

Communications is Everywhere

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There is an opportunity for communications at every Syracuse University sporting event. Why do students attend, what makes them stay, and what do they gain from the experience? Being a silent observer of a sports match is simply not enough. So what keeps the audience engaged and willing to return? A short answer is the spirit groups such as the cheer team, dance team, and marching band. But what makes these groups so compelling? One contributing factor is their ability to communicate during the event. On Friday April 1, 2022, the ACC network hosted a televised off-season football game in the Carrier Dome. One reason the network opted to host this live event at Syracuse specifically was because they wanted these spirit groups present. The groups have the unique ability to communicate and spread school spirit and unity to the students present. Without the presence of the spirit groups at these sporting events, the games would not be as entertaining for the spectators (both virtual and in-person). The attendees rely on the spirit groups to maintain their pep, especially at times when the game is not overly entertaining. Thus, there is a huge opportunity for communications at these events as they have a large audience that craves constant entertainment and multiple groups prepared to communicate school spirit through various entertaining mediums. However, the groups could do more to communicate school spirit outside of the Dome or to virtual attendees by utilizing social media to reach their audiences on different platforms.

The spirit teams do a good job communicating spirit when they are at the games. The directors of each team get headsets with microphones on them to communicate with the people that run the schedule of the game. The directors are told when each group is allowed to perform, and the exact second that they have to cut off their performance. This is especially crucial for the marching band to keep in mind, as the home team can be penalized if the band plays while there is an active play on the field. The band even goes as far as tailoring their material to the diverse

audience. The band members have music books with around 100 different songs that they are all ready to play at any moment. The band director specifically selects music that will appeal to the student section, such as Industry Baby or Bad Guy, music that will appeal to the alumni or parents in the crowd, such as Sweet Caroline or Gimme Some Lovin', and music that will energize the crowd in general, such as Alive and Amplified or All I Do Is Win. Additionally, the cheer team is always prepared to start a "Let's Go Orange" chant to get the crowd, specifically the student section, energized. The cheer and dance teams also give out free shirts at every game to increase school spirit through merchandise and crowd interactions.

In addition, the Dome allows advertisers opportunities to communicate during the game. While commercials run for folks watching at home, the live viewers get to see ads as well that may promote game-specific hashtags or a company's products. If an advertiser wishes, they can also promote their brand on the field. During a few commercial breaks companies can sponsor fun events on the field while the football teams rest or huddle such as a children's race across the field that occurred on April 1. This increases interactions with fans directly and increases spirit as they cheer for who they think will win. Finally, the Dome also has cameramen that roam the crowd, filming a few lucky viewers during dance breaks. This again increases crowd interaction and spirit as more audience members will be willing to show their spirit when they realize they have a chance to get on the big screen by doing so.

While communicating school spirit to the crowd during games is extremely important for the spirit groups, they could extend their communication beyond the Dome environment to communicate school spirit to their audiences through social media. Syracuse's cheer team's Instagram posts a picture every time a game occurs. Sometimes the post will be stating that there is a game later in the day, but most often the picture and caption are posted after the game is

over. These posts have a connotation of “we were there” rather than communicating a sense of school spirit such as “The game was great! Were you there?” or “Orange unite! See you all soon at the game!” The dance team’s Instagram does a better job of promoting upcoming games, but still mostly focuses on highlighting its members rather than promoting school spirit. Finally, the marching band does a good job of posting spirited captions such as “Did you miss us? We sure missed you!” or “Yes! The sweet sounds of Citrus are back in the DOME!” but lacks helpful information such as what game the post is for or any captions that would incite engagement and spirit specifically for the school. The Instagram is also a little hard to find as it is under @suathleticbands rather than a more recognizable name with “marching band” in it.

I would recommend that all three groups not only promote the events they are going to be at more, but also attempt to engage more with their followers. Social media is a very easy way for groups such as these to reach their audience on a one-to-one level, and they are all missing an opportunity to communicate spirit to their audiences outside of the Dome. Getting users involved by asking them what songs they’d like to hear the band play, or what they’d like to see in the next dance routine, is a great way to get audience feedback and increase their stake and voice in school spirit. The teams could even incorporate their social medias into the sporting events.

Tweets are featured on the big screen in the Dome, so it would be easy for the teams to post a picture of some of their members at the game and use the required hashtags to get on the screen. Then they and their social media accounts would be promoted to the audience during the games. This would not only increase their followers during the games, but it could also lead to online discussions and engagement in real-time. The crowd could request songs and routines in real-time which would give them a voice in the school spirit being communicated and even turn the spirited communication into a two-way conversation.

Communication is important because it contributes to the development of a person and how they connect with others. Research conducted by Sherwyn P. Morreale, Michael M. Osborn and Judy C. Pearson proved how communication is an important skill in every stage of a person's life. Starting in childhood, "oral communication competence can contribute to individuals' social adjustment and participation in satisfying interpersonal relationships. Youngsters with poor communication skills are sometimes viewed as less attractive by their peers and enjoy fewer friendships" (Morreale et. al. 2016, 2). This identifies how communication plays an important factor at a very early stage in our lives. If one is unable to communicate well, they may be treated as an outsider which will affect their ability to communicate later on in their life and potentially even affect their future success. Communication's importance continues on through adulthood as "People entering the workforce are assisted by communication skills and employers endorse communication skills as basic to most jobs. Communicative skill is essential in multiple professional careers... [and] Upward mobility is more probable as communication skills increase" (Morreale et. al. 2016, 12). Thus, if one does not learn how to properly communicate, there is a good chance that they will have a harder time achieving success than their peers that can communicate effectively. Therefore, it is crucial that everyone learns how to communicate effectively from a young age because communications plays such an important role in our everyday lives from our developing years through our professional lives.

Communications is especially important for brands as it creates bonds between consumers and bonds between the business and its consumers. In *Social Media Strategy Marketing, Advertising, and Public Relations in the Consumer Revolution* by Keith A. Quesenberry, the concept of the power of the consumer is discussed. Quesenberry writes that, "the power of the consumer voice has grown quickly through social media" and that "the spread

of consumer influence is shifting power from institutions to individuals” (Quesenberry 2021, 38). The use of word of mouth has always been important for the process of a business gaining new customers as people recommend brands and products they like to people that they know. But the emergence of social media has only made these interactions easier. Now anyone can post online about a brand or product they like and influence many others to test it out for themselves. Thus, the concept of communications, especially online, is crucial for businesses to consider. If planned carefully, many businesses could improve their sales and image within the public’s eye by enhancing conversations about their brand online and improving their communication techniques with their potential customers.

The importance of communications is also present in events such as the Dome events discussed previously. A study conducted by Husni Kharouf, Rui Biscaia, Alexeis Garcia-Persz, and Ellie Hickman analyzed the role of online communications during “mega events” such as the Olympics. The results of this study can be related to the Dome events, and supports the argument for online communications being crucial during them. The researchers explained how the mega events “often promot[ed] interactivity and real-time experiences to engage consumers with the event and other consumers (Filo et al., 2015, Yoshida et al., 2018)” (Kharouf et. al. 2020, 736). This can be related to the Syracuse sporting events in the dome that advertise hashtags for viewers to use to participate in online discussions in real-time. The more online discussions of the event are promoted, the higher the chance viewers begin to partake in the discussions. The researchers described how the promotion of interactivity among consumers that have a shared interest in the event will be willing to discuss with each other online, and that these discussions “highlight the need for organizers of mega events to consider improving the online event experiences of consumers through improved communication strategies” (Kharouf et. al. 2020,

742). The promotion of consumer discussions during these events is so crucial because the discussions improve the consumers' perception of the brands involved as it contributes to a word-of-mouth style of communications. The more people that see their friends discussing the event, the more the event and all of the organizations involved will get brand awareness. The researchers noted this, stating, "Previous studies have found that effective communications, online content engagement and consumer interactions are important aspects when examining consumer online experiences and the continued success of organizations (e.g.; Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015; Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011; Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012). In turn, the delivery of a good online experience has been suggested to play a central role on consumers' future online behavioral intentions towards organizations (Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Klaus, 2013)" (Kharouf et. al. 2020, 736). Thus, the more that the spirit groups interact with Dome event viewers online in real-time, the more the image of the groups and the engagement on their posts and in-person events will improve as consumers will become more familiar with the teams and their image and want to consume more of their content. Overall, this proves how important communications is in the context of the Dome events and in general for businesses that would like to improve their online engagements, overall image, and success of the business by sponsoring or participating in events.

The off-season football game in the Dome on April 1 was a strong example of communications existing in a field that is not normally associated with communications. Although the main draw to the event was the entertainment of a football game, the thing that keeps the audience at the event and engaged with it is the spirit teams that are communicating with the audience throughout the game, whether they realize it or not. While the spirit teams do do their fair share of communicating spirit to the audience present during the games, the teams

could do a better job of communicating with the audiences viewing the game virtually. This could be achieved through a focus of communication through their social media accounts before, during, and after the games. The teams could even utilize other communication opportunities that occur during the game such as the advertising events on the big screen and on the field during breaks. Keith A. Quesenberry's textbook on social media strategies and the communications studies conducted by Sherwyn P. Morreale, Michael M. Osborn and Judy C. Pearson and Husni Kharouf, Rui Biscaia, Alexeis Garcia-Persz, and Ellie Hickman prove how important communication is for individuals as well as brands and consumers, especially during big events such as sporting events in the Dome. Thus, if the spirit teams were to capitalize on online communications with their audiences, they would greatly increase their brand awareness and success in communicating school spirit.

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