

AN ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE THIRD WORLD IN BRITISH CHARITY ADVERTISEMENTS

Rhian Richards

School of Applied Communications, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

In the 1980s, providing aid to the Third World became highly fashionable. Triggered by the success of Live Aid, charities captured the imagination of the developed world. However, many critics claim that the enormity of this success was tarnished, as the use of piteous images and simplistic story lines supported patronising attitudes towards people in the Third World. This paper examines the extent that the discourses in charity advertisements have contributed to the formation of negative perceptions in British public opinion. The initial research question 'How do charity advertisements represent the Third World?' was analysed via a content analysis of 100 charity advertisements published in the British press. Positive or negative points were assigned to each advert by incorporating a variety of different theories such as semiotics, critical discourse analysis, stereotype analysis and an analysis of the practice of speaking for others. The content analysis also compared adverts from the periods prior to and following the introduction of guidelines on charity advertising practices by European NGOs in 1989. The findings suggested that whilst in the past the portrayal of the Third World was mainly negative in charity ads, the representation has improved since 1989. The final part of the research analysed British public opinion of the Third World via focus groups. The results indicated that, in spite of the improved content of advertisements, public perception of life in the Third World has not progressed. This calls into question not only the approach taken by charities but also the effectiveness of advertising as a medium. To counter-act these issues a new comprehensive strategy encompassing a variety of mediums may be necessary to publicise charitable appeals.

Stream: Public Communication

Part One: Introduction - The 'Victimisation' of the Third World

Prior to the late 1980s, charity advertising was chiefly unrestricted and tended to portray emotive images of helpless, starving children. Both charity organisations and the Western media tended to omit positive images of self-sufficiency or cultural prosperity. The resulting ignorance about the reality of life in the Third World¹ has encouraged many people in the West to believe that the Third World is totally

¹ For the purposes of this study, the definition of the developing or Third World relates to the economically underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America and is marked by a number of common traits; distorted and highly dependent economies devoted to producing primary products for the developed world and to provide markets for their finished goods; traditional, rural social structures; high population growth; and widespread poverty (www.thirdworldtraveler.com).

dependent on Western aid, thereby disregarding its large contribution (industrially and culturally) to life in the developed world. Charity advertisements² may support this perception by the inclusion of images or texts that promote the idea that countries are aid dependent. The aim of this paper is to examine the discourses that charity advertisements articulate about the Third World.

The significance of Live Aid

In 1984, Michael Buerk's report of a famine of 'biblical proportions' in Ethiopia generated a highly charged emotional response from the British public. This response was channelled into a pop concert entitled *Live Aid*. The significance of *Live Aid* was that it was 'unboring', raising the level of interest in the Third World to unheard of levels. However, *Live Aid* put no money into educating the British public about the Third World, it also showed only images of the starving (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.73). For NGOs, the public reaction to the famine was unparalleled and led to a mad scramble for donations and their share of the publicity. Within both charitable organisations and the media, many observers began to recognise that the visual impact of negative imagery was bypassing a thorough analysis of the situation to rely on a more simple narrative, one of dependency and blame. The African subjects of the campaigns had been objectified so that the British public could weave a message of self-congratulation about their generosity.

The introduction of guidelines

Concerns regarding the negative effects of *Live Aid* led to an UN investigation which was conducted in the UK by Gaag and Nash in 1988. The results of the study confirmed that negative images, published by both NGOs and the media, were persuading young people in Britain to believe that Africa was a doomed continent totally reliant on aid from the West. In response to this study, the General Assembly of European Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) adopted a *Code of Conduct on Images and Messages Relating to the Third World* in April 1989. At the same time many charities formed their own guidelines on the use of images and text in their literature.

The dilemma

Justice and equality should be at the forefront of NGO appeals, however, the effects of catastrophe, war and poverty are the very reasons for the existence of NGOs. It is unsurprising therefore that many NGOs have cashed in on images of disaster (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.64). With the introduction of guidelines in 1989, charities should have become more contemplative in their use of images and text. The aim of this study is to examine the content of charity advertisements and establish if this has occurred. Subsequently, using the results of this analysis, people's attitudes to the adverts were also explored. As the research paper has two parts, a two-prong approach was employed, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

A quantitative approach

The first part examined charity advertisements via a content analysis. The research question was: 'How do charity advertisements represent the Third World?' Each advertisement was examined for negative and positive points and these were counted.

² As the words 'advertisement', 'advert' and 'ad' have the same meaning, this study may refer to all

The results of the count were split into two groups, pre 1989 and post 1989, after the establishment of the *Code of Conduct* to establish: 'Do adverts in the post 1989 period portray developing countries more positively?'

A qualitative approach

The second part of the research involved focus group discussions. The intention was to affirm the assumption that Western audiences gather negative perceptions from charity advertisements and to confirm if opinions have changed (as a result of the positive advertisements) since the 1980s. A further exploratory question: 'How effective are adverts at appealing for donations?' was devised to explore if more sensitive portrayals hinder the effectiveness of appeals.

Part Two: The literature - 'Demonisation' and 'Disaster Pornography'

Many writers have warned of the effect on race relations if only inadequate, pitiable, unsuccessful people are featured in advertisements, reinforcing white readers' feelings of superiority (Whitaker, 1983: p.159).

O'Barr (1994) states that the discourse in contemporary advertising techniques has changed little since the colonial era when developing countries were portrayed as backward and socially inferior. Similarly, Watney argues that 'Africa has been effectively demonised, in a post-colonial discourse of perpetual catastrophe and *unnatural* disasters' (Watney, 1990: p.100). The injustice of such representations is highlighted in a study conducted by European NGOs:

For the majority of Europeans, the Third World is a supplier of raw materials (63%) and provides an outlet for European products (59%). However, one European in two believes our relations with the Third World are based on the Third World's need for aid from the rich countries (European NGOs, 1989).

Cohen identifies images of the Third World with pornography claiming 'it exposes something in human life that is as delicate and deeply personal as sexuality, that is, suffering' (Cohen, 2001: p.178). Further, Paddy Coulter, has stressed that little is ever said about what Third World governments or local organisations are doing to improve conditions in their own countries. The language is invariably of 'them' and 'us' – the apparently helpless them being helped by the neo-colonial us (Coulter, 1989: p.10).

There is a need for charity advertisements to educate the public about the causes of disasters and the reality of life in the Third World. However, such an initiative appears unlikely if raising money and not awareness remains the priority. Part of the problem is that many charities believe they have to choose between education or maximising their income (Whitaker, 1983: p.161).

A gap in the literature

Two studies were of particular relevance to this research. The *Images of Africa* report by Gaag and Nash researched the material of British NGOs (including advertisements) and preceded the introduction of the 1989 guidelines by European

the VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) organisation released the findings of a study entitled *The Live Aid Legacy*, which specifically researched British public perception of the Third World. This study follows on from Gaag and Nash's study by examining whether a change has occurred in the content of ads as a direct result of the guidelines introduced in 1989. Further, it compares the effect of the change in charity advertising policy-making on public opinion.

Part Three: The content analysis methodology and concepts

The advert as communication tool

Adverts are intended to shape our experience of reality through the creation of structures of meaning. Advertisers ask us to participate in ideological ways of seeing ourselves and the world (Bignell, 1997: p.33). Charity adverts are therefore a representation of reality as the charities select what to include in the ad and set the terms of what will be significant. I chose to study newspaper advertisements as they are a self-contained snap shot of a supposed reality and are more conducive to content analysis than a TV or internet ad, which may be composed of several sequences of words and images.

The selection of a sample

One hundred advertisements from Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid and UNICEF were analysed. These charities were selected to facilitate the acquisition of the sample as, due to the size and age of the organisations, a large enough sample from the pre and post 1989 era could be found. All of the charities have guidelines of some sort relating to the use of images in their materials. The adverts were selected via a random search through the British press from the 1950s to 2003.

For this study the 100 charity advertisements were selected on the basis that they feature an image of the recipient(s) of aid. The images widen the scope of the content analysis and provide consistency between the type of advert analysed. Some of the adverts featured a lot of text which provided a context for the appeal, others contained only images. Many of the images used unidentified starving children or emaciated bodies.

The system of enumeration

The presence or absence of signs within the image/text of an advert allows the allocation of negative/positive points on a point scale. Zero points were awarded if the response was not clear. The points for each advert were tallied and a comparison drawn between the period pre and post 1989. To check the coding reliability, I reviewed the results of twenty advertisements against the original material. There were no errors. Additionally, I acquired the assistance of a friend to check the results of another twenty advertisements, selected at random. After a discussion, three questions were changed from a positive reading to an unsure or zero rating.

The coding system is drawn in part from examples provided by Ole Holsti in *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities* (1969) and Philip Bell's article 'Content analysis of visual images' (2001). However, the adaptation of the study is my own. Refer to table 1 below for a full list of content analysis questions and an example of the score methodology.

Table 1: Content Analysis Methodology		Connotation/Implications		Score e.g		
		IF YES		Y	N	U
1)	Is the person/(people) depicted as the recipient(s) of aid the sole occupier of the text/image?	All people in the third world are isolated and unsupported by their communities		X		-1
2)	Is the image of a lone mother and child?	Isolation and abandonment of the weak by their own community			X	0
3)	Do we know where the person/(people) depicted as the recipient(s) of aid lives?	Educates and promotes understanding of the lives of people in developing countries			X	-1
4)	Does the person/(people) depicted appear to be part of a living cultural heritage? (e.g. is their country's history, culture or economic life mentioned/depicted?)	The realities and complexities of the countries of the Third world are explained in their historical context			X	-1
5)	Are the lifestyle(s) of the recipient(s) of aid represented in a manner which conveys the value and meaning of the person's existence?	The realities and complexities of the countries of the Third world are explained in their historical context			X	-1
6)	Is the cause of the problem/poverty articulated?	Explains the obstacles posed to development			X	-1
7)	Are other agents/participants (e.g. Government) held accountable for causing the problem/poverty?	Explains the obstacles posed to development			X	-1
8)	Are the NGOs domestic/native partners eg. Local church networks, local health organisations or local aid workers mentioned/pictured?	Conveys the idea that charities are working with people who are actively striving to improve their lives			X	-1
9)	Does the advert suggest giving more than money? (e.g. political support?)	Causes of the problems become more apparent			X	-1
10)	Does the advert congratulate the Western world, the charity or the donor for their support? (e.g. "thanks to our help, many have been saved")	Fosters a sense of Western races' superiority			X	1
11)	Does the advert suggest that the donor can rescue a child e.g. by fostering or by feeding a particular child?	The only hope for all Third World children is a kind Westerner who will provide financial rescue		X		-1
12)	Is there an evangelical tone to the narrative?	Colonial discourse: suggests a civilizing mission bringing Christianity to the natives: foster a sense of Western superiority			X	0
13)	Does the person/(people) depicted appear to be actively involved in his/her own survival? (e.g. depicted as working)	Indicates the efforts being made by people in the countries themselves			X	-1
14)	Does the person/(people) depicted appear to be totally dependent on foreign aid to survive? (e.g. depicted sitting passively or begging)	Implies that the subject is dependent and a victim, which may fuel blame and prejudice		X		-1
15)	Does the viewer look down on the person/(people) depicted?	Photo shots which look down on subject makes them look dependent and vulnerable			X	1
16)	Does the person/(people) depicted have eye contact with the photographer?	Implies an equality between subject and viewer and a respect for people as individuals			X	-1
17)	Does the headline stand alone (ie no text or narrative)?	Indicates a tokenism/exploitation of symbolic value which may fuel prejudice			X	-1

18)	Is the headline sensationalised? Eg. Does it contain metaphors, euphemisms, rhyme or slang?	Indicates a tokenism/exploitation of symbolic value which may fuel prejudice	X	-1
19)	Is the text of sufficient length to enable a clear narrative? (e.g. more than one paragraph stating the charity contact details)	The realities and complexities of the countries of the Third world are explained in their historical context	X	1
20)	Does the text contradict or seem incompatible with the visual message? (e.g. a picture of a hungry child is accompanied with a seemingly unrelated text?)	Encourages misinterpretation by viewer, devalues the text or image	X	1
21)	Is the person/(people) depicted's story told?	Educates and promotes understanding of the lives of people in developing countries	X	-1
22)	Is the story told by using the person/(people) depicted's own words?	Implies an equality between subject and viewer and a respect for people as individuals	X	-1
23)	Does the narrative suggest that the person/(people) depicted have endeavoured to provide for themselves as opposed to merely receiving aid?	Indicates the efforts being made by people in the countries themselves	X	-1
24)	Are long-term solutions to the problem/poverty suggested? (e.g. education, farming equipment, political intervention against war or trade embargoes)	Indicates that progress can be made	X	-1
25)	Is a timeframe for relief work provided?	Indicates that progress can be made	X	-1
26)	Does the image provide a clear indication of who the subject is? (ie are features clear)	Implies an equality between subject and viewer and a respect for people as individuals	X	-1
27)	Is the purpose of the image purely to generate pity or shock? (e.g. a photograph of an emaciated or dead child)	Implies that the subject is dependent and a victim, which may fuel blame and prejudice	X	1
28)	If a white person is pictured, does the image perpetuate a stereotype: the active white person versus the passive black person?	Creates a stereotype and fosters a sense of Western races' superiority	X	0
29)	Is the image greater than 50% of the advertising space? (Image to text ratio greater than 50%?)	Greater emphasis on the image than the narrative, images tend to be more emotive and less educational than text	X	1
30)	Does the person/(people) depicted appear unaware that the photo is being taken?	Disregards human rights, implies non-human characteristics	X	0
TOTAL				-12

The construction of questions

The formation of questions was influenced by a variety of different theories/concepts regarding the portrayal of images and texts in the media, including semiotics, an examination of narrative code, critical discourse analysis, stereotype analysis and the practice of speaking on behalf of others.

Semiotics: how to read the signs?

Analysing adverts involves separating them from the world in which their signs and meanings pass unnoticed as natural phenomena. Roland Barthes believed that the key concept within semiotics is the layering of meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2001: p.94) and that the significance of signs is two-fold. Firstly, a sign's signifier (surface meaning) denotes what is being depicted, for example a visual depiction of a person. But the connotation (or signified) is the idea or value being expressed or realised through the representation. Therefore, in this content analysis, the signifier of a person pictured alone may generate the signified, the assumption that all people in the Third World are neglected and lonely – refer question one.

Signs may be manipulated, for example, photographs may be edited or selected for particular appeal. Camera shots which look down on the subject can make the viewer feel powerful, the subject seem abjectly weak and powerless – refer question fifteen. Whereas, if the subject looks directly at the camera, our position as voyeurs is ruptured – refer question sixteen. This opens up a fuller concept of the subject's position; who are we in relation to the subject? Who looks at what (Lister & Wells, 2001: p.83)?

The importance of a narrative code

In *Mythologies* Barthes (1972) explains that society consists of a system of myths or stories which serve to clarify a confusing world. During analysis, I inspected the 'social mythology' of charity ads to check if they reinforced a Western sense of superiority, making an inequitable society seem natural and self-evident, denying the recipients of aid any self-determination. Do ads propagate the myth that all people in the Third World rely on aid? – refer question fourteen. Question eight was included to check if the numerous partnerships with local organisations were mentioned in the adverts, as this may counter the notion that the West is somehow superior.

Additionally, the study was designed to examine if the narrative code in which poverty is represented ignores the role of capitalism, imperialism and other agencies in bringing about a situation whereby Third World economies are crippled by long-term debt repayments or fertile soil is used to grow cash crops for export, ensuring a continued dependency on short term emergency aid (Lister & Wells, 2001: p.79) – refer question seven. Imperialist discourse often views race hierarchies as a natural progression, a result of evolution and the laws of nature (Watney, 1990: p.95). While advertisements do not suggest this, they also often do not give causes of the poverty, thus appearing to confirm the racist theory – refer question six.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Like the semioticians, Michael Foucault, the French philosopher, examined the construct of texts, however he was concerned not just with the production of meaning but also with where meaning originates (Hall, 2001: p.73). In the case of charity ads, the producer of an ad in the developed world will find it difficult to separate themselves from the discourse learnt from their own culture and will express this discourse via ideological content in the text. In this thesis, for example, we will examine if a Christian evangelical discourse is present in the adverts - refer question twelve.

Stereotype analysis

When focussing on a stereotype, we must look at it in its comparative context. For example, question 28 is designed to explore if the inclusion of white or Western people in an advertisement produces a comparatively negative stereotype of the recipient of aid, because white people are depicted as actively assisting, whereas the recipient is passively receiving. The representation of people as passive could be dehumanising as it shows a lack of independent will (Sykes, 1985: p.88).

Voice and the analysis of speaking for others

If a charity ad has no voice, i.e. does not tell the story of the person depicted, then the person's identity may be completely ignored by the viewer - refer questions seventeen, twenty-one and twenty-two. Often adverts feature Westerners speaking on behalf of a person in the Third World, sometimes the subject and their communities remain totally silent. Alcoff states that the discursive context is a political arena, therefore those whom speak for others already have political power. She questions whether the practice of speaking for others is ever valid and what are the criteria for validity (Alcoff, 1991: p.7)?

The limitations of the content analysis

This content analysis has many limitations. For example, semiology cannot be exact, as all signs are polysemic or open to a range of different interpretations (Bignell, 1997: p.106). Also, the allocation of positive/negative points to each image/text is based on opinion, albeit an opinion informed by methods suggested by several researchers in this area. Plus, I am unable to generalise from my sample to all Western charities that donate to the Third World as other charities may have totally different objectives from those whose adverts were chosen for this study.

Part Four: The content analysis results

By means of the content analysis of the adverts, I hoped to discover a generally positive vision of development in the Third World, particularly within the post 1989 selection of advertisements. A vision that would include an explanation of the partnership with local aid agencies, a just portrayal of aid beneficiaries, and a balanced and thorough discussion of the cause of any problems.

Counting the evidence

The first part of the research involved the examination of 100 advertisements and questioned: 'How do charity advertisements represent the Third World?' Each advertisement was examined for negative and positive points and these were counted. The results of the count are summarised in table 2.

Table 2	Oxfam	Christian Aid	SCF	UNICEF	Total score:
Total score ads pre-1989:	-118	-81	-93	-21	-313
Total score ads post 1989:	40	110	-2	-8	140
Total score for ads:	-78	29	-95	-29	-173

The number of adverts analysed for each charity is summarised in table 3.

Table 3	Oxfam	Christian Aid	SCF	UNICEF	Total score:
Number of ads pre-1989:	19	14	11	6	50
Number of ads post 1989:	17	21	7	5	50
Total number of ads	36	35	18	11	100

There is a strong correlation between the age of the advertisements and the charities' total positive or negative score. For example, Christian Aid, a total of positive 29 points, gained the most positive score. However, the charity also had the greatest number of adverts evaluated from the period post 1989, 21 as opposed to just 14 ads before 1989. Whereas, for the worst score, Save the Children Fund's negative 95 points, just seven ads were evaluated in the post 1989 period compared with 11 adverts prior to this time.

A total negative score of 173 points was awarded to the adverts analysed, implying that the majority of advertisements negatively represent the Third World.

A summary of the content analysis findings

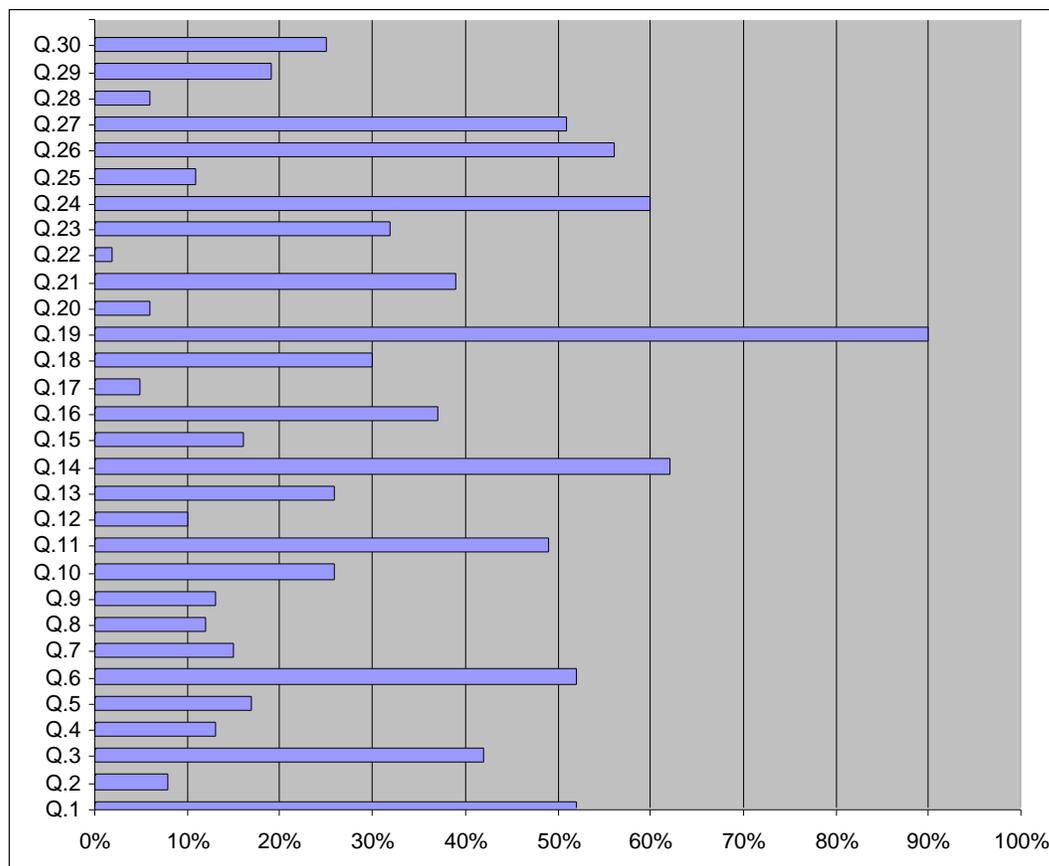


Figure 1: Total Percentage of 'Yes' Responses – for questions refer to table 1

In 1988, the study 'Images of Africa' concluded:

All the photographs showed Africans as passive, if not starving. 63% were of pitiful, emaciated people. 70% of the people being photographed seemed unaware that their picture was being taken (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.48).

In comparison, this study (refer to figure 1) demonstrates a marginal improvement in the content of advertisements; images of pitiful or emaciated people comprised 51% of the ads and just 25% appear unaware that their picture is being taken.

However, over half of the ads did not stipulate the cause of the poverty and only 15% highlighted the agents responsible for the problem. If aid agencies refuse to tell a political story they risk falling back on a narrative of simple victimhood, empty of context and meaning. 'Empathy without understanding can fritter away when the next victim appears' (Ignatieff, 1998: p.295). Of particular concern is that disparities between the First and Third World may be attributed to misfortune alone as none of the ads refer to the colonial policies of European nations and only two ads refer to interest payable on Third World debt.

The charities' local partnerships and the aid recipients' struggle to survive are extremely under-represented in the advertisements. Just 42% of ads identify where the person lives. The diverse cultures and meaning of existence in the Third World are also poorly explained as are the personal stories and narratives of the people depicted.

On a more positive note, more than half of the ads named long-term solutions to crises. Also, photographic techniques and the setting or frame of the adverts appear to be more sensitively designed, although half of the ads still contained images intended purely to induce pity.

From this analysis, it would appear that overall; charity advertisements generate a negative representation of the Third World. However, the outcome is better than that of the study conducted by Oxfam in 1988, indicating that the adverts in recent years have buoyed the results. A further analysis, comparing the adverts in the period post 1989 may support this hypothesis.

A comparison of advertisements in the pre and post 1989 era

The results of the adverts published post 1989 group were counted to establish: 'Have the adverts changed since 1989 to portray life in developing countries more positively?' (Refer to table 2). The overall score for the adverts in the period is positive 140 points, in contrast to the negative 313 points scored by adverts in the pre-1989 period. Hence the answer to the research question appears to be yes, British charity adverts have portrayed life in the Third World more positively since 1989.

To verify the accuracy of this claim, the breakdown of the results (refer figure 2) can be compared to the clauses within the European NGO *Code of Conduct*.

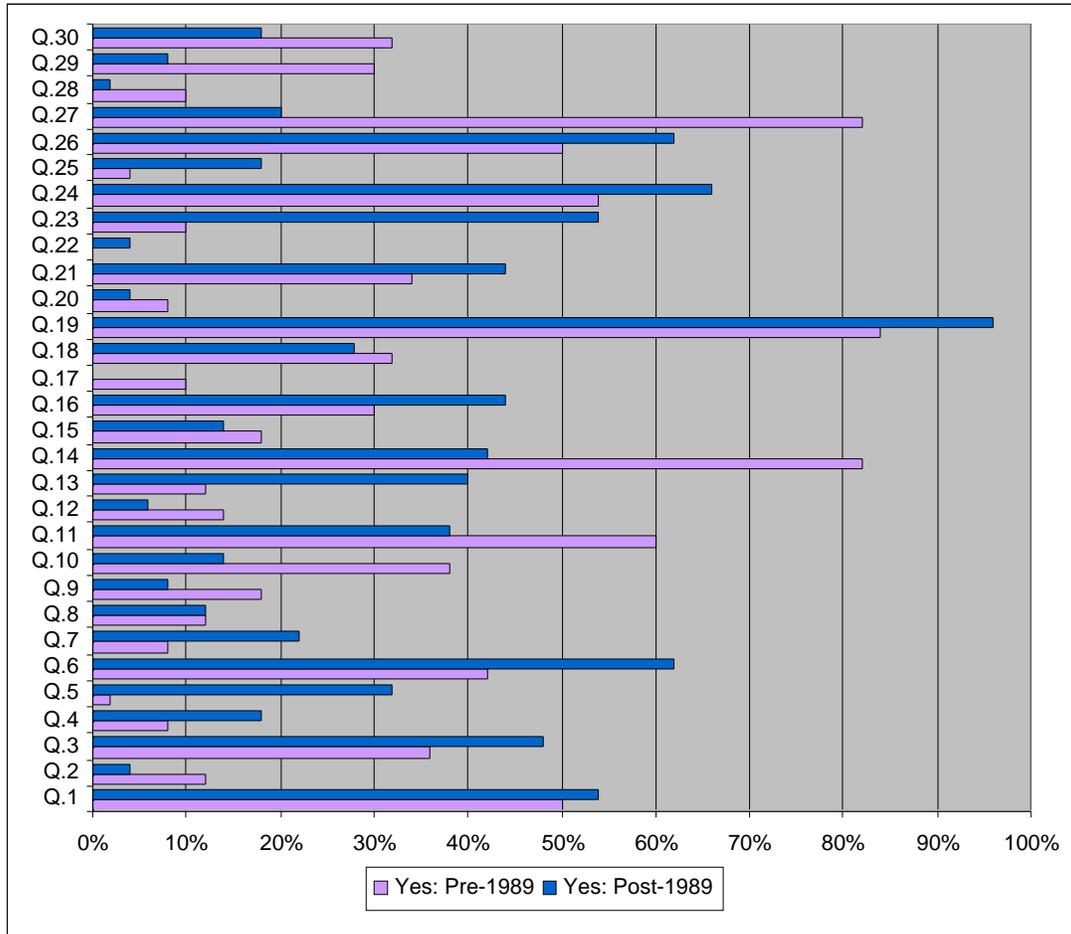


Figure 2: Total Percentage of 'Yes' Responses from Pre-1989 and Post 1989 – refer to table 1 for questions

1. *The causes of the poverty must be apparent (political, structural or natural)*

The cause of the problem is articulated in 62% of adverts in the post 1989 period compared to 42% in the prior period. However, the agents responsible for causing the problems were only included in 22% of the adverts published in the post period.

2. *Avoid apocalyptic or catastrophic images, which may fuel prejudice*

Twenty percent of the adverts examined from the post 1989 contained pitiful or shocking images. This compares extremely favourably with the prior period when 82% of the images were negative. The trend away from using emaciated children in appeals is quite marked and may be seen as an adverse reaction to the insensitivity employed in image-making during the 1970s and 1980s.

3. *Subjects must be presented as human beings, giving them a cultural identity and dignity*

There is an improvement in the identification of subjects in the period post 1989. The national identity of the subjects is provided in 48% of the ads post 1989, compared to 36% prior although the cultural representation of the subjects remains poor at just 18% of the ads. The representation of the meaning of people's lifestyles rose to 32%, from a very low 2% in the prior period.

The provision of dignity incorporates the visual representation of people in ads. The subject appears aware that their photo is being taken in 82% of the ads post 1989. Additionally, the person has eye contact with the photographer in 44% of the ads post 1989, up from 30% in the period prior.

4. *Accounts should be given by the people themselves and not interpreted by a third party*

The story of the people depicted in the ads is told in 44% of the ads in the post 1989 era, compared to 34% in the period prior. The narration of the ad in the subject's own words occurs in just 2 of the adverts overall, both of which were in the post 1989 period.

5. *Avoid discrimination or messages which foster a sense of Northern superiority*

Of the adverts in the post 1989 period, 14% congratulate the West for their support of the Third World compared to 38% in the previous period. Whereas 38% suggest that the donor can rescue a particular recipient of aid compared to 60% in the period prior.

6. *People's ability to take responsibility for themselves must be highlighted*

Messages highlighting self-sufficiency appear far more frequently in the post 1989 selection of ads. However, the percentage of ads which depict partnerships with local organisations in the pre and post 1989 periods remained the same at 12%.

Summary: Advertisements from the period prior to and post 1989

Generally, the ads in the period post 1989 are more equitable in their portrayal of people in the developing world. For example, there are far fewer adverts which focus on congratulating the West for 'rescuing' the Third World and there are a substantially higher amount of adverts which emphasise the ability of people in the Third World to help themselves. However, the relationship with local partnerships remains understated. The representation of people's lifestyles has increased but could be further improved.

Part Five: Focus groups

A number of points drawn from the results of the content analysis required further investigation in focus groups. The sample comprised three homogeneous groups of people from each of the following categories: Charity volunteers, pensioners and university students. The sampling technique was purposive as each group was chosen specifically because of its social structure. The charity volunteers due to their familiarity with the industry, may have 'specialist knowledge or concerns relevant to the subject under investigation' (Hansen et al., 1996: p.266). The university students and the pensioners were chosen to provide contrasting results, due to the difference in age, their experience of communication trends and belief-systems should differ remarkably. The gender of the groups was mixed. In spite of the differences in age between the groups, it is important to note that all live in the same geographic area and come from the same cultural and socio-economic background, white working class.

A limitation of this particular study's focus groups is that only three sessions were actually conducted. However, the significance of this is lessened by the fact that the groups were principally designed to investigate the relevance of the content analysis results in an exploratory capacity.

What were group attitudes toward people in the Third World's lifestyles and cultural identities?

The most immediate impressions strongly associated the developing world with images of disaster, extreme poverty and basic living conditions – lack of food, dirt, violence, disease, dependence on good weather and harvest. However, the group of university students hinted that they recognised the value of existence in the Third World.

Student: We'd like to know a bit more about his daily life, where's his family, where he lives, you don't have any of that information.

Do the participants recognise that the subject's story may not be told?

Some participants criticized an advert, which contained an image of a starving child but no text.

Chapel member: Is he/she a native of Africa? The picture shows one person only, not a family, why? Is it used to produce pity?

However, in general, the advert was viewed as being a fair representation as the participants believed it reflected the reality of living in the Third World.

What were the causes of problems in the developing world?

Although the pensioners were oblivious of the West's role in the generation of problems in the Third World, the chapel group indicated they are aware of the role of the Western world in the cause of poverty.

Chapel member: Unfair trading. We sell a lot of arms world-wide. We exploit them. The debt, interest rates have been fixed, it's unfair.

The university students were equally damning of the West's role.

Student: Exploitation, that's the relationship they have with us.

However, a few responses also indicated that the victims were to blame for their predicament. Middleton suggests 'Prejudice, sometimes barely if at all conscious, suggests 'fecklessness' as part of the problem – the poor must in some way be complicit in their own misfortunes' (Middleton, 1998: p.9).

Chapel member: I don't mind them having children but they produce children that can't be fed.

Do the participants think that people in the Third World are totally dependent on aid from the developed world and, if so, where do they get this impression from?

Most of the participants took it for granted that our discussion related to people in the Third World who are dependent on aid and accepted the ads as straightforward depictions of what was actually happening in the Third World.

Pensioner: The ad is fair, because it happens often and because the camera doesn't lie

However, the university students expressed some concern about the truthfulness of the advertisements and mentioned the significance of the supply of food coming to the UK from the Third World. Most participants agreed that television and the news media were their main sources of information about the Third World, reinforcing Gaag and Nash's conclusion that the media ultimately form public perceptions of the Third World (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.18). Less emphasis was placed on receiving information from charities

Do the participants understand the extent that charities rely upon their relationships with local organisations?

Gaag and Nash found in 1988 that: 'Political analysis was rarely seen in terms of African/Western alliances.' (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.40). This is apparently the view today as only one person, a university student, identified the contribution of local organisations.

'How effective are adverts at appealing for donations?'

Many of the focus group participants complained of compassion fatigue.

Pensioner: Whenever there's a famine in Africa, that's the image they portray. It makes me feel horrified; I have to look away. The danger is that sometimes when we cannot bear to look we switch off.

The change in advertising practices since 1989 has had little effect on public consciousness, querying the relevance of charity advertising as a medium of communication. Most members of the focus groups overwhelmingly expressed their distaste for and rejection of recent advertising practices such as junk mail appeals.

The distinctions between focus groups

It appears that the older the focus group participants, the more unquestioning and confident they were about their attitudes towards the Third World. For example, the pensioners were the most confident about the way the Third World is represented by charities. The majority of the chapel members felt similarly that the representation of the Third World in charity advertisements was fair and balanced. Whereas the university students questioned not only their own views but those presented by charities and the news media. They particularly questioned the hypocrisy of the portrayal of the Third World by the West.

Student: You don't know if the picture is set up. Obviously they'll depict the child as being the most vulnerable, starving, it's to get people's attention isn't it? But, no it's not fair as it may not be a true portrayal of his life, they don't just sit around feeling sorry for themselves all day, He probably doesn't want to be seen as this poor helpless child who's starving to death.

I believe that the age difference between those participants over 45 compared to those in their early twenties is significant to their reaction to advertisements in two ways. Firstly, the older participants would have been exposed to adverts in the 1970s and 1980s which contained mainly negative and pathetic images. Whereas university students would mainly have been exposed to adverts in the post 1989 era only, suggesting that the more positive style of adverts influenced their views.

The second reason may be more important, as it relates to changes in educational focus. The university students, by definition, are likely to have received a greater *level* of education than the other groups. However, the most significant factor is the *type* of education received. As many charities and schools have aimed to encourage students to question the one-dimensional view of the Third World since the late 1980s, the students questioned for this study will have benefited from this educational style. Therefore, education may have played a significant part in breaking down the stereotypical view of the Third World. This is strongly suggested by the results of this study.

Conclusion of focus groups findings

The results of the focus groups suggest that the use of more balanced and equitable images in charity advertising has had little effect on the British public perception of the Third World. For most of the focus group participants it was impossible to think of the developing world as anything other than one which desperately needs help. The pensioners and the chapel members were particularly unquestioning of the validity of this assumption. VSO explains that the danger of stereotyping all Third World people in this way lies in the implication that the West are superior and powerful givers; they are grateful receivers. 'There is no recognition that we in Britain may have something to gain from the relationship' (VSO, 2002). The role of the giver is thus seen as a choice between which cause is the most deserving and not an evaluation of politics, economics and the exploitation of the developing world.

Part Seven: Conclusions, the path ahead for charities

This research study has indicated that the improved content of charity advertisements, has had little impact on British people's perception of the Third World. In light of this predicament, this conclusion will explore the challenge for charities to sustain socially and politically correct yet effective campaigns through the examination of two further questions.

i) What is charity?

Why do people in the Western world donate? Most of the focus group participants wished to know how their donations had 'helped' indicating a desire for self-gratification. Pity was identified by the focus groups as a further motive for donating to charity. The problem with using pity as an appeal is that it presents the Third World as a problem which may be solved, leading to a negative perception in public opinion. Thus it appears that if charities are to market their advertisements they must appeal to an emotional public, seeking piteous images and self-righteousness. The problem for aid agencies is that, whilst they are selling development relief in the same way as any other product is sold, they should also be working for a more equal world. The error lies in the assumption that charity advertising is a purely marketing enterprise. By concentrating on raising funds, it may be easy to ignore the promotion of social justice and equality.

ii) What is the validity of the charity advert?

The findings of this research suggest that the medium of advertising alone is not sufficient for charities to progress in their aim of informing and appealing to the British public today. An alternative involves charities adopting a comprehensive strategy encompassing a variety of mediums. This strategy is discussed below.

Comprehensive communication strategies

1. Change the approach of advertisements

To gain public interest and combat 'compassion fatigue', the public's complacency should be attacked. A new approach to charity advertisements may reverse the irrelevance of this form of campaigning. In *Progress and Poverty*, Robin Richardson suggests that advertisements should provide the following information (Richardson in Whitaker, 1983: p.160):

- The West can learn from the developing countries
- The West doesn't have all the answers
- There are reasons for poverty; it's not just bad luck
- Tackle the causes, not just the symptoms
- Economic and political changes are needed, not just charity and aid.

2. Increase public education

In 1988, Gaag and Nash determined that public education was at the fringes of most NGO work. However, today it is the stated aim of many organisations to dramatically improve education and involve young people in an active process of learning which will teach them about issues which involve the UK as much as the 'Third World' (Gaag & Nash, 1988: p.66). For example, Oxfam views the development of public opinion in the UK as being as important as the payment of grants to their projects.

The university students responses suggested that education had enabled them to identify and challenge the underlying assumptions in their views about the Third World. Currently, a vast selection of educational resources is available from a number of charities, however many teachers may not be aware of the variety of information on offer. Charities could mention their educational resources in their advertisements thus encouraging people to apply for this information.

3. Develop a partnership with the news media

The news media has had an immense influence on public perception by providing a chiefly singular story of disaster in the Third World. However, the news media is an important ally to aid agencies, as it is often responsible for freely publicising the events that fuel their appeals. There is a need for charities to conscientiously object to inferior and incomplete media reports. Further, charities must avoid mimicking the media's narrative style and educate people to understand a more complex view of the Third World. Charities must be imaginative in their provision of information to the media and demand and create a genuine interest in the depiction of a more balanced reality of life in the Third World.

4. Aim for self-sufficiency

Charities could explain the two-way relationship between the developed and developing world in their advertisements, emphasising to the Western public that

they're part of the problem by not paying enough for goods. Oxfam's campaign for 'Fair Trade' is an excellent example of how charities have remodelled their appeals. Oxfam's 'Ethical Purchasing Policy' states that Oxfam will strive to purchase goods and services which are produced and delivered under conditions that do not involve the abuse of any persons and pay fair wages (www.oxfam.org.uk). This will ensure that local workers are able to build up local businesses which may provide protection from exploitation.

There are however, some limitations to this approach. Some observers have claimed that appeals such as those for 'Fair Trade' cannot take account of the devastating effects of despotic governments and civil wars. There is a need therefore, for a combined approach to the distribution of aid, which will fight for fairer trading rights, promote development and provide some emergency relief.

Recommendations for further research

This research has provided insights on the representation of the Third World by charities and their influence of British public opinion. However, given the limitations of the research there is scope to replicate parts of the study. For example, the number of advertisements examined by content analysis may be increased to include ads from different mediums, charities or countries. Also, the number of focus groups may be increased to incorporate different socio-economic or cultural groups.

Many of the suggestions for alternative campaigns mentioned above, such as appeals for 'Fair Trade', have already been initiated by charitable organisations. Future research may need to address how effective these efforts have been on public understanding of the true role of the West in the Third World.

Final Conclusions

The plausible alternatives to rethinking charity campaigns maybe to solely provide more positive versions of the third world in charity ads, but this method has already been tried and shown to fail. Advertising is only one means of communicating the message about the Third World. The adoption of a comprehensive approach to publicising appeals may be the only way forward for charities.

The task is to remind people that we live in one world, to generate a continuing commitment that is not bought off by a donation to a disaster fund (Harold Sumption, adviser to Oxfam and Action Aid, in Whitaker, 1983: p.200).

References

- Alcoff, L. (1991). The Problem of Speaking for Others. *Cultural Critique*, (20), 5-32.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Becker, H. (1988). Image, Ethics and Organizations. In Gross, L. et al (Eds.), *Image Ethics; The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film and Television* (pp. iii-xvii). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, P. (2001). Content Analysis of Visual Images. In Van Leeuwen, T. and Jewitt, C. (Eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, (pp.10-34). London: Sage Publications Ltd
- Benthall, J. (1993). *Disasters, Relief and the Media*. London: IB Tauris.
- Bignell, J. (1997). *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Buerk, M. (1989). Images of Crisis in Africa. In Vandello, T. (Ed), *Global Partnership in Development, The Challenge for Australia* (pp.149-156). Melbourne: World Vision.
- Cohen, S. (2001). *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cook, G. (1992). *The Discourse of Advertising*. London: Routledge.
- Coulter P. (1989). Pretty as a Picture. *The New Internationalist*, (194), 10-12.
- Deacon, D. (1999). *Researching Communications, A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis*. London: Arnold.
- Dellinger, B. (1995). *Views of CNN Television News: A Critical Cross-Cultural Analysis of American Commercial Discourse Style*. Vaasa: Universitas Wasaensis
- De Waal, A. (1997). *Famine Crimes*. London : Villiers Publications.
- European Non Governmental Organisations (1989). *Code of Conduct: Images and Messages Relating to the Third World*.
- Fair, J.E. (1996). The Body Politic, the Bodies of Women, and the Politics of Famine in U.S. Television Coverage of Famine in the Horn of Africa. In *Journalism & Mass Communication Monographs*, (158), 1-45.
- Fairclough, N. (1998). Political Discourse in the Media: An Analytical Framework. In A. Bell & P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to Media Discourse*, (pp. 142-162), London: Blackwell.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. In Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (Eds.), *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (pp.208-226). Brighton: Harvester.
- Gaag, N. van der and Nash, C. (1988). *Images of Africa: The UK Report*. Oxford: Mimeo.
- Gamson, W.A. (1992). *Talking Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Green, S. (1977). *International Disaster Relief: Towards a Responsive System*. USA: McGraw Hill.
- Hall, S. (2001). Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse. In Wetherell, M. et al. (Eds.), *Discourse: Theory and Practice* (pp. 72-81). Trowbridge: The Cromwell Press.
- Hancock, G. (1989). *Lords of Poverty*. London: Macmillan
- Hansen, A. et al, (1998). *Mass Communications Research Methods*. Houndmills Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Holsti, O. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Phillipines: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.
- Ignatieff, M. (1998). The Stories We Tell, Television and Humanitarian Aid. In Moore, J. (Ed.), *Hard Choices. Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*, (pp.287-302). USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Kitzinger, J. (1993). Understanding AIDS: Researching Audience Perceptions of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. In Eldridge, J. (Ed.), *Getting the Message: News, Truth and Power*, (pp. 271-304). London: Routledge.
- Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Krueger R.A. and Casey M.A. (2000). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Leibes, T. and Katz, E. (1990). *The Export of Meaning: Cross Cultural Readings of 'Dallas'*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leiss W. et al (1986). *Social Communication in Advertising*, Canada: Methuen.
- Lissner, J. (1977). *The Politics of Altruism: A Study of the Political Behaviour of Voluntary Development Agencies*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation of Studies.

- Lister, M. and Wells, L. (2001). Seeing Beyond Belief: Cultural Studies as an Approach to Analysing the Visual. In Van Leeuwen, T. and Jewitt, C. (Eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, (pp.75-86). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lowry, M. (1998). *The Construction of Needy Subjects: An Analysis of the Representation of Third World Children in Charity Advertising*. Master of Arts, University of Ontario.
- Maxwell, J.A. (1996). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. California: Sage Publications Ltd.
- McAllister, M.P. (1996). *The Commercialization of American Culture: New Advertising, Control and Democracy*. California: Thousand Oaks.
- Middleton, N. (1998). *Disaster and Development: The Politics of Humanitarian Aid*. London: Pluto Press.
- Morgan, D. (1988). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Morley, D. (1980). *The Nationwide Audience*. London: British Film Institute.
- Myers, K. (1983). Understanding Advertisers. In Davis H. & Walton, P. (Eds.), *Language, Image, Media*, (pp.205-223). New York: St. Martins Press.
- O'Barr, W.M. (1994). *Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Oxfam and Images. Guidelines on Images*. Oxfam pamphlet produced by the Audio Visual Resources Unit.
- Oxfam (1985). *Oxfam and Images. What makes an appropriate picture for Oxfam?* Study conducted by the Visual Communications Working Group.
- Oxfam (1994). *Which Picture? Information from Oxfam*. Pamphlet produced by the Audio Visual Resources Unit.
- Rieff, D. (1997). Charity on the Rampage; The Business of Foreign Aid. *Council on Foreign Relations Inc*, www.netnomad.com.
- Richardson, R. (1977). *Progress and Poverty*. Sunbury on Thames: Nelson.
- Schudson, M. (1984). *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shohat, E. and Stam, R. (1994). *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, London: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. (1988). Can the Subaltern Speak? In Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (pp.271-313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Sykes, M. (1985). Discrimination in Discourse. In Van Dijk, T. (Ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis Volume IV, Discourse Analysis in Society*, (pp.83-101). London: Academic Press.
- Van Dijk, T. (Ed.) (1985). *Handbook of Discourse Analysis Volume IV, Discourse Analysis in Society*. London: Academic Press.
- Van Dijk, T. (1991). *Racism and the Press, Critical Studies in Racism and Migration*. London: Routledge.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). Semiotics and Iconography. In Van Leeuwen, T. and Jewitt, C. (Eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, (pp.92-111). London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Vaux, T. (2001). *The Selfish Altruist: Relief work in Famine and War*. UK: Earthscan Publications.
- VSO (2002). *The Live Aid Legacy*, www.vso.org.uk/media/liveaidlegacy.pdf.
- Watney, S. (1990). Missionary Positions: AIDS, "Africa" and Race". In Ferguson, R. et al (Eds.), *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, (pp.89-103). New York: The New York Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Whitaker, B. (1983). *A Bridge of People: a Personal View of Oxfam's First 40 Years*. Bath: The Pitman Press.

Williamson, J. (1978). *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. Southampton: Camelot Press.

www.christian-aid.org.uk

www.oxfam.org.uk

www.savethechildren.org.uk

www.thirdworldtraveler.com

www.unicef.org.uk

Address for correspondence

Rhian Richards

51, Cutter Street,

Richmond

Victoria, 3121

Rhian_Richards@hotmail.com