saw public interest group participation as unlikely to be self-interestedly rational. However, if the membership cost is low, joining easy, and membership reinforces the self-image of the potential member, then membership is more likely than an economically-based rational choice calculation would suggest. In the main, monetary costs are less significant than Olson's account tended to imply. In practice these *deliberately targeted* individuals do not need to make elaborate calculations about the extent to which they as individuals or groups are pivotal and efficacy in making decisions. Some will simply decide they will feel better having joined: the expressive benefit calculation need not involve members knowing anything other than their own welfare.

Olson's supporters have noted the low cost of participation in protest businesses as a confirmation of his thesis. Hardin, for example, claims that environmentalists annually spend less on 'their apparently great cause than two pack a day smokers spend on cigarettes'. He says that the annual sum is 'a trivium'.[48] If we accept this, then the argument can perhaps be reversed. If the sum is indeed trivial, is it unlikely that potential members are free-riding on the grounds of cost saving? Free-riding is likely to be a reasonable response to significant investments, but it is less reasonable for costs that are minimal.

(vi) Manipulating the Perception of the Value of Collective Goods

There is no need to assume that public interest membership is explained either by material self-interest or altruism: individuals selectively obtain gratification from 'other regarding' actions that *appear* altruistic. The reward is often a 'feel good' or 'expressive' factor.[49] One might like the confirmation of one's own beliefs given in membership newsletters. If individuals are 'self-regarding and instrumental' in their behaviour it does not follow that they free-ride.[50] They might have self-regarding reasons for acting collectively. Margolis argues that it is rational to allocate expenditure to a group which does not give selective material rewards if one allocates some portion of one's spending for social purposes. He argues that a donation to a charity is rational if individuals decide the social value of (say) $10 if given to charity is greater than spending $10 on themselves.[51]

[48] R. Hardin, 'Comments', in C. Russell, ed., *Collective Decision-Making* (Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 122–9.

[49] R. H. Salisbury, 'An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups', *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 13 (1969), 1–32.

[50] Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*, p. 249.

[51] H. Margolis, *Selfishness, Altruism and Rationality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 103.

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Cohen notes that recruiters and fund-raisers talk of a hierarchy of needs.[52] The product they are selling, Cohen says, is a purchase for the relatively affluent who have satisfied other wants and now wish to build up their self-esteem. Economists would treat such decisions as luxury goods purchased rationally when other needs are satisfied. Olson assumes that there are identifiable collective political goals but that one would not invest one's own resources because these would not materially affect the probability of the goals being attained. In his 'economic man' perspective the rational result would be 'free-riding'. However, Hirschman argues that the 'economic' view of participation fails to understand that public-oriented action carries its own reward. These strict economic analyses identify (and possibly exaggerate) the obstacles to participation: 'The implication of the confusion between striving and attaining is that the neat distinction between costs and benefits of action in the public interest vanishes, since striving, which should be entered on the cost side, turns out to be part of the benefit'.[53] Such a view of political participation has important consequences. For example, under such circumstances individuals who seeks to maximize the benefit must maximize their participation. If the benefit flows from collective action then 'Far from shrinking and attempting to get a free ride, a truly maximizing individual will attempt to be as activist as he [*sic*] can manage'. It is impossible to free-ride this: to free-ride the cost is to free-ride what was sought. In Hirschman's word, individuals who attempt to free-ride do not simply 'cheat' other participators, *they cheat themselves first of all*.[54]

The 'purchase' of group membership or the expressive act of making a financial contribution to a worthwhile cause might itself be valued. For example, supporters of an organization such as WWF might enjoy 'consuming' the fact that they are members. As Koopmans argues for many Greenpeace or WWF members, 'participation implies little more than paying a small yearly fee and perhaps putting a sticker on the back of their four-wheel drive, while they may simultaneously be a member of a car drivers' interest organization and vote for a party that does not support stricter environmental legislation'.[55]

Support for a cause might well *not* be very strongly associated with the likely success of the group. An individual might enjoy the social distinctiveness of being associated with a minority cause. Individuals may participate in apparently fruitless group activity as it is the participation that is the reward rather than the outcome. Rothenberg suggests that some groups can afford to

[52] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*. See also R. Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); and A. H. Maslow. 'A Theory of Human Motivation', in J. M. Shafritz and A. C. Hyde, eds, *Classics of Public Administration*, 3rd edn (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole), pp. 129–37.

[53] Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, pp. 85–6.

[54] Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, pp. 86–7.

[55] Koopmans, 'New Social Movements and Changes in Political Participation in Western Europe', p. 37.

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be public losers in a policy influencing sense, because they do not seek to be 'insiders'.[56] Members may be content to see activity rather than policy success. Groups can perform a surrogate function; their activity removes the need for individual participation. For an annual subscription fee members can support an organization such as Greenpeace without becoming active themselves. The fact that Greenpeace does not prevent dirty beaches may have very little bearing on membership turnover. (In fact, it could be argued that the more dirty beaches there are, the greater the 'need' for Greenpeace. As Lowery and Gray point out, in the environmental sphere the competitors of environmental groups are other environmental groups, *not polluters*; pollution helps confirm the need for the group.[57])

The decision about membership rests in part on the evaluation by the individual of the value of collective benefits. Olson views all potential members who do not join organizations as free-riders. Our perspective is that unless one actually values the group output one does not face the choice of support or free-riding. However the primary source of information available is the group itself. The view on the value of the outputs is likely to be influenced by the version of reality that the group provides. Environmental groups highlight the serious problem for the planet caused by the destruction of the rainforest or the creation of the hole in the ozone layer. These may be both real and serious problems, but it is the one-sided summary of the technical debate that is skilfully presented by the relevant groups. Newsletters and other communications (which can be regarded as a selective incentive for the member) are more important as a means by which the group can manipulate the evaluation of issues and its role in addressing them.

Kimber makes the point that free-riding is unlikely where the member is uncertain about the supply of the collective good. He suggests that it is important to distinguish between the idea of a good being supplied, and the supply of a good being certain (particularly for group members). As we have seen, it is common group strategy to try and convince members that a problem is on-going, that it is an ever-present threat and that their continued support is needed to redress the situation. In such circumstances, and with groups actively encouraging worry about the uncertainty over the supply of collective goods, the individual is pushed in favour of joining.[58]

(vii) Manipulating the Perception of the Value of Collective Bads

It has been argued that members are encouraged to participate by exaggeration of the *consequences* of group failure and building-up the assumption that

[56] L. S. Rothenberg, *Linking Citizens to Government* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[57] D. Lowery and V. Gray, 'The Population Ecology of Gucci Gulch, or the Natural Regulation of Interest Group Numbers in the American States', *American Journal of Political Science*, 39 (1995), 1–29, p. 9.

[58] R. Kimber, 'Collective Action and the Fallacy of the Liberal Fallacy', *World Politics*, 33 (1981), 178–96, p. 193.

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nonparticipation by individuals will guarantee failure of the group (see below). Crenson has argued that individuals are more likely to contribute to the prevention of a collective bad than to the securing of a collective good.[59] He pointed out that rational individuals might bear the initial costs of providing a collective good, in the knowledge that once it was provided, say a clean street, others would contribute to prevent it being lost. Mitchell remarks:

> In a situation where individuals have a high disutility for public bads that they are unable to escape, where they have imperfect information, and where the cost of contribution is low, the act of contributing is consonant with a rational strategy of seeking to minimise the maximum regret.[60]

Groups can feed the potential member information at the same time as they are seeking to present the monetary costs of joining as being negligible. Mitchell maintains that: 'environmental lobbies have an incentive to highlight (if not exaggerate) the threat posed by environmental bads and/or the desirability of the collective goods they seek to obtain and their organizational effectiveness in preventing bads or obtaining goods'.[61] Bosso argues that: 'direct mailers shop for the next eco crisis to keep the money coming in'.[62] Bosso's *Ambulance Chasing* argument is supported by Pierre Gassmann of the International Red Cross claimed that (in Germany), 'Only those who have a "sexy catastrophe" on offer … can rely on sufficient donations from sensitive European humanists'.[63]

(viii) Manipulating Perceptions of Personal Efficacy

Basic rational choice suggests that individuals will make logical calculations which recognize that outcomes are likely to be independent of whether or not they join. The planet is unlikely to be much affected by whether or not one gives to Greenpeace. However, in practice, 'members' seem to have an exaggerated sense of their efficacy; they expect their action to influence the delivery of valued goals. For example, 71.2 per cent of new and 74.7 per cent of veteran FoE members, and 69.6 per cent of Amnesty members believe that their support made a difference. Indeed, the most interesting data relates to the exceptionally few respondents who felt that their participation had no effect (7.3 per cent FoE Veterans, 6.9 per cent of Amnesty members). These responses suggest that

[59] M. A. Crenson, 'The Private Stake in Public Goods: Overcoming the Illogic of Collective Action', *Policy Sciences*, 20 (1987), 259–76, p. 265.

[60] Mitchell, 'National Environmental Lobbies and the Apparent Illogic of Collective Action', p. 120.

[61] Mitchell, 'National Environmental Lobbies and the Apparent Illogic of Collective Action', p. 121.

[62] Bosso, 'The Color of Money', p. 114.

[63] *Spiegel Special*, November 1995.

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group members do not accept the free-riding premise that nonmembership is marginal to the group.

Potential members may in theory assume that their action is irrelevant to group viability and consequently (safely) free-ride. However, the psychological pressure to 'buy one's round' works in groups – especially when the costs are low. Dunleavy, citing Finkel, Mueller and Opp, notes that groups develop a sense of ethical duty among potential members to participate and not free-ride, and the empirically widespread belief in the 'unity principle' – which holds that 'the participation of everyone (in the identity set) is necessary to have a chance of obtaining the (group's) public good'.[64] Belief in the unity principle seems more widespread than an urge to free-ride.[65] This 'equity ethic' seems stronger when others are seen as contributing. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the more visible the contribution of others, the less likely is free-riding.

Potential members apply the principle that if they free-ride, then it is reasonable to assume that others will. This may be illogical in Olson's terms but it seems a reasonable assumption in practical circumstances. *Moreover, group communications encourage these beliefs*. Amnesty appeals confront denial and assert: 'You can do something.'[66] A Greenpeace appeal to its lapsed members said (with original emphasis):

> Greenpeace only exists because people like *you* continue to be supporters. Without *you* there is no Greenpeace. And without *your* past support actions like the ones below may well have been impossible. We can't carry on unless our supporters, people like you, renew their support … Our actions in the future depend on you acting *now … Without you we're sunk. With you we can change the world.*

When the role of personal efficacy is combined with our other major point – that one cannot free-ride if the act of subscribing is itself valued – then the potential for group viability is further enhanced.

(ix) Reducing the Costs of Membership: Patronage

Most groups try to deal with membership instability by supplementing subscription income with other forms of finance. The organizational strategy is to develop a financial portfolio which contains various income-generation sources. Not only will this help insulate the group from any fluctuations in subscription income, but finance from other sources can be used to subsidize the costs of membership.[67] Walker pointed out that the US Federal Government (like governments in most democracies) is an important sponsor of many interest groups. However, while the national government 'is unlikely to be

[64] Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*, p. 62.

[65] See G. Marwell and R. E. Ames, 'Economists Free-ride, Does Anyone Else?' *Journal of Public Economics*, 15 (1981), 295–310.

[66] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 124.

[67] For example, a Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) official we interviewed claimed that the group was previously subsidising its membership via its income from other sources.

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the sole sponsor of a group … its overall impact on the group system through tax incentives, contracts, and grants, is enormous'.[68]

Walker found that bodies including corporations, foundations, government agencies, private charities, etc., 'often provide financial and organizational support that is the key to the maintenance and effectiveness of interest groups'.[69] Thus, groups have been able to expand their financial base beyond what could be raised by membership subscriptions alone. In fact, some groups are heavily reliant on patronage for their financial survival. Reliance on patronage helps resolve the free-rider problem because individual subscriptions become of lesser importance to the organization. In fact, Walker argued that one of the most important reasons for the rapid expansion of the citizen groups sector in the United States was because of the growth of patronage. His 1980 survey found that 89 per cent of citizen groups had received financial assistance from an outside source in order to start its operations.[70] Imig highlighted that in 1992 the US Children's Defense Fund's total income was approximately $12.9 million, of which some 59 per cent came from a private foundation grant and a further 10 per cent came from corporate donations.[71] While in 1990 the British Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) had a total income of £21.7 million, of which £17 million came from legacies and £128,000 from membership subscriptions.[72] In 1993–94 21 per cent (approximately £4 million) of the WWF-UK's income came from legacies, 18 per cent from aid agencies and grants, 7 per cent from corporate donations (from organizations such as Boots, Cadbury, ICI, Shell and Tesco) and 2 per cent from charitable trusts.[73]

(x) Marketing Consumerism or Marketing Anti-Consumerism?

The argument in this article is that groups act like private corporations by selling largely nonmaterial goods for private consumption: individuals 'buy' a sense of contributing to Greenpeace just as one buys the advantages of private

[68] J. L. Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 33.

[69] Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*, p. 48.

[70] Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America*, p. 49.

[71] Imig, 'Advocacy by Proxy', p. 14.

[72] R. Garner, *Animals, Politics and Morality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), cited in W. P. Grant, *Pressure Groups, Politics and Democracy in Britain*, 2nd edn (Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), p. 32.

[73] In fact, not only is patronage important/crucial for group maintenance, it is also very important in the early stages of group formation. According to A. J. Nownes and G. Neeley, 'Public Interest Group Entrepreneurship and Theories of Group Mobilization', *Political Research Quarterly*, 49 (1996), 119–46, patronage allows many public interest groups not to 'overcome the "free-rider" problem as much as by-pass it' (p. 124).

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transport. This is an ironic twist on the nature of public interest activity. In this light it turns out that members are engaged in private gratification.

A competing interpretation might readily accept the *active* groups as stimulating funding from quiescent supporters, but interpret the supporter motivation differently. Hirschman notes that political participation is highly correlated with socio-economic status. He sketches the usual explanation for this: 'the more people are endowed with economic and other resources, the more they tend to participate in politics, because these resources make it possible and advisable for them to take an interest in public affairs, alongside their private pursuits, as a smoothly complementary activity'. Affluent participators are seen as having more time, more skill and a 'greater stake in politics'.[74]

However, Hirschman sets out another route to consumer citizen participation. He argues that if one is disenchanted with the gratifications available from private consumption, then one may wish to try the public route. In this scenario, the middle-class bias in political participation is not a 'natural outgrowth of their success in private life'. Instead, he presents the contributors as 'a group of people who have experienced a great deal of disappointment in their search for happiness through private consumption'. He sees them as 'on the rebound' from material gratification. He suggests that public-oriented action is the sort of activity that 'carries its own reward'. Most importantly then, he sees public interest activity not as a cost but as a benefit.[75] Hirschman says that while it is not obvious what type of public cause these individuals will become attached to, it is likely to be 'reform-minded'.[76] In this kind of account the public interest motivation is at base anti-consumerist even though it is facilitated by the tools of commerce and displayed by those with economic advantages.

INSTABILITY AS CONSEQUENCE OF MARKETING? THE 'REVOLVING DOOR' PROBLEM

These types of organization operate on a revolving door model – to compensate for high drop-out, they have to work hard to attract new recruits.[77]

Many public interest groups (and political parties) face a membership turnover problem not stressed in the literature. For example, the Green party made a net gain of more than 10,000 members between 1988 and 1990, and a net loss of more than 13,000 between 1990 and 1993 (this deficit represented a loss of half its membership). Turnover rates are very high. For example, Letto estimated that the average turnover rate for environmental groups in the United

[74] Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, p. 75.
[75] This discussion is based on pp. 82–91 of *Shifting Involvements*.
[76] Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements*, p. 75.
[77] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 177.

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TABLE 2 *Membership Turnover at Amnesty, 1992–93*

Date	Membership
June 1992	82,919 (100%)
Joined 1992–93	33,977 (+ 41%)
Lapsed 1992–93	20,340 (− 24.5%)
May 1993	96,556 (+ 16.5%)

States was 30 per cent per annum.[78] Godwin argued that those American groups who have in the past relied upon marketing techniques to recruit members (such as Common Cause and Zero Population Growth) have suffered 'volatile swings and permanent downturns' in recent times.[79]

With regard to environmental groups in Britain, it is important to explain why only 35 per cent of those who joined FoE in 1991 rejoined in 1992.[80] Amnesty's 'normal' drop-out rate is 40 per cent after the first year; the average membership life is four years.[81] This again confirms that nonrenewal is a major issue. In 1992–93, although Amnesty managed to achieve an overall net increase in membership of 16.5 per cent, it actually lost 24.5 per cent of its pre-existing membership. It had to recruit 41 per cent to attain the 16.5 per cent increase (see Table 2). Apparent stability is the net result of balancing large-scale entry and exits.

Ironically, the groups that devote most attention to recruiting and retaining membership might be particularly prone to instability. Information from FoE Scotland found that the organization was in slow growth/plateau mode from a membership of 4,169 in 1990 (1 January) to 4,487 in 1995 (1 January), but as with other public interest groups there was a turnover problem which meant that the consistency of numbers did not represent a consistency of individuals. However, the level of instability seems much lower than for FoE (London) Limited and Amnesty. In 1993 FoE Scotland had a net increase of 3 per cent (127) but this masked a loss of 12.5 per cent. It is at least possible that the greater stability for FoE (Scotland) is the result of their lower media profile: potential members are less likely to find the group taking the initiative in giving 'joining opportunities', so members have to work comparatively harder at securing membership. Accordingly those who join may be more committed: less active recruiting succeeds less well in stimulating the weakly predisposed to

[78] Cited in Bosso, 'The Color of Money', p. 114.

[79] Godwin, *One Billion Dollars of Influence*, p. 66. Indeed, even though Godwin's direct-marketing recruits thought a group was successful (this may be explained by their reliance on group leaders for information), their membership was still likely to be less permanent. Godwin, pp. 65–6, observed these patterns may have serious implications for citizen action groups dependent on direct marketing for members and income. These groups may suffer substantially greater losses than social network associations when an issue loses its position in the political limelight.

[80] Young single women's rejoining rate is particularly low in the first year.

[81] Cohen, *Denial and Acknowledgement*, p. 235.

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membership. While some public interest groups are successful in membership retention, it appears to be that it is the organizations with the strongest advertising presence that have the highest turnover.

Rothenberg addresses the issue of membership instability through his theory of 'experiential search'. He argues that initial decisions to join groups are rarely rational in the way Olson predicts, but none the less are rational in the sense of displaying a deliberate learning process. At the point of rejoining: 'the decision to join makes sense as a strategy by individuals who recognise their lack of knowledge. Members join groups to learn about them, and as they acquire knowledge, some can be expected to leave'.[82] Rothenberg's work is important in taking us beyond the fixation with the initial decision to join to a focus on the decision to rejoin and remain in membership. This line of reasoning *may* help us account for the high membership turnover amongst new members which many public interest groups experience.[83]

Rothenberg interprets membership as about 'testing before final purchase'.[84] However, high turnover is also consistent with the fact that mail-order based groups permit a form of political participation which can be labelled *cheap participation*. For a cost below the threshold of serious analysis by the relatively affluent potential member, they can make a political statement of preference, without engaging in the costs (time and money) of 'real' participation. This is to say that for mail-order groups *the participation demands are in fact very low*. It is the casual nature of the engagement rather than the subsequent disillusionment that accounts for turnover.[85]

BUILDING THE GROUP INTO THE MEMBERSHIP DECISION

This article has challenged the paradigm which focuses on the individual and the range of incentives/disincentives that are relevant to the joining decision. An alternative paradigm emphasizes how the incentives considered in the individual rational approach choice are themselves *the product of group manipulation*. Group activity places the decision on membership onto the agenda. Moreover, the group can actively shape the parameters of choice. It can persuade potential members that the issue is of importance, and it can manipulate downwards the perception of the cost of contribution via cross-subsidization from patronage or the provision of selective incentives.

This is not to say that the individual motivation to join is not important, but

[82] Rothenberg, *Linking Citizens to Government*, p. 22.

[83] See also Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*, p. 54.

[84] Rothenberg, *Linking Citizens to Government*.

[85] This is why groups encourage members to pay their annual subscription via direct debit. This method of payment removes the membership renewal decision from an individual's immediate agenda.

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the membership of groups such as Amnesty and FoE is a reflection not just of a spontaneous public interest but:

(i) a level of concern about an issue that the groups can generate by providing information;
(ii) a level of predisposition to support group goals that groups can alter by their persuasion and presentation: and
(iii) a level of membership that groups can alter by their recruitment strategies.

The likelihood of participation in a mail order group is not a spontaneous indication of support for group goals, but it is massively influenced by the group itself and its recruitment strategies.

As a consequence of the business parallels that can be appropriately drawn between businesses and these type of groups, it is worth noting that group competition implies negative consequences for at least some of the groups. Bosso has queried how many large environmental organizations the 'market' can bear.[86] Godwin has noted that competition for members can lead to political negativism,[87] as groups are unable to adopt certain types of policy position because of the need to use high-profile and emotionally-charged tactics to maintain their 'customer base'. A political system featuring extensive group marketing might lack many of the attractive features once associated with the development of wider interest group participation.

[86] Bosso, 'The Color of Money'.
[87] Godwin, *One Billion Dollars of Influence*.

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