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An insight into humanitarian communication: The practice, thinking, and challenges of NGO professionals

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**An insight into humanitarian communication:
The practice, thinking, and challenges of NGO professionals**

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DECLARATION

I, Natasja de Jong, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICAN	International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
MSF	Doctors without Borders
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
SAIH	Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Funds
STC	Save the Children
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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ABSTRACT

Different factors, such as globalization and new information- and communication technologies, have changed the field of humanitarianism tremendously throughout the last decades (Barnett, 2005; Vestergaard, 2008). NGOs have become the leading actors in representing the global poor, sharing information about global poverty, promoting universal human rights, and raising awareness for humanitarian assistance (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Peet and Hartwick, 2009). To provide this, NGOs are dependent on financial and moral support from governments, international organizations, and private donors. This research is focused on the last group, private donors, and looks at how NGOs reach out to the Western public, inform them about poverty and development, and ask their (financial) support. Humanitarian communication is widely critiqued throughout the years, where the portrayal of poverty and development is argued to be unbalanced. There is a lack of understanding humanitarian communication from the NGOs point of view. The goal of this study has been to uncover the broader landscape of humanitarian communication by looking into the thinking, practice, and challenges of NGO professionals engaged in humanitarian communication. Drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals in Western NGOs and a content analysis of narratives, this research explores the practice of humanitarian communication. The findings show that there are different types of communication, aimed at creating a strong brand, raising awareness, and raising private donations. These different communication types are all pointed towards the ultimate purpose which is to prevent or promote a specific cause, or more generally to help people in need. In order to reach this purpose, the findings of this research show that NGOs are challenged in using their communication platforms as holistic and consistent as possible, while at the same time convincing the public to support them. This is accompanied by strategies that contribute to an unbalanced portrayal of poverty and development, but are hard to avoid. The findings of this research show that there are certain aspects NGOs can take into account in order to give a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development and still raise private donations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“I’m basically heading up a team that’s getting Africans together in this time of need for Norway. You know – helping them out. A lot of people aren’t aware of what’s going on there right now. It’s kind of just as bad as poverty if you ask me. Sunlight puts smiles on people’s faces. People don’t ignore starving people so why should we ignore cold people? Frostbite kills too.” (SAIH, 2012).

The above lyrics are derived from the music video ‘Africa for Norway’, a faux satirical campaign launched by the Norwegian Students’ and Academics’ International Assistance Fund (SAIH) in 2012. The music video shows a group of young Africans joining forces together and collecting radiators for Norway. At the same time, the video gives an impression of Norwegians struggling with the snow and ice during wintertime. The music video shows similarities to Band Aid’s video ‘Do They Know Its Christmas?’, and clearly mocks the presentation and message of the Western celebrity campaign. The pretended message of the ‘Africa for Norway’ campaign is to encourage Africans to donate their radiators to the people in Norway who are, according to the campaign, freezing to death. The actual message is to counterbalance the stereotypical and simplistic image of developing countries that is often portrayed in the Western society. SAIH wants to show that ‘where Norway is much more than people freezing’, developing countries are much more than hopeless people depending on the West to save them (Evans, 2013, p.180). According to SAIH, the campaign is not aimed at reducing ‘the importance of the hard work of NGOs’ but to create a bigger understanding of how the portrayal of poverty and development can be harmful (Evans, 2013, p.183).

SAIH is engaged in the ongoing debate about the representation of poverty and development by Western media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academia, who are leading actors in representing the global poor, sharing information about global poverty, promoting universal human rights, and raising awareness for humanitarian assistance (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Peet and Hartwick, 2009). Previous studies, focused on the representation of poverty by Western media, NGOs, and academics, provide us with a detailed overview of the content and strategies used in humanitarian communication. As a result, many studies show that the representation of poverty and development is misleading and change is needed to represent poverty and development in a more balanced way (Barnet, 2005; Clark, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010). The

portrayal of poverty and development is argued to be one-sided and often oversimplified, focused on stereotypical stories of aid recipients who are portrayed as passive and dependent on the West in rebuilding their lives (Orgad, 2013). These stories are critiqued to be misleading, harming NGOs, the people they represent, and the development of a country (Chouliaraki, 2010; Vestergaard, 2008). In accordance with the critique, oversimplifying the causes of poverty will endorse stereotypes and lead to misconceptions about long-term development, where the improvement of the country and the awareness of results are not shown (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). Based on this, it is argued that a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development is needed, where poverty and development are not only associated with stereotypes and oversimplified stories (Vestergaard, 2008).

In line with this, SAIH created the Radi-Aid Awards in 2013. Radi-Aid assigns the most harmful and the most creative charity campaign with the aim to engage people in issues about poverty and development, challenge the way NGOs communicate, and ultimately bring academic critique to a practical platform (SAIH, 2017a). The Award show received a tremendous amount of media attention from people all around the world, showing the actuality of the topic. This becomes clear once more after the 2017 Radi-Aid Award, organized by SAIH, where the campaign ‘Ed Sheeran meets a boy who lives on the streets’ by Comic Relief was selected as the most harmful campaign in relation to poverty and development. In the campaign, the famous British singer Ed Sheeran travels to Liberia to offer temporarily housing to some of the homeless children on the coast of Liberia (Comic Relief, 2017). The nomination of the Radi-Aid Awards led to a heated debate, where different viewpoints were shared. Liz Warner, CEO of Comic Relief replied to the Radi-Aid nomination by highlighting the importance of challenging organizations to be responsible and let people tell their own story: ‘There’s always a balance between the passion for raising money to support real projects changing real people’s lives and how those people are represented’ (SAIH, 2017b, para. 7). Those who critiqued the Radi-Aid selection argued that celebrity videos like the video of Comic Relief contribute to reaching a wider audience. In a news article in the New York Times, Mzezewa (2017, para.14) writes that it is wrong to critique the Comic Relief Campaign:

“I don’t know a lot of people who scroll YouTube looking for videos of civil war or famine. But I know a lot of fans of singers like Mr. Sheeran who would watch him — and probably be moved to donate money to a cause they might know little about because he says it’s worthwhile.”

Using celebrities that are known to the public is a fundraising model that is ‘tried and tested’. Videos like the one with Ed Sheeran are appeals, meaning that it is important to receive quick responses from the public (Casey, 2017; West, 2008). Considering this, the video was a success. The Comic Relief fundraising campaign, where this video of Ed Sheeran was part of, raised over 80 million pounds, and the fame of Ed Sheeran helped with this (Casey, 2017). In addition, it is argued that, even though the video is mostly focused on Ed Sheeran, it does inform the viewers about the problems that Liberia is facing.

An important question that rises is: does this mean that any method of achieving your objective is justifiable? NGOs have a charitable background, meaning there is a need to raise money. With that money, NGOs do very good things. The experience of NGOs is that certain stories work to make people understand that there is a need.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

While NGOs are pressured to give a balanced portrayal of poverty and development, there is a growing need to understand the practice of humanitarian communication. In order to achieve their objectives, NGOs rely on financial and moral support from governments, international organizations, and private donors (Karns, Mingst, and Stiles, 2015). A core objective in receiving donations from the (Western) public is being able to reach and provide them with necessary information about poverty and development issues. The strategies used to reach and inform the public are part of an ongoing public and academic debate about humanitarian communication. While this debate includes different opinions, most actors argue that change is needed and the representation of poverty and development should be more balanced (Chouliaraki, 2010; Vestergaard, 2008). If not, this might lead to misconceptions about poverty and development.

It is important to give insight into the practice of humanitarian communication from within the humanitarian sector, and not overlook the perspectives of NGO professionals, the challenges they face, the use of different communication outlets and, ultimately, look at a balanced way to

inform the public. This research aims to map out and understand the broader landscape of humanitarian communication by exploring the thinking, practice, and challenges of NGO professionals engaged in humanitarian communication. The research questions guiding this research are: (1) *How do NGO professionals practice humanitarian communication* and (2) *How can they achieve a balanced portrayal of poverty?* In order to answer the research questions, the following sub-questions will be answered:

- (1) How is content created?
- (2) What factors shape humanitarian communication?
- (3) What challenges do NGO professionals face in relation to humanitarian communication?
- (4) How do NGOs profile themselves on different communication platforms?
- (5) What are ways to move away from a stereotypical portrayal of aid recipients?

1.2 WORKING DEFINITIONS

NGO: This term is used as shorthand for Western humanitarian NGOs working with both (short-term) emergency-focused aid and (long-term) international development, covering all types of Western NGOs working with humanitarian aid.

NGO professionals related to humanitarian communication: This term refers to people responsible for the communication, marketing, fundraising, media, and advocacy departments, engaged in the planning, designing, and production of the communication towards the Western public.

Public: This term refers to the specific target group of the NGO, the Western public, especially those who are not a donor.

Aid recipient: There are different terms in relation to the people who are subject of humanitarian communication, such as beneficiaries and sufferers. It is argued that both these terms emphasize the ‘need’ of aid. This research therefore refers to ‘aid recipients’, which is argued to be more neutral, as shorthand for the people that receive aid based on donations from the Western public.

Developing countries: Also here, different terms can be used, such as ‘the Global South’ or ‘post-colonial countries’. In relation to development studies, the general term is ‘developing countries’ which is why this term is used throughout this research.

1.3 RESEARCH OUTLINE

From here, this research will be structured as following. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical background for this research. Following, Chapter 3 present the methods used in this research. Chapter 4 gives a detailed overview of the results and discussion. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the conclusion of this research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is focused on the three main concepts that are relevant for this research. It starts by explaining the meaning of poverty in relation to the research. Further, the understanding of NGOs is discussed. Lastly, it gives an overview of the different strategies used in humanitarian communication and the changes throughout the years.

2.1 POVERTY

There may be as many poor and as many perceptions of poverty as there are human beings. The fantastic variety of cases entitling a person to be called poor in different cultures and languages is such that, all in all, everything and everyone under the sun could be labelled as poor, in one way or another. (Rahnema, 2010, p.174)

The first concept relevant for this thesis is poverty. In order to understand the way poverty has been represented over the past years and how this effects both the ‘poor’ and NGOs, it is important to define poverty. As quoted above, there are many different meanings of poverty, all depending on the approach and the contextual background. With a diversity of definitions, varied from a social, economic, and political perspective, it is difficult to understand the actual meaning of poverty. It is therefore, first and foremost, important to give a framework of the meaning, different theories, and the context in which poverty is explained.

2.1.1 A history of poverty

Poverty has a very old history and so has the charity of the poor. Before the 20th century, ‘most people were born, lived and died in poverty’ (Catz, 1990, p.11). Poverty was accepted as a fact of life and distinguished into two groups: the deserving and undeserving poor (Cats, 1990; O’Conner, 2001). The undeserving poor were argued to be those who were poor due to their own fault such as personal problems or laziness and choose to live off aid given to them. The deserving poor were argued to be those who were poor due to no fault of their own but because of sickness, age or other disabilities. This distinction is the basis for many discussions around poverty, because it frames ‘who should – and, the more difficult question, who should not – receive help’ (Catz, 1990, p.9).

Important in relation to this research is that this was the beginning of the classifications of the poor (Cats, 1990). The discussion around the meaning of poverty assured that one group of poor people was isolated from the rest, which resulted in this group being stigmatized. Poor people received a powerful label. This label continued throughout the 20th and 21st century, where absolute poverty mostly existed under the deserving poor, who were now defined based on race and geography (O’Conner, 2001). This led to an increased isolation of black people from white people and black communities from white communities. The life of the poor was passed down from generation to generation, where poor people were stuck in the *poverty trap*, unable to lift themselves out of poverty without help from outsiders (Du Toit, 2009). The poor were now ‘those who, for reasons beyond their control, cannot help themselves’, where ‘only the intervention of sympathetic elites could begin to lift poor people out of their degraded and helpless condition’ (Catz, 1990, p.20).

2.1.2 Poverty defined

The most common definition of poverty is that of Webster (1993, p.1778), that defines poverty as ‘the lack or relative lack of money or material possessions’. This is, however, a very broad definition and could, as quoted by Rahnama (2010) in the beginning of this chapter, entitle everything and everyone. Sen (1981, p.434) describes poverty in the most traditional way, looking at the ‘sharp decline in food availability’. This decline is about ‘people not *having* enough food, not about there not *being* enough food’, meaning there can be many different reasons for the decline in food availability (p.434).

Where poverty was looked at in relation to a nation’s income per capita in the 1950s and 60s, poverty is nowadays much more complex than only looking at a person’s lack of income and should be seen in relation to ‘the social pressures, expectations, and conventions within which each individual or household lives’ (Sachs, 1990; Townsend, 1962, p.219). According to Du Toit (2009, p.229), in order to understand poverty it is important to understand how:

All the facets of their existence and experience come together in a complex and always historically situated way to produce a state of lack, powerlessness, suffering, or need which can then (always in a particular context, always within the framework of meanings of a particular political or moral discourse, and always by particular people with their agendas and interests) be called poverty.

Important to take into account when looking at poverty is the well-being of a person and the social, economic, and psychological circumstances (Sumner and Tribe, 2008). Poverty is not just about production, but about ‘the social consequences of production’ (Peet and Hartwick, 2009, p.2).

2.1.3 The meaning of poverty in relation to development

In line with this research, it is important to link poverty to development, as these concepts are often intertwined. Just like poverty, the meaning of development varies largely and the many different definitions of development make understanding the meaning complicated (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). A traditional and accepted way to explain development includes a certain ‘change’ in the life of people (Sumner, 2006; Cowen and Shenton, 1996). A definition that covers this explanation is that of Kothari (2005, p.4), who defines development as ‘the concern with processes of change in so called third world or developing countries and more recently transitional economies’. The idea of this theory is that development is mainly interested in the practice of reducing poverty in the ‘Global South’ or ‘post-colonial countries’ (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Reducing poverty in relation to development is often understood as projecting ‘the Western model of society onto the rest of the world’ and is in development studies referred to as the modernization theory (Sachs, 1990, p.42; Sumner, 2006).

In relation to this, the most powerful idea of poverty is that poverty is caused by internal problems that need to be solved by external sources (Sachs, 1990; Servaes, 2008). The modernization theory is an often discussed topic and the opinions on whether or not this is still the case in the development field differ. Critics believe that development should not be focused on the lacks of a society but on its potential (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). Instead of looking at the ‘Third World’ as diverse and exceptional societies, the modernization theory focusses on developing countries as ‘placed on a single progressive track, more or less advanced according to

the criteria and direction of the hegemonic nations' (Sachs, 1990, p.42). According to most, the modernization theory is still very much alive in today's meaning of development and to move away from the westernization of the world, the way development is understood should be reshaped (Pieterse, 1995; Sumner, 2006).

2.1.4 The 'continent of poverty'

Poverty is, as discussed, distinguished into the deserving and undeserving poor, where the deserving poor, those living in poverty with no fault of their own, are defined based on race and geography (O'Conner, 2001). Numerous studies have shown that the deserving poor are nowadays often associated with Africa, which is argued to be the 'continent of poverty' (Aina, 2014, p.26). In 2012, Oxfam (2012) investigated how the British public looks at Africa. The study showed that 62% of the participants link Africa to either poverty or famine. This Oxfam research is one of many that show that the Westers public looks at Africa as 'a country', not a continent with many different cultures, histories, and economical situations (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007, p.17). Most African countries are actually economically progressing in a positive direction: out of the ten countries with the biggest economic growth between 2000 and 2010, six countries were African (Aina, 2014; Evans, 2013). Still, it is important to emphasize that there are countries in the African continent that experience poverty, corruption, famine, civil war, and instability. These are very real issues in several regions in African countries. The point is, however, that Africa is often generalized, leaving out the context of a continent with fifty-four countries and diverse cultures and languages, universities, modern cities, and communication facilities (Aina, 2014; Evans, 2013). The representation of Africa as poor and dependent on aid is not necessarily a lie, but the picture that is shared is that the continent faces problems from Yemen to Nigeria, which is half the continent of Africa. This is often the case, where the diversity of the countries, its cultures, and histories are not recognized.

In order to understand the representation of Africa, it is important to look at its historical context (Pieterse, 1995). Africa has long been an isolated continent, dominated by the West in relation to slavery and colonialism. Africa and her history have long been known through the construction of power structures, which was based on the distinction between Africa and the Western world,

showing the central role of the West. As Roe (1999, p.2) famously said: ‘everything works... except in Africa’. Africa is often seen as the hopeless continent, the heart of darkness, where ‘things only get worse’ (Roe, 1999, p.5). In relation to development, it is believed that Africa is unable to be self-sufficient and is dependent on Western aid in rebuilding the lives of the people. This is in line with the modernization theory, as discussed earlier, where internal problems are to be solved by external sources.

It is important to note that this idea of Africa is ‘very much a creation of outsiders’ (Roe, 1999, p.8). Many of these ‘outsiders’ have the image of Africa as a single country, where ‘nationals from various African countries are simply *Africans*’ (Aina, 2014, p.27). In relation to this, the theory of orientalism is important. Said (1978, p.10) introduced the concept of orientalism as ‘a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the orient’ and (most of the time) the ‘occident’. The occident is the West, pictured as civilized, versatile and superior, while the orient is the *other*, who is not *us*, pictured as simplistic and passive. According to critics, the idea of orientalism is very alive in today’s representation of the poor in relation to development (Joye, 2015; Orgad, 2013). It is therefore that, according to Joye (2015, p.2), we live in a ‘Eurocentric and parochialistic’ society, focused on the Western vision of the world.

This inward directed look, centralizing the West, is argued to be seen in the representation of development and poverty of Western media, NGOs, and academics. The next part of this chapter gives insight into the relation between NGOs and Western media in relation to poverty and development.

2.2 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

NGO appeals today rely on strategies of textual playfulness that create a distance from Western lifestyles of (relative) privilege and urge us to reflect on global poverty not through moral argumentation but through the affective estrangement that these forms of distance enable. (Chouliaraki, 2011, p.365)

Charity in itself has existed for as long as humanity (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). According to studies, the concept of humanitarianism became widely used in the post-war era of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s (Sumner, 2006; Macrae, 2000). After the cold war, NGOs

became the number one actors in representing the ‘voice of the people’ and were seen as specialists in promoting humanitarian support (Reimann, 2006). NGOs have developed themselves in the key sources in ‘achieving a common purpose, often oriented beyond themselves or to the public good and raising awareness of and helping to frame issues’ (Karns et al, 2015, p.16). They can be defined as ‘self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared towards improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people’ (Vakil, 1997, p.2060). There are nowadays more than 8500 humanitarian NGOs that operate at local, national and international level and are dependent on financial and moral support from different stakeholders, such as governments, international organizations, and private donors (Karns et al, 2015). In addition, they rely on states for ‘both material and political access without which few organizations could achieve their goals or survive very long’ (Reimann, 2006, p.63). The work of NGOs includes the delivery of emergency and short-term aid and the assistant in long-term development, but also raising awareness for humanitarian development.

2.2.1 Humanitarianism transformed

Globalization and new information- and communication technologies have changed the field where NGOs operate. According to McLuhan (1964), we live in a *global village*: a world without time and space barriers where everybody can interconnect with one another. Because of this, economic inequalities, wars, disasters, and conflicts have become more global (Lim, Barnett, and Kim, 2008). Where it was once impossible to understand the suffering of the poor, the global village makes it possible to witness war, famine and humanitarian crises from a distance (Vestergaard, 2008). Local disasters and conflicts are no longer a nation’s problem; globalization makes them international issues (Macrae, 2000). With this, international aid and humanitarian work became more and more important.

With more eyes on international aid, the environment of NGOs, its purpose, and scope have changed a great deal after the 1990s. Its direction and aspiration changed from being isolated from political issues to being involved into world politics (Barnett, 2005; Reimann, 2006). Humanitarianism used to be focused on impartial relief and natural disasters, but expanded to human rights and long term development (Macrae, 2000). Where humanitarianism barely existed

as a field until the 1990s, the amount of organizations working with poverty and development increased enormously which changed them into professional institutions. Due to the growth of humanitarianism, the field where NGOs operate became ‘an immensely competitive field and a multi-billion dollar business’, with hundreds of organizations working in order to promote global humanitarianism (Vestergaard, 2013a, p.444). Barnett (2005, p.723) gives the example of Doctors without Borders, who ‘grew from a two-room office in the 1970s into an international network of 19 semi-independent branches, with a combined annual budget of \$500 million, running programs in over 70 countries, with 2000 international and 15000 national staff’. There are nowadays NGOs for all kind of purposes, who have grown into being the leading actors in the promotion of universal human rights as well as important operators in the global society (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). Exactly this change, the increase of different organizations with different missions and visions, has created an institutionalization and commercialization of the humanitarian field (Barnett, 2005). One of the effects of these changes was the increased attention to branding and communication strategies, with the aim to reach the right stakeholders.

As explained, NGOs need financial and moral support from different stakeholders, such as governments, international organizations, and private donors, in order to do their work. In line with this research, the support from private donors is central. From here, the chapter will therefore focus on the effort to reach private donors. In relation to this, it is important to explain the different factors relevant in reaching this group.

2.2.2 Humanitarianism and the rules of the media

In order to reach private donors, from now on referred to as the public, NGOs are heavily dependent on the media in creating awareness about humanitarian issues and promoting their cause (Hojjer, 2004). Media play a very important role in forming the public understanding of social issues and events (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017). Lim et al (2008, p.118) argue that news coverage is significantly connected to foreign assistance and may ‘promote or hinder international aid action’. In order to reach the public, it is argued that NGOs have adapted their communication strategies to media logic. Hjarvard (2008, p.113) defines media logic as ‘the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the

media and their logic'. Media logic is thus the practice to reach the public's attention by using the rules of the media, by creating content that is focused on what the media is looking for, 'in an as simple and 'easy-to-use' way as possible' (Cottle and Nolan, 2007, p.867).

In order to get more insight into the communication strategies of NGOs, it is important to discuss the factors that influence news selection. One important factor is the news worthiness of the story (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007). Stories that are considered newsworthy are those concerning the power elite, celebrities, and relevance to the (Western) audience (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). Or as Ginneken (1998, p.24) argues: '10.000 deaths on another continent equal 1000 in another country equal 100 deaths in an outpost equal ten deaths in the center of the capital equal one celebrity'. A story is also newsworthy when it contains a surprising element or when a story is 'breaking news'. Stories that have been reported before, such as chronic problems or ongoing wars, are not considered as newsworthy. In addition, there is only 'space' for one crisis at the time, meaning that the most newsworthy story will be reported. A second important factor is the personalization of the story (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007). Rather than focusing on the context of the story, social processes or group dynamics, media tend to personalize the story by focusing on interesting individuals. Lastly, the factor of dramatization is important when selecting news (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007). Harcup and O'Neill (2017) argue that news need to include a surprise element with good or, especially, bad news such as death, injury, defeat, or loss. This results in only certain stories being suitable enough to be newsworthy. Emotive and dramatic imaginary as well as exciting and dramatic stories are often preferred over realistic and stable stories (Vestergaard, 2013b).

In relation to this thesis, it is important to understand the effect of media logic. According to critics, NGOs frame their communication in such a way that it follows these rules of the media, in order to create visibility and recognition (Powers, 2014). Framing in this case can be understood as (Entman, 1993, p.52):

To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

Various studies have analyzed the way NGOs frame poverty and development throughout the years, both in media and via their own communication platforms. These studies show that NGOs have used different strategies in reaching the public. The next part of this chapter illustrates these different strategies.

2.3 HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION

Humanitarianism used to seem so simple: picture an African child standing on a parched plain, a sack of food aid behind him offering the promise of life and hope. Now, the new image is more complex and fragmented. (Macrae, 2000, p.87)

The last part of this chapter illustrates the different strategies used by NGOs in reaching the public, referred to as humanitarian communication. Humanitarian communication is defined by Chouliaraki (2010, p.4) as ‘a mode of public communication ... aims at establishing a strategic emotional relationship between a Westerner and a distant sufferer with a view to propose certain dispositions to action towards a cause’. Humanitarian communication shapes the way the audience thinks about poverty and development and is often argued to be a moral education: proposing how the public should feel about and act upon poverty and development (Chouliaraki, 2010). As argued throughout this chapter, NGOs are an important source in representing issues related to poverty and development. Representation is (Hall, 1997, p.17):

The production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through languages ... which enables us to refer to either the real world of objects, people, and events or indeed to an imaginary world of fictional objects, people and events.

As Borgerson and Schroeder (2002, p.571) very well put it, ‘representations have the power to make us believe that we know something of which we have no experience’. Various studies on humanitarian communication emphasize three main strategies in the representation of poverty and development, namely (1) the pornography of poverty, (2) deliberate positivism, and (3) post-humanitarian sensibility. From here, this chapter will illustrate the different aspects of these strategies.

2.3.1 The pornography of poverty

An important starting point in this research related to humanitarian communication is the Ethiopian famine (1984-85). It was argued to be the first media hype as well as the ‘key event in the formation of geographic visualizations of the African continent’ where Western media outlets and NGOs shared shocking images of suffering and starving children (Clark, 2008, p.3). The famine received a lot of media attention, also from Western celebrities. The now famous songs ‘We Are The World’ from Michael Jackson and ‘Do They Know Its Christmas’ from Band Aid raised a lot of money and attention during the famine. Band Aid alone raised over 24 million dollars with their song. The Ethiopian famine was argued to be ‘more about the aid effort rather than the famine itself, contrasting passive Ethiopian victims with enthusiastic philanthropic deeds’ (Clark, 2008, p.145).

The coverage of the Ethiopian famine was the beginning of what was later identified as the pornography of poverty. Close-up images of starving, half-clothed, black African children with bloated bellies and flies in their eyes started to dominate humanitarian communication, as illustrated in figure 1. It was argued to be the representation of suffering in ‘its plain reality’ (Chouliaraki, 2010, p.5). According to critics, this strategy was pornographic because it ‘puts people’s bodies, their misery, their grief and their fears on display with all the details and all the indiscretion that a telescopic lens will allow’ (Vestergaard, 2013a, p.459).



Figure 1. Pornography of poverty (©East African Emergency Appeal via Pinterest, WorldPress, Oxfam via Pinterest)

Central in this strategy is the ideal victim, described as innocent people who embody a sense of pure humanity because ‘being refugees has made them into pure victims’ (Fair and Parks, 2001, p.40). The portrayal of the ideal victim is focused on the suffering of especially (nameless)

women and children. Women and children are argued to evoke sympathy, giving the Western public feelings of guilt, indignation and compassion (Hojer, 2004). In contradiction, men are often associated with violence, independency, and seen as strong, which does not symbolize sympathy. The powerful image of the starving African child became ‘the universal icon of suffering’ (Cohen, 2001, p.178). This strategy shows similarities to the factors that define media logic, where the images have the purpose to emphasize emotion. These images make the story dramatic enough to be seen as newsworthy.

This type of representation was especially popular in the 1980s-1990s and aimed at creating a shock effect (Dogra, 2007; Cohen, 2001). According to Chouliaraki (2006), the shock effect would result in a logic of complicity, giving the public a sense of moral responsibility to help the distant poor. This strategy is therefore highly efficient for short-term fundraising, being able to impact the emotions of the audience (Hoijer, 2004). Despite the effects, the pornography of poverty has received a lot of critique. This type of representation should reinforce the concept of orientalism and emphasize the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by portraying aid recipients as helpless and passive ‘bystanders of their own affairs’ (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007, p.18). The message that is shared is argued to be focused on the NGOs and donors as the ‘hero’ who can save the day by helping the poor. This points out the dependency of the aid recipients on Western donors in building up their lives (Cohen, 2001).

On the contrary, some questioned the critique and argued that if starving and weak children are the reality, it is important to show this to the public. Furthermore, as Cohen (2001, p.180) points out, ‘if people are portrayed as not asking for your help, why then should you offer this help?’ However, the critique on the pornography of poverty surpassed these questions and as a result, external agencies offered NGOs Codes of Conducts on Messages and Images with a focus on ethical considerations (Adair, 1999). These Codes of Conduct offer NGOs a ‘set of guidelines to assist organizations in their decision-making about which images and messages to choose in their communication while maintaining full respect for human dignity’ (Newsroom, 2012, para.2). By signing the Codes of Conduct, NGOs promise to commit to the guidelines and avoid images that are argued to be stereotypical. However, many NGOs have developed their own Codes of

Conduct, based on their own values and purpose. Oxfam, for example, shared their newest brand guidelines in 2011, which includes guidelines on the use of images (Oxfam, 2011, p.20):

Images of needy, vulnerable people – especially in emergency work – may generate the cash in the short-term, but they can often perpetuate the negative opinion that a poor country’s problems will never be solved. Oxfam communicators should, wherever possible, use images that are Real, Engaging, and preserve the Dignity of the people portrayed.

In general, these guidelines are focused on avoiding stories and images that can harm, stereotype, or discriminate aid recipients (Vestergaard, 2013a).

2.3.2 *Deliberate positivism*

The guidelines led to a change from negative to positive imagery called deliberate positivism, as illustrated in figure 2. This strategy in relation to humanitarian communication was especially popular in the 20th century and focused on the aid recipients as active, resilient, full of hope, and grateful for the help of the West (Chouliaraki, 2010; Orgad, 2013). As a result of the critiques after the Ethiopian famine, stories became personalized, focusing on distinct individuals with a name and personal story. Similar to the negative imagery, stories are mostly focused on the lives of children and women. Sympathy is important here, as positive imagery shows the gratitude of the aid recipient. The strategy shows similarities to the factors that define media logic, where stories are personalized by focusing on individuals rather than the context of the story.

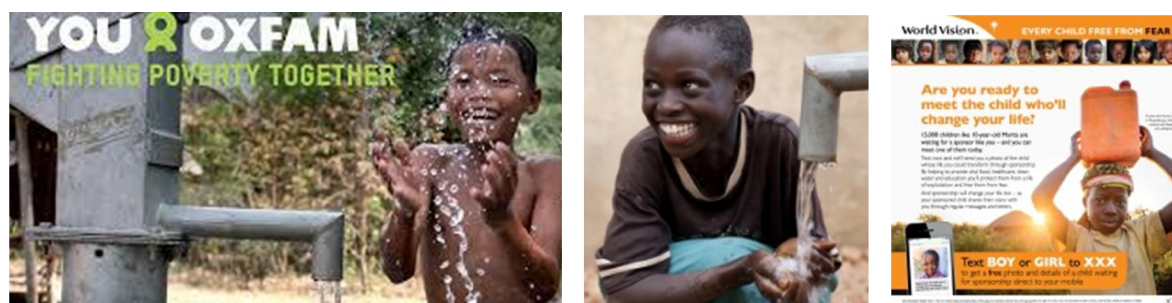


Figure 2. *Deliberate positivism* (© Oxfam, WaterAid, World Vision)

The strategy of deliberate positivism is argued to be aimed at providing the public with evidence of the positive effects of their donation (Chouliaraki, 2010). Despite the difference with the pornography of poverty, this strategy has received critique as well. It is argued that the positive

representation lacks agency of the aid recipients, and highlights the differentiation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, by emphasizing that aid recipients are happy due to the donations from the public (Chouliaraki, 2006; Orgad, 2013). According to Dogra (2007), the strategy is a lazy way to move away from the critique on the negative imagery. Even though this strategy changed from crying children to happy and smiling children, it is argued to still emphasize the ideal victim (Vestergaard, 2008). Dogra (2007, p.167) argues that it is a different version of the stereotypical representation of poverty, still ignoring the ‘messy question of power and ideology’. The circumstances of aid recipients are simplified, with a focus on the positive results of the Western aid (Chouliaraki, 2010).

2.3.3 Post-humanitarian sensibility

The strategies of negative and positive imagery were followed by post-humanitarian sensibility. This strategy was a direct result of the impact of new online communication technologies. This increased the (online) competition between NGOs and forced them to adapt their communication strategies into a business model, importing advertising and corporate logic, focused on reaching as many people through marketing strategies (Hoijer, 2004). The increased competition between NGOs played a big role in the rise of post-humanitarian sensibility. This led to the importance of creating a strong and powerful brand in order to stand out from others and reach the public (Vestergaard, 2013a).

Brand awareness is a central element in this strategy, where NGOs try to differentiate themselves by promoting their brand and be noticed by the public (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). By transforming charity into brands, donors get the chance to identify with the work of NGOs and the values they cherish (Vestergaard, 2008). A character of post-humanitarian sensibility is the focus on accountably and transparency. In line with creating a strong brand, this shows the public what the organization believes in, and what it does to accomplish this (Chouliaraki, 2011; Orgad, 2013). New communication technologies are used as a platform to differentiate themselves from other organizations working in the same field (Cottle and Nolan, 2007). An important aspect is the ‘simplification of action’, with the purpose to create an emotional attachment to the brand of

the organization rather than the aid recipients (Chouliaraki, 2010, p.14; Orgad, 2013). This led to a strategy where not the aid recipient is central, but the organization itself.

One way to create an emotional attachment to the brand of NGOs is with celebrity activism, as illustrated in figure 3. Celebrities are supposed to increase the brand awareness of NGOs (West, 2008). The public will associate the name of the organization with the celebrity who is its ambassador, leading to increased brand awareness (Chouliaraki, 2011). Those who would otherwise not be interested in the work of an NGO might develop interest because of the celebrity that has attached his or her name to the brand. Famous people in combination with dramatic stories are a ‘magnet for attention’ which leads to media attention and interests from the Western public (Chouliaraki, 2011, p.366). The strategy shows similarities to the factors that define media logic, where the celebrity is central. Due to the celebrity element in the story, the story becomes newsworthy and has relevance to the Western audience.



Figure 3. Post-humanitarian sensibility, with British singer Ed Sheeran, Irish singer Bono, and American actress Angelina Jolie. (©Comic Relief, NPR, UNHCR)

The strategy of post-humanitarian sensibility has received critique as well, where brand awareness leaves out the deeper understanding of humanitarian action as well as the voice of the aid recipient (Chouliaraki, 2011). Central in this strategy is the organization, or in the case of an ambassador, the celebrity.

In general, all these strategies are argued to not critically address the complex dimensions of the work of NGOs (Chouliaraki, 2010). NGOs are critiqued to ‘privilege the voices of the West over the voices of suffering others’ (Chouliaraki, 2011, p.365). The iconography of humanitarian communication in general has been argued to create sympathy for the people in need (Vestergaard, 2013a). In all the strategies, there is a clear distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, where the specific focus on the Western aid that can help aid recipients indicates their

dependency and emphasizes how different ‘they’ are from ‘us’. Different studies show that it is important that NGOs include the voices of the aid recipients in their humanitarian communication (Chouliaraki, 2011; Servaes, 2007).

2.3.4 The voice of the aid recipients

Moving from a strategy that ‘speaks on behalf of the poor’ towards letting aid recipients speak for themselves should overcome the critique on humanitarian communication and move away from this type of representation (Karns et al, 2015, p.275). By including the voice of the aid recipients, this should make people understand the variety of the living conditions of aid recipients and overcome stereotyped thinking (Servaes, 2008). Several NGOs have tried to include the voices of aid recipients in their communication, for example by handing out cameras to people in refugee camps or letting them post personal stories on social media. WaterAid (2017) initiated the ‘Voices from the Field’ program, where local people were recruited to collect content and create humanitarian communication. This strategy comes with critique, where studies show that there is still a lot of agency from the organization itself (Chouliaraki, 2011). Content that is created by aid recipients is eventually edited by the Western NGO itself. Despite the critique, these initiatives show that NGOs try to look beyond the traditional way of sharing information and that aid recipients can be a source of information. This should show a more balanced picture of aid recipients.

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter shows that NGOs operate in a complex field. NGOs face the dilemma of finding the right balance between on the one hand educating the public about development and on the other hand use effective fundraising tools, where they ‘will almost always prefer more attention to less attention’ (Thrall, Stecula, and Sweet, 2014, p.3). The theoretical background has shown that this preference has led to a certain narrative on poverty; a single story based on colonial power structures, often without addressing the complex and sensitive context, and focused on the ideal victim. Critiques argue that this narrative on poverty should be challenged and be replaced with a more complete and balanced picture of aid recipients. In order to do so, a better understanding of the practice of humanitarian communication is needed.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology applied in this study that was used to answer the research questions. The first section explains the research design of the in-depth semi-structured interviews. The second section explains the research design of the content analysis of narratives.

This research uses an intensive design, meaning that the sample size is small. In line with this, both the in-depth interviews and the content analysis have a qualitative approach. The aim was to get in-depth knowledge about the opinions of NGO professionals as well as the way they practice humanitarian communication. The research is therefore focused on the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Gilbert, 2008). In order to investigate this, qualitative methods seemed relevant. On top of that, the sample size is small, so a qualitative approach works well. This research used an inductive approach, rather than a deductive approach, as the theory is used to conduct the analysis and interviews and support the results (Gilbert, 2008).

3.1 IN-DEPTH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In order to answer sub-questions 1, 2 and 3, as discussed in chapter 1.1, this research relies on in-depth semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications. In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals engaged in advocacy organizations have been conducted in order to answer sub-question 5. The method of in-depth semi structured interviews seemed relevant, as the aim of this part of the research was to give an insight into the practice and experience of NGO professionals. In-depth semi-structured interviews provide a level of support as well as flexibility to the researcher (Bryman, 2012). This strategy supported the focus on the meaning that the interviewees gave to their work.

3.1.1 Data collection

This research is focused on Western NGOs. To start with, this research was primarily focused on the NGOs with an office in Norway. NGOs in Norway were approached by email, asked to participate in the research. Many NGOs in Norway did not want to participate to this research,

due to lack of time, priority or hesitation towards the topic. Some NGOs agreed to participate but decided not to after they received the topic list or scope of the research. Due to the small amount of NGOs that agreed to participate in the research, NGOs that have an office in the Netherlands were included. NGOs in the Netherlands were approached by email, asked to participate in the research. The same situation occurred in approaching Dutch NGOs, where they were not able to participate due to lack of time, priority or hesitation towards the topic. Some interviewees that participated in the research explained that they receive many requests for interviews, which they cannot always respond to. In addition, they explained that the topic of the research is somewhat sensitive, as NGOs are aware of the critique towards their communication strategies. The many requests NGOs receive from researchers and the hesitation towards the topic can be the reason for the difficulties in finding NGOs to participate in the research.

As a result, the sampling approach was not selective but rather based on convenience sampling. This means that the sampling selection can be seen as not representative for the entire target population and is limited to Western NGOs that have an office in Norway and the Netherlands. Ultimately, eight in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with NGOs professionals engaged in the planning, designing and production of humanitarian communications at Western NGOs. These organizations are agreed to be some of the largest and leading in the humanitarian field, focused on both humanitarian emergency aid and long-term development. The NGOs can therefore, despite the convenience sampling, be seen as a considerable representation of the humanitarian field.

The interviews were held with NGO professionals related to humanitarian communication, based on a variety of positions at different departments including the communication, marketing, advocacy, fundraising, and media departments. Table 1 gives an overview of the NGOs that participated in the research and their main purpose and focus.

Table 1. Overview of interviews with NGO professionals

Job title	NGO	Main focus area
Spokesperson	Doctors without Borders (MSF) the Netherlands	MSF works for people worldwide where the need is greatest. MSF delivers emergency medical aid to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from health care. MSF works in more than 60 countries. (Doctors without Borders, 2018)
Campaign Manager	Doctors without Borders (MSF) the Netherlands	
Head of Communication	Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA)	NPA undertakes practical preventive and supportive work at home and abroad. The organization’s engagement centers on two strategic areas: just distribution of power and resources and protection of life and health. NPA works in partnership with local organizations in more than 20 countries. (Norwegian People’s Aid, 2018)
International Brand, Media, and Communication Advisor	Oxfam the Netherlands	Oxfam International works with partners in over 90 countries to end the injustices that cause poverty. Oxfam works in more than 90 countries. (Oxfam, 2018)
Spokesperson	Save the Children (STC) the Netherlands	STC promotes children's rights, provides relief aid and helps support children in developing countries. STC works in around 120 countries. (Save the Children, 2018)
Director of Communication	Save the Children (STC) Norway	
Director of Marketing	Plan International Norway	Plan International is a development and humanitarian organization that advances children’s rights and equality for girls. Plan international works in 71 countries. (Plan International, 2018)
Director of Communication	UNICEF Norway	UNICEF provides humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries. UNICEF is a United Nation’s program and works across 190 countries and territories. (UNICEF, 2018)

In addition to the interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with NGO professionals engaged in advocacy organizations. Interviews were conducted with the Team Leader for Information and Policy at SAIH Norway and the President at IDleaks the Netherlands. SAIH, established in 1961, is a solidarity organization of students and academics in Norway, working with long-term development and advocacy activities both in Norway and internationally. SAIH aims to improve the conditions for education and development globally with the motto ‘Education for Liberation’ (SAIH, 2017a). As part of their advocacy work, SAIH runs yearly campaigns in Norway. One of the themes that SAIH has

worked with over the years is the theme ‘Our image of the global South’. Since 1999, SAIH has been engaged in the debate around the narrative of poverty, questioning how the Western media, NGOs and academia present aid recipients and how they can change this narrative (SAIH, 2017a).

IDleaks, founded in 2011, is a platform for professionals, academics, students, and others interested in international development and humanitarianism, focused on creating an open and nuanced debate on humanitarian communication. IDleaks (2017, para.3) aims to ‘contribute to an environment in which all development actors are able to learn from one another, without being criticized’. IDleaks activities vary from workshops and debate evenings on topics related to humanitarian communication, QuickScans where humanitarian campaigns are reviewed and the IDleaks Awards, modelled after the Norwegian Radi-Aid Awards and focused on Dutch humanitarian campaigns.

Eight interviews were conducted at the organizational office of the NGO and two via Skype due to the distance to their offices. The interviews lasted for 1 to 1½ hour and were recorded and transcribed. A topic list (see appendix 1) was used to make sure to cover the main themes but also give the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and discuss other themes related to the research. The topic list is developed based on chapter 2 and highlights the main themes in relation to the practice of humanitarian communication. The interviews with STC the Netherlands, MSF the Netherlands, and IDleaks were held in Dutch. The other interviews were held in English.

3.1.2 Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed via the Guide on Coding and Analysis, created by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Their idea of coding is to find a pattern in the data, by taking five steps:

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1. The transcribed interviews were read thoroughly and elements that were potentially relevant to the specific parts of the research questions were marked;
 2. The marked parts that were similar were grouped into ‘repeating ideas’;
 3. From there, ‘themes’ were identified;
 4. These ‘themes’ were linked to chapter 2, the theoretical framework;
 5. The themes in combination with the theoretical framework were the basis for the ‘theoretical narrative’ on the practice and experience of NGO professionals.

Using these steps as a guideline in analyzing the interviews contributed to determining the reliability of the analysis. By taking the same steps, analyzing all data the same way, and linking all findings to the theoretical framework, an attempt is made to make the research as reliable as possible.

3.2 QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

In order to answer sub question 4, as discussed in chapter 1.1, this research relies on a qualitative content analysis of narratives. A content analysis is concerned with textual and visual information, aimed at exposing meaning and motives within written, spoken, and visual language (Wester, 2006). This method seems relevant, as the aim of this part of the research is to give a close look at the content of humanitarian communication. A content analysis is defined as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of the issue’ (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). By using this type of research, one assumes that the content is not just meant to give meaning making, but to lead the audience towards a particular feeling (Krippendorff, 2004). This analysis is based on primary content, meaning content that is created and communicated by NGOs themselves, which leaves out secondary content, created by externals such as the media.

3.2.1 Data collection

The data collection follows the interviews with NGO professionals on humanitarian communication and is therefore focused on the communication platforms of the NGOs that were interviewed. With this, the content analysis is an important addition to the interviews because it

explores how the practice, thinking, and challenges of NGOs are translated on their communication platforms. The communication platforms that were analyzed all have their own characteristics and are used for different purposes, aimed to reach and inform the public. For each NGO, 5 sources in relation to humanitarian communication were analyzed, varying in size and function.

The front page of the website as of December 2017/January 2018: The front page of the website gives a general overview of what is most important for the NGO to share with the public, as this is the first impression. Therefore, the front page of the website is analyzed.

Most recent campaign or advertisement: 2016 campaign ‘Save children like Jon’ by STC the Netherlands, 2016 campaign ‘Childhood means everything’ by STC Norway, 2015 ‘Selfie Campaign’ by MSF Holland, 2017 campaign ‘Grow’ of Oxfam the Netherlands, 2017 campaign ‘Stories from children – not suitable for children’ of Plan International Norway, 2014 campaign ‘with Syria’ of NPA, and 2017 campaign ‘Heartbeat’ of UNICEF Norway.

(Online) catalogs and brochures: The catalogs and brochures were collected from the website or the office of the NGO.

Social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter): Between the period of two months (December 10, 2017 - February 9, 2018), the posts on the official social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) were analyzed. Ten posts of each platform by each NGO, most suitable in line with the methodology, were used.

The latest annual reports: STC the Netherlands annual report of 2016, STC Norway annual report of 2016, MSF the Netherlands annual report of 2016, Oxfam the Netherlands annual report of 2016/2017, Plan International Norway annual report of 2017, NPA annual report of 2016, and UNICEF Norway annual report of 2016.

3.2.2 Data analysis

The data is analyzed through a narrative study, focused on the different ways that a message is communicated (Adger, Benjaminsen, Brown, and Svarstad, 2001). In addition to look at ‘what’

is constructed, a narrative study analyses ‘how’ this is constructed (Gilbert, 2008). As this research is focused on how humanitarian communication is constructed, this method seems relevant. According to Johnstone (2004, p.664), a narrative study is ‘a way of constructing ‘events’ and giving them meaning, as we pick out bits of the stream of experience and give them boundaries and significance by labeling them’. Although narrative studies are primarily developed for textual analysis, also spoken and visual materials can be narratively viewed (Kohler Riessman, 2008). This research analyses text, visuals, and audio. A picture, even more than a text, can be used to ‘create emotional responses’ (Alam, 2007, p.62). It is therefore important to look at images in addition to analyzing texts.

When studying narratives, several aspects are important. In the first place, a narrative is a story with a chronological order, a plot, with (1) a beginning defining the problem, (2) a middle elaborating its consequences, and (3) an end outlining the solution, with premises and conclusions (Adger et al, 2001; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Roe, 1999). This chronological order is important, as a sentence like ‘I punched this boy / and he punched me’ gives a different idea of the event than ‘this boy punched me / and I punched him’ (Johnstone, 2004, p.637). In the second place, a narrative is constructed with a detailed structure that involves a cast of actors with certain roles, such as the heroes, villains, and victims (Adger et al, 2001). These actors are placed in a certain setting. In relation to this research, the role of the NGO, the aid recipients, and the public are important. In the third place, a narrative has a certain purpose where the teller and the listener are central. Questions that need to be asked are ‘why is the narrator telling the story?’ and ‘why should the audience listen to it?’ (Johnstone, 2004, p.637). In the last place, when analyzing visuals it is important to look at their internal and external narrative. The internal narrative refers to ‘the story that the image communicated’, while the external narrative goes beyond this and refers to the social context in which the image is placed and ‘the social relations within which the image is embedded at any moment of viewing’ (Banks, 2001, p.11).

As there are no standard approaches to analyze texts and visuals, this analysis is based on a cluster of authors and their theories and perspectives in relation to narrative studies (Adger et al, 2001; Banks, 2001; Johnstone, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 2008). The factors are:

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1. The structure of the story
 2. The cast of actors
 3. The purpose of the story
 4. The internal and external impact of images

The dataset was analyzed with the three levels of Coding for Qualitative Analysis, as described by Gilbert (2008). Level one was based on open coding, where the data was analyzed and relevant parts were marked and put into categories. Selecting the relevant parts was based on the four factors as described: the structure, cast of actors, purpose and support of images. Level two was based on axial coding, where the established codes were linked to differences and similarities and put into new categories. Level three was based on selective coding, where core themes were discovered and merged into main categories. By using determined steps as a guideline, analyzing all data the same way, and linking all findings to the theoretical framework, an attempt is made to make the research as reliable as possible.

3.3 LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In relation to the semi-structured interviews, ethical considerations were taken into account. Before the start of the interviews, participants were asked permission to record the interview. All participants gave this permission. In addition, the participants were asked if they wanted to remain unidentifiable. All participants allowed the use of their job title and the name of their organization in the results of this research. Lastly, participants were asked if they wanted to read the direct quotes that are used in the results and approve these before publishing. All participants choose this option, leading to the direct quotes being read and approved by them.

A limitation to the semi-structured interviews is that this research is focused on NGOs in Norway and the Netherlands. The differences between these countries, such as financial governmental funding, the public debate around development aid, and cultural issues, are not taken into account in the results. This may limit the quality of the research. However, NGOs nowadays work together as an international entity. As there are many similarities between the Dutch and Norwegian NGOs, the choice of countries reduces the limit of quality of the research.

A limitation to the content analysis of narratives is that this type of research is subjective. It is easy to be biased in interpreting the content and automatically take a standpoint in the field of study. In order to be as objective as possible, the analysis is conducted being aware of this subjectivity. In addition, the analysis was set up based on the three levels of coding, which contributed to reducing potential bias.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter gives an overview of the results and discussion and answers the research questions. Section 4.1 and 4.2 answer research question 1: *How do NGO professionals practice humanitarian communication?* Section 4.3 answers research question 2: *How can they achieve a balanced portrayal of poverty?*

4.1 THE PRACTICE AND THINKING OF NGO PROFESSIONALS

This section is based on the in-depth semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications and answers the following sub-questions: (1) *How is content created and* (2) *What factors shape humanitarian communication?*

In general, the interviews with NGO professional show that in practice, NGOs separate between different types of humanitarian communication with an overall separation between fundraising, information, and awareness causes. As a result, NGOs have extensive marketing, communication, and advocacy teams. There are some variations in the size and structure, where some NGOs have separate departments and others have merged the different communication teams into one department. Overall, all interviews overlap in their explanation of the structure of their humanitarian communication teams. The NGO professionals explain that the variety of different stakeholders, such as policymakers, foreign governments, and the media, make the practice of humanitarian communication complex and challenging. Ultimately, humanitarian communication contributes to the main purpose of each NGO: to prevent or promote a specific cause and help the people in need.

There are many aspects that NGOs need to consider in relation to humanitarian communication. A story should reflect the NGOs brand and values, it should have a specific purpose, and all relevant stakeholders should be recognized. In what follows, this section explores the key themes that arose from the interviews on the practice of humanitarian communication and the different ways to reach the public.

4.1.1 The importance of a powerful brand

One key theme of humanitarian communication is the importance of creating a strong and trustworthy brand. All NGO professionals emphasize how a strong brand is important in reaching the public. Therefore, all the communication shared with the public is, to varying degrees, in line with their brand. The interviewees explain that they try to have a red thread in their humanitarian communication, focused on stories with delineated purposes, and controlled by content teams. In coordination with all the different communication departments or teams, the content teams carefully discuss what and when information is shared on which platform in order to speak as one ‘voice’. These findings confirm that NGOs have adapted into institutionalized and commercialized organizations, as discussed by Barnett (2005) and Hoijer (2004), including different communication departments for purposes varying between marketing, media, and content sharing.

The institutionalization and commercialization becomes very clear when the NGO professionals explain how content is created. Most interviewees explain how their organization used to be based on separate members. In order to be able to speak as one voice and work based on one brand, all members now work together as one international, judicial entity. Many NGOs have a shared network, such as a global media unit or a global creative content unit, which collects content for different purposes and distributes this to all members. This content is collected from the local offices in which the NGO is present. Relevant information from one of these local offices is shared with the international offices, in order for them to communicate this with the media and the public.

All interviewees explain that the way content is created gives them access to actual information from their sources on the ground, which is used as an opportunity to build their brand. NGOs want to share information that contributes to the brand value and give the public the chance to identify with what they represent. The Campaign Manager at MSF the Netherlands explains how they work with an ‘always on’ strategy, where they try to have different communication ‘outings’ that declare the brand of MSF, where the most important aspect is that all these different activities and communication utterances fit with the brand value.

We try to share meaningful information, about who we are and what we do. Not just, we work in so many countries, but this is Erna and she works in this country and this is what she does on a daily basis. So we try to bring the public along in the MSF story and based on this, build our brand. (Campaign Manager at MSF the Netherlands)

All interviewees highlight the importance of speaking as one voice in line with their brand. In order to do that, NGOs have developed guidelines. These guidelines are not so much seen as rules, but rather tools to help with the creation of the a brand and being able to speak as one voice. The use of guidelines was originally introduced in relation to the representation of aid recipients, to avoid stereotypical images (Adair, 1999). The interviews with NGO professionals show that they now serve to make sure that all communication platforms share the same ‘voice’.

The NGO professionals describe how they use different communication platforms where all communication platforms are equally important. All NGO professionals emphasize that all these platforms are very well coordinated and focused on different audiences with different purposes. Ultimately, all these platforms contribute to the brand of the organization, aimed at holistic, comprehensive, and consistent messaging. The interviewees point out that this should always be in line with the vision of the NGO and never in collision with its brand. The Director of Communication at STC Norway explains how information that is shared is carefully discussed.

Our social media editor would be very strict. If someone says; “I am doing this work and I think it would be so cool if someone made a nice video and posted it”, our editor would always ask “why”. “Why are we doing this? Are you influencing someone? Do you want to show the results of our work? Do we want people to donate? Do want them to support us? In what way?” And by asking that question all the time, I think you get very aware of the quality of content and communications. (Director of Communication at STC Norway)

This is shared by other NGO professionals who explain how their content teams would check the information before it is shared with the public to make sure that there is one line and one style in content sharing. Many NGOs are going through organizational changes, where the different departments related to humanitarian communication are being renewed in order to speak as one entity. This confirms what Cottle and Nolan (2007) argue, that the field of humanitarianism is still transforming and new information- and communication technologies keep influencing the practice of humanitarian communication.

Overall, the findings of this section show that the introduction of branding strategies, which is a direct result of the professionalization of the field as discussed by Barnett (2005), is clearly present. With a strong and powerful brand, NGOs make sure that they stand out from other organizations and bring the public along in their storytelling. This confirms what Vestergaard (2008) points out, that NGOs use their brand to give the public the opportunity to identify themselves with what the NGO does and the values that are important. NGOs have grown into being the leading actors in the promotion of universal human rights and putting specific issues on the agenda (Barnett, 2005; Lim et al, 2008). The findings of this section confirm that NGOs understand the value of a strong and powerful brand in their role as leading actors. From here, the next section illustrates how a powerful brand is used to raise awareness for issues that are important for the NGO.

4.1.2 The role of traditional media

One key theme of humanitarian communication is raising awareness for both ‘loud’ and ‘silent’ stories. When discussing the different approaches in reaching the public, all the NGO professionals mention the importance of raising awareness via traditional media.

When you talk to a journalist, you are not interested in getting this journalist to give money. You are interested in the journalist talking or writing about a certain situation, making the audience alert or conscious about a situation or problem. (Director of Communication at UNICEF Norway)

The interviews show that NGO professionals see communication via traditional media as ‘free publicity’ or ‘earned communication’. The Director of Communication at UNICEF Norway gives an example of how UNICEF raised awareness via traditional media in relation to child rights in Norway. Some time ago, Norwegian media was part of a public discussion about a rare muscular disease called spinal muscle atrophy. The medical treatment was, according to the Norwegian government, too expensive. This led to a huge debate, where UNICEF Norway shared their opinion in several newspapers, stating that the price of a medical treatment should not influence the right of the child. UNICEF’s statement was used by the parents of the children carrying the disease and eventually, the Norwegian government decided to give the medical treatment to children under 18. The Director of Communication at UNICEF Norway explains

that this was a success for them, raising awareness and standing up for the rights of children. This example relates to what is pointed out in the previous section, namely how a strong brand can help NGOs to raise awareness for issues important to them.

According to the interviewees, the press is still the most reliable information source for the public. Some NGO professionals point out that the public consider the communication platforms of NGOs to be biased, while traditional media are believed to be more authentic and honest. This makes communication via traditional media highly worthy. Most interviewees emphasize the importance to distinguish the NGO professionals talking to the media from the NGO professionals working with marketing and communication. The Head of Communication at NPA explains that content from a (local) specialist would give much more trust than a comment from someone from the media department. The NGO professionals responsible for traditional media are separated from the other teams, but work closely together with the marketing, fundraising and/or content teams. They ultimately work towards the same goals but emphasize their independence.

As a media person, I want to emphasize that I am separate from fundraising in the sense that my goal is not to get funding but to inform the public. We work a lot together but it is important that the press understands this difference. (Spokesperson at MSF the Netherlands)

The NGO professionals explain how they would reach for the media channels that are well regarded and with the best reputation. Some interviewees explain that there are cases where the media are afraid that the information from NGOs is manipulated and facts are exaggerated in order to be newsworthy. This has led to media being very much focused on fact checking. The interviewees emphasize that their communication outings are not manipulated. There is a rather specific focus on giving truthful information and checking facts before they are shared with the media. Several NGO professionals explain that the speediness of the media clashed with the method of the NGOs. The Spokesperson at MSF the Netherlands explains that a lot of people have to agree with the story before it is shared with the media, meaning that it takes time to agree on the right message. This is a constant race around the clock. The Spokesperson of STC the Netherlands explains it with the saying ‘a camel is a race horse designed by a committee’, emphasizing the difficulty of incorporating many different, sometimes conflicting, opinions.

The findings show that NGO professionals are aware of the rules of the media and adjust their content to the media logic. Media logic is explained by Cottle and Nolan (2007) as is the practice to reach the public's attention by following the rules of the media. Different studies show that in order for stories to be considered newsworthy, they need to include aspects such as dramatized or personal stories and a relevance to the Western public by including a celebrity or an influential person (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). The interviews show that NGOs separate between stories that are newsworthy and stories that are not. The interviewees explain that humanitarian disasters and emergencies generally receive a lot of media attention. NGOs have to respond to this and try to always 'say something' in the media.

If there is a rapid-onset crisis, you could almost see it with your own eyes on TV because someone has been there with their mobile phone. When those kinds of images are shown in the media here, people immediately even want to help. So it's also a matter of providing sometimes. So not only asking, but saying, if you want to help, here, we are doing this work. (Director of Communication at STC Norway)

There are, however, also situations where NGOs want to share certain stories with the media that do not include factors related to the rules of the media. As a result, media are not interested in sharing these stories. The interviewees explain how they try to connect their messages to newsworthy topics. Some NGO professionals point out how save certain stories until they become newsworthy in the media. The Director of Communication at STC Norway explains how normally on day three of an emergency, the media are interested in talking about the specific needs of children. The International Brand, Media, and Communication Advisor at Oxfam the Netherlands describes how they linked their global campaign on inequality to DAVOS, the annual meeting of political and business leaders. He points out how this is typically a pretty successful media story, where Oxfam receives a lot of attention from traditional media. This illustrates how NGO professionals are aware of the media rules.

It is, however, not always possible to connect stories to newsworthy topics. There are cases where the stories are simply not seen as newsworthy. The NGO professionals explain how media make their own choices and how this is often out of their hands.

I once tried to share a report on children in Myanmar and their testimonials. The media did not pick up on this, and I remember that a day later another NGO shared a similar report and the media did share that report. This can happen, it depends on so many different aspects, and sometimes it's just luck. We cannot always influence that. (Spokesperson at STC the Netherlands)

In line with this, the interviews show that NGOs have found creative ways to raise awareness via the media. The Director of Communication of STC Norway describes how they, successfully, asked attention for the war in Syria on its sixth anniversary in March 2017. Together with other NGOs, STC Norway organized an event where Norwegian celebrities sat down in a big tent in front of Oslo Central Station, reading out loud news clippings from Norwegian media during the six years of war in Syria. This was filmed live and shared on social media. The event received a lot of media attention. This is a good example of asking attention and creating awareness for a story that is not directly newsworthy. It also confirms how including media logic, in this case the contribution of celebrities, helps with making a story newsworthy.

Some interviewees explain that the combination of traditional media and content marketing is emerging, which gives new ways to communicate with the public via traditional media. The Campaign Manager at MSF the Netherlands illustrates how they have different collaborations with Dutch news- and lifestyle platforms, where people travel to one of the countries where MSF works to share their stories with the readers. This leads to stories from, for example, the editor in chief who gives his or her view on the issue via a blogpost. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway gives the example of the TV series 'Stuck', which follows Emilie Beck, a Norwegian actress, who travels to developing countries to discuss the different challenges that girls are facing all over the world. 'Stuck', shown via the website of the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten, has received a lot of Norwegian media attention. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway explains how 'Stuck', which is aimed at creating engagement and awareness, is an example of new media opportunities that benefit both the media and the NGO. Media need to find new ways to get financed, and NGOs need to find new ways to communicate and raise awareness. The Head of Communication at NPA highlights how the press does not always have access to the right sources and the NGO does, leading to a win-win situation where both parties get what they want.

Overall, the findings confirm what Barnett (2005) and Lim et al (2008) argue, that NGOs are nowadays leading actors in promoting universal human rights and putting specific issues on the agenda. The findings of this section show that traditional media are an important source for NGOs in raising awareness. The idea that NGOs are dependent on traditional media in raising awareness for humanitarian issues, as pointed out by Cottle and Nolan (2007), is still very much alive. Even though new information- and communication technologies have given NGOs new opportunities to communicate with the public, the findings of this section show that they often still rely on traditional media to promote their cause. The NGO professionals point out that traditional media is seen as ‘free publicity’ or ‘earned communication’ which shows how they differentiate between communication via their own platforms and communication via traditional media, like newspapers and television. An interesting finding is the new trend to create collaborations with news-platforms. The NGO professionals emphasize that these initiatives are aimed at creating engagement and awareness and do not have a fundraising purpose. Raising awareness and raising private donations are two separate communication aspects. From here, the next section gives insight into the specifics of communication with a fundraising purpose.

4.1.3 Need-based communication

One key theme of humanitarian communication is need-based communication, and is aimed to raise private donations. Out of the different approaches in reaching the public, this is the most critiqued communication aspect. Many studies have analyzed and discussed the content sharing in relation to raising private donations. The interviewees working with marketing and fundraising explain that the communication that is need-based is often done via advertisement. All interviewees highlight the importance of fundraising messages.

We exist because of our purpose. But without fundraising we cannot solve any purpose. We can't do anything. (Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway)

Fundraising is a sensitive topic and most interviewees explain that the practice is often misunderstood. In general, the NGO professionals point out that it is difficult to combine different purposes into one communication message as this is confusing for the audience. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway points out how their 2015 campaign, ‘Stop

the Wedding’, was a very successful campaign in terms of reach and attention, it reached more than 2 billion people. In comparison with the amount of attention the campaign received, it did not raise as much private donations. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway explains that the campaign was primarily focused on raising awareness and therefore had a different approach than a fundraising campaign. When a subject gets complex, it becomes more difficult to fundraise. This is supported by the other NGO professionals, who explain that there are different types of ‘reaching out’ with different storytelling and different goals. It is important to distinguish those in order to get the expected outcome. If the goal is to fundraise, it is therefore important to make the message understandable for the audience, be very precise about the need and the solution, and to specifically ask the public for money. The NGO professionals describe that need-based communication has a specific order of getting the attention of the audience by making them understand the problem, followed by triggering them to take action.

Most interviewees mention how the representation of the aid recipient in need-based communication is a discussion between the communication and fundraising teams. Some interviewees argue that they specifically chose to share particularly positive stories of aid recipients. Oxfam the Netherlands, for example, is focused on positive need-based communication, which is in line with their brand value.

So we want to show people who are the helpers, and who are strong because of the help that they received. And not people who are needy because they are demanding it from the person who sees the poster at the buss top. (International Brand, Media, and Communication Advisor at Oxfam the Netherlands)

In line with this, other interviewees emphasize that they do not want to create need-based communication that is focused on the negative portrayal of aid recipients. They are all very aware of the critique that is given and are careful with the information that they share with the public.

In relation to fundraising, most interviewees explain that it is often much more complicated than just moving away from negative stories. Most NGO professionals explain that a story about people who are strong and taking care of themselves does not have the same impact as a story of someone who needs help. This confirms the study of Orgad (2013), who argues that NGOs use

images of helpless and suffering aid recipient because it creates more emotional attachment than the image of the active and powerful individual and therefore triggers more people to donate. More importantly, the NGO professionals point out that there are cases where it is necessary to share images that relate to the negative imaginary, just because that is the reality. As some of the NGO professionals argue, by only showing positive images you give the impression that everything is fine, which is often not the case. The Spokesperson at STC the Netherlands explains that their main purpose is to help children in need and sometimes negative images are necessary to show what is actually going on. In order to show the urge to support the NGO, and thereby the people in need, people need to be aware of the reality.

There are countries in Africa who are developing and making real progress. The world is doing quite well. But there still are countries and areas where there is war and famine. We ask people to donate for these causes, so we need to show what it looks like. It is important that people give money so we can help these people. So in a way, showing negative images is needed to make people think. (Spokesperson at STC the Netherlands)

All interviewees emphasize that they are very careful with the stories they share, being aware of the impacts but also the consequences. The Spokesperson at MSF the Netherlands emphasizes that they believe in the strength of facts and numbers and are very cautious in predicting misery. They would only talk about a famine when the actual numbers are high enough to talk about a famine. If not, MSF would talk about a shortage of food. This is shared by the other interviewees. The Director of Communication at STC Norway explains that they would never pick up an African boy and say that all Africans are poor and unable to take care of themselves. In line with this, all NGO professionals emphasize the importance of informed consent, where people have to be aware of what they are participating in, what they give their face and voice to. Stories that include negative images are agreed upon from different stakeholders, including the aid recipient or caretaker of the child. The NGO professionals explain that they have strict guidelines and do not share 'staged' images or stories that are untrue. They emphasize that these images are in fact real. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway explains that they are able to get detailed information about the lives of the aid recipients they represent because they are long term and locally based, and therefore familiar with the stories of the people they represent.

We don't go somewhere and pick up a mic to someone we don't know and ask them to tell us about their miserable lives. We know these children, these families, and the communities. We have staff present there, they know what they are getting into. And that is how those stories come about. Because people see the importance of revealing what is actually out there. (Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway)

When discussing the need-based communication, the NGO professionals explain that humanitarian communication is so much more than just fundraising. The overall goal is to create results. These results are achieved by different type of communication purposes, and fundraising is only one of them. Most interviewees emphasizes that it is important to not only raise money but give back in forms of results. People need to see that the money is used in a good way and it is important to give a face to the money that people have been willing to give. Part of building trust is giving results. The interviewees mention that it is only possible to show result-based communication after people have donated and therefore after need-based communication. In general, most interviewees point out that they work for a charitable organization, meaning that they cannot do their work without donations. They clarify that they are not selling a product just for the sake of selling it, but that they are working towards a bigger cause.

Our job is to make the world cautious about the situation, we sort of say 'wake up and see what is happening'. That is the essence of our work. (Director of Communication at UNICEF)

The interviewees explain how their most important goal is to help the people in need and in order to do that, they need to raise money. When they create a campaign or share content, most NGO professionals argue that it therefore only makes sense to ask people to donate.

Overall, the findings of this section show that fundraising is important for NGOs in order to solve their purpose. In order to reach the public, need-based communication consists of specific aspects, often focused on portraying a person who needs help, aimed to get the audience emotionally involved. This supports what is said by scholars, who argue that it is easier to trigger people to donate when they know they are helping someone in need, rather than helping people who are already taking care of themselves (Orgad, 2013). Humanitarian communication is often critiqued for being focused on negative images, showing suffering in its 'plain reality' (Chouliaraki, 2010, p.5). The findings of this section show that sometimes negative stories are

necessary and important for people to act, as positive stories might lead to the idea that assistance is already provided.

4.1.4 Discussion

In conclusion, when it comes to the practice of humanitarian communication and to answer sub-questions 1, content is created based on a specific, well organized structure. The interviews show that NGOs separate between different types of communication, where the most important aspects are to create a powerful brand by being transparent and accountable, raise awareness about topics important for the NGO, and create fundraising appeals with the aim to trigger the audience to donate. These different types of communication are separated under different departments or teams, who work closely together but have their own purposes and goals. Content is collected by either the member organization itself or by a global content unit, often based in the international office of the NGO. The findings of this section show that the field of humanitarian communication is transformed into an international network where all member organizations work together as effective as possible. With this, the findings support what is discussed by Barnett (2005) and Hoijer (2004), who point out that the professionalization of the humanitarian field had transformed NGOs into institutionalized and commercialized organizations, including different communication departments for purposes varying between marketing, advocacy and content sharing. The findings show that collecting content is always done in collaboration with local member organizations, ‘the people on the ground’, and includes information about the problem, the need, and the way to move forward. After content is collected, it is shared with all the member organizations. In some cases, the content is edited by the global content unit. In most cases, the member organizations can edit the content themselves, based on the purpose of the message, such as sharing transparent and accountable information, raising awareness, or raising private donations.

To answer sub-question 2, the findings show that different factors shape humanitarian communication, depending on the type of communication. In general, the most important factor that shapes humanitarian communication is that all communication aspects have to fit with the brand values of the NGO. The interviews with NGO professionals are all based around the basic

idea that all humanitarian communication should be well coordinated, in order for all content to be in line with their brand. The findings show that content is created based on the general meaning of humanitarian communication, which has the purpose to create a ‘strategic emotional relationship’ between the public, the NGO, and the aid recipient (Chouliaraki, 2010, p.4). The findings show that NGOs use their brand to raise awareness and change people’s mindset. This supports what is pointed out by Vestergaard (2008) and Cottle and Nolan (2007), who argue that humanitarian communication is seen as a moral education, by telling the public how to feel and act towards certain topics related to poverty and development.

Another important factor is the influence of media logic in all communication aspects. This confirms the idea that media logic is a central factor in humanitarian communication, where stories should have a newsworthy element, a relevance to the Western public, or include touching or personal stories (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Harcup and O’Neill, 2017). The findings show how NGOs cannot always control which stories are shared by the media and therefore support what is argued by Hoijer (2004), that NGOs are still dependent on the media in raising awareness.

A last important factor concerns communication with the purpose of fundraising. Fundraising messages have to include an element that clearly shows the need, but also triggers the public to take the step to donate. The findings confirm what is discussed by different scholars, who point out that images of aid recipients in need create emotions and give the people a sense of moral responsibility to help them (Orgad, 2013; Hoijer, 2004). The NGO professionals are aware that portraying aid recipients as victims creates sympathy and feelings of guilt. In contrast to what Chouliaraki (2006) and Vestergaard (2008) argue, who point out that NGOs should move away from negative images, the findings show that this is almost impossible. These images are in fact real, and the people really need help. The findings are therefore in line with what the statement of Cohen (2001), who argues that if you don’t show the public that the people need help, they might not feel the need to offer it. The interviews show that in order to trigger the public to donate, an important factor is to show the need for them to do so.

Overall, the interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications explain that the practice of humanitarian communication is aimed at creating a strong and powerful brand, which will help NGOs to raise awareness and fundraise, both leading to the ultimate goal, to help the people in need. From here, this chapter continues with the results and discussion of the content analysis on narratives, and gives insight into how the practice of NGO professionals is translated into their different communication platforms.

4.2 DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES

This section is based on the content analysis of narratives and answers the following sub-question: *(4) How do NGOs profile themselves on different communication platforms?* The previous section explained the practice and thinking of NGO professionals working with humanitarian communication. The interviews with NGO professionals reveal that there are different types of reaching out, depending on the purpose of the message. Based on the content analysis of narratives, it becomes clear that the different types of reaching out are also found in the communication platforms of the NGOs. Different communication platforms are used for different purposes.

In what follows, this section explores the different types of reaching out that arose from the content analysis of narratives. Because the results are similar to the results of the interviews with NGO professionals, this section has a similar outline as section 4.1. The different types of communication aspects are supported by various examples. These examples are used to present the results more effectively and illustrate the key findings.

4.2.1 Brand promotion via information sharing

The content analysis shows that humanitarian communication is used to share in-depth information to promote the brand of the NGO. This is especially seen through the website, annual reports and brochures of the NGOs that were analyzed. The annual reports and brochures were, in addition to the welcome desks at their offices, available on the website of the NGO. This makes sense, as the website is a platform used to share in-depth information and is therefore the

first place people will go to when they want to know more about the organization (Benkler, 2006). In order to illustrate how NGOs share in-depth information to promote their brand, the next paragraphs explain the use of annual reports, brochures, and the website in more detail.

The findings of the content analysis show that annual reports, shared on the website of the NGO, are used to show the main priorities of the NGO and aimed at being accountable and transparent. All NGOs share their annual reports via their website and all the annual reports are identical in the information they share. They all include detailed information about the ambition and strategies, programs, communication outings, and organization of the NGO. The information is supported by tables, graphs, and pictures. In addition, all the financial expenses are shared in detail. This emphasizes the purpose to be transparent and accountable and confirms what Vestergaard (2013a) points out, that by being transparent and accountable, the public is able to identify with the NGO. All the annual reports repeatedly point out the main priorities of the organization and the purpose of the work they do. This is in line with the idea of a strong brand, discussed by Cottle and Nolan (2007), where the public should be able to understand what the organization does to accomplish its purpose.

The findings of the content analysis show that brochures, like the annual reports, are a way to share in-depth information and show the purpose of the organization. An example that illustrates this is the brochure of UNICEF Norway. The brochure includes in-depth information about the different projects UNICEF works with. In addition, the purpose of UNICEF, which is to fight for children's right in every country, is very clearly shown. The brochure is focused on the rights of children and shows stories of children in different countries, including Norway, and explains how their rights are being violated and what UNICEF does to help them. When looking at the back of the brochure, which is usually used to summarize or emphasize what can be found inside, the main purpose of UNICEF becomes clear:



Figure 4. Brochure ‘Fremtiden formes av de med sterkest tro på at den kan endres’ of UNICEF Norway

“UNICEF’s most important task in the future is to develop new solutions – and put that into use in a scale that it benefits the whole society.”

This text is supported by six paragraphs that include:

“(1) UNICEF reaches more children than any other, (2) UNICEF is the world’s largest actor in emergency aid for children, (3) UNICEF has a unique impact, (4) UNICEF changes the future, (5) UNICEF is an expert on children, and (6) UNICEF leads the way in developments for children.”

This example illustrates how the brochure is aimed at sharing information but also making the reader understand the main purpose of UNICEF. The information that is shared is focused on UNICEF’s primary goal, which is helping children. As the example points out, the word ‘children’ is used in almost all sentences, always in combination with the name of UNICEF and powerful words such as ‘world’s largest actor’, ‘unique impact’, and ‘expert’. The text in the brochure is supported by images of children from different countries. The images are used as illustration, but have the purpose to emphasize that children are central. The images and the information that is shared in the brochure contribute to the brand value of UNICEF, to fight for children’s right in every country.

The findings of the content analysis show that the website is used to share the annual reports and brochures. In addition, the website itself is a source of information, aimed at informing the public about the main purpose of the NGO. An example that illustrates this is the homepage of Oxfam the Netherlands. Oxfam’s main purpose is to defeat poverty through positive change. This is clearly shown on the homepage of Oxfam the Netherlands, where aid recipients are portrayed as happy, strong, and independent people. When clicking on the ‘this is us’ button, clearly shown on the homepage, the visitor can read:



Figure 5. Homepage of Oxfam the Netherlands

“We are powerful women, hardworking farmers, ambitious youngsters, driven researchers and involved donors. We are the voice of millions. We defeat poverty”

The text is supported by videos and personal stories of ‘powerful woman’ and ‘hardworking farmers’, showing insight into the work of Oxfam. This example illustrates that the main purpose of Oxfam the Netherlands, to defeat poverty through positive change, is clearly portrayed on the website. The message on the homepage aims to inform people how powerful, hardworking and happy the aid recipients are, by using words as ‘powerful women’, ‘hardworking farmers’ and ‘ambitious youngsters’. The image of happy people, who are shown in their ‘natural environment’, emphasizes this. The story of suffering is removed from this narrative, and aid recipients show action and agency. This narrative is in line with the post-colonial critique of the negative imagery and shows characteristics of the deliberate positivism (Orgad, 2013; Vestergaard, 2013a). The image and the information that is shared emphasize the brand value of Oxfam, to defeat poverty through positive change.

The examples of UNICEF Norway and Oxfam the Netherlands illustrate what is seen in all the annual reports, brochures and on the websites, namely how they are used to share in-depth information about the work of NGOs. This contributes to showing the public how the NGO stays true to its value and purpose. This is in line with numerous studies that show how the creation of a powerful brand gives the public the opportunity to identify with the NGO (Chouliaraki, 2011; Cottle and Nolan, 2007). These studies point out how NGOs try to be transparent and accountable to justify their actions. The findings are in line with the strategy of post-humanitarian sensibility, where the story is built around the purpose of the organization, giving people the chance to identify with its values (Vestergaard, 2013a). As Chouliaraki (2010) argues,

sharing in-depth information contributes to the brand story of the NGO. The findings show that NGOs use the website, annual reports and brochures to do exactly this. These findings match the results of the interviews with NGO professionals, who emphasize the importance of creating a powerful brand, in order to raise awareness and fundraise, both leading to the ultimate goal, to help the people in need. From here, the next section shows how NGOs use their brand to raise awareness and create social change.

4.2.2 *Raising awareness and creating social change*

The content analysis shows that humanitarian communication, in addition to creating brand awareness via information sharing, is used to raise awareness and create social change. The content analysis shows that the NGOs raise awareness through their own communication platforms, especially social media. Via social media, the audience is asked to take action, sign a petition, or get familiar with certain topics by reading relevant information. This makes sense, because social media are known to have easy and fast access to the public and are used to connect with them (O'Reilly, 2007). An important characteristic of social media is the transparency and interactivity, aimed to create a bond with followers (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). 70% of the analyzed posts are built around sharing knowledge, educating the public and raising awareness about topics important for the NGO. In 30% of those cases, the purpose is to create 'social change', in addition to raising awareness.

An example that illustrates how social media are used to raise awareness and create social change is a post on the Twitter account of NPA. In this post, NPA urges all states to join a treaty to end nuclear war and asks all followers to support the organization:



Figure 6. Twitter post from NPA

This example illustrates that the main message is to raise awareness and bring about social change. In this post, the link to ‘taking action’ is central. The image is part of that link and therefore more or less an addition to the text. The post starts with a question directed to the audience, followed by a to-the-point description of the problem with words such as ‘the only rational choice’ and ‘we urge ALL states’. It ends with a call for action with words such as ‘go to nuclearban.org today’ and ‘join the movement’. The public is seen as a force of ‘social change’. This example shows how NGOs use their social media platforms to take action, which confirms their purpose of leading actors in the promotion of social change, as discussed by Cottle and Nolan (2007) and Lim et al (2008).

Another example that illustrates how social media are used to create awareness is a Facebook post of STC Norway. In this post, STC Norway informs its followers about the effects of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the work STC does to protect girls from being circumcised:



“200 million women worldwide are affected by genital mutilation. Many experience huge physical and mental damage due to these activities. STC and Church Aid work together with local leaders and girls in Ethiopia and Somalia to end this practice. Since 2011, we have protected 129.971 girls from being circumcised. Read about the project here.”

Figure 7. Facebook post from STC Norway

This example illustrates that the main message is to raise awareness about a difficult topic, showing the audience the importance to change the activity of FGM and the work that STC does. There is a clear structure, starting with pointing out the problem and its consequences, followed by the solution aimed at informing the public. The image guides the text by showing young local

girls, aimed to visualize the issue. The image is more or less an addition to the text, which is central. The post shares a link where the audience can find detailed information about FGM. This example shows how NGOs use their social media platforms to raise awareness with the aim to deepen the knowledge of the audience on certain topics, in this case FGM, the effects of it, and the importance to stop this from happening any more.

The examples of NPA and STC Norway illustrate what is seen in the majority of the social media posts, namely to raise awareness and create social change. In both examples, the posts are connected to newsworthy issues. The message of NPA on Twitter is linked to the ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) movement. After ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2017, the ICAN movement has been a newsworthy topic worldwide and received a lot of media attention. The message about nuclear weapons and the call to ‘join the movement’ is therefore very newsworthy. The message of STC Norway on Facebook is linked to the ‘International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation’ that takes place on February 6. Here, STC Norway picked up on the issue of FGM with a post to raise awareness on February 6 and thereby link the post to the International Day of FGM. This is in line with the media logic, where stories are connected to issues that are newsworthy in order to be relevant to the media and the public (Cottle and Nolan, 2007).

These findings match the results of the interviews with NGO professionals, who explain that they try to link issues that are important to the NGO to newsworthy topics. The purpose of the social media posts are focused on the empowerment of the public, not as a donor, but as a supporter. This confirms the idea of Barnett (2005, p.733) that NGOs have the purpose to promote values that make the world ‘safer, more human, and more just’. The examples illustrate how NGOs consider themselves to be an important operator in informing the public about issues relevant to them, and how they feel responsible to influence the mindset of the public. The findings supports what Reimann (2006) argues, that NGOs more and more aim at raising awareness and influence stakeholders. The findings of the content analysis show that one aspect of humanitarian communication is focused on exactly this. Humanitarian communication is often critiqued for the one-sided focus on fundraising. In contrast, the findings in this section illustrate that humanitarian communication is much bigger than just fundraising. However, the findings of

the content analysis show that fundraising is also part of humanitarian communication. From here, the next section shows the aspect of fundraising in humanitarian communication.

4.2.3 Fundraising

In addition to communication aimed at showing the brand value of the NGO and raising awareness, NGOs need to ask for private donations. The content analysis shows that humanitarian communication with the purpose to raise private donations is especially done via campaigns and advertisements. Campaigns and advertisements, in general, have the purpose to ‘inform, persuade or motivate whole populations or large population segments to modify their behavior’ (Bauman, Smith, Maibach and Reger-Nash, 2006, p.312). The aim of campaigns is to directly appeal the public to get their attention and ask to take action, by using short and powerful language. Using campaigns and advertisement for need-based communication therefore seems relevant. The content analysis shows that NGOs use different ways to communicate with the aim to raise private donations, similar to the three strategies that were demonstrated in chapter 2. Out of the seven campaigns that were analysed, two showed similarities to the strategy of negative imagery, three to the strategy of positive imagery and two to the strategy of post-humanitarian sensibility. In what follows, this section illustrates three campaigns with different strategies.

Firstly, the findings of the content analysis show two campaigns related to ‘negative imagery’ (Chouliaraki, 2010). An example that illustrates this is the 2016 campaign ‘Help Children like Jon’ by STC the Netherlands. The campaign features the two year old Jon. While the video shows images of Jon and other starving children, a Dutch male voice-over informs the audience that ‘today millions of children, like little Jon, have nothing to eat’. When the voice-over informs the audience about the different ways to help the children in need, the video shows how they receive food and medical attention. The video ends with a call to donate money to help the children:

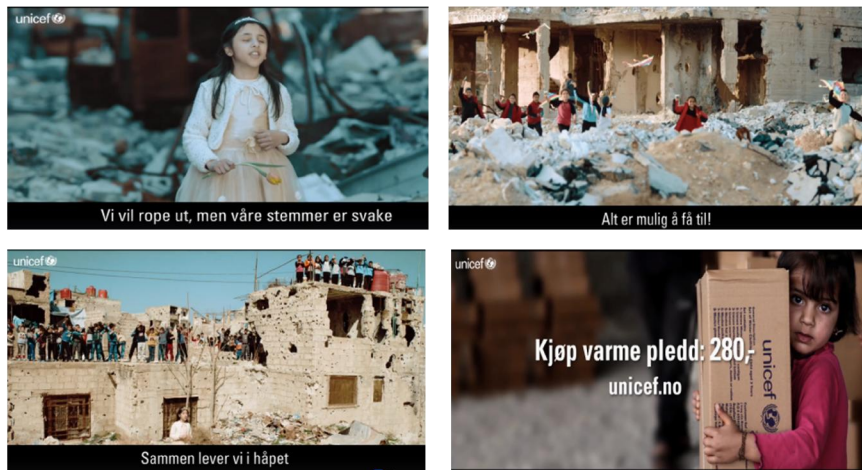


“We cannot let this happen. With your help, we can give children special nutrition, and with your donation, we can give people the knowledge to grow food themselves. Do it today, because too many children like Jon are starving. We can do something about tomorrow. Thank you.” (Audio from voice-over)

Figure 8. Stills of campaign ‘Help Children like Jon’ by STC the Netherlands

This example illustrates that the main message of the campaign is to raise money for children who are starving. The purpose of the images is to create a shock effect, and create feelings of guilt and indignation, aspects that are, according to Hoijer (2004) part of the ideal victim. This is in line with the strategy of negative imagery, where poverty is represented in ‘its plain reality’ (Chouliaraki, 2010, p.5). In addition, one of the children is given a name in order for the audience to get emotionally attached. The campaign shows a clear explanation of the need, that is the children who have nothing to eat and who need special nutrition. There is also a clear solution, namely that with the donations of the public, many children can be helped. The video triggers the audience to take action, by using words as ‘with your help’ and ‘with your donation’, showing the audience that they can actually help these children.

In addition to campaigns that are in line with negative imagery, the findings of the content analysis show three campaigns related to the ‘positive imagery’ (Chouliaraki, 2010). An example that illustrates this is the 2017 campaign ‘Heartbeat’ by UNICEF Norway. The video shows Ansam, a 10 year old blind girl from Syria. Ansam, together with a choir of children, performs the emotional song ‘Heartbeat’ in Arabic. In the song, the children repeatedly ask ‘to get their childhood back’. The song is supported by images of happy and smiling children who are playing with kites and paint. The video ends with the call to ‘help them to stay warm during wintertime’.



“We want to say it loud but our voice is weak. We may be children but our cry comes from the heart. We want to erase fear and be the change. We want to say it loud: everything is possible. Together we can hope.” (Lyrics from the video ‘Heartbeat’)

Figure 9. Stills of campaign ‘Heartbeat’ by UNICEF

This example illustrates that the main message of the campaign is to buy products for the children in Syria. The purpose of the images is to get the audience emotionally involved, and give them a sense of moral responsibility to help the children. The video emphasizes the innocence of the children who, despite their circumstances, keep ‘hope’, want to ‘erase fear’ and ‘be the change’. The audience can help these children by buying them blankets, which is clearly shown at the end of the video with a link to the website of UNICEF Norway. The video takes place in the environment of the children. By letting the children speak for themselves and explain in their own words what they desire, the video creates emotional attachment. The emotional song, sang by a blind child, contributes to this. The children are portrayed as happy, playful and strong. This is in line with the strategy of deliberate positivism, where aid recipients are portrayed as happy, strong and full of hope (Orgad 2013). However, the video does not provide the audience with evidence of the positive effects of their donations, which is also part of this strategy (Chouliaraki, 2010). It is rather a call for action, aimed to impact the emotions of the audience by showing happy children. This is in line with the portrayal of the ideal victim (Hoijer, 2004).

Lastly, the findings of the content analysis show two campaigns related to the ‘post-humanitarian sensibility’ (Chouliaraki, 2011). An example that illustrates this is the 2015 ‘Selfie Campaign’ by MSF the Netherlands. This campaign is not focused on the aid recipient, but on the people in the field, such as aid workers and employees travelling to the countries where MSF operates. The video features a number of aid workers who show the audience a glimpse into their lives,

explaining what it looks like to work in the field for MSF, what they do to help the people in need, but also what really happens during a humanitarian crisis. The videos were made by aid workers themselves and shown as a video log, giving an insight from the aid workers point of view. The videos were supported with advertisements in online and printed media.



“Bram fights malaria in the Central African Republic.
Erna fights Ebola in Sierra Leone.
Show that you support our people.”

Figure 10. Advertisements for the 'Selfie Campaign' by MSF the Netherlands

This example illustrates that the main message of the campaign is to trigger the audience to support the aid workers in the field by showing a ‘raw’ insight into the daily lives of the people on the ground. It shows what MSF does to reach its purpose. The advertisements do not just show an aid worker, but show ‘Bram who fights malaria’ and ‘Erna who fights Ebola’ which triggers the audience to be emotionally attached. The images of Bram and Erna emphasize this emotional attachment. It creates the feeling that people get to know Bram and Erna, showing that they are people like ‘us’. The video shows what it looks like to be an aid worker in the countries where MSF operates, making the audience understand that these are stories from the field. The example of MSF the Netherlands is focused on the empowerment of the organization, showing the impact that the organization makes. This is in line with the strategy of post-humanitarian sensibility, where the audience gets a chance to identify with the aid workers, and therefore the NGO (Chouliaraki, 2011). The videos end with the call for action: ‘Our people offer medical assistance worldwide. They cannot do this without you. Support our teams’. This emphasizes that these aid workers cannot do their work without the donations from the audience.

The examples of STC the Netherlands, UNICEF Norway, and MSF the Netherlands show that there are different ways to communicate with the aim to fundraise, based on different strategies.

However, there are broad similarities. All the examples are very precise about the need and the solution and specifically ask the public for donations. This is done by triggering the emotions of the public and empowering them in helping the aid recipients. The findings match the results of the interviews with NGO professionals, who emphasize that fundraising campaigns and advertisements always include a specific ‘call for action’, asking the public to donate. In order for them to do that, fundraising appeals are made understandable for the audience. According to critics, stories that are made understandable eventually lead to a simplified version of the reality (Orgad, 2013). The findings of this section confirm this, where the videos and advertisements are a simplification of the difficult and complex situations.

4.2.4 Discussion

In conclusion, to answer sub-question 4, the content analysis of narratives shows that the communication platforms used by NGOs have different purposes and NGOs profile themselves differently on each communication platform. These findings are an important addition to the studies of Chouliaraki (2010) and Vestergaard (2008), who focus their research on fundraising appeals only, and therefore lack a broader overview of all aspects of humanitarian communication. The findings of the content analysis show that the annual reports, brochures, and website are especially used to share in-depth information and results. This supports the idea that NGOs profile themselves as specialists in helping aid recipients, as discussed by Reimann (2006). Here, stories are in line with the brand values to give the public the opportunity to identify with the NGO. In addition, the findings show that social media is mainly used to raise awareness and create social change. This is in line with Barnet’s study (2005) that points out how NGOs are nowadays more and more focused on profiling themselves as important actors in promoting global humanitarianism. Lastly, the findings show that campaigns and advertisements are used to raise private donations. Here, NGOs profile themselves as the ‘voice of the people’, as proposed by Reimann (2006). In general, there are clearly different communication styles used to reach the public.

Where NGOs profile themselves differently on the various communication platforms, there is also a broad similarity. The traditional meaning of development, by Cowen and Shenton (1996)

described as a certain ‘change’ in peoples live, especially the lives of people living in developing countries, is seen on all the communication platforms that were analyzed. The content that is analyzed has a specific focus on the problems in developing countries, but also emphasizes how the NGO and the public can be the ‘change’ in the lives of aid recipients. Interesting in relation to this is that the idea of the modernization theory, ‘the belief that underdevelopment is rooted in mainly internal causes that can be solved by external aid’, is reflected on the different communication platforms (Servaes, 2008, p.186). The modernization theory is critiqued for seeing the world through the eyes of the West (Peet and Hartwick, 2009). The findings of the content analysis show similarities, where there is a clear distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’, with a message that ‘we, the West’ can save the less fortunate. Said (1978) and Joye (2015) warned that this would ultimately create an inward directed look and contribute to the idea that development can only take place if the West is prepared to step in. The findings of this section illustrate that this is something that is translated in the practice of humanitarian communication.

This is in line with the historical background of poverty where one group of people was isolated from the rest, resulting in this group being stigmatized. The findings confirm what is discussed by O’Conner (2001) and Catz (1990), who argue that people living in developing countries have received a powerful label of the ‘deserving poor’. The findings show that this powerful label is still present in the majority of today’s representation, where the aid recipients are represented as those who cannot help themselves. Representation has the power to ‘make us believe something of which we have no experience’ (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2002, p.571). Despite the fact that the stories that are shared are real, the application of a ‘modernization’ way of thinking contributes to an oversimplified and one-sided view of poverty and development, where the meaning stays isolated and the powerful label of the ‘deserving poor’ continues.

An interesting finding is that the aid recipients that are represented are not so much associated with Africa and therefore contradicts the studies that argue that poverty and famine is linked to Africa (Evans, 2013). According to critics, the deserving poor, those living in poverty with no fault of their own, are often associated with people living in the continent Africa, which is argued to be the ‘continent of poverty’ (Aina, 2014). When looking at all the communication platforms, it becomes clear that the dominant story that is shared is not ‘Africa’ but that of the refugee crisis

in Syria and surrounding countries, the Rohingya victims in Myanmar, and the famine in the horn of Africa. Where the last story is related to the African continent, the first two are not. The findings simply show that the communication outlets that were analyzed focus on the most acute humanitarian crises at any given time, representing the most vulnerable people rather than Africa as related to poverty.

Despite the differences between the different aspects of humanitarian communication and the communication platforms that are used, the content analysis on narratives shows that stories that are shared are still very much a representation created by outsiders. According to Roe (1999) and Servaes (2008), this ultimately contributes to an unbalanced portrayal of poverty and development. From here, this chapter continues with the results and discussion of the interviews with NGO professionals engaged in advocacy organizations as well as NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communication, and gives insight into how NGOs can give a more balanced portrayal of poverty.

4.3 A BALANCED PORTRAYAL OF POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT

This section is based on the in-depth semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications as well as NGO professionals engaged in advocacy organizations SAIH and IDleaks. An explanation of the organizations SAIH and IDleaks can be found in chapter 3.1.1. This section answers the following sub-questions: (3) *What challenges do NGO professionals face in relation to humanitarian communication and (5) What are ways to move away from a stereotypical portrayal of aid recipients?*

So far, this chapter has given insight into the practice of humanitarian communication and points out that there are different types of humanitarian communication, based on the purpose of the message. In general, the need-based communication is critiqued the most for contributing to the unbalanced portrayal of poverty and development. The interviews with the Team Leader of Information and Policy at SAIH and the President at IDleaks show that there is not necessarily one way that is the right way in humanitarian communication. There are however certain aspects that can be avoided to achieve a balanced portrayal of poverty and development and still raise

money. From here, this chapter will look at different factors that can contribute to showing a balanced portrayal of poverty and development.

4.3.1 Give contextual background

The interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications show that there are nowadays more humanitarian crises, leading to NGOs being more focused on short-term aid than they were before. This has led to NGOs being in urgent need for private donations. This was also noticed by SAIH during the most recent nomination of the Radi-Aid awards. The jury of SAIH received many nominations of advertisement about famine that showed similarities to the so called ‘pornography of poverty’. There were so many similar campaigns that the SAIH jury was questioning whether or not there actually is a better way to show stories and images of war and famine. Both the interviews with SAIH and IDleaks emphasize that NGOs do not need to replace images of suffering and starving people. According to the Team Leader of Information and Policy at SAIH, it is important to share these horrible and devastating stories and images of war and famine, as they are in fact real, but to always show context. The President at IDleaks adds that it is important to give background information in order to avoid taking the story out of context.

Often little attention is paid to the fact that the disasters that we see happen mainly in places that are already in poor and unstable areas. So by only pretending that the disasters are an isolated problem, you actually miss important facts about what is going on. (President at IDleaks)

This is supported by different studies that highlight that in many cases, ‘humanitarian aid is doing little to address the root causes of the crises in which it works’ (Macrae, 2000, p.94). As the interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications point out, need-based communication is often focused on simplifying the problem so that complex issues are made understandable for a greater audience. Certain images contribute to getting people’s attention and trigger them to donate money. Giving context can therefore make the story too difficult for the audience. This is a challenge for NGOs, who want to reach the public in the best way possible. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks explain that giving context does not take away the need-based purpose of fundraising appeals. It

simple means that the message should include facts and numbers so that is not taken out of context. When an NGO has captured the attention of a viewer, it can use the opportunity to ‘elucidate the greater picture’ (Evans, 2013, p.182).

Another challenge is that explaining the underlying causes, with the aim to give background information, is in many cases very difficult. Before stories are shared with the public, they are checked by different people to make sure that the right message is shared, without including information that might harm the people in need, the local governments, or other stakeholders. The Spokesperson at STC the Netherlands illustrates how they sometimes cannot give details about places they work in.

One of our spokespersons in Europe commented on a story about starving children in the Horn of Africa. Soon after that, the local government warned us that they do not want to see stories like that because they are a country in progress and don’t want negative publicity. So we always have to consider, is it worth to speak out while taking the risk to get into trouble and possibly be expelled from the country where we work. That would mean we would not be able to help tens of thousands of children, and we can’t risk that. (Spokesperson at STC the Netherlands)

This means that certain information cannot be shared. This is confirmed by several studies, who point out that there are many ethical and political dilemmas that NGO professionals working with humanitarian communication need to be aware of. Poverty can be based on natural, economic or political causes, and especially the political character makes humanitarian communication very complex (Macrae, 2000). Issues as security, vulnerability, and requirements from local governments can hinder the context (Nolan and Mikami, 2013). NGOs therefore have to be careful with the information they share and find ways to share stories and give context without harming stakeholders. The President at IDleaks points out that it can be meaningful to be transparent about this and explain to the public that the situation is very complicated and mention the different aspects that make it complex.

Show that development cooperation is a controversial area where multiple interests are fighting for priority and that it is not a kind of magic fix. Explain that, as an organization we have an interest in this and that clashes with these practices, and that is difficult for this and this reason. (President at IDleaks)

In relation to this, both the President at IDleaks and the Team Leader of Information and Policy at SAIH emphasize the importance to share results and achievements that were made based on the donations, without specifically asking for donations. The interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications show that this is something they are aware of. The Director of Communication at UNICEF Norway explains that a lot has to do with trust. In 2017, UNICEF was part of the Norwegian telethon, a nationwide charity campaign that raises money for a chosen cause. This was a big event for UNICEF, where they raised 245 million kroner. The Director of Communication at UNICEF Norway emphasizes that a big part of their work will now be to communicate about the results and show what UNICEF does with the money and to make sure that the people who donated will be reached in showing the results. In many cases, however, results and success stories are shared by NGOs via other communication channels, such as the website and annual reports. The content via these communication channels will most certainly only be seen by people actively looking for it. It is therefore important to share the results and achievements via the same communication channels that were used to ask for donations (IDleaks, 2017).

Overall, these findings point out that showing context is a way to avoid stereotypical stories and to give a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development. As this chapter has pointed out so far, the meaning of poverty and development is often simplified. This can be due to the fundraising factor, where NGOs are in need of private donations and therefore share stories that are made understandable for the public. This section shows, however, that the ethical and political dilemmas also contribute to a simplified version of the reality, where NGOs cannot share specific information due to the sensitivity of the topic. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks explain that NGOs should include this in their communication and be transparent with the public about the complexities. Helping the aid recipients does not simply mean that people give money; the solution is often much more complex. It is important to show the role NGOs play in helping aid recipients. Humanitarian aid and development are complex political issues and are based on certain (political, economic or natural) factors, which should be shared in humanitarian communication (Chouliaraki, 2006). Poverty is not ‘just’ a lack of money, material property, or food. To relate poverty to food availability for example, Sen (1981) emphasizes that

it is often not about there not *being* enough food, but about people not *having* enough food. Poverty is about the social causes and consequences of, in relation to this example, the lack of food. There can be many different reasons why people have no access to food (Du Toit, 2009). The findings of this section show that in order to really understand poverty, people have to understand this. Eventually, this can lead to a better understanding of the meaning of poverty and development.

4.3.2 *Show empathy*

Another factor that is important in showing a balanced portrayal of poverty and development is to create a connection between the audience and the aid recipient. Aid recipients are often showed in such a way that creates apathy, where the audience is asked to pity the poor. This emphasizes how different the situation of aid recipients is from that of the audience. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks explain that it is important to show empathy and reduce the distance between the aid recipient and the audience. They admit that it is difficult to communicate about vulnerability, but point out that there are creative examples of humanitarian communication aimed at creating a connection between the audience and the aid recipient.

There are campaigns that really show that effect by pretending it was us. Then they really manage to understand. It is a big problem, that we distance ourselves from the problem. But with a campaign like this, you actually manage to feel that this could happen to me and therefore I have to give money. And that is a big difference. (Team Leader of Information and Policy at SAIH Norway)

One example is the 2014 campaign ‘Would you give your jacket to Johannes?’ by SOS Children’s Villages Norway. The campaign shows a Norwegian boy, Johannes, sitting at a bus stop in Oslo, without a jacket on while it is freezing outside (SOS Barnebyer, 2014). A hidden camera shows how strangers take off their coat and give it to the boy. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness for children in Syria. The video puts the situation of Syria into a context that is understandable for the audience. By asking the audience what they would do if they saw a freezing child, the story creates empathy and recognition. People understand that they would help a child that is freezing. Another example is the 2015 campaign ‘Stop the Wedding’ by Plan International Norway. The campaign was focused on a 13 year old Norwegian girl who was

getting married and was blogging about her wedding preparations. This marriage was staged, aimed at creating attention to the real stories of real brides, which was revealed later in the campaign after Plan had received a lot of (international) attention. The Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway explains how this campaign was aimed at creating attention to the real stories.

We didn't reveal that it was fake. A lot of people thought it was for real. It's a technique; we like to bring the problem back home. Because unfortunately if I portray something in Africa, it will be too distant. People need to have something to relate to. So we brought the problem back home. Then suddenly everybody understands that this is terrible. And this is happening every other second, every day. (Director of Marketing at Plan International Norway)

Both examples create a recognizable situation for the public, by turning the problem upside-down. The campaigns use examples that are known to the public, and by doing this, people create empathy towards the people who deal with these problems in real life.

Overall, these findings point out that in order to show a balanced portrayal of poverty and development, it is important to create a connection where the audience understands the underlying relevance of the issue. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks confirm what is said by Joye (2015, p.5), who argues that many fundraising appeals lead to apathy, where the audience is invited to 'care for people in need who are not like us'. This eventually leads to a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The examples of the campaigns by SOS Children Villages and Plan International Norway show how NGOs can move away from the portrayal of the ideal victim, which is often associated with distant, helpless, and passive aid recipients (Cohen, 2001). The findings support what Hoijer (2004) and Vestergaard (2013a) demonstrate, namely that the portrayal of the ideal victim contributes to feelings of apathy because the distance between the aid recipient and the audience is too big and the issues are too distant from the lives of people in the West. The findings of this section show that by bringing far-off issues close to home, people understand that 'they' are not so different from 'us' and these issues can happen to anyone. This ultimately creates empathy towards the people who really face these issues.

4.3.3 *Let aid recipients speak for themselves*

A last factor in showing a balanced portrayal of poverty and development concerns the voice of the aid recipients. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks point out that it is important to avoid speaking on behalf of the aid recipients and show that they can speak for themselves. They explain that in order to really understand issues related to poverty and development, the public should be able to understand the context from the point of view of the aid recipient, showing what is beyond their control.

It is important to let them speak themselves and let them be in charge of what they have to say. You feel sometimes when you see these campaigns that they just got some words in their mouth that they have to say. Remove the Western voice over saying ‘help them now’. Show the reality in a different way through them, through their eyes. (Team Leader Information and Policy at SAIH Norway)

The interviews with NGO professionals engaged in the planning, designing, and production of humanitarian communications show how it can be difficult to get information from aid recipients, as they are aware that they receive help from the organization that interviews them, leading to a power relation between the organization and the aid recipient. The President at IDleaks illustrates that, even though aid recipients speak through an organization in a context where they might be biased, they can always say more if you let them speak rather than not including them. In 2017, STC published a report about the views and experiences of aid recipients called ‘The People in the Pictures’ (Crombie, 2017). Recommendations in the report focus on the need to listen to the aid recipients and to apply more agency and accountability, where they are speaking for themselves. This example shows that NGOs are aware of the debate and are willing to invest in new ways of content making.

An example of this new form of humanitarian communication is the campaign ‘Stop the Pity, Unlock the Potential’ by Mama Hope (2017), an NGO that is focused on community-led projects in developing countries. The campaign aims to counterbalance the narrative on poverty, where instead of emphasizing our differences, the campaign aims to create a connection between the people in the West and the people in developing countries. One of their videos, ‘Fight the Stereotype’, shows four Kenyan men, Gabriel, Benard, Brian and Derrick, who make fun of the

way African men are portrayed in Hollywood movies (Mama Hope, 2012). The video was their own idea and they collected the content and edited the video themselves. Their message is to look beyond the image portrayed in Hollywood movies and actually include real voices of the people when representing them and show what they have to say about the topic.

The findings pointed out in this section are in line with what Chouliaraki (2013) argues, namely to move away from the ‘professional voice’ and the ‘I’ towards a situation where multiple voices get the chance to speak for themselves. According to critics, humanitarian communication is often about ‘an elite group based in a large Northern city that claims to speak on behalf of the poor, disadvantaged people in another part in the world’ (Karns et al, 2015, p.275). Giving these people a voice of their own can challenge the powerful and stigmatized label that is put on aid recipients. This might lead to accepting their voice as one ‘worth listening and responding to’ (Chouliaraki, 2013, p.267). By letting aid recipients tell their own story and let them be in charge of the content and editing, new issues will arise that are not pointed out by ‘outsiders’. This also leads to a more outward directed look, where not the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are emphasized but the ability to understand and share the feelings of people living in poverty. By including these facets, the discourse on poverty where one group of people is isolated and simplified, might be challenged and changed. Sharing information where aid recipients are capable of telling their own stories can give a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development.

4.3.4 Discussion

In conclusion, to answer sub-question 3, the interviews with NGO professionals show that the most challenging in their work is to make the public take the step from being known with the organization and its values to actually supporting them. All interviewees explain that it is a day-to-day business to get people to see what the organization is doing. This is something that NGOs have to invest in and the different types of communication contribute to accomplish this, in order to reach the ultimate goal: to help the people in need. In line with this, it is a challenge for NGOs to constantly find the right balance between getting the desired impact and informing the public.

These findings confirm what is discussed by Orgad (2013) and Cohen (2001) who point out how there is a constant balance between the need to fundraise and the need to raise awareness.

To answer sub-question 5, this section point out that there are certain aspects that can be taken into account in order to move away from a stereotypical portrayal of aid recipients. By showing context, creating empathy, and letting aid recipients speak for themselves, it is possible to avoid stereotypes, inform the public in a nuanced and creative way and still get the public's attention and collect money. The interviews with SAIH and IDleaks point out that showing a balanced portrayal of poverty and development does not mean that NGOs should remove the picture of suffering people in need. NGOs can and should share these images, as this is the reality. A balanced picture of poverty and development simply means that people have to understand all aspects of it.

The meaning and context of poverty has changed throughout the years. Where there was once a clear distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, nowadays poverty is associated with aid recipients living in developing countries (O'Conner, 2001). Poverty was long understood as the 'lack of money or material possessions' (Webster, 1993, p.1778). However, this definition was argued to be too broad, as there can be many reasons for the lack of money and material possession (Sen, 1981). Poverty is about the social consequences of the lack of money and material possession and should be seen in relation to the social, economic, and psychological circumstances of the people living in poverty (Peet and Hartwick, 2009; Sumner and Tribe, 2008). The findings of this research show that in order to really understand poverty, but also the effect of the work of NGOs and indirectly the impact of private donations, people need to understand the underlying causes, historical backgrounds, and cultural effects of the issues. If not, the meaning of poverty will continue to be isolated. The powerful labels that the poor received so many years ago can be removed by taking into account the underlying causes and consequences of poverty. Creating content that leads to empathy as well as letting the aid recipients share their own vision, in their own words, and based on their own experiences can bring new viewpoints to light and reshape our long-term view on development.

5 CONCLUSION

The field where NGOs operate has changed. Once small organizations have now evolved into large NGOs with huge influences. NGOs have the role as representative of aid recipients and are powerful sources in raising awareness and helping to understand issues related to poverty and development. In doing this, NGOs make use of private donations in reaching their purpose. These different aspects give NGOs a position of power. As a result, their work is a vocal point of attention and NGOs are vulnerable to critique. Humanitarian communication, the link between the NGO and the public, is widely critiqued over the years. The findings of this research show that humanitarian communication has different methods of reaching out to the public, making the practice very complicated. In addition to fundraising appeals, humanitarian communication includes other aspects, focused on the purpose of the NGO and raising awareness for causes important to them, which are argued to be just as important. These other aspects are often left out when studying humanitarian communication, leading to critique specifically aimed at need-based communication, which is focused on fundraising. Because NGOs operate on a large public platform, critique will always be part of everything they do. No matter how hard NGOs try to adjust their strategies, critique will always follow. The findings of this research show that it is important that studies that critique the practice of humanitarian communication look at all facets of it. There is a large variety in humanitarian communication and looking at only one part of the practice, shows an unbalanced picture of all humanitarian communication.

In line with this, the findings of this research show that that private donations are important for NGOs to reach their main purpose, which is to prevent or promote a specific cause, or more generally to help people in need. It is difficult to fundraise without including specific aspects, such as touching people's emotions and simplifying the problem. Certain images do fundraise and NGO professionals practicing humanitarian communication are aware of that. It is generally known that certain images increase donations. When there is a desperate need for private donations, NGO professionals trust that these images will give them that. It is however those aspects that are specifically critiqued. Moving away from this type of communication, especially in a time where there are so many humanitarian disasters but also in a period of financial

instability, is very difficult, if not impossible. In order to do their work, NGOs are, to a large extent, dependent on private donations, making their reality complex; in order to receive private donations, all elements need to work. It is an ongoing struggle to find the right balance in humanitarian communication.

The results of this thesis show, however, that there are certain aspects NGOs can add in their humanitarian communication to show a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development and still reach the public and raise money. Sharing stories of suffering people, which have been critiqued so much, is not wrong. These stories are in fact real and the public should be aware of the situation. It is not so much about showing the aid recipients in a positive or negative light. It is more about giving context and facts. The public should know that the humanitarian field is complex and often relies on factors that make the work of NGOs difficult. It is important that the public understands that development aid is complicated and supporting aid recipients by giving money is not a magic fix. In order to give a more balanced portrayal of poverty and development, giving contextual background of the precise role of NGOs in development aid and humanitarian assistance should be shared in humanitarian communication.

At the time of writing, the humanitarian field is under pressure. In February 2018, Oxfam was accused of covering up an investigation into the engagement of aid workers in sexual exploitative behavior in Haiti in 2011. Oxfam was working in Haiti on earthquake relief projects, while employees were involved in hiring prostitutes and organizing sex parties. An investigation by The Times started the scandal, followed by an immense focus on Oxfam from international media. Accordingly, the European Union is now investigating Oxfam, governments have threatened to remove funding, and Oxfam lost thousands of donors. The Oxfam scandal has shaken up the whole humanitarian field. Other NGOs are now being questioned and investigated and new scandals related to other NGOs have come to light.

The Oxfam scandal is, to a broader extent, linked to the unbalanced power relation between the aid recipient and the Western savior and a lot has to do with humanitarian communication. Humanitarian communication, as the findings of this research show, is built around the brand of the NGO, focused on their purpose and principles. This includes fundraising appeals that trigger

the public to do what is right. In order to receive financial support for their work, they share a simplified and one-sided story, which is argued to be unavoidable. This has led to a simplification of poverty and development, leaving out the complexity of the field but also making the public believe that their donations solve poverty issues. The result of this is seen in the debate following the Oxfam scandal, which is more about the money that people trusted Oxfam with and the misuse of this trust, than about the impact on the aid recipients. The heated discussion around the work of NGOs brings to light how the Western public thinks about the humanitarian field and shows their lack of understanding development. The Oxfam scandal can be seen as a start to give a more realistic portrayal of development aid. NGOs should be more transparent about the work they do, which is about more than the donations of the public. This should help reframe the issue around foreign aid, where the public understands the deeper value of the work of NGOs.

A last note in relation to this research, moving away from the Oxfam debate and the role of NGOs in the portrayal of poverty and development, is the role of the public. More people go to developing countries as tourist or part of a study program or volunteer project. They take home damaging images, keeping alive the stereotypical associations of poverty and development as well as the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ power relations. Their good intentions to collect donations from their relatives and friends before their trip are often combined with one-sided and simplified representations of the people they are planning to help. Including the role of individuals in the representation of poverty and development can contribute to understanding new ways to move forward.

This research is focused on a small sample of Dutch and Norwegian NGOs and can therefore not be generalized. To develop a more holistic understanding of the meaning of humanitarian communication, further research that includes a broader data sample is needed. In addition, this research leaves out fundraising activities other than campaigns and commercials, such as door-to-door visits, face-to-face fundraising activities, and tele-marketing. As a result, not all types of humanitarian communication towards the public are included in this research. Further research that includes this can give a broader meaning to the practice of humanitarian communication.

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7 APPENDIX 1

TOPIC LIST FOR INTERVIEWS WITH NGO PROFESSIONALS

Introduction

- Introduction of research study
- Walkthrough interview (topic questions, practicalities)

Personal information of participant

- Background
- Job position

Procedure of content selection

- How is content selected
 - o by whom
 - o based on what
 - o where from (internal, external)
- Most important message you want to share
 - o getting people to donate, asking for attention, giving a story, explaining about the goals of the organization
- Important factors in selecting content
- What factors influence the direction of the story?
 - o how poverty is represented
 - o one story over the other
- Challenges in selecting content?
- Limitations in selecting images?
- Are there any guidelines?
 - o how committed are you to these guidelines?

Use of communication outlets

- Key communication outlets used by your organization
 - o Preferred?
 - o Different communication outlets used for different goals?
 - o Role, importance and selection of visuals
- The role of social media: Have things changed after the development of social media? If yes, in what way?

Changes throughout the years

- Different strategies and approaches throughout the years?
 - o If so, why? What works best? What is preferable?
- Biggest challenge in your work throughout the years?
- How do you find a balance?
- Most important in your work

Example of campaign

- What was the background of this campaign?
- What was the goal of this campaign?
- What was the process in decision-making on how to portray the subject?
- What was the reason for this portrayal?
- What was the intended reaction from the public?
- What was the outcome of this campaign? (in terms of public awareness)

***Topic for SAIH and IDleaks on humanitarian communication**

- What are the main critiques around humanitarian communication?
- What are new ways of portraying beneficiaries in humanitarian communication?
- Is it possible to move away from the poverty porn trap? How?
- What are solutions to communicate and challenge the mainstream perceptions of global poverty?



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