

Idle No More: A positive approach in getting noticed

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Summary:

The Idle No More campaign is a wonderful example of activism, particularly as carried out by young adults, which has reached the public through positivity, education outreach, live experience, and social media campaigns.

Background

The Idle No More movement began in late 2012 and has quickly gained lots of attention. Their vision states that they “call(s) on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honor Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water”. To state the complex situation simply: The Canadian government passed Bill C-45, which imposed on a treaty with Aboriginals in Canada. This bill was passed to give prime ministers more power over energy and pipeline projects, but will have negative effects on the environment. One example is the Navigable Waters Protection Act, which will be violated “leaving less than 1 percent of Canada’s waterways protected” (Bernd, 2013). Idle No More has spanned past the Natives and other Canadians have joined the movement. This case study asks in which ways the Idle No More campaign gains success through its incorporation of social media and live experiences. It also focuses on the significance of youth participation in the campaign’s success.

Findings

There are many environmental and political protests, but not all gain notice worldwide. Idle No More has run a smart campaign in that they realized the power of positive actions. They hold rallies and teach-ins in which they educate people on the complicated issue they’re fighting against. The campaign has also organized a sort of flash mob dance incorporating drums and chanting and representing a bit of their culture. The group is peaceful and informative, and also incorporates the rest of Canada in the

issue. They recognize that although it's their treaty that's been violated, the environment of all citizens will be affected.

Social media has also been a great strength in this campaign. Idle No More has a Twitter account with nearly 6,000 followers and a Facebook page with over 119,000 likes. A University of Saskatchewan student, 22-year-old Erica Lee, shared her view on the importance of social media in this movement with *Toronto Star*: "Traditionally, it's the chiefs and the people in power that have the ability to speak to the media, whereas now, people like me — university students who have been involved in this kind of stuff — are getting interviewed," Lee said.

Social media campaigns and youth activists seem to go hand in hand. Technology is second nature to young adults, and this is an advantage in the campaigning world. The young members of the Idle No More movement are a huge asset to the group and serve as a bridge to the outside world.

In an article from Truthout, Cofounder of Idle No More, Sheelah McLean gives her opinion on the importance of positivity in a campaign:

This movement has been built on love and spirituality. It's been built in a peaceful way," McLean says. "There are so many ceremonies and prayers that are part of the rallies and part of the flash-mob round dances, a part of the movement." McLean believes it's this power of ceremony and ritual as well as the articulation of long-suppressed truths about the relationship between colonization, oppression and ecology that has drawn the outpouring of love for the movement (Bernd, 2013)

The organization's dedication to connect with their neighbors has definitely proved instrumental. They don't put on speeches about how *they're* being wronged and the government hates *them*. Instead, they are educating the community with care to show how preserving the environment is relevant to everyone.

One pivotal action taken that gained attention was when Attawapiskat Chief, Theresa Spence went on a six week hunger strike with only fluids but no solid foods. This feels like a somewhat less extreme, but Ghandi-esque gesture, but this, rather than violent protests, was their strategy get Prime Minister Stephen Harper to meet with Idle No More. Unfortunately, though he said he'd consider it, the Prime Minister has still failed to allow this meeting. In the past months, Idle No More has hit some controversy. At a protest in October both they and the police forces, the RCMP, became violent. In my opinion, this somewhat damaged the cause's non-violent image but supporters were more outraged by the RCMP's actions than the Natives'. Reporters and onlookers weren't able to get many photos or video footage due to barricades, leaving the protesters as the main source of news and social media. This definitely gave them the advantage, as the story was told from their point of view.

Conclusion

Idle No More has been a reasonably well-run campaign. The movement won Samara's Best Democratic Moment of 2012, following in the steps of the Occupy Movement, which won the award in 2010. The similarity with these movements is that they both grew through in great part due to social media. This progressive campaign is

inclusive and for the most part, positive. And the young members have the perspective to really reach all generations. The campaign is still going strong almost a year later, but unfortunately much of the news on it has fizzled out. Two days ago Idle No More protesters marched to Parliament Hill to discuss the First Nations Education Act. These issues could be followed up on by following the progress the group makes with the C-45 bill and their Education Act.

Idle No More has been a significant movement for its perseverance, follow-through and generally positive actions. Campaigns fueled by only anger, like Occupy Wall Street, don't have staying power. Hopefully these protesters will stay true to their peaceful nature and still promote change. This really is an inspired *and* inspiring movement that was very enlightening to learn about.

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