

**Idle No More:
An Activist Public Relations Campaign**

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Actively seeking to promote environmental protection and indigenous sovereignty, the Idle No More Movement has been successfully utilizing communication and activist public relations strategies in order to reach numerous publics and to gain national exposure.

Idle No More is an ongoing protest movement that began in December of 2012. As the movement website explains, the Government is trying to pass laws that will ultimately take away sovereignty and the inherent right to land and resources from the First Nations inhabitants. Idle No More seeks to promote environmental protection and indigenous sovereignty and to “restitute traditional laws and Nation to Nation Treaties by protecting the lands and waters from corporate destruction. Each day that Indigenous rights are not honored or fulfilled, inequality between Indigenous peoples and the settler society grows” (Idle No More). The movement plans to accomplish their goals through awareness, sharing knowledge about indigenous sovereignty and environmental protections, and ultimately gaining supporters. This case study will ultimately examine the role of public relations when it comes to being involved with activism and movements such as Idle No More.

As their website explains, “Idle No More has quickly become one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history, sparking hundreds of teach-ins, rallies, and protests across Turtle Island and beyond” (Idle No More). Since the protest began, Idle No More has gained both media attention and, as their website explains, has brought together a number of groups and peoples “looking to work against the current and pending governmental policy that impacts on collective rights, social safety nets, and environmental protections” (Idle No More).

As John Anderson explains in his article, there has not been a successful, national movement for all First Nations and Inuit people to win significant gains” (Anderson, 2013, p. 58). With this increased desire for the Fir Nations and Inuit people to be heard, this movement has been able to grow and gain national exposure due to “excellent communication and an even better campaign strategy” (Anderson, 2013, p. 58). With public issue campaigns and movements such as this, gaining national exposure of what the group is protesting is important in order to be

heard and to make a difference in the end. Activists encounter challenges that “demand diverse communication tactics” (Jiang & Ni, 2009, p. 291). As Anderson explains, due to mass communication efforts, widespread recognition and timing, this movement has been long lasting, significant, and has resulted in “fundamental change” (Anderson, 2013, p. 58).

As research conducted by Hua Jiang and Lan Ni explained, public relations and communications theories have great importance and relevance to activist organizations, including concepts of two-way symmetrical communication and confrontational communication tactics. Activist organizations face many challenges and conflicts when it comes to creating a successful movement, and utilizing appropriate public relations tactics is vital for success. Areas of communication that would be involved in such a movement would include media relations, mainstream media exposure, propaganda techniques, coordinating rallies, mobilizing members, use of communication networks, social media outreach, research, utilizing available resources and delivering messages and information to the public relevant to what they are protesting. Outreach is an important goal when it comes to successful activism movements. An outreach plan is typically constructed internally to be conveyed to external audiences in order to gain supporters of the movement. It is important that the information the organization is giving to the public is always reliable before making it available. This will ultimately strengthen the ties with the publics and gain followers and supporters.

The issue of identity and activist identity formation has also been a focus in public relations literature. In order to generate an identity for a specific activist movement, the concept of forming an identity is important as to what the movement will communicate externally. Forming an identity is important when aiming to target audiences. It is important that “the identities activist organizations choose to exhibit should be compatible with their organizational

missions and values” (Jiang & Ni, 2009, p. 290). The concept of forming an identity is connected with two-way communication as it is guaranteed that the activist group will have to interact with different audiences, members, and individuals who are involved with the movement. To create understanding about the movement, there is a link between the internal and external publics of the organization, as the overall goal of the movement needs to be relayed to the public and stakeholders of the organization. Derina R. Holtzhausen discussed two-way communication both internally and externally in her research as well; discussing how internal communication is of great importance to creating successful two-way information flow. Having organizational goals and a perceived identity influences public relations practices (Jiang & Ni, 2009, p.292). This is important when discussing activist movements and Idle No More, for the organization itself has to communicate both internally and externally and use appropriate public relations tactics in order to get their point across and do what it is they are aiming to achieve with their movement.

The Idle No More movement can be analyzed through numerous public relations and communications concepts and theories. Both economic and social inequalities are the main issues faced with this movement, with an overall goal of promoting environmental protection and indigenous sovereignty. The movement has been successfully utilizing communication and activist public relations strategies in order to reach numerous publics and gain national exposure and recognition. On the part of the activists involved, communication, planning, and organization is important to create and execute a strategic campaign strategy that will ultimately gain recognition of what they are protesting and spark interest for anyone who cares to notice. Awareness, outreach, leadership, movement identity, teamwork, internal and external communication and relationships are all important aspects of an activist movement and public relations tactics can greatly help analyze and explain such movements.

Works Cited

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