

Idle No More, But Successful in the Future?

A Look at the Idle No More Movement According to the RACE Model

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Introduction

Idle No More is a grassroots public campaign dedicated to maintaining a responsible, just and ethical stance on the treatment of the environment, as the movement perceives the corporations and governments as infringing on and destroying natural resources in need of protection. That said, while environmental concerns are an aspect of the campaign, the Idle No More movement is about something much more. As Americans, we are a nation founded on the idea that all men are created equal, and that freedom from tyranny and oppression is a God given right. Idle No More is a fight and defense of sovereignty, much like the sovereignty our forefathers sought. Idle No More fights for the rights of the indigenous peoples of North America, as well as their tribal lands and cultural rights to it.

Currently, according to the website, the nation of Canada is the main culprit, as its million dollar industries in logging, mining and other resource-based production is currently being run by corporations that keep the government in their pocket while raping the earth of its resources. In addition, they are causing continuing destruction to lands of tribal and cultural significance to the native people of the nation and area. Its website cites its mission statement as follows, "Idle No More calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honor Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water" (IdleNoMore.com). In essence, this means that they are hoping to alert and inform people to join a "peaceful revolution" in order to defend the environment, and protect the land that belongs to all of us (with emphasis on indigenous peoples or natives) from exploitation via big business. My research question would be to directly ask how Idle No More has adhered to the RACE model, and where/how it has proven effective.

Research

To begin, I will observe Idle No More in relation to the RACE model. The RACE model, as we know, refers to “Research, Action, Communication and Evaluation”. Through their time as an organization, Idle No More has seemed to do extensive research in the government regulations they are fighting against, as well as several of the companies involved in using the indigenous lands for exploitation. Within their own website, they cite several specific cases in legislation that they wish to present, enforcing the idea that they completed the necessary research to move forward with legislative demands. For example, “Repeal provisions of Bill C-45 (including changes to the Indian Act and Navigable Waters Act, which infringe on environmental protections, Aboriginal and Treaty rights) and abandon all pending legislation which does the same.” (Idlenomore.ca) The demand itself indicates research and collective agreement on how to properly fix the situation to meet the group’s organizational goals.

Next, we come to the action model. Action would be direct moves made in the attempt to make a proactive change for the organizations ideals. This could be anything from holding rallies, to organizing boycotts, to the creation of literature and maintaining a consistent presence in the legislature. As recently as October 7th of this year, Idle No More has continued to campaign and spread its message through a rally held in Winnipeg Canada, as well as several other cities throughout the nation. “The Idle No More movement planned protests in as many as 40 locations across Canada on Monday, with more scheduled to be held in other countries. Today was chosen because it is 250th anniversary of the day King George III signed the Royal Proclamation, outlining a framework around aboriginal community and protected lands in what would become Canada.” (Couttes, 2013) This is an example of the Action aspect.

Next, we come to what may be one of the most important aspects of Public Relations for a grassroots campaign such as Idle No More. Communication, as they say, is key. Like many of

the current movements and social revolutions, the campaign relies heavily on a presence in social media, through Facebook, Twitter and many other social networking sites. In the modern world, we see a drastic increase in the success of anything that utilizes social media to increase advertisement or awareness. “Right now, social media advertising only represents about 1-10% of advertising budgets for most advertisers. However, with the explosion of mobile devices both Facebook and Twitter have at least 50% of their users accessing the sites via mobile device. Mobile ads already account for 23% of Facebook’s ad revenue, and Twitter reported that mobile ad revenue regularly beats its desktop ad revenue. As the proliferation of mobile devices continues, social media is well-positioned to grab an increased share of the mobile advertising market.” (Chief, WovenText) So, for an organization that remains grassroots and based on public support, social media offers a rapidly growing base for individuals to market for a relatively cheap price, if at all basically all day long through smart phone technology. “Major social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, and increasingly Tumblr, have a massive user base and deep databases. As of July 2012, Americans were spending an average of 12 hours per month on social media, which makes them a captive audience. 18-24 year olds spend an average of 20 hours per week on social media platforms.” (Chief, WovenText) The opportunity to market a cause to the target audience for that cheap proves that Idle No More is intelligently communicating within their means.

In addition to the Race Model, the Idle No More campaign can be analyzed extensively for its usage of social media and general media to promote or demonize the individuals involved. In main-stream Canadian media and news, several instances of violence and destruction were displayed when riots broke out at a rally between protesters and the Royal Canadian mounted police. “Protesters were arrested for firearms violations, threats, intimidation and mischief”

(Winter, 2013) In turn, protesters responded by saying that there had been excessive use of force by the police throughout the event, one protester explaining that “it got wild and they tackled us all down, my 67 year old mother was among those subdued.” (Winters, 2013) The media portrayed the event as a riot, which obviously causes some unfortunate collateral damage for a campaign calling for peaceful protest. However, in addition several videos on Youtube as well as countless Twitter and Facebook posts cited examples of excessive police force and exaggerated rates of violence. Being a grass-roots movement as well as relatively young, Idle No More is receiving a lot of support from college aged kids, who will continue to see support and information regarding the organization on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Tumblr. In turn, this creates a greater interest, as individuals post, share and create support by sharing that information with like-minded, sympathetic or motivated friends.

Finally we come to the evaluation. Honestly I will need to see more action from the organization in relation to some of the PR successes and failures, and how they were responded to by the movement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would say that the organization has proved successful in falling into the RACE model. They have adequately addressed most of the aspects, through being well read on what they are fighting, organizing and operating on a consistent basis as to remain a presence politically, maintaining a presence in social media and literature for the cause, and continuing to do so based on past successes. The public relations campaign has proven to work well, and I believe that Idle No More will continue to garner more and more acknowledgement and

notoriety within the nation of Canada and beyond, as the organization has already continued to grow to other nations like the United States.

Sources

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