

Eftekhar, M, H Li, LN Van Wassenhove, S Webster (2017) The role of media exposure on coordination in the humanitarian setting, *Production and Operations Management*, 26(5): 802-816.

**Summary:** Despite facing high demand and constrained resources, humanitarian organizations (HOs) often refrain from sharing resources or coordinating effectively in the field. While such coordination could enhance operational efficiency and reduce costs, there exists a widespread belief that it might diminish the media visibility individual organizations receive, potentially affecting their future fundraising capabilities. In this study, we empirically examine the influence of media exposure on the donations received by HOs. Interestingly, major donors are increasingly pressing for enhanced accountability and improved operational performance from HOs, thus encouraging better coordination among them. Consequently, utilizing a stylized model, we delineate the optimal coordination strategies, considering the specific funding sources and primary objectives of each organization.

**Key takeaways:** The central argument of this discussion posits that the influence of media exposure and operational performance on the coordination decisions of HOs can be examined through the lens of *Resource Dependence Theory*. This theory suggests that resource dependence can exert significant, albeit contrasting, effects on the strategic choices of HOs. On one side, HOs seeking to boost individual donations might opt for more exclusive media exposure, potentially reducing their willingness to coordinate intensely with peer organizations. Conversely, the pursuit of increased institutional donations, driven by a desire for enhanced operational performance, may lead HOs to seek closer coordination with their counterparts, aiming for more efficient operations.



When multiple organizations collaborate, media attention can be diluted among them, or in some cases, only one organization may gain visibility while the others do not. This study is among the few to empirically demonstrate the relationship between media exposure and the reluctance to coordinate within the humanitarian sector. Despite long-standing assumptions about media exposure's significant influence on charitable donations, scientific evidence to substantiate this widespread belief has been scant. Our results reveal that HOs primarily funded through institutional donations are more inclined to coordinate with their peers compared to those reliant on individual donations. Overall, while HOs' hesitancy towards collaboration may not serve the broader interests of beneficiaries, it is grounded in rational considerations. Additionally, we explore the effects of increasing media intensity with the rising prevalence of social media. Our findings suggest a likely positive societal impact due to increased overall donations. However, we also highlight a potential risk of diminished social welfare.

While working on this paper, I enjoyed learning much from the following references (either for the technical reasons or the context):

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Toyasaki, F, E Arikan, L Silbermayr, I Falagara Sigala. 2016. Disaster relief inventory management: Horizontal cooperation between humanitarian organizations. *Production and Operations Management* 26(6): 1221-1237.