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Feed the dogs
A case of humanitarian communication in social media

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Abstract

In this paper, we address negative aspects of the interplay between networked media and humanitarian communication through the lens of mediatization theory. We analyze a case of humanitarian communication that travelled through Facebook in unpredictable ways and demonstrate the breakdown between sender and receiver positions. The case shows how communicative practices are challenged and how humanitarian organizations are destabilized in a new and unpredictable communication environment. Using mediatization theory, we outline four aspects of social media processes that challenge the current practice of humanitarian communication. Furthermore, we suggest that broadening the consideration of media amalgamation enables a critical discussion of humanitarianism in networked media.

Keywords
Humanitarian communication, mediatization, networked media, case study

In this paper, we investigate how one organization experienced a breakdown of control and the clearly assigned roles of senders and receivers in a case of humanitarian communication. Humanitarian organizations are working to a greater and greater extent within a marketing paradigm (Bajde, 2013; Eikenberry, 2009) in which communication with donors is vital. Several authors have argued for the benefits of moving humanitarian marketing com-

munication to social media because social media enhance credibility (Curtis et al., 2010), two-way dialogue, foster strong social relationships, and facilitate outreach (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). However, whereas literature on non-profits and humanitarian organizations has mostly reported on the positive effect of communicating with donors via social media, very little is known about the difficulties the same types of organizations face when they engage with social media.

While we acknowledge the many potential benefits humanitarian organizations can experience when communicating on social media, we analyse in this paper a case of networked humanitarian communication that highlights the difficulties of moving communication to social media platforms and, thereby, challenges the largely positive view of networked humanitarian communication.

Thus, the question we seek to answer is: how can humanitarian organizations navigate the challenges they meet when they try to benefit from social media communication?

In order to move humanitarian communication forward, we take a meta-perspective by conceptualizing the mediatization of humanitarianism and discussing the way actual humanitarian communication is not just a matter of individual agents and their social media literacy but also a matter of structures of technology, access, and power. The concept of mediatization helps us to look at both how the institutional logic of humanitarianism changes because of networked media *and*, at the same time, how the social construction of reality changes through changing media (Lundby, 2014).

The case analysis contributes to the understanding of some challenges to organizational communication on networked media in general such as user interactivity and the communication managers' lack of skills and understanding of a changed communication structure (Rydén, Ringberg, & Wilke, 2015). However, the case also demonstrates particular challenges to humanitarian organizations on networked media such as the breakdown of distances between donor and recipient, the politicization of charity work, and, finally, the difficulty of maintaining a decentralized communication effort in a small, mostly volunteer-based local section of a national humanitarian organization that is short on the skills and time needed to manage communication in social media. Furthermore, we want to highlight the critical voices in the discussion of networked humanitarianism and propose that the field of humanitarian communication could benefit from a holistic approach that encompasses the perspectives of producers, texts, audience (Orgad & Seu, 2014), and (we would add) *media*. Very few critical voices problematize the assumptions inherent in notions of participatory technology in humanitarian communication (Chouliaraki, 2012a). This paper advances a more critical approach and argues that it is important to understand better how the institutional logic of humanitarianism changes in the context of networked media. Moreover, we suggest that, in order to develop a critical perspective of how networked media influence humanitarian communication, it is necessary to consider the wider implications of changes to media channels. In other words, networked media mean more than

just a new and easier way to reach donors, and this paper outlines some of these implications.

Our critical thinking is informed by critical perspectives on social and participatory aspects of networked communication that question the supposedly inherent empowerment potential and boundless connectivity of new media (Dijck, 2013; Dijck & Poell, 2013; Fuchs, 2011). Such criticism runs counter to the much more prevalent depictions of social media as spaces of liberated agency and boundless communication found in participatory communication literature, exemplified by the likes of *Spreadable Media* (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013), *Wikinomics* (Tapscott & Williams, 2007), and *YouTube* (Burgess & Green, 2009). As we reveal below, similar celebratory accounts have also been advanced in humanitarian communication literature, thus fuelling hope that humanitarianism as a field will blossom thanks to technology-enhanced communication between humanitarian organizations, donors, and receivers (McPherson, 2007; Watson, 2009). Critical voices, however, raise questions of how new technologies structure possibilities and point to issues of limited access and asymmetric power dynamics (Dijck, 2012, 2013; Fuchs, 2011). Yet, these voices have been much less visible in the networked humanitarian communication literature. Thus, this paper aims to open up the critical debate by pointing out the need for a critical understanding of how technology also has structural implications, which limits free agency and potentially spins communication out of control for producers.

In order to open up the debate, we critically examine networked humanitarian communication through the lens of mediatization theory. As a first step, we introduce the concept of mediatization and outline the potential for analysing networked humanitarian communication from this perspective. In the second part of the theoretical section, we discuss the intersection of networked media and humanitarian communication, contrasting the more critical accounts with the overly celebratory accounts popular in management books on communication in social media. Next, we analyse an empirical case of networked humanitarian communication on Facebook to illustrate the challenges and pitfalls of networked humanitarianism when moving from theoretical appraisals to practical performance. Finally, the analysis leads to a broader discussion of the mediatization of networked humanitarian communication and outlines four aspects of how social media changes and challenges humanitarian communication work.

Mediatization theory

Mediatization theory addresses the changes that happen in society with the advent of new forms of media and changing uses of media (Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013; Livingstone, 2009). From the perspective of mediatization, media mediate practically everything and thereby shape all areas of everyday life (Lundby, 2009).[1] The two main strands of mediatization theory are the institutionalist and the constructivist approach, each focusing on slightly different issues and operating on different levels of analysis (Couldry & Hepp, 2013).

The institutional analysis investigates specific aspects of society such as, for example, Hjarvard's analyses of the mediatization of religion and education (2008, 2010, 2011; Hjarvard & Lövheim, 2013). In this perspective, mediatization is about the way non-mediatized forms of representation have to conform to contemporary media logics (Hjarvard, 2008), thanks to the media's increasing social and cultural relevance since the emergence of mass media (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). In other words, the institutionalist perspective of mediatization advances the notion that media constitute an institution with its own set of rules (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 196; Hjarvard, 2008, p. 110). The institutionalist perspective then analyses how other fields adjust to the media rules or logics (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Krotz, 2009; Schulz, 2004). For instance, seeing that social media have been found to advance a particular media logic (Dijck & Poell, 2013), one could investigate how humanitarian organizations adjust to the social media logic.

On the other hand, the social constructivist perspective on mediatization investigates the ways processes of media and communication construe reality (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hepp, 2012). Mediatization from the social constructivist perspective, thus, is not something that came with mass media, as the institutionalist perspective would argue. Instead, mediatization is seen as a continuous process, albeit intensifying with more and more forms of media (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Krotz, 2009). From this perspective, mediatization is a *meta-process* just like globalization or commercialization (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2015). For example, mediatization from a social constructivist perspective might entail the ways in which humanitarian interactions on social media also influence and construct offline humanitarian interactions. As pointed out by Chouliaraki, media construct humanitarian action through representations of distant others and their suffering as well as through mobilizing particular forms of agency toward such suffering (2008, 2012a, 2012b). As such, employing the lens of mediatization to understand how networked media have implications for humanitarian communication aids investigation of how vulnerable others become (or fail to become) part of our shared moral universe and of the opportunities for humanitarian action within this universe.

In this paper, rather than look at the two perspectives of mediatization as mutually exclusive, we understand them as two different levels of analysis; and, therefore, we aim to address both aspects. Our goal is to show that the two perspectives are complementary because the institutional analysis discusses specific examples of mediatization upon which the social constructivist perspective can build its macro-level analyses.

Processes of mediatization

Mediatization is primarily about change – for example, the change in mediation as a result of the emergence of different types of media (Kammer, 2013). However, the way these changes are investigated and what constitutes change is not always clear (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). In this paper, we follow Knut Lundby and Winfried Schulz in their outline of four

processes of mediatization: extension, substitution, accommodation, and amalgamation (Lundby, 2009; Schulz, 2004). This analytical perspective has developed analytical properties for the direction, form, and character of the media activities as well as the messages involved in the changed process (Lundby, 2009; Petersen, 2012).

In addition, the perspective provided by Lundby and Schulz addresses the ways mediatization invades other spheres such as private life and points out how economic structures are affected by new media – for example, when broadcasting lowered the cost of spreading information (Schulz, 2004, p. 93). Thus, *extension* expresses the way communication technology extends human communication, but it also points out the way that encoding processes seek to overcome the barrier of the critical or unfocused receiver through new forms of communication technology. *Substitution* focuses on the ways previously unmediated social activities are suddenly mediated in various ways or the manner in which new communication technologies are substituted for old ones. *Amalgamation* points out the ways in which mediated and non-mediated activities mix, overlap, and amalgamate. Finally, *accommodation* discusses aspects of adaptation and transformation – for example, when economic aspects of media enforce certain behaviours or discourage others (Lundby, 2009, pp. 10-11; Schulz, 2004, pp. 88-90).

With its focus on both structures and agents, mediatization theory helps us understand how transformations happen in varied aspects of humanitarian communication. It provides us with a framework sensitive to the structures and technologies of communication while, at the same time, it helps us to investigate how structural changes influence and are influenced by the participation of individual actors in the structures. Mediatization theory, therefore, enables holistic analyses that encompass producers, texts, audience, and media channels; and inspires to look across spaces and domains to understand the multilevel impacts of changes in media use and the junctures of hitherto separated domains catalysed by these changes. Thus, mediatization theory allows us to analyse the structures of humanitarian actions offline as well as online *and* to take a meta-perspective on how these actions are theorized in the literature.

Networked humanitarian communication

A lot of hope has been invested in networked media's potential application in the field of humanitarianism. Loader and Mercea (2011) describe two recent waves of utopian discourse foretelling how new media will democratize society by reshaping communicative power relations. The *first wave* envisioned the Internet as a catalyst of "online Agoras and Habermasian forums" where inclusive and egalitarian debates can take place, liberated from entrenched power structures (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p. 757). In response to the rather disappointing results – thanks, *inter alia*, to increased privatization and commercialization of the Internet (Baym, 2015), the *second wave* invests hope in *social media* and "the user-citizen as the driver of democratic innovation through the self-actualized networking

of citizens engaged in lifestyle and identity politics" (Loader and Mercea, 2011, p. 758). Compared to the first wave, the second wave puts less emphasis on new media as a space for *public political speech* (i.e., political speech commons) and more on new media as spaces where individuals can share and live out their moral and lifestyle projects. These differences aside, both waves stress the contrast between the passive mass-media audiences of old and the active Web 2.0 citizen-participants (Dijck, 2009) who constitute the new *"participatory culture"* (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013). From these perspectives, new media amplify individual agency and freedom as spaces in which the boundaries between private and public, social and commercial, production and consumption, work and play, etc., no longer hold back human(itarian) creativity (Dijck and Nieborg, 2009).

Current research on the use of social media in humanitarian contexts indicates that manifold opportunities and challenges await non-profits. Briones et al. (2011), for example, highlight new opportunities for non-profits to build relationships with journalists and the public as well as challenges connected with ensuring the necessary human resources to work with new media and to negotiate the diverse levels of knowledge, skill, and attitudes of their audiences toward social media. The unrelentlessly expanding, cacophonic environment of new media (Guo & Saxton, 2014) places considerable additional strain on humanitarian organizations, which need to allocate valuable resources to deal with the massive intake and production of information (Zorn, Grant, & Henderson, 2013). While, on one hand, new media (like any other media) entail costs and impose their own structural limitations on humanitarian communication, on the other hand they tend to be extraordinarily good at provoking diverse reactions and "polymedia" events across different media platforms (Madianou, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, managerial literature offering advice to humanitarian organizations on how to communicate in new media has picked up the positive potential of social media. We illustrate this trend through two influential books: Watson's *Causewired* (2009) and Kanter and Fine's *Networked nonprofit* (2010).[2] The "revolutionary power" (Kanter and Fine, 2010, p. 5) of social media is tied to the "new force for social change called *free agents*" (2010, p. 16). Hence, the authors call for non-profits to leverage the "superwired, always-on, live-life-in-public… superinformed consumers who expect to create and support causes, change politics, and have personal involvement in the brands they support" (2010, pp. xxi-xxx) while respecting their freedom to "come and go at their discretion… [and to] participate when and how they want" (2010, p. 20). "The intrinsically democratic" social media are argued to put "the tools of attention, and fundraising, and action into the hands of any citizen who cares enough to use them" (Watson, 2009, p. 123). Both books describe social media as "vehicles for [two-way] conversation", fostering transparency and trust, and activating "the natural creativity and passion that people bring to causes" (Kanter and Fine, 2010, p. 10). Accordingly, social media are portrayed as "fertile hosts" or "hotbeds" for social causes (Watson, 2009, p. 39) that "connect people as never before in human history" (Watson, 2009, p. xxx). The barriers to humanitarian engagement are lowered even

more as social media erode the boundaries separating humanitarianism and the market, thus mobilizing "philanthropic *consumers*" and "social *entrepreneurs*" whose "urge to communicate will create the basis for a golden age of activism and involvement, increasing the reach of philanthropy" (Watson, 2009, p. 19). New media are suggested to play a vital role in fuelling "a movement from institutions to individuals" by turning "the very marketplace-democracy that powers the best online businesses into a force for social change" (2009, p. 138). However, practical advice on how to deal with challenges and pitfalls of communication in new media is scarce in these books.

Ultimately, the celebratory arguments revolve around an increased productivity of communication. Watson's writing, in particular, illustrates the progressive embrace of market and business principles in humanitarian communication. From this perspective, social media are argued to represent a more efficient means to market causes through the active participation of 'consumers'. However, as pointed out by Eikenberry (2009), 'marketization' of humanitarian efforts can compromise the social and political essence of humanitarian organizations since efficiency takes precedence over essence. While new media have been implicitly linked to the progressive marketization of humanitarian communication (Chouliaraki 2012a), this complex relationship calls for more study.

Thus, both theoretical and managerial perspectives depict new media as a revolutionary democratic force that empowers individuals and liberates them from orthodox structures (Loader and Mercea, 2011). Social media are primarily considered in terms of desirable *extension* of communication – that is, they add new ways to communicate and are a beneficial *substitution* of conventional media (i.e., adding better ways to communicate). Accordingly, *accommodation* of social media is deemed inevitable and more or less unproblematic. Therefore, we argue that these discourses of empowerment, ease of communication, and derived monetary effect shape the expectations that humanitarian organizations have of networked humanitarian communication and, furthermore, that these types of media are now so much a part of everyday life (Sørensen, 2009) that training communicators for social media is expected to be redundant. However, not everyone agrees with such a celebratory, 'no-frills' accounts of humanitarian communication in social media.

Critical perspectives on social media and humanitarian communication

As Orgad and Seu observe, the interpretations of new media's influence on humanitarian communication tend to divide into utopian or dystopian perspectives (Orgad & Seu, 2014, p. 26). In addition to inspiring hope for more inclusive, democratic, and just social worlds, new media technologies also arouse fears and critique. For example, Baudrillardian and Habermasian critiques stress that new technologies are hardly democratic and humane when they serve as devices of social control, distorting reality and/or reducing it to superficial, spectacular images (Chouliaraki, 2008). Loader and Mercea caution against

the "utopian optimism of the earlier experiments in digital democracy" and their failure to recognize the complex socio-cultural structures at play (2011, p. 766). Along these lines, Dijck argues that social media are increasingly co-opted to engineer and codify particular forms of sociality and to steer user agency, so that "user agency is defined more than ever by the capital-intensive and technology-driven economies of global, vertically integrated markets" (2009, p. 54).

Furthermore, Kelemen and Smith (2001) point to the "cyberlibertarian" tendency to downplay the importance of "collective association as a source of moral action", promoting a narcissistic objectification of the "Other" instead (Kelemen & Smith, 2001, pp. 382-383). Thus, we argue that social media intensifies existing dilemmas of humanitarian communication and marketing such as speaking on behalf of others (Dempsey, 2011, 2012) and displaying suffering for the sake of raising money (Chouliaraki, 2008, 2012a, 2012b).

As opposed to celebratory accounts of new media as tools for *liberation*, new media (and the humanitarian communication therein) remain "embedded in structures of iterability that reproduce the dominant visions and divisions of community" (Chouliaraki 2012b, p. 279). For instance, Saxton and Wang (2014) argue that dictums of popularity, social acceptance, and conformism shape communication in social media even more than in traditional media (Saxton & Wang, 2014). Similarly, research on slacktivism (Davis, 2011; Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014) shows that users are more concerned with socializing and having fun than with the arduous complexities of social change (Meijer, 2012; Saxton & Wang, 2014). This coincides with Chouliaraki's (2012a) broader critique of the tendency of technologized humanitarian communication to undermine solidarity by marginalizing the voice of vulnerable others in favour of "user-citizen" hedonism and narcissistic self-expressivity (Chouliaraki, 2012a).

Moreover, Chouliaraki (2012a) proposes that humanitarian communication in new media favours partial personal readings as opposed to more objective, shared interpretations of humanitarian problems. Therefore, it is less effective in integrating humanitarian audiences and providing a shared foundation for collective action. Applying mediatization theory helps us to consider critically the respective processes of extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation from the institutionalist and constructivist perspective in order to develop an understanding of how social media logic affects both the institution of humanitarianism and the wider perspective on how this logic construes possible actions both on- and offline. Consequently, naïve renditions of social media as unproblematic tools for communication and liberation ought to be avoided. In addition to extending communication, social media can also silence and marginalize. Social media do not simply empower and liberate agents from social structures and mass media logics but rather instil their own media logic that is very much entangled in existent and emergent socio-economic structures and inequalities. Rather than merely substituting traditional media, social media amalgamate with traditional media in various ways. As open, transparent, and inviting as networked media might seem, networked media require considerable and,

at times, problematic accommodation. When closer attention is paid to the practices and structures of (humanitarian) communication in social media, we can begin to unpack the way humanitarian communication is changing in order to accommodate social media and how that leads to the amalgamation of online and offline spheres. To think through these issues more closely, we next analyse an illustrative case study of humanitarian communication on Facebook.

Methods

Our method in this analysis of the mediatization of networked humanitarian communication echoes Hjarvard and Schrott in their characterizations of media as *a cluster of functions* (Hjarvard, 2012) or dimensions of media (Schrott, 2009) because we emphasize the plurality of producers, audiences, texts, and technologies over the one-dimensional focus on, for example, the organization or the travelling of the image. Our aim is to focus on the production side of humanitarian communication. With our illustrative analysis of one case, we discuss aspects of audiences, lack of control over messages, and media channels from the perspective of the producer – in this case, the humanitarian organization.

Our empirical case covers the events ensuing from a Facebook post by a humanitarian organization. The particular charity is part of a national organization that provides food and shelter to homeless people. The national organization has many other activities, but this particular case discusses only the shelter's attempt to communicate through Facebook.

The empirical case study has been investigated via a web sphere analysis and complemented by an informal interview and debriefing session conducted with Poul, the manager of the shelter, in order to understand how the online interaction moved from Facebook to the physical space of the shelter. The interview and debriefing session was recorded as field notes but not taped. Thus, we have collected data via Facebook and at the shelter. Like Schneider and Foot, we conceptualize Facebook as a "web sphere" – that is, as a collection of online resources connected by hyperlinks (Schneider & Foot, 2005). This helps us follow the case as it develops and spreads in unpredictable patterns on Facebook. As such, we do not limit our case to the particular post by Poul on Facebook, but we also look at the interactions inspired by sharing and commenting on the post.

Data

In total, 1,059 people commented on the post or on comments to the post. We included all comments to the original post and also two follow-up posts from the shelter – one that thanked donors for the donated dog food and another explaining that the need had been more than met. The follow-up posts generated very limited response; for example, they each only had three comments and no comments to comments. And whereas the origi-

nal post was shared 714 times directly from the local section's Facebook profile, the first follow-up post had one share and the second one had no shares.

Furthermore, we were also allowed access to Facebook's statistics with regard to the shelter's page, and we have been able to analyse the changes in attention that this post caused. The advantage of doing a web sphere analysis is to integrate structural, rhetorical and sociocultural aspects into one analysis rather than to focus on one single aspect. This is important in order to understand the complexity of the interaction on Facebook and the move to material donations in the physical space of the shelter.

Finally, we also included the national webpage of the charity organization as part of our material for the case. The webpage represents the national centralized organ of communication; however, it has none of the interactivity available on Facebook, and there is no reporting of the local branches' social media activities. Thus, the national webpage served as background information about the organization and provided an understanding of its communicational structure based on organizational diagrams and descriptions of divisions of labour between the central office and regional offices. The shelters are only one of the activities in which this charity organization is engaged, and the shelters are, to a large extent, run locally with little intervention from the central organization.

Analysis: Promises and discomforts of networked charity communication

On March 21, 2013, a shelter for homeless people in Svendborg (a small Danish city) was out of dog food. Usually, they keep a supply in case some of the homeless people come in and ask for something for their dogs. However, on that day, someone was asking for dog food, but there was nothing left. To remedy the situation, Poul, the manager at that time, posted their need for dog food on the shelter's Facebook page along with a picture of the dogs. The post was a simple request for food and ran: "Dear FB friends, we are out of dog food. If you have something to spare, we are happy to take it off your hands."[3] The picture showed a couple of cute dogs; and, as if they were aware of the plea for food, they even tilted their heads as if to say, 'hey, we are cute but hungry, please'.

The post received an overwhelming level of attention compared to the interest Facebook users otherwise show in the shelter's activities. Before the dog food post, the average number of views was about 45 with no additional reach in terms of sharing and liking. However, the dog food post, according to Facebook statistics, reached 63,231 people, which dropped to 9,250 the following week. The case, thus, seems to affirm at least some of the possibilities foretold by the celebratory literature on networked humanitarianism such as supercharging messages and boundless networking. However, the case also demonstrates that there are serious challenges emerging from the single Facebook post that reaches into the semi-private sphere of the shelter and exposes homeless people in various ways as we discuss below.

Users from all over the country were liking, sharing, and commenting, and the word kept spreading. People from faraway parts of the country were suggesting alternative ways to donate. One asked for an account number to which she could donate money, for the shelter to buy the dog food themselves. Another suggested donating dog food to the shelter nearest to hand in the hope that the national organization then could organize a transport of dog food between the shelters. And many people asked when volunteers were at the shelter, so they could go there and donate. Users also commented on the cute dogs, and others gave advice about contacting local pet shops, grocery stores, or other charitable organizations that might want to donate. Finally, a huge number of people celebrated and cheered the people who promised to donate.

As the web storm spread, consequences for the physical space of the shelter started to emerge as people from various strata of society were lining up to donate at the shelter, and dog food was piling up. Practical problems arose in having volunteers meet the donors of dog food – even at times when the shelter was closed. There was also a lack of storage space for all the food; some people donated expired dog food, which, of course, had to be thrown away. Eventually, the shelter's trash cans were overflowing with expired dog food. On a less practical level, when the donors suddenly showed up in person with expectations of thankfulness and gratitude, tacit tensions emerged between them and the users of the shelter.

Problems of a different kind also emerged. Suddenly, the shelter and its users became very visible within the city and on Facebook. Some of the Facebook users were not supportive at all. They asked whether homeless people should beg for food for their dogs or take care of it themselves. Moreover, some users spent a lot of time debating the living conditions of the dogs and questioned the ability of homeless people to be good dog owners. The unintended critical discussion by the Facebook users made the manager of the shelter feel overwhelmed and stifled by all the attention, according to our field notes. Rather than seeing social media as his new channel for communication and awareness creation, he was hesitant to use Facebook again because of the risk of negative feedback and critical exposure of the homeless. Furthermore, the lack of control over the offline invasion of donors made him uncertain about using Facebook in the future for similar requests because he was worried about practical issues of handling dog food, donors, and volunteers. With his limited resources, he was unsure whether Facebook should be included in future marketing or requests of donations. Thus, even if the post as such was successful in its goal of obtaining dog food and raising attention – as promised by the networked humanitarian literature – the structural properties of Facebook also caused the post to spin out of control for the manager.

As is common for this type of humanitarian organization, the manager acts as the local social counsellor, janitor, communications manager, manager of the volunteers, cook, and caretaker of whatever else needs to be done. Thus, the acquisition of skills such as communication on social media is often not prioritized or not an option. Thus, gut feelings and

'trial-and-error' experimentation dominate the approach to social media as well as to other types of communication. Communication with mass media is mostly serviced through the national organization and their communication department. Thus, in moving from his average audience of 45 people to a much larger number, the manager was acutely aware of the risk of exposing the homeless people he serves and becoming the involuntary host for politicized debates about homelessness.

Findings

Social media logic: The case shows that the promises found in the social media and net-worked charity literature can come true; the message of the need for dog food spread like wildfire to various areas of Denmark, and people started organizing transport from different areas to the shelter. The volume of dog food donated was overwhelming, and the energy mobilized by the single post was intense. Thus, there was a very successful instance of evoking the needy distant other (Chouliaraki, 2012a) in the form of the two dogs in the photo. The photo itself speaks well to the intimacy and familiarity that is commonly part of conversations on Facebook (Miller, 2008). Furthermore, the request in the post was very specific; there seems to be a direct link between the dogs in the image and the need for dog food, creating a connection between the mediated world of Facebook and the social reality of the dogs (Ashuri, 2012). Moreover, there is no extra demand for money or time, only the specific request – which, if you are a dog owner who lives in the area, is fairly easy to accommodate. Through the post, Facebook users got a chance to emerge as social "entrepreneurs" (Watson, 2009) in their own eyes and in the eyes of their Facebook friends. For example, posting a comment means that their friends will be able to see the poster's willingness to act. And there are the salutations from strangers in the thread, rewarding the donors with supportive comments such as "Fuck, this is great! Giant salutations for my fellow humans <3 <3<3 I'm so moved by these acts of humanitarianism".[4] In that sense, the conversations and coordination of dog food transport allow a slice of sociality to emerge among the Facebook users, who become actors and creators of society by their declared care for distant other dogs. In this way, a quasi-public space emerges in which solidarity is mobilized and social problems are debated (Tierney, 2013).

Critical perspectives: Posting the need for dog food, however, is also precarious precisely because it mobilizes people to go to the shelter, where they meet, not necessarily THE cute dogs from the picture, but other dogs and their owners. Thus, the discrepancy between the mediated dogs and the real-life dogs becomes visible and interferes with the images created through social media mediation. Furthermore, since Facebook is a relatively cheap, instant, and emotive medium that promotes a culture of openness and instantane-ity, humanitarian organizations find it hard to continue more abstract fundraising, where pleas are more indeterminate in terms of timing, resources given and recipients supported. As a consequence of the openness and instantaneity of Facebook, the users experiences

the dilemma between donating money towards an abstract cause versus giving money to these specific dogs that they feel connected to in the moment through Facebook.

Yet, there is no absolute connectivity – the two dogs are still mediated because they are pictured and posted according to the logic of Facebook communication. Even when people encounter them at the shelter, the communication and images first encountered on Facebook colour the interaction. The imaginings and expectations fostered on Facebook are difficult to satisfy. These two dogs might not need *your* food and might not be available to you – or, maybe, they are just not as cute in real life as they are in the picture. From a mediatization perspective, then, it is clear that not just the institution of humanitarianism is changing because of changes in communication channels. Rather, the fundamental basis for interaction has been changed because, suddenly, the streets around the shelter are transformed by the lines of people, and the interaction among people has also been shaped by the social media logic of intimacy and immediacy. Thus, just the act of showing up at the shelter by donors reveals a change in the construction of their world, which (we argue) is facilitated by the social media transformation of humanitarian communication.

Furthermore, from an institutional perspective on mediatization, the changes in humanitarianism based on a social media logic, for example, are displayed in the critical comments on Facebook in which some people worry about the dogs – the leashes are too short; people should take care of their animals; why are they not inside in a warm living room? Thus, discomforts arise when a humanitarian ethos of respect and care for others and their vulnerability (normally protected by anonymity) suddenly bumps up against the Facebook logic of proximity, instantaneous expressivity and taste (liking), and individual control. The temptation and opportunity for moral judgment of the other intensify due to the seemingly direct connection between pictures posted on Facebook and needy dogs and their owners. Thus, the public space that emerges with its debate and solidarity can be highly asymmetric and image-centred inasmuch as people are guessing and arguing based on a single photo – often, forgetting about the broader context. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the organization to retain independence and flexibility in redirecting the solidarity that is mobilized.

Discussion

The case illuminates the difficulties one local shelter experienced from a post on Facebook and how a change in communication channel influenced and changed offline interactions. This paper advances the discussion on networked humanitarian communication by demonstrating the negative aspects of this example of social media mediatization – for instance, by pointing out the problematic amalgamation of online and offline forms of communication. Mediatization theory from a social constructivist perspective helps us develop an understanding of how humanitarian interactions on social media influence and colour offline interactions. This aspect of amalgamation is largely missing from the current

critical literature on networked humanitarianism. Below, we outline four ways social media influence and change humanitarian communication.

Conflicting positive and critical perspectives also exist in the literature on the broader social implications of the Internet and Web 2.0 technology. On the one hand, critical perspectives raise our awareness of the lack of privacy and the risk of surveillance (Boyd & Crawford, 2011; Fuchs, 2011) and point out just how difficult it is to understand fully networked technology and its derived logic (Dijck, 2013). These critiques are based on institutional analyses that highlight the structures of technologies and of the media platforms as well as the invisible power structures of technology and media. To this, we add the perspective that understanding the amalgamation of different media logics is necessary in order to navigate the institutional transformations influenced by social media.

On the other hand, more participatory approaches to theorizing networked media adopt a more optimistic tone. These approaches stress that many inventions and developments are created by users and that users educate each other to be both critical and skilled consumer-creators of networked media (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013). Thus, rather than committing ourselves to either side and deeming networked humanitarian communication either a success or a failure, we need to consider both the upside and downside of networked media while, at the same time, recognizing that the line between the two can be unclear and needs to be open to discussion and investigation.

Returning to the perspective of mediatization, it is clear that networked media transform diverse aspects of humanitarian communication. We discuss them by applying the framework of four mediatization processes articulated by Lundby (2009) and Schultz (2004) as presented earlier.

1. Extension. In the discourse on networked humanitarianism, the expectation is the networked or social media will work as an unproblematic extension of face-to-face communication and also of the willingness and motivation to help directly. However, the "extension" of communication between users, humanitarian organizations, and receivers tends to be mediated in ways that grant more space and attention to the more provocative voices (e.g., users discussing the living conditions of the dogs versus the many users promising to donate dog food). Thus, charity organizations divert their resources to engage in various political and social interactions that change their role from creating awareness and raising funds – that is, as a mediator between need and remedy – to become political actors and spokespeople for the charity recipients. The imposition of new role expectations causes ambivalence on the part of individual humanitarian workers and raises questions of what can be said on behalf of receivers of charity and how it can be said (Dempsey, 2011, 2012). The move toward participatory communication, thus, reflects back on the organization and produces a need to clarify what role the organization should or could take in the mediation process between the public, donors and receivers; for example, are the homeless people allowed to participate in debates on the shelter's Facebook page? Who gets to speak on behalf of the homeless? With the manager's new-found reluctance to use social media

for future pleas for resources, this case illustrates a case of negative mediatization (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014) on an institutional level in which the manager actually withdraws from a new type of media because it has diminished his communicative control. And while his withdrawal could indicate his awareness and acknowledgment of his lack of social media skills, it is also a sign in a wider perspective of the reluctance of organizations to reorient their communication strategies and competences towards a more interactive communication paradigm (Rydén et al., 2015). In particular, the manager's reluctance also signifies the lack of training of communication skills and the incoherence of communication efforts within the national organization.

2. *Substitution*. Substituting one type of media with another affects humanitarian communication and donor behaviour such as, for example, what the Danish shelter experienced when posting the photo of the dogs. In that case, the focus of Facebook users went from general ignorance of the shelter and its activities to a strong focus on the dogs, their living conditions, the circumstances of their owners, and what causes the dogs to live in a particular way. The substitution of mass media with networked media redirected attention from the living conditions of homeless people and the overall activities of the shelter to two particular dogs. The staging of the dogs on networked media dissociated the dogs from their owners and created a situation in which dogs and people compete for charity and care. This is not to suggest that social media always produce this effect. Nevertheless, it does suggest that, in the process of moving from broadcast media to networked media, it is vital to find ways to mobilize different forms of media for different purposes rather than assigning all communication to an allegedly superior medium. In our case study, there is, indeed, an increase in scale and a deepening of engagement with the cause, as the networked humanitarian literature proposes, but "the cause" shifts as well and might no longer be aligned with the needs of the recipients of the charity or the mission of the humanitarian organization.

3. *Amalgamation*. Networked media are transformative for humanitarian communication because they change the borders between online and offline communication. As the case illustrates, the donors were suddenly not only donating money via banks but showed up at the shelter expecting to be greeted and validated as donors – even when they tried to donate expired dog food. This, on the other hand, created a questionable power dynamics in which feelings of gratitude and benevolence suddenly had to be performed in the physical space of the shelter. A networked humanitarian organization, thus, has to consider how the intimacy created through the networked media (Miller, 2008) transforms the socio-physical spaces of charity – for example, by installing expectations of maintained intimacy such as continuous welcoming and expressions of gratitude.

4. *Accommodation*. For the most part, the discourse on networked humanitarianism presents networked media as a positive opportunity to attune the organization better to its milieu and operate closer to potential donors, who can, in turn, make closer connections to social causes (Watson, 2009). However, Dijck and Poell (2013) argue that the

transparency, openness, and connectivity associated with networked media are far from self-evident or unproblematic. As always, transparency, openness, and connectivity are limited and bent in favour of certain actors. We would also add that, in the case of humanitarian communication, these media attributes are not necessarily desirable. For example, the individual humanitarian worker might not be able respond to the expectations of immediacy or intimacy resulting from the social media logic, thereby leaving him or her powerless in the mediation between donors and receivers. To paraphrase Chouliaraki (2012b), what is needed is not *total* transparency, connectivity, etc., but rather "proper distance" that allows for the dignity, autonomy, and freedom of those involved – the charity recipients, in particular.

The questions raised above overlap with but also extend the existing critical accounts on networked communication and networked humanitarian communication, in particular. They enrich the existing discussions and their common emphasis on the problematic individualization and marketization of humanitarianism by focussing attention on the problems of amalgamation between online and offline, networked and mass media. Furthermore, we argue that the attention on the living conditions of the dogs and their cuteness had the effect of marginalizing the homeless people even more. Thus, while we provide few answers, we hope to open up the discussion and encourage further consideration and discussion of the role of networked media in humanitarian communication and to point out the managerial challenges and pitfalls of moving communication to a new medium.

Conclusion

In this paper, mediatization has proved to be a viable theoretical handle for teasing out the complexities and nuances of the changing structure of networked humanitarian communication. Mediatization with grounding in institutional and social constructivist perspectives sustains an analytical perspective on how media logic influences and shapes different aspects of society and institutions. Networked media change the roles and dynamics of communication and lead to new structures of power and powerlessness in humanitarian communication while, simultaneously, encouraging novel forms of sociality and solidarity and energizing relationships between donors, organizations, and receivers. Moving the discourse of networked humanitarianism forward also means to develop and discuss examples of the negative facets of social media's influence on humanitarian communication – and, from a managerial perspective, to find ways to work with and manage these negative aspects.

While networked media can be an empowering tool, it is important to recognize that the producers' control over networked media is limited. Furthermore, networked media shape expectations and, thereby, have structural influence on actors' possibilities. Networked media are transformative but not always in desirable ways because networked media logic also means that there are challenges, expectations, and structures that the

institutions and individuals are unaware of or unable to respond to. The connectedness, openness, transparency, and democratization often associated with networked media are far from unproblematic. They come with their own limits and unwelcome side-effects – especially, in sensitive communication contexts such as humanitarianism. As a result, we suggest the need for continuous investigation into the ways new technologies and media facilitate or discourage new structures, actions, and agencies.

Notes

1   For a more comprehensive introduction, see the special issue of *Communication Theory* on mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2013).
2   We chose these two books because of their influence in the field of humanitarian communication and their strong focus on new media and humanitarian causes. The authors of these books have led the swelling ranks of commentators and consultants on social media and humanitarian communication.
3   Authors' translation
4   Authors' translation

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