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The Structural Organization of NGO Publicity Work: Explaining Divergent Publicity Strategies at Humanitarian and Human Rights Organizations

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This article examines the role of humanitarian and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in producing global news content in light of legacy news media's shrinking international footprint. Using original interviews, NGO documents, and content analysis, it finds that different types of funding, government relationships, organizational dynamics and desired impacts tend to be associated with divergent publicity strategies. In particular, some NGOs target the prestige press to engage with political elites, while others use the general news media to attract new audiences for fund-raising and educational purposes. The implications of these findings, both for international news and scholarly analysis of civil society, are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: NGO, journalism, international news, civil society

Introduction

In 2010, Human Rights Watch appeared in *The New York Times* roughly every other day, yet on the three major U.S. network news outlets (ABC, CBS, and NBC), it appeared a mere six times in total. In contrast, Save the Children appeared in *The New York Times* just twice per month, but was cited on U.S. network news 35 times.[2] What factors explain these organizations' divergent publicity profiles? Although some scholarship has called attention to the increasingly prominent roles played by humanitarian and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the public sphere (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Moyn, 2010; Waisbord, 2011), less attention has been paid to explaining differences in the types of publicity NGOs pursue and the reasons that they pursue them. As a result,

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[2] Human Rights Watch appeared 172 times in *The New York Times*; Save the Children appeared 27 times. Broadcast news figures are based on a LexisNexis search including transcripts from ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News. A more detailed account of divergent media citations is included in the findings section.

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existing scholarly knowledge espouses conflicting views on the factors driving NGO publicity. Some see publicity shaped primarily by a desire to put issues and locales on the public agenda that would otherwise languish unnoticed (Cmiel, 1999; Zuckerman, 2013). Others argue that publicity is more often shaped by organizational needs for visibility, fund-raising and recognition (Bob, 2005; de Waal, 1998) or by media demands for newsworthiness (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010).

In this article, I argue that what is missing from current analyses—and what is needed to provide a more complete picture of the factors driving NGO news making—is an account of the variable *structural organization* of NGO publicity. I use this term to refer to the economic, political, and organizational determinants shaping different types of NGO publicity. Drawing upon interviews, participant observation, key NGO documents, and content analysis, I identify four factors shaping NGO publicity: an organization's forms of funding, its relationship to the state, its own organizational dynamics, and its desired impacts. NGOs, I argue, address these factors in different ways, and their publicity strategies vary as a result. Specifically, I show how the structural organization of some NGOs shapes publicity strategies primarily concerned with using the prestige press to engage in elite policy debates. Conversely, the structural organization of other NGOs drives publicity strategies primarily intended to use general media to attract new audiences for fund-raising or educational purposes.

Where existing analyses generally see an NGO's organizational needs and media demands constraining an NGO's normative aims, this analysis sheds light on how different structural factors *enable* NGOs to pursue different types of publicity strategies. In effect, I show that NGOs not only produce different types of publicity but that different publicity strategies have different structural underpinnings—that is, that how NGOs address their economic, political, and organizational issues shapes the production of different types of publicity strategies. In turn, these differential publicity strategies correspond to—rather than are mechanically controlled by—diverse media logics. In providing this analysis, I aim to contribute empirical clarity to the growing scholarship on the news-making experiences of NGOs while offering an analytical approach that may be useful for scholars studying the news-making experiences of source organizations more generally.

Existing Perspectives on NGO Publicity

Existing scholarly knowledge offers three views on the factors shaping NGO publicity. A first perspective suggests NGO publicity is shaped primarily by a desire to put issues and locales on the public agenda that would otherwise languish unnoticed. In this view, NGOs constitute the organizational backbone of "transnational advocacy networks" that generate, frame, thematize, and circulate information about humanitarian and human rights issues (Clark, 2001; Cmiel, 1999; Dawes, 2007; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The impartial gathering of facts and figures, scholars argue, is central to this work (Clark, 2001; Hopgood, 2006). Without the coercive resources of states or the financial resources of corporations, NGOs accrue authority by being knowledgeable, impartial experts (Lang, 2013). To the extent that NGOs have influence, argues Kenneth Cmiel (1999), it comes from their work instantiating a "global flow of key bits of fact" (p. 1232).

In the past, NGOs relied primarily on the news media to publicize their work. As legacy news outlets cut foreign news budgets—and as digital technologies lower the barriers of entry to being a news provider—NGOs find themselves taking on an increasing number of publicity functions (Kumar, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2009; Sambrook, 2010). Many NGOs have hired reporters, photographers, videographers, and online specialists to help produce news content, either in collaboration with news outlets or for their organization's own website (Bogert, 2010; Bristol & Donnelly, 2011; International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002; Sambrook, 2010). The result of these ventures, scholars argue, is that NGO publicity has more opportunities than ever before to reach relevant stakeholders, either by shaping media coverage or by directly targeting niche audiences. Zuckerman (2004) notes, for example, how NGOs produced and published online extensive reports throughout the early 2000s on political violence in Darfur, paving the way for news outlets to understand what was occurring when they finally turned their attention to the story. NGOs in such cases, he argues, "did the first round of investigative journalism that news organizations failed to do" (p. 53).

A second perspective argues that NGOs contribute to the public sphere for a more instrumental set of reasons. On this view, while NGOs may intend to put neglected issues and locales on the public agenda (and may sometimes succeed in doing so), their news-making strategies primarily reflect organizational needs for visibility, influence, recognition, and fund-raising (Bob, 2005; Cohen, 2001; de Waal, 1998; Geras, 1998). Bob, for example, stresses that NGOs choose issues, causes, and locales that closely match their own organizational needs (relevant cultural frames, linguistic capacities, etc.) more than on the basis of severity or need. Relatedly, several authors suggest that NGO publicity tends to overhype existing problems in ways that maximize the financial benefits to organizations (de Waal, 1998; Rieff, 2002). Rothmyer (2011), for example, notes that, in their publicity, NGOs "tend to focus not on what has been accomplished but on convincing people how much remains to be done. . . . These pressures create incentives to present as gloomy a picture . . . as possible in order to keep attention and money flowing" (p. 18).

A third perspective acknowledges that NGO publicity is shaped by both normative aims and organizational considerations. It argues, though, that normative aims have been subverted not primarily by organizational needs; instead, NGOs have been forced to adapt their publicity strategies to the biases and preferences of the news media. Scholars consider this outcome the effect of a "media logic" and argue it to be the primary factor shaping NGO publicity (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010). Cottle and Nolan (2007) argue that subservience to news norms of timeliness and newsworthiness lead NGOs to sensationalize their causes in ways that are meant to appeal to media outlets rather than discuss structural issues at the root of the ills addressed. Fenton (2010) and Waisbord (2011) argue that NGOs tend to adopt pragmatic approaches to media publicity. That is, while NGO professionals remain privately critical of news coverage, they prefer to cooperate with journalists out of fear that opposition will result in their exclusion from the public sphere. To varying degrees, each author understands entanglements with the news media as being potentially harmful to NGOs' normative underpinnings. As Cottle and Nolan put it: "To attract the media spotlight, they [NGOs] deploy communication strategies which practically detract from their principle remit . . . and symbolically fragment the historically founded ethic of universal humanitarianism" (pp. 863–864).

Each of these perspectives captures important aspects of the factors shaping NGO publicity. NGOs *do* want to raise awareness of neglected issues and locales, but this normative aim is constrained by various organizational considerations and news media interactions. The problem with the existing literature is that social factors (i.e., organizational needs, media logics) are conceptualized largely as *impeding* normative aims. That is, the need for visibility, recognition, and media attention is seen primarily as distracting from underlying NGO aims. Yet social factors *enable* as well as constrain. Understanding what factors enable some NGOs to pursue publicity strategies that correspond to their normative aims while others pursue publicity that stands in tension with them constitutes a key lacuna in the existing literature.

What's needed, therefore, is an analysis of what I will call the structural organization of NGO publicity—that is, the economic, political, and organizational determinants that shape different publicity strategies. Rather than asking how social factors impede NGO aims, this approach begins with a more basic question: How do different determinants *shape* divergent publicity strategies? In asking this question, I assume that NGOs create publicity for a variety of reasons—sometimes to raise awareness of events, other times to raise funds, and still other times to steer social change—and that the relevant question to ask is what factors enable different publicity strategies. This is a point acknowledged but not analyzed fully in the existing literature (e.g., Cottle & Nolan, 2007).

This perspective brings to the realm of NGOs a long-standing concern in the sociology of news production: the impact of structural organization on information production. Media scholars have long examined how various professional, economic, political, and organizational determinants shape different types of news content (Beam, 2003; Schudson, 2011). Scholars have been less quick to raise these questions with respect to NGOs, typically because the immediate question asked about them is whether or not the public sphere is open to their messaging. But given the diversity of roles NGOs play (Waisbord, 2011), the professionalization of the NGO sector (Lang, 2013), and the changing dynamics of the contemporary information environment (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011), such questions can shed important light on the factors driving divergent publicity strategies.

Asking about the factors shaping NGO publicity in this way also invites an alternative, though not necessarily competing, mode of understanding NGO-media relations. Scholarship that identifies a "media logic" at work in shaping NGO publicity importantly notes the ways that NGOs adapt their work to the norms and preferences of the news media. But the news media contain multiple logics, as Waisbord (2011) notes in his own work on NGOs, and these logics can be conceptualized in variable terms based on different patterns of ownership, labor conditions, media formats, and state-media relations. "If the journalism logic is broken down," he writes, "then the news media appear as a more heterogeneous institution than what conventional labels (e.g., 'the media') suggest" (p. 150). My argument is that precisely the same analytical move—one that stresses the variable structural factors shaping information production—must be made with respect to NGOs.

The implication of this perspective for NGO-media relations is as follows: NGOs not only adapt their work to media demands, but different types of NGO publicity *correspond* to the news needs of different types of media outlets. This is a point Schlesinger (1990) made years ago in his critique of the "media-centrism" of media production scholarship. According to Schlesinger, source organizations belong to their own fields of actions and the dynamics within these fields lead to differential publicity strategies. Scholars studying government and corporate sources have employed this perspective fruitfully (Davis, 2002; Reich, 2009). For example, Davis's (2002) study of the publicity strategies of financial firms explains how companies actively shun general news media coverage and instead target the financial press in an effort to gain competitive advantages over rivals. In detailing the structural organization of NGOs, I aim to bring a similar perspective to discerning the factors shaping divergent NGO publicity strategies.

Data and Methods

This article is based on interviews, participant observation, analysis of NGO documents, and content analysis. Between November 2010 and July 2013, I conducted 65 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with NGO professionals at leading Western humanitarian and human rights NGOs. Interviewees came from the following organizations: Amnesty International, CARE, Christian Aid, Concern, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, International Medical Corps, Médecins Sans Frontières, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children, and World Vision. As some of the largest and most respected Western humanitarian and human rights NGOs, these organizations provide a reasonably accurate point of entry through which to understand the informational roles played by NGOs (Barnett, 2011). Of course, research into other NGOs, both within and beyond the humanitarian and human rights sector, is needed to complement and extend the existing analysis.

Interviewees included a cross-section of professionals working in the NGO sector. To ensure a diverse range of viewpoints within any one organization, both research and public relations staff were included, as were junior and senior staff members. Whenever possible, interviews were preceded by my attendance at the organization's daily meeting, where the day's work agenda was discussed and set. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in person at organizational offices in New York; Washington, DC; London; or Brussels. Interviews not conducted in person were done by telephone or online via Skype. Respondents agreed to be identified only by organization and job title.

Initially, interview questions focused on ascertaining the range of information work performed by humanitarian and human rights NGOs. Through this process, it became clear that, although information work shared some broad features across all NGOs, significant differences existed as well. In subsequent interviews, interviewees were asked about these differences. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes, and the explanatory framework provided below is drawn from responses to these questions.

Given the emphasis several interviewees placed on the composition of funding in shaping publicity strategies, I supplement interview and participant observation data with publicly available information on NGO finances. For each NGO, the most recent financial reports (2012) were examined to discern the degree to which the organization relied upon different proportions of restricted and unrestricted funding (explained in detail below). These data provide rough indicators of the composition of NGO funds, thus complementing statements by NGO interviewees about the importance of funding composition for publicity strategies.

To explore whether different NGO publicity strategies related to differences in coverage, I conducted a simple content analysis to see which news outlets NGOs tend to appear in. Given the importance different NGOs placed on appearing in the prestige press versus general news media, I examined patterns of NGO citations in two representative news outlets: *The New York Times*, generally considered a leading prestige press news outlet, and the *NBC Nightly News*, generally deemed an outlet with a broader demograhic reach (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilholt, 2007). To ascertain the presence of each NGO in a respective news outlet, the organization's name was entered into a LexisNexis search. I began all searches in 1990—when many NGOs began to grow significantly (Moyn, 2010)—and repeated the procedure every five years up to and including 2010, totaling five collection periods (beginning January 1 of the year and ending December 31). Each story was read to ensure that the organization was in fact mentioned. Per-year totals were added together to create a single measure of media mentions per outlet.

Findings

Humanitarian and human rights NGOs conduct a range of information functions, spanning the domains of fund-raising, impartial reporting, and advocacy. NGO professionals report involvement in activities as diverse as conducting research for original reports, pitching news stories to media outlets, sharing on-the-ground contacts or analysis with foreign correspondents, sending e-mail updates to their supporters, writing blog posts for websites, and waging thematic online campaigns about issues of topical relevance. In their public communications, NGOs use these information functions to achieve various strategic purposes (raise public awareness, solicit donations, encourage public solidarity, demand political action, etc.).

Although the range and purposes of NGO information work are vast, not all NGOs share similar publicity strategies. Some understand public communication primarily as a route to influence policy makers. "We're not very mass media oriented," one communication director explained to me.

> We're more into hitting the elite media. [It's] much better to have an op-ed in the *Financial Times* than it is to have some lines in *The Sun* [UK daily]. That's where we're going to reach our targets, which are foreign policy makers. It's an elite group of people and we're very aware of that. (Interview with communication director, International Crisis Group, July 4, 2010)

Similarly, a professional at Human Rights Watch, which has a comparable publicity strategy, explained:

> We're not an organization focused on public education and we're not necessarily interested in reaching huge numbers of people. We do not waste a wit of time with *Good Morning America* because that's not what's going to move our audiences. We're *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, *FT* [*Financial Times*]—a handful [of outlets]. (Interview with deputy executive director, Human Rights Watch, November 29, 2010)

In contrast, professionals at other NGOs discussed a strong preference for reaching broader news audiences, often for fund-raising but sometimes for educational purposes. "Broad audiences are the holy grail," one professional answered when I asked him what type of audience his organization pursues. "We're just using everything we can to reach that broad audience" (Interview with communication officer, Christian Aid, July 11, 2011). Another claimed that, when it comes to publicity, the primary aim is fund-raising, and for that, "nothing beats the evening news" (Interview with media officer, World Vision-UK, July 15, 2011). Another oscillated between the relative merits of elite and general audience approaches, concluding:

> If I had a choice between the two, I would go for the more general media . . . perhaps not as detailed or as well crafted as it [the message] would be elsewhere, but bringing on an audience that is not following your issue. (Interview with press officer, Médecins Sans Frontières–UK, July 19, 2011)

These different publicity tendencies—one focused largely on using the prestige press to pursue policy makers, the other focused on attracting new audiences for fund-raising or educational purposes—are shaped primarily by four factors, each described in detail below: (1) the composition of an NGO's funding; (2) an NGO's relationship to the political field; (3) intraorganizational dynamics between research and marketing departments; and (4) the desired impacts of publicity work. The way each organization addresses these factors (i.e., how to fund itself, how it relates to governments, etc.) differs; consequently, the types of publicity they favor—and the degree to which they favor it—differ accordingly.

Table 1 provides a schematic overview of which factors lead NGOs to seek different types of publicity. NGOs with larger proportions of core funding, antagonistic relations toward governments, organizational dynamics that favor research, and an intended audience composed primarily of policy makers generally prefer publicity in the prestige press. In contrast, NGOs with larger proportions of project-funding, neutral relations toward governments, organizational dynamics that favor marketing, and potential donors as the intended audience exhibit a strong preference for publicity in the general news media, especially broadcast television. To be sure, internal gradations exist within each sphere, and the boundaries between the two are not precisely defined. The point here is to highlight a more general pattern in the factors shaping divergent publicity strategies. I describe below each of these factors and the divergent publicity tendencies they shape.

Table 1. Factors Shaping NGO Publicity, Elite Versus Mass Audience Orientations.

Factor	**Elite/niche publicity**	**Mass audience publicity**
Form of funding	Majority unrestricted	Majority restricted
Relationship to state	Antagonistic	Neutral
Organizational dynamics	Strong research	Strong marketing
Desired impacts	Policy change	Fund-raising, educational

Composition of Funding

Raising funds is basic to the existence and expansion of all NGOs, and this task requires the active solicitation of donations in varying scales from individuals, corporations, and governments (Gross Stein, 2008; Hopgood, 2006). Donations rely in part on public awareness of the NGO's brand; NGOs cultivate these brands assiduously, and none could exist without taking fund-raising considerations into account. However, the degree to which an NGO's public communications are shaped by fund-raising aims depends in part on the specific composition of an NGO's funds.

Funding in the NGO sector generally comes in two basic forms. Core funding (sometimes called unrestricted funding) is money given to the organization to use as it sees fit. A $100 dollar donation may be used for whatever purposes the organization deems necessary (e.g., research, advocacy, campaigns). In contrast, project-based funding (also known as restricted funding) is money donated to a specific program, activity, or country (e.g., women's health in Afghanistan, AIDS awareness in Kenya). All organizations seek and maintain both types of funding, though the proportion varies. Table 2 indicates the proportion of core to project funding at leading humanitarian and human rights NGOs. This variation matters. NGOs drawing a larger proportion of unrestricted funding generally report placing less emphasis on using publicity for fund-raising, leaving them with the time and resources necessary to pursue non-fund-raising-related publicity functions.

Table 2. Composition of Funding at Humanitarian and Human Rights NGOs, 2012.

	Unrestricted funds	**Restricted funds**	**Total public support**
Amnesty International[a]	74.1%	25.9%	$88 million
CARE	58.6%	41.4%	$546.2 million
Christian Aid	54.0%	46.0%	$152.7 million
Concern	21.9%	78.1%	$189.5 million
Human Rights Watch[b]	83.0%	17.0%	$73 million
Int'l Crisis Group	86.0%	14.0%	$22.9 million
Int'l Medical Corps	38.4%	61.6%	$106.8 million
Médecins Sans Frontières	79.0%	21.0%	$1.2 billion
Mercy Corps	69.8%	30.2%	$268.5 million
Oxfam[c]	55.2%	44.8%	$616 million
Save the Children[c]	51.6%	48.4%	$146.4 million
World Vision	26.9%	73.1%	$1.1 billion

Note. For organizations not based in the United States, financial figures were converted to U.S. dollars using Oanda Currency Converter at the organization's fiscal end of year budget date. Data are from 2012 annual reports and financial statements of NGOs.

[a] Amnesty International figures are for the International Secretariat.

[b] In 2011, financier and philanthropist George Soros pledged $100 million over 10 years to Human Rights Watch. Because the pledge comes in annual increments, the organization is legally required to count that

money as "temporarily restricted" even though the money is for general—that is, unrestricted—use. To more accurately portray funding proportions, the $20 million donated in 2011 and 2011 were moved from restricted to unrestricted funding.

[c] Oxfam and Save the Children funding information derived from their UK sections. These sections constitute both the historical origins of the organizations, and the largest contemporary branch in terms of members and funding.

When I asked at a staff member at Amnesty International's online news unit whether fund-raising aims motivated his work, he replied: "Our team doesn't do much with fund-raising. Amnesty's quite lucky in that regard. . . . So, financially, money isn't really a problem we're trying to address" (Interview with news unit officer, July 22, 2011). The communication director of International Crisis Group, whose overall budget is relatively small ($22.9 million in 2012) but of which 86% is comprised of core funding, made the point about core funding even more explicitly:

> We are in an absolutely envious position in that regard—it's great. We rely on a lot of small, little core donations so we don't just have to be seen. You know, I'm a policy pusher; I don't have to get the name out. We do a little bit of branding anyway, of our image generally, but we don't have to be seen for the sake of being seen. (Interview with communication director, International Crisis Group, July 4, 2011)

In contrast, for NGOs whose funding is composed with a greater proportion of project-based funding, it is crucial to maintain a public profile to elicit further donations. As one person from Save the Children put it:

> A lot of the fund-raising we do during big emergencies [earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.] comes from the media profile we get at those moments. So it's absolutely critical that we build that profile in those first few weeks, or first few days even. That's why we basically just push everything else aside. . . . Fund-raising in those moments keeps our programs funded for the next few years. (Interview with communication director, Save the Children–UK, July 14, 2011)

In organizations with a greater proportion of project funds, NGO professionals monitor the news agenda closely, looking for ways to build brand presence. The range of media they monitor is enormous—from audio-visual and print media to lifestyle publications and emergent online platforms—but respondents overwhelmingly note the enduring centrality of broadcast television due to the size of its audience (Interview with media officer, Oxfam International, February 18, 2011). Natural disasters, as noted above, are seen as especially important. Press officers rush to the scene alongside journalists, bringing "visibility items" with them—T-shirts, hats, and stickers affixed with the organization's logo—in an effort to draw public attention to their work (Interview with staff member, Mercy Corps, June 2, 2011). "It's a way you notify people that we're here. . . . I'm here, we're here, and we're doing work" (Interview with communication officer, International Medical Corps, April 27, 2011). A year that goes by without a "major disaster relief event," as World Vision explains in its year-end financial report, hurts the bottom line significantly.

NGO professionals are clear-eyed about the motivations behind such strategies. Those with core funding acknowledge that their organizations are not without fund-raising; rather, fund-raising occurs primarily outside the realm of media publicity. International Crisis Group, for example, holds an annual closed-door "Global Briefing" event that features prominent analysts. Tickets to the event cost more than US$1,000 per person. Human Rights Watch also hosts an annual fund-raising dinner. Conversely, communication professionals involved in fund-raising publicity express a desire to address other issues but "recognize this is what pays the bills" (Interview with media officer, Christian Aid, July 11, 2011).

NGOs' Relationships to the Political Field

The appropriate position of an NGO vis-à-vis the state is an enduring question in the humanitarian and human rights sector (e.g., Calhoun, 2010; Fassin, 2011; Kennedy, 2004). Some organizations aspire toward neutrality in political conflicts to ensure that everyone, regardless of political affiliation, receives humanitarian assistance and human rights protection. Others publicly target political actors responsible for human rights abuses. No one correct position to these questions exists, but where an organization locates itself in relation to the political field shapes its publicity work greatly.

For NGOs shading toward neutrality, a key feature of publicity work is sometimes an active orientation *against* seeking news coverage. "There is, I would say, fully 60% of the time [that] I turn down media inquiries and say I'm sorry because of security issues I can't talk about that" (Interview with communication officer, International Medical Corps, April 27, 2011).[3] Others explained that, as long as host governments do not interfere with on-the-ground operations, they have little incentive—and more than a little risk—in generating publicity. "Sometimes we will be very low profile because we're able to operate . . . [and] do what we need" (Interview with senior press officer, Médecins Sans Frontières, June 18, 2013).

In contrast, NGOs embracing a more antagonistic stance toward the state exhibit a greater desire to speak publicly against political actors. Human Rights Watch, for example, describes its reporting methodology as containing three basic elements: reporting facts on the ground, shaming human rights violators by publicizing those facts, and advocating political actors to enact changes based on those facts (Bogert, 2012; Roth, 2007). On this view, publicity is not separate from the group's work; rather, it is "baked into the methodology" (Interview with deputy executive director, Human Rights Watch, November 29, 2010). NGOs with this more antagonistic bent see publicity as a way to capture the attention of political elites who would otherwise ignore the research they do.

To be sure, neutral organizations will sometimes speak out against state actors. In such cases, NGOs see publicity as a way to get governments to change their position on an issue that impacts their work. Conversely, antagonistic organizations will sometimes opt against publicizing violations. "We may

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[3] Whether "neutrality" is really neutral is an enduring debate among NGO practitioners and the scholars who study them. Some argue that neutrality in fact supports the status quo (e.g., Kennedy, 2004). I do not argue the point here; rather, I simply point toward neutrality as a substantively different orientation among NGOs vis-à-vis more antagonistic positions.

be exploring back channel negotiations with a government, and during those moments we may not seek publicity, and sometimes [we'll] actively avoid it" (Interview with press officer, Amnesty International, June 19, 2013). But the general tendencies of neutrality and antagonism are well understood by professionals working in them. When I asked one person whether more news and public awareness of child malnourishment issues would be useful to his organization's work in a North African country, his reply was unequivocal: "Being all over *Time* magazine or *CNN* is not really going to be in the best interest of keeping up our operation and treating malnourished kids" (Interview with communication officer, Médecins Sans Frontières, February 18, 2011).

Organizational Dynamics

NGOs are comprised of various departments—research, policy, advocacy, media/communication, development, outreach, and so on—and NGO professionals discussed how organizational dynamics shape publicity work. Some report being part of organizations where policy and research departments play an important role in shaping publicity that is oriented toward elite or niche news outlets they imagine their peers (i.e., other NGO professionals and policy researchers) read. Others describe organizational dynamics that tend to privilege marketing, media/communication, and development departments. In the latter, publicity tends to focus on deciding whether media coverage will bolster institutional aims (e.g., raising funds, building brand awareness).

In organizations where the research staff holds greater sway, publicity professionals spend much of their day waiting for researchers to give them information on which to base their work. "The day is basically structured around getting your story approved through all the different elements of the institution," explained one person. "Usually, we decide we are going to do a story and we sit there until a researcher gives us information to base the story on" (Interview with press officer, Amnesty International, July 22, 2011). The publicity professional explained further how difficult it was to get research staff to care about reaching the general public.

> I was asking one researcher to make a call to a family of a person who had been unfairly imprisoned for a long time on spurious charges, and I asked her to help nail down the facts, which is obviously of primary importance. But they find the idea difficult to grasp sometimes of color or quotes or something that will catch the eye of the reader. And we say, "Can you ask them how they felt about it?" And they will respond: "Why should I ask them how they felt about it? Isn't it obvious how they felt? They felt bad!" And we'll say: "Can you get them to say it in their own words?" And sometimes I think they think that it is so trivial that it's not worth doing. But even if it seems trivial or cosmetic, if you can't sell the story to a shallow-minded reader who wants to identify with the person, then that information won't be read necessarily by the general public.

In organizations where marketing, media/communication, and development departments hold more influence, the way organizational dynamics shape publicity differs. I spent a morning with a policy researcher at one such organization (Interview with World Vision staffer, July 15, 2011), who suggested it was difficult to get the communication staff focused on issues not already in the media spotlight. These issues, the researcher explained, were no less important, and the organization had, he felt, an obligation to work just as hard getting coverage in areas outside the media spotlight as those directly in it. Later that day, I asked a person on the communication staff about it. His response was playful but unequivocal:

> Why should I beat my brains out for a story that is not going to get coverage just because there is some moral imperative to do so? I take a horrendously pragmatic view of these things. . . . At the moment we just need to make media impressions and the way to do that is to be in the middle of an emergency. (Interview with communication director, World Vision–UK, July 15, 2011)

Desired Audiences and Desired Impacts

When NGOs think about interacting with the news media, they think about what sorts of audiences they need to reach to satisfy their specific objectives. Different media outlets confer access to different audiences, and this fact leads NGOs to seek out outlets that align with their desired impacts. In general—and in keeping with the preceding three factors—NGOs seek two types of news media outlets. A first comprises general mass media, and the primary reason for NGO interest is fund-raising or education. Over the past several decades, NGOs have documented a consistent correlation between news coverage in the mass media, particularly broadcast outlets, and fund-raising (Interview with press officer, Oxfam, February 18, 2011; Interview with communication director, Save the Children, July 21, 2011).

For organizations whose primary aim is to impact policy makers, the prestige press is highly preferred. Newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde,* and others are seen as proxies for access to elite policy makers. Receiving publicity in them is seen as a key way to enact policy changes. "Our reports are about influencing the policy discussion," said one professional, explaining that her job was in part to "make sure that our policy prescriptions are part of the discussion—as things are unfolding, while it can still make a difference" (Interview with media officer, International Crisis Group, April 1, 2011). At the same time, NGO publicity efforts are shaped by consumer research that indicates what news outlets their donor base most commonly reads. For NGOs targeting the elite press, their publicity efforts tend to correspond to research showing their donors or members read such publications: "It does matter to us where we show up in the news; we want to get the most influential news organizations and those where we feel we are more likely to attract interest for members" (Interview with media officer, Amnesty International, December 14, 2011).

As shown in Table 3, NGO mentions in news outlets underscore the outcomes of differential news targeting across the NGO sector. The organizations that receive the most mentions in *The New York Times*—Human Rights Watch (599) and Amnesty International (485)—are also among the organizations that receive the fewest mentions on *NBC Nightly News*. Conversely, the NGOs receiving the most mentions on *NBC Nightly News*—Save the Children (76) and CARE (35)—garner some of the fewest media citations of all NGOs in *The New York Times*. Some NGOs like Oxfam and Médecins Sans Frontières occupy a middle position, garnering moderate media mentions both in *The New York Times* and on the *NBC Nightly News*. Finally, some NGOs receive few mentions at all, indicating the degree to which many NGOs fail to ever achieve media publicity.

Table 3. NGO Media Mentions by News Outlet, 1990–2010.

	The New York Times	***NBC Nightly News***
Amnesty International	485	11
CARE	14	35
Christian Aid	16	2
Concern	9	6
Human Rights Watch	599	15
International Crisis Group	89	3
International Medical Corps	20	2
Médecins Sans Frontières	284	21
Mercy Corps	36	12
Oxfam	132	16
Save the Children	76	51
World Vision	48	18

Increasingly, NGOs conduct a wide range of publicity work that extends beyond either of these two types of media outlets. Yet all respondents, regardless of which NGO they worked for, stressed the continued importance of appearing in the mainstream news media, in part due to the sizeable audience legacy news media confer. "Our website gets around 30,000 visitors a day," one person informed me. "It's respectable for an NGO, but it's miniscule compared to the traffic on mainstream media sites" (Interview with deputy executive director, Human Rights Watch, November 29, 2010). At the same time, news media can be used to conduct "acupunctural advocacy" that targets all the relevant news media consumed by a policy maker.

> We want her [the policy maker] to wake up and turn on NPR and hear about Human Rights Watch's report on waterboarding that guy in Libya, and then pick up the *Washington Post* and there it is again. And, oops, look it's in the *Financial Times*, too. We want it to be inescapable. We want to be sure to occupy all the information channels that flow into the brains of the people who can make a difference. (Bogert, 2012, video file)

This account, and others like it, stresses the "hybrid" (Chadwick, 2013) nature of NGO publicity—that is, not the absence of mainstream media for source organizations but complex interactions between them to achieve maximum publicity.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article began by asking what factors shape divergent NGO publicity strategies. Through interviews, participant observation, analysis of key NGO documents, and content analysis, four factors are shown to shape divergent publicity strategies: form of funding, relationship to state, organizational dynamics, and desired audiences and impacts. How NGOs address these factors vary, and their publicity strategies vary as a result. NGOs with larger proportions of core funding, antagonistic relations toward governments, organizational dynamics that favor research, and an intended audience composed primarily of policy makers prefer publicity in the prestige press. In contrast, NGOs with larger proportions of project funding, neutral relations toward governments, organizational dynamics that favor marketing, and potential donors as the intended audience exhibit a strong preference for publicity in the general news media, especially broadcast television.

This analysis builds upon and modifies existing scholarship in the areas of both journalism and civil society. Among journalism scholars, there is growing recognition of the need for analyses of the norms and practices shaping information production outside the newsroom (Jacobs & Townsley, 2011; Schudson, 2011; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011). In analyzing NGO publicity, I have attempted to expand the lens of journalism inquiry by asking questions familiar to scholars of news production—How do economic, political, and organizational determinants shape news content?—in the less familiar setting of humanitarian and human rights NGOs. In doing so, I have shown how structural factors enable different types of NGO publicity.

Among scholars of NGOs in particular and civil society more generally, there is a growing awareness of the centrality of media publicity to civic organizations (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Fenton, 2010; Lang, 2013; Waisbord, 2011). Yet in many accounts, the news media are typically treated in broad-brush terms (e.g., "the media"). By detailing the multiple factors shaping divergent publicity strategies, I show not only that NGO publicity strategies are diverse but that divergent publicity strategies correspond to—and are not mechanistically controlled by—diverse media logics. These diverse logics interact in complex ways across legacy and digital news formats (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2012; Chadwick, 2013; Karpf, 2012). I suggest that such complexity should not obscure a more basic point: that NGO publicity follows from the structural organization of the NGO sector and not simply the predilections of the news media.

To be sure, NGOs do not have total control over how their publicity messages will play out. This is especially true given a contemporary media environment where NGOs may find their messages picked up beyond targeted settings. The NGO Invisible Children's "Kony 2012" campaign provides a case in point. After the video went viral, the organization came under criticism on a variety of fronts: for lacking nuance and local context to focusing only on the beneficial role to be played by external saviors. Leaving aside the validity of the criticisms, their primary cause, I would suggest, is simply that the video reached beyond the audiences with whom the organization typically interacted—that is, college-age students on liberal arts campuses in the United States. As one of the film's directors said in response to criticisms: "Our films weren't made to be scrutinized by the *Guardian*" (Good, 2012).

This study examines the publicity practices of leading Western humanitarian and human rights NGOs. A more complete mapping of the humanitarian and human rights sector could examine the information roles played by the thousands of smaller NGOs around the world, and assess the degree to which the four factors identified here are important in shaping their publicity practices as well. Moving beyond the humanitarian and human rights sector, research could also examine NGOs clustered around different thematic foci—the environment, poverty, urban planning, and so forth—and examine their information roles in different national and transnational information environments. Finally, inclusion of web-only NGOs can refine the factors detailed here and assess the degree to which "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) permits NGOs to pursue new publicity strategies that bypass the news media altogether (see also Karpf, 2012).

Existing scholarship typically revolves around competing claims about the roles of NGOs in the public sphere. To optimists, NGOs provide important information about neglected parts of the world. To skeptics, NGO publicity is shaped more by organizational needs and media demands. This research shows how the capacity to fulfill normative aims may depend on specific structural features. On this view, organizational needs can be resolved in multiple ways, some of which may do more to achieve the stated aims so admired by optimists. Further research exploring the relationship between publicity strategies and publicity outcomes may continue to refine scholarly knowledge of the structural factors best suited to enabling NGOs to achieve their normative aims.

These findings bring to light important questions about not only the structural underpinnings of normative aims but *which* normative aims NGOs ought to fulfill. Should NGOs focus primarily on persuading elites to take specific actions? Or should they aim to educate the public, expand the media spotlight, and foster emergent forms of global citizenship? If the former, the findings present room for optimism. NGOs that align most closely with the prestige press constitute a modest expansion of the category of elite and allow for humanitarian and human rights information and perspectives to be articulated as legitimate concerns in discussions of international affairs. This is no small feat. NGOs have established themselves—in a relatively short period of time (Moyn, 2010)—as legitimate reference points toward which journalists can turn to "index" international news coverage to elite political opinion (Bennett, 1990).

Yet NGOs are often hailed for doing more than influencing elite decision-making. They are variously seen as connecting individuals and groups from different walks of life, encouraging solidarity across national boundaries, and creating the basis of a more cosmopolitan civic order (Cottle & Nolan, 2007; Silverstone, 2007; Zuckerman, 2013). On this view, the fact that political discussions are intended to be restricted to policy makers and that general media are often used for fund-raising suggests reasons for caution. In fact, NGOs oriented toward general audiences may do more to perpetuate "ironic spectatorship" (Chouliaraki, 2013) than foster global solidarity. Clearly, no single normative model provides all possible information functions (Benson, 2008; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). But bringing empirical research into conversation with the often-underexplored normative underpinnings of NGO publicity remains an important scholarly concern moving forward.

In sum, this article has shown the various factors shaping NGO publicity work. It has argued that divergent publicity strategies follow from the variable structural organization of the NGO sector. Further, different structural factors promote different publicity strategies, some of which may do more to fulfill the normative hopes latched upon by contemporary NGOs. The present study aims to offer both a snapshot of NGO publicity at a moment in time and a guidepost for scholars studying NGO publicity in the future.

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