

Spring 2017

Picture This: The role of digital storytelling in motivating donations towards refugee relief

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Picture This: The role of digital storytelling in motivating donations towards refugee relief

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Spring 2017

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Abstract:

It is often assumed that powerful photographs and film footage have the ability to move viewers in the developed population to action. Frank Fournier, the photographer who captured the face of 13-year-old Omayra Sanchez in her last hours of life, as she stood trapped in a pool of muddy water and debris, said, “I believe the photo helped raise money from around the world in aid and helped highlight the irresponsibility and lack of courage of the country's leaders (BBC, 2005).” His statement encompasses the common perspective that imagery can motivate donations, but there is a lack in data regarding the transition from reaction to action. This study is concerned with the effectiveness of various digital storytelling appeals (shock effect, positive images, and post-humanitarian communication) in attaining donations for refugee relief efforts. Refugees are perhaps more distant from the donor population than any other victimized group, and have struggled through periods of severe anti-refugee sentiments that has made the collection of aid and process of reintegration challenging. The extreme discourse between populations and the ever-growing number of displaced persons makes refugees the ideal population to study. This research asks what in a digital story, particularly the imagery, motivates developed populations to not only react emotionally with refugee issues but transition to donate to refugee relief efforts? Through literature and interviews regarding image-evoked empathy, identity, and group influenced responding, and the analysis of photographs and digital storytelling platforms that unpack various imagery appeals, we discover that image use for humanitarian campaigns has evolved to it's most effective form yet. Advancing from the traditional technique of applying imagery and sharing narratives, digital storytelling aims to alleviate intergroup empathy bias and increase awareness, funding for crises, or both. This study explores how advancements in technology have brought forth digital storytelling, which

combined with the implementation of the post-humanitarian communication appeal generates evocative campaigns that fit the framework necessary to motivate donation for refugees more productively and ethically than has been done in the past.

Preface:

Before I began this year of travel and research I started a blog project titled “Bridge Over Distance,” with the intension to document my observations and reflections as I migrate from region to region. The idea is that as my brain changes according to my experiences and the cultures I am immersed in, that contextually influenced shift will be documented in what I am inclined to write and the way I write it. Images support the words, helping to immerse the reader in the region too. The platform has been and continues to be a tool for myself, but it is also a tool to bridge the distance between the site visitors and the people of the places described. It is my own digital story.

Empathy, a sexy topic these days, is a feeling integral to connection with others. From schoolyard bullying to mass genocide, I’ve felt that cases of humans hurting other humans could be evaded if the potential perpetrator was empowered enough to have the capacity to feel and comprehend the life experience of the potential victim. This is the solution I’ve dreamt up in the back of my head as the only way to stop the repetitive violation of human rights. If humans could understand and respect other humans, at least their basic rights to live equitably among one another regardless of their differences, how could we be capable of hurting one another?

I keep hearing vague call-to-action statements coming from professionals and intellectuals in briefings and conferences. Statements like “we need solidarity now” and “do more,” that insinuates that empathy is the solution. Ironically, the people who listen to these statements, who are already working in the human rights field, generally already recognize a

global lack of compassion. The people who are not involved, who are disengaged and unaware, are the ones that must wake up. The ambiguity of these phrases has irritated me. It's easy to stress compassion but how do we actually build it? That internal frustration is the inspiration and motivation behind my study. A personal passion for displaced persons brought me to the idea to focus on refugees. I don't doubt that empathy is the bridge over our distance, but this study is a practical step towards productive emotion and strategic feelings based campaigning for refugees.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all the ears that patiently endured my circle talk and emotional babble that has articulated itself into the pages that follow. Thank you to the people who answered my questions before, during, and after briefings and engaged my curiosities. To those that helped connect me to new professional contacts (Anne Golaz, Michael Speir, Christian Captier, Francoise Flourens, and Alexandre Lambert) and to the contacts who took the time to answer my questions and impart their knowledge on me (Valerie Gorin, Sophie Natter, Paul Slovic, Florence Kim, and Nitasha Kaul), I am grateful for your effort and input, thank you. To SIT for supporting my studies abroad with the help of scholarships, behind the scenes advising, and in the classroom. To my teachers all the way back in Elementary, and the University of Oregon professors for shaping my brain, prior to my departure to Switzerland, to think as it does. Thank you to the people that have ever been unfriendly towards me, the challenge you put in my hands has provoked the thought that has built my passion towards creating a world that follows the "Golden Rule." Thank you Mom, for telling me what the "Golden Rule" is, to treat others the way you want to be treated, and for never letting me forget it growing up. My Dad, you are the epitome of patience and good listening, thank you modeling these important qualities. My friends and family, thank you for being home to me, so even if I have no physical place to go

your support is my foundation and your love puts a roof over my head. But to my brothers, blow the roof off and leave the structure standing, love is all around.

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In the midst of wars and unrest, and the resulting masses of refugees fleeing, digital storytelling is a multi-media tool that has become an increasingly popular campaign method used by non-governmental organizations dedicated to refugee relief. The developed population viewing these images has reacted with a range of intensity, but the general theme is that the stories told by these images are intended to emphasize the needs of victims and evoke an empathetic or compassionate response through immersion. Throughout the humanitarian sphere, in human rights conferences, briefings, articles, on social media platforms, there is a common cry for “solidarity now.” Empathy, compassion, and solidarity; these terms go hand in hand when it comes to fueling discussion and interest in human rights. But with this, there has been a common understanding that these emotional responses do not actually solve the root of the problems. Neither do donations alone. There is a present gap in literature covering the developed populations’ transition from just an emotional response to the digital storytelling used in refugee campaigns, and the physical act of donating for the cause. The objective of this study is to better understand what about an image and the associated story allows it to succeed in not only evoking emotion, but also in motivating donation. This research concentrates specifically on refugee relief efforts, as this context battles the added challenge of inspiring an empathetic reaction and

donation from a developed population that is often considered different and distant from the refugees in need.

Literature review:

Humans, with our shifty identities and subjective memory, are complex, dynamic, and very unpredictable. Emotions and motivations are highly variable. In order to comprehend emotional and donation reactions to large crises, to imagery, and to one another, this project begins by using a study by Weiner and Auster that draws on Halpern's essay, "What is Clinical Empathy," to break down empathy into two parts: cognitive and affective empathetic response. Literature published by Slovic et al. puts these emotional reactions within the context of grand crisis with a discussion of compassion fatigue. Cryder et al. takes this a step further, recognizing that proportionality can reduce the collapse of compassion, claiming that when presented with evidence of significant impact of action, this increases the tangibility of a crisis and motivates people to intervene. Cikara et al. elucidate the drivers of empathetic response in competitive intergroup settings, and the link to xenophobic tendencies that fuel the lack of support for and resettlement of the refugee population. Aaker and Akutsu take that sensitivity of identity and propose the best ways of asking for a donation depending on the group identity of the audience. Building from methods of request, Chouliaraki's study introduces the presentation and distinction of image based appeals, defining post-humanitarian communication, which is a core concept behind digital storytelling. An interview with Dr. Valerie Gorin of the CERAH offers an expert perspective on what works within an image and what doesn't, as well as a clear definition of what digital storytelling entails. After examining case studies of campaigns launched by Save the Children, the International Organization for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Radio Television Swiss, and photographs of Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh, this

study comes to a conclusion supported by Thomas Haskell's "recipe" theory, explained in Kennedy's research, revealing the components essential for an effective digital storytelling campaign and why.

The Refugee:

For the purpose of this study we will consider refugees as defined by the UNHCR:

[A person] who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries. (USA for UNHCR, 2017)

Why focus on donations:

In briefings with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Program for HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Health Organization (WHO) I asked what is the most helpful form of aid (volunteers, food, money, or goods) for refugee relief? The answer was always monetary donations. For NGOs, monetary donations are flexible and support work in the field. It is also more quantifiable than other forms of aid. For these reasons this study is focused on what motivates donations in the form of money. Signing petitions and putting pressure on States is helpful as well, but this study concentrates on donating, as it is an act of the developed population members' personal investment as well as generosity that is a step further than discussion.

Research Question:

The question driving this study targets the current trend of digital storytelling for refugee relief campaigns. It asks, **what in a digital story, particularly the imagery, motivates developed populations to not only react emotionally with refugee issues but transition to**

donate to refugee relief efforts? In answering this we uncover the transition from a reaction to a photo to donation for the cause. With this information organizations dedicated to refugee relief can design image-based digital campaigns that are more productive in acquiring donations from the developed population.

Research methodology:

The data compiled for this research study is secondary sourced, pulled from peer-reviewed studies, literature, credible news publications, photo publications, briefings, and informal and formal interviews with professionals and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Much of the literature was obtained through online databases and articles recommended by interviewees. This approach offered up-to-date material pooled from a range of fields (i.e. human rights, psychology, marketing, social media), which fit together to provide a complete picture of the developed community's response to digital storytelling for refugee relief campaigns. Under the time-constraint of 4-weeks, using secondary sources proved ideal and online resources offered breadth of material and all-hours accessibility. Using sources from diverse fields, this study captures what motivates individuals to transition from empathizing and discussing to actually donating to the Syrian refugee crisis. By reading scholarly articles and books, watching videos and reviewing photo publications, this project comprehends the psychology of the "healthy" group and what is effective in inspiring an inclination to not solely observe and internalize but to act in aid for another's struggle. This study provides a clearer understanding of the interaction between the developed public, imagery, storytelling, and motivating aid for refugee relief. Ethical considerations were taken when seeking permission for the use of interviewee names and organizations. Zero-contact was made with vulnerable populations and all data was provided through interviews, conferences and lectures, and

previously published material. Ethical considerations were also applied in the selection of imagery presented in the Photograph Appendix, as some of these photos are shocking and disturbing in the reality that they portray. But, all images had been previously published and widely viewed across the globe, deeming them suitable for inclusion in the Appendix. Finally, this study was restricted by a lack of response from professionals contacted, lack of professionals with knowledge in this material, and minimal public data regarding NGO donation surges and trends corresponding with refugee relief appeals.

Analytical/Theoretical Framework:

This study opens with an overlook of the global refugee crisis and who is the target donor population. With the context of the crisis established, I unravel the psychological web of compassion fatigue, distance, and the “othering” of groups. Next, I tie psychology to the chosen presentation of appeals for an ideal response. From there, imagery appeals are unpacked to give way for an understanding of what digital storytelling is and why it is a desirable mode of campaigning. After this the factors of time, surprise, and context are introduced. Finally, all of these components that build a digital storytelling campaign and the donor population response are analyzed through several case studies.

*Not all case studies examined are full campaigns nor specially intended for fundraising purposes. But, we can look at their effectiveness as awareness raising platforms that indirectly increase donations.

Analysis:

Refugee Crisis Background:

Although it is persecution, war, or violence that forces people into the refugee position, the lack of response and resettlement of displaced populations can be attributed strongly to

xenophobia and racism. As conflict continues more people are forced to flee, and without receptive sanctuaries the number of displaced persons accumulates. Today we continue to have trouble recognizing the person behind our differences, hindering the capacity to welcome and integrate refugees. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends report in 2015 revealed that by the end of the year, 65.3 million people, one in 113 persons, had been displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution. This is a record-breaking number, increasing by 5.8 million from the year before (UNHCR, 2015). UNHCR Regional Representative for the United States and the Caribbean, Shelly Pitterman, put the refugee count in perspective in an address at a meeting regarding the resettlement of refugees from the Middle East. As reported in 2016 there are 263,000 Burundi refugees. There are 987,000 refugees and internationally displaced persons fleeing violence in Central African Republic, and more than twice as many from Democratic Republic of Congo. Even more are coming from Somalia and South Sudan. The second largest refugee population is from Afghanistan, with 380,000 Afghans newly displaced in 2015. Of the world, Syria and Iraq have the largest numbers of internally displaced persons. In 2016 a million Syrian refugees found sanctuary in Europe, while 4.8 million found refuge in host countries neighboring Syria. But, as put by Pitterman, “we are confronting the most troubled political – humanitarian landscape than at any time since World War II (Pitterman, 2016).” On January 5th, 2017, it was updated that 13.5 million Syrians of a population of 23 million are of refugee status. Nearly half of that 13.5 million is comprised of children (Charity Navigator, 2017). Over the past 6 years, this has become the largest displacement crisis in the world. Dr. Valerie Gorin, lecturer at the Center for Educations and Research in Humanitarian Action (CERAH) in Geneva, claims that the hardest moment during the Syrian crisis was in 2014 to 2015 when refugees could cross from Greece in the

Mediterranean to Europe, at which time the anti-refugee sentiment exploded. Between 2014 and 2017 there has been a major shift in dialect regarding displaced persons, replacing labels like “cockroach” and “vermin” with the recognition that these people are victims, a change in perspective that has helped to raise awareness, and subsequently deliver more humanitarian relief for the crisis. Imagery and the stories behind them, most notably that of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi on a Turkish beach, were the catalysts behind this change.

Donor Population:

Sophie Natter, International Digital Manger in the communication department of MSF, shared that MSF donors come from 27 different countries, but the majority of the money comes from Europe and North America. The graph below, published in an article by Devex but sourced from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), displays the top donor countries in 2015 contributing to the region and the amount they have given in US million dollars.

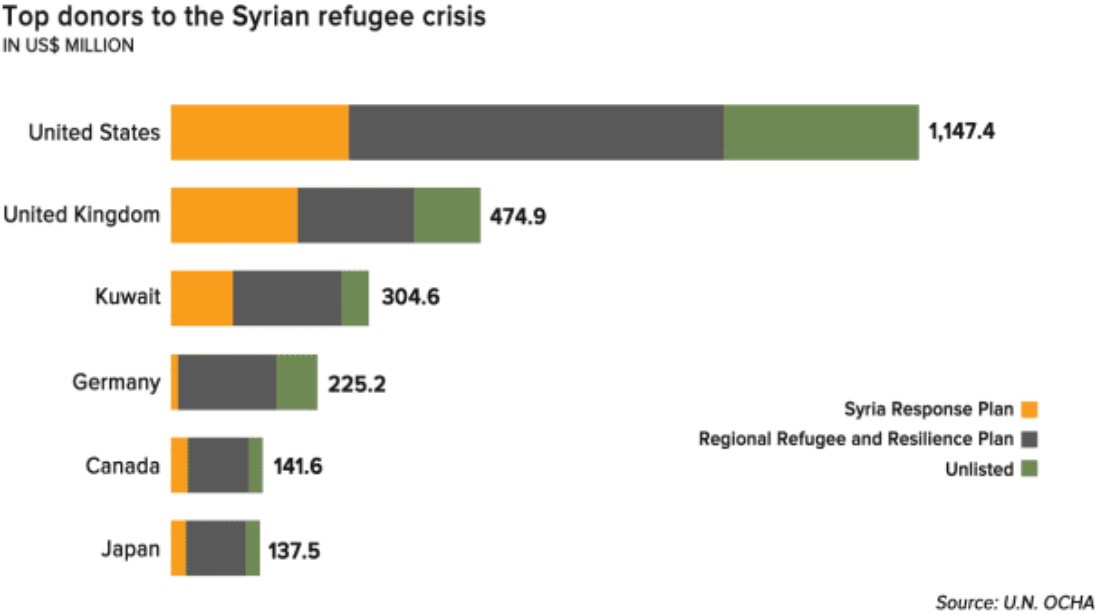


Figure 1: Top donors to the Syrian refugee crisis in US dollars, shown in millions (Barcia, 2015)

The graph displays national contributions, which offers a general image of who is leading the donations towards Syrian relief. Although this study concentrates on non-state funding, with the United States and the UK dominating this chart it is evident that the Western population is the prominent donor.

The donor group supporting NGOs is large and diverse. As described by Dr. Gorin, the average donor is anyone between 25 and 75 who is part of the actively working population, usually in developed regions. Although both men and women donate, women often donate out of a compassion reaction, especially for issues regarding children because of the instinct to identify as a mother. Men often give with the incentive of the male role as the provider. The elderly population doesn't usually give a lot at one time but gives more often, usually weekly or monthly contributions. They have more time to dedicate, they read the newspaper more, and there's a big tradition of charity in older generations. Fittingly, the older population prefers newspapers and television, with negative images and emotional charge that plays on guilt to motivate donation, as was popular in past humanitarian campaigns. Current 20-30 year olds, as coincides with the technological advancements of the new generations, are more attracted to digital campaigns. For example, the Ice Bucket Challenge for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's disease, was the most successful digital campaign yet in terms of awareness and donations. The ALS Association raised \$5.7 million compared to \$1.2 during the same period the year before, and tweets surged within 10 days, peaking at 90,000 on August 11th (Braiker, 2014). The campaign was presented as a fun challenge, making it desirable to be involved, that aspect diffusing the abrasiveness of asking for money. Considering the demographic of the donor population and what they respond well to, and as technology advances and the youth moves into

the position of the elderly, this information is critical when determining the presentation of campaigns and appeals.

The Roots: Empathy, Distance, Impact, and Identity Grouping:

There are a number of interpretations as to what “empathy” means, but my research will follow the definition created by psychologist Carl Rogers, quoted in a Stanford study:

[The ability to] perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ conditions. (Stueber, 2013)

Furthermore, empathy has been split into two different types: cognitive (perspective) and affective (emotional). A study by Weiner and Auster draws on Halpern’s essay, “What is Clinical Empathy,” to determine that cognitive empathy is the *imagining* of another’s feelings, while affective empathy is the *physical manifestation* of another’s feelings in oneself that emerge from the cognitive process (Weiner and Auster, 2007). Arguments based off of reason or justice evokes cognitive empathy, or perspective taking, while those campaigns that are emotionally driven and lack clear logic for action tap into the affective empathy perspective (Decety and Yoder, 2016). Several studies have argued that the only “true” empathetic experience is when both types of empathetic response are active. Assuming true empathy is ideal for donation gain, what triggers the two types of empathy response is important to note when examining the design of digital story campaigns for refugee relief.

In the midst of large numbers it can be difficult to comprehend the magnitude of a crisis. This reaction has been given the titles “psychic numbing,” the “tangible victim effect,” and the “collapse of compassion,” all of these names sharing the idea that as the number of people in need of help increases, the level of empathetic response decreases. In one study by Cameron and Payne, the collapse of compassion is attributed to the tendency to regulate emotion for higher

numbers of people in apprehension of experiencing overwhelming levels of emotion (Cameron and Payne, 2011). As published in the journal PLOS One, Paul Slovic and colleagues found that even in incidents involving just two people, compassion is less for the group than an individual. In this study participants were presented both real and hypothetical situations and were asked to make a donation and report how they felt about donating, to either a lone needy child or two needy children. A photograph along with the name and age of each child was identified. People's positive feelings about donating decreased substantially for the group of two, and that emotional diminution was tied to lower donation amounts (S. Slovic and P. Slovic, 2015). This is also entwined with pseudoinefficacy, which is the affective phenomenon that, "positive feelings about the child one can help are dampened by negative feelings associated with children who cannot be helped (Vastfjall et al., 2015)." This study showed that the negative feelings triggered by the awareness of the children that could not be helped reduced the "warm glow" associated with aiding the child that could be helped, irrationally deterring from helping any child at all (Vastfjall et al., 2015). Essentially, humans are wired to help one person at a time, and will be swayed from doing that if we sense there are more people that we cannot help. A request for aid must be presented in a way that focuses on individuals, that makes them seem real, and it must feel possible to help everyone.

Not only must the victim feel real, but the crisis must be tangible too. Another Slovic study regarding inaction discusses the prominence effect; the idea that when faced with two options people will act upon the choice that has more defensible attributes (Slovic, 2015). This translates into the field of refugee relief. As a distant crisis, where the impact of action is difficult to measure, people will generally make the choices that are more concrete (personal security, money towards savings vs. donating to someone else, national defense). Wants and needs that

are immediate and personal are the most comprehensible, and injustice that is abstract is distanced and harder to act upon.

Distance is geographic (those we see), but also social (those we know) and cultural (or ethnic) (Kennedy, 2009). The more tangible the issue and the person in need, the greater a potential donor can comprehend their impact and would be motivated to take action. Another study conducted by Cryder et al. determines that if details about an intervention promote a sense of impact, generosity will increase. The scale of impact works in tandem with a number of studies on the “tangible victim effect” that reflect that due to the perception of a proportionally higher impact for the one, prosocial feelings like sympathy are higher for an individual in need than they are for a group (Cryder et al., 2012). Essentially, recognizing that your donation makes a very real, and very big difference, is important. Thinking about impact in terms of an individual helps people perceive their impact as larger. Several factors that increase the “realness” element includes if it is currently happening compared to the future (i.e. response vs. prevention), physical proximity, and similarity in life experience and identification with the victims (Cryder and Loewenstein, n.d.). Honing in on identity, it is more challenging to trigger an emotional response and subsequent financial contributions when the victims are not of the same “group” as the donors. Trends of nationalism contribute heavily to the defining of “in” and “out” groups, creating strong social and cultural divides. It has been found that it is harder to empathize with people of the out-group because brain activity known as perception-action-coupling, which refers to the spontaneous and implicit simulation of others actions and expressions, is limited for the in-group and is not innately triggered for out-group actions (Gutsell and Inzlicht, 2010). This is one example of unconscious behavior that deepens the

divide between groups. Without the natural imitation of another's actions, we struggle to understand and feel their experience, and therefore, limit empathetic potential.

In a study of intergroup empathy bias, Cikara et al. elucidate what drives empathetic or counter-empathetic responses in intergroup contexts. Their findings show that intergroup empathy bias, in competitive settings, is driven by out-group antipathy rather than significant in-group empathy. Essentially, in competitive environments, like the nation-to-nation contest that arises in nationalist contexts, the dislike of the other is stronger glue for a country than an in-country identity bond. The study defines counter-empathetic responses in-group members experience toward the out-group; "schadenfreude" is when an out-group member's pain can elicit perceivers' pleasure, and "glückschmerz," the opposite, is when an out-group member's pleasure may cause the observer pain or anguish (Cikara et al., 2014). Counter-empathetic responses are rooted in fear of the threat of the other. Xenophobia and fear for national security are major drivers of the anti-refugee populist sentiment, likely because refugees are perceived as extremely different from the general donor population. This high degree of separation between donor groups and refugees, and the resulting xenophobia-inspired counter-empathic reactions toward the displaced group, is the main barrier from motivating interest to support refugee relief efforts. Shelly Pitterman of the UNHCR stated in her address that, "empathy and a sense of responsibility motivate communities around the world to help refugees (Pitterman, 2016)." But how do we cultivate that sense of empathy and responsibility when refugees generally belong to the "other" group from the communities with the ability to help?

How you ask matters:

As previously eluded to, when asking for a donation it is ideal for the donor to feel connected to the victim. The format of the appeal can minimize the separation between

benefactor and beneficiary. A study by Aaker and Akutsu posits that when requesting a donation, the corresponding identity evoked shifts based off of the type of ask. Human personality is dynamic, in which factors like specific or broad identity, context, emotional underpinnings, the donor's phase of life, etc. influence how a request is received. Wording can trigger a different identity, which has the potential to bridge the distance between the donor group and the refugee population. These elements and how they relate to the donor population must be taken into consideration when grasping the best way to motivate donations if using descriptions or blatant requests for donation. Cultural context and the prevalent identity there is the central aspect of the audience to consider when wording an ask. For example, personal identity trumps social in individualist cultures, while collectivist cultures are geared more towards social identities. Complementing imagery and wording with the dominant identity of a culture establishes a higher potential for giving. For personal identities there is a greater willingness to donate money when asked for time (volunteering) before money, as this evokes an emotional mindset. Asking a personal-dominant identity for donations initially correlates with a utilitarian perspective, a view that is notably driven and independent and less oriented towards giving. This reaction reverses when the questions are posed in a socially oriented manner by adding the words "joining others." In this case personal identities prefer to donate rather than volunteer, presumably because it is easier for the personal identity that dominates individualist societies to imagine donating with a group than to sharing time with a group. Considering the donor population is primarily from Westernized countries that typically embrace an individualist culture, these findings suggest that when requesting aid from an individual it is ideal to initially evoke an emotional mindset, or, to word the ask as a socially orientated phrase like "joining others," to steer the audience towards donating rather than volunteering. The study evoked an emotional mindset by first asking for a

donation of time before a subsequent request for money (Aaker and Akutsu, 2009). A practical example might be in a slideshow or video where the first image requests volunteers, a second image asks for a donation. A less literal application might be to soften the viewer by using music, imagery, narratives, or other multi-media tools to spark an emotional mindset.

Imagery Appeals:

In marketing and branding, images that evoke emotion generally fulfill 4 categories: authenticity (in the moment shots, notably imperfect), cultural relevancy (diversity and inclusion), reflects the human experience, and incorporates classic storytelling archetypes (the caregiver, the innocent, the giver, the hero, etc.) (Getty Images, 2017). When using imagery in the humanitarian sphere to provoke prosocial emotions for a victim, like affective empathy, there exists a hierarchy of effective characteristics. Although it depends on the victim, in general first are children, the younger the better. Following youth are, in order, pregnant women, young women, old women, all women, young men, then old men. Men in general are harder to victimize as there is a tendency to view them as guilty of something, but combining men with another agent, like a baby, give the image victimizing power as the man transforms into the identity of the father. Portraits of individuals or families are more effective than groups, especially portraits with names and stories. Lastly, eye contact is generally better than a hidden face, although there are exceptions to this (see Alan Kurdi case study below) (Gorin). But the danger with using any imagery, victimizing imagery especially, is that without a name and story the result is “characterization” rather than “humanization” of the individual featured.

Humanitarian communication traditionally employs two types of imagery appeals, the “shock effect” and the “positive image,” which aim is to inspire action towards a cause by invoking a strategic emotional relationship between a Westerner and the distant sufferer. The

core aesthetic of both techniques is juxtaposition. The shock effect, which was popular in past humanitarian campaigns, uses imagery that contrasts the “bare life” of sufferers (i.e. starved bodies, a reaching hand, lack of clothes, etc.) from the plenty of developed society. The result is feelings of guilt, shame, and indignation. (Chouliaraki, 2010) The “Napalm Girlⁱ,” Nick Ut’s photograph of Kim Phuc released in April 1972, is one famous image adopting the shock effect that caused a massive change in perspective regarding the Vietnam War. The “Napalm Girl” became a symbol of the horrors of armed conflict. The photograph features a group of children running up a highway accompanied by several soldiers. The focus is on the child in the middle, nude and screaming after having been hit by napalm. Children, who represent innocence, their crying and screaming faces, the lack of clothing, the soldiers disregard of the children before them, the aggressive cloud of black smoke in the background, are all components to the image that evoke a loud response of horror and shame to the viewer who did not intervene the conflict that caused the moment. Another known image is of Omayra Sánchez Garzónⁱⁱ in Armero, Colombia, taken by Frank Fournier and released in November 1985. The photograph shows her in her final hours of life, trapped by debris, waste deep in water, after a mudslide caused by a volcanic eruption. The 60 hours in which she was trapped were filmed and broadcasted by journalists, footage that shocked the comfortable viewers into awareness of the inadequacies of both government relief response and supplies. Fournier, the photographer, later said, “I believe the photo helped raise money from around the world in aid and helped highlight the irresponsibility and lack of courage of the country's leaders (BBC, 2005).” There is a lack of data on the trends of donations before and after the release of this image, but Fournier’s quote encompasses the longtime belief that dark and shocking photographs move people to donate.

There is a limit with the shock effect. As a social and ethical rule for humanitarian code, you cannot show dead bodies, neither anything too bloody nor depicting mutilation. For journalists this rule is flexible, but it is generally followed on personal ethics. The photograph of the Syria Gas Attackⁱⁱⁱ published on the cover of the French news journal, *Libération*, breached this ethical code. The journal received a wave of negative response from viewers who did not understand *why* it was necessary to show such a graphic visual. Gorin says, “I think that’s what the people need, they need to know why they need to see this suffering,” (Gorin). This instance reflects the importance that non-governmental organizations and journals always explain the “why.” Repeatedly showing depressing imagery without a sound explanation as to why they are important to see drains the donors, instilling both a sense of powerlessness and resistance to the gloomy campaigns. They can also strip the dignity of the person behind the image, focusing on their neediness but not on the story of the human behind the photograph. Images that fall within the “shock effect” category moralize the donor society through consciousness of the different reality of the “other,” placing the responsibility to act in Western hands, which shames inaction. At the same time it plays with Westerners’ collective guilt over a long history of complicity during colonialism. Functioning on an exchange between pain and pity, regardless of the potential benefits of mediating distance and confronting the uncomfortable reality, there is a major ethical concern with selling the “helplessness” of victims to the “Western savior.” (Chouliaraki, 2010)

The difference with the positive image angle is that it places the focus on empowering the sufferer, emphasizing agency and dignity. Positive images empower the benefactor as well by portraying to them that they can effect change. Two key qualities of a positive image are 1) the personalization of sufferers by focusing on individuals as actors and 2) singling out donors as a

person that can make a tangible contribution to improve a life. The personalization within positive imagery awakens the viewer's "modal imagination," to envision what is possible in addition to what is actual, a necessary step before compassion. Bilateral emotion allows one to imagine the possible experience of another and comprehend the shared experience of human kind. This appeal relies on sympathy rather than complicity, which counteracts the downfalls of the shock effect (Chouliaraki, 2010). The photograph of Sharbat Gula^{iv} from Afghanistan, titled "Afghan Girl," was taken by Steve McCurry and featured on the cover of National Geographic in June 1985. In the photo her face is a little dirty, her headscarf is slightly torn, but she is clothed and looks directly at the camera. The striking beauty of her green eyes and ferocity of her expression create an intensity that maintains her dignity and establishes a sense of fellow feeling in the viewer. The response to the photo was massive; in 1985 Gula's face became an icon for the refugee population and helped to establish sympathy for displaced persons by bringing the image of an intense will to live to the developed population's attention.

The looming problem with using positive imagery is that in empowering victims by characterizing them with dignity and self-determination, these campaigns run the risk of simultaneously disempowering them by appropriating their "otherness," which distances identity and empathy (Chouliaraki, 2010). A secondary risk with positive image campaigns is the loss of apparent need. Save the Children attempted a transition into the positive image appeal when they replaced all negative images with smiling faces, even advertising their annual report at "child friendly" (Save the Children Sweden, 2009). This change ultimately led to a drop in funding (Gorin). The decline in donations was not necessarily because positive images are less effective for funding than negative imagery; the challenge is that the image must still tell the reader why he or she should be concerned. In the example of the Save the Children image switch, the reason

for concern was less obvious. Aaker et al. makes a hypothesis that supports the attractiveness of the positive image appeal, suggesting that giving out of happiness impacts identity, while giving out of guilt is short lived and does not. Identity impacted giving is sustained longer than generosity not grounded in indemnity. Considering this, imagery that cues happiness as a motive rather than guilt may lead to larger or repeated donations (Aaker et al., 2009). But impacting your personal identity and connecting with a victim via shared identity are two separate emotional experiences. Those that use either positive or “shock effect” imagery should generally be wary of promoting a patronizing relationship between the benefactor and victim. Both of these appeals, if the name and narrative of the person are not identified, tend to appropriate the individual. Lacking the story deepens the gap between groups and perpetuates the historical role of the Western savior.

A third appeal is newly emerging within digital storytelling campaigns, which Chouliaraki calls “post-humanitarian communication.” Photorealism, which captures the starkness of reality, is evident in all three appeals. But rather than using photorealism as a means of authentic witnessing, in post-humanitarian communication it is merely a tool to represent *acts* of suffering (Chouliaraki, 2010). This third appeal breaks from the moral mechanism of “grand emotion” applied by both the shock effect and positive image approaches, disengaging public action from pity and instead encourages the viewer to decide independently if action is worthwhile. The shock effect and positive image appeals rely heavily on cueing emotional reaction for action, while post-humanitarian communication works on a low-intensity regime.

Another significant component to this approach is simplification in two ways, by using technology to make action as easy as clicking to donate or sign a petition, and by excluding any justification for action. The second mode of simplification sets this third appeal apart,

eliminating the moral discourse surrounding the decision to act on suffering. Ultimately post-humanitarian communication relies on belief in the brand of the humanitarian organization as a motive to act rather than the marketing of suffering and moral agency. This approach lacks grand emotion but is not devoid of emotion. Post-humanitarian communication uses narrative devices like irony, hyper-reality, and optical illusion, sensitivities that insinuate rather than inspire an emotional response to suffering. The emotions of guilt, empathy, etc. arrive during introspection. Unlike imagery that attempts to evoke emotion and affective empathy, post-humanitarian communication achieves whole empathy. This technique initially targets the evocation of cognitive empathy by strategically inspiring perspective taking, and then affective empathy arrives second during the emotional reflection experience.

An example of post-humanitarian communication is the ad campaign conducted by Amnesty International in Switzerland, this one employing the narrative device of chronotopic reversal. “Chrono,” referring to time, and “topic” for place, is the technique of swapping the person and place from the issue of discussion with another in order to reduce the emotional distance between groups (Gorin). The Amnesty International ads took photographs of scenes of human rights abuse, captured by journalists in the field, juxtaposed against backgrounds that blended with the streets of Switzerland surrounding them. 200 posters^v were posted around the country, all branded with the line, “It’s Not Happening Here But It’s Happening Now” (D&AD, n.d.). Post-humanitarian communication portrays crises through a lens of cool logic that emphasizes realism and simple action; emotion is experienced second, in reflection over the sad reality. This prevents the presentation of the problem from becoming overwhelming, which would risk compassion fatigue. Then, this appeal de-complicates action by substituting the

window of moral contemplation and justification with a clear and easy solution: typically, the click of a button. (Chouliaraki, 2010)

What is digital storytelling?

As described by Dr. Valerie Gorin, digital storytelling is anything that relates to the use of social media applications and technical devices for multi-media online content that share stories, emphasizing the needs of the victims in a way that immerses the viewer in the issue. In short, it is to share a narrative using digital tools and multi-media, especially imagery.

Throughout the past century NGOs have been focusing on beneficiaries as victims, applying storytelling as a tool for humanitarian campaigns. With advancements in technology came the rise of digital storytelling. Although holding onto core techniques of traditional storytelling, the digital media has allowed for a major shift in lens. Now, digital storytelling empowers victims by allowing the people the opportunity to take the camera in their own hands and tell their stories by themselves. By offering who they are and how they are in their circumstance, the victims play a role in changing the socio-political climate surrounding their crisis; simultaneously, they create an image that makes their life experience comprehensible to the donor population. In this way digital storytelling has the ability to increase tolerance, which must be established before cultivating any donor-group desire to provide relief aid.

Time, Surprise, and Context:

Monetary donations can come as a one-shot contribution or consistent donations (i.e. weekly, monthly, annually). Although one-shot donations are helpful, acquiring regular donations is the ideal. Considering the longevity of refugee issues, one of the greatest challenges with motivating relief aid for refugees is making it relevant and maintaining that relevancy. Humanitarian campaigns must provide consistent reminders of the existing problem to maintain

interest and funding, especially to establish loyal donors. People have short attention spans, so the general standard in marketing is the briefer the message the greater the sell. On the other hand, although it sends the message quickly, a single photo is not enough to maintain lasting interest (see case study on Alan Kurdi photo); again, people need to be reminded. For this reason NGOs have been producing digital storytelling campaigns, using videos and series of photographic imagery to tell stories and publicize issues over an extended period of time. In this way viewers follow the stories, increasing investment in the refugee crisis. Video, dynamic and sensory, can be a highly effective digital storytelling tool for immersion but risks losing power via length. A Wistia study in 2016 found that the ideal length for a video is under 2 minutes. Surprisingly, the difference between a 30 second video and 90 seconds is not drastic in viewer retention, but the tipping point reflects that videos 2 minutes or less keep about 70% of viewers by the end. Anything longer than 2 minutes experiences an exponential drop in audience engagement (Fishman, 2016). In support of this, MSF videos that are 30 seconds or less have received the best response (Natter). MSF is also among a number of NGOs that have adopted the social application “snapchat” to provide photo and film updates from the field, taking the length limit to the next level as videos reach a maximum of 10 seconds on this platform.

Not only does the message need to be communicated quickly, but for any of the above-mentioned imagery appeals to be effective there must also be an element of surprise. This might manifest in the images themselves, like “shock effect” images that foster pity-oriented emotions. It can also be a light-hearted surprise too. The ALS ice bucket challenge incorporates surprise through the interactivity component of campaign; the challenge to dump a bucket of ice on your head, which mimics the feeling of ALS symptoms. Post-humanitarian communication models achieve surprise via narrative devices like irony and chronotopic reversal, reframing the expected

in an unexpected way. However it is achieved, the idea is to startle the audience out of complacency and into action.

Although surprise is powerful, this can be hard to achieve under certain contextual conditions. For example, Gorin explains that it is impossible to successfully fund for 2 similar crises at the same time, as they will compete with one another. This is evident as Syrian refugees currently overshadow Yemeni refugees, and most other refugee populations for that matter. Context also contributes greatly to the size of donations. An example of this is the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The conditions for donations were perfect. The disaster took place the day after Christmas, a mood of generosity already in the air. Being the season for holiday breaks, a lot of people were vacationing there at the time so everyone knew someone that had suffered from the Tsunami. For these reasons, in addition to the known beauty and popularity, the region received a massive surge of support and donations. In contrast, countries like Pakistan notoriously have a harder time stirring donations compared to countries like Indonesia that have the “paradise” appeal (Golaz, "Human Rights and Health," 2017). The when and where of a crisis have a powerful influence and the feelings of generosity and willingness to engage.

Case Studies of Digital Storytelling:

All three imagery appeals are used in digital storytelling, and their use and success in humanitarian campaigns for refugee issues are explored in the case studies below.

Save the Children; “The Most Shocking Second A Day”

The Save the Children digital storytelling campaign, “The Most Shocking Second A Day,” is a textbook example of the application of post-humanitarian communication, with particular use of chronotopic reversal. In 2013, Save the Children released a video 1 minute and 34 seconds long featuring a girl from London and one second from each day of her year. The

video begins on her birthday; a group of family and friends sing for her as she blows out her candles at her birthday party. She's portrayed as a happy and healthy child, playing with lipstick, eating snacks, on the playground and in the park. As the clips flick through they increase in intensity. The TV can be heard in the background as news of conflict is broadcasted. Her father's anxiously raised voice can be heard, creating an air of tension. Sounds of airplanes are introduced, all the while the girl is being a child—coloring, playing with fireworks. The family has to leave their home, bombs fall, guns are fired, and she becomes more and more disheveled and scared. Her hair begins to fall out, she grimaces as she eats an old apple for nourishment, and movement of the images heightens, insinuating that the family is constantly on the run. At a checkpoint she is separated from her father. Eventually she is rescued by military, but the childlike sparkle in her eyes is lost. The video ends with the girl in a dull refugee camp. It is her birthday again, but this year it is just her mother is singing Happy Birthday, holding up a metal pan with a makeshift birthday cake and single candle. (savethechildrenuk, 2014)

The video was released without any prior advertising, and without a blatant request for donation. The only mention of funding during the video is a small textbox in the upper right corner that offers a number to text the words “URGENT” and “SYRIA” to donate 5 dollars or 5 pounds. The tactic was simplicity, to help the developed population move past otherness and comprehend what life is like for Syrian refugees by swapping the person and place with an in-group member of the donor population. At the end the message appears, “just because it isn't happening here doesn't mean it isn't happening.” At the same time in the bottom right corner is a hyperlinked textbox that reads “how you can help,” offering action without imposing and only after immersing the viewer in the experience. Jeremy Soulliere, Save the Children spokesman, said the first video brought in funds but, as the intention was to raise awareness, they did not

track the amount (Basu, 2016).

Two years later, in 2016 Save the Children released another campaign video, this one titled “Still The Most Shocking Second A Day.” Throughout this video there is a small black tab in the bottom left corner, and only once you move your cursor over it can you see it reads “Save child refugees now” with a hyperlink below that connects you to a Save the Children donation page. At the end of this video a phrase is displayed, similar to what was shown in the first video. It reads, “It’s happening now. It’s happening here,” (savethechildreनुक, 2016). Now, in 2017 the first video has been viewed over 56 million times, and was the most watched public service announcement in 2014 (Russell, 2014). The second video reached over 1.8 million people. The significantly lower reach of the second video brings important attention to the value of context and surprise. The shock factor of the chronotopic reversal was exhausted after the first video, so the sequel had no chance to accumulate interest.

IOM; “I am a migrant”

In September 2015, the IOM launched the digital story platform and campaign titled "i am a migrant." It features testimonials of migrants and refugees across the globe to connect people with the human stories of migration, an effort to make the migrant and refugee experience more tangible to the developed population. Thus, the stories decrease the sense of “otherness,” increasing empathy and counteracting the xenophobia driven anti-migrant sentiments. The resounding goal is to promote diversity and inclusion of migrants in society. So far, the "i am a migrant" campaign has received and collected more than 1,300 stories, from more than 90 countries (Kim). The website is arranged so that the viewer has the option to select the country of origin, the current country, and a hashtag stating “#iamarefugee” or “iamamigrant.” Tiled across the page are square photos of individuals and families submitted by victims themselves, subtitled

with a direct quote, the name of the speaker, and the distance they have traveled from home to sanctuary (<http://iamamigrant.org/>). Noting the value of accurate narrative, Florence Kim, Media and Communications Officer of the IOM explains, “When publishing the stories and photos we receive it is important to go through the proper steps to insure we represent participants correctly. “i am a migrant” gives them the opportunity to represent themselves through their own words,” (Kim). By using photos and quotes submitted by migrants and refugees themselves, and protecting the validity of their words, this gives the campaign authenticity while empowering the victims instead of appropriating them.

The goal being perception change, there is no donation aspect to this platform, but the IOM is planning to slowly include donation options according to projects or initiatives that they would support through the campaign. As affirmed by Kim, “the emotional response [to the stories has] turned into actions more than donations.” The IOM, after the use of the “i am a migrant” website and various social media sites, has observed a greater response from the public when there is a visual aspect of the story whether it be photo or video. And, although Kim says the IOM does not regularly promote appeals, she does mention that it is the positive messages that tend to illicit more of a response online. For example, a positive quote from a migrant is received better and shared more widely than negative narratives. Perhaps it is the sense of hope that is felt out of optimistic words that alludes to donors that their dollars will have a larger impact, which motivates the larger response to positive messages. A growing Twitter audience and increasingly more “shares” worldwide has been beneficial for exposure, and ultimately a change in mentality regarding displaced persons. (Kim)

UNHCR; “What They Took With Them”

The UNHCR’s campaign video, “What They Took With Them” applies the post-

humanitarian appeal in combination with the shock effect. It uses the technique of celebrity diplomacy, an effort to make it easier to relate to the refugee crisis. Stars Cate Blanchett, Keira Knightly, Juliet Stevenson, Peter Capaldi, Stanley Tucci, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Kit Harington, Douglas Booth and Jesse Eisenberg, and writer Neil Gaiman stand in line across a stage dressed in all black. They perform Jennifer Toksvig's poem "What They Took With Them," which was inspired by stories and first-hand testimonies of refugees describing the items they took before fleeing their homes. A source of inspiration for the poem were the photographs and film footage from Brian Sokol's project "The Most Important Thing," made in collaboration with the UNHCR, which captures the faces and narratives of refugees and the items they took. These images flash across the screen, none of which are gruesome and most of which feature a neutral yet haunting expression. The tone is dramatic, with a quickly moving tempo, a forceful rhythm, and aggressive music that mirrors the chaos of the refugee experience and give the film it's dark ambience. The words and sounds immerse the viewer in the frightening moment of catapulting into flight, forced to decide what to take from home, coupled with the uncertainty of whether or not they will return. Chosen objects include items like plastic bags, flag, smartphone, house keys, pain killers, bandages, face whitening cream, one pair of flowery jeans, favorite scarf, dates, bread that isn't fully baked, a cup, with interjecting explanations behind some said items. The campaign was released exclusively on the UNHCR Facebook page on September 8th, 2016. Now it has accumulated just over 500,000 views and 11,000 shares. (UNHCR, 2017)

Overall, the video has a deeply negative feeling, and was not super successful because it evoked too many feelings of oppression to be productive. Dr. Gorin presented this video to classes of graduate students at the CERAH, and even those who have had experience with refugees and witnessed shocking events in the field, cried. The critique with this video, made by

Dr. Gorin, is the loss of target. Covering all refugees, it featured too much information and lasted five minutes, which was too long (Gorin). Like the risk with the shock effect, without a clear enough outlet for action after sad footage, combined with an understanding of the impact of the action, the result is more draining than stimulating. At the end of the video the UNHCR presents the request, “We stand with refugees. Stand with us. Sign the petition now,” and the link to the petition at withrefugees.org appears, but it does not clarify what the petition is for and what it has the power to do to change the current situation. In the video the “why” is implied, by showing the horror of what it means to be a refugee. The “how” to act is offered, but a visual of the impact is not present. Jason Wojciechowski, a campaign strategist at Corelab, an agency that makes creative political campaigns for global NGOs, including those on the refugee crisis, commented on the video, "They tell me to 'Stand with Refugees'...As a person who's just been moved by this video and connected with it, I don't know what that really means." (Gharib, “Help Refugees,” 2016)

The petition was launched in June and presented on September 19th, 2016 at the UN High-level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants, urging political leaders to take action in support of refugee resettlement and integration via education, safe living spaces, and work opportunities. With the help of the campaign it managed to gather over 1 million signatures. And, even though the “What They Took With Them” campaign was geared for petitioning governments and attracted just 500,000 views, the UNHCR still received donations in response to it. As described by Amy Sample Ward, CEO of the Nonprofit Technology Network, a group that helps NGOs with digital campaigns, this was more of a “list-building” or “momentum-building” strategy. The petition accumulated a number of emails of individuals who supported the meaning of the video,

who could then be sent more information and asked to donate later. (Gharib, “Help Refugees,” 2016)

MSF Exodus (2014) and MSF Staying Alive (2016)

Founded by both journalists and doctors, MSF is an NGO with a history of reportage. Part of their program is treating patients, but another significant part of their work is speaking out about what they see in the field (Natter). Both of the Exodus and Staying Alive platforms are interactive web documentaries that incorporate 360-degree video footage, interviews, day-to-day sounds, quotes, photographs, and articles written regarding the refugee crisis. Each campaign has separate sections for regional crises. Exodus (<http://exodus.msf.org/en/#home>), released in 2014, at which time there were 16.7 million refugees worldwide, highlights the experience of refugees in Syria, the internally displaced in South Sudan, and migrant crossing in Mexico. Staying Alive (<http://stayingalive.msf.org/>) is more recent, launched in 2016 and sheds light on Syria and South Sudan. With a clear intent of immersion, the opening video advertises, “Experience their lives through virtual reality.” The content for these platforms is always based off of what is happening in the field, making it adaptive, as well as centered on testimonies from patients. One of the pioneer MSF web documentary campaigns was made for invisible refugees in South America 8 years ago, in 2011, and titled Urban Survivors (urbansurvivors.org). Being one of the first digital storytelling campaigns, the newness gave it the element of surprise necessary for success. It was well designed with quality content, translated into multiple language, and embraced a very people-centric approach for the 6 months of its running.

All of these campaigns accomplish informing viewers of the realities of the crisis via immersive techniques and the sharing of victim narratives, but there is no advertised donation aspect, as MSF does not operate crisis specific appeals. This makes it impossible to know exactly

how effective these platforms were in acquiring donations. MSF has 6.1 million private donors coming from 27 different countries, most of which are located in Europe and North America (USA donors usually offering one-shot donations) (Natter). Funds also come from Latin American and offices in the UAE, with increasingly more support from Asia. The Europe and North America dominated support is tied to MSF historically being a European organization (Natter). The MSF activity report for 2015 reflects that the majority, 1,332 million and 92%, of MSF funding for all projects is from private income. Public institutions provide 95 million, which is 7%, and all other sources comprise 17 million euros in donations (Windal, 2015). Donors to MSF cannot select where and for what cause they wish to donate, that is determined by MSF based off of regional needs and priorities, but the donors are well-informed as to what their contribution ends up going towards. Data regarding private donations to MSF as a whole for 2014, the year of the Exodus release, increased from 2013, mostly due to an increase in private donations. However, funding allocated to Syria dropped from 30,659 euros in 2013 (MSF, 2013) to 16,937 in 2014 (MSF, 2014). The drop occurred after 5 MSF members were taken hostage by the Islamic State (IS) in Syria and MSF had to withdraw from IS controlled areas. A report for the income changes from 2015 to 2016, the year of Staying Alive, has yet to be released.

Radio Television Swiss; “Exils”

Radio Television Swiss, a Swiss station that runs on tax dollars, created an immersive journalism operation, “Exils,” aimed to document objectively, the real migrant experience. For 3 weeks in October of 2015, journalist Nicolae Schiau followed and documented non-stop the journey of 6 young men fleeing the city of Raqqa, Syria (the capital of ISIS in Syria), as they moved from Turkey to Germany to France^{vi}, a migration that spanned over 6000 km. All of the

boys were non-accompanied minors, except for 2 who were over 20 at the time. Schiau used 2 go-pros embedded in his backpack to simulate Google street view and provided 15-minute daily broadcasts and minute-to-minute use of social media (i.e. twitter, facebook, instagram, soundcloud), creating an interactive viewer experience. In the Radio Television Swiss short video describing the project, the narrator says, “It’s another way of telling the story of the migrant road,” (Radio Television Swiss, 2015). The incorporation of social media allowed the audience to direct the show, while giving the feeling of travelling with the group on the train. Schiau would adapt what he filmed, the interviews he conducted, the questions he asked, etc. according to what the people wanted to learn about. People felt they were creating the story with him. (Gorin)

The report accumulated 25,000 followers a day for the live videos, the audience primarily comprised of 15-20 year-old Swiss who traditionally hadn’t taken an interest in migrant and refugee issues. This was the target audience, as the documentary worked to change sensitivities, reduce xenophobia, and deliver a more emotional education to the young generation. According to Dr. Gorin, the young people responded positively on social media. It was easy to click through screenshots, to come and go with the live footage, or sit and watch for a longer time. It was like watching a movie but where you can talk to the actors, which established a relationship that prevented the footage from projecting a fiction feel. (Gorin)

This was solely journalistic reportage with no direct donation aspect to the operation. But, “Exils” may have indirectly led to an increase in Swiss people donating to organizations in support of Syrian refugee relief. With the massive following it accumulated the documentary at least brought awareness to the refugee crisis, and more than likely shifted the growing anti-refugee sentiments in Europe, the malleable youth, towards support and solidarity.

Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh:

Although this study is of a single photo and therefore cannot share the full story of the boy featured in it, it is well worth examining because of the extreme reaction it evoked from the international community. Photographed by Nilufer Demir of the Dogan News Agency in Turkey, it features the dead body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi^{vii} lying facedown on a Turkish beach. There is no blood or mutilation, giving the photo an almost peaceful quality. Alan is dressed in primary colors red and blue, still wearing his sneakers. Dr. Valerie Gorin articulates the element of surprise, “the way he’s dressed is like he’s going to school but now he’s dead on the beach.” She continues, describing the image as the perfect shot to portray the “lonely child.” There are no other children, no adults, allowing for one-person identification instead of a group. With his light skin and hidden face the photograph eliminates any racial connection, diverting intergroup bias and anti-refugee sentiments. Paul Slovic, Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon, supports this, explaining that a face can motivate action but it can also distance people because it allows for the recognition of differences (Slovic). In the case of Alan Kurdi, the ambiguity of identity enabled people to act. He represents the vulnerability and innocence of the child character, which naturally builds consensus in a context of division. The image focuses on the problem. Gorin uses the simile; Alan was left like a piece of washed up trash, had the sea not of brought him to the beach he would’ve been forgotten. Alan Kurdi’s photo symbolized the drowning of humanity. (Gorin)

The Dogan News Agency was the first to put the picture on their website and it went fairly unnoticed until Peter Bouckaert from Belgium, the head of Human Rights Watch, brought it to the social media world’s attention. He tweeted the picture on September 2nd of 2015 and wrote a press release immediately after titled, “Dispatches: why I shared a Horrific Photo of a

Drowned Syrian Child.” His explanation re-iterates why the photo worked, as he says, “I care about these children as much as my own. Maybe if Europe’s leaders did too, they would try to stem this ghastly spectacle (Bouckaert, 2015).” The fact that Bouckart (and generally everyone else who viewed the picture) could visualize the child as his own is what gave it power; the distance from the “other” was *eliminated*. The photograph was retweeted 20 million times in 12 hours. The next day it was featured on the fronts of newspapers worldwide. Because the photo was tweeted it allowed it to be interactive and provoke conversation, unlike traditional newspapers that do not have the same interactivity. Most of the buzz created by the photo had to do with the people writing about it online (Gorin). A study by Slovic et al. collected Google trend data regarding the number of Google searches for “Syria,” “refugees,” and “Aylan,” (the boy’s name was initially published as Aylan Kurdi) from before (August 2015) and after the photo was published. The graph shown in their study is below (Slovic et al., 2016).

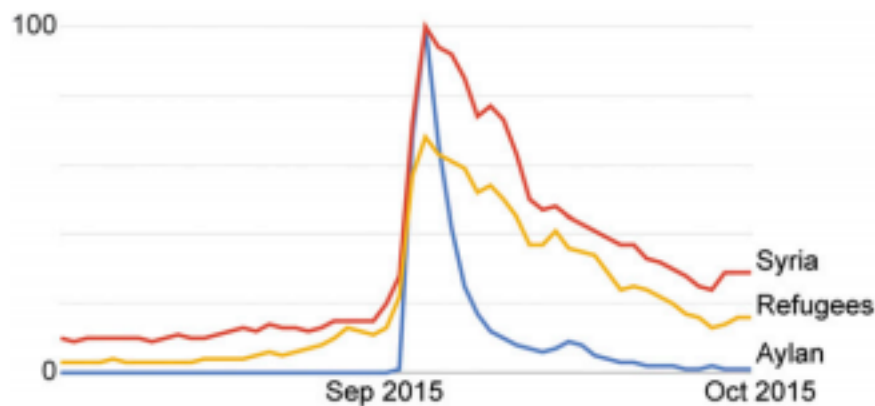


Figure 2: Google trend data of searches for "Syria," "refugees," and "Aylan," August-September 2015.

Google does not provide the number of searches. The graph is scaled to a maximum search of 100, all other values are proportional to that. (Slovic et al., 2016)

As depicted in Fig. 2, there was a spike in the searches for all three words in the days following the image release, with a gradual decline in the weeks following but the searches still remained

above the baseline. The more general terms “Syria” and “refugees” attracted more interest, which could be interpreted as increased interest in the overall crisis.

In addition to the verbal buzz, the image led to a monetary surge. There is limited data available to the public regarding donation trends pre and post photo release, but Slovic and his team received access to donation data from the Swedish Red Cross fund for Syrian refugees. Fig. 3 displays the daily donations to this fund before and after Alan Kurdi’s image went public.

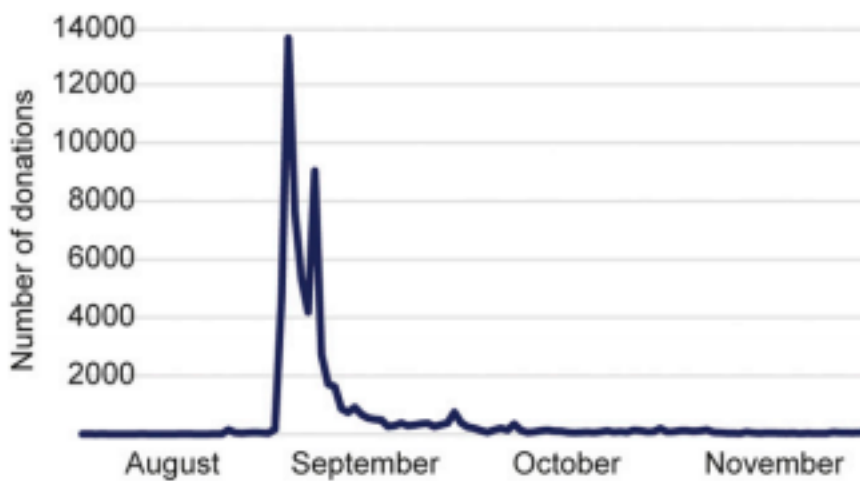


Figure 3: Daily donations to the Swedish Red Cross fund for Syrian refugees August-November 2015. (Slovic et al., 2016).

Lasting 5-weeks after the photo’s appearance, the mean number of daily donations to the Swedish Red Cross fund for Syrian refugees (which began on August 4th, 2015, and continued until November 30th, 2015) was 100 times greater than the week prior the photo release. The mean amount of these donations during the week of the publication was 55 times higher compared with the week before (1,908,437 SEK vs. 34,284 SEK). The donation amounts decreased during the second week post-publication but were still about 11 times higher than before the photo was shown. After 6-weeks the amount of money being donated was back to about the same level as one-week prior the photo’s publication. (Slovic et al., 2016)

The Swedish Red Cross fund was not the only group to see a surge. Mercy Corps attained \$2.3 million in donations in the month following the publication, compared to the \$4.5 million they had received during the prior 4 years (Gharib, “Little Boy in Aleppo,” 2016). Donations to World Vision tripled, Islamic Relief saw a 100% increase in donations, and the UNHCR received \$100,000 of unsolicited funding on its general global donate page. Within 2 days following the photograph circulation, the Malta-based Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS) had received a record of 1 million euros (\$1.1 million), compared to 10,000 euros on a usual day. In the UK, one crowdfunded project, CalAid, which supports persons taking refuge at the northern French port of Calais, raised nearly 120,000 pounds (about \$154,000) in just a few days following the image. (Deutsche Welle, 2015)

Swiss Solidarity, a fundraising and project sponsoring organization, also benefitted from the image, potentially by coincidence. They released a 10-day appeal on September 1st, 2015 to go towards refugee relief (Swiss Solidarity, “Refugee Crisis,” 2015). It also happened to be the UN recognized International Day of Charity on September 5th, right in the middle of their appeal and just a few days after Alan Kurdi’s photo took over the Internet. They raised 24 million Swiss francs between August 31st and October 15th, 2015 (Swiss Solidarity, “How Money Donated for Refugees is Being Spent,” 2015). In the 3 years prior to that surge, Swiss Solidarity raised just 27.5 million Swiss francs (Swiss Solidarity, 2016).

Considering the spike and decline in donations, this supports the idea that one photo is not enough. Alan Kurdi’s image undoubtedly changed the way the world views refugees, bridging the gap between groups significantly. But as mentioned in the pages before, the human attention span is short and reminders are necessary to keep crises relevant. A year after Alan Kurdi’s image, following an airstrike in Aleppo, another image of a Syrian boy was released.

Omran Daqneesh, 5 years old, was filmed being carried from the rubble after the airstrike and placed on a bright orange chair in the back of an ambulance. Covered in white dust, the bright red of the blood on his injured face in stark contrast, his expression is dazed as he wipes the blood with his hand then smears it on his chair. A still shot was pulled from the video in which the boy stares in the direction of the camera with a stoic look in his eye. The image was released by the Aleppo Media Center and circulated social media and newspapers in the days following (Hunt, 2016). Although still significantly well known, this photo did not have the same effect as the boy on the beach. Communications officer of Mercy Corps, Christy Delafield, is quoted in an article published by National Public Radio (NPR), recognizing that Daqneesh's photo received a lesser reaction; she says, "I'm not sure if it's because of the Olympics or the election, but it seems like the news cycle has moved on quickly" Mercy Corps did receive \$50,000 in the first 24 hours after the image circulated, but the donations "trickled" away just after a day (Gharib, "Little Boy in Aleppo," 2016). Gorin suggests that the image was probably less successful because of the blood, it wasn't on Twitter, it was in a video, Omran is not dead and still seems cared about as he is in an ambulance, and there was some compassion fatigue as this was not the first photo of a Syrian boy victim (Gorin). The limited response to Daqneesh's image a great example as to how reactions to imagery are fairly unpredictable. Both Kurdi and Daqneesh images employed the "shock effect" appeal, Kurdi's photograph in a milder way. Motivating action through guilt, a short lived emotion, as well as the photographs being of one-time publication, allowed people to respond with a donation to compensate their feelings and then move on.

Case Study Wrap-up:

Overall, there is a definite lack of data articulating the changes in donation trends in conjunction with digital storytelling campaigns. This is prominent as most of the case studies

reflected here, have declared “awareness” as their platforms’ primary goal, not donation. Even so, Save the Children’s “The Most Shocking Second A Day” video is a classic example of post-humanitarian communication using chronotopic reversal that had massive success (unspecified increase in donations, but 56 million views of the first video). The sequel did not achieve nearly the same reaction, another testament of the value of newness. The IOM “I am a migrant” campaign has no donation aspect and no quantifiable form of awareness-raising or exposure, but it serves as a good example of using very minimal information, the name, distance, quote, and personally submitted photo, to communicate a story. The UNHCR video, “What They Took With Them,” was less effective, and was also a step closer to the shock effect. It received just 500,000 views, but did contribute to an increase in donor funding for the UNHCR. The MSF Exodus (2014) and MSF Staying Alive (2016) platforms did not have quantifiable reactions, but they represent quality and respected, highly informative platforms that function on immersive web documentary. Radio Television Swiss’s live documentary, “Exils,” received a massive following, and successfully brought attention to an issue from a typically uninterested audience, the youth. This was because of the interactivity, the TV show style following, and the ease of technology. As for the single photos of Alan Kurdi and Omran Daqneesh, Alan Kurdi evoked probably the largest international reaction, but it was short lived. The lesser response to Omran Daqneesh a year later, like Save the Children’s “The Most Shocking Second A Day” sequel, supports the noted value of surprise.

Conclusion:

This study of image use and digital storytelling in the scheme of motivating donations for refugee relief comes to a string of conclusions. First, compassion fatigue is a challenge, but can be reduced if the victim is made more tangible--if the distance between the donor and the “other”

is bridged. Several factors that increase the “realness” element includes if it is currently happening compared to the future (i.e. response vs. prevention), physical proximity, and similarity in life experience and identification with the victims. These factors go hand in hand with evoking an empathetic response. Empathy is defined as both cognitive (perspective-taking) and affective (emotional) empathy, but it’s best if both are evoked. This is hard to achieve in the case of refugees as xenophobia has led to extreme “othering” of the refugee population from the largely Western donors. When asking for donations from Westerners, it best to trigger emotion first. Traditional shock effect and positive imagery appeals are used to evoke emotion to bridge the gap and make the victim feel more real, playing with affective empathy. Although these images usually succeed in establishing a strategic emotional relationship between the beneficiary and benefactor, the emotion is grounded in a symbolic picture and is not authentic, and therefore, the emotion is short-lived (i.e. guilt, indignation). Shock effect and positive images usually end up appropriating the victim as well, especially if no name and story is included. Digital storytelling that uses shock effect and positive image approaches can still empower the individual, as long as the victim is in control and reflected with skills and thoughts; as an ethical consideration, it is important that he or she is not solely portrayed as a representation of pain or gratitude. Considering the demographic of the donor population and what they respond well to, and as technology advances and the youth moves into the position of the elderly, we can predict increasing responsiveness to digital storytelling techniques.

Looking at techniques used and the type of response evoked (cognitive vs. affective empathy, grand emotion or subdued), it is evident that post-humanitarian communication is the popular appeal for digital storytelling. And, it is creating a productive reaction from the developed population, manifested as online discussion, signing of petitions, and donations that

are recorded as linked to campaigns (i.e. MSF yearly increase in private donations). Post-humanitarian communication reaches equilibrium between thought and feeling towards a victim via narrative devices (techniques like hyper reality, optical illusion, chronotopic reversal, all of which reframe the lazy perspective of the disengaged to experience the perspective of the victim). Across the board of appeals, 3 characteristics are certain to bring about a bigger donor reaction (footage under 2 minutes, incorporation of surprise, and contextual consideration). Ultimately, refugee campaigns should apply appeals that most closely match the “recipe” for humanitarian action proposed by Thomas Haskell: 1) to see the problem, 2) to see you are the cause, 3) see the way to stop it and how you can make a significant impact, and 4) the way to stop it must be easy and not break routine (Kennedy, 2010). Finally, appeals must be emotionally educational, not merely emotionally driven. They cannot press people to give; donation must be intrinsically motivated. Only then can generosity be sustainable. Like sharing a cup of tea, digital storytelling creates a relationship through sharing. It is humanizing, as stories turn the person in the image from *an* idea into flesh *with* ideas. When “the refugee” becomes “the friend,” then the easy action of donation follows.

Abbreviation List:

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

MSF Médecins Sans Frontières

IOM International Organization for Migration

UNAIDS United Nations Program for HIV/AIDS

UNDP United Nations Development Program

WHO World Health Organization

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

CERAH Center for Educations and Research in Humanitarian Action

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

OCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ALS Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis “Lou Gehrig’s Disease”

NPR National Public Radio

IS Islamic State (Previously known as ISIS)

Photograph Appendix:

i: "Napalm Girl," Nick Ut, 1972



ii: "Omayra Sanchez," Frank Frontier, 1985



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LES ENFANTS D'ASSAD

Selon les témoignages recueillis par «Libération», le régime syrien est le responsable de l'attaque chimique qui a causé mardi la mort d'au moins 74 personnes et en a contaminé plus de 500 autres. **PAGES 2-4**

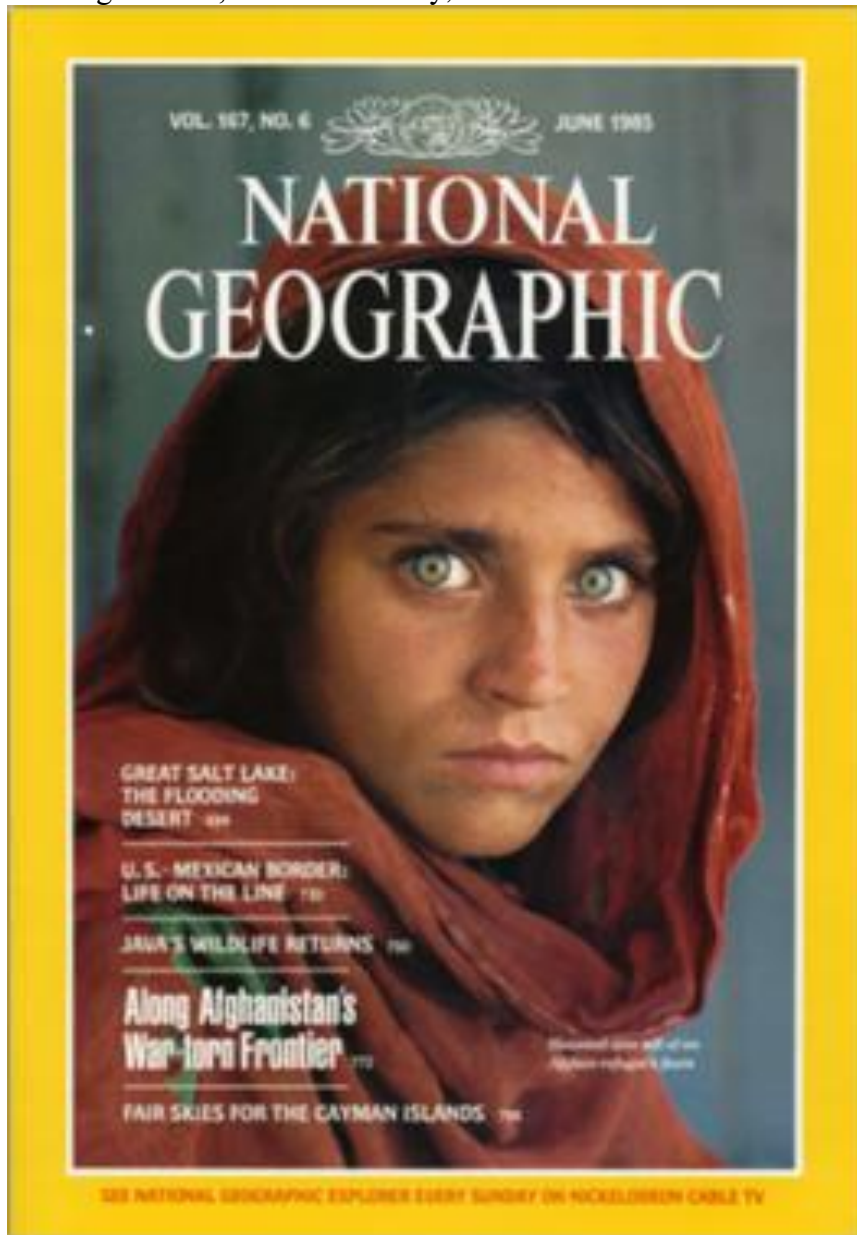


En Syrie, mardi, à l'hôpital de Khan Cheikhoun, après une attaque au gaz toxique, certains blessés sont en état de coma. AFP

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iv: "Afghan Girl," Steve McCurry, 1985



v: Amnesty International Poster campaign example:



vi: Map of “Exils” route:



vii: Alan Kurdi, Nilufer Demir, 2015



viii: Omran Daqneesh, Aleppo Media Centre, 2016



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