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December 3, 2022
COM3546
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Written Assignment II

Institutionalization, critical to ensuring an organizations longevity, enables a lasting impression and relationship between the organization and the public. Public relations initiatives, as part of strategic communication, are often linked to corporations trying to remain in a positive light with the public, or a government official saving face. However, one of the most successful instances of public relations locally was neither initiated by a corporation nor a public official, but rather an educational institution. This educational institution was Appalachian State University when they hosted ESPN's College Game Day production. Appalachian capitalized on this opportunity which allowed for the university to showcase its values and ideals strategically through segments on the show dedicated to the school. This is just but one example of public relations which resulted in increased interest from the public.

In Written Assignment 1, strategic communication is defined as “the planning, execution, and management of deliberate actions or messages which shape an organization’s motives and how they are perceived by the public” (Miele, 2022, p. 1). Institutionalization, when applied to organizations with large public relation initiatives, can be viewed as beneficial to their strategic communication model because it incorporates “the process of infusing ‘rule-like’ values and procedures into an organization and sustaining them over time, regardless of circumstances or of the individual personalities and philosophies of the entity’s main leaders” (Zerfass et al., 2014, p. 353). By integrating strong values, achievable goals, and clear missions into their culture, organizations can remain steadfast in these ideas which ground them in their purpose, leading to a strong and enduring relationship between the organization and the public. Many state this rigidity and structure limit adaptability and flexibility, hindering progress in this rapidly changing world. Advocates, though, say that “enduring fundamentals of institutionalization offer

the very stability that organizations need to persist despite the inevitable changes and adaptations they must deal with” (Zerfass et al., 2014, p. 353). Clear goals, objectives, and values allow for an organization to thrive and grow because they provide a solid foundation which helps guide and make decisions. Considering this, “institutionalization is a form of and could be considered subordinate to strategic communication” (Zerfass et al., 2014, p. 354).

Public relation initiatives are abundant, especially in today’s interconnected world. If you have been on social media this past week, you are likely to have seen friend’s “Spotify Wrapped” results, which is a marketing and public relations strategy aimed at uniting users over their common music interests and serves as free advertising right before the holiday season. Under the guise of commonality and sharing music with friends, whether it be new or familiar to us, results in free marketing for the organization. By tugging on the desire to relate to one another, Spotify easily accomplishes what many organizations and companies pay for- a symbiotic relationship with its consumers. Another public relations campaign familiar to many is the Ikea #StayHome initiative, in which they implored citizens to stay home and social distance during the COVID-19 pandemic. One obvious aspect of this initiative is “the lack of a direct sales message which increase the authenticity for this campaign which proves Ikea is more than just a company selling products, but it also genuinely cares about its customers well-being during this critical time” (Le, 2022). These types of campaigns ingratiate companies with the public, as citizens do not feel like they are being sold to or taken advantage of during times of crisis. Instead, values are what inspires the public to continually patronize an organization or company.

One of the most successful public relations events for Appalachian State University occurred recently by hosting of ESPN’s College Game Day. ESPN, colloquially known as “The

Worldwide Leader in Sports”, draws around 76 million viewers a year (Hayes, 2021) and is a great tool for recruiting, relations, and advertising. College Game Day airs every Saturday beginning at nine in the morning and ending at noon, prior to kickoff. Currently, the show travels to a selected campus to host the “Game of the Week”, in which the three-hour program speaks of not only the football program, but the university culture, academics, and surrounding community in which the host school resides. ESPN and College Game Day encapsulated Appalachian’s five Values flawlessly in their programming: Faculty excellence in teaching and all forms of scholarship, Diversity, equity and inclusion, Sustainability and resilience, Public service and engagement with community, and Global perspective (ASU, n.d.).

In a segment highlighting the culture in Boone, ESPN’s Marty Smith asks student Krystal Carter to describe the soul of Appalachian State to which she responds, “It’s rich and vibrant” (Spence, 2022, 01:34:36). Marty Smith asks another student the same question, and the student says, “It’s beautiful, we’ve got great diversity up here, a ton of great people” (Spence, 2022, 01:35:10). The values of diversity, equity, and inclusion is evident across Appalachian State. While implemented by leadership, these values are embodied by the faculty, staff, and students. One of the biggest highlights on College Game Day at Appalachian State was the poster contest, in which students were asked to design a witty and creative poster and the winner would be awarded free tuition for a year. When the winner was announced out of the three finalists, the host Jess Sims revealed that “Thanks to Chancellor Everts and the great App State, all three of you are getting free tuition for the full year...this is that App State love” (Spence, 2022, 01:43:20). Chancellor Everts epitomizes the idea that “It is up to leadership not only to create but to preserve values” (Zerfass et al., 2014, p. 355) Appalachian state did not stop at giving three students a free education for a year, they also handed out numerous gift cards to fans

within the community to be used at the campus bookstore for team gear and paraphernalia. The generosity from Appalachian State towards its students and the surrounding community of Boone highlights their dedication to public service and engagement with the community. Finally, to demonstrate the University's commitment to sustainability and resilience, the Appalachian State Team Sunergy solar car was proudly displayed throughout the entire program.

By rooting itself in steadfast values, Appalachian State has positioned itself as an educational leader in the southeast and proves that “organizations can be adaptive if they are institutionalized around values rather than technical processes” (Zerfass 356). Chancellor Everts announced recently that the College Game Day broadcast has had an appreciable impact on the campus and surrounding community and that the coverage “was the equivalent of more than \$360 million in advertising spending” (Griffin and Reed, 2022). The largest impact was not only felt in advertising, but admissions as well. Chancellor Everts “also said that App State had seen a 25% increase in applications since being featured on the show” (Griffin and Reed, 2022), proving that “the most effective strategic communication changes behaviors” (Zerfass et al., 2014, p. 354).

It is evident that any organization founded and operated on clearly defined values is poised to withstand time and crises while also cultivating positive relationships with the public. While building these bridges between the public and organization, leaders must always consider that “purposeful influence is the fundamental goal of communication by organizations” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 10), as evident in Appalachian State University's increase in applications from their appearance on College Game Day. Their mission to portray Appalachian State University as an institution of education, inclusion, diversity, and charity, was well perceived by the public and inspired many to apply to the school.

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