''TRUST ME, I'M AN NGO''

A case study on restoring the credibility of NGOs

Author: Marianthi Seitanidou

Student number: 1025094

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Supervisor: J.M.Joachim (PhD)

Nijmegen School of Management

Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands

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Abstract

In hindsight of the various scandals that NGOs have been involved in during the past decade, regarding misuse of funds, sexual misconduct and high-pressure marketing strategies affecting the vulnerable population, there is a declining amount of trust in NGOs, from donors and beneficiaries alike. It is obvious that rebuilding trust is vital for NGOs, as they heavily rely on donors and subsidies for their funding, and the beneficiaries for their reason to exist. Perceptions of untrustworthiness therefore, can be an existential threat to NGOs, as funds from the private sector and governments could be allocated elsewhere, and their access to conflict and disaster areas declined. To avoid these consequences, there is often call for more accountability measures, with the most prominent feature being transparency, based on the notion that a more transparent organization will be perceived as more trustworthy. Many scholars, however, do not share the assumption that the accountability agenda can build more trust in NGOs, arguing that it could rather have an adverse effect. This study will examine the dominant rational model of trust, as well as the alternative that have been proposed in literature, namely the social trust model, with particular focus on the concept of accountability, its different types and how these relate to the issue of trust. Based on two case studies of humanitarian NGOS, 'Oxfam' and 'More than Me' (MTM), it will try to answer the following research question: *How do NGOs restore their credibility after a scandal has occurred?*

Keywords: Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), trust, accountability, credibility, case study, OXFAM, More than Me.

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List of abbreviations

CBO: community-based organization

CSO: civil society organization

GRO: grassroots organizations

INGO: International non-governmental organization

MTM: 'More than Me'

NGO: Non-governmental organization

NNGO: Global north non-governmental organizations

NPO: non-profit organizations

SNGO: Global south non-governmental organizations

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The NGO credibility crisis

Humanitarian NGOs have been traditionally considered to be inherently credible and trustworthy entities (O'Dwyer & Boomsma, 2015), due to the fact that their main objectives are to improve the life conditions of (marginalized) people, by provide humanitarian aid where it is needed, as well as advocacy for important social causes. However, recent scandals in the NGO sector, such as the fraud allegations of American Red Cross (Sullivan, 2016), or the sexual misconduct against junior stuff members of Save the Children (McVeigh, 2020), among others, have tarnished the virtuous image of humanitarian NGOs, and negatively impacted their perceived credibility (Gibelman and Gelman 2004).

Credibility, in fact, is fundamental for NGOs, as they rely on it to attract, enhance and maintain funding from donors, as well as support from their constituents. Therefore, when their perceived credibility is diminished, NGOs risk losing their resources and supporters, which essentially poses an existential threat to them. (Keating, & Thrandardottir 2017, 135). A further important function of credibility is that it is used as a source of legitimacy for NGOs, for their role as global political actors. That is because NGOs are independent bodies, without regional or international mandates (Wong 2012, 89), and therefore they can only rely on their virtuous reputation of 'doing good', for their involvement in the global political arena. Therefore, given the importance of credibility for the operation and the legitimacy of NGOs, as well as the current credibility crisis, as a result of various recent scandals, it is imperative for NGOs to find a way to restore their credibility.

1.2. Research puzzle and research question

In their attempt to restore their credibility, NGOs have started to adopt certain mechanisms, the most prominent of which is accountability. Accountability refers to the ability of the organizations to hold themselves responsible for all the things that they do or do not do (Grant and Keohane 2005, 42), as well as to provide account to the various stakeholders of their financial, professional and organizational activities (Srinivas, 2015). It cannot be a presupposed, however, that accountability necessarily leads to an increase in the credibility of NGOs (Keating, & Thrandardottir 2017, 138).

For that matter, the existing accountability literature focuses on rational assumptions of accountability, such as transparency and external oversight, based on the notion that the more information there is about what is going on in an NGO, the more credible it will be perceived. However, many scholars do not agree with these premises, and point, instead, to the societal characteristics of trust, which the rational model of accountability overlooks, such as shared identity, common values and shared goals (Hurley, 2014, 57), which are considered to be fundamentally important for building and maintaining NGO credibility, without the need to constantly supplying information. Therefore, in order to determine how NGOs can restore their credibility, it is important to distinguish which dimensions of trust are necessary to be established. The contestation between the rational and the social assumptions of trust has led to the development of two theoretical models of trust, namely, the rational and the social trust model. These two models will be analysed in the second chapter of the thesis, and their dimensions will be evaluated by the empirical part of this research, with the ultimate goal to provide supporting evidence, over which model is better suited for addressing the following research question:

How can NGOs restore their credibility?

1.3. Research methodology

For the empirical part of our study, the qualitative research method of case-study was chosen. Specifically, we purposely selected two cases of NGOs, 'Oxfam' and 'More Than Me' ('MTM'), which were exposed in 2018 for sexual misconduct against their beneficiaries in Haiti and Liberia, respectively. What we wanted to examine was how the organizations handled the allegations, focusing on whether their strategy followed a theoretical framework of rational or social trust. Moreover, we analysed the public reaction to the NGO scandals and determined the extent of public criticism or continuing support for the NGOs. Finally, based on the patterns of behaviour that emerged, we tried to draw general inferences about which model could be considered more successful in restoring the credibility of NGOs. For the data collection, we conducted a document analysis from multiple secondary sources, i.e. news reports, opinion pieces, official statements and social media, as an attempt to triangulate the data and avoid selection bias to the degree that it was possible.

1.4. Scientific and societal relevance of the study

This study will build upon previous research on restoring NGO credibility and will attempt to provide additional support on either of the two models of rational and social trust, which have been proposed in literature. The subject is ever so relevant, and has recently gained momentum, after multiple NGO scandals have come into the light, challenging the notions of inherent credibility of NGOs and threatening their role as social and political actors. Therefore, the findings of the case-studies in this thesis, featuring humanitarian NGOs involved in misconduct scandals, will be useful for the development of a new political theory for trust-building in NGOs. Furthermore, this study will also contribute to society by benefitting various NGO stakeholders. For instance, NGO CEOs and managers could use the results of the study as a sign of confidence, that the implementation of certain credibility mechanisms will be more successful than others for trust-building. Moreover, donors,

politicians and policy-makers could also use the results of the study as a guide for supporting and pressing for certain credibility mechanisms to be implemented.

1.5. Thesis structure

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework on which our rationale for this thesis is based. Definitions of the core concepts are provided, and the main implications that arise from them are discussed. At the end of the chapter, an overview of the debating theories is given, as well as the assumptions for our empirical research. Furthermore, Chapter 3 presents the methods that were used, namely the qualitative case-study and the document analysis. Specifically, the case study as a research method is discussed, while there is mention of the type of cases used, as well as the criteria through which they were selected. At the last part of this chapter, we discuss the research technique of document analysis, and the sources that were used for the collection of our data. In Chapter 4, the analysis of the data takes place, while in Chapter 5, there is the presentation of our empirical results and a thorough discussion of the findings, as well as suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

In the first part of this chapter, definitions of NGOs will be provided and their different types and purposes will be explained. Then, we are going to analyse key concepts of this thesis, such as legitimacy and credibility. Next, we are going to mention credibility- enhancing mechanisms, with special focus on accountability. The drawbacks of accountability will also be mentioned, leading to the introduction of the alternative theory. Lastly, the two theories will be analysed and contrasted, and their theoretical assumptions will be underlined.

2.1 What is an NGO?

This section aims to properly define NGOs and classify them according to their characteristics. The first mention of the name NGO, or non-governmental organizations, goes back to 1945, when the newly formed United Nations included it in Article 71 of their Charter. Since then, there has not been a single unified, formal definition for them, while there are different connotations for the term, depending on different circumstances and contexts. However, they generally include groups or associations, which are independent from the direct influence of governments (non-governmental) and are not created for profit purposes (non-profit).

For instance, the UN define NGOs as

> '*Not-for-profit, voluntary citizens' groups, which are organized on a local, national or international level to address issues in support of the public good' Task-oriented and made up of people with common interests, NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to governments, monitor policy and program implementation, and encourage participation of civil society stakeholders at the community level. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms, and help monitor and implement international agreements. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, the environment or health.*

The World Bank states that NGOs

> '*Include many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. They are private agencies in industrial countries that support international development; indigenous groups organized regionally or nationally; and member-groups in villages.*

> *NGOs include charitable and religious associations that mobilize private funds for development, distribute food and family planning services and promote community organization. They also include independent cooperatives, community associations, water-user societies, women's groups and pastoral associations. Citizen Groups that raise awareness and influence policy are also NGOs*" (World Bank 1995, 7-9).

In the absence of a universal definition, we introduce the UN and the World Bank definitions, in order to demonstrate the most relevant elements of NGOs. Specifically, the UN definition captures the main functions and goals that NGOs serve in the societies that they operate, such as *bringing awareness to certain issues, monitor the implementation of policies* and generally act as the mediator between the governments and communities. Instead, the World Bank definition focuses on the different groups NGOs may consist of, and highlights their nature as *independent* and *non-commercial* actors.

The World Bank (1995), further classifies NGOs into two main types, namely *operational* NGOs, which primarily provide services and take part in designing and implementing development projects, and *advocacy* NGOs, which have the primary goal of promoting a cause, such as human rights, environmental issues and social justice, by influencing public policy. However, the distinction of these categories are not always clear, as many NGOs serve both an operational and an advocacy functions, while, for instance, advocacy NGOs can also be focused on specific projects, without taking part in their design and implementation process (Lewis, 2010, 337).

NGOs also carry different names, some of which are used interchangeably, even if they don't always serve the same purposes. Some of them are NPOs (non-profit organizations), GROs (grassroots organizations), CSOs (civil society organizations), CBOs (community-based organizations), INGOs (international non-governmental organizations), SNGOs (global south non-governmental organizations), NNGOs (global north non-governmental organizations), etc. (Brown, 2009, 5). One question that is also associated with the term NGO and its ambiguity is whether it is referring to a local, regional, or transnational organization. While until the 1990s, NGOs were conducting almost entirely provincial activities, and any existing global bodies were known as International NGOs, from the 1990s they started becoming involved in global social issues, particularly after the Copenhagen Social Summit in 1995

(Willetts, 2011, 32). Today, NGOs constitute global actors that participate in international diplomacy and the term NGO itself, is referring to both regional and transnational bodies. Therefore, the term NGO will be used for all levels of activity from now on, and there will only be restricted to local, regional or transnational level if necessary for the research.

2.2. Legitimacy and Credibility

When we talk about the legitimacy of NGOs, what we are ultimately aiming for is to investigate whether and under which circumstances they can be considered legitimate actors in international politics, and thus included in the global policy making. That is because, NGOs as independent organizations do not actually have an "*official domestic or international mandate*", in order to be considered "*legitimate political actors*" (Wong 2012, 89). Therefore, they need to attain their legitimacy some other way. As the four models of legitimacy by Thrandardottir (2015) suggest, the legitimacy of NGOs could be *constituted* ('social change model'), as the role of NGOs in considered fundamental in a liberal democratic society, *granted* ('new institutional model'), as the prominence of NGOs is considered to be a result of the power shift from governments to the third sector, *attained* though the market ('market model'), as a result of supply and demand, which pushes private actors to deliver government services, or *political empowerment* ('critical model') of the marginalized, who do not take part in decision-making (Thrandardottir 2015, 109-115). No matter the origin, legitimacy brought down to its most basic level means two things: (1) that an actor is lawful and (2) credible. However, this does not mean that a credible actor is necessarily lawful and vice versa. Nor does it mean that the two terms are synonymous, even if they might sometimes be used to address similar issues. What it does mean though, is that legitimacy has a dual dimension, as proposed by Beetham (1991, 100), namely '*'legitimacy derived from rules''* (Beetham 1991, 64) and ''*legitimacy through social construction''* (Beetham 1991, 100), of which the former is the normative argument and the latter the social constructivist one. The reason for that is, that legitimacy from rules, derives from the adherence of the NGO to the existing regulations of the status quo (e.g. being registered), while the legitimacy through social construction derives mainly from positive public perceptions about the role of NGOs. On the other hand, credibility, as stated by Gourevitch and Lake (2012, 10), refers to '' *statements that are believable or accepted as truthful by one*

or more audiences'', without being value-laden, contrary to legitimacy, which clearly includes a normative dimension in itself. By distinguishing between legitimacy and credibility, we underline the institutional, social and cultural context that shapes our trust in NGOs. Specifically, as credibility is context-dependent, it depends on the standards of a certain community, (Gouveritch & Lake, 2012, 139) which makes it likely that different communities will evaluate the credibility of the organizations differently. For the purposes of this study, the concept of credibility will be used, specifically how reliable the public considers the NGO to be, since what is of interest is the social perception of legitimacy, rather than its legality.

But why is NGO credibility important? Generally, NGOs rely on their ethical perceptions and expectations by donors that 'their time and money will be used wisely'' for the cause that the NGO is pursuing (Keating & Thrandardottir, 2017, 5). In fact, studies suggest that perceptions of high NGO credibility attract donors to dedicate resources to them, while the loss of credibility is likely to lead donors to withdraw their resources and invest it somewhere else. (Keating & Thrandardottir, 2017, 11). The importance of credibility to NGOs is also apparent if we consider that for both their operational as well as their advocacy agencies, we heavily rely on their own reports for verification. Do our donations really contribute to human relief? Are certain products cruelty free and sustainable? As we are usually very much remote from the areas of action, it is very hard to observe and verify these claims, so ' *'we only have their word for it'' (*Gourevitch & Lake & Stein, 2012, 10). However, NGOs cannot always rely on their perceived morality, either because this morality has been contested in view of public scandals (Gibelman and Gelmann, 2004) or because there is so little information about an NGO's activities, that perception is not enough (Amagoh, F., 2015) and reassurances are needed. It is then imperative for certain mechanisms to be set in place, in order for the organizations to regain the trust lost.

2.3. Credibility mechanisms

The reassurances for the virtuous activities of NGOs are translated into specific mechanisms, aiming to establish, enhance, regain and maintain credibility. NGOs strive to increase their transparency, modernize their processes (often by using advanced technologies) and enhance their independence from governmental and corporate structures (Gourevitch & Lake & Stein,

2012, 19). In the words of Omona, J., Mukuye, (2013, 316), ''*NGO credibility rests on key factors such as accountability, transparency, networking, and effectiveness*''. Due to the fact that the effectiveness of an organization is particularly hard to evaluate, we shall focus on only the first three suggested mechanisms.

- *Accountability* implies, according to Grant and Keohane (2005, 42), the ability of actors ''to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in light of these standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met''. What accountability means for NGOs, is the way in which the NGO is holding itself responsible ''for what it believes, what it does and does not do'' (Slim, 2002, 12). There is upwards (donors) and downwards (beneficiaries) accountability, strategic and functional, internal and external (Edwards and Hulme 1996, 61, Slim 2002, 12), as in general NGOs must answer to donors, members, partners and people they work for. Therefore, there is accountability for something, for someone and in a particular way. Specifically, two prominent types of accountability are the following:

Accountability for what?

Accountability is often based on a principal-agent relationship of NGOs with their donors, as NGO are trying to fulfil the expectations that were determined by the donors. In that sense, they are accountable for a wide range of issues, succinctly operationalized by Robert Behn (2001, 6) using a threefold typology; accountability for finance, fairness and performance. The first two types are a matter of organization, as they refer to the way in the NGO accomplishes its objectives, including the allocation of its funds, while the third is about the outcome of NGO activity. Together, they form a serious dilemma, also known as 'Behn's Accountability Dilemma'. The dilemma is that accountability measures set in place for finance and fairness, might hinder the performance of the organization, as it is likely to limit the efficiency of the NGO to realise a specific outcome. For instance, spending a large portion of the organization's budget on promoting transparency, a key feature of accountability, might limit the funds available for the NGO campaigns themselves, and as a result, they might be less successful.

Accountability to whom?

NGOs are accountable to many different actors, who are organized in three specific directions. Upward accountability, involves mostly the donors and mediators, while horizontal accountability is when NGOs are accountable to themselves, their members, employees and peers. Downward accountability refers to the accountability of donors to NGOs, as well as the one of NGOs to their beneficiaries. Specifically, Ebrahim and Weisband (2007, 195) explain the different accountabilities as: "upwards to patrons, downwards to clients, and internally to themselves and their missions''. Grant & Keohane (2005), also came up with seven types of accountability, namely:

- Hierarchical (accountability to leaders of a bureaucracy, such as the NGO founders)
- Supervisory (accountability between organizations in a network, e.g. agency watchdogs)
- Fiscal (accountability to funding agencies, such as donors, banks)
- Legal (accountability to follow (quasi) judicial processes, e.g. lawsuits)
- Reputational (accountability to the public opinion, e.g. the media)
- Market (accountability to financial stakeholders and consumers)
- Peer (accountability to other peer organizations)

- *Transparency* is considered to be a fundamental condition for an NGO to be trusted. It can take many different forms, such as transparency in allocation of funds, internal organization and implementation of program objectives. In any case, donors and beneficiaries alike, need to be aware, where and how the funds handled by NGOs are used, what exactly the organizations are doing to alleviate human suffering and who are the stakeholders involved (McGann and Johnstone, 2006, 18).

- *Networking* is also a major factor for NGOs, as it contributes to its credibility. It 'raises the profile of the organization' (Srinivas 2010, 620) and links the organization with other sectors and government structures. These linkages often assist the organization to overcome internal problems of administrative, financial or legal nature, by means of cooperation (Srinivas 2010, 622).

2.4. The theoretical frameworks of trust

In this section, the two theoretical frameworks of trust will be presented in detail, namely the rational and the social trust, out of which the two debating models for 'restoring the credibility of NGOs' will be emerged.

The rational trust model

The rational conceptualisation of trust goes back to many decades of scholarly work, in many different disciplines. In Political Science, it has recently received prominence through the work of Andrew Kydd in the 2000s. (Ruzicka, J., & Keating, V. C. 2015, 13). Kydd's rational trust, in short, is based on three dimensions, which are also relevant to the research question of our study: first, 'how likely it is that the other is status quo oriented' (Kydd, 2001, p. 810), second 'the belief that the other side is trustworthy, thus willing to reciprocate cooperation' (2005, p. 3) and lastly, 'having confidence that one's interests are not in too much conflict with the other side'(2010, p. 2680). What all these dimensions have in common is the perception of trust as a 'rational prediction' of how the other party is going to behave (Ruzicka, J., & Keating, V. C. 2015,14), according to which cooperation is or is not achieved. Applied to NGOs, the rationalistic model proposes that credibility and thus trust, depends on the extent of the information that donors and constituents have about the activities and objectives of the organizations, as well as their ability to provide external penalties for them in case of defection from their original goals and interests. That is because, the more information donors and constituents have about an organization, the more likely they are to identify and predict whether they are credible enough to be trusted, while the external penalties in case of defection, will deter organizations from failing to fulfil their obligations or commit malfeasance (Coleman 1990, 91). But how do donors acquire this information?

Coleman (1990) further argues that the most important source of information comes from the interaction that donors have with the organizations themselves. Hardin (2002) operationalizes this interaction, by first making a rough estimate of the perceived credibility and then adjusting the probability higher or lower, according to the new information that is gained (Hardin 2002, 113). Another way of attaining trust, is by means of accountability, which serves as the self-regulation of NGOs, providing checks and balances to avoid defection (Keating & Thrandardottir 2016, 136). The accountability agenda, specifically, puts emphasis on transparency and external monitoring, as conditions of credibility. (Burger and Seabe, 2014, 6), under the assumption that the more information that NGOs grant to donors, governments and constituents, whether on their own accord or though external oversight, the more able they would be to hold them accountable Bellver and Kaufmann 2005,4), in case of intended or unintended defection from their expectations. The nature of this agenda is relying on the principal-agent model (Thrandardottir 2015, 111), which is heavily influenced by market principles and contractual agreements. The NGOs, according to this accountability agenda, are striving to fulfil the criteria that were set up by donors, and they are evaluated for their ability to carry out their goals successfully. This often enables donors to manage the agenda of the NGOs, in order to avoid conflicts of interest or lack of/misleading information about the activities of the charities. Overall, the accountability agenda heavily relies on implicit assumption of rationality, in terms of the behaviour of actors and their relationship with each other.

Costs of Accountability

Accountability has been put forward as the way to increase and maintain NGO credibility, by several scholars (INGO Accountability Charter, 2008, Core Humanitarian Standard, 2014 etc.). This agenda stems from the belief that self-regulation in the humanitarian sector is a good way to prevent and hinder wrongdoings. However, this belief has come ever more into question, with allegations that show NGOs are not able to 'get their house in order'. Jordan and van Tuijl (2007) for instance, have criticized the accountability measures adopted by NGOs, for being unproductive and distracting to their missions, arguing that they often 'do not address the needs of NGOs, or are divorced from their missions, they do not address moral obligations, while they prioritize some relations over others' (Jordan and van Tuijl 2007, 153), echoing the arguments of Ebrahim (2003) that NGOs put emphasis on upward

accountability (to the donors), over downward accountability (to the beneficiaries). Another criticism that the accountability agenda of NGOs faces, is that it urges the organizations to professionalize internally and adopt more bureaucratic policies, to the point that they lose some of their flexibility and 'soft power', which is one of their biggest 'competitive advantages' to other actors (Keck and Sikkink 1999, 102)The monetary burden is also very heavy (Jordan 2005) and it poses a serious impediment on smaller NGOs, as they struggle to follow the established norms and often divert them away from their original mission goals. Finally, there's often talk of the 'reputation trap' of NGO accountability, which forces NGOs to set up their agendas in such a way that they pursue short-term, tangible goals, to highlight their success, which, in turn, could be unrelated to or contradicting their long-term objectives (Gent et al, 2015, 427). Overall, the accountability agenda makes several rational assumptions, which are not always applicable.

The social trust model

The theories of social trust do not completely disregard the rational nature of trust between actors, but they do imply that the relationship is more complicated than what the rational model makes it out to be. Specifically, it is argued that trust is more than a mechanism to bet on the future good behaviour of actors (Keating & Thrandardottir, 2017, 140), based on the information that one has about said actor. However, it is obvious that a good reputation does contribute to trust, as organizations that are consistently found to have committed malfeasance or be involved in scandals, will be less likely to be considered credible. What the social trust model underlines though, is the aspect of social relations that make donors identify with an NGO, to such an extent that they can perceive it to be credible, regardless of whether they have what it can be considered sufficient information about its 'virtue' (Keating & Thrandardottir, 2017, 141). Some authors suggest a dual nature of trust regarding NGOs, with Mayer et al. stating that perceived qualities such as benevolence and integrity are just as important for trust, as the abilities of an organization (Mayer et al. 1995, 720), indicating both social and rational elements of trust. According to Luhmann et al. (2018, 41), "*trust relationships find a favourable soil in social contexts (...) characterised by the relative persistence of the relationship, by reciprocal dependencies, and a certain quality of unforeseen*". An important question in social trust theory is what kind of social factors contribute to increasing the perception of trust, as well as under which conditions. Some of

these factors are thought to be: shared identity, common interests and values, solidarity, group motivations and pursuing shared goals (Hurley 2006, 57). Even though the social factors that are influencing NGO credibility and donor trust are not the same for every organization, in general, donors and stakeholders are going to endorse NGOs when they feel a familiarity with the NGO and a connection to their cause, despite having often no direct experience with them (Luhmann 2018). The advantage of familiarity is that it does not take as long to attain, as the information that is needed in the rational model. An ideological connection to an NGO, is translated to positive perception and increased trust, at a much earlier stage of the NGO-donor relationship than the principal-agent model suggests, which is why NGOs are founds to be (one of) the most credible societal organizations, according to many surveys conducted (GlobeScan Radar, 2011). In the absence of having to go through extensive accountability strategies, NGOs following a social trust model are able to focus on improving their values when setbacks (e.g. scandals) take place, allowing them to overcome them and regain the trust that was lost. As Mark Hurst (2018, 10) argues, NGO scandals may be inevitable, but the way to deflect them is not by stricter regulation, as many might suggest, but appealing to the ideals that "hold them together". This view is further supported by the fact that despite the various public scandals coming to a fore, NGOs have managed to survive and to continue being considered trustworthy (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2019). Therefore, the social trust model implies that common ideologies, values and identities between stakeholders and NGOs, lead to higher perceptions of trust of the latter, while for the rational trust model, trust is only possible in light of information, providing evidence on the credibility of the organization.

Accountability agenda in the models of trust

The effect that accountability has on trust, depends on the model of trust that we are using as a framework. For rational trust, the accountability agenda, promoting transparency practices and external monitoring, as we have mentioned already, increases the credibility of an NGO, and hence the trust of the donors, since they are able to examine the behaviour of the NGO, based on information and deterrence practices. On the contrary, social trust perspectives view accountability as an indication of untrustworthiness, since the accountability mechanisms are used to discourage bad future behaviour, by bearing the costs in the present. There is no real

trust in the first place, if such mechanisms are needed to establish it (Keating and Ruzicka 2014, 757).

Furthermore, the two models disagree on the outcomes of accountability, with social trust supporting that it is possible for NGO trust to become 'expected', the more closely together the shared values of donors-NGOs lie. However, at the instance of a defection, concerns are raised about the original alignment of values, and loss of credibility is possible (Zucker 1986, 100). Lastly, the two models of trust disagree on the costs of accountability. The social trust model deems accountability mechanisms distracting and extremely bureaucratic, as they divert resources, personnel and focus from the causes and the core issues of NGOs, to maintaining the accountability agenda (Keating and Ruzicka 2014). Supporters of rational accountability argue, however, that NGOs are regulated only to the extent that is necessary for trust to be established (Hind 2011, 201).

2.5 Theoretical assumptions

Based on the theoretical framework that we have presented, the following assumptions are formulated and on which the empirical part of the thesis rests:

- Based on the accountability model, an NGO will increase its transparency and external monitoring, as a way to enhance its credibility and regain the trust of donors.
- Based on the social trust model, the NGO will highlight its commitment to the shared motivations, values and ideologies of the organization with its donors, to regain the trust of donors.

Similarly:

- Based on the accountability model, we would expect donors, governments and constituents to demand more transparency and external monitoring, in response to the NGO misconduct.

- Based on the social trust model, we would expect donors, governments and constituents to express their continuing support to the organization's core values, ideology and shared goals, in response to the NGO misconduct.

Conclusively, the above assumptions, situated at the two different theoretical frameworks of rational trust and social trust, will be examined and discussed in the rest of the chapters of this thesis that follow. Using the research method of a case-study, two prominent cases of NGO misconduct will be analysed, in order to determine whether the NGOs employ a rational trust or a social trust strategy, as a response to the scandals for which they have been exposed. In addition, public reactions to the scandals will be documented and evaluated, in order to make inferences, about whether the accountability or the social trust model is more suitable in rebuilding trust.

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 Introduction

The present study uses a qualitative research method, which was deemed most appropriate to examine patterns of behaviour and evaluate the motivations of public response to NGO initiatives in the aftermath of a scandal. In general, qualitative research methods include interviews, discourse and documentary analysis (Silverman 2000, Flick 2006), which allow for the study of specific issues in depth, with special focus to 'context, circumstances and nuance' (Flick, 2006). At this point it is important to distinguish that methodology refers to the research approach that is adopted, while the methods refer to the specific techniques used for conducting our research. Furthermore, the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter provides a 'set of concepts used to define and explain our phenomena' (Silverman 2000, 77).

In this study, we opted for a case study design, i.e. an in-depth and extensive study of a very limited number of cases, events or organizations (White, 1999). Specifically, we chose a multiple-case comparative study design. The cases that were purposely chosen, were the sexual misconduct scandals of the NGOs, OXFAM and More Than Me (MTM), which took place in 2011 and 2014 respectively, but both came into light in 2018. We characterize the

chosen cases, according to the ‘most-similar’ case type (Gerring, 2007), as they are similar in all premises, except the independent variable of 'size'. What we are interested in, is to analyse and compare the reactions of the two NGOs to the allegations of their scandals, as well as the reactions of their constituents, according to the models of rational and social trust. The purpose of this analysis was to provide confidence in either of the two models, in terms of their appropriateness for restoring credibility in NGOs.

For the data collection, we conducted a document analysis, which was based on the interpretation of four types of documents; news articles, official statements, expert columns and Tweets collected from the social media platform ‘Twitter’. The time frame of the study covers the events from the moment that each scandal was exposed, in February 2018 and October 2018 respectively, and examines the reactions of the public and the NGOs themselves, both in the aftermath of the outbreak, as well as within the rest of the years 2018 and 2019, in order to assess whether the public perception was altered in the months that followed.

3.2. Research Model

In this section, the research model is presented, beginning with a general overview of the research method, its advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, the case selection process and the case-type is discussed.

Case-study as a research method

A case study is defined as the intensive study of ‘a spatially delimited phenomenon’ (Gerring, 2007, 19), which can be observed at a certain point in time, or over a specific period of time, with the overall aim to ‘shed light on a larger population of cases’ (Gerring, 2007, 20). It allows us to delve deep into a specific manifestation of a phenomenon and examine the events that took place, within a real-life context (Yin, 2014). But when is it appropriate to use a case-study as our research method?

Firstly, a case-study addresses questions that are descriptive (what has occurred?) or explanatory (how and why it occurred?) in nature (Shavelson and Towne, 2002). Secondly, a

case-study provides us with in-depth information and it is better suited for a smaller number of observable data to address research questions (Bromley, 1986). Thirdly, a case study is not limited to a single-case analysis, but it can also include multiple-cases. In addition to this, the observation of the cases can be either 'synchronic', focusing at a single point in time, or 'diachronic', extending over a longer period of time (Gerring, 2007, 27). In this thesis, a two-case comparative study will be used, namely the cases of 'OXFAM' and 'MTM'. It will be diachronic in nature, since the responses of the NGOs in the aftermath of the exposure for their misconduct will be examined as well as the as those of their constituents and how these evolved across time.

An important question that comes with conducting a case study is whether it is indeed possible to generalize from it, in order to make theoretical inferences. While authors agree that it is possible to arrive at broader conclusions on the basis of case studies, it is important to take into account the unique characteristics of the cases to determine whether the results could also apply to other cases in different contexts (Silverman 2005, 135). For that reason, the type of cases (Gerring, 2007) being used, is crucial, as well as the criteria for selecting them. Therefore, upon presenting the research design of this thesis, these questions will be addressed.

3.3. Case-selection

One of the most important, but also challenging steps of conducting a case-study research is selecting the most appropriate case to study the phenomenon in question. When selecting a case, it is important to keep in mind the overall purpose of the case-study, namely whether it is 'discovery-led' or 'theory-led' (Descombe, 2007), or whether it bears elements from both. In this thesis, the latter is the case. The aim is to describe the phenomenon of interest in the context of two particular cases, but also to examine, to what extent the theoretical assumptions in the literature, related to rational and social trust, apply to these cases. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that for a successful case-study research, a 'purposive, non-random' selection process has taken place (Gerring 2007, 88), to ensure that, despite the small number of cases, the cases are to an extent representative and informative of the research objectives.

Case-design and case-type

The methodology for the selection of cases varies according to the number of cases that are being used in a case study design and the 'case-type' (Yin, 2014, 63, Gerring 2007, 89). A single-case design should include a case that is 'critical, unique, unusual, or revelatory' (Yin 2014, 51) to confirm, challenge or extend the researcher's theoretical hypothesis. Multiple-case designs, by comparison, aim to predict the replication of either similar results ('literal replication') or different results, for reasons that are justifiable by the theory ('theoretical replication') (Yin 2014, 57). Regarding the case-types, multiple ways of categorization can be found in literature. Gerring, for example, identifies (2007) nine different case types. Due to the space limitation of this thesis, we are going to elaborate solely on the case-design and case-type that we have chosen.

In this study, a multiple-case, comparative research design was used to enhance the robustness of the results. 'OXFAM' and 'MTM' were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- The cases must be contemporary (under ten years)
- The cases must include NGOs that have been exposed for misconduct by an external source
- The cases of NGO misconduct must have gained popularity
- There must be adequate available public information about the cases in English

The case-type that is used is that of most-similar cases. Specifically, the two NGOs are similar in most premises, as they are both transnational, humanitarian NGOs, which were exposed by 'whistle-blowers' in 2018 because their employees engaged in sexual misconduct towards the beneficiaries of the organizations. However, the two cases differ on one independent variable (x1), which is the size of the organization, with OXFAM being one of the biggest and wealthiest charity organizations in the world, while MTM is a US-based NGO that operates mostly in Liberia and it is considered small in terms of size and monetary budget. The two cases also differ in the dependent variable of the research, which is the restoration of trust. We consider that, since OXFAM, despite the Haiti scandal, has managed to survive and it still has considerable funding and presence worldwide, it managed to restore its credibility, at least to an extent. However, as MTM was forced to shut down, after having

suffered tremendous financial losses, on top of their loss of credibility, we consider that it failed to restore its credibility.

Time frame

The time frame of this study is limited to the events that followed the exposure of the two scandals, in February 2018 and October 2018 respectively. Although the sexual misconduct occurred in both cases much earlier on (2011 and 2014), the events only became known and were publicized in the year of 2018. This is why this study focuses on that year. Since we also wanted to evaluate the public response to the NGO scandals at different time points, we used data from the whole duration of 2018 and 2019, (February 2018 to December 2019), in order to examine whether public opinion shifted from the aftermath of the breakout to the months that followed.

3.4. Data collection technique

Document Analysis

For the collection of our data sample, we opted for a document analysis method. Document analysis includes the systematic reviewing and evaluation of a wide range of documents (Bowen, 2009), such as written statements, financial reports, official publications, news articles, expert opinion pieces, scientific journals, social media etc. Documents, in the words of Bowen (2009), ‘’contain text and images that have been recorded without the intervention of the researcher’’ (2009, 27). However, to be used in research, the data derived from document analysis need to be critically reflected and interpreted, in order for the researcher to gain a certain meaning, understanding and knowledge of the empirical case and use it to make theoretical inferences. This makes document analysis a suitable data collection technique for qualitative case-study research. Other than being in line with the chosen research method, document analysis was selected also for pragmatic reasons as it is less time-consuming compared to other data collection techniques such as, for example, interviews or surveys, and due to its availability, as the documents that were analysed were all in the public domain of the internet, therefore easy to attain.

Operationalization

Before the collection and the observation of the empirical findings, it is important to establish which indicators of rational and social trust are used in this research. For the reactions of NGOs, we considered the following indicators as supporting evidence of rational trust: a) claims of transparency, (e.g. by releasing evidence, classified documents, internal memos etc.), b) demonstration of responsibility by the leadership (e.g. apology, resignation from senior positions), c) external oversight (e.g. referring to charity watchdogs, independent bodies etc.), d) creation or upgrade of accountability mechanisms to deter future wrongdoings. For the reactions of the public we considered the following indicators of rational trust: a) demands for more transparency, b) demands for change in leadership, c) demands for more external monitoring of the NGO activities, d) cancelled or decreased donations. For the indicators of social trust we considered the following: the NGOs a) claiming to still be committed to their values and ideologies, b) making an appeal to the 'good work' that the organization has been doing. For the reactions of the public we considered social trust: a) the continuing support to the organization, despite the allegations, b) steady or increased donations.

Sources of documents

For this thesis, the documents that were analysed include (1) news reports of international newspapers covering the timeline of the scandals; (2) official statements by representatives of the NGOs 'OXFAM' and 'MTM', from their websites, online presence in social media and interviews; (3) opinion pieces by experts of the humanitarian sector or of NGOs, in particular; and (4) Tweets posted by individual users on the social media platform Twitter. We expected that the news sources would include facts about the events that took place, as well as the timeline of the cases. In addition, we expected that the official statements would include the reactions of the NGOs to the exposure of their scandals, including pledges for responsibility and accountability measures. For the opinion pieces of experts, we anticipated critical appraisals of the events as well as assessments by other NGOs belonging to the entirety of the humanitarian sector, though also suggestions regarding future courses of action. Lastly, from Twitter users we expected to attain information about constituents' reactions to the scandals and to the statements of the NGO representatives. The reason for choosing multiple sources for our data collection is that an attempt was made to triangulate

data and minimize the impact of bias in our research, in a way that it would not be implied that 'findings are an artefact of a single source type, a single investigator's bias' (Patton, 1990). The specific sources that were used for the analysis of this case-study, are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Document sources for case 1

Sources	No. Articles	No. Opinions	No. Statements	Tweets
Oxfam International			7	
The Times	1			
The Guardian	4	1	2	
The Independent	2		1	
BBC news	2		2	
Reuters	1			
Huffington Post UK		1		
DW	1			
Civil society voices		3		
Public domain of Twitter				12
Total = 40	11	5	12	12

Table 2: Document sources for case 2.

Sources	No. Articles	No. Opinions	No. Statements	Tweets
MTM board			3	
Propublica	2		2	
BBC	1			

NPR		1		
TIME	1			
Non-profit Chronicles		1		
Al Jazeera		1		
Reuters	2			
VOX		1		
CS monitor		1		
Front page Africa		1		
Public domain of Twitter				7
Total = 24	6	6	5	7

3.5. Data collection process

The first step of document analysis was to collect ‘secondary data’, i.e. data that were initially collected by someone other than the researcher, for a purpose that is different than that of the present study (Allen, 2017). News articles were first examined, by researching the key words ‘NGO sex scandal’, ‘OXFAM Haiti scandal’, ‘More than Me foundation rape allegations’, 'More than Me Liberia scandal' and ‘Accountability for NGO scandals’ on the internet. Then, we skimmed through the search results that showed up on the search engine, in order to determine whether they included information that was relevant to the research objectives. This search process resulted in 11 relevant news articles for Case 1, and 6 for Case 2 that were examined in the analysis. Next, the website of OXFAM was used to extract information about the Haiti sexual misconduct allegations. It is worth mentioning that the official website of MTM was no longer available at the time of the research, so no relevant information could be gathered from this source. Furthermore, we looked for the past official statements of the NGOs, filtering the results to include documents from February 2018, to December 2019 and selected statements (12 for Case 1, 5 for Case 2) that included the organizations reactions to

the allegations, as well as efforts to repair their loss of credibility by enforcing new accountability measures. After that, expert opinions that were published by major media outlets in the form of blogs, columns, or editorials were examined. We collected 5 relevant documents for Case 1 and 6 for Case 2, which included assessments of the cases and their consequences for the humanitarian sector, as well as suggested courses of action, by searching for the previously mentioned key words them under the 'opinion' label, which can be found in most news websites that were used. Lastly, we signed up for the Twitter platform and searched for the tags, or hashtags '#Oxfamscandal' '#OxfamHaiti' '#Oxfamscandal2018', '#MoreThanMescandal' '#MoreThanMeAcademy' and '#KatieMeyler'. We then skimmed through the results and selected tweets (12 and 7, respectively), containing positive or negative comments, criticisms and demands towards the NGOs, for the time period February 2018 to December 2019. These reactions were considered indicative of the public perception of the NGOs' credibility. Although all documents were fairly easy to access, the process of identifying and reducing the documents to those that were relevant was rather time consuming. That is because, a detailed reading of a large number of documents was required to make sure implied meaning was not overlooked and the 'key themes' of the data were accurately established.

Classification of documents

In the next phase of the data collection, an attempt at classification was made. Specifically, we classified derived information from sources according to whether they supported the accountability perspective or the social trust perspective. In practical terms, what we considered support for accountability, was from the side of NGOs, evidence about being transparent, taking responsibility for the harm caused, and strengthening their accountability mechanisms. From the side of the public, we considered calls for transparency and external monitoring, as evidence of accountability support. Support for the social trust model was translated into commitments for the organizations' shared values and goals from the side of the NGOs, and continuing support for the mission and the positive impact of the organization, despite the instances of the misconduct, for the public. Furthermore, data from twitter were also classified into positive and negative sentiments towards the NGOs, to trace the public perception of trust throughout the year 2018.

Display of Documents

Next, an attempt was made to visually display the data (O'Dwyer, 2004) that were going to be used for the analysis. This was done in the form of a spreadsheet, by creating a synthesis of document extracts, in a chronological order, with the aim to identify the themes and patterns which would help us address the research question and structure the data for easier access throughout the analysis.

Document Analysis approach

The documents were analysed using the 'interpretative' content analysis approach, according to which language is analysed through a given context. Paragraphs, rather than words or sentences, were used as the unit of analysis, to investigate meaning and take into account the discursive aspects of documents, in order to identify connections between accountability and trust, as well as shed light on the research question and research objectives. Instead of using a coding theme, critical categories were constructed through which the key themes and patterns of behaviour emerged. This was important, to determine whether and to what extent the findings were in line with theoretical expectations and for conclusions to be drawn as supporting evidence for the research question.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter covers the detailed description of the Oxfam and MTM cases, as well as the analysis of the empirical data, derived from the document analysis conducted. Specifically, for each case, the rational and social trust model are analysed, with clear segmentation of the two components of the case study, namely the '*NGO reactions*' and the '*public reactions*' to the scandals of the respective organizations.

4.1. Case I: The Oxfam Haiti scandal

- *Description of the case*

Oxfam, one of the world's largest NGO with presence in over 90 countries for the last 70 years, has recently experienced a significant loss of credibility due to the exposure of sexual misconduct of its senior staff members against the organization's beneficiaries in Haiti, where the organization had been working, following the 2010 earthquake. The case first came into light in February 2018, by the British newspaper The Times (O'Neill, 2018), which published a report exposing senior members of the Haiti relief team for hiring Haiti survivor women as sex workers, some of which were also thought to be underage. One of the staffers, Roland van Hauwermeiren, who was the head of the Haiti operations, was also accused of using an Oxfam funded villa for these sexual abuses.

Right after the scandal was exposed in the media, senior representatives of the NGO released a statement (Oxfam, 2018), claiming that an internal investigation had already taken place back in 2001, which ended with several members involved in the misconduct being fired or forced to resign. In addition, they claimed to have disclosed their report on the case to the Charity Commission. The Commission on the other hand, in a following statement (Charity Commission, 2018), argued that they had not received full details on the case, as the Oxfam report that was disclosed to them at the time, stated that there was no evidence of abuse against beneficiaries, nor potential harm against minors. In light of this, Oxfam's Deputy Executive, Penny Lawrence, resigned, claiming full responsibility for the actions of the organization's staff *(''Oxfam: deputy resigns''*, 2018). At the same time, the European Commission warned that it would withhold funding for organizations that don't live up to 'ethical standards' and urged Oxfam to ''clarify the allegations with maximum transparency and as a matter of urgency'' *('EU warns charities to uphold 'ethical standards'*, 2018). By that point, Oxfam had suffered a loss of its credibility, as it was also demonstrated by the significant drop in donations, estimated by Oxfam to have lost more than 7.000 regular donations within one week (Elgot and McVeigh, 2018).

Oxfam's Executive Director Winnie Byanyima announced on Twitter (@Winnie_Byanyima, 2018) that they had ordered an independent commission to review the case and that they were committed to taking appropriate measures to regain the public's trust. In line with this commitment, Oxfam published a redacted version of its 2001 report on the cases of misconduct in Haiti, which further incriminated the accused staffers, who were said to have

also threatened the witnesses of the original investigation by physical means (Preston, 2018). Finally, the Chief executive of Oxfam apologized again to all affected parties and presented to members of British parliament, the detailed strategic plan (10-point plan), aiming to restore the organization's credibility. This plan is updated every three months and includes the implementation of new policies for the screening, transparency and safeguarding, as well as 'transforming the organization culture' (Oxfam, 2018) that fostered this kind of behaviour.

4.1.1. Analysis of the rational trust model

- *Oxfam's reaction to the allegations of the Haiti scandal*

There is no denying that Oxfam's response to the Time's report and the allegations that followed was swift. However, it did not always follow the same strategy with regards to restoring the organization's credibility. In their expose, the Times accused the organization of trying to cover-up the sexual abuses of their staff in Haiti, a claim which was later verified by the Charity Commission. Initially, Oxfam denied the allegations, stating that they "did 'anything but' cover the incident" (*'How the scandal unfolded'*, 2018), as they had communicated the abuses to the Charity Commission, after conducting their own private investigation, at the end of which they dismissed the staff members that were involved. Oxfam, likely considered that this would be the end of the Haiti case, however, more information on the incidents soon followed.

The Charity Commission contradicted Oxfam's claims of having adequately investigated and disclosed the evidence of the abuses (Charity Commission, 2018), arguing that details were obscured behind the label of 'sexual misconduct', without making it clear that beneficiaries were abused by the organization's Haiti staff, nor that minors were involved. Therefore, the allegations of a cover-up were heavily reinforced, and Oxfam was forced to take the situation

more seriously. At that point, Oxfam's chief executive released a statement to the BBC, admitting to not disclosing the details of the abuses in 2011, however, denied instigating a cover-up. This was the beginning of the strategy shift for Oxfam towards accountability, which became apparent with the resignation of its Deputy Chief Executive in Haiti, Penny Lawrence, who took ''full responsibility'' over the handling of the scandal. Lawrence, specifically stated that she was deeply sorry and ashamed that this happened on her watch (Oxfam Press release, 2018). Therefore, an important element of the accountability agenda, namely the leadership taking responsibility, was successfully set into place.

On the contrary, Oxfam CEO Mark Goldring sparked major outrage with his comments, stating that the backlash to the organization was blown out of proportion, as if '*'they murdered babies in their cots*''(Aitkenhead , 2018). He also went on the offensive, stating that the Haiti case was likely exploited by the opponents of the humanitarian sector for their own agenda. Oxfam International did not back up Goldring, and he was later forced to apologize for these statements (Smout, 2018). This shows that the image Oxfam was trying to portray was that of a responsible and accountable NGO, which does not correspond with statements such as Goldring's. This argument is also supported by the fact that immediately after the controversial statement of the CEO, Oxfam profusely apologised to the beneficiaries and the public, both through their official statements and the press and even admitted their shortcomings and internal struggles. (Slawson, 2018, Oxfam Press release, 2018).

This attempt to appear honest, responsible and transparent, was also likely influenced by the European Commission threats to cease the funding of organizations that did not meet the set ''ethical standards'', as well as the thousands of donations cancelled mere days after the scandal was exposed. Furthermore, Oxfam employed the strategy of external oversight by launching an independent commission (Gray, 2018), consisting of mainly women's rights experts, to review the working culture of the organization and set up a variety of measures for safeguarding. Particular attention was also given to inducing transparency, as demonstrated by the release of the redacted 2001 investigation report on the Haiti case, to the public (Oxfam Press release, 2018). The organization's errors were now open to public scrutiny, as a display of commitment to accountability, which culminated with the introduction of their 10-strategic plan, essentially an accountability plan, containing among others, steps for the strengthening of the process of screening, managing and vetting staff members, to avoid similar incidents in the future. (Sharman, 2018, Oxfam press release, 2018). Overall, Oxfam made use of all the accountability strategies that we have identified as indicators of rational

trust: transparency, external oversight, responsibility of leadership and commitment to updated accountability measures. Some indicative Tweets and quotes of the Oxfam reactions, related to the rational trust model can be seen in the Figure (2) below:

Fig.1 Illustrative Tweets and quotes of Oxfam reactions (rational trust)

Oxfam Executive Director, Winnie Byanyima on Twitter, Feb.12

Source: https://twitter.com/Winnie_Byanyima/status/963167479085326341

Penny Lawrence, deputy chief executive, Oxfam press release, Feb.12

"As programme director at the time, I am ashamed that this happened on my watch and I take full responsibility.

"I am desperately sorry for the harm and distress that this has caused to Oxfam's supporters, the wider development sector and most of all the vulnerable people who trusted us.

"It has been such a privilege to work for such an amazing organisation that has done and needs to continue to do such good in the world."

Source: https://oxfamapps.org/media/press_release/2018-02-oxfam-announces-resignation-of-deputy-chief-executive/

CEO Oxfam Mark Goldring, The Guardian, Feb. 16

"The intensity and the ferocity of the attack makes you wonder, what did we do? We murdered babies in their cots? Certainly, the scale and the intensity of the attacks feels out of proportion to the level of culpability. I struggle to understand it. You think: 'My God, there's something going on there.'" Is it that political opponents of international aid are exploiting Oxfam's crisis?

Source: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/16/oxfam-boss-mark-goldring-anything-we-say-is-being-manipulated-weve-been-savaged

Oxfam International on Twitter, Feb.16

Source: https://twitter.com/Oxfam/status/964505259115778049

- *The public reaction to the Haiti scandal*

In the aftermath of the exposure of the Oxfam scandal, the reactions from the public were overwhelmingly negative, with many constituents expressing shock, disappointment and anger towards the organization, especially regarding the allegations of a cover-up. Specifically, the initial public reactions to the Times report were captured on Twitter, as the social media platform facilitates immediate reactions to such exposés. As observed, the majority of Tweets indicated the diminishing of their trust to the organization, as well as the desire to switch to other charities they deemed more credible (Fig.3.i.).

After more information came into the light, with the statement of the Charity Commission contradicting the Oxfam claims, the news outlets started covering the story and expressing their views, and those of humanitarian aid experts. The Guardian, especially, released a wide number of articles regarding the Oxfam case, highlighting the lack of *transparency* from

Oxfam, with quotes such as ‘’*we finally beginning to know what Oxfam did not want us to know*’’ (Moore, 2018), and expert statements, such as that from former Oxfam staffer Helen Evans admitting she had previously received allegations about sexual abuses, which were not disclosed (Booth, 2018). At this point, the BBC reports that a thousand people cancelled their regular donations to Oxfam, in a single weekend (‘*Oxfam direct debit donations fall amid abuse scandal’*, 2018) a number which rose to over seven thousand in a week. (Elgot and MacVeigh, 2018), indicating the negative reactions of the Oxfam constituents to the Haiti abuses.

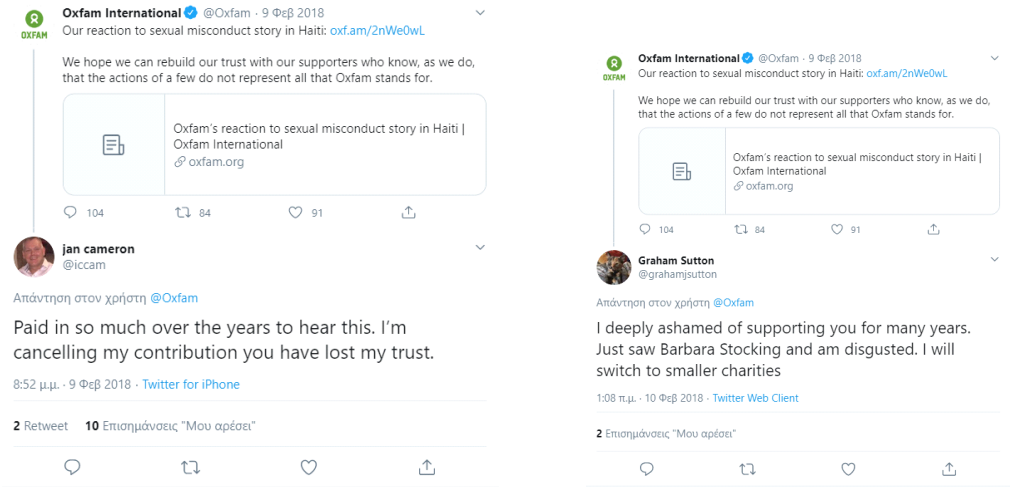
As a remedy for the organization’s damaged reputation, transparency was also promoted, in order to ‘’*slowly gain back public respect*’’ (Rawnsley, 2018). In the same wavelength, the BBC stressed the importance of transparency for the organization’s reputation to be restored (Mackay, 2018). Other accountability measures and institutional reform were also suggested, as the ‘*’only route out of this terrible mess is for the organization to turn a harsh light on itself, accept its failings and work to change them*’’ (Haddon, 2018). The measures that were most commonly expressed by the public, was the *external monitoring* of Oxfam’s activities, and the resignation of CEO Mark Goldring, as an indication of taking responsibility for the way the organization handled the abuses in Haiti. In fact, the Telegraph mentioned that one of the problematic aspects of Oxfam’s response to the scandal was that they ‘did not inform the Haitian authorities, the charity regulators, the big donors or the British government’. (Bird, 2018). These accountability demands were also evident in the reactions of Twitter users (Fig.3.ii.), with many claiming that the organization was far too large and powerful to be held accountable. This argument was also shared by the chair of the Charity Commission, Baroness Stowell (Calderwood, 2019), who stated that ‘’no charity is so large, nor is its mission so important that it can afford to put its own reputation ahead of the dignity and wellbeing of those it exists to protect’’. Other Twitter reactions, directly targeted former CEO Mark Goldring, shaming him for the statements he made, that the charity was treated ‘’ *as if we murdered babies in their cots*’’ (Baynes, 2018), and demanding his resignation, claiming they would otherwise be unable to trust the organization again (Keith Watson, @kw1330, 2018).

Another popular argument expressed by many, was that misconduct is rooted into the culture of humanitarian aid organizations and thus, institutional changes need to be made, in order to avoid abuse in the future. The 15-month long investigation of the Charity Commission on the case, also came into that conclusion, claiming that there is ‘*’a culture of tolerating poor behaviour at Oxfam*’’ (Charity Commission Haiti report, 2019).Chief

executive of the Charity Commission, Helen Stephenson, stated specifically, that their inquiry showed Oxfam ‘’lost sight of the values it stands for’’, as they internally tolerated poor behaviour over a period of years. Ex-Oxfam aid worker backed up these claims on BBC, revealing sexual misconduct was also taking place against junior staff members, as she personally was sexually assaulted by a senior Oxfam colleague (‘*Ex-Oxfam aid worker tells of sex assaults by colleagues’*, 2018). Lastly, Twitter users also highlighted the problematic aspect of centralizing power by organizations such as Oxfam, which fosters such behaviours (Tim Boyes-Watson, @tim4mango, 2018). Therefore, the arguments of the public that were expressed according to the rational trust model could be classified into three categories: reactions a) demanding more transparency, b) demanding more external monitoring and c) advocating for less power and funding for the organization.

Fig 2. Illustrative Tweets of public reactions to the Haiti scandal (rational trust)

i. Initial negative reactions



Source: https://twitter.com/iccam/status/962036437767012352
Source: https://twitter.com/grahamjsutton/status/962100833843335168

ii. Accountability arguments

Source: https://twitter.com/neohedonist/status/1018061583182958592

iii. External oversight:

Source: https://twitter.com/nealpatrick86/status/962378375854723077

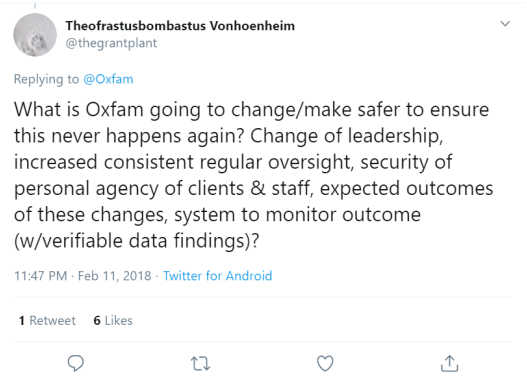
iv. Responsibility of leadership:

Source: https://twitter.com/kw1330/status/964540361132642305

Transparency:

Source: https://twitter.com/ReikiHale/status/962636720159289344

v. Accountability mechanism*:*



Source: https://twitter.com/thegrantplant/status/962805222946017280

4.1.2. Analysis of the social trust model

- *Oxfam's reaction to the allegations of the Haiti scandal*

Oxfam's reaction to the allegations of the Haiti scandal also bore elements from the social trust model, as the organization attempted to accentuate their strong commitment to their values and shared goals with its constituents. Specifically, in the initial statements, Oxfam tried to frame the case as an isolated incident, taken place several years ago (''seven years ago''), by a few corrupt individuals (''with a small number of staff involved'') (Oxfam Press release, 2018), which, they claimed, ''*does not represent all that Oxfam stands for*''. Therefore, there was an initial attempt for Oxfam to distance itself from its own staff members, whom they portrayed to be the sole perpetrators of the abuses. To make this more apparent, Oxfam continued to highlight the organization's virtue, contrastive to the despicable actions of some of the staff, or in the words of Oxfam *"a group of privileged men abusing those they were meant to protect*." (Oxfam Press release, 2018). They did this by using strong wording to refer to the accused staff, such as ''t*otally unacceptable*'', ''*most*

appalling'', ''r*eprehensive behaviou*r'', while there is repetitive mention of the Oxfam values throughout the entirety of the first reaction statements (''*against the high values of Oxfam'', ''we stand firmly against exploitation'', ''the actions of the few do not represent what Oxfam stands for'', ''root out such behaviours''* etc.). The values of Oxfam were further demonstrated through numerous mentions of the 'good' work that the organization, (e.g. ''*our work advancing women's rights is central to Oxfam's values''*, Oxfam 2018) had been doing in Haiti, as well as the rest of the countries that they operate in.

Overall, Oxfam was, at first, under the impression that an appeal to its own values would be enough to control the damage done to its credibility, by the exposure of the Haiti scandal. Its dismissive stance to the allegations of the Times, was a deliberate effort to appease the negative reactions and create the impression that no harm was done by the organization itself (''*there were no regulatory concerns*'', Oxfam 2018), nor were there patterns of wrongdoings to be addressed.

Fig 3. Illustrative Tweet of the Oxfam reaction to the Haiti scandal (social trust)

Oxfam initial reaction on Twitter, Feb. 9

Source: https://twitter.com/Oxfam/status/961992180670828545

- *The public reaction to the Haiti scandal*

In the aftermath of the exposure of the scandal, some journalists and Twitter users sided with the original reaction of Oxfam, which put emphasis on the good values of the organization, contrary to the despicable actions of some of their staff. Some media, also expressed their concerns over the negative reaction that the organization was receiving, stating that ''*Oxfam should not be hung out to dry*'' (Hind, 2018) over the behaviour of some of their staff, or ''*bad apples*'' (Haskell, 2018). On Twitter, several users, among them ex-Oxfam staffers, highlighted the noble work that the organization is doing in many unprivileged places of the world, and while condemning the individual actors that carried out the abuses, continued to show support for the organization as a whole. (e.g. 'I remain a proud Oxfam supporter', Owen Barden (@owenbarden, 2018), *'of course I don't condone the alleged behaviour of Oxfam Staff in Haiti, but I overall respect those who go in to help out'*, Mary Beard, (@wmarybeard 2018), '*These disgusting individuals never belonged to Oxfam*', @Erinch Sahan 2018).

Furthermore, some people emphasized the involvement of political opponents of the humanitarian sector to the Oxfam case, '*those who want to exploit the Oxfam case to justify foreign aid cuts*'' (Tom Parry, @ParryTom, 2018), essentially '*throwing the baby with the bathwater*'' (Haskell, 2018). The Guardian (2018) also identified the populist right as the ones wanted to ''*caricature the NGO as the paymaster of pimps and perverts''* (D'Ancona, 2018), aiming to harm the reputation and credibility of the NGO sector.

Finally, proponents of the social trust model concluded that the Oxfam scandal should not make donors or governments withdraw funding and support to the organization, but instead, support them even more in order for them to continue identifying and reporting bad behaviour. Donations, they claim, should primarily be used to alleviate human suffering and not to set in place expensive safeguarding processes (D' Ancona, 2018).

Overall, the public reaction to the Haiti scandal according to the social trust model could be classified into the following three categories: reactions a) supporting the organization's values, b) highlighting the political agenda of the opponents, c) advocating for more support for the organization.

Fig 4. Illustrative Tweets of the public reaction to the Haiti scandal (social trust)

i. Tweets in support of the values of Oxfam

Source: https://twitter.com/PreddyMutepfe/status/967342288530755585

Source: https://twitter.com/GeorgeMonbiot/status/962950155354943488

Source: https://twitter.com/ErinchSahan/status/962813683364761605

Tweets voicing concern over the opponent political agenda

Source: https://twitter.com/Oxfam/status/964510629930381312

4.2. Case II: The MTM Liberia scandal

- *Description of the case*

The MTM foundation was founded in 2008, by then-26 year old American Katie Meyler, with the aim to provide education to young girls in Liberia, who were vulnerable to exploitation. The organization, albeit small, had received considerable funding, among which a $1 million award by J.P. Morgan Chase (Young, 2018), as well as praise for their work in the complicated landscape of Liberia. In October 2018, however, the non-profit news platform Propublica (Young, 2018), in collaboration with TIME magazine, released an investigation, along with a documentary, which revealed the sexual abuses of Liberian students of MTM, by the organization's co-founder, Macintosh Johnson. Johnson had been allegedly sexually abusing MTM school girls as young as ten years old, in 2014 and before. Ten girls pressed charges against Johnson, however, the real number is estimated to be much higher, as it was discovered by a classified document that was uncovered (Harper, 2018).
Eventually, Johnson was put on trial, and despite the fact that none of the MTM staff testified against him, he was convicted and later died from HIV/AIDS related illness in 2016 ('*Liberia launches investigation into alleged rapes at US-backed school'*, 2018). One of the victims had also been tested HIV-positive, spreading concerns for the health of the rest of MTM's students.

CEO Katie Meyler was accused of being aware of the abuses, with multiple sources pointing to her alleged romantic involvement with Johnson. While Meyler denied the accusations, she was later forced by the MTM board to temporarily resign. (Young, 2019). Simultaneous independent investigations, commissioned by the Liberian government and the US board of MTM itself then took place, the results of which were published a year later. The evidence of the investigations were damning to the organization's credibility, raising safety concerns for MTM beneficiaries, and potential violations of child protection law. (McLane Middleton MTM Safeguarding Audit, 2019). The findings of the investigation were extensively covered in Propublica, which criticized MTM for negligence and for failing to protect the victims (Young, 2019). In view of this, MTM decided to shut down on June 30 2019, citing financial reasons, due to its ''inability to fundraise'' (statement in Young, 2019).

4.2.1. Analysis of the rational trust model

- *The MTM reaction to the allegations of sexual misconduct in Liberia*

Following the 2018 Propublica investigation about the sexual abuses of MTM students by co-founder Macintosh Johnson, the organization promptly issued an apology statement, expressing that they were ''*deeply profoundly sorry*'' for ''*failing*'' the victims (Young, 2018). In the same statement, they underlined the safeguarding measures that they had taken since the incidents took place in 2014, including training and awareness programmes so they don't ''*miss it again*'. Their strategy, evidently, was in line with the accountability agenda, as the NGO appeared to be taking responsibility, as well as being committed to taking the appropriate preventative measures against such incidents.

Soon, however, the case reached the mainstream media, which brought the allegations of Propublica, regarding a potential cover-up by the organization, to the fore. For instance, the BBC reported the Propublica claims, that ''*CEO Katie Meyler was aware of the sexual abuse allegations, but ignored the crimes*'' (BBC, 2018), citing a former MTM board member who said that Meyler had told him the allegations were '*''really, really, really bad''* and that she believed that '' *(the abuses) involved potentially all girls over 11 at school*''. (*More Than Me CEO temporarily resigns amid Liberia rape scandal', 2018).* Meyler, in response, stated in TIME magazine (Young, 2019) that these allegations were *''simply not true''* and underlined

that she immediately informed the authorities in June 2014, when she first became aware of the abuses, and ''*fully cooperated with them*'' to ensure the speedy arrest of Johnson. (The Guardian, 2019). This was likely an attempt to portray the NGO as transparent and law-abiding, which falls under the accountability model for the restoration of trust. Meyler also insisted that her only mistake was hiring Johnson, who exploited his power, essentially putting the blame entirely on him (Gunther, 2018).

Despite these statements, Meyler resigned, after the recommendation of the MTM board (FPA, 2018). After Meyler's resignation, the NGO commissioned an independent investigating panel, at the same time that the Liberian government launched its own investigation, to review the allegations against MTM (Young, 2019). This was another strategic move towards restoring the credibility of the NGO, which falls under the notion of external monitoring, an important element of the accountability agenda. However, the findings of the independent investigation further damaged the reputation of MTM, as it discovered severe deficits in the organization's safeguarding policies, administration and leadership, which indicated that the children of the MTM schools were still vulnerable to exploitation. (Young, 2019. Moreover, the panel came into the conclusion that the organization was not transparent about the details of the sexual abuses, and did not take adequate care of the potential victims, for instance by testing them for HIV/AIDS, from which the perpetrator died. In the end, MTM decided to shut down, citing 'inability to fundraise', due to the sexual misconduct scandal, while also taking into consideration the findings of the independent investigation reports. Lastly, MTM apologized again and pledged to use its remaining resources to help the victims and the children of Liberia (Young, 2019).

- *The public reaction to the MTM sexual misconduct scandal in Liberia*

The sexual misconduct scandal of MTM was received with overwhelmingly negative criticisms, especially after allegations of a cover-up by the organization emerged in October 2018, by 'whistle-blower' Propublica. Considering the small size and influence of the

organization, there was significant coverage of the scandal in mainstream media, as well as mentions on Twitter. (Fig.5.). MTM was criticized for not being more proactive in informing the authorities about the extent of the abuses, which is an argument for transparency. In addition, a common argument that was traced, was the potential involvement of CEO Katie Meyler in obscuring the scandal, especially as rumours of her romantic relationship with the perpetrator began to circulate. Despite the initial apologies, Meyler deflected responsibility, arguing that her only fault was hiring Johnson (Young, 2018), which sparked outrage from the public. This outrage was reflected in the form of people protesting in the Liberian capital, holding placards that voiced their criticisms against MTM, such as 'Shame on you Katie Meyler', 'No excuse for rape', 'Fix the system' (Higgins 2018). A petition on social media was also created, asking to shut down MTM (Boley and Brown, 2018) and for Meyler to resign. Claims of Negligence, was another theme that emerged, based on the notion that MTM did not take the appropriate measures to not only tend to the victims, for instance by providing HIV-testing and psychological support, but to prevent the misconduct from occurring in the first place (Young, 2019). The Liberian government, also expressed 'great concern' over the Propublica findings and ordered the re-opening of the case to 'determine culpability' of the NGO for putting children at risk (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia, 2018 retrieved from Facebook). Moreover, a social media campaign was launched, demanding justice for the victims, and accountability from the organization. When asked about the scandal, people of Liberia stated that while foreign support is needed, there needs to be more 'rigorous minitoring' (Boley and Brown, 2018) over the activities, funding and practices of NGOs. This argument is echoed in the media, with Liberian journalists demanding the strengthening of the institutions that monitor violence in the humanitarian sector (Pailey, 2018). In addition to this, social groups, such as the Liberia Feminist Forum, highlighted that the rapes would be prevented if MTM and the government, as monitoring agent, took security and safety seriously (Harris, in Peyton, 2018). We assessed that these demands fit the 'external oversight' dimension of the accountability agenda, as well as the 'responsibility of leadership'. Lastly, there was significant mention of the inadequacy of the MTM leadership, and Meyler specifically, to manage the NGO, in such a complicated environment as Liberia. Meyler was criticized for starting the organization at a rather young age, without having the education or professional experience to be in charge of a humanitarian NGO that is working with vulnerable young girls, while several staff members did not possess the formal qualifications that are expected in the humanitarian sector (Higgins, 2018). We considered that criticism, as an indication of the NGO's low standards,

which while not specifically included as an indicator of rational trust, it is likely to harm the credibility of an organization.

Fig.5. Illustrative tweets of the public reaction to the MTM scandal (rational trust)

Source: https://twitter.com/musu4real/status/1050507653087195136

Source: https://twitter.com/Liberianstars/status/1050778836214960133

Source: https://twitter.com/Lillian_Guerra/status/1051491405091225604

Serious Black
@NicT10

Katie Meyler should be locked up. She was so in love with being a white savior that she let her predatory ex lover rape scores of Liberian girls, and tried to cover it up. He also likely infected some of those girls with HIV. #whitesavior #MoreThanMe #katiemeyler

8:49 μ.μ. · 23 Οκτ 2018 · Twitter for Android

1 Retweet **3** Επισημάνσεις "Μου αρέσει"

Source: https://twitter.com/NicT10/status/1054791960081293313

Tweet

Syan Rhodes
@SyanRhodes

Disturbing. Disgusting. Devastating. Incredible investigative reporting of horrific sexual abuse of vulnerable young girls and apparent cover-up by people seemingly only interested in fundraising. #KatieMeyler #MoreThanMe

ProPublica @propublica · 11 Οκτ 2018
Who is responsible when those who help also cause harm? Our new investigation w/ @TIME explores how Liberian girls were exploited while in the care of an American charity called More Than Me. propub.li/2CCZwvl

7:52 μ.μ. · 11 Οκτ 2018 από Houston, TX · Twitter for Android

Source: https://twitter.com/SyanRhodes/status/1050429055626035206

Chioma Agwuegbo
@ChiomaChuka

Negligence, fraud, cover ups, rape, and violence destroyed the very children MTM was set up to protect.

This is why investigative journalism is important, why independent media must be protected. I hope #MTM faces the full wrath of the law. #KatieMeyler

She Wanted to Help Liberia's Most Vulnerable Girls. Then Her School Became a P...
An investigation into a major American charity working with children in Liberia uncovered stories of sexual abuse
time.com

10:42 π.μ. · 22 Οκτ 2018 · Buffer

Source: https://twitter.com/ChiomaChuka/status/1054276670033666049

Tweet

Miss Vannette
@MissVannette

One small victory. @katiemeyler deserves to have all honors, awards and accolades stripped away until she honestly accounts for what she allowed to happen to those girls. #katiemeyler #morethanme #HoldKatieAccountable #HoldMTMAccountable

Source: https://twitter.com/MissVannette/status/1050910409488814080

4.2.2. The social trust model

- *MTM's reaction to the allegations of the sexual misconduct in Liberia*

There are very few instances, in which MTM could be considered to employ the social trust model as a strategy for credibility. One of the most prominent is included in the apology statement of MTM, once the allegations of sexual abuse of Liberian school girls were made public in October 2018. MTM stated: '*'these instances are contrary to the values, objectives and principles of MTM"* (statement extracted from Young, 2019). With this statement, the NGO attempted to distance itself from the perpetrator of the abuses, who was framed as a corrupted individual that had '*'coined the NGO into believing he was a kind of savior*'' (Katie Meyler, extracted from Sleight, 2018). More instances, in which MTM highlighted its values, were found in the resignation statement of CEO Katie Meyer, who stated that ''t*he organization has always been focused on doing what is best for young women and girls in Liberia*'' ('*More Than Me CEO temporarily resigns amid Liberia rape scandal'*, 2018), as well as her resignation announcement on her personal Facebook page. Meyler indicated that it had been '*her life's work'* to serve the mission to protect 'the most vulnerable girls of Liberia', as well as that it 'first priority' and '*primary concern'* over the past 10 years (Katie Meyler, 2019. Retrieved from Facebook 1.8.2020). Despite these comments, aiming to show the commitment of Meyler and MTM to their core values, the NGO did not invest enough in this strategy, as it did with accountability. It is possible that MTM and Katie Meyler did not consider social trust to be a viable option for restoring the organization's credibility and thus focused on taking more accountability measures.

- *The public reaction to the MTM sexual misconduct scandal in Liberia*

In the 24 documents and Tweets that were used for the analysis of the MTM Liberia case, we were not able to identify any instances of public reaction that correspond to the social trust model. Evidently, there is not a wide amount of reporting or mentioning of the MTM case

available in the public domain, however, we believe if reactions of continuing support for the organization did in fact exist, we would, at least, be able to trace positive connotations towards MTM and CEO Katie Meyler, which was not the case. Detailed information about the donations made to MTM in 2018 and 2019 were also not available, due to the fact that MTM has ceased its online presence and terminated its official website. However, reports point to a drop in donations following the scandal, with prominent funder Novo Foundation, cancelling its allocated funding (Gunther, 2018).Therefore, we deduce that the public had withdrawn its support for MTM and did not consider them to be committed to the values they promoted.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Reflection

5.1. Summary of findings

Case I:

Oxfam employed elements from both the rational and the social trust model, as an attempt to restore its credibility. At first, more social trust components were adopted by Oxfam, as the organization framed the issue as a mistake of individual persons, which does not reflect on the organization and its values as a whole. To substantiate this claim, Oxfam highlighted the long-term humanitarian work that the organization had been doing in Haiti and other disaster areas, and stressed its commitment to support the victims of the misconduct. The commitment to the values and the appeal to previous 'good work' of the NGO, were both identified as indicators of social trust. However, when concerns were raised over a potential cover-up of the case by Oxfam, the organization shifted its strategy towards the accountability agenda. Specifically, we identified the following accountability strategies, in line with the indicators of rational trust: responsibility of leadership, reflected in various apology statements, and the resignation of some of its senior staff, transparency, reflected in the public release of the 2001 original investigation report on misconduct, and external oversight, as seen by the independent investigation, commissioned by Oxfam. Regarding the public reaction to the Oxfam scandal, elements from both rational and the social trust model were found. At first, there was an overwhelmingly negative response towards the

organization, translated also in plummeting donations. The public demanded the resignation of the Oxfam leadership, transparency and honesty for the NGO's failings, development of more external monitoring, and a commitment to set the appropriate accountability measures. Essentially, the accountability agenda was again the epicentre of the public reactions to the scandal. However, there were also several reactions that demonstrated support for the NGO, despite its wrongdoings, citing the organization's values and 'good work' over a long time, while also raising concerns over the political motivations that may have been trying to undermine Oxfam and the humanitarian sector. In the end, Oxfam, for the most part, survived the Haiti scandal and it is able to still be among the most prominent NGOs today.

Case II:

Contrary to the case of Oxfam, MTM almost exclusively adopted the accountability model, as the basis of its strategy to restore its credibility. The only elements which could be attributed to the social trust model, were found in the in the apology statement of MTM and the resignation of its CEO. Specifically, MTM, similarly to Oxfam, claimed that the scandal does not represent the values and mission of the organization. However, MTM did not make an effort to substantiate its commitment to its values, but focused, in turn, to establishing accountability. In terms of accountability, MTM apologized to the victims of the abuses, and pledged to set in place the appropriate measures, in order to avoid similar future incidents. The NGO denied, however, allegations that it had tried to cover-up the abuses, citing full cooperation with the authorities, as an attempt to appear transparent. After the resignation of its CEO, an indication of responsibility, MTM commissioned an independent panel to review the case. This was in line with the notion of external oversight, which we identified as an indicator of rational trust. In terms of the public reaction to the MTM scandal, we were not able to trace any indicators of social trust, as none of our sources showed continuing support for the organization, while the limited information available regarding donations indicates a significant decrease. For indications of rational trust in the public reactions, there was a lot of criticism over the lack of transparency of MTM, for not making the incidents of abuse public in 2014, which was received as an indication to cover-up the case. We also found overwhelming support to shut down MTM and for CEO Katie Meyler to resign. Support for external oversight of funding and personnel was also found, as MTM leadership was deemed inadequate to carry out its objectives in Liberia.

5.2. Comparison and reflection of the findings

In this section, we are going to compare the findings of the two cases and address their similarities and differences. Then, the findings will be reflected and their theoretical implications will be discussed. Specifically, based on the findings of the document analysis, the two NGOs adopted some similar mechanisms, in terms of accountability. For instance, they both released an apology statement, and announced the resignation of their senior staff that were in charge of the operations, in which the scandal took place. These mechanisms correspond to the 'responsibility of leadership' indication of rational trust. Moreover, both NGOs employed the strategy of 'external oversight', in the form of commissioning independent investigations, to review the cases of misconduct and those involved. However, these are the extensions of the similarities between the two cases. Oxfam was, in terms of accountability, much more proactive, as it is demonstrated by the release of the redacted 2011 investigation report, which serves as an indication of establishing transparency. In addition, Oxfam created a plan (10-point-plan) with specific steps, aiming to strengthen its accountability mechanisms to prevent the reoccurrence of such incidents. MTM on the other hand, did not take any substantial preventative actions after the scandal surfaced, as it also indicated by the results of the independent investigation. The most important difference, however, between how the NGOs handled the allegations of their scandals, was that MTM hardly adopted any elements from the social trust model. Apart from a few public statements about being committed to their values, the NGO did not take the necessary steps to convince the public about their commitment. In comparison, Oxfam appealed to the good work that the organization has been doing for years, in order to support the claim that the 'corrupted' individual persons should be blamed for the misconduct, rather than the entire organization. One possible explanation about this difference is, that, as Oxfam is a large, transnational NGO, which has been operating for many decades, it was easier for them to establish social trust. This is an organization that people know fairly well, and can feel a connection to, in terms of having the same objectives and motivations for the alleviation of human suffering. MTM, however, had been operating for under a decade at the time of a scandal, in a small West African country, and the most well-known thing about the charity, was American CEO Katie Meyler. Therefore, it is logical that constituents turned to Meyler for accountability and for verification that the charity was still committed to helping vulnerable girls in Liberia. When the CEO and MTM failed to deliver these expectations, by inadequately addressing

accountability and by not establishing social trust, the organization's credibility was shattered and it was later forced to shut down. On the contrary, Oxfam applied multiple dimensions of accountability, and made an effort to appeal to the social trust objectives, so despite the damning evidence of wrongdoings, the NGO managed to survive. This line of argumentation is supported by the findings regarding the public reaction to the scandals. In both cases, demands for accountability, responsibility, external oversight and transparency were made, showing that these elements are considered important for the public to trust NGOs. However, reactions in line with the social trust can only be traced in the case of Oxfam, in which the public showed some continuing support for the organization, while this is entirely absent from the case of MTM. In terms of the theoretical implications of these findings, we do not deem appropriate to make any grand generalizable inferences. However, we consider that through this research, the social trust model has gained support for its contribution to NGO credibility. The case of Oxfam, in which both rational and social trust models were adopted, was more successful in building credibility, than MTM, in which only the rational trust model was applied, and thus, the importance of social trust on credibility seems to be rather hard to be ignored. Therefore, in the research question *'how NGOs restore their credibility',* the social trust model could, at least partly, be the answer.

5.4. Strengths and limitations of the study

Our case study provided in-depth understanding of the rational and social models of trust by examining their implications in a real-world context (Yin, 2014, 4), i.e. that of humanitarian NGOs, Oxfam and MTM. We were able to inspect in detail, the specific strategies employed by the two NGOs and their impact on the public perception of their credibility. Specifically, we attempted to make inferences about the appropriateness of each model in increasing NGO credibility, concluding that we gained confidence in the ability of the social trust model to, at least in part, contribute to more credibility. Therefore, this study provides supporting evidence to the ongoing debate on the rational and social dimensions of trust, and opens the way for more research on this topic. Furthermore, the data collection method of document analysis, allowed us to review a large amount of information in an efficient and cost-effective way, without them being affected by our involvement (e.g. as with interviews) in the research process. However, this study was also subjected to several limitations that should be

mentioned. Generalizability and representativeness are the most commonly cited limitations of case studies, due to the limited amount of cases that are being studied. It is understandable that we should be careful about making inferences about the behaviour of the population, based on the limited findings of a few cases. One other limitation is that our data was collected by using only secondary sources, i.e. written documents, extracted from the internet. The source documents were not created with the research question in mind, therefore critical review was needed for argumentation, to avoid the use of misleading or biased information. Another instance of potential bias, is that of the selection of the source documents, as there was not a wide range of available data, so we cannot be certain that the sources used are representative. In terms of data collection, the Internet was used as a search engine, via the use of keywords, which potentially omitted some data, in case they were tagged under different terms. Another limitation is that the use of the Internet as a search engine, provided us access only to a limited part of public information, especially in Case II, in which the NGO had already shut down and ended its online presence. Other forms of media, such as television or radio coverage were not included. Time restrictions in conducting this research were also applicable.

5.5. Future research

This research was restricted to two cases of humanitarian NGOs, for the study of the models of rational and social trust and therefore, it might not be appropriate to generalize the findings to a broader level. For that reason, we would encourage further replication of the research objectives to more cases of NGOs (e.g. large-N quantitative research), using different types of NGOs (e.g. regional, local NGOs) and at a different location (e.g. Western countries). The reason for these recommendations is for the researchers to consider and examine possible confounders. We would also propose the research of this topic, using different data collection methods, such as interviews, or focus groups, as a means to get a deeper insight of public perceptions of accountability and trust. Lastly, another dimension that would be interesting to investigate, is the influence of the media on the credibility of NGOs, since their involvement likely plays a significant role in shaping and framing issues of accountability and trust.

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