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The Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism is the first major interdisciplinary centre in the UK to develop a broad, yet focused, interface between law, justice and journalism in society. The centre aims to harness and maximise opportunities for research collaboration, knowledge transfer and teaching to become an international centre of excellence and brings together expertise in the disciplines of Law, Criminology and Journalism at City University London.

**CLJJ Working Papers:** ‘The Future of Humanitarian Reporting’ is the fourth set of working papers in a series from the Centre for Law Justice and Journalism at City University London. This publication marks the launch of the Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism’s initiative ‘The Future of Humanitarian Reporting’, which was launched at an event at City University London on 6 March 2013.

**Leadership and Expertise:** The Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism (CLJJ) is directed by three of City University London’s leading academics, as well as being supported by a number of specialists from the university.

**Professor Howard Tumber**, CLJJ Director (Journalism) is Professor of Journalism and Communication within the Graduate School of Journalism, City University London, and has published widely in the field of the sociology of news and journalism. His recent research is concerned with the role of journalists and the reporting of international conflict throughout the world and across media channels. He is managing director of the CLJJ.

**Professor Lorna Woods**, CLJJ Director (Law) is associate Dean of Research at The City Law School, City University London, and has research interests in broadcasting law and policy, regulation of the media and the related issues of freedom of expression and privacy. She is also known for her work in EU Law as well as the protection of human rights in Europe.

**Professor Chris Greer**, CLJJ Director (Justice) has published widely in the areas of media criminology, victimology, and punishment and social control. His current research examines the shifting relations between the press, the criminal justice system, and news consumers at a time of media proliferation and market destabilisation. He is founding and current co-editor of the international journal, *Crime, Media, Culture*.



## **THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN REPORTING**

These working papers mark the launch of the Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism's initiative 'The Future of Humanitarian Reporting', which aims to make recommendations for the way journalists, NGOs and academics can improve reporting of humanitarian disasters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### **Contents**

#### **Foreword**

*Glenda Cooper* 5

#### **Introduction: Putting the human at the heart of humanitarian reporting**

*Lyse Doucet* 9

#### **The mainstream media and disasters in the digital age**

Humanitarian disasters and communications in a globalised world

*Simon Cottle* 13

Drawing the thin line: Reflections on news media's use of user-generated content in reporting on a national disaster *Stijn Joye* 23

Radar: From the margins to the front page *Alice Klein* 29

#### **NGOs and a fragmenting media world**

Text appeal? NGOs and digital media *Glenda Cooper* 35

Social media and humanitarian reporting *Claire Wardle* 43

Creation, curation, connection and community *Liz Scarff* 51

Digital by default? How DFID is using new media to deal with disasters *Russell Watkins* 57

#### **Telling traumatic stories: journalist, survivor and aid worker perspectives**

Survivor blogging: Reporting emotion and trauma after Utøya *Einar Thorsen* 61

Emotion and trauma in reporting disaster and tragedy *Sallyanne Duncan and Jackie Newton* 69

How we now report disasters: Emotion and trauma *Ros Wynne-Jones* 75

The changing face of humanitarian reporting: Putting the survivor centre stage *Brendan Gormley* 81

#### **Appendix**

'The Future of Humanitarian Reporting' speaker list 6 March 2013 87

Resources/contact 89



## FOREWORD

January 2010: a massive earthquake devastates Haiti. A doctor performs brain surgery on a 15-year-old girl. Another man writes a gripping eyewitness account for the *Guardian* about the dead bodies piled up on the street.

In the past it would have been obvious which was the journalist and which the aid worker. But Dr Sanjay Gupta was working for CNN as a reporter when he carried out the surgery (Blaze-Carlson, 2010). Prosperity Raymond, the named author of the *Guardian* piece, was Christian Aid's Haiti country manager (Raymond, 2010). Meanwhile, the latest news was being broken via social media. As the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Brainard, 2010) noted, digital media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Skype were crucial in delivering early information about the destruction and relief efforts.

By the time Hurricane Sandy hit Haiti – as well as the north-east coast of America and the Caribbean – two and a half years later, people were using the photo app Instagram to upload pictures of the storm at a rate of 10 a second – 1.3m hashtagged in total (Taylor, 2012).

We've come a long way since Michael Buerk's seminal piece from Korem in 1984. As a piece of journalism, it still has the power to move and shock. But what is astonishing is that in a seven-minute report, only two voices are heard: Buerk's and that of a white Médecins Sans Frontières doctor.

What does it mean for the way we report humanitarian disasters in future if ordinary citizens can break the news, aid workers can act as journalists, while journalists cross the line and get involved in the relief effort? What kind of pictures and accounts will we be exposed to if anyone can upload images of a dying victim of a hurricane – or the death of a dictator, as in the case of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi? And while a wealth of user-generated content made the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami a mega-story – and saw mega donations raised (\$1,241 per survivor [ICRC, 2006]), what kind of disasters will we end up covering if it depends on tweets and Facebook posts to get our attention?

In March 2013, a conference organised by City University's [Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism](#), in partnership with the Red Cross, debated these issues. It looked at the latest developments in the use of user-generated content (UGC) by the mainstream media and aid agencies, the relationship between journalists and aid workers now that social media is a factor, and how, in the Twitter age, we should think about reporting emotion and trauma.

This collection of working papers examines these ideas in detail.

Three key interest groups, whose relationships play a crucial role in how humanitarian crises are perceived, took part in the conference: academics, journalists and NGOs. Representatives of each group – with their different styles and perspectives – have contributed to this publication, so that different voices and viewpoints are heard and, ultimately, better relationships forged.

To introduce this publication, **Lyse Doucet**, the BBC's chief international correspondent, looks back over 30 years in journalism. She reflects on the difference that new technology and media has made for journalists who cover disasters – and the aid agencies who find themselves under increasing scrutiny. She poses the question: what is the future for humanitarian reporting?

The first section looks at how the mainstream media has adapted to covering crises in an internet age. **Prof Simon Cottle** addresses the changing nature of humanitarian disaster itself in our increasingly globalised world – and the speed and volume of information we can now gather about such disasters. **Dr Stijn Joye**, in an analysis of how the Belgian media covered the 2012 Sierre coach crash, looks at how newspapers crossed a 'thin and delicate line' by taking pictures and information about those involved from websites, blogs and Facebook without permission. **Alice Klein**, co-director of Radar, which trains citizen journalists, poses the provocative question: why do foreign correspondents think they can report reality better than those who live in the area reported on?

The second section examines how NGOs are dealing with an increasingly fragmenting media world. **Glenda Cooper** looks at whether NGOs are really allowing different voices and stories to be heard in the new media environment. **Dr Claire Wardle** of the news agency Storyful warns that NGOs are still treating social media as if it is the same as broadcast or print. Social media consultant **Liz Scarff** points out the practicalities for NGOs who want to create a social media campaign. Meanwhile, **Russell Watkins** from the Department for International Development argues that while DFID is neither an NGO nor a media organisation, 'we are all publishers of content now'.

The third and final section looks at the difficult issues surrounding emotion and trauma, whether you're a survivor, a journalist or an aid worker. **Dr Einar Thorsen's** looks at how survivors of the mass shooting on the Norwegian island of Utøya in 2011 used social media both to call for help during the attack, and as a coping mechanism to deal with post-traumatic stress. **Dr Sallyanne Duncan** and **Dr Jackie Newton** argue that sensitive and connected reporting by journalists into the aftermath of disasters can aid the mourning process. **Ros Wynne-Jones**, a journalist who has reported from Kosovo, East Timor, Rwanda, and Chad-Darfur, reflects with poignancy and brutal frankness about what it is to be a humanitarian reporter. Finally, **Brendan Gormley** argues that the NGO community still needs to work harder to put the survivor at the centre of their communications.

But the debate does not end on these pages. We have created a [special page](#) on the City University website to track this project's development, with audio and video from the conference itself and hyperlinks to relevant reports. Please contact us with your own thoughts and experiences so that we can continue to develop our research and work in this area.

My grateful thanks to Peter Aggar and Maria Cesay for administrative help, and to Prof Howard Tumber for his suggestions and advice. I hope you enjoy reading these papers.

Glenda Cooper  
February 2014

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## **INTRODUCTION: PUTTING THE HUMAN AT THE HEART OF HUMANITARIAN REPORTING**

*Lyse Doucet introduced the conference with some thoughts on how humanitarian reporting has changed over the past three decades*

About 30 years ago, when I was living and working in West Africa, the United Nations organised a tour of Africa for a group of journalists. It took us across the continent, from Senegal to Sudan.

What was the point?

The UN said the world's media weren't telling the real story: that in the midst of another terrible famine in the Sahel and beyond, Africans were not just victims waiting for handouts; Africans were solving their problems themselves.

And how did I report it? Well, in places like the Malian capital Bamako I sent my reports by telex – those clattering teletype machines we had to use back then – and the BBC voiced my dispatches in London.

When we got to Khartoum in Sudan, all my radio equipment got lost at the airport, so that was the end of that.

When we reached Kenya I wrote an article for a London-based magazine, and someone hand-carried it to Britain. If that person was reliable, my story would have arrived a few days later.

That was reporting then. No wonder people didn't know what Africans were doing. No wonder maybe even Africans didn't know what Africans were doing. And no wonder it was so difficult even for aid agencies to know what was happening.

That was then. And this is now.

A few years ago, I happened to be in Peshawar in northwest Pakistan, having lunch with an old friend. And on that day the country's worst floods of the century started, without warning. All roads were blocked by the driving rain and rising waters. My producer and I were stuck. We couldn't get out, and a story was breaking there.

So what did we do?

We took our smartphones, and started photographing and filming, and tweeting and texting. We had a small video camera with us so filmed reports that way too, and sent them to the BBC in London over the internet. And we shared resources with our Pakistani colleagues working for the BBC in Peshawar. We told the story, as it happened.

But even if I'd only had my smartphone, I could have reported the story as it broke. Many others were also telling the story with their smartphones – not journalists but people from all walks of life. And with my small cellular phone I could reach quite a few of them – directly – by tweeting.

I tweeted: 'I'm in Peshawar, the roads are all washed out, people are

suffering.’ Within seconds, someone tweets back: ‘I’m in Rawalpindi, it’s starting to rain here, we’re getting worried.’ Then someone replies from Karachi in the south: ‘It’s not raining yet, but we hear it will. Are you coming here?’ I was connecting to people, and they were connecting to me. They were helping me to tell their story, and they were telling it themselves.

Soon, countless journalists were all over the story, too. Pakistanis, working with the many TV channels and newspapers that had grown up in recent years, were soon reporting along all points of the Indus river – from areas already devastated by the torrents of rushing water, to places further south, where people anxiously waited.

The aid agencies were all over it, too. How could they not be? These were epic floods, from Kashmir in the north to Karachi in the south. When the UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon arrived a few weeks into the crisis, we were asked to accompany him on his helicopter. So we flew high above the land to see the terrifying scale of the disaster, and dropped down to talk to people on the ground. Both vantage points are crucial to truly understand the full scale of any calamity. In some ways, with all our new technologies and means of transport, our jobs are a lot easier now. There’s so much more information.

But in other ways, our jobs as journalists and aid workers are much harder.

For reporters, who like to get the story out first, other people are getting there before us. Stories are now breaking first on Twitter and Facebook. Videos are being uploaded first on YouTube. People on the ground, living the story, no longer have to wait for us to show up, or call. They have their own means to convey their message.

And it’s not always the established aid agencies who are now first to get help to those who need it. Sometimes it’s community activists, compassionate neighbours, local heroes. They’re already there, on the ground, distributing whatever aid they can gather. Other times it’s political organisations with other agendas.

In the midst of a disaster, what matters most is getting aid to people in dire need. Whoever brings it is welcome. But it means that the traditional aid agencies, with the big names we all recognise, have to work harder to be at the top of their game, to do what they are meant to do best.

Glenda Cooper, who organised The Future of Humanitarian Reporting conference, asked on her blog on the BBC’s College of Journalism website: ‘What does it mean for the way we report humanitarian disasters in future if ordinary citizens can break the news and aid workers can act as journalists?’ (Cooper, 2013). Can journalists cross the line and get involved in the relief effort? What kind of pictures and reporting will we be exposed to, she asks, if anyone can upload images of a dying victim or of an earthquake?

When Glenda mentions journalists crossing the line, she cites CNN’s Dr Sanjay Gupta, who is actually a trained medical doctor and does roll up his sleeves and go into the operating theatre. I think I speak for myself and my

colleagues trained in first aid that you wouldn't want your community to be totally dependent on us.

During Pakistan's punishing floods, popular Pakistani television anchors saw first-hand where their government and the aid agencies were letting people down. They started raising money through their own TV channels, and even began distributing aid, shaming those who weren't doing their jobs.

But when the government tried to stage photo opportunities, journalists were back to doing what they do best – reporting.

I remember one occasion when Pakistan's Prime Minister flew into a badly affected area where people waited happily, patiently, to receive government aid. 'We are here to help in your hour of need,' he announced on live television. Then he left, as quickly as he had come, and the distribution suddenly stopped. But the cameras kept rolling, and the tweets kept coming, exposing what had been, in the end, just a publicity stunt.

Spin doctors and aid sharks beware.

In a lecture last year for the Royal Television Society (Doucet, 2012), I argued that we live in times where everything has changed, but nothing has changed. The traditional rules of journalism still apply. The old rules of getting aid to those who need it most still matter. What is the job of aid agencies? It is to get help to those who need it, to gather accurate information, to let us know about the scale of the disaster. And if they don't do their job they'll hear about it, we'll hear about it, because there are many more people there on the ground, able to tell us.

When it comes to aid, especially when disasters are big, logistics and supplies cost money. So aid agencies often look to us, the journalists, to tell this story. I do believe it is part of our job, in these humanitarian disasters, to help people understand why this matters, and why they should care.

But our main job is to tell the story. And telling it well involves more than a timeline of tweets or a video stream on the internet. There's a lot of information, and sometimes there's too much information. The stories of individuals, the stories themselves, can get lost.

That is why, in our business, the story and the storyteller still matter. There needs to be that human focus. I would say that has been the essence of storytelling since time immemorial, from the days when people relied on stories told aloud, person to person, family to family, village to village.

The facts matter, too. Is it five people stranded or 50? Is it 500? Is this a crisis affecting thousands of people, or millions? Our reputations rely on getting this right. If we don't, people will remember we didn't. In our battle to find the truth, we are all on the same side.

Call it climate change, call it cyclical change, in our world disasters are happening all too often, in all too many places. Roads are washed out, villages are cut off, sometimes we simply cannot get there. But other people are already there, sending their stories to us when we can't get to them. And

whether you call it an uprising, a revolution, or a war, large parts of the world are now in tumult, difficult to get to, often dangerous.

Look at Syria. It's not just a war, but a growing humanitarian crisis. Lives are being shattered, a country is being broken, and it's heartbreaking to watch it unfold.

Is there a future for humanitarian reporting? Yes, if reporting is done in the best of reporting traditions, and if, in humanitarian relief, the human is kept at the heart of humanitarian.

*Lyse Doucet is the BBC's chief international correspondent and a presenter for BBC World TV and World Service Radio. She is regularly deployed to report and anchor special news coverage from the field.*

*She played a key role in the BBC's coverage of the 'Arab Spring' across the Middle East and North Africa and been covering major stories in the region for the past 20 years. She has reported regularly from Afghanistan and Pakistan since 1988. Her work has also focused on major natural disasters, including the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistan floods.*

*Before joining the BBC's team of presenters in 1999, Lyse spent 15 years as a BBC foreign correspondent, with postings in Jerusalem, Amman, Tehran, Kabul, Islamabad and Abidjan.*

*She is an honorary patron of Canadian Crossroads International and a member of Friends of Aschiana UK, which supports working street children in Afghanistan.*

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## **HUMANITARIAN DISASTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD**

*Simon Cottle examines the changing nature of humanitarian disasters in global context and today's rapidly transforming communication ecology*

The recent explosion of social media alongside the exponential growth in mobile telephony around the world, as well as remote satellite surveillance, crisis mapping and crowd sourcing, SMS texting, and new digitalised appeals and donation transfers, are currently all making their mark on the contemporary field of humanitarianism. To borrow a phrase from the social theorist John Thompson, and in the contexts of humanitarian disasters, they are contributing to the 'transformation of visibility' (Thompson, 1995) and transforming traditional relations of communications power as they do so (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle, 2012). The opportunities that these technologies afford demand careful and concerted attention. But this is only one half of a globally spinning coin. On the other side, the nature and forms of humanitarian disasters in the world today are also fast changing, and these warrant no less serious recognition – and world response.

This short paper sets out to briefly situate the changing nature of humanitarian disasters in globalised context. It then offers some general observations on what exactly is distinctive and new about today's reconfiguring communications ecology, and how it matters within the field of humanitarianism at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

My principal argument is that it is imperative that we keep *both* the changing nature of humanitarian disasters in global context and today's rapidly transforming communication ecology clearly in mutual view. This is no time for lop-sided media-centrism, much less technological (communications) determinism. But it is a propitious moment to address how both 'old' and 'new' media enter into the global course of humanitarian disasters, affecting them from the *inside out* and *outside in*.

### **Disasters, crises, catastrophes . . . in a globalised world**

Major disasters around the world are on the increase and infused by four principal factors: climate change, rapid urbanisation, poverty and environmental degradation (Global Humanitarian Forum, 2009; UNISDR, 2012). Many 'natural disasters' today can be more accurately described as '*unnatural* disasters', given their determination by complex and systemic social forces now shaping human habitats and life chances, and ecology and climate around the globe. Disasters can also be seen as unequally distributed hazards. 'Natural disasters' have long hidden their 'socialised' nature (Giddens, 1990) and unequal impacts around the globe (poorly constructed buildings, not earthquakes, for example, kill people, and elaborate risk reduction strategies invariably cost money). In this sense, then, natural

'hazards only become disasters when they exceed a community's ability to cope' (Holmes & Niskala, 2007:2; see also United Nations Environmental Program, 2007).

Moreover, not all disasters, whether natural or (*un*)natural, automatically find prominent news exposure, and thereby encourage donor funds for disaster relief operations. The vast majority of 'uninsured lives' in the South, it seems, are not only cheap (Duffield, 2007) but also un-newsworthy. This is often explained in terms of impinging geopolitical interests, national cultural outlooks and the operation of foreign news values (Benthall, 1993; Galtung & Ruge, 1981; Hawkins, 2008; IFRCRCS, 2005; Moeller, 1999; Seaton, 2005) – factors institutionalised and professionally routinised in today's journalistic 'calculus of death' (Cottle, 2009; 2013a).

The increasing numbers of disasters around the world, therefore, need to be situated within a broader conceptualisation of global crises (Cottle, 2011) and what Ulrich Beck refers to as global 'manufactured uncertainty' (Beck, 1992) and, in a post-9/11 world, 'manufactured insecurity' (Beck, 2009). In addition to anthropogenic climate change and global market meltdowns, the threats now confronting human populations include exacerbating crises of water, food and energy shortages; forced migrations; intensified ethnic conflicts; state human rights violations; the global insecurity of transnational terrorism; and new forms of western 'risk-transfer' warfare (Abbott et al, 2006; Amnesty International, 2009; Oxfam, 2009a, 2009b; Shaw, 2005) – the latter increasingly putting humanitarian workers at risk.

The established humanitarian concept of 'complex emergencies' no longer adequately encapsulates – much less explains – the nature of these and other 'globally originated' and 'globally invigorated problems' (Bauman, 2007). Developed in the post-cold war period with its increased opportunity for humanitarian (and military) intervention in conflict-based humanitarian disasters, the concept of complex emergencies helped to reintroduce 'the political' into the notion of 'humanitarian emergency' (Calhoun 2004). In this way, 'conflict-generated emergencies' (Macrae & Zwi 1994, cited in Keen, 2008:1) or 'humanitarian crises that are linked with large-scale violent conflict – civil war, ethnic cleansing and genocide', became distinguishable from natural disasters or 'disasters caused primarily by drought, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tidal waves or some other force of nature' (Keen, 2008:1). But, as we can begin to detect in such statements, the definition and conceptualisation of 'complex emergency' is inattentive to how the 'global' may now also be at work in such disasters.

For example, large-scale conflicts are rarely self-contained, but embroiled in changing global configurations of state power and exacerbated, if not fuelled, by interests and resources that invade from well beyond the conflict zone or even surrounding region (Dillon & Reid, 2000; Duffield, 2001, 2007; Kaldor, 2006; Shaw, 2005; United Nations, 2009a). In the post-cold war period, 'new wars' are the product of failed and failing states. They involve

complex webs of interests and identities that benefit from overseas trade connections and remittances sent from abroad, and that plunder natural resources for the international marketplace (United Nations, 2009a). In this context, famine and environmental forces can be, and often are, used to advance war aims and processes of 'ethnic cleansing'.

Earlier distinctions between interstate wars and intrastate conflicts, as well as between political conflicts and natural disasters, have today become considerably less clear-cut. In a globalised world, we need to develop concepts of humanitarian disasters that accurately map onto the endemic and encompassing nature of today's global crises (Cottle, 2011).

Evidence for globally produced disasters is not difficult to find. It is documented, for example, in the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) reports; Kofi Annan's Global Humanitarian Forum's calculations of 300 million people now being seriously affected by climate change each year, including 300,000 deaths (Global Humanitarian Forum, 2009); the precariousness of interlocking global financial systems, periodic meltdowns, and their devastating impacts on developing countries (United Nations 2009b); the alarming rise of weather-borne (Oxfam, 2007) and vector-borne diseases (World Health Organization, 2007); and the world audits of human rights abuses and their links with these and other forms of world crises (Amnesty International, 2009).

To add to this global complexity, disasters and crises are not necessarily discrete. They often interlock and dynamically mutate into related crises and disasters, and exacerbate yet others (Ahmed, 2010; Held et al., 2010; Cottle, 2011). Changing climate, we know, can exacerbate competition for land, water and food. It creates conditions for civil strife and political instability, and produces issues of national and international insecurity (International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2007) and human (in)security (Kaldor, 2007).

Climate change can also lead to the incubation of deadly vector-borne diseases and forced migrations of environmental refugees. A complex of factors contributed to the global food crisis of 2008. These included: increased demand for grain-intensive meat production in developing economies such as China and India; poor harvests exacerbated by climate change in others; the production of biofuels displacing food production in the South to support climate change policies in the North; and rising world energy costs. Together, these contributed to a marked increase in world food prices and a global food crisis that impacted on the world's poor and led to food riots in scores of cities around the world (Oxfam, 2009a).

It is important, therefore, to keep the multidimensional, interlocking and mutating character of global crises and their humanitarian disasters clearly in view if we are to avoid dissimulating the complex global interconnections and inequalities involved. And so too, of course, must we aim to better understand and make use of the increasing centrality and capability of media and communications within their unfolding trajectory.



### **Communicating disasters: what's new?**

It's worth remembering, given the current buzz about new communications, that the involvement of media communications in disasters is far from new. Throughout history we know that communication technologies have been used to convey disasters and their impacts across space and time, while progressively collapsing both space and time. The rise of printing and news sheets in England in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century; the development of public postal services in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the construction of rail networks then telegraph systems in the United States in the 1840s; the laying of underwater telegraphic cables linking Britain and India in the 1860s; and Marconi's experiments with radio transmission in the late 1890s that led to radio broadcasting in the 1920s, *all* progressively extended the range and speed by which calamitous events could be communicated (Flichy, 1995; Thompson, 1995; Rifkin, 2009; Briggs and Burke, 2002). Before these modern means of communication, foreign envoys, travelling merchants and seafarers would have imparted word-of-mouth accounts, rhetorically embellished no doubt to enthral listeners and draw a crowd. More than 300 years ago Daniel Defoe published his journalistic account of the Great Storm of 1703 and the loss of over 8,000 souls in Britain, based on first-hand accounts of eye-witnesses (Defoe, 1704). Reports of disasters, including those based on personal testimonies and graphic accounts are also, it seems, not new.

Nonetheless there *is* something new in today's communication environment and how this relates enters into contemporary humanitarian disasters. Earlier historical communication trends progressively collapsed both time and space, but these trends have now reached such heights that communications reach deep inside disasters, shaping them as they do so. The *extensivity* and *intensity* of media and communications in disasters, I suggest, is unparalleled and in at least six analytically distinguishable ways, each impacting the field of humanitarianism. Many of these developments could hardly have been imagined only a decade or so ago.

1) **Scale:** Significant parts of today's media and communications ecology now exhibit extensive *scale* in terms of their encompassing global reach, which, since the advent of geo-stationary satellites and the internet, can communicate images and information about humanitarian disasters and catastrophes simultaneously to vast swathes of the world's population.

2) **Speed:** The accelerated *speed* of media and communications around the globe has now reached a point in which time has effectively collapsed when transmitting 'live' or near-real-time images, speech and text to globally dispersed audiences and potential relief organisations. Inevitably, such speed of communications may grant emphasis to immediacy and experience over analysis and deliberation, and contribute to the undermining of traditional practices of information management (see Cottle and Nolan,

2007).

3) **Saturation:** The increasing *saturation* of human society with universalising means of communication, such as mobile phones (see below), contributes to the establishment of normative expectations about communications access and availability, and the preparedness of everyone concerned to use them in disaster situations.

4) **Social relations' enfranchisement:** These same universalising technologies communicatively expand and enfranchise disaster *social relations*, increasingly incorporating survivors as well as relief workers and those responsible for averting disasters or ameliorating their effects, and reconfiguring the communications field as they do so.

5) **Surveillance:** The increasing availability of new 'bottom-up', 'many-to-many', 'interactive' communications alongside established 'top-down', 'few to many', 'one way' communications, with both now facilitating communications beyond as well as within national borders, all significantly enhance the *surveillance* capacity of contemporary media. So does, importantly, satellite monitoring sponsored by civil society actors and governments. This renders attempts by states to keep major disasters 'out of sight, out of political mind' much more difficult than in the recent past. For example, there was a haemorrhage of video images and eyewitness accounts from Burma following Hurricane Nargis in 2008, in contrast, say, to the news blackout imposed by the Chinese authorities following the Tangshan earthquake in 1976, one of the deadliest in human history.

6) **Seeing:** Contemporary media and communications provide unprecedented opportunities for us to not only read and hear about disasters, but also, importantly, to *see* disasters, sometimes as they unfold 'live' on screens in front of us. This enhanced capacity for media visualisation, as we shall hear, provides enhanced opportunities to 'bear witness' to disasters around the world and their human consequences – a prerequisite, it seems, for empathetically informed humanitarian response (Chouliaraki, 2006; Cottle, 2013).

In these six analytically distinct, albeit often condensed, characteristics of *scale, speed, saturation, social relations' enfranchisement, surveillance* and *seeing*, earlier historical spatial-temporal trends of media and communication have reached new global heights of extensity and intensity. In such ways today's media and communication environment is not only deeply entwined within wider society but, inevitably, becomes infused *inside* many contemporary disasters, shaping their unfolding trajectory and global responses.

As these six characteristics begin to suggest, however, it is not helpful to view communication technologies simply as external technologies or as communication adjuncts to society. From the printing press to the internet and beyond, they are better seen as profoundly entwined within the fabric of social life and constitutive of processes of societal change – features no less

relevant, as we shall hear, in the context of many disasters.

To take media and communications seriously and to explore their involvement in humanitarian disasters, therefore, is not to presume a simple media causality or technological determinism, but rather to propose that we begin to see how today's media ecology is interwoven within social relations and the conduct of society more generally. As John Thompson argues, 'In a fundamental way, the use of communication media transforms the spatial and temporal organisation of social life, creating new forms of action and interaction, and new modes of exercising power, which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale.' (1995: 4) Crucially, this re-ordering of time and space by media and communications contributes to the 'transformation of visibility' that in turn unsettles traditional social relations and the exercise of hierarchical political power (Thompson, 1995: 119-148). This more socially embedded, less technologically fixated view of media and communications, and the 'transformation of visibility' as *constitutive* rather than simply *causative* in social life, has particular relevance for understanding disaster communications today.

Consider, for example, how the following contribute to the 'transformation of visibility' of disasters. Geospatial remote-sensing satellites now document and help to verify humanitarian disasters and human rights abuses in different conflict zones, whether Darfur (2004-2005), Sri Lanka (2009), South Sudan (2012) or Syria (2013), and routinely map the shifting progress and severity of droughts, hurricanes, forest fires and melting glaciers. The recent proliferation of 24/7 television news channels around the world (Rai and Cottle, 2010) has expanded the capacity to circulate images of disasters and human suffering from distant locations, and global news providers such as CNN and BBC World now frequently commission or produce their own film reports on distant disasters (Volkmer, 1999; Cottle and Rai, 2010; Robertson, 2010). National broadcasters, for their part, have access to significant resources and the latest technologies. These enabled, for example, Japan's national broadcaster NHK to put helicopters into the air and broadcast live the 2011 tsunami, which brought a wave of death and destruction to communities along the country's southern, Pacific coast. Ordinary people and citizen journalists around the world now routinely use videophones and social media, recording images of the drama and despair of cataclysmic events and uploading them to the internet (Allan, 2006; Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Pantti et al., 2012) or forwarding them directly to the world's news media for wider circulation. Open-access crowdsourcing technologies such as Ushahidi (Swahili for 'testimony') dynamically map and visualise the moving hotspots of disaster. And, on a planet of 7.1 billion people with an estimated 6.8 billion mobile phone subscriptions, more than 4.5 billion are now in the developing world (ITU, 2011, 2013). This profound revolution in communications facilitates early disaster warnings as well as the communication of public health messages and survivors' needs (Nelson et al.,

2010; United Nations Foundation, 2011).

In all these and other ways, today's media and communications are undoubtedly contributing to Thompson's 'transformation of visibility'. As they do so, they are complexly entering into the course and conduct of disasters (Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen and Cottle 2012).

### **Conclusion**

This brief discussion has deliberately sought to position both the changing nature of humanitarian disasters as well as today's rapidly changing media and communications ecology in global context. Humanitarian disasters are increasingly bound up in endemic global forces that unequally condition life chances and, for some, the very chance of life itself on a rapidly populating and ecologically threatened planet. Global interdependencies of economics, energy and environment look set to converge into complex and enduring global crises in the future.

Today's extensity and intensity of media and communications under conditions of globalisation also enters into humanitarian crises. Media and communications variously enter into disasters, crises and catastrophes. They can do so from the *outside in* and *inside out*, whether in respect of their *scale, speed, saturation, social relations' enfranchisement, surveillance* or *seeing*. Together, they are transforming disaster visibility around the world, thereby opening up new challenges and new possibilities in the contemporary field of humanitarianism. What the impact of all this will be – for those working within the field of humanitarianism, for survivors caught in the eye of the storm, and for the rest of us who are both able and inclined to help – warrants sustained empirical analysis and theorisation in the years ahead (Cottle and Cooper, *forthcoming*).

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## **DRAWING THE THIN LINE: REFLECTIONS ON NEWS MEDIA'S USE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT IN REPORTING ON A NATIONAL DISASTER**

*Stijn Joye looks at how a bus crash brought to the fore increasingly pressing ethical questions about how newspapers use personal information from websites during national and international disasters*

In March 2012, 22 Belgian children, four supervisors and two bus drivers died in a bus crash in a tunnel in Sierre, Switzerland. Another 24 children were seriously injured. The crash dominated the Belgian news media for months. In reporting on what was immediately identified as a *national* disaster, the intense news coverage revealed a particular dynamic which could be compared to the coverage of international disasters.

Next to its traditional informative role, news media took up an important social role in the aftermath of the crash. It provided support and condolences to those affected, as well as to the broader community. This is what Perez-Lugo (2004) refers to as the therapeutic function of media. Other scholars such as Wayment (2004), Kitch and Hume (2007), and Pantti and Sumiala (2009) all underline the vital part the media plays as a public forum for collective acts of mourning, which draw on a sense of (national) unity and community, solidarity and identification.

But in playing this role, several Belgian news outlets crossed a thin and delicate line. Allegedly aspiring 'to give the tragic suffering a face' (cf. Voorhoof, 2012) and make the suffering visible or close to all, as was later stated, some newspapers took private pictures of the children from websites, blogs and Facebook without requesting permission from the parents.

This essay reflects on the particular case of the Sierre news coverage by Belgian media, but also raises broader questions about the use of user-generated content by mainstream news media and the potentially far-reaching ethical and deontological issues related to this emerging practice.

### **When the media becomes the object of a media debate**

The media's presentation of the crash was characterised by the kind of emotional discourses that are common in the context of disasters that affect people from one's own country, and particularly children. But from a scholarly journalism studies point of view, the most intriguing aspect of the event was the very intense, critical and reflexive debate on the applied journalistic practices. The debate in newspapers, and on websites, television talk-shows and blogs, developed in parallel to the standard news coverage. It focused on two elements.

On the one hand, the debate criticised the mainstream news media's extensive, oversentimental and, at times, sensational news reporting. These particular features of the news coverage were an important catalyst for the



questions raised about the lack of respect journalists showed for the privacy of the victims and their relatives. On the other hand, and particularly relevant for this edited volume's main theme, the discussion was triggered by, and mainly dealt with, two prevailing issues that are related to the use of new media and user-generated content by mainstream media.

First, the Sierre bus crash coverage reminded many people of another recent national disaster during which the Belgian news media had made some serious errors. In reporting on the severe hurricane that struck the music festival *Pukkelpop* in 2011 killing five young festivalgoers, some newspapers got caught up in a scramble for a scoop. Consequently, two established mainstream newspapers presented rumours and preliminary estimations about the death toll as confirmed facts on their websites. This resulted in an 'echo effect' in which other news outlets cited this false information without checking the facts themselves. When these 'facts' were picked up by the national news agency *Belga*, they were quickly disseminated internationally. After a while, the newspapers responsible had to issue a statement correcting the false data. They eventually published a letter of apology on their websites and in the editorials of their print editions. Media watchers, policy makers and the general public condemned these mistakes, and ambitious plans were initiated to prevent them from happening again.

Second, the Sierre media debate centred around the use of user-generated content by the mainstream press. Two days after the crash, Belgium's two most popular newspapers – *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Het Nieuwsblad* – published pictures of the deceased children taken from their personal Facebook profiles, their school's Facebook page and website and the blog of a teacher who was supervising the trip. But at that time it was not yet clear who had survived and who had died in the crash – not even to some of the parents who were anxiously waiting for more news on the fate of their children.

Both newspapers published the pictures of all the children on their front pages, without requesting the permission of the parents. There were also pictures of children on the coach during the outward journey, alongside emotional quotes from the teacher's blog, such as: 'Dear mom and dad, I miss you very much.' This all caused a major public outcry on Twitter, Facebook, online forums and blogs, and generated many readers' letters to the editors. Other, more institutional voices quickly followed.

Confronted with such severe criticism from the public, government officials and ministers, as well as other media commentators and journalists, the chief editors and reporters of both newspapers initially put forward some arguments in their defence, such as [author's translation]: 'These pictures were meant as a tribute to the victims'; 'It was an extremely difficult decision that was taken after hours of intense discussion'; 'What is the problem? We have only tried to cover the event in the best possible way, as journalists should do'; 'The public has the right to be properly informed'; 'The pictures

are printed in black and white, as well as very small'; 'They were taken from public sites'. One journalist even said: 'But my mother approved it.'

Despite the variation in their logic and gravity, what these comments actually made clear was that there were some serious problems slumbering beneath the surface – problems of ethics and journalistic deontology in using private pictures and user-generated content. Or as one journalist asserted in a moment of self-criticism: it is indeed righteous and valuable of news media to display empathy and compassion, but it is a very thin line between that and *tactless* empathy which should then be considered as plain voyeurism (Rogiers, 2012).

The criticism, the media debate and the fact that this was the first case of its kind in Belgium, put pressure on the country's independent professional organisation of journalists, the Council for Journalism, to swiftly develop new and appropriate guidelines for the proper use of user-generated content, as this was the first case of its kind in Belgium.

The council's new directive restricted the republication of information and pictures taken from social network sites and personal websites. It quite explicitly ignored the fact that such information is often easily and freely available on blogs and Facebook. The principle behind the directive was that content posted on social media or personal websites is only intended for a small group of relatives and friends, not for the general public. The directive focused on the *intention* of social media websites and their content. By doing so, the council *de facto* established a privacy claim or statement on user-generated content that needs to be respected. However, no legal consequences, such as penalties or sanctions, are attached to not complying with the directive.

### **Broader remarks and implications**

Looking back on the intensive news reporting and the accompanying media debate, the case of the Sierre bus crash proved that there are still a lot of challenges that new media and its features pose to mainstream news media and journalism, especially when it comes to ethics and privacy. In the context of disasters, which unavoidably involve a lot of sensitive information and powerful emotions, this is a fundamental and timely concern. At present, it appears that the list of tensions or challenges is longer than the list of solutions. One key challenge is finding the right balance between respecting the privacy of victims on the one hand and the social role of the media in displaying the personal suffering of the victims on the other.

Another challenge deals with the urge to be the first to report in an age of commercialisation of news and increasing competition. There is a tension between providing minute-by-minute updates in an online news context (cf. case of *Pukkelpop 2011 supra*) versus journalistic standards of accuracy in reporting. Related to this is the tension between media as a commercial outlet and media as a public forum for mourning which – in the context of highly

emotional events such as disasters – makes for a very thin line between being compassionate and being sensationalist.

One final issue that I would like to touch upon is the accessibility of online information. In their defence, many journalists found it remarkable and even incomprehensible that the very same information they retrieved so easily online and that is accessible to anyone who knows how to use an internet search engine, receives an entirely different status once it is distributed by means of another medium, such as a newspaper or a television broadcast.

In their view, the key problem with the new directive is that it establishes a fundamental distinction in the public character of content published in traditional media outlets versus that published online. In order to make sense of this uneasy and hazy situation, some pointed towards the responsibility of the so-called *producer* when posting the information online and his/her own obligation to govern the privacy status and accessibility of such personal information.

Debates on these kinds of issues and tensions are only just starting. But it is clear that dramatic events such as the Sierre bus crash or any other humanitarian disaster can accelerate this process due to the intense human emotions involved and the challenges they pose to a large number of established societal institutions, including the news media. The coming together of traditional mainstream media and new media adds an extra layer to this ongoing discussion that cannot and should not be ignored.

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## **RADAR: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE FRONT PAGE**

*Alice Klein describes an innovative project which trains citizens in the developing world to report on stories around them via text messages*

In their coverage of the Kenyan elections in March 2013, an overwhelming number of mainstream media outlets included the phrase ‘marred by violence’ in their headlines. The truth? This ‘violence’ was just three localised cases, while the rest of the country experienced a busy but generally peaceful election.

With high stakes in 2013, exacerbated by the still-vivid memories of the post-election violence, which killed more than 1,000 people in 2007/08, surely Kenya’s peaceful vote should have been cause for celebration rather than blame?

Yet stereotypes peddled by the western media risk cementing a perception by Kenyans that the outside world is too willing to look for the bad in their country, rather than the good. These stereotypes are widely mocked in the Kenyan press and on Twitter. Kenya’s *Daily Nation* ran a humorous piece entitled ‘Shame of Foreign Reporters Armed with Clichés to Attack Kenya’ (2013), while one of our own Radar reporters submitted ‘Kenya’s Election “marred” by CNN Reports of Violence’ (Radar, 2013).

### **The power of the media**

Behind the jokes, however, lies a serious point: the mainstream media has long-term influence and manipulates our perceptions. The media informs public opinion and influences policy; it affects everything from tourism to trade. However, accessing information still remains a challenge in many countries. While the world has never been more connected – with millions of emails sent and received every day – most of the world’s population is not yet online. In rural India, for example, only 2 per cent of the population access the internet (Vaidyanathan, 2012).

Yet mobile phones have become a global phenomenon. Three-quarters of the world’s population have access to one (World Bank, 2012). They offer an affordable, accessible channel for dialogue and connect people even in areas with few resources. This represents a huge opportunity, and that is where Radar steps in.

The people most vulnerable to corruption, denial of rights, abuse and poverty are the least likely or able to report it. So Radar trains citizen reporters from the most under-represented groups in basic newsgathering. Our training focuses on ‘micro-reporting’ via SMS. For the price of a local text, news alerts of just 140 characters can be sent using any phone – from a green-screen Nokia to the latest iPhone.

Radar acts as a central hub, receiving the SMS reports and sharing them online and with international journalists and editors. Where there is media

interest in a story, we help the reporter develop it into a longer news article, often resulting in a paid commission.

This simple, affordable model means that people can share news and opinions from wherever they are in the world – from Kenya’s Masai Mara or Sierra Leone’s Freetown slums to the Himalayan foothills in rural northern India.

It’s important these people share their news and perspectives because they are often most impacted by poverty, political tension and emergencies – yet the least able to say so.

### **The media is biased**

With shrinking foreign desk budgets, most mainstream news outlets now take their news from wire agencies (Moore, 2010). Even when they do have a correspondent or ‘stringer’, these journalists – like their agency counterparts – are based in the capital cities and so have an urban bias.

Foreign correspondents and stringers are also likely to be male. In the UK and US, the lack of gender diversity in media is such a big issue it has spawned campaigns and advocacy groups, such as Women in Media & News (WIMN). WIMN (2013) says ‘women of colour, low-income women, lesbians, youth and older women’ are especially excluded in the US. In December 2011, Kira Cochrane reported in the *Guardian* that around 80% of newspaper articles are produced by men in an average month in the UK (Cochrane, 2011).

Attempts to redress the gender bias and promote more women as correspondents in countries across the developing world appear to be even less successful than American and British efforts.

There is also bias in the issues and interviewees journalists choose to report on. Traditionally, they have not sought the views of marginalised groups, like the people Radar train: those with disabilities or living with HIV, women and girls, people from slums or the rural poor living in remote and offline areas – often referred to as ‘last mile’ communities.

A likely male, middle class reporter sitting in a high-rise office block in downtown Nairobi is not able to travel across the country, interviewing people from all walks of life. Therefore, his copy will not be representative. Yet his stories are frequently picked up and duplicated worldwide, both in print and online, and often form the basis of broadcast coverage.

Mobile technology, though, is now effectively ‘shrinking’ space. It accordingly offers an antidote to this otherwise unrepresentative and biased media coverage (journalism.co.uk, 2010).

One example is Ushahidi. This non-profit tech company specialises in developing open source software for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping. It has already shown us the power of eyewitness reports.

Ushahidi was set up in response to Kenya’s post-election violence of 2007/08. It was then used in the response to Haiti’s 2010 earthquake, successfully linking aid workers to those trapped under the rubble

(Huffington Post, 2010). Its success has spawned a wealth of websites and networks for aid workers who use SMS and geo-located tweets to respond to emergencies, such as Crisis Mappers ('the humanitarian technology network') and Conflict Map ([conflictmap.org](http://conflictmap.org)).

It is widely acknowledged that Ushahidi is very effective, visualising citizens' reactions to crises via mobile, the internet and even geo-located tweets. But it neither constitutes nor facilitates conversation or analysis beyond the crisis.

One attempt to advocate for improved dialogue during disasters and put human interaction back into the response was 'infoasaid'. The project, run by Internews and BBC Media Action and funded by UK aid, ended in December 2012, but its 'communication is aid' mantra continues elsewhere ([infoasaid.org](http://infoasaid.org), 2012). Internews director of humanitarian communication programs Jacobo Quintanilla argues that communication is one of the most powerful forms of aid. He says that humanitarian responses 'are still too often undermined because people's information needs are still considered a low priority' (Quintanilla, 2013).

Quintanilla also suggests humanitarian organisations are not listening enough. Indeed, unidirectional communication – the type most often deployed by humanitarian organisations during crises – prevents people from taking ownership of their own survival and rehabilitation. It is no use texting earthquake survivors what the symptoms of cholera are, via an automated SMS sent to a mass of phone numbers from the likes of Frontline SMS, if those suffering the symptoms can't reply to find out what to do next or where to seek treatment.

### **Turning a monologue into a dialogue**

Inspired by Ushahidi's eyewitness/mobile approach and the increasing realisation of the importance of communication during emergencies, Radar saw the need for more comprehensive communication to flow out from, as well as back into, poor or disaster-affected communities.

Rather than solely focusing on emergency response, Radar sees poverty and social marginalisation as a form of chronic emergency. We therefore help some of the world's poorest communities to share their realities. So while Radar can and does encourage reporting on crises, including election violence and public health emergencies, our focus is on long-term development issues.

We ensure those selected for training are from the groups who will make the most use of that training – those who face the greatest obstacles to getting their voices heard. Civil society groups nominate trainees, helping to ensure the project operates within trusted circles. We prioritise people living with disabilities, slum dwellers, rural communities, women and girls, people living with HIV, and those from marginalised ethnic and social groups.



But there are challenges. Some in the mainstream media remain unwilling to relinquish control and trust innovative internet use. They flinch at the phrase 'citizen journalism' and fear a wealth of unverified falsities, spreading like wildfire across the world wide web.

Despite its democratising effects, it's true that the internet also runs the risk of allowing false information to spread, and some citizen journalism forums lack proper verification procedures. It is essential to maintain editorial rigour to ensure information is accurate. Radar has a number of ways of ensuring that what we publish is legitimate.

Firstly, we work with trusted civil society networks to ensure that those put forward for training are already engaged with an issue or their communities to some degree. Secondly, we run intensive face-to-face training workshops, ensuring we find out who our reporters are and vice versa, which builds trust. We train people in the fundamentals of good journalism, including why we must report accurately and avoid plagiarism, hate speech and hearsay. Thirdly, our software guarantees we only ever receive and publish stories from the people we've trained, whose names and numbers we have programmed into our system. Finally, there is always the option of not publishing sensitive, provocative or unverified information.

A story that needs extra research or is strong enough to be pitched to external media, is developed with Radar staff. This mentoring system improves reporters' skills and means their work can reach beyond social media channels.

Paul Lewis, the *Guardian's* special projects editor, has done much to promote the virtues of citizen journalism. In a [Ted talk \(TedX, 2011\)](#), he describes using these citizens to help verify information and challenge the 'official version of events'. However, Lewis sees these people as sources of confirmation in a wider story he is writing. They are useful tools in his own story-writing machinery. But this approach can limit the role of citizens as news producers themselves. Radar tries instead to take citizen journalism to the next level, by viewing citizen journalists as news producers in their own right, not simply as sources.

There is also a need to challenge mainstream news coverage, which often fails to allow communities to speak for themselves. This lack of local representation – whether owing to bias or a lack of resources – means relying on assumptions and stereotypes. It is sloppy journalism.

Radar's model – and indeed the central tenet of citizen journalism – is that by putting out real news and the views of people on the ground, unfair or inaccurate news coverage can be challenged and countered. Local people's access to sources, their understanding of local dialects and their inconspicuousness can help them find more stories more easily and report them in greater depth.

In a recent interview, a high-profile BBC radio journalist asked what makes Radar's stories any better than those from mainstream media. The

answer is that we get a wider range of real-time news alerts and reactions from people on the ground, from all over Kenya, Sierra Leone and India, and from a diversity of voices – voices that all too often go under the radar.

It may be worth turning the question around and asking international media and foreign correspondents why they think (often white, often male) westerners can report the reality of Kenyans better than Kenyans themselves?

Perhaps it's time to relinquish some control to the people on the ground – the people who will still be there when the mainstream media packs up and goes home.

*Alice Klein is a freelance multimedia journalist who trained at the Daily Telegraph and has since contributed to international mainstream media (Guardian, BBC, Washington Post, AFP). While freelancing in East Africa she encountered under-resourced journalists and members of civil society with fantastic stories but no means to share them. She has since set up and now co-directs Radar, a communication-rights organisation, which trains under-resourced and citizen journalists to report via SMS. Radar's reporter networks are drawn from socially and geographically marginalised populations in Africa and India: [Twitter.com/OnOurRadar](https://twitter.com/OnOurRadar)*

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## **TEXT APPEAL? NGOS AND DIGITAL MEDIA**

*Glenda Cooper looks at the opportunities – and the pitfalls – for charities who are trying to get their message out through user-generated content*

As a million people died of starvation in Biafra in the late 1960s, a young photographer Don McCullin captured the haunting image of an emaciated albino boy. McCullin later announced that by taking such images he wanted to 'break the hearts and spirits of secure people' (McCullin cited in Campbell, 2003: 68).

Biafra is often described as the first mediated humanitarian disaster. Fast-forward 40 years and we arrive at Hurricane Sandy, where at one stage ten storm-related pictures were being uploaded on the photosharing app Instagram every second; 1.3 million in total were hashtagged (Taylor, 2012).

No wonder that NGOs have felt the need to embrace new technology so enthusiastically – from Plan UK using face-recognition technology in adverts, to Oxfam allowing a Syrian refugee to take over its Twitter feed for a day, to Save the Children flying out 'mummybloggers' to Bangladesh to tweet, blog and upload pictures to Flickr about a campaign to reduce child mortality.

There have been notable successes – Save's campaign reached 10 million people via Twitter for example (Save the Children, 2010 cited in Cooper, 2011). But in the rush to find the next best thing, have NGOs considered the ramifications of the rush to new media?

What I want to address is the strengths – and the limitations – that new technologies have for NGOs. In particular – the likelihood of hearing different stories, different voices and the consequent problems that NGOs may encounter.

### **Different stories?**

Haiti 2010 was dubbed the first Twitter disaster – and the impact social media had for NGOs was considerable. According to the Twitter-tracking service Sysomos, 2.3 million tweets included the words 'Haiti' or 'Red Cross' between 12 and 14 January. Nielsen, the global information company, found that the Red Cross' Twitter account, which had been adding 50–100 followers a day before the quake, added 10,000 within three days. By Friday morning (the quake happened on Tuesday), donations to the Red Cross had exceeded \$8 million (Evans, 2010).

When Oxfam America's Facebook fan base jumped from 35,000 to 250,000 during Haiti, the charity set up a live blog site, which aggregated all their Haiti-related podcasts, video clips and twitter streams, and uploaded a YouTube video appealing for money within five hours of the quake. This resulted in \$1.5 million raised within 48 hours. Meanwhile, in this country, Christian Aid employed Twitter and Facebook, their own website, mobiles, email, flip video, podcasts and Skype to co-ordinate relief efforts and send

updates to supporters. Their call for dropping Haiti's debt received 10,000 signatures in four days (Byrne, 2010).

Social media also mobilised aid in real time. First, with conventional phone lines down, aid workers used Twitter and Facebook to contact each other. Jason Cone, communications director at Doctors Without Borders, started tweeting when the aid group was unable to land its planes carrying vital supplies. Eventually his tweets were picked up both by the US Air Force and by NBC anchor Ann Curry, and landing slots for the Doctors Without Borders planes were given a priority (*Today*, 2010).

In Haiti, online mapping tools were used, in particular Openstreetmap and Ushahidi, which was first developed in 2007 and used SMS and Google Earth to map post-election violence in Kenya. They showed the destruction caused by the quake, and then sources of aid and accommodation.

Social media had proved its worth – not just in helping disasters get to the top of the news agenda, but in getting help to victims as well. It was a phenomenon that was repeated during the Pakistan floods of 2010, when, angry at European delays over committing funds, 4,000 people contacted their political representatives in the space of 24 hours (Oxfam, 2010).

### **Digital divide**

While it is wrong to think that only the developed world has access to mobile media and there has been a huge growth in cellphones in Africa, a digital divide does exist. For example, a study of the BBC's news coverage of the Haiti earthquake shows that while its web-stream positively invited the contributions of people who were affected as the main source of news, only eight web-stream entries came from 'average people' in Haiti. The remaining 42 are attributed either to western NGOs or to westerners who were indirectly touched by the earthquake (Chouliaraki, 2010: 15).

And the kinds of disasters that get most social media attention tend to be the rapid onset disasters. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Flickr lend themselves to the dramatic over the chronic; the earthquake over the long-term famine. It is not an accident that the disasters we have seen framed through the lens of user-generated content are ones like the tsunami, the Sichuan earthquake and the Haiti earthquake rather than the East Africa famine, which only became a big media story thanks to the very traditional media combination of the BBC and a star reporter, Ben Brown. As Tom Sutcliffe of the *Independent* once commented, 'The problem with citizen journalists – just like all us citizens – is that they're incorrigible sensationalists.' (Sutcliffe, 2007: 28)

### **Different voices?**

Instagram pictures of Sandy, first-person accounts of the earthquake in Haiti – the framing is unapologetically personal a lot of the time. As Stuart Allan points out, unlike the familiar arguments over objectivity in mainstream

reporting, user-generated content has privileged the subjective (Allan, 2004). The shaky footage of the tsunami wave, the falling buildings in the Sichuan earthquake, the very unprofessionalism of the footage and words produces iconography that can sidestep the typical distancing effect between us and them. And NGOs have embraced this – encouraging field staff to tweet from a disaster zone or give quotes, mobile phone footage or stills to a press officer who can send them out on their behalf.

One of the most effective examples of this came in March 2013 when Oxfam GB handed over its [Twitter feed](#) to Hasan, a Syrian refugee in Jordan's Zaatari camp, for a day. His tweets were retweeted by big Twitter names such as Stephen Fry and Damon Albarn. Another was Save the Children's 'mummybloggers' campaign – organised by Liz Scarff, also on the panel here. Instead of taking journalists on a press trip, in 2010 the charity flew three prominent mummybloggers to Bangladesh to raise awareness about needless child deaths. Such was the enthusiasm and pull of the bloggers that the trip helped Save reach 10 million people on Twitter, inspired 100 blogposts, prompted the all-powerful Mumsnet to invite one of the women to join a webchat with Nick Clegg, and was picked up by major news outlets such as the *Today* programme and the ITV lunchtime news. Not bad for an outlay of around £5,000 to get the women there (Cooper, 2011).

Supporters of this kind of approach claim it reduces the audience's sense of 'compassion fatigue' or what Lillie Chouliaraki (2006) has called the 'anaesthesia' of traditional disaster reporting. If you ask focus groups about user-generated content, they consistently respond positively, seeing it as more authentic, real and emotional.

Crucial to this is the increasing use of ordinary pictures displayed for a wider public via Facebook, Flickr, Instagram and Twitter – the kind that Hasan and the mummybloggers were tweeting. They are pictures that have traditionally been seen as 'private', but are now being deployed more widely, playing with our perceptions. The division between private and public is being diluted (Becker, 2011; Wardle, 2008; Nissenbaum, 2004; Grimmelmann, 2009).

This is connected to a change in whom we see as 'victims' in disaster coverage – a shift from those directly involved and their immediate families to the whole nation. 'It has become less about "them" and more about "us",' says Mervi Pantti (2011:227). We are now all familiar with the physical rituals seen after the death of Diana, Princess of Wales – candles, shrines, flowers. Arguably, similar rituals are now an integral part of disaster reporting. One could even view Disasters Emergency Committee appeals as almost mandatory so we can show how much we care. Or indeed celebrities taking to Twitter to articulate grief and loss. After the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the *LA Times* collated a list of celebrities who had responded. They included hip-hop star Wyclef Jean (who comes from Haiti), as well as MC Hammer, Ashton Kucher and Demi Moore whose connection to the island is less clear

(D’Zurilla, 2010).

Yet this ‘personalisation’ does not always have the desired effect of breaking down the ‘us and them’ dichotomies. Simon Cottle (1995) argues that while ‘ordinary voices’ are often routinely used in TV news items, they are rarely granted an opportunity to challenge political or expert authorities. Instead they become what Ulrich Beck calls the ‘voices of the side-effects’ (cited in Cottle, 1998) – to symbolise the human face of a news story.

And Chouliaraki points out that we live in a society where ‘our own private feelings are the measure against which we perceive and evaluate the world and others...’ While news becomes part of this ‘culture of intimacy’, it implicitly allows us to focus on our own sufferings and disregard those ‘others’ outside our own horizon of care (Chouliaraki, 2006:13). There is simply a limit to the empathy we can have.

So while we may gawp at a Facebook page and click ‘Like’, watch video tributes on YouTube and read tweets from refugees it does not mean the distances are being overcome.

### **When it goes wrong...**

There are also potential problems. Verification is a problem not just for journalists. NGOs have long had difficulties with being able to accurately give figures when a crisis occurs. Now they are under more pressure – either to put out the headline-grabbing figure and risk it being wrong, or not, and leave supporters in the dark and less likely to donate. The privacy and taste issues that surround the kind of pictures that can end up on social networking sites are something that may come to be a problem.

And there are clear examples of where social media campaigns have backfired. Invisible Children’s ‘Kony2012’ was on one level hugely successful – probably 100 million people in total reached via YouTube and Vimeo (Carsten, 2012). But it distorted reality – Kony was no longer in Uganda – and reinforced the idea that the west was there to save Africa. It showed how social media could send inaccurate messages around the world even more quickly.

Mainstream charities have suffered too from well-meaning but perhaps unhelpful people tweeting on their behalf. Two campaigns – Africa Needs You and Charity Bribes – came dangerously close to the line. The first – set up by two graphic designers – targeted celebrities, asking them to tweet on behalf of and donate to Unicef. It was a campaign that had the potential to be spam, if not bullying, and damage Unicef’s relationship with potential ambassadors (Charity Celebrity, 2011). The second, Charity Bribes, while more gentle in its approach, also used Twitter to ask celebrities to do something for a particular charity before they had any relationship with it (Hughes, 2012).

And finally, security. While most NGOs say they talk clearly to staff about the pitfalls of social media, the blogger NGO Security says the blurring between private and public can have security ramifications (NGO Security). As Vincent Lusser of the International Committee of the Red Cross said at its

Dispatches from Disaster Zones conference: 'Our colleagues in Kabul have to think that what happens in Afghanistan can affect our colleagues elsewhere in the world.' (Lusser, 2006).

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## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN REPORTING**

*Claire Wardle looks at real-life examples of how NGOs could learn to use social media better*

The impact of social media is well documented, whether that's the impact on brands, politics, journalism, policing, education, or the NGO and charity sector. But in the literature, there is often a gap between what could be happening and what is currently happening in reality. In this paper, I'm going to focus on the ways in which social media could be transforming the NGO and humanitarian sector if the technology's full potential to connect with different audiences is released. There are also real opportunities for connecting with newsrooms and journalists via social media, as traditional avenues for building relationships with the media are changing.

### **Development of UGC**

Even a brief analysis of recent journalism history shows how quickly user-generated content (UGC) has moved from the exception to the norm. The devastating tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 was the first major news event where pictures taken by the public on ordinary cameras showed how the disaster unfolded, because there was no available footage from the mainstream media. The London bombings in July 2005, six months later, convinced even the most sceptical that the increasing number of cameras embedded in mobile phones would provide new angles for breaking news. The main BBC bulletin on the evening of 7 July led with pictures taken by people being guided to safety through the underground tunnels. It was the first time the BBC had begun a bulletin with UGC.

Social media has also changed the ways that journalists find and follow up on stories. Many reporters from major news organisations look to build relationships with press officers on Twitter, and are alerted to story ideas via 140-character direct messages, rather than relying on traditional press releases. Such journalists also expect a multimedia release, which includes YouTube and Soundcloud clips, as well as photos and relevant tweets. The days of a one-page emailed press release are undoubtedly numbered.

Whether it's YouTube footage of a car bomb taken by Syrian activists or bystander pictures of the Boston bombings tweeted in the immediate aftermath, journalists and the wider public alike are increasingly turning to social networks to find breaking news content. It has created a fundamental change in the dynamics between journalists and their audiences. Where journalists used to undertake their newsgathering in private, relying on their black book of sources or 'the wires' spitting out breaking news flashes, they are now increasingly turning to social networks for story ideas, sources and content. This seismic shift means audiences can access the same content as the journalists in real time. A study by the Pew Research Center (Pew, 2012)

found that many people, particularly young people, turned to YouTube for footage of a breaking news event, whether that was the Japanese tsunami or Hurricane Sandy.

### **Storyful: a social media news agency**

At the social media news agency Storyful, we connect sources on the ground and the content they produce with traditional reporters. Storyful is a team of journalists who spend every day scouring social media, discovering and then verifying news stories and content – whether it's breaking news footage on YouTube, Flickr or Instagram, or an announcement tweeted by a celebrity or politician.

News organisations 'subscribe' to Storyful as they would to other wire services, like Associated Press or Reuters, knowing that we've verified the content and sought permissions from the uploaders, meaning the content is 'safe' to use.

Verification is absolutely crucial for news organisations. At a time when the public can search for pictures on Twitter at the same time as journalists are seeing them, the role of news organisations is becoming one of trusted guide, helping steer the audience through what is real, and what is not, on the social web. Unfortunately, news organisations all too often run pictures with the caveat 'this cannot be verified, because it is UGC'. Newsrooms are waking up to the need for verification, and learning the tools and techniques for the forensic analysis of online content. They are slowly starting to understand that it requires the same rigour as offline fact-checking. For more explanation about some of these techniques, it is worth reading the blog posts about Storyful's verification processes (Browne, 2012) and the [Boston Marathon explosions](#) (Browne, 2013).

We work with NGOs who are increasingly creating content that has value to news organisations. Below is one of our entries about a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW). It includes the YouTube video uploaded by HRW, as well as links to the report, and wider contextual information including details.

StoryfulPro

# SRI LANKA - [PUBLIC] Human Rights Watch say security forces rape Tamil detainees - February 26

Story by: **Della Kilroy**, Storyful Journalist [Follow @Dellakilroy](#)

Published 11.25 on 26th February 2013 Updated 11.25 on 26th February 2013

Human Rights Watch released a report on February 26 stating that Sri Lankan security forces have been using rape and other forms of sexual violence to torture suspected members or supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE.

The 140-page report, 'We Will Teach You a Lesson' Sexual Violence against Tamils by Sri Lankan Security Forces, features accounts of 75 cases of alleged rape and sexual abuse that occurred from 2006-2012 in both official and secret detention centers throughout Sri Lanka.

CLEARANCE  
 PUBLIC  
 February 26 2013  
 1 story contact

CLEARANCE: **PUBLIC**  
 The content in this entry is provided by an NGO for public dissemination and rebroadcast. It may be used freely with credit to Human Rights Watch.

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 Org: Human Rights Watch  
 YouTube: [HumanRightsWatch](#)  
 Facebook: [HumanRightsWatch](#)  
 Twitter: [emmadaly](#)  
 Language: English  
 Updated: 19/06/2012 at 12:35  
 Pre-Cleared? No

CHANNELS

- Humanitarian (NGO)
- World News
- Human Rights

TAGS

**SRI LANKA**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

Storyful has existed for almost four years. In that time it has provided a wealth of case studies about NGO content, and what works and what doesn't for newsrooms.

NGOs are often tempted to create their own 'packages' – two and a half minute edited, polished pieces with a voice over. These are very rarely used by news organisations, who want to produce their own packages.

News organisations want three things:

1) B-roll: background footage from an area they're struggling to access, which they can use as 'filler' in their package.

2) Authentic voices. They want to hear people talking about something they've witnessed something or are living through. They don't want interviews, they want to hear someone talking freely in a way that would allow them to edit their words into a package.

3) They want authentic content they can verify quickly because it's from a trusted source. Many journalists are nervous about using content from the social web because they're worried it might be false. If NGOs can provide authentic footage from emergency situations, news organisations will be much more likely to use it, and in fact will be very grateful for it.

NGOs who provide this type of content are having real success.

Another significant point is that many press officers at charities, NGOs and humanitarian organisations are often ex-broadcasters from major newsrooms. As a result, much of their emphasis is about getting the package on the main television news or radio programmes. There is a real missed opportunity to connect with online, social media or live-blogging editors, as well as data journalists. Reporters working in these channels are always looking for strong content, and lots of it. The key to success in this area is training field officers, many of whom have smartphones, to document what they're seeing and give people who are directly affected the tools they need to tell their own stories.

### **Different types of social media engagement**

Social media allows NGOs to talk directly to their audiences without having to wait for the mainstream media to create a story. Whether it's an aid worker instagramming her day-to-day activities in a refugee camp in South Sudan (Mahoney, 2013), a doctor live-tweeting his three-day journey to provide vaccinations to a rural village in West Africa, or a provocative YouTube clip asking directly for money, the opportunities exist to reach audiences directly. And while social media isn't free (it requires proper time and therefore resourcing), one of its most seductive elements is that an incredibly 'shareworthy' idea or piece of content will travel widely, even if it's from the smallest of NGOs or charities. It levels the playing field.

But social media is often talked about in very simplistic ways. While the tools themselves are relatively easy to use, they are much harder to master. Bandyng around the phrase 'social media' hides the many different ways it's being used by NGOs.

The following illustration is a way of talking about the different types of engagement.

8. Using social media to directly help or give a voice to the communities you're supporting
7. Using social media to assist in emergencies
6. One-off social media campaigns to drive public interest
5. One-off social media campaigns to drive media interest
4. Everyday engagement between your organisation & 'the audience'
3. Everyday engagement between NGOs & the media
2. 'Audiences' talking between themselves about your content everyday
1. 'Audiences' sharing your content everyday

Many organisations focus on levels 3-6 – and understandably so, as that is what they can directly control. Levels 1 and 2 – ‘your audience’ talking about you and sharing ‘your content’ – can’t be controlled, but they’re the most powerful levels.

This is because if a press officer or an NGO’s Twitter or Facebook account implores me to ‘read this web story’, ‘listen again to our podcast’ or ‘watch our weekly YouTube broadcast’, as audience member, I immediately know that it is their ‘job’ to tell me to do this. If my best friend tells me to ‘read this’, ‘listen to that’ or ‘watch this’, I am significantly more likely to do it. So the aim of any digital strategy for an NGO should be about building a



community of online advocates. When an NGO manages this feat, it's because they have properly invested in social media.

Meanwhile, levels 7 and 8 on the ladder are slowly receiving more attention. There is some incredible work undertaken by [volunteer developers and coders](#) who gather virtually – online in other words – during humanitarian crises. They build 'crowdmaps' detailing places where people can find shelter or receive help, and create online people-finders to allow people to locate lost friends and family.

NGOs are starting to build social media into their crisis and emergency plans, both to work more closely with news organisations to amplify messages, and to support vulnerable communities. The latter is level 8 – where NGOs should be focusing their efforts. I often make jokes at conferences that NGOs will only really take social media seriously when someone builds a 'Trip Advisor' for NGOs to allow communities who have been helped to write reviews: whether that's the usefulness of a water well, or the friendliness of the field staff.

But joking aside, this is how social media will make an impact on NGOs and humanitarian work. The technologies should be there to help communities connect with one another, as well as with people who can support them.

### **Case study: Charity appeal**

One case study that I think is worth explaining involves a charity appeal on homelessness (Wardle, 2010). The woman leading the campaign wanted to hire a professional photographer to take images that would illustrate the lived experiences of homeless people. She was then going to use a trained journalist to record stories from the people at the homeless shelter. After really thinking about the project, she changed her mind. She decided to provide cameras to people staying at the homeless shelters, and give them space to interview each other about their experiences. The results were incredible, because they were authentic. No photographer, however talented, could have taken photos in the same way. They would never have been able to gain the trust necessary to get access to the most personal experiences. Similarly, no journalist would have been able to produce the same intimate portraits.

### **Ethics**

The ethics of using content from the social web deserves its own book, let alone a chapter. Newsrooms are slowly learning social media's new ethical boundaries: for example, not using content from Facebook that is only accessible through personal connections; not using photos or videos without seeking permission, and providing adequate credits. When it comes to taking photos or videos of vulnerable communities, there are real issues – from ensuring consent has been sought to turning off automatic geo-location on

smartphones so people are not put in danger. Most NGOs now have comprehensive social media guidelines and policies that cover these issues.

## Conclusions

The use of social media is now non-negotiable. All NGOs should have a clear digital strategy with social media embedded in the day-to-day work of all their staff, not just the press team. The best content to share should be created by those who work most closely with the people affected, or ideally created by those people themselves. Too many NGOs are simply applying their own tried and tested techniques for 'broadcast' media to social media. It doesn't work.

It's not about controlling the message or creating polished pieces of content. It's about providing footage that news organisations can't get or create themselves, either because they can't access a location or they don't have the relationships with people on the ground who are being directly affected. And ultimately, social media isn't about getting more coverage from mainstream news organisations, it's about raising awareness directly with different types of audiences, and about connecting directly with people who are being affected themselves. Hopefully it shouldn't take 'NGO Advisor' for this to happen.

*Dr Claire Wardle is responsible for promoting the benefits of social media as well as integrating its use by Storyful's news clients. Claire's taught and managed research projects at universities in the US and UK. Four years ago, she was invited by the BBC to design and deliver social media training across the organisation. She has since worked with other news organisations, government clients, and non-government organisations around the world, offering consultancy and training in the integration of social media. She holds an MA and PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.*

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## CREATION, CURATION, CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

*Liz Scarff looks in detail at how to engage 'Generation C' in stories about humanitarian disasters*

We all know that social media and advances in technology have changed the communication landscape. What was once the former passively consuming audience is now a networked landscape of publishers: sharing, curating and creating.

Yet social media is not a sexy 'magic bullet'. And it is not a quick, easy win. Used in isolation it won't raise millions, generate endless column inches or influence politicians or donors.

My paper isn't based on academic theories; it's based on experience. In order to mobilise the public at speed and at scale during humanitarian emergencies, NGOs need to re-think and re-engineer how they communicate with the public. They need to shift gear and produce communications that encourage creation, curation, connection and community.

Laying the foundations is essential – a solid framework is necessary to underpin all activity. This often requires a huge culture shift for many large organisations. Successful social media requires multiple stakeholder cross-organisational input, board-level understanding and sponsorship, solid real-time metrics and data insight, and the right staff roles in the right organisational structure.

### **The practicalities NGOs must consider**

One of the biggest (and often overlooked) challenges is that social media dictates a shift in organisational ways of working. Social media should never be used in isolation. Campaigns need to build symbiotic relationships between social media, media and PR, advocacy, digital, marketing and field communications staff. Traditional silos need to be broken down in favour of a multidisciplinary approach, with all teams pulling together in the same direction. Without this kind of structure underpinning all activity the results will always be limited.

The audience is now channel agnostic (for example a conversation that starts on email could easily jump to Twitter). This dictates that storytelling is no longer linear, as it would have been in traditional broadcast or print. So all campaigns need to be multi-channel (or transmedia) and work to consolidate non-linear storytelling into a linear format that makes sense for the audience (the whole audience that is, from digital natives<sup>1</sup> through to silver surfers<sup>2</sup>). In

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<sup>1</sup> A digital native is a person who was born during or after the general introduction of digital technologies and has interacted with technology from an

addition the same content would ideally be used offline in press ads and direct mail. The supporter should be taken on a seamless journey, regardless of the channel in which they are viewing the content.

Another vital ingredient is ensuring an NGO has communications field staff who are well trained in social media and equipped with the right technology to provide real-time updates and content. This would include a BGAN (a satellite internet network that connects laptops to broadband in remote locations), which can be used for live media interviews and web broadcasts, through to an unlocked smartphone that can be used with a local Sim card(s). As well as using a data (internet) connection, your phone should also be set up to control social channels using SMS, which often provides greater reliability.

Next, it's important to understand how social media has fragmented the audience(s) and how fundraising appeals (or any campaign) need to use meaningful social media measurement and analysis to enable all channels to feed symbiotically off each other. Meaningful measurement helps validate a campaign, enabling it to push out of social media channels into others such as traditional media or government relations. The value you add to the campaign, such as securing media coverage or a meeting with a politician, is then fed back to the community on social channels, feeding the symbiotic feedback loop and making the campaign ever bigger.

Compelling storytelling is key. NGOs need to embrace storytelling partners and external influencers (bloggers, YouTubers etc) in a creative way that taps into the cognitive surplus – that is active participation rather than passive consumption (Shirkey, 2011), all while keeping your story angle(s) within your audience(s) frame of reference.

And lastly, given that social media is a conversation and not a one-way broadcast, NGOs need to consider the recipients of aid. Just as the audience are no longer passive media consumers, neither are they.

### **What social media can do for NGOs: Blogladesh and Pass It On**

Can social media actually achieve anything tangible other than getting a bunch of people to give a thumbs up?

Yes.

Let's jump back to 2010. I was tasked by Save the Children ahead of a UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) summit in New York to raise awareness about the shocking levels of child mortality in the developing world. I put together a project that took three of the UK's most influential blogging mums to Bangladesh. Who could be better to tell stories about

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early age. The term was first coined by Marc Prensky in his work, *'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants'*, published 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Silver Surfers are people over the age of 50 who use the internet on a regular basis.

children than mothers who have hopes and dreams for their own children, especially as mums were a key audience for Save the Children?

As part of what was dubbed 'Blogladesh', the mums told compelling stories of the challenges facing mums in Bangladesh— everyday challenges like treating diarrhoea. The difference being that in Bangladesh, these everyday challenges are potentially fatal, with millions of children dying of preventable diseases in poor countries every year.

I constructed a tight schedule and storyline. Once in Bangladesh the blogging mums shared their stories minute-by-minute over the course of a week. These were real stories of real people in real time: from the heartbreaking moment we watched a child die of pneumonia and spoke to the doctor who, with his limited resources, had battled to save her life, through to meeting the inspiring health workers.

By working with such prominent bloggers, we got immediate access to their large audience. The idea was that we didn't take just the three mums; we took their whole parenting community (each with their publishing platform, blog, Twitter feed, etc). And we created a digital storm.

It was the first time a UK charity had taken bloggers on a live-reporting trip. It created huge surprise and support within the blogging community. The hashtag #Blogladesh trended on Twitter and reached more than 4.5 million people before the bloggers had even left the country.

As a result, while we were in Bangladesh, we were able to secure key media opportunities with Sky, the *Sun* and regional print and broadcast outlets. Numerous celebrities including actor Stephen Fry, *New York Times* columnist and Pulitzer Prize winner Nick Kristof and author Neil Gaiman also supported the campaign on Twitter. This in turn inspired journalists such as India Knight to tweet.

We hosted Twitter and web chats while in the field, and more than 150 bloggers wrote blog posts in support. On our return to the UK, we secured significant media exposure including on the BBC *Today* programme, ITN lunchtime, Six and Ten o'clock news and *The Times*. Influential website Mumsnet invited one of the bloggers to its webchat with Nick Clegg. And we were able to secure a meet and greet for the bloggers with Andrew Mitchell, then Secretary of State for International Development.

I even took one of the bloggers to New York to the MDGs conference. However, it was revealing that support across social media dipped because the UN conference was out of the blogging communities' frame of reference.

The real coup was securing another meeting with Nick Clegg at the summit, at which we filmed the blogger asking him what he was going to do about the millions of children dying every year. This meant we could turn a potentially dry story into something ITN were keen to pick up.

At the summit, the UN launched a worldwide campaign to save 16 million mothers and children over the coming five years. Nick Clegg

announced that the UK government aimed to double the number of women and children's lives it would save.

In total, Blogladesh reached 10 million people through Twitter and pioneered a new direction in communication for Save the Children. It was highly commended in the *Guardian* Digital Media Innovation awards and was Third Sector and PR week campaign of the week.

In 2011, with valuable lessons learnt, my next Save the Children project tripled this success by mixing up the audiences, wrangling the essential non-linear storytelling into a linear format and creating a compelling storyline that would work across multiple platforms, multiple days and push out into print and broadcast media.

Pass It On involved and activated the vibrant YouTube community. YouTube is largely underused and misunderstood by NGOs. They see it primarily as a platform to host their films, often overlooking the YouTube community whose celebrities command viewing figures in the millions.

I took Lindsay Atkin, a YouTuber in her own right and mother of Charlie McDonnell, Europe's largest YouTuber, over to Mozambique. Chris Mosler, a popular parenting blogger, and Tracey Cheetham, a well-connected political blogger, came along too.

We wanted to raise awareness about the critical need for vaccines in the developing world, ahead of a global conference hosted by David Cameron in London to pledge funds for vaccines. I put together a social media storytelling campaign that over the course of a week followed the journey of a vaccine from a warehouse in Maputo to an outreach clinic hosted under a tree in the middle of rural Mozambique.

The project reached 27 million people on Twitter, achieved more than 200,000 YouTube views, saw over 200 bloggers writing posts in support, secured significant national and regional media coverage, and influenced politicians (Fieldcraft, 2013).

### **Harnessing the power of 'Generation C'**

Understanding your audience, as we all know, is essential. But traditional audience profiling is not enough. It is vital to understand audiences in the social space, how they group around a topic, niche or geographical location, and how this relates to your own brand, and in turn your own community.

When launching an emergency appeal the story will of course include the core compelling facts. But in the modern communication landscape storylines also have to be crafted in order to inspire participation. Rather than asking yourself, 'What story do I want to tell?' the question should be, 'What story do I want to tell that will inspire my community to participate?'

The seminal piece of reporting from Michael Buerk on the Ethiopian famine in 1984 was seven minutes of relentlessly shocking images combined with words that packed a punch and inspired a generation to respond.

Jump forward 19 years and how audiences are now able to respond using new skills enabled by cheap technology is summed up in one line in the BBC's documentary, 'How Hackers Changed the World: We are Legion'. The line: 'It felt like you were making a difference, you yourself, and you didn't even have to leave your home.' These were the words of Brian Mettenbrink, a former member of Anonymous, the radical online 'hacktivist' collective and the subject of the programme, broadcast in March 2013 (BBC, 2013). Project Chanology was a campaign by Anonymous against the Church of Scientology's practices and their attempts to remove from the internet a video of Tom Cruise talking about the Church.

Anonymous, and its actions, may be an extreme example. But the point is that every community will have people within it who are willing to go the extra mile, who want to participate and see demonstrable results. Today's audiences are sophisticated, knowledgeable and smart. They want to know and see where their money is being spent. They want to know that their actions (tweeting, Facebook likes, etc) are actually achieving something and they want to participate. Current insider intelligence from the blogging community reveals a fatigue with charity blogging trips that don't have a tangible goal for this very reason.

Brian Mettenbrink took part in the Anonymous campaign because he knew he could use DDOS (Distributed Denial of Service) to take down the Church of Scientology website. He quite clearly saw the results of his work. US-based Charity:Water has harnessed a similar approach. Donors are sent a report with photographs, GPS co-ordinates and data of the water well they have funded. Funders can see the specific results of what their fundraising has achieved.

During the West Africa food crisis in 2012, I produced a social media communication project for World Vision UK that was specifically designed to engage different audiences and get them to take action. The storytelling event, #ShareNiger, was crafted to push the under-reported food crisis into the social media and traditional media spotlight. The engagement and participation asks were nuanced across the numerous audiences. These included blogging school children, parenting and lifestyle bloggers, broadsheet newspaper readers (press ads) and ultimately the public at large, as the project reached national and international media outlets.

The strength of the project secured UK government match funding, reached 10 million people on Twitter, engaged with school children across the UK, and gained national and international media coverage. Importantly, the project also combined on and offline audiences by securing a partnership with Cybher, one of the UK's most influential blogging conferences.

Raising funds for a slow-onset crisis is notoriously difficult. #ShareNiger secured coverage in the *Telegraph*, and CNN news and the BBC, among others. It mobilised the audience to spread the word and raise £810,000.



All these case studies target what Google has recently coined Generation C – people who care deeply about creation, curation, connection and community. It's not an age group; it's an attitude and a mindset.

Social media flattens the world, giving everybody access to the same communication tools. Operating an organisation from behind closed doors is no longer an option. NGOs can flourish by extending their ecosystem to include the connected global population, working with and utilising its abundant resources. In our hyper-connected world, media that doesn't encourage participation, sharing or creating will become media that is just not worth engaging with.

*Liz Scarff runs Fieldcraft, a communications consultancy working on the cross-section of social media, technology and storytelling. Her work has won awards and accolades from the Guardian Digital Innovation Awards, Social Buzz awards and PR Week among others. Liz is a judge for this year's One World Media awards. With a background in print and visual journalism, Liz has written and photographed for the Daily Telegraph, the Guardian, the Independent, the BBC, Elle magazine, Marie Claire and Glamour among others. Her work has been published in more than 14 countries and has seen her setting up a newsroom at Everest Base Camp, crossing the Sahara Desert in a Lada and travelling up the Karakorum Highway, Pakistan in a decorated Bedford truck. Find Liz on Twitter: @LizScarff*

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## **DIGITAL BY DEFAULT? HOW DFID IS USING NEW MEDIA TO DEAL WITH DISASTERS**

**Russell Watkins** reveals how the government has begun using social media to inform the public about how aid money is spent after disasters

When a humanitarian crisis happens overseas, the Department for International Development (DFID) is the lead UK government department coordinating the UK's response. DFID is not an 'on-the-ground' aid delivery agency; it primarily provides rapid emergency funding to aid agencies such as Oxfam, Save the Children, UNHCR and the World Food Programme, or the Red Cross movement. But, if needed, it does occasionally provide direct assistance – supplying materials such as tents and plastic sheeting for shelter, for example, or providing essentials such as hygiene kits.

DFID also co-ordinates the rapid deployment of British technical staff to disaster zones – such as civilian humanitarian advisors, urban search-and-rescue specialists from the UK fire service, or volunteer emergency medical trauma teams from the NHS or NGOs. Within hours of being alerted, DFID can get 70 or so firefighters, surgeons or other experts in the air en route to an emergency because of its co-ordination of logistics and deployments.

We often provide access for media organisations or smaller NGOs who otherwise might not be able to get to a disaster. After the Asian tsunami in 2004, the Haiti earthquake in 2010, and the earthquake/tsunami in Japan in 2011, DFID provided rapid access to the affected areas for first responders, specialist NGO staff, humanitarian advisors and journalists alike.

But, as the International Committee of the Red Cross has pointed out, around 90% of humanitarian disasters overseas go unreported (ICRC, 2013). Rapid-onset emergencies, such as major earthquakes, tsunami or floods are thankfully rare, but it is these events that capture the headlines and public attention. Less reported are the so-called chronic emergencies – prolonged or recurring droughts, or long-running conflicts that often affect far greater numbers of people. These are humanitarian emergencies too, and the UK responds to them as well – usually via providing emergency funding to established UN and NGO agencies already on the ground.

So DFID has a story to tell in humanitarian emergencies – whether through direct response as outlined above, facilitating access, or through the longer-term humanitarian aid that it funds others to deliver. The UK is one of the world's largest donors to humanitarian emergencies, and people in Britain are incredibly generous in times of human need. Communicating about how we help on behalf of the British public is an important part of what we do.

But how does this connect DFID to the future of humanitarian reporting? The point here is that, like almost all other NGOs, UN agencies, international donors and media organisations, DFID has embraced technology and social media to help tell its own stories.

From Facebook and Twitter, to Flickr and YouTube we try to tell the human stories of people who've been helped by British aid. Of course we still work with traditional media, but we are looking to use digital and social media tools to tell stories in as many targeted ways as possible – where it is appropriate to do so.

We're also trying to have open conversations with people via these channels directly where we can. From answering journalists' enquiries on Twitter, to receiving direct requests for help from earthquake victims in Haiti, to monitoring Facebook for reports of damage after the 2011 Japanese tsunami, we're trying to use all the tools available to us. We have press officers using Twitter and a small number of multimedia communications producers who can be deployed as part of a British government response team.

Beyond the immediate emergency response, evaluating how the money is spent is also an important part of the story. Visiting projects run by NGOs who've received UK funding and speaking directly to aid recipients is a vital part of DFID's work of monitoring, lesson-learning and ensuring value for money. Whether it's six weeks after an emergency, or six months to a year, this part of the cycle of humanitarian response is also an opportunity to tell the stories of those who've been helped.

We see social media as a vital means of communicating with the public about what we do. Photography and visual communications in particular are an integral part of this. Pictures can tell dramatic stories very quickly and effectively, and they are very social-media-friendly. They can be shared, retweeted and 'liked' easily, and they reflect people's online behaviour – they're a medium by which millions of us are communicating every day. True, it's a crowded market place, with some 300 million images uploaded to Facebook every single day (Thomas, 2012). But if you have good imagery to help tell your story, your images will get seen and shared, and could quickly reach a vast audience.

But it's not just about responding to, or reporting on, disasters after they happen. DFID has also funded various media-specialist NGOs, such as BBC Media Action, Thomson Reuters Foundation and Internews. We've paid them to run the infoasaid project, to map media capacity in countries at high risk of natural disasters and to train local journalists in those countries, so that relief agencies know what media resources and organisations are available when disaster strikes, and local media have the capacity to report for themselves.

We also support innovation in humanitarian response through initiatives such as the Humanitarian Innovation Fund and the Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network. We fund projects that use SMS text messaging to provide disaster survivors with information and the chance to give feedback to the aid agencies that are meant to be helping them – and let them know if aid isn't getting through. And we provide seed-funding to enable other innovative ideas to be fully developed.

A number of media-specialist NGOs have also pre-qualified as partners in DFID's Rapid Response Facility – meaning that when an emergency strikes, they can get access to emergency funding quickly. This enables them to deploy specialist media staff or journalists where necessary – to help either report on the crisis, support local media organisations, or even assist the joint communications efforts of the international aid community.

All of this means that DFID plays various roles in the reporting of humanitarian emergencies: from donor to direct relief organisation and even reporter as well. As mentioned earlier, DFID isn't an NGO and it isn't a media organisation. But in the age of social media, in a hyper-connected world, we are all publishers of content.

Of course there are differences between government communications, NGO campaigns and independent media reporting. There are also ethical issues to consider, about how we collectively and individually represent people who have suffered appalling hardship, and who often have little left but dignity. We need to be mindful of their safety and security above all, as well as that of our own staff.

But all of these voices are part of the story. I think there is a desire out there for more positive reporting of humanitarian emergencies. The international community is getting better at responding to them, and there are positive stories to tell.

Technology is creating new opportunities for all of us to communicate. The media is always looking for new angles and the most interesting stories, in a time of shrinking budgets and real-time, up-to-the-second breaking news cycles. With the ability to publish what we want, at will, comes a certain amount of responsibility to the people we're communicating about, and we need to keep sight of this.

What does this all mean? Well, whether you're an NGO communicator, a journalist or a civil servant, as Lyse Doucet, the BBC's chief international correspondent, said in her opening remarks at the Future of Humanitarian Reporting conference, there are some fundamental principles that remain:

Everything has changed, but nothing has changed. The same rules of good journalism still apply. The same rules of humanitarian aid still apply. It's about storytelling – and storytelling is not just a timeline of tweets or a stream of YouTube videos. Is there a future for humanitarian reporting? Yes, of course there is – if the reporting is done in the best journalistic tradition and as long as the human remains at the heart of humanitarian aid (Doucet, 2013).

Her second point here is profoundly important. Humanitarian principles still apply – we mustn't forget these in the rush to 'tweet first, verify later'. The primary obligation for humanitarian NGOs should be to protect those they're meant to be helping – and sometimes that means not telling their story, to either protect them from more harm, or to protect aid agency access to them.

Access to technology – mobile phones, smart-phones and the internet – is rapidly changing the landscape. We will increasingly hear directly from affected communities themselves, with or without the help of aid agencies or the media. Some NGOs are leading the way in facilitating this, such as FrontlineSMS/Ushahidi and Radar. But it will primarily happen from the bottom up, from people themselves. As Alice Klein from Radar says, western agencies – and the western media – still put too much emphasis on ‘giving people a voice, and a reluctance to let go and just listen to what people say’.

And finally, visual communication is the key. People are sharing imagery online in huge numbers today. But there are important issues to remember around ethics, identity and representation, not to mention those of permission and copyright. The tone of visual communication is also crucial. I think there is a desire, from the public and the media, to see the other side of disaster as well – the more positive stories of hope and success that humanitarian aid does deliver for so many people. We all have a responsibility to tell those stories too.

*Russell Watkins is editor for photography and humanitarian communications at the Department for International Development (DFID). He works closely with DFID's press, social media and humanitarian response teams, as well as with NGO and UN partners, to explain where, why and how UK government emergency aid is delivered. Over recent years he has communicated about the conflict in Sri Lanka, the Haiti earthquake, the floods in Pakistan, the Horn of Africa/Sahel crises and the Arab Spring uprisings. He set up DFID on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr in 2008, and leads on DFID's use of photography, video and social media. Prior to joining DFID, he produced photography, multimedia and online content for the British Library and worked as a freelance photographer since 1996. He has an MA in Photography from the University of Westminster.*

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## **SURVIVOR BLOGGING: REPORTING EMOTION AND TRAUMA AFTER UTØYA**

*Einar Thorsen reveals how blogging and social media were used not only to communicate a live news event, but also to help people deal with post-traumatic stress*

On 22 July 2011 Norway was rocked by two devastating attacks by the Norwegian right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik. The first involved a car bomb detonated outside government buildings in Oslo at 15:25, killing eight people and injuring a further 98. The second, reported to police at 17:30, was a shooting spree at the Arbeidaranes Ungdomsfylking (AUF) youth camp on Utøya island – 69 people were eventually confirmed dead, and more than 60 injured. Most of those shot were 18 or younger. Two were only 14 years old. In total, there were 564 people on the island when Breivik arrived. He was eventually arrested on the island at 18:34. The combined attacks lasted just over three hours and killed 77 people.

People who were caught up in the Oslo attacks used mobile phones and social media to document events as they unfolded, providing for others a raw, uncensored and immediate account of what they were witnessing. Victims on Utøya island used their mobiles as emergency communication tools – publishing cries for help, confirming they were alive and seeking information about what was going on. Drawing on a larger study into social media and news reporting of the 22 July 2011 attacks in Norway, this article will explore vivid personal accounts posted on blogs by survivors from the Utøya island. It will highlight some of the issues and challenges that arise from the use of social media and blogging as a) a form of citizen crisis communication, and b) a mechanism for dealing with post-traumatic stress.

The rise of blogging platforms and social networking sites has simplified access to publishing tools for ordinary citizens, and subsequently increased the visibility of demotic voices to both national and global audiences. The rate of adaptation by both journalists and their audiences means blogging and social networking is gradually becoming a normalised part of media landscapes across the world. In the process, these forms of internet communication have dramatically altered the relationship between journalists and citizens, in particular when sourcing eyewitness accounts of crisis.

Over the past decade there have been numerous examples of the reporting of high-profile crisis events being influenced by images or video footage captured by eyewitnesses. These include the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004; the London bombings in July 2005; the execution of Saddam Hussein in December 2006; the attempted suicide attack at Glasgow airport in June 2007; the Burma uprising in September-October 2007 (also known as the 'Saffron Revolution'); and the Mumbai attacks in November 2008. In 2009 the disputed presidential elections in Moldova and Iran were both

followed by civic uprisings, in part mobilised by social media use. Twitter in particular became the hub for first-hand accounts of demonstrations and violent crackdowns on protests. Indeed such was its perceived importance to protesters in Iran that the US State Department even asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance so they could continue using it. By the 2011 'Arab Spring', social media had become a normalised part of civic uprisings and crisis reporting.

What has emerged is a news landscape where citizens gather, process, select, comment on and distribute information to people they are connected to in a similar way to journalists. This is particularly potent in situations where journalists are not present, or in countries where international news organisations are either banned or restricted in their reporting.

Back to Norway in July 2011. When the car bomb went off in Oslo it destroyed the Prime Minister's offices as well as other buildings in the surrounding area. This included the headquarters of one of Norway's leading tabloid newspapers, *Verdens Gang* (VG), and the daily newspaper, *Dagsavisen*. Coupled with the unexpected nature of the attacks, this impact on both state power and news organisations inevitably contributed to a slightly chaotic information picture in the immediate aftermath.

News of both attacks spread rapidly on both Twitter and Facebook, with citizens engaging in different forms of crisis communication. These were: firstly, publishing eyewitness accounts or practical information; secondly, rife speculation about the potential for further bombs and the amplification of those rumours; and thirdly, people seeking to explain the events by connecting them with past events and thus beginning to frame our understanding of possible perpetrators and their motivations.<sup>3</sup>

'It's not news. It's real life. It's rawer, uncensored. If you where [sic] Norwegian on Twitter today you got it uncensored whether you wanted it or not,' reflected the social media consultant Hannah Aase on her blog. Despite the nature of her job, Hannah confessed: 'I have to admit I had no idea that news got so real – so fast in social media.' Such was the prominence of social media during and after the attacks that news organisations not only used it as a source, but even published articles based entirely on victims' Twitter feeds and blog posts.

### **Survivors' stories**

Many survivors took to blogs to tell their own stories directly in the days following the attack. One prominent example was from Prableen Kaur, who posted on her existing blog only 15–16 hours after the event. On 23 July 2011 at 10:00 she began her post with:

I have woken up. I cannot sleep. I'm sat in the lounge. Feel sorrow, anger,

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<sup>3</sup> Each of these categories are analysed in detail as part of my larger study into social media and news reporting of the 22 July 2011 attacks.

luck, God I don't know what. There are too many thoughts. I'm afraid. I react to every tiny sound.<sup>4</sup>

Kaur goes on to describe how she 'will write about what happened on Utøya. What my eyes saw, what I felt, what I did.' The harrowing account is confessional in nature, descriptive of her emotions and sensitive towards other victims whose names she has made anonymous. Several graphic and emotionally disturbing examples of what happened follows, including the moment Breivik opens fire on them:

A man came. 'I'm from the police.' I remained lying down. Somebody yelled back asking him to prove it. I can't quite remember what he said, but the killer began to shoot. He reloaded. He shot those around me.

Like many of the survivor blogs from Utøya, Kaur's story attracted significant attention. The initial blog post received 476 comments and was picked up by both Norwegian and international media. It was translated and reported verbatim or paraphrased by the likes of the *Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *Sun* and *Basler Zeitung*, and achieving further international attention courtesy of being syndicated by the Associated Press.

Emma Martinovic also survived the Utøya attack and set up a blog two days later. In her opening post on 24 July she explained her motivations:

I have decided to create this blog, mainly for my own sake. Need a place to write. I'm going to write from the minute that devil started shooting until the minute I was safe. I will explain painful experiences that will be difficult to read. The images in my head are still unclear, things have yet to fall into place.

Her blog post also attracted significant attention with 1,152 comments and again being cited in the international media. The vivid imagery of the violent killing spree no doubt providing an irresistible realism for audiences desperately in search of answers:

I see a mate about to jump, and that second he was shot. At a distance I could see and hear two shots, straight to the head. I saw his head 'explode', I saw he was split in two. I tried, I screamed 'SWIM OR RUN!!', but it was no use, there was too much noise. The helicopter above me and the devil shooting.

### **Contact with journalists**

Another survivor, Jaran Berg, set up a blog after Utøya with the first post on 23 July at 23:41. His story contained similarly disturbing descriptions of the carnage and the intensity of emotions he experienced:

Come round a bend and there I see that there are bodies lying, I can't be sure

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes translated from Norwegian or Spanish by the author.



how many, at least 10 young people. One image has burned itself into my mind, I guess she must have been 16 or 17, just lying there with a hole on the top of her head, absolutely the most horrific sight I have ever seen. I have to throw up, then take a moment or two to gather myself again.

Berg also reflects on his contact with people outside of the island, sending text messages to friends and family – being ‘in no doubt it was the last time they would hear from me’. After the attacks several journalists were accused of endangering victims on the island by calling them, which could purportedly have revealed their location to the killer. The 22 July public enquiry in Norway surveyed 185 of the Utøya survivors and found 45 (24%) were contacted by the media via phone/text whilst the shooting was going on. Berg counteracted the view that this was problematic for him, by recounting how he:

had contact with a friendly P4 [radio] journalist, I told her what was happening and she kept me abreast of the developing situation as best she could with regard to the police. I would say she kept me alive through that horror, for which I am eternally grateful, Ingrid!

Wrought with emotion, Berg concludes the blog stating: ‘I’m relieved, I’m in shock, I’m happy, I’m sad, I hardly know what to think or feel?’ This mixture of disbelief, shock and fear was also reflected in Khamshajiny (Kamzy) Gunaratnam’s blog. She started blogging only a month earlier and posted about ‘the worst day in my life’ the same night as the attacks:

I’m actually still in shock. I can’t shed a single tear. I can’t believe it: Today I actually almost got killed. Hunted and killed.

The post received 481 comments, with most expressing gratitude to Kamzy for sharing her chilling experiences. Elise exemplifies the sentiment expressed by others:

I do not think it is possible for us who were not there to fully comprehend what you went through yesterday, and what you will go through tonight and what you will go through in the time ahead. You do not know me, but I just want to say I have great respect for what you are writing. It is incredibly brave of you, and horrific to read.

Others translated the blog into English and posted it in the comment fields so non-native speakers could understand it. Paul Coletti from the BBC also got in touch, posting a request for an interview at 10:57: ‘Do you speak English? Would you have time for a short interview with BBC radio on the phone?’ – some 15 hours after the event. María Comes from *El País* posted a similar request at 16:38, ‘I am deeply sorry about what happened. We are working on the story and I’d like to talk to you about all of this.’

This sparked a fierce rebuke from several people responding to Comes in Spanish. Juan Carlos denounced her, saying: 'I find it amazing that you ask a girl in shock, after a traumatic experience you write as soon as possible and ask her to give you the phone number. Anything goes for a journalist of *El Pais*?' Others wryly pointed out that Kamza's contact details were actually on her CV, 'if you had bothered to take a comprehensive look at the blog'.

Undeterred *El Pais* published a translated version of Kamza's blog post at 19:18 on 23 July, which even featured on the homepage of its news website. In its leader the paper noted that, 'This paper has tried to contact her, but received no response', and that the 'BBC has interviewed [her] this afternoon and other international media have also told her story'.

### **Defiance and pity**

In a post on 25 July to TheFatAtheist forum, Morten Hellesø described how Breivik had tried to break into the building he was hiding in: 'It was the most terrifying part of it all, and for a moment, I considered my life forfeit. The feeling of helplessness was crushing.'

Reflecting on how some of his 'perspectives have changed', Hellesø concluded: 'I treasure my and other's lives more than before, I still struggle with some traumas, and I have a small case of paranoia.'

Yet he also expressed the defiance so evident in many of the survivors' accounts, wanting 'to return to that island next year', as 'the best way to honour the memory of those who died by showing that I'm not afraid, and I'm not silenced!'

Similar sentiment was expressed by Ann of the 'Havrekjeks' blog. She described the shooter as 'a pitiful man who obviously has many problems':

But I feel no hatred or anger towards him. I do not feel much at all. I just think about all the poor little bodies that lay scattered in our beautiful summer paradise, those who are no longer with us. It is painful and it is terribly sad.

### **The pain goes on**

The survivor bloggers continue to post updates, describing in detail how they are coping. Frequently they refer to symptoms of post-traumatic stress: flashbacks, avoidance, sleep deprivation, anger outbursts, lack of concentration, restlessness, loss of appetite, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, grief and depression. Marte Ødegården who had been active on Twitter before and after the Utøya attack explained why she set up her blog a few weeks after the event (8 August 2011, received 526 comments):

The first post is often the worst and the best in many ways. It makes me tell my story again as a therapy for me, while thoughts and feelings of the horrific things that happened come back and catches me off guard. I will start with a clean sheet of paper and tell the story of what happened to me on 22 July

2011.

Ødegården's blog contains graphic descriptions of how she was hiding when Breivik shot her in the legs. The feeling she was going to die and the realisation the girl next to her was already dead. She spent a long time in hospital due to the seriousness of her injuries, so was shielded from much of the media frenzy that followed the attacks:

The bubble I live in is great. After copious psychological help I no longer see pictures of dead comrades, though I occasionally think about it. The bubble prevents me also in getting the big massive wave of society. The wave of community is good, but much else is tiring.

In a later post dated 24 August, Ødegården says how she has started to feel trapped by the 'bubble' she is in, describing it as 'annoying' and preventing her from fully appreciating what happened. In contrast, Emma Martinovic reflected in a post on 27 July about the pressures of being a media-profiled survivor:

When we arrived it wasn't just TV2 that wanted contact with me, but loads of media, I felt I was pulled in all directions. I have such little energy now that I cannot describe the whole day in detail. [...] After the TV2 broadcast I went straight into a documentary that lasted for four hours.

The strain was such that:

I feel that if I shut my eyes for just 10 minutes, I wake up in trauma, constantly cold sweating.

Prableen Kaur, who was also interviewed extensively, expressed similar frustration about the barrage of journalists attempting to contact her. In a post on 21 August she described her turbulent emotions:

I don't understand why I'm alive. Why he didn't shoot me when those around me got killed. I just cannot understand it. I cry a lot. My mobile is ringing constantly. Text messages arrive the whole time. Journalists, journalists, journalists.

Here the contradiction of public and private space comes to the fore, with both the survivors and journalists wanting to tell their stories in public. The former were seeking outlets to express their raw emotions for therapeutic reasons and to help others understand. The latter wanted to draw on the lurid detail of these victims' experiences to illustrate their narratives. Such was the interest from journalists that the 22 July public enquiry found that 105 (57%) of Utøya survivors were in touch with mass media in the period 22–24 July, with 120 (65%) being described by the media through interviews or

photographs. In total, 165 (89%) of those questioned had had *some* contact with news media following 22 July. This contact, however, was evidently not always welcome and appears not to have satisfied the same need the victims had for unmediated self-expression.

### **Conclusion**

Today's news cycle is condensed and the challenges to journalistic practice – be they about verification or ethical concerns about who to contact or what to publish – are being played out in real-time. On 22 July, especially on the island, people were posting emergency responses – effectively vying for their survival in public. This was less a case of documenting what was taking place (in a journalistic sense), and more an attempt to attract help to save their own lives. At the same time, they were making information public ahead of the news media, who in turn were ahead of official accounts from emergency services.

This article has sought to cast light on just some of the many examples of survivors blogging about their experiences, and the vivid and captivating nature of their accounts. Blogging was used by survivors as an integral part of their own coping mechanism and dealing with post-traumatic stress. Countless ethical and practical considerations for journalism in reporting on such humanitarian crises arise in light of the 22 July case study. Blogs and social media made it easier for journalists to reach survivors, and some journalists may not have been accustomed to dealing with a crisis on this scale.

Victims who contributed their reflections on blogs became 'public' personas. They were adolescents and young adults, perhaps not realising the extent of media pressure that would follow – despite showing an impressive self-awareness and maturity in their writing. While they might serve as a cathartic experience for the writer, survivor blogs also appeared to appease people's hunger for an unmediated realism, with intensely emotional and gory details about the events. What this demonstrates is a need for critical media literacy – for victims, journalists and other citizens alike – to enable people to appreciate the risks associated with self-disclosure and exposure, while also effectively harnessing the power of online networking for personal therapy and publicly documenting their experiences.

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## **EMOTION AND TRAUMA IN REPORTING DISASTER AND TRAGEDY**

*Sallyanne Duncan and Jackie Newton suggest how journalists could work better with the bereaved to produce ethical reporting in the light of disasters*

Humanitarian reporting often involves compelling accounts of distant human suffering, such as Michael Buerk's iconic coverage of the 1984 famine in Ethiopia. Yet, for every major disaster there are personal tragedies by the score, or even by the thousand. Reporting these stories of individual bereavement is a form of humanitarian reporting many journalists are likely to come across. While there are clearly significant differences in reporting humanitarian disasters and reporting personal bereavement, there is also common ground. Behind every major tragedy and those images of distant suffering are individual families who have endured the loss of a child, father, sister. In both cases, the human connection is at the heart of story – or should be.

Our research shows that reporters appear to be caring, emotionally involved, but often anguish about covering traumatic events. They are well aware that intrusion can occur even when they are behaving responsibly and sensitively. Journalists' experiences of reporting the Dunblane massacre is a good example (British Executive, International Press Institute; Jemphrey and Barrington, 2000; Duncan, 2005).

But despite these good intentions, reporters often cover the bereaved, the vulnerable and the traumatised from an insufficiently informed position. This creates a reliance on instinct, previous experience, and a variable application of regulatory systems and personal decision-making. A greater professional understanding of the conditions, involvement and responses to grief, loss and trauma would educate journalists – including those involved in the production process as well as in frontline newsgathering – in the appropriateness of their treatment of a vulnerable person's story. After all, they wouldn't expect to report a football match without understanding the rules of the game. Why should reporting death and disaster have a lesser standard? (Townend, 2012)

Lessons from our research may be helpful to the wider field of humanitarian reporting. The responses from journalists and bereaved families we have interviewed have led us to a model of ethical co-operation, defined by the three fundamentals of context, consent and control. These, although first mooted for social media encounters, could also be of help to reporters in the field. Therefore, seeking ethical co-operation – negotiating the ground between encouraging an interviewee to discuss traumatic events while respecting their reluctance to revisit the original trauma – is a key dilemma for journalists reporting the vulnerable and bereaved.

Within this model, context includes the nature of the event, the type of contact (i.e. whether it's direct and face-to-face; organised by a third party such as emergency services, charities and NGOs; by telephone, Skype or social media) and the political, social, cultural and emotional implications for the interviewee. Regarding this last point, British sociologist Tony Walter (1996) looks at the 'western' psychological model of 'normal' grieving and contrasts it with the experience of reactions to bereavement in other societies where emotional links with the deceased are much more prolonged, appreciated and explicit. Thus, a further layer of complexity is added for the reporter who is covering stories of people whose values and grief rituals differ from their own and who is therefore unfamiliar with the context of the interviewee's behaviours.

In terms of consent, journalists are generally well aware of the requirement for informed consent from interviewees in traumatic situations – whether this is implicit in the journalist stating who they are, or more explicit through the use of written acknowledgement. However, this is not always apparent to vulnerable interviewees who, due to the effect of their continuing ordeal, may forget they are speaking to a professional whose purpose is to use their memories and reactions in a media story. There are the factors of shock, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), to consider and while these emotional states undoubtedly make interviewees more vulnerable, they should not necessarily negate the testimony they can give about their personal traumatic experiences, which are often part of the wider humanitarian tragedy. Consent also applies to the unauthorised use of social media material, which could be seen by those at the centre of stories as stealing their identity because they have lost control of the material's use. Additionally, harm can be caused when news organisations use material from a deceased person's online presence that the bereaved relatives were unaware even existed. (Newton and Duncan, 2012)

People who have experienced a trauma are often eager to have their story heard. In our research, bereaved families have been keen to tell us that their story belongs to them and not to the journalist. This need may apply to many victims of humanitarian disasters as well. Equally, the absence of reporting personal human tragedy can have as distressing an effect, leaving the bereaved and traumatised feeling neglected and their pain unacknowledged (Newton, 2011). Therefore, the act of interviewing can give solace and, in turn, control to the bereaved or traumatised. Nevertheless, reporters should consider ceding some of their control in the interview to the vulnerable interviewee in terms of the material covered and approach taken. Honest disclosure by the reporter that the editing process, global syndication and dissemination via social media are beyond their scope will assist significantly in building trust.

This prerequisite for ethical co-operation through consideration of context, consent and control is poignantly illustrated in interviewing asylum

seekers, particularly women. As displaced witnesses of atrocity whose legal status is often at risk, they are highly vulnerable and fearful of encounters with journalists. This is because of language and cultural differences, perceived hostility, the potential to compromise relationships with the authorities, repercussions for relatives and associates in their home country, and the personal and painful nature of their experiences (Diamond and Duncan, 2008). Thus, it is vital that journalists explicitly ensure that interviewees understand the context in which their stories will be told, what they are consenting to and the conceivable impact of what they are telling the journalist.

Entering into this type of negotiation with an interviewee subverts the traditional paradigm of journalistic power and the interviewee's corresponding acquiescence. Explaining the journalistic objective in terms of outlining, before the interview, the areas to be discussed and the intended focus of the eventual article, is especially important for refugee and asylum-seeking interviewees who are unlikely to be familiar with the UK press and who do not share the same cultural references as the journalist. This openness is a form of sharing control with the interview subject. It reinstates an element of control to the interviewee, who through their trauma has lost control of other aspects of their lives. (Diamond and Duncan, 2008)

That said, journalists should be aware of 'good taste censorship' and be willing to 'show and disturb', otherwise they could be accused of being indifferent rather than considerate, according to veteran foreign correspondent Martin Bell (in Kieran, 1998). One journalist said she is unlikely to refrain from asking questions that could be painful for traumatised interviewees, believing that sometimes journalists 'protect themselves when they think they are protecting others (by avoiding asking difficult questions)' (Diamond and Duncan, 2008).

This stance would seem to correspond with the views of communications experts from NGOs (Orgad and Vella, 2012) who are concerned that there is too much 'over-positive' messaging. One fundraising director said, 'If you're self-censoring, you're not actually depicting the real-life situation... You're saying, "it's all fine". It's not. That's taking it too far the other way.' (ibid)

In our research, bereaved families have indicated a need for their stories to be heard, even if they are harrowing for the wider audience. While considering which 'images' of disaster or trauma to report, it may be fruitful to consider that there is more to humanity than dignity alone. Emotion and loss are part of the picture. In this form of reporting, crossing the line from impartial journalist to active supporter has its place.

Nevertheless, journalists must consider protecting themselves from emotional trauma, even if it goes against the grain to 'admit' any personal distress. Our research found journalists resistant to any form of counselling in



the newsroom, and suspicious of the 'de-briefing' processes suggested by professionals in the field.

Stress is a normal reaction to extreme or prolonged exposure to violence and other human tragedies. But an exceptional thing about journalists is that we alone seem to think that we are exceptional in our reactions. Violence and its emotional aftermath affect all first responders, including police, fire and ambulance workers as well as journalists. (Hight and Smyth, 2003)

Browne, Evangeli and Greenberg (2012) describe journalists as a 'unique cohort' in times of tragedy or trauma because of the lack of a 'direct, helping role'. Their study of 50 journalists found a worrying correlation between PTSD, exposure to trauma and guilt about reporters' involvement in a tragedy. The authors add that 'ethical dilemmas may result in behaviour perceived as violating moral standards', referring specifically to objectivity, when the moral imperative to offer help in times of disaster clashes with the journalistic duty to record and remain impartial. For those covering wars, civil uprisings, famines, acts of terrorism and natural catastrophes this will be a familiar experience.

This is further evidence that journalists ought to believe that they are doing the best they can to avoid emotional distress, and that being seen to 'do the right thing' according to ethical and moral constraints can be a protective element in terms of mental trauma.

Traumatised and bereaved people can often build trusting relationships with journalists they have met as a result of their tragedy. In the mid- to long-term they may actively seek publicity during criminal investigations, at anniversaries, or as they begin to campaign on issues related to their loss. This relationship can become important to journalists because it helps negate their 'guilt' about intrusion into grief during the early stages of the story. Certainly, regional journalists and those from the Mirror Group who reported the Hillsborough tragedy with rigour came to be trusted and respected by campaigners.

Journalists can help the public to find meaning in the grieving process and to understand an essentially chaotic world. Some theories of bereavement counselling have stages which ape the process of death reporting (Graves, 2009, Newton and Duncan, 2012). People want to know how others feel about significant events in their lives because they want to try to unravel how they might feel if it happened to them. Death stories help us to make sense of our experiences, but they also give a voice to the bereaved and survivors who want the world to recognise how much they miss their loved one (Duncan, 2012).

The role of the journalist after a tragic event needs to be recognised generally – and specifically – by third parties such as the police and, in the case of disasters, NGOs.

## Conclusion

Reporting tragedy and trauma provides the facts, but it also enables the journalist to record the emotions of those left behind, thus providing a more rounded understanding of loss. Journalists can be perceived as participating in the mourning process by being official archivists, moving from being a traditional detached recorder of facts to a more attached expresser of emotions. Even in the midst of a humanitarian disaster, there is the potential for a journalist to take the bereaved's recollections of their loved one and craft them into a coherent narrative, telling an articulated story of the death, the life, and the loss. Thus, responsible, sensitive and connected reporting of disaster, trauma and bereavement can be a positive experience for both the bereaved and the journalist.

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## **HOW WE NOW REPORT DISASTERS: EMOTION AND TRAUMA**

*Ros Wynne-Jones reflects on her own personal experience as an international correspondent to examine how journalists are affected by traumatic stories*

At the Future of Humanitarian Reporting conference, I was asked to present some personal thoughts on humanitarian reporting, based on 15 years or so reporting from conflict and disaster zones. I discussed real-life moral and personal dilemmas and the effect of that reporting on journalists, using five examples and images.

My background is as a feature writer for newspapers including the *Daily Mirror*, *Independent*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Sunday Mirror*, and I've written regularly for the *Guardian*. I am currently a columnist and writer on the *Daily Mirror*, the newspaper on which I originally trained. My career has taken me to war, disaster and post-conflict zones including Kosovo, East Timor, Rwanda, Mozambique and Chad-Darfur. I also wrote a novel set in South Sudan and have reported from that country in particular over many years.

### **1. Bang Bang Club picture, Kevin Carter, South Sudan**

The iconic picture of an emaciated, barely alive child being stalked by a vulture was taken by Kevin Carter, the South African 'Bang Bang Club' photographer in March 1993. It was taken in a drought and famine-afflicted area of South Sudan, a country I have reported from intermittently through its long years of war and its struggle for – and now with – independence from the north of Sudan. By the time I came across the photograph of the little boy called Kong Nyong, I had reported from the famine zone myself on dozens of occasions. It caught my attention not just because it is a shocking image, and because of all the moral questions it immediately raises, but because it struck me as a deeply truthful image. It said something about reporting from famine-zones and reporting from South Sudan that I had somehow, in all my own reporting, failed to articulate.

It also confirmed for me several rules I have tried to employ in my career as a humanitarian reporter – including always naming and giving context to every child and person in photographs and interviews wherever humanly possible.

The moral questions Carter's photograph raises are manifold. Why is the photographer still photographing? Why doesn't he intervene? How close is the boy to the vulture? Does the photographer see the boy or only the frame of the picture and its composition? In famine – and war reporting – they are questions that raise themselves during every working moment. The image won the Pulitzer Prize a year later in 1994. The same year, Kevin Carter gassed

himself in his car with exhaust fumes. He had seen many other horrific things during the apartheid struggle in his own country of South Africa but he was haunted by South Sudan.

I recognised in the photograph the feeling I had every time I returned from the drought in South Sudan, when I would turn the tap on and off in disbelief. What haunted Kevin is not just a photographer or reporter's dilemma but every first world inhabitant's dilemma. We are not innocent or uninvolved. A journalist though, in particular, is an atom that disrupts other atoms. Martin Bell has written about a journalism of attachment as if it is something to aspire to. I would maintain there is no such thing as a journalism of detachment, not at least until news of wars and disasters is brought to you by Google Earth.

We are not all faced with choices as clear or bleak as Carter's in our reporting, but there are choices all the same. What if I – or you – had given one of dozens of dying children in a feeding centre my/your water bottle? In the end, journalism – and aid work – is done by human beings and we have to live with our decisions. I ended up writing a novel about South Sudan, called *Something Is Going To Fall Like Rain* (Wynne-Jones, 2009) that has these moral decisions at its heart.

In the various wars I covered – Kosovo, East Timor, South Sudan – I saw myself not as a war reporter but a humanitarian reporter. I think the distinction is important. War is never a story I have pursued. I am interested in writing about human beings.

## **2. 'Anyone here who's been raped and speaks English?'**

This was the title of the memoirs of Edward Behr, the veteran *Newsweek* correspondent. Published in 1978, they were retitled (under duress) for the American market as *Bearings: A Foreign Correspondent's Life Behind the Lines*. Behr said that he had heard a BBC reporter shout the phrase to European survivors after a siege at Stanleyville, eastern Congo in 1964.

I think that instead of blanching from the phrase, we need to admit that all war and disaster reporting asks a version of this question. Humanitarians of all kinds need to tell a story – not just reporters, but aid workers and human rights activists too. After every massacre, you are looking first and foremost for someone to tell you something that connects with readers or viewers back home. Journalists are looking for the most photogenic, articulate, heart-breaking story. Sometimes this is the most heart-breaking part of reporting. That the old lady whose grief is only average grief, whose loss is only average loss and whose status as an elder not a child means she is not photogenic, is not painful enough to distract a home audience from their own lives and worries. But to pretend that it is otherwise only heaps sin on sin.

### **3. Fergie and Andrew's wedding day, 1999**

Every reporter has their own Bang Bang moment, the vulture that flaps at their own shoulder. Mine came in 1999 when I was covering the war in East Timor. After receiving local information, I went to the site of a reported massacre with three aid workers and a photographer. The Indonesian Aitarak ('Thorn') militia – their name written everywhere in red paint and blood – had been attempting to dispose of the evidence when we arrived. A series of charred bodies lay in the back of a pickup truck, including the remains of women and children. A hut full of half-destroyed ID cards suggested these deaths were part of a bigger project. We were desperate to get this news back to London, a difficult scenario given we were living in burned-out buildings with satellite equipment that worked only intermittently. All of us in the group felt it could be the evidence the international community needed to intervene further in East Timor. In the event, I spoke to the foreign desk who told me that no news was needed from Timor today as Fergie and Andy (the Duke of York and his former wife Sarah Ferguson) were getting back together. I had to explain to terrified East Timorese people that it was a busy news day in London (Wynne-Jones, 2012). All of us, in our different ways, were very haunted by that moment. Not just the remembered scene, but how it registered as nothing compared with an utterly meaningless – and subsequently proven untrue – story that would nevertheless sell papers, unlike scenes from a massacre.

### **4. Omagh bomb**

In 1998, 29 people died and 220 were injured when a bomb exploded outside a school uniform shop in Omagh, Northern Ireland. The injured included six teenagers, six children and a woman pregnant with twins (BBC, 2007). I was one of the reporters who arrived within a few hours of the bomb into the chaos of a town experiencing the state of paralysis that usually follows an act of terrorism. Pre-social media and with a majority of people not on mobile phones, it was very hard for local people to establish who was alive and who was dead or injured. Lists were put up at the gym which families with people who were unaccounted for would scour in a state of terrible tension. My mobile phone had no signal, and I had no internet connection to file my copy back to London. So I had to queue for a payphone somewhere in the town centre. There were many, many other people queuing too, either trying to find out news or to tell friends and relatives they were alive or that someone was dead or injured.

I faced a dilemma in tying up a phone for a long call to read over 2,000 words to a copytaker. I also began to realise that it was going to be a very public call – a surreal rendering of families' grief into journalistic cliché right in front of their very eyes. I let a few families go ahead of me, but in the end the deadline became impossible to ignore. I took the phone, and standing

there at the open phonebox, delivered an instant spoken-word version of the Omagh community's pain.

Very often when we write about these things, the people involved don't read it, particular if you are writing from a foreign country. Or if they do they at least have the distance of a few hours, and a page not a person to confront. I have always wondered how those people felt listening to what I was reading. It contained lots of information they wouldn't necessarily have known – the number of dead, police statements, latest theories of who was responsible. It was also full of detail – the blood slipping down the hill from the uniform shop – they would have recognised but perhaps not wanted to hear right then, that night, at the payphone on the high street.

### **5. The Kosovan nail crisis**

In 1998, I reported from the refugee camps in Albania and Macedonia that built up in the run-up to the Kosovo war. Thousands were being expelled every day from Kosovo, many with just the clothes they stood up in, and forced onto trains leaving the country. After days of chaos thousands were trapped in a muddy no-man's land on the border that turned into a health crisis. British forces were among the armies building tented cities to receive them. I worked in the camps for a few weeks reporting the stories of families. On one occasion, I did hear someone from a British newspaper – who mistook me for a Red Cross worker – say something very close to 'Anyone here been raped and speak English?'

On the very first day I was in the camps, a refugee woman from Pristina asked me for nail varnish. It hadn't been on my list of priorities packing to go on a trip everyone presumed would end up in a warzone. The next day, two other women asked me the same thing. I realised that among the people coming in and out of the camps – soldiers, aid workers, government officials, journalists – not many were women. Women aid workers said they were being asked the same thing, for lipstick and nail varnish.

I had never reported from a European war before, and I began to realise that there were differences as well as similarities to the developing world conflicts I had covered. Many of the people in the camps were from Pristina, a bustling very westernised European city where people were used to dressing smartly, eating at restaurants and shopping at boutiques. I began to see the torn, chipped nails of the women in the camps as a symbol of everything they had been robbed of in becoming refugees. A desire to paint their nails was about personal pride and dignity.

I phoned my then editor, Rosie Boycott, ironically the former editor of *Spare Rib* feminist magazine. Our newspaper had had a massive appeal and was sending lorry-loads of supplies to the camps through Unicef – nappies, powdered milk, tinned food and other essentials. I asked whether they could send a box of nail polish and some lipstick, anything the fashion department could muster. Most people seemed to think I'd gone mad under the strain of

several weeks monitoring aid convoys from the airport and reporting from the camps. Rosie Boycott understood immediately.

The nail polish arrived a couple of weeks later on board an aid convoy. A kind woman from Unicef, several Kosovan refugees and I set up a nail clinic in a tent inside one of the camps on the border. Endless queues formed. We painted nails for hours. Women wept and told us it was the best day since they had been forced to leave their homes. There was laughing and singing, kids came and had their nails done. It was a magical day in my memory among many bleak days of murdered people and lost children. It wasn't war reporting. But just maybe it was humanitarian reporting – a moment of listening intently to the people whose voices you are recording – at its heart.

*Ros Wynne-Jones is an award-winning journalist who writes about UK and global poverty. A Daily Mirror columnist who currently writes about the effect of cuts and austerity on ordinary British families, she has also reported from over 40 countries for titles including the Independent, Guardian and New Statesman. Her first novel, Something is Going to Fall Like Rain, about aid workers in South Sudan, was published by Reportage Press in 2009, with an iPad and Kindle edition in 2012.*

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## **THE CHANGING FACE OF HUMANITARIAN REPORTING – PUTTING THE SURVIVOR CENTRE STAGE**

***Brendan Gormley** argues that the international NGO community still needs to work harder to put the survivor at the heart of their communications*

Amid the proliferation of political and financial news and commentary in recent years, reporting about the world's most vulnerable populations – the poor, the displaced, and communities affected by crises – has been sidelined. According to the British Red Cross (Watkins, 2013), about 90% of humanitarian disasters overseas go unreported. It is rapid-onset emergencies, such as major earthquakes, tsunami or floods, which capture headlines and public attention. Less reported are prolonged or recurring droughts and food shortages, or long-running conflicts that often affect far greater numbers of people in total (EC, 2012).

Some argue that international audiences do not want to hear about these complicated, complex and often chronic crises (Gladstone, 2012). For even the most accomplished journalists, these crises are not easy to explain and are made all the more difficult by audiences that have become accustomed to the delivery of news in short, bite-size chunks.

When we look back at Michael Buerk's report from the famine in Ethiopia in 1984, there are a number of stark differences between reports on similar emergencies today, not least the fact that the BBC report was approximately seven minutes long. If audiences today, who are accustomed to 24/7, 140-character, graphic real-time news, do devote viewing time to prime-time news at 6pm or 9pm, they will see two-minute news packages, not seven-minute marathons. As well as this, tightening budgets of newsrooms around the world make it difficult for news outlets to independently cover international stories at any length of depth (Fenton, 2010).

It is in this space that NGOs are playing a growing role as providers of humanitarian news. Mainstream media and NGOs have long had a symbiotic relationship, with the media using NGO experts for news tips, quotes and access to hard-to-reach people and places. Now, journalists are under more pressure to produce copy with fewer resources and for more outlets – for example, a print journalist may now have to file copy for the print edition of the newspaper, the online edition and a blog, and produce a podcast. And with many foreign news bureaus shuttered, communication-savvy NGOs are taking on a bigger role in humanitarian reporting (Fenton, 2010).

Aware of the constraints facing media outlets, NGOs are providing full news packages to reporters and editors: researching and pitching stories; providing contacts for sources, profiles and experts; developing content; providing logistical support, analysis and opinion; and, in some cases, giving journalists funding to travel.

Without this support and content, many foreign news stories would not be told at all (Fenton, 2010). But questions about objectivity and journalistic standards arise when a newsgathering process relies too heavily on NGO communication of which the primary purpose is fundraising and branding. The increased proliferation of NGOs in recent years means there is a high level of competition between them to garner the attention of both policy makers and donors (Fenton, 2010). NGO communication and PR departments have grown as fundraising and campaigning roles have gained importance. These departments are often well-resourced, carrying out the media work described above as well as producing fundraising communications. Their work is primarily aimed at western audiences – current and prospective donors. In an increasingly competitive world, the danger is that there will return to the disaster short-hand that was prevalent before the Red Cross and NGO code of conduct developed after the Goma crisis established a new consensus that put the dignity of the survivor at the centre of disaster reporting and imagery.

However, the communication that is less well-resourced is the communication between agencies and affected communities. According to then IFRC general secretary Markku Niskala, people affected by disasters need information as much as they need food, shelter and water (IFRC, 2005). Accurate information dramatically improves the delivery of assistance (Haddow, 2009).

‘Giving vulnerable people the right information at the right time is a form of empowerment,’ said Jonathan Walter, editor of the 2005 IFRC *World Disasters Report*. ‘It enables people to make the decisions most appropriate for themselves and their families and can mean the difference between being a victim or a survivor.’ According to a BBC Media Action policy paper (2012), although many humanitarian agencies continue to see communication as something that is done to raise money or boost the profile of their disaster relief efforts, the sector is, increasingly, seeing the need for a clear strategic focus that responds to the information and communication needs of those affected by disaster. However, the paper also notes that though few within the humanitarian sector disagree with the logic of prioritising such communication, in practice it is still ‘rarely operationalised in ways that are clear and meaningful’ (2013: p3).

Communications systems are highly localised and changing fast, due to access to technology. Those who understand the local context best are local professionals, including local journalists, IT specialists and the private sector (BBC Media Action, 2012). Local media can play a vital role in ensuring that affected people get the accurate and timely information they need to save lives and reduce suffering. Known and trusted by local communities, speaking in the local language and familiar with local politics and culture, local media can meet an important need that international relief agencies and other external groups cannot meet on their own.

Support for local media can also help local reporters better understand the complexities of delivering aid in an emergency and form more constructive relationships with humanitarian agencies. This helps local reporters provide the information that communities need to maximise the use of assistance and report on the problems of aid through a constructive public dialogue, rather than simply critical reporting (Internews, 2012).

The need to support local media after a disaster is heightened because often essential infrastructure will have been destroyed. In Haiti in 2010, as in other emergencies, communications infrastructure was seriously damaged by the earthquake. At least 31 local journalists died and many others were injured; several radio stations collapsed; and media that did survive lost the ability to pay staff because their advertising base collapsed (Wall & Chery, 2011). Telecommunication infrastructure was also severely damaged. It was at this time that the demand for information and the need to communicate was at its height.

The Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network aims to ensure that people caught up in emergencies are provided with life-saving information and can communicate with humanitarian responders. In current crises, these responders include not only NGOs and UN bodies, but also media development organisations, mobile operators and other private sector actors.

The CDAC Network promotes coordination and dialogue between these actors to ensure that they work together to best serve the needs of communities affected by crisis, a need highlighted by the recent OCHA *Humanitarianism in a Network Age* report (2013). The report states that analyses of emergency response during the last five years show that poor information management has severely hampered effective action, costing many lives (OCHA, 2013). A lack of standards for sharing has hamstrung responders. Despite efforts to improve, the flow of information between aid agencies and the people they aim to help has been consistently overlooked (*ibid.*, 2013).

Communities are more and more connected through mobile and internet technology, so survivors and their spokespeople can be heard around the world. The question is whether the international humanitarian community is willing to listen and put the voice of the survivors at the centre of their priorities and plans. NGOs also need to focus on rebalancing their communication efforts, moving from fundraising and brand awareness to better engagement with local media, offering life-saving information and two-way communications with local communities.

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*Network and a trustee of Age International, One World Media and the Noel-Buxton Trust. He is a member of the Risk Horizon Expert Group (Govt. Office for Science) advising ministers on emerging international risks, a member of the Independent Review Panel for the NGO Accountability Charter and ODI's Council.*

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## **SPEAKER LIST**

### **THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN REPORTING CONFERENCE**

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

6 March 2013, 9.15am-3.45pm

#### **Opening remarks**

Professor Howard Tumber

#### **Introduction**

Lyse Doucet, chief international correspondent, BBC

#### **Session 1: UGC and humanitarian disasters: the latest developments in mainstream media's use of new media**

chaired by Professor Stewart Purvis City University London

- Nicola Bruno Effecinque/Refreshing Journalism
- Professor Simon Cottle Cardiff University
- Chris Hamilton BBC
- Dr Stijn Joye University of Ghent
- Dr Claire Wardle Storyful

#### **Session 2: Communicating change: how NGOs are using new media to deal with disasters**

chaired by Paddy Coulter Oxford Global Media

- Glenda Cooper, City University London
- Alice Klein, Radar
- Liz Scarff, social media consultant
- Russell Watkins, DFID

#### **Session 3: The End of the Affair? How do aid agencies and journalists relate to each other in the social media era?**

chaired by Prof Suzanne Franks City University London

- Charlie Beckett LSE
- Ian Birrell, journalist
- Leigh Daynes, Doctors of the World
- Brendan Paddy, Disasters Emergency Committee
- David Randall, *Independent on Sunday*

#### **Session 4: How we now report disasters: emotion and trauma**

chaired by Prof Howard Tumber, City University London



- Dr Sallyanne Duncan, University of Strathclyde
- Dr Jackie Newton, Liverpool John Moores University
- Dr Einar Thorsen, University of Bournemouth
- Adrian Thomas, British Red Cross
- Ros Wynne-Jones, journalist

**Closing discussion** moderated by Paul Mylrea, BBC

- Glenda Cooper, City University London
- Prof Simon Cottle, Cardiff University
- Brendan Gormley, CDAC
- David Randall, *Independent on Sunday*
- Adrian Thomas, British Red Cross
- Russell Watkins, DFID

## RESOURCES

Resources and further information about the project can be found on the website for the Centre for Law, Justice and Journalism, City University London at:

<http://www.city.ac.uk/centre-for-law-justice-and-journalism/seminars-events/the-future-of-humanitarian-reporting>

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**CLJJ Working Papers**

Connie St. Louis (ed)

**Reframing Libel**

CLJJ and the CFOM, University of Sheffield

**The Initiative on Impunity and the Rule of Law**

Judith Townend (ed)

**Justice Wide Open**