Title of the manuscript

Grassroots humanitarianism on YouTube: ordinary fundraisers, unlikely donors and global solidarity

Author information

Pantti Mervi, University of Helsinki

Contact details

Department of Social Research
Media and Communication Studies
P.O. Box 54 (Unioninkatu 37)
FIN-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland
E-mail: mervi.pantti@helsinki.fi

Biography

Mervi Pantti (PhD) is Associate Professor and Director of the International Master's Programme in Media and Global Communication in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki. She has published on mediated emotions, crisis reporting, and participatory media. Her latest books are *Amateur Images and Global News* (with Kari Anden-Papadopoulos, Intellect, 2011) and *Disasters and the Media* (with Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Simon Cottle, Peter Lang, 2012).

Grassroots humanitarianism on YouTube: Ordinary fundraisers, unlikely donors and global solidarity

Abstract

Social media have become important channels for directing humanitarian communication. Aid organisations increasingly use social networks to reach the public and simultaneously we have seen the emergence of self-organising volunteers who take on a variety of humanitarian tasks that previously belonged to institutional agents. This article discusses disaster appeal videos on *YouTube* as a type of citizen communication that occurs in the aftermath of disasters. The appeal videos aim to raise funds for the disaster victims by acting as intermediaries between humanitarian organisations and the public. The study explores how these appeals try to create solidarity with the plight of disaster victims, and how viewers respond to these appeals from ordinary humanitarians. The article argues that this peer-to-peer moral education may help, to some extent, to get round the distrust of humanitarian organisations and may also be able to cultivate the idea of global solidarity within the everyday lives of *YouTube* viewers.

Introduction

Humanitarian campaigners are increasingly aware that their audiences are circumspect about their appeals (Vestergaard, 2014). Accordingly, they have renewed attempts to cope with audience wariness or denial by using new styles, methods and channels of appeal. Above all, humanitarian organisations have turned to the potential of the internet and social media to promote their fundraising efforts, to recruit volunteers and, in a more general sense, to shape their organisational brand. Chouliaraki (2010) sees the emerging 'post-humanitarian' style of appealing as an attempt to break through audiences' lack of engagement by offering effortless action and low emotional involvement.

The reasons for the lack of audience engagement with traditional aid appeals are often related to a dislike of humanitarian organisations' commercialised, brand-oriented practices (Nash, 2008; Vestergaard, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2010). In her study on audiences' denial of humanitarian appeals, Seu (2011: 453) argues that audience members see themselves as being duped by sleek and manipulative NGO appeals. Consequently, she argues that the ways in which the suffering of the victims of a disaster are represented matter less than the audiences' relationship with the fundraiser who is appealing for aid.

With the above in mind, the relationship between the fundraiser and its audience is placed at the core of this article, which examines how appeals that have been produced by ordinary people using the *YouTube* platform encourage the audience to donate money to help victims of major natural disasters. The main thrust of the argument is that ordinary people increasingly serve as mediators of humanitarian suffering and as voluntary intermediaries between aid organisations and the general public. Obviously, the involvement of ordinary citizens in humanitarian work is nothing new as NGOs customarily recruit people as volunteers for various tasks, including collecting donations. In addition to those institutional forms of citizen volunteering, digital communication technologies have enabled the emergence of self-organising volunteers. The expanding literature on the use of social media during crises has shown that people increasingly take on roles as 'digital volunteers' and merge into global, virtual communities called 'volunteer technical communities' (VTCs) that engage in activities such as spreading and verifying information, geospatial mapping, and translating aid requests (e.g. Starbird and Palen, 2011; Ortiz and Ostertag, 2014).

Another form of digital volunteering that occurs in the aftermath of a disaster are disaster appeals created by citizens (Pantti and Tikka, 2014). These ordinary fundraisers, in contrast to

the above described technical volunteers, lack any formal collaboration with traditional aid organisations and typically take on the ownership of activities that were previously unknown to them in order to fill a perceived need to assist disaster victims. For instance, after the devastating tsunami in Japan in 2011, Jason, who lives in Japan but was visiting the USA at the time, published a video on *YouTube* entitled 'Help me HELP JAPAN.' The video was recorded in a single close-up shot and describes how bad and helpless he feels at not being able to help and comfort the people in Japan. 'I want to do something positive,' he says, and promises to donate 50 cents to the Japanese *Red Cross* for each positive comment on Japan posted.

Such videos raise questions about the kinds of moral space that user-created appeals offer for showing solidarity towards distant others. This article asks how do these appeal videos, produced outside the official visibility of humanitarian organisations, function as moral educators? How do their audiences respond to their call to relieve the suffering of disaster victims? Do their amateur textual strategies and aesthetics help to mobilise solidarity and circumvent the 'shoot the messenger' (Seu, 2011) effect? With that purpose in mind, 40 user-created disaster appeal videos for victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2011 East Africa famine, the 2011 tsunami in Japan, and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, and the comments made by the viewers of those videos were analysed through qualitative content analysis.

Volunteering in the post-humanitarian world

Due to reductions in government funding, aid organisations have become more reliant on private voluntary donations and support (Drummond and Crawford, 2014; Stoianova, 2013). This is happening at the same time as humanitarian organisations are increasingly utilising social media to reach donors, the earthquake that devastated Haiti having been a turning point, highlighting the fundraising potential of social media and, in particular, text messaging (Smith, 2012). Moreover, NGOs increasingly delegate parts of their fundraising efforts to citizens who donate the proceeds they generate to an organisation; the fundraising is typically conducted in various mundane recreation-related activities performed offline or online (see e.g. Hart-Brinson, 2012). For different humanitarian actors, social networking sites have become indispensable platforms for the organising of humanitarian fundraising as they allow the easy peer-to-peer sharing of messages through personal networks on behalf of the fundraisers' cause (Miller, 2009).

The increased currency of volunteering has been criticised for its tendency to relocate complex social issues away from the public sphere and transform them into individual, non-political problems. Thus, volunteering has been understood as a part of the expansion of neoliberal governance, which encourages the shifting of responsibility onto private individuals and organisations and away from the state. The appeal of volunteering is, as Vrasti and Montsion (2014) argue, that is appears to be an authentic act of generosity, independent of formal institutions or the ideology of market forces.

Another way of looking at volunteering is to see it in relation to the potential of new media technologies, which are affecting the conditions of social interaction and political activity. Thompson's idea (1995: 263) of the 'democratisation of responsibility' through increased media visibility has been a starting point for thinking about the kind of political and moral spaces that digital platforms offer. Clearly, on the one hand, new communication technologies have allowed people to communicate and engage directly with one another on a global scale and, on the other hand, people increasingly participate in producing and publicising humanitarian crises through their own cultural performances, rather than 'seeing' them in the media (Frosh and Pinchesvki, 2009). Social media, therefore, is seen as being able to both

increase the authenticity and legitimcay of humanitarian messages and circumvent the deficit of direct, meaningful action, which has been cited as a principal reason for the public rejecting the moral requests of humanitarian campaigners (Madianou, 2013).

What then are the moral and political consequences of humanitarian campaigning that relies on the authenticity of ordinary voices? In order to answer this questions, it is necessary to examine the narrative strategies and affective registers of amateur appeals against those of humanitarian organisations. Chouliaraki (2010) traces a trajectory from 'negative imagery' campaigns that focused on the suffering of victims and aimed at evoking guilt, shame and indignation to make the public act, to 'positive imagery' campaigns, which changed the focus of the imagery from the sufferer's victimhood to personalised agency and operated in the emotional regime of feelings, such as sympathy, empathy and gratitude (see also Vestergaard, 2014). The contemporary 'post-humanitarian' styles of appealing that Chouliaraki (2010) identifies offer low-intensity emotions, simple action and short-term forms of agency. In her analysis, the 'post-humanitarian' appeal is characterised by the 'technologisation of action' and 'de-emotionalisation of the cause' (p. 117). The technologisation of action refers to the use of the Internet as a vehicle for public action to help the suffering of distant others, which has simplified engagement with humanitarian causes, essentially decoupling the action from solidarity and the moral question of 'why'. An important consequence of this technologised style of humanitarian communication is the transformation of the affective registers of suffering that these appeals produce. While appeals still rely on the traditional affective regimes of humanitarian campaigns, they are not utilised to invoke emotions that would lead to action, instead they invite the Western public to self-reflect.

NGOs' campaigns are said to have increasingly adapted new methods to quell public distrust and the questioning of the authenticity and altruism of humanitarian communication. Ultimately, attempts by humanitarian organisations to try and gain legitimacy in the eyes of the public have led to a situation in which 'humanitarian organisations refrain from taking a stance and assuming a role as moral educators' (Vestergaard, 2014: 524). Against these suspicions, it is interesting to examine how grassroots campaigns on *YouTube*, with its emphasis on authenticity related to DIY culture and peer-to-peer communication (Burgess and Green, 2009: 54), function as a stage for moral education and whether the ordinariness of these fundraisers affects how their cause is perceived.

Grassroots appeals on *YouTube*

Established in 2005, *YouTube* is one of the world's most popular websites, combining video production and sharing with social networking features. The various forms of interaction it enables include the possibility to rate, like/dislike and comment on a video. Next to its interactive potential, *YouTube* can boast of remarkably large audiences, even amateur productions and viral videos can attract tens of millions of views (see Thelwall, Sud and Vis, 2012). For this study, 40 disaster appeal videos were selected based on their popularity, the amount of viewer-comments they received and the need to include different forms of videos. Thus, each of the four cases (the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami, the 2011 East Africa drought and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013) is represented by ten videos. All the selected videos were posted by private individuals and explicitly ask for donations and include links to humanitarian organisations to enable the viewers to do that.

I divided these appeals into two broad categories according to how the ordinary humanitarians address their potential viewers: directly or indirectly (see Table 1). The first category (*vlogs*) contains videos either entirely filmed in an intimate shot, in which the poster speaks directly to camera about his or her reaction to a disaster and makes his plea, or

documents a fundraising performance by the YouTuber(s). Videos with an indirect address do not feature the author but consist of self-made or existing footage, images, words and sound that form a montage. In the following, I identify and describe three elements in the videos and their descriptions: the emotional engagement, the moral agency of the viewer and the trust-building mechanism.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The emotional engagement

In vlogs, which were the predominant form of video concerning the tsunami disaster in Japan, the emotional engagement is formed by the authentic emotional expressions and ordinariness of the humanitarian actors and their enthusiastic pleas for help. The victims are usually absent in the visual representation and present only in the textual and verbal descriptions. As a result, viewers are invited to empathise with the Youtuber, who functions as a proxy witness and representative of the victims. Some Western vloggers say that they have been 'hit by the news,' while some Japanese vloggers have been 'personally affected' by the disaster. This emotional turmoil they are experiencing becomes a justification for asking the viewer to share the moral responsibility of providing relief for the victims. An emotional identification with a vlogger also arises from the aesthetic style, which is characterised by unedited close-ups and the everyday language. Kevin's vlog entitled 'Haiti Earthquake Victims - Help Support [Donations]' is an exception to the author-centred vlogs as images of the aftermath of the Haiti quake are seen in the background, while in the foreground Kevin pretends he is reporting from the scene:

> What's up, this is me, Kevin Wei, and I'm here in Haiti, helping people…ish. But I am helping them because I donated money to them so… that they could, like, build their economy and everything like that. And I want you to do it also. So, what I want you to do is grab your cell phone and text the word 'Haiti' to '90999' and what that's gonna do is take 10 bucks from your next cell phone account to *Red Cross* so they could help Haiti.

Montage videos aim to raise funds by placing either the expression of global solidarity or the sufferers at the centre of the narrative. The former elicits a 'fantasy of a moral global community' (Fassin, 2012: xii) by focusing on the communion and compassion of people witnessing a disaster, as in a a video called 'JAPAN DISASTER Pray for Japan... from NewYork' that pictures ordinary people from different ethnic backgrounds on the streets of New York, holding a notepad where they have written their greetings to Japanese people such as 'Recover soon!' and 'I think of you'. The latter is especially the case in most of the African famine and Haiti appeals that operate within the traditional emotional regimes of humanitarian communication, i.e. empathy, shame and guilt (Chouliaraki, 2010). As humanitarian narratives, they encourage the audience to act from an empathetic connection with the victims. In a video titled 'East Africa Appeal' we see heart-wrenching images and hear, in voice-over, the story of a baby called Umi:

> This is Umi. She's 3 months old. She weighs 1.7 kilos. That's less than 2 bags of sugar. She's suffering from hypothermia, pneumonia and severe dehydration. Umi hasn't eaten for 5 days. Her mother, Amina, is suffering from dehydration too. Her condition is so bad, that she's unable to feed Umi herself. --- Many people have donated to the crisis in

East Africa but there is still a severe shortfall. Please help children like Umi to survive. Thank you!

Agency of the viewer

The appeal videos primarily approach the viewer as a donor. In addition to the straightforward pleas to donate in the titles, the text of the videos or the address to the viewers, the fundraisers list several links to humanitarian organisations in the video description – all of which collect money for a specific disaster. However, poster-centred vlogs differ from montage videos in that they offer opportunities for action and engagement that go beyond clicking on a donation link. For example, vloggers ask their audiences to translate their appeals into different languages, post links to as well as information about the websites of humanitarian relief providers, post positive comments about the victims of the disaster, and so on. Thus, they aim to build collective moral agency by engaging their audience in humanitarian action in terms of both 'paying' and active 'speaking' on behalf of the disaster victims (Boltanski, 1999, 17-20).

Some vloggers do this through playful solidarity campaigns which cross the border between the online realm and 'real world'. Nigahiga, the maker of the most viewed video (7.7 million views) of the sample, says not only does he want to help Japan but he also wants to encourage others around the world to do so as well:

> The purpose of this video was not only to support Japan myself, but to encourage others as well. I could have easily donated the money and not made a video about it, but I think it's a lot more important to get support from all over the world.

He promises to donate 10 dollars to the *Red Cross*' disaster relief fund for Japan for every honk he gets. Next, we see him next to an intersection in Los Angeles holding a sign 'Honk if you love Japan' and having fun with his friends as people drive by and honk. This video became a trend-setter for amateur fundraising videos as NigaHiga's subscribers took the idea and produced their own 'Honk if you love Japan' video campaigns. There are other videos made in a similar vein, for instance, the video 'Philippines Typhoon Relief – Hugs' was posted by GiveLiveInspire with the aim of collecting funds and raising awareness for the victims of typhoon Haiyan. The video shows the posters --- two young men from the USA of Filipino descent --- walking round San Francisco's streets with a billboard saying that for every hug given they would donate a dollar to the relief fund.

Authenticity and trust-building

In vlogs, the sense of authenticity is reinforced by the ordinariness of the amateur campaigners. This ordinariness is most pronounced in Whiteboy7thst's video entitled 'HELP JAPAN!!!' in which he characterises himself as someone who 'doesn't go to school' (Figure 2). Whiteboy7thst consciously takes on the role of the intermediary between his followers and the victims of the disaster. He says he wants to raise awareness about the disaster among his subscribers (gamers between 12 and 21), who, according to him, are not well-informed because they 'do not follow news'.

While almost all the videos on the East-African famine placed their moral claim on photorealistic images of suffering, in vlogs the main strategy for building moral legitimacy is to function as an exemplar of appropriate behaviour regarding the disaster, that is, giving their time, effort and money to help those in need. As seen above, the fundraisers typically start by describing their own donation, or promise to donate in exchange for their audiences' attention

and expressions of solidarity towards the cause. Thus, they follow the fundamental principles of fundraising, which say that fundraisers need to convince potential donors that they are deserving of their donations because they are doing volunteer fundraising work or have already made their own donations.

In order to understand the legitimacy these ordinary fundraisers may have in the eyes of their audience, one must consider their profile on *YouTube*. Most of the authors joined *YouTube* long before the disaster occurred, some of them also have a large group of followers. Typically, they post videos on topics such as music, games, video-making, beauty and everyday life. Consequently, the amateur appeals appear as ruptures within the normal *YouTube* diet of the followers and this, together with the ordinariness of the posters and the amateur aesthetics of the videos, may contribute to their moral weight and legitimacy. Only the authors of the African famine videos, with their societal and spiritual interests, did not have this lifestyle and entertainment-orientation.

While the peer-to-peer nature of amateur humanitarian appeals may help to circumvent the 'shoot the messenger' effect, the distrust of the communication of humanitarian organisations is present in these appeals too, which obviously operate within a broader media context and the broader humanitarian discourse. The distrust is seen, for example, in how the *YouTube* humanitarians emphasise the legitimacy of the NGOs that they are raising funds for, and in how they, as Whiteboy7thst did, try to safeguard their own legitimacy and altruism by showing evidence of their own transaction with an aid agency in the video.

Viewer-comments on the amateur fundraising videos

It is assumed here that comments on these videos might give insights into how audiences respond to the moral calls of the videos, and how these responses may vary depending on the case or on the textual and emotional strategies of a video. The comments were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Bryman, 2008), which classifies comments according to the attitude towards the cause and the reason for leaving a comment. For instance, supporting the cause with an intention to donate was expressed in comments such as, 'I just donated 10 bucks. Shit, if I can spend an endless amount on toys and booze, I can try to help out some unfortunate Haitians with a measly 10 bucks.' For each video, the first 100 original comments --- or as many as available, excluding comments on the comments --- were iteratively categorised into 12 different categories: 1) Clearly stated intention to donate or statement that donation has been made; 2) Sympathy for the author or appreciation of the author's video; 3) Sympathy for the victims; 4) Distrust related to donation; 5) Annoyance about other users' comments; 6) Annoyance about the topic; 7) Hostility towards the author/video/other users; 8) Hostility towards the topic and donation; 9) Neutral comments; 10) Other users' calls to visit their page/watch video/call a number; 11) Off-topic comments; and 12) Non-classified comments (in languages other than English, unrecognised symbols, etc.).

The total viewer and comment numbers and the number of positive and negative ratings offer initial insights into the reactions of the viewers. In this respect, the differences between the cases are notable (see Table 1). In total, the ten videos that were raising funds for the Japan disaster collected almost 12,500,000 views while the Haiti videos received about 600,000. Moreover, the Japan videos were liked about 275,000 times in comparison to less than 2,000 likes for both the Africa and Haiti videos. In addition, the Haiti earthquake and East-African famine videos have considerably fewer comments than the videos for Japan.

The differences in these numbers reveal, on the one hand, the old fact about the geopolitics of suffering: some lives are less deserving of our attention than others, and in this respect citizen appeals on *YouTube* are no different from other mass media representations.

Japanese victims are approached as 'our' equals, while African and Haitian victims are represented as powerless 'others' in need of Western help. Here it is also important to note that only in the appeals on behalf of Japan and Philippines did the YouTubers come from the disaster-struck nations and regions, or were of Japanese or Filipino origin, and thus these appeals can be understood as giving a voice to the affected communities. On the other hand, the differences are also connected to the hierarchy of the popularity of YouTubers. Almost all of the YouTubers who organised fundraising for Japan have a significant number of subscribers, which obviously predicts a higher number of views. In some cases, it is perhaps mistaken to talk about *ordinary* fundraisers or amateur videos. For instance, Nigahiga, American of Japanese descent, created his *YouTube* channel in 2006 to showcase his comedy videos and has become one of the most popular personalities on *YouTube* with almost 14 million subscribers.

The study was interested in finding out which narrative strategies and ways to appeal generated the most and the least intentions to donate, and the most and the least expressions of empathy for the victims of the disasters. The first observation to be made is that the responses were different in every case. What stands out is that the Haiti earthquake received the least comments expressing empathy but generated the most racist comments, echoing the racialised mainstream media representations of Haitian victims as unorganised and lawless, which were present in the reporting of the disaster in the mainstream media (Balaji, 2011). Overall, the percentage of those who expressed their intention to make a donation is small (5 percent), especially in comparison to the largest categories of comments, which expressed sympathy for the poster of an appeal (25 percent) and off-topic comments (24 percent). In addition, it is clear that these appeals generated more expressions of sympathy for their makers than for the victims of the disasters (13 percent).

While the comments differed from case to case and video to video some general trends can be identified. First, celebrity and popular culture driven appeals, for instance using a popular song, typically generated an overflow of off-topic comments and respectively very few expressions of compassion. What is also clear is that video montages focusing on the suffering of victims created more empathetic responses than vlogs that centred on the feelings and actions of the self-made humanitarian: this is true for all four disasters. The appeal video which generated most empathetic comments for the victims (87%) and the least amount of off-topic comments (2%) and no aggressive reactions is the video montage 'Horn of Africa Drought 2011 - Give me hope that 'help' is coming!' which showed shocking images of suffering. Similarly, in the case of the Haiti quake, the video which earned the biggest share of comments expressing an intention to donate (17%) was a photorealistic montage of stills depicting the horror of the earthquake's aftermath. In the following I will discuss the differences and similarities in more detail. Table 2 below shows the six most typical responses per country.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Haiti

The comments on the Haiti quake appeal videos generated more off-topic comments on average than the other cases, constituting 40% of all comments (see Table 2). The most illustrative video in this respect was a version of R.E.M.'s 'Everybody Hurts' a charity single that brought 21 noted singers together in an attempt to raise money for the victims. The video was uploaded by jammycab, from the UK, with a request to donate to the listed official organisations. The upload collected 261,766 views and 549 comments, of which 80% were off-topic ramblings about the celebrities in the video. Another 13% of the responses were classified as sympathy for author, which were mostly expressions of appreciation for the upload, while expressions of sympathy for the victims amounted to only 2% of the comments. This suggests that using celebrities to

attract attention to a cause may actually distract attention away from it because people already have strong sentiments or opinions about the celebrities, thus this observation echoes the findings that celebrities are generally ineffective in cultivating a cosmopolitan engagement with distant suffering (Scott, 2014).

In addition to the off-topic comments, the Haiti discussion was characterised by aggressive comments. Regarding this, the second most watched (140,347 views) and commented on (825 comments) video is illustrative. It presents a slideshow consisting of photos of the earthquake's aftermath, uploaded by American vlogger newsiegirl2008. Sixty percent of the comments saw people exchanging negative words related to the author or other commentators. In addition, eight percent of the comments expressed anger or irritation about making a donation, some of which were racist: 'probly the best thing to ever happen to haiti...now its like they get one big welfare check! tipical niggers.' While anonymity is seen to lead to negative comments and flaming (Thelwall, Sud and Vis, 2012), in general, positive sentiments were prevalent in comments on disaster appeal videos.

East Africa famine

In comparison to the other cases, the videos about the famine and drought in East Africa received the most supportive and empathetic comments, both for the author and the victims. However, most of the authors do not have many subscribers, thus only one out of the ten videos earned over 300 comments, the others collected less than a hundred comments, four had less than ten comments. The most popular campaigner was liliesarelike (51,203 subscribers) who lives in the UK and is a 'mum to 3, primary school teacher, vlogger, anti-bullying campaigner, Save the Children Ambassador.' She made the Umi video with its direct appeal to donate to the victims of famine through *Save the Children*. The video gathered 7,398 views and 79 comments. These comments are mostly appreciative of the author's efforts and 9 percent of the comments communicate an intention to donate.

The video which gained most views was uploaded by peoplepassion (1,294 subscribers, 1,604,432 views, 309 comments), who is based in Australia. The biggest categories were expressions of sympathy for the victims (31%) and appreciation for the author's effort (19%). Negative comments regarding the topic were few, but they represent the comments in this category made on the other African famine appeals videos, which often centre on the issue of birth control: 'I can't help but think: if they can't afford food they probably can't afford birth control either. But then again, don't have sex if you can't afford to have babies.' However, negative comments were relatively few, and rather than being hostile or explicitly racist as in the Haiti appeals they tried to make a rational argument.

Japan

The ten videos asking for aid for tsunami affected Japan garnered 122,348 comments. Two types of responses dominate: off-topic comments constitute one third of all comments, while sympathy for the author constitute about 25 percent. The video appeals for Japan illustrate the case that celebrities, famous songs, movies, video effects or the characteristics of the vlogger(s) may increase the number of views but do not necessarily evoke expressions of solidarity, instead they can distract viewers' attention away from the main subject. For example, one video uses Godzilla, the famous Japanese movie monster, to raise people's awareness that Japan needs their help, but roughly 80% of the comments focus on the movie and not a single comment stated an intention to donate. Similarly, the appeal published by the Japanese beatboxer,

HIKAKIN (656,949 subscribers), earned 278,346 views and 2,234 comments, but more than a third of the comments were focused on the beatboxer's pronunciation of English, while another third were aggressive, mainly towards other commentators who made fun of the vlogger.

Three of the vloggers had a comparatively small numbers of subscribers. However, the case of TheAISM (127 subscribers) who is based in Canada, shows that the popularity of the video is not always dependent on the amount of subscribers, or that a celebrity-driven appeal results in off-topic discussion. TheAISM posted a video of a song, 'The Power in You' (179,179 views), and most comments demonstrated sympathy for the victims (40%). In fact, sympathetic comments for this video constitute over one third of all the comments made in this category for all ten videos on Japan's tsunami (39%). Another interesting vlog is a short message from a young Japanese vlogger runnyrunny999, popular for his food and cooking videos (184,822 subscribers), who uploaded a video to thank those who were worried about him and his family, and which also included information showing how people could donate. This simple message collected 63,513 views and 956 comments. In the category of stated intention to donate this video was the most successful, totalling 32%, which is almost half of all comments in this category regarding the Japan video appeals.

The Philippines

The responses to the calls for help after Typhon Haiyan are unique because they express feelings of strong gratitude towards the *YouTube* authors who raise money. In the case of the Philippines disaster, a sense of global togetherness is constructed though appreciative enthusiasm for ordinary campaigners. The Philippines case also seems to be an exception because the sampled videos mostly receive positive comments and only a comparatively small number of comments generate negative emotions. Most of the commentators (some claiming to be Filipino or of Filipino descent) thank the authors for their efforts to help. A good number of comments express emotionally strong appreciation: 'From the Filipinos THANK YOU SO MUCH! YOU DON'T KNOW HOW THIS MEANS TO US. Thank you for making us important to you. Thank You!' The video best demonstrating the trend of thankfulness was filmed by two young men of Filipino descent from the USA, who collected hugs and donations. Eighty percent of the comments expressed appreciation for their efforts.

The most commented on and viewed video featured the popular song 'We Are the World' posted by Kevin Ayson from the Philippines and set to images of the victims. The amount of views was higher than all other nine videos (views: 5,583,129; comments: 6,309) on the Philippines disaster combined, and higher than for twenty sampled videos for the cases of Haiti and Africa combined. Regarding the first 100 comments, 47 expressed appreciation for the author's charitable effort, but mostly he received thanks from people in other countries, especially from United States citizens, who expressed their support for the victims. Nevertheless, no comments expressing an intention to donate or stating that a donation had been made were found. Another music-led appeal 'SOS Philippines - The song after the storm' was posted by Armand TJ, an aspiring Filipino songwriter. This appeal, a song written by the author and sung by Filipino children, is interesting because of the author's efforts to make it viral. In the video description he writes, 'There's a global campaign to make this song become a movement for unity, not just for the Philippines, but for the whole world. To support this movement, we need to get this SOS out there as much as we can. Every share/repost/tweet/blog/tag will help make a difference and add fuel to the fire'. The appeal collected 266,617 views and 540 comments, nearly half of them expressing gratitude to the author. The author himself commented repeatedly. asking viewers to spread his video 'to touch more hearts and souls around the world'.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that *YouTube* offers a new site of cosmopolitan citizenship (Burgess and Green, 2009: 79) due to its (partial) autonomy from commercial media and its rootedness in ordinary experiences and popular discourse, which can lead to enhanced opportunities for participation and public dialogue. While citizens have traditionally volunteered to assist established aid organisations in their disaster responses, self-organised fundraising extends the range of the engagement of citizens conducting humanitarian action. So far, most academic attention regarding digital volunteers responding to a disaster has been given to the practices of the technical volunteer communities, however, there is a need to look at the new citizen roles and actions from a wider perspective and to examine how citizen volunteering and participation in the informal contexts of everyday life may cultivate a cosmopolitan solidarity by constructing a sense of togetherness and collective responsibility.

The specific case of grassroots fundraising on *YouTube* illustrates such attempts to construct commitment and solidarity. By drawing on a variety of textual strategies and emotional addresses, from shocking photorealistic imagery to playful performances of solidarity, they ask for their viewers' voice and for their money. Thus, they do not entirely correspond with the low-intensity action and emotionality of 'post-humanitarian' appeals, as described by Chouliaraki (2010), even if they displace the moral 'why' question and, in many videos, centre on the campaigners rather than on the victims. Moreover, as we have also seen, they are equally bound by the geopolitically inflected narratives of disasters just like traditional organisers of moral emotions and humanitarian aid are. The fact that the global solidarity enacted in these citizen appeals is rooted in the emotional experiences and life worlds of the YouTubers means that culturally close victims are accorded more attention than more distant ones. In addition to reproducing a global hierarchy of human suffering, they also show the deep digital divide across the global disaster zone: whereas the citizens in the Philippines and Japan participate in the donor mobilisation, affected people in Haiti and East-Africa do not speak for themselves and remain in the role of the helped.

The appreciation and empathy expressed in comments suggests that this peer-to-peer moral education may help, to some extent, to get round the widely documented distrust of humanitarian organisations (and the mainstream media). *YouTube* fundraisers use their own authentic ordinariness to act as intermediaries between aid organisations and the public. However, the impact of these appeals cannot be verified in terms of donations or further acts helping the humanitarian cause. However, this grassroots humanitarianism also allows for hopeful readings of its moral possibilities, in particular regarding its potential to include the voices of the affected communities and to reach unlikely donors, especially youths, while simultaneously bringing the idea of solidarity with distant others into their everyday lives.

References

Balaji, M. (2011) 'Racializing Pity', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28(1): 50-67.
Boltanski, L. (1999) *Distant Suffering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bryman, A. (2008) *Social Research Methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Burgess, J. and J. Green (2009) *Youtube. Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Chouliaraki, L. (2010) 'Post-humanitarianism', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13(2): 107–126.

Drummond, J. and N. Crawford (2014) 'Humanitarian Crises, Emergency Preparedness and Response', HPG Report, ODI, London.

Fassin, D. (2012) *Humanitarian Reason*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Frosh, P. and Pinchevski, A. (2009) 'Crisis-readiness and Media Witnessing', *The Communication Review* 12(3): 295–304.

Hart-Brinson, P. (2012) 'Civic Recreation and a Theory of Civic Production', *Sociological Theory* 30(2) 130–147.

Madianou, M. (2013) 'Humanitarian Campaigns in Social Media', *Journalism Studies* 14(2): 249-266.

Miller, B. (2009) 'Community fundraising 2.0.', *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 14: 365–370.

Nash, K. (2008) 'Global Citizenship as Show Business', *Media, Culture & Society* 30(2): 167–181.

Ortiz, D. G. and S. F. Ostertag (2014) 'Katrina Bloggers and the Development of Collective Civic Action', *Sociological Perspectives* 57(1): 52–78.

Pantti, M. and M. Tikka (2013) Cosmopolitan Empathy and User-generated Disaster Appeal Videos on YouTube. In: Benski T and Fisher E (eds.) *Internet and Emotions*. New York: Routledge, pp. 178-192.

Scott, M. (2014) 'The Role of Celebrities in Mediating Distant Suffering', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, online first May 8, 2014.

Seu, I. (2010) 'Doing Denial', *Discourse and Society* 21(4): 438-57.

Seu, I. (2011) 'Shoot the Messenger', *Human Rights Practice* 3(2): 139-161.

Smith, A. (2012) 'Real Time Charitable Giving', Pew Research Center, http://www.pewinternet.org/files/oldmedia//Files/Reports/2012/Real%20Time%20Charitable%20Giving.pdf.

Starbird, K. and L. Palen (2011) 'Voluntweeters: Self-Organizing by Digital Volunteers in Times of Crisis', in Proc. CHI. Vancouver, Canada: ACM Press, pp. 1071-1080.

Stoianova, V. (2013) 'Private Funding for Humanitarian Assistance', Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/private-funding-2013-online1.pdf.

Thelwall, M., P. Sud and F. Vis (2012) 'Commenting on YouTube Videos', *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 63(3):616-629.

Thompson, J. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Vrasti, W. and J. M. Montsion (2014) 'No Good Deed Goes Unrewarded', *Global Society* 28(3): 336-355.

Vestergaard, A. (2014) 'Mediatized Humanitarianism', *Journal of Business Ethics* 120(4): 509-525.

Vestergaard, A. (2008) 'Branding the Humanitarian', *Journal of Language and Politics* 7(3): 200–16.

Case	Form of the appeal	Views	Total comments (*analysed comments*)	Likes	Dislikes
Japan	Direct: 7 Indirect: 3	12,480,223	122,348 (*918*)	275,609	4,806
Africa	Direct: 2 Indirect: 8	1,757,340	628 (*363*)	1,873	173

Haiti	Direct: 3 Indirect: 7	617,376	1,890 (*446*)	1,574	59
Philippines	Direct: 5 Indirect: 5	6,630,687	8,301 (*494*)	56,953	1,420
TOTAL	Direct: 18 Indirect: 22	21,485,626	133,167 (*2,221*)	336,009	6,458

Table 1: An overview of the *YouTube* disaster appeal videos

Haiti (n=446)	East- Africa (n=363)	Japan (n=918)	Philippines (n=494)
Off-topic comments 40%	Appreciation for the author 29%	Off-topic comments 33%	Appreciation for the author 51%
Appreciation for the author 14%	Sympathy for the victims 28%	Appreciation for the author 25%	Sympathy for the victims 16%
Hostility towards the author, video or commentators 12%	Off-topic comments 14%	Sympathy for the victims 11%	Off-topic comments 10%
Sympathy for the victims 10%	Neutral comments 13%	Hostility towards the author, video or other users 10%	Annoyance about other users' comments 6%
Annoyance about other users' comments 10%	Annoyance about the topic 4%	Intention to donate 8%	Other users' calls to visit their page, watch video, call number 6%
Intention to donate 5%	Intention to donate 4%	Annoyance about other users' comments 4%	Neutral comments 4%

Table 2: The six most typical responses per country