Branding in the Nonprofit Sector
A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Refugee Organizations' Branding Strategies on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

The construct of branding has mostly gained its popularity in the for-profit context, even though it is of equal importance in the non-profit sector. Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are dependent on recruiting volunteers, receiving donations, and partnerships with external stakeholders. Thus, an effective branding strategy is vital to the daily operations of NPOs. Social media can act as a useful tool to brand the NPO, however, the potential should also be fully realized. This calls for more practical insights into NPOs branding practices to guide practitioners in their content creation on social media. While previous studies have investigated platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in the context of NPOs' branding practices, research on the strategic use of Instagram remains scarce. Furthermore, research on branding practices in the humanitarian sector remains narrow. For this purpose, the Instagram posts of three international refugee organizations, namely, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (N = 30), the International Rescue Committee (N = 30) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (N = 30) are examined in the context of one of the most recent humanitarian crises in Europe, the conflict in Ukraine. More specifically, through deploying the method of multimodal critical discourse analysis, this research aims to explore how international refugee organizations strategically position their brand on Instagram in the context of the Ukrainian conflict. The findings indicate that organizations position their brand through four dominant strategies. First, the organizations showcase their brand purpose by emphasizing the severity of the crisis and storytelling about forcibly displaced people and brand origins. Second, the organizations highlight their brand mission through showing their presence, efforts and measures, communicating about the organizations' solidarity and aim to influence external actors, and driving their financial objectives and visibility. Third, the strategy of branding the organization visually is characterized using organizational colors and the strategic positioning of the logo. The last strategy, reinforcing humanitarian discourses, is showcased by three representations 'organization vs. forcibly displaced people', 'forcibly displaced families' and 'generic masses fleeing'. The four strategies together illustrate how refugee organizations brand themselves on social media, contributing to the limited amount of research in the field.

KEYWORDS: *Nonprofit branding, humanitarianism, refugee organizations, social media, multimodal critical discourse analysis*

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1. Introduction

The year 2021 marked the year with the highest number of displaced people in recent history. At the end of 2021, a total of 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022), representing one of the largest crises the world is facing nowadays. The current conflict in Ukraine contributed to the steep rise in numbers of forcibly displaced people, being even considered as the fastest growing 'refugee crisis'[1] in Europe (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Specific international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) have dedicated their efforts to helping the displaced and showcased their operations to Western audiences through social media platforms (cf. infra). According to the latest statistics, social media play a central role in the communication of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), including refugee organizations, as it has proven to be the most effective tool in inspiring donors to give (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2020). Especially Instagram, a platform that allows users to share videos and photos with their followers and offers interaction opportunities through for example liking, commenting, and sharing content (Instagram, n.d.-a) is an effective tool for NPOs' communication (Miller, 2010). This is due to the visual nature of the platform. Audiences are hereby more likely to interact with appealing pictures as they are perceived as more interesting in contrast to text (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Hill, 2004). When merging both visuals and text in captions, messages can overall be communicated more effectively (Schill, 2012), thereby strengthening the brand of the NPO.

A strong brand is necessary for NPOs to stay competitive in the industry (Mirzaei et al., 2021). Hereby, a brand should represent "who you are, what you do and why that matters" (Kylander & Stone, 2012, p. 38). The concept of branding can be further understood as how the identity, service or product of the company is recognized (Anholt, 2005). This recognition takes place in the realm of the communication channel, style and content which brings the personality and nature of the product forward and consequently that of its target audience (ibid.). In addition, branding also involves the brands' purpose, ethics, corporate strategy, external and internal communication, as well as stakeholder and consumer motivations and behaviors (ibid.). Thus, the communication strategy of a brand must involve a strong

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[1] While the term 'refugee crisis' may be considered as oversimplified with a hegemonic construction (Ongenaert, 2022) and several scholars criticize the use of such terminology (e.g., Fransen & De Haas, 2019), the term is used in the scope of the present study to not neglect the urgency and the suffering taking place. Furthermore, one must acknowledge that the term not only relates to people seeking refuge in foreign countries but that the crisis also involves people that are internally displaced or seeking asylum.

positioning of the brand, as it allows organizations such as international refugee organizations to achieve their objectives.

While branding in the commercial sector has already been studied for several decades, research in non-commercial branding remains scarce (Chapleo, 2015). Existing research in the area of NPO branding has investigated how social media platforms are utilized in achieving the organizations' objectives (e.g., Burton et al., 2017; Waters & Jones, 2011; Waters et al., 2009). However, potential often remains untapped to utilize social media in achieving benefits (Burton et al., 2017) as well as informing and engaging with stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009). While the current state of research gives best practice examples of NPO branding on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, further research is needed to address other relevant social media platforms such as Instagram. Instagram is to the researchers' knowledge the only platform that has not received as much attention in NPO branding yet. Additionally, previous studies consistently argue that the body of literature is still unsatisfactory and suggest to further examine the use of social media in the development of NPOs' brand (Goldkind, 2015; Sepulcri et al., 2020). This not only contributes to organizations' performance (Sepulcri et al., 2020) but also gives practical implications to various stakeholders (e.g., marketing practitioners, public relations practitioners) on how to use social media as a catalyst.

While branding is acknowledged within the broader scope of humanitarian branding literature (e.g., Vestergaard, 2010), to the researcher's knowledge, branding strategies of refugee organizations has not received attention in academia yet. Only a few studies shed light on general communication strategies of refugee organizations, providing a basis for further exploration (e.g., Ongenaert, 2019, 2022; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). The relevance of studying refugee organizations and their branding strategies is routed in the fact that their communication about refugee crises is known to shape the public perception and general discourses circulated in society (Chouliaraki, 2012), creating broader implications for policies and society. Additionally, understanding the strategic positioning of the refugee organizations' brand can assist other NPOs in the humanitarian sector in deploying an effective communication strategy on their own social media accounts.

Within this context, this research aims to fill current gaps in academia by investigating three specific cases of refugee organizations (i.e., UNHCR, IRC and NRC) in answering the central research question: How do international refugee organizations strategically position their brand on Instagram in the context of the Ukrainian conflict? The research will be conducted by using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to understand the discourses each of the international refugee organizations uses in their branding strategy on

Instagram. Hereby, Instagram posts (images and the first image of carousel posts) as well as their corresponding captions are analyzed. The adoption of a multimodal approach enables the researcher to conduct an in-depth critical analysis of textual and visual components.

Being the core topic of this research, first, the concept of nonprofit branding and its key components are discussed. The subject is further theorized by focusing specifically on the branding strategies of NPOs on social media. Hereby, previous studies on NPOs' presence on diverse social media platforms and branding strategies of humanitarian organizations are outlined to provide a basis for the analysis. Given the limited and fragmented nature of research on the branding of refugee organizations, the representation of forcibly displaced people is discussed which represents the central aspect in refugee organizations' branding strategies. For the final section of the theoretical framework, central communication practices of refugee organizations are provided for further contextualization. The study will continue by outlining the methodology which is followed by an in-depth review of the results. Finally, the discussion and conclusion are presented together with its implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Branding in the Nonprofit Sector

2.1.1 Introducing Nonprofit Organizations' Branding

Branding has its origins in the commercial industry. The concept of branding, as defined by Keller (2003), involves the creation of mental structures to organize the knowledge about services and products that clarify consumers' decision-making while also providing value to the organization. Internal factors contributing to brand success are equally crucial and should be aligned to the following principles, as suggested by Krake (2005). First, organizations should create brand associations by only focusing on a small number of brands. Second, the mix of brand elements should be constructed in a way that supports brand awareness and brand image. Third, the communication should be consistent, and policies applied in a logical manner. Fourth, the link between the brand and the character of the company should be clear and ideally, passion towards the brand should be rooted in the company (ibid.). While this framework is very relevant to the commercial setting, applicability to the nonprofit sector should be specified given the latter's unique characteristics and nature.

Branding in the nonprofit sector, or what is also referred to in academia as NPO branding, can be understood as the active management of tangible and intangible perceptions to communicate consistent messages to stakeholders (Hankinson & Rochester, 2005). While some scholars view branding as a practice being for-profit in nature (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009), a growing body of literature suggests that branding can offer a differential advantage for NPOs (e.g., Belenioti & Vassiliadis, 2017; Guo & Saxton, 2014). It has been even argued that branding is more vital to NPOs in comparison to organizations in the for-profit sector as the NPO's brand is evaluated by the eyes of the public and stakeholders in terms of their image, identity and reputation (Paço et al., 2014). Branding captures consumers' attention and promotes engagement in prosocial behaviors (Shehu et al., 2016). Specifically, the brand image has shown to affect the likelihood for people to donate, while the organization's reputation plays a role in the recruitment of volunteers (Paço et al., 2014). Therefore, brand-oriented activities play a pivotal role for NPOs in achieving their objectives.

2.1.2 Nonprofit Organizations' Branding Practices

When specifically looking at NPOs' branding practices for external stakeholders, it must be acknowledged that it is "more complex than simply satisfying donor needs" (Stride & Lee, 2007, p. 109). While there are similarities in the approach of commercial branding and

NPO branding, their dependence on values differs. Moreover, values are at the very heart of NPOs and justify the organizations' existence (Stride & Lee, 2007). Values act as a driver in organizational behavior while also creating meaning which is useful to not only internal but also external stakeholders (ibid.). Hereby, external stakeholders also play a role in co-creating brand value – a practice which can be understood as joint value creation between the organization and external stakeholders (Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018). To successfully co-create brand value, one can differentiate between four strategies: (1) brand communities (2) influence, (3) brand stories, and (4) presence (ibid.).

First, brand communities are composed of interaction between the organization and their stakeholders and beneficiaries. Their attachment is stronger in comparison to individual consumers which is argued to be more valuable to a brand (Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018). If properly managed, the relationships between the stakeholders can even be considered as potential resources which can significantly increase the value of the brand (Gao et al., 2018). Second, making use of so-called influencers with a big influence on their personal or professional network to enhance engagement with the organization is another best practice in the branding of an organization (Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018). Hereby, two strategies can be of use: capitalizing on existing content that fits well with the organization's brand or requesting influencers to co-create content (ibid.). Third, storytelling has already been considered by several scholars to be relevant to the external communication of an organization (e.g., Ongenaert et al., 2022; Waters & Jones, 2011). Similarly, Nyangwe and Buhalis, (2018) argue not only the importance of brand stories but further the possibility for organizations to communicate their values and establish a relationship with stakeholders. This can be done more effectively (in terms of reach and engagement) through an engaging story as opposed to simply sharing information about the organization. Lastly, presence is relevant for the establishment of relationships between stakeholders (ibid.). Presence and visibility allow for greater experience for external stakeholders (Björner, 2013). Taken together, the co-creation of values can be done through different strategies and plays an important role in the branding practices of NPOs. However, next to the (co-) creation of values, other elements are relevant in the construction of a successful brand. In the following a more detailed and integrative framework is introduced to highlight the different elements necessary for successful NPO branding.

2.1.3 Towards Successful Brand Management of Nonprofit Organizations

Garg and colleagues (2019) have recently introduced a model to successful brand management of NPOs (Figure 1). The scholars argue that the proposed metrics increase the effectiveness of NPOs' branding practices. In contrast to previous scholars who have either based their research on an outside-in perspective (external perception of the brand by e.g., competitors and consumers) (Davis & Dunn, 2002; Munoz & Kumar, 2004) or focused on the relation between brand identity and brand image (Kylander & Stone, 2012), Garg and colleagues (2019) consider aside from brand identity and brand image, also brand performance to achieve the organization's vision to be relevant in the branding strategy of NPOs. The importance of the three metrics is assessed from different stakeholders internally and externally (e.g., volunteers, donors, beneficiaries, management, media) and can be seen as a starting point to analyze NPOs branding strategies – the aim of the present study.
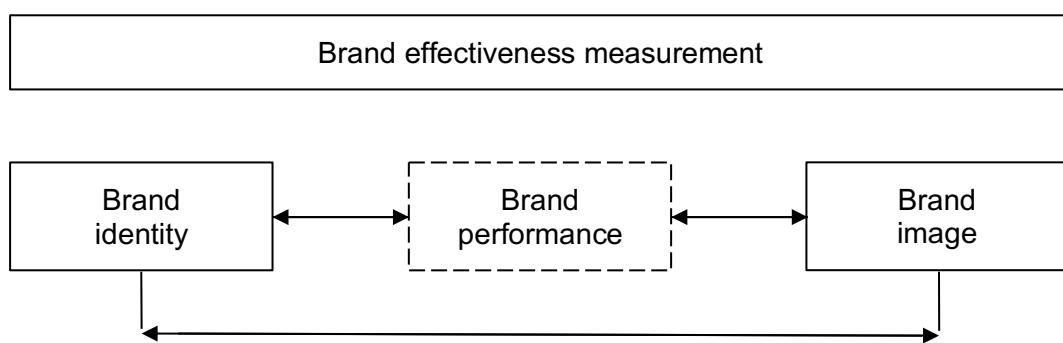
Figure 1: Model for Effective Brand Management of NPOs (Garg et al., 2019)

First and foremost, brand identity focuses on the sender and captures how internal stakeholders create and perceive the brand (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Hereby, vision, leadership (Bridson & Evans, 2004; Napoli, 2006), shared values (Voeth & Herbst, 2008) as well as the culture at work (Chernatony, 2006) are among other factors part of the brand identity construction. Especially NPOs should lay emphasis on promoting a culture in the organization that reflects their mission (Garg et al., 2019). A brand mission involves the boundary of services that are provided and acts as a tool for strategic orientation through which stability and consistency of services is ensured (Brown & Iverson, 2004). Furthermore, the visual identity can be established and reinforced by making use of brand symbols (P. Hankinson, 2000), including the logo, graphics, or website that refer to the organization's culture and identity (Garg et al., 2019). When organizational cohesion is achieved about the

organizations' brand identity, transparency and trust by external stakeholders can be increased, contributing to a positive brand image and ultimately driving the objectives of the NPO to create a greater social impact (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Brand image can be conceptualized as external stakeholders' perception of the brand (Kylander & Stone, 2012). This perception is evaluated by NPO's communication to external stakeholders which should be done consistently and distinctively (Garg et al., 2019) to ensure an alignment between the brand image and brand identity (Kylander & Stone, 2012). The brand image is manifested by external stakeholders through the levels of brand association and loyalty, familiarity (Garg et al., 2019), understanding (Lehmann et al., 2008), perception of services (in terms of quality) (Aaker, 1996; Munoz & Kumar, 2004), and regard for the NPO (Garg et al., 2019). The extent to which the brand image is perceived as positive to external stakeholders is reflected among others in the support (financial & non-financial), awards or accolades given to the NPO (ibid.). Furthermore, the perceived differentiation should also not be overlooked in the construction of the brand image (Garg et al., 2019; Lehmann et al., 2008). Lastly, brand identity and brand image can be aligned through brand performance. Brand performance includes both internal parameters (rooted in brand identity) and external parameters (rooted brand image) (Garg et al., 2019). Internal brand performance parameters include organizational communication structure (Napoli, 2006; Parthasarathy, 2013; Sargeant, 2013), vision, skills and managers' leadership qualities, available human and financial resources (Garg et al., 2019), and the quality of processes (Sargeant, 2013). A strong brand identity acts as an enabler to the efficient use of resources and acquisition of new resources, which enhances the organization's capacity and ultimately drives the brand performance (Garg et al., 2019). On an external level, trust, support, sustainable growth and social impact can be increased through strong brand performance which in turn influences the reputation over a longer time period and contributes to the brand image and brand identity (ibid.). To conclude, we can see that while the model provides a basis for successful brand management, the strategic positioning of NPOs' brands still lacks sufficient in-depth research, to which this study will respond.

2.2 Nonprofit Branding on Social Media

2.2.1 Nonprofit Organization's Dominant Branding Strategies

One of the communication channels through which NPOs can strategically position their brand is social media. Previous studies have already pointed out that NPOs which communicate their intentions and core values are more likely to have high levels of

engagement (Tapp et al., 1999), fundraising efforts (Hou et al., 2009), charitable giving (Sargeant et al., 2008), retention rates and volunteer recruitment (Randle et al. 2013). NPOs are hereby characterized through adopting human-like characteristics which differ from commercial brands (Venable et al., 2005). Therefore, social media can act as a useful tool to communicate core values and the purpose of the NPO (Mirzaei et al., 2021). The brand purpose can hereby be defined as the impact of the brand on the lives of people (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). While NPOs are higher purpose natives, the communication about NPO's brand purpose on social media is essential to create a relationship with the audience (ibid.). Purposeful branding allows to gain a competitive advantage and act as growth driver (Vilá & Bharadwaj, 2017). When this is communicated alongside NPOs' mission, and the societal contribution of the organization is clarified, long-term relationships can evolve between the audiences and NPOs (Mirzaei et al., 2021). Further engagement can be driven with social media, as it allows for the audience to engage in immediate action – people are able to repost comments, donate, and sign petitions within a few clicks (Madianou, 2013). Given the affordances of social media platforms, NPOs can utilize them to help in fulfilling and further driving their mission and directives. The limited literature and relevance to stakeholders reveals the importance to investigate NPOs branding strategies on social media and thus frames the research topic of the present study.

A few studies have investigated the use of specific platforms such as YouTube (Waters & Jones, 2011), Twitter (Burton et al., 2017) and Facebook (Waters et al., 2009) by NPOs in their branding strategy. Overviewing literature, various types of strategies can be distinguished. First, disclosure can be seen as part of NPOs' branding strategy. Disclosure refers to for instance including profile information such as listing of administrators, description of the NPO, URL linking to the NPO's website and logo, as well as NPO's history and mission statement on social media (Waters et al., 2009). Second, information dissemination and involvement also play a relevant role in NPOs' branding strategy. This refers to posting photos, news links and engaging in a discussion (via e.g., discussion boards) with the audience (ibid.). The third strategy that can be distinguished is the communication of the brand and organizational identity (Waters & Jones, 2011). This can be conveyed by NPOs through (a) a professional appearance (e.g., videos are produced with still cameras, closing credits, diving directly into the content without opening title sequences) (b) demonstrations / references to their future work and mission and (c) referring to the organizations' guiding values and principles (ibid.). Especially the latter, also confirmed by previous research, indicates that values are drivers for organizational behavior, and they must be communicated

for the sake of internal and external stakeholders (Stride & Lee, 2007).

While these branding strategies are relevant in the establishment of the NPOs' brand on social media and are exemplified with strategies on Youtube, Twitter and Facebook, Instagram has so far mostly been identified as a relevant social medium for commercial brands to brand themselves (e.g., Martinus & Chaniago, 2017; Park & Namkung, 2022). Research on the use of Instagram as a means for NPOs' branding remains scarce, to which this study will respond. Since its establishment in 2010 (Instagram, n.d.-b), Instagram is among Youtube and Facebook one of the top content sharing platforms worldwide with an estimated active user count of two billion (Appendix A). The high number of users therefore reveals the importance to analyze NPO's branding strategies on Instagram to not only close the research gap but also guide practitioners in their content creation. Thus, the following section will cover the underlying branding strategies in more depth, with a specific focus on content, engagement as well as cross-branded promotion strategies on NPOs' social media accounts.

2.2.2 Content, Engagement & Cross-Branded Promotion

Content by NPOs has shown to mostly revolve around their services, programs, advocacy, volunteer accomplishments, recruitment, and fundraising (Water & Jones, 2011). Information about successes and accomplishments by NPOs is communicated by anecdotal evidence, interviews and by presenting statistics. Other content may involve celebrity speeches or visits, responses to a crisis, or interviews with senior staff of the NPO (ibid.). When specifically looking at the actors present on NPOs' social media accounts, users, clients of nonprofit programs, and celebrities are the most frequently portrayed groups. Celebrities have already been found by previous research to be a common part of NPO organization's content as broader audiences can be reached (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019; Kyriakidou, 2019) and media attention for the NPO can be increased (Cottle & Nolan, 2007). Celebrities are hereby commonly presented by giving a testimony instead of being highlighted quietly (Water & Jones, 2011). With regard to the engagement strategy, NPOs rather insert call to actions (encouraging audience to e.g., share the video, provide feedback, connect for volunteering opportunities, donate, sign petitions, contact legislators) instead of community management (e.g., responding to comments) (ibid.). To enhance the brand identity on social media, six guidelines can be applied: (1) storytelling, (2) keep it short, (3) focus on one core message, (4) relevant to the audience, (5) tell the audience what you want, and (6) be genuine (ibid.). These can be seen as guiding principles in the content production while current technological

developments must also be taken into account when applying the six rules to the NPOs' content on social media.

While the content and engagement strategy are relevant, co-branded and co-created promotion between NPOs and other brands also plays a relevant role in NPOs' underlying branding strategies (Burton et al., 2017). Co-branded promotion offers the opportunity to tap into the potential of new audiences from other organizations' networks (ibid.). However, several studies suggest that organizations fail to make use of the potential to engage with stakeholders (e.g., Burton et al., 2017; Lovejoy et al. 2012). The promotion approach is still at a 'philanthropic stage' which suggests low levels of engagement and resources (Austin, 2003). The limited levels of reciprocity demonstrate that NPOs presumably lack expertise in social media management because of time and staff constraints which ultimately leads to limited recognition by partners on social media (Burton et al., 2017). Thus, the potential of co-branded promotion must be leveraged by NPOs to draw in new audiences from corporate partners and engage in an effective communication strategy on social media.

In sum, the branding practices, including the content and engagement strategies and the untapped potential of co-branded promotion provide a basis to further explore the understudied field of NPO branding. While the current academic debate about branding practices of NPOs on social media provide a basis, more research is needed in the field, specifically with regard to NPOs operating in the humanitarian sector. The following section will cover humanitarian branding practices in more depth to set the ground for the following literature on refugee organizations specifically.

2.3 Humanitarian Branding

Humanitarian organizations have shown to adopt an increasingly professionalized approach towards communication management (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005) in which the brand purpose represents a key element in the communication with stakeholders (cf. supra) (Vestergaard, 2010). A coherent approach is key to managing complex conflicts and emergencies, gaining support for victims, addressing insecurities and protecting the organizations' independence (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005). While branding can be seen as an opportunity to communicate the organization's values, one may also criticize the tension between the logic of recognition in advertising and raising awareness which is considered a central element in the operations of humanitarian organizations (Vestergaard, 2008). The goal of social change is aided through donations which allow the organization to operate in the first place, thus public awareness is fundamental (ibid.). However, the increasingly portrayed

suffering in the media leads to suspicion (Boltanski, 1999), allowing the audience to distance themselves (Liebes & Katz, 1989) while also creating a numbing effect which in turn influences the spectator to feel indifferent, ultimately resulting in compassion fatigue (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019; Tester, 2001). This is a common dilemma among humanitarian organizations and they have to find new creative ways in which they can engage their audience and receive support.

To tackle this challenge, humanitarian organizations have shown to deploy a new strategy in mobilizing the public in which core values of the organization and reasons to take action are not anymore explicitly part of their branding strategy and rather paradoxically suppressed (Vestergaard, 2010). Instead, humanitarian organizations make use of the so-called montage technique, where two paradox discourses are merged to force the audience to construct a new meaningful relation – which is individually constructed in the minds of the audience. The technique takes for granted the knowledge of the audience about persuasive tools and includes them as complicits instead of persuasion victims (ibid.). Hereby, humanitarian organizations avoid being subject to the so called 'skepticism of representation' (Boltanski 1999; Vestergaard, 2008) and rather make use of the advantage of not being held accountable; thus, not risking the credibility of the organization (Vestergaard, 2010). One must acknowledge, however, that the new technique raises the risk of "being appealing at the cost of the humanitarian appeal" (Vestergaard, 2010, p. 182).

When taking a broader perspective, another essential element of humanitarian organizations' branding strategy is represented by their placement of logos. Logos are signifiers of trust (Kylander & Stone, 2012) and can be helpful when aiding people with low literacy levels or in a context where multiple languages are utilized (e.g., refugee camps) (Martin & Brown, 2021). But most importantly, logos also represent a way for humanitarian organizations to communicate their support for good causes to the distant audience (ibid.). The placement of logos can enhance the visibility of the humanitarian organization in the context of increasingly intensified competition and funding challenges (Waisbord, 2018). However, this drive for visibility also comes with its challenges. While one may question to what extent certain causes are supported in favor over others (and significant global problems are neglected) due to the interest of creating a public spectacle (Wilkins, 2018), organizations can at the same time also be held accountable for their doings (Martin & Brown, 2021). Humanitarian organizations are thereby situated in a so-called 'reputation trap' in which they align their brand purpose and brand mission to that of the donors, produce more tangible (brandable) results for means of reputation and financial support (Gent et al., 2015). In

addition, when specifically looking at on-site branding practices, one can also criticize the consequences in terms of sustainability. Brands always represent a sense of ownership (Blain et al., 2005; G. Hankinson, 2004). In that regard, humanitarian aid organizations' logo represents free service and dependence. This can hinder affected communities to form a state of ownership over the service and willingness to keep the service upheld (e.g., water source) (Martin & Brown, 2021). The humanitarian response therefore results in becoming an unsustainable solution.

The current state of research suggests to further explore how humanitarian organizations currently brand themselves and uncover patterns that are driving the brands' main objectives. More specifically, refugee organizations provide an interesting case to further explore humanitarian branding practices (Martin & Brown, 2021). This can guide practitioners in deploying an effective branding strategy and contributes to the limited scope of literature in the field.

2.4 The Representation of Forcibly Displaced People on Social Media

To narrow down the focus of the present study and to respond to current research gaps, the present study examines refugee organizations in particular (cf. supra). Hereby, the representation of forcibly displaced people is relevant to discuss because they form the core of refugee organizations' branding strategy while also being the main purpose of refugee organizations' existence – or as Vestergaard (2010) refers to, the *raison d'être*. Thus, the different representations not only play a role in shaping public opinion (Chouliaraki, 2012) but also in the construction of the refugee organization's brand. The importance of studying refugee representations especially on visual social media, can be seen in the processing of visuals. According to Guidry and colleagues (2018), visual content is processed in a different way. It is more consistently remembered and action is taken more frequently in comparison to text-based content (Houts et al., 2006; Mansoor & Dowse, 2003).

When overviewing early studies, the communication about forcibly displaced people can be considered a double-edged sword. While many express their support and empathy towards forcibly displaced people and understand their risks when leaving their home country behind (Gale, 2004), others express security concerns (McKay et al., 2012). Journalists add their stance by making use of social media to report about crises situations to their audience (McGonigal, 2015) and harness the power in framing the storyline. This framing has severe consequences for the public opinion and discourses circulated which can ultimately have implications in changing the branding strategy of refugee organizations. One of the frames

which are very relevant to the context of forcibly displaced people is emphasis framing (Guidry et al., 2018). The term can be conceptualized as selecting a set of facts in favor over another (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012). Hereby, one can differentiate between two different 'subframes': episodic framing in which a specific story or a particular example is shown, and thematic framing where the topic is situated in a broad social context (Gross, 2008). Previous research suggests that people exposed to thematic frames are more likely to be supportive of the humanitarian policy interventions and think in a broader context, whereas episodic frames lead to lower support levels (Iyengar, 1991). However, according to more recent research conducted by Guidry and colleagues (2018), episodic frames are more frequently present in humanitarian-concern content on Instagram. Examples include storytelling of specific aid workers or forcibly displaced people (ibid.). Given the low support levels of this frame, one may criticize the untapped potential by refugee organizations and that content must shift towards thematic frames to be more persuasive. In contrast, security-concern posts contain most frequently the thematic frame where larger issues are discussed in the context of the 'refugee crisis' (ibid.). Thus, one may argue that the presence of security concerns (McKay et al., 2012) is rooted in the use of thematic frames. While they cannot be diminished, adopting thematic frames will increase support levels for aid workers and forcibly displaced people, contributing to refugee organizations' mission (Guidry et al., 2018). Aside from this, visual humanitarian-concerned content on Instagram lacks intensity in comparison to text-based content (ibid.), providing another opportunity for refugee organizations to enhance their visual messages to the audience.

In sum, the visual representations of forcibly displaced people together with thematic framing on Instagram must be enhanced as it can increase support levels contribute to the salience of messages. Current frames for forcibly displaced people are rather "hurting chances to sway public opinion toward asylum and welcoming more refugees" (Guidry et al., 2018, p.14). This has important implications for refugee organizations' branding practices, as they must acknowledge the circulated representations and discourses of forcibly displaced people while also acknowledging the quick processing of images in opposition towards text. Their content and branding strategy therefore must align with these insights to receive support by different kinds of audiences.

2.5 The Communication Strategies of Refugee Organizations

When specifically reviewing literature on the branding practices of refugee organizations, only literature on the communication strategies of refugee organizations can provide the basis to further explore the field. As discursive strategies in refugee organizations' communication practices play a vital role in the construction of their brand on social media, the present study will review current trends in the following section to be later applied in the context of branding practices.

Overviewing the current academic debate, research has already pointed towards the influential role refugee organizations play (Dijkzeul & Moke, 2005), specifically, their communication practices influencing public perceptions and the further potential to influence policies and society on both levels – macro and micro (Chouliaraki, 2012; Ongenaert, 2019, Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to investigate what communication strategies refugee organizations use in the context of their brand positioning on social media. Even though there is only a limited number of studies exploring the area, a recent study by Ongenaert and colleagues (2022) provides a theoretical ground to explore refugee organizations branding practices. The scholars identify different communication strategies with a five being particularly relevant to the branding of refugee organizations: (1) individualizations vs. collectivizations, (2) us vs. them representations, (3) passive victims vs. the empowered, (4) solidarity discourses. The strategies can be distinguished as strategies of representation (cf. strategies 1, 2, 3) and argumentation (cf. strategy 4). Corresponding with Richardson (2017), the researchers also showcase the importance of analyzing both present and absent elements as they provide meaningful discourses. In the following each of the strategies will be elaborated in more detail, as they give insights into the general communication patterns of refugee organizations, their representation of forcibly displaced people and simultaneously also their external brand positioning.

2.5.1 Individualizations vs. Collectivizations

The use of individualizations and collectivizations is one of the strategies through which refugee organizations position their brand (cf. supra). While literature has highlighted the general tendency of humanitarian actors that obtain a voice to dehumanize forcibly displaced people (Chouliaraki, 2012; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019), more recent research suggests that refugee organizations are increasingly also portraying specific individuals in content such as videos, photos and stories (Ongenaert et al., 2022) which is perceived as more humanizing (Hansen & Machin, 2019). Typically, they are

portrayed in such cases as "ideal victims", or their relatives are specified (Höijer, 2004; Johnson, 2011; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019) while it must be noted that they are often still portrayed anonymously without names, using pseudonyms or by only using first names to protect their identities (Ongenaert et al., 2022). By making use of specific story lines, audiences' engagement is further driven and relatability with the forcibly displaced people is achieved (ibid.). While these developments point towards a branding strategy that acknowledges the importance of less homogenized portrayal of forcibly displaced people, this strategy also offers the advantage of avoiding specific and refutable arguments (Hansen & Machin, 2019) and the importance to substantiate is viewed as obsolete. Furthermore, dehumanizing and negative representation strategies are still present in refugee organizations content (Ongenaert et al., 2022). This typically takes place through the combination of individualizations and collectivizations in which refugee organization's workers or celebrities are portrayed as protagonists (ibid.) to generate a feeling of identification (Chouliaraki, 2012; Kyriakidou, 2019), and forcibly displaced people are collectivized (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Next to this, the functionalization of forcibly displaced people is also present in refugee organization's content, contributing to negative representation strategies (ibid.) which should generally be avoided to drive the brands' purpose and objectives.

2.5.2 Us vs. Them Representations

The second identified strategy is the use of 'us vs. them' representations in refugee organizations' public brand positioning (cf. supra). The representation of "others" as mentioned in previous research (Machin & Mayr, 2012) aims to generate a sense of solidarity among the audience and call for protection of the displaced (Ongenaert et al., 2022; Machin & Mayr, 2012). While 'us' represents the active doers (e.g., refugee organization, citizens, international community) which are represented as homogeneous group to show unity, 'them' represents the forcibly displaced people which are dependent on 'us' (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Forcibly displaced people are thereby often put in the context of deserving-undeserving dichotomies by referring to 'refugees' and 'economic migrants' to emphasize and strengthen refugees' rights as opposed to migrants being undeserving to receive the right for protection (Ongenaert et al., 2022; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Although it should be acknowledged that this type of narrative leads to other risks and the rights by other forcibly displaced people are undermined (e.g., Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Pupavac, 2008; Malone, 2015). This implies a careful use of this communication strategy. Furthermore, refugee organizations aim to align 'us' against discourses that concern anti-immigration and threats (Ongenaert et al.,

2022) which may be routed in the idea engage in humanitarian policy interventions, as previously pointed out (Guidry et al., 2018; Iyengar, 1991). It must be acknowledged however, that there is potential for alternative dichotomies to rise. In occasional instances, classic us-them dichotomies are set aside, and 'we' refers to the refugee organization's workers and the forcibly displaced people which are presented as opposed to state authority or traffickers to represent inclusivity and unity (Ongenaert et al., 2022).

2.5.3 Passive Victims vs. Empowered Doer

The third identified strategy is the use of 'passive victims vs. the empowered' representations in refugee organizations' public brand positioning (cf. supra), reinforcing humanitarian savior logics (e.g., Bergman Rosamond & Gregoratti, 2020; Ongenaert et al., 2022). This strategy is characterized by representing forcibly displaced people as victims (e.g., Chouliaraki, 2012; Pupavac, 2008) being rather passive (Ongenaert et al., 2022; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). They are typically portrayed in press releases of the organization as subject to negative existential processes (e.g., living in deteriorating psychological, physical and material conditions) and by portraying them in contrast to the empowered doers who provide aid (e.g., handing out blankets, food) such as refugee organizations, international community or celebrities (Ongenaert et al., 2022). While forcibly displaced people are sometimes also portrayed as doers, they are then rather portrayed with negative connotations (e.g., survival strategies) (Ongenaert et al., 2022; Ongenaert & Joye, 2019).

This tendency can also be closely connected to the research by Mittelman (2020) who highlights the opposing representation of humanitarian workers as 'heroes' and forcibly displaced people as 'sufferers'. Hereby, organizational workers are in a position of power, centrally positioned in the image as educated, knowledgeable saviors providing aid to the sufferer (ibid.), corresponding with Jung's (1959) research in which the archetypal hero personifies a 'unity of opposites': the hero healing the sufferer. The hero is ascribed an almost god-like persona while being confronted with the paradox of fighting with human vulnerability (ibid.) which in turn makes the audience assign more attachment with the figure and enhance trust and deeper connection (Mittelman, 2020). Next to this, forcibly displaced people are also represented as subject to relational processes (e.g., by presenting statistics, aggregations, or by presenting them as symbol of phenomena) (Ongenaert et al., 2022). However, one must acknowledge that especially the use of numbers leads to the simplification of more complex issues, resulting in increased distance between the audience and the suffering (Silverstone, 2013). In sum, the strategies therefore mainly point towards a negative

pity-based representation and reinforce emergency and crisis discourses, being predominantly present in content such as press releases (Ongenaert et al., 2022) as means to gain visibility.

In contrast, when reviewing the literature on other types of content, specifically photos and videos, both positive and negative pity-based representation strategies can be seen (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Especially the positive representation strategy was already emphasized by earlier resarch (Chouliaraki, 2012) and is seen as more fitting towards the 'Northern' morals and culture (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Forcibly displaced people are thereby represented more frequently as active doers in the context of positive processes (e.g., finding safety, contributing to host society) and speakers (e.g., talking about their lives pre-, intra-, and post-conflict) (Ongenaert et al., 2022). However, in contrast to reality, one may criticize that forcibly displaced people are represented as too self-determined (Chouliaraki, 2012) and the strategy of organizations regulating the people who get a voice (only to a particular group of forcibly displaced people e.g., talented, charming, middle-class) (Pupavac, 2008). While the former results in a dehumanizing representation (Chouliaraki, 2012), the later leads to a homogenizing representation strategy (Godin & Doná, 2016).

The combination of both positive and negative representations is visible when positive and negative mental processes are represented, where forcibly displaced people give insights into their state of mind and feelings (e.g., cognition focused: thinking; affection oriented: hopeful, resilient) to create empathy while at the same time passivity can be implied (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Forcibly displaced people are also represented by not having strong agency, which is suggested by having them as subjects to behavioral processes (e.g., smiling, posing) (ibid.). The captions of the photos thereby underline the strategic nature of the picture and represent the organization's involvement to a more active extent in contrast to visuals (ibid.). In general, these more individualized representations are utilized to facilitate relatability and identification which can be considered as more humane (Chouliaraki, 2012; Ongenaert et al., 2022) in opposition to aforementioned communication strategies.

Furthermore, research suggests that the strategic use of visual discursive devices can further reinforce or contrast the textual representations (Ongenaert et al., 2022). More specifically, the use of proximity and interaction in photos and videos showcasing people can have an influence on audience engagement, degrees of association and power relations (Hansen & Machin, 2019). For instance, relatability and identification can be achieved if refugee organizations make use of vertical angles in which forcibly displaced people are presented at similar levels (implying equality) (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Other discursive strategies such as horizontal angles via front views, close side views (to communicate

closeness) or rear views (i.e., audience is situated within the perspective of the represented person) can further be utilized to facilitate higher degrees of audience engagement (ibid.) With regard to power relations, distant side views (to communicate detachment, anonymity) or the birds eye view (to communicate lower status, limited agency of forcibly displaced people) can be used which reinforce negative pity-based representation strategies (ibid.).

To conclude, depending on the type of content, different representation strategies can be seen (cf. supra). As the present study aims to investigate both textual and visual content, each of the positive, negative and combinations of representation strategies provide a basis for further exploration of the 'victim vs. doer' representation while also acknowledging the nuances provided by visual discursive devices.

2.5.4 Solidarity Discourses

While having outlined the representation strategies extensively (cf. supra), in the following a specific argumentation strategy is discussed which is deemed as relevant to the refugee organizations' brand positioning: pity-and irony-based solidarity discourses (Ongenaert et al., 2022). While the spread of solidarity discourses by external stakeholders has already been acknowledged by previous research, specifically with its presence on social media (Gualda & Rebollo, 2016), the importance for refugee organizations to reinforce such discourses could even be considered as more vital as it can be closely connected to their brand purpose. Without the solidarity of external actors and resulting financial gains, the organizations' daily operations become difficult to execute. Thus, solidarity discourses are vital to the brand positioning of refugee organizations.

Current research suggests that organizations reinforce such discourses through calls for solidarity, emphasis on the magnitude of current crises, appreciation of relevant actors contributing to the organization (with political actions and / or solidarity) and inclusion of testimonials by forcibly displaced people to further legitimize the actions taken (Ongenaert et al., 2022). The importance of accountability in humanitarian communication should thereby not be underestimated, as other scholars have already suggested in previous studies (e.g., Jacobsen & Sandvik, 2018). In addition, the consequences of negative political action and lack of solidarity are communicated in the form of warnings or fears (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Aside from this, solidarity discourses are communicated by celebrities and highly ranked employees of the organization through personalized and testimonialized frames, together with emotional and professional connections to engage the audience (ibid.). By using individualized frames as well (e.g., the audience is put in the position of a forcibly displaced

person), further calls for solidarity and responsibility are communicated (ibid.). Lastly, by framing forcibly displaced people as inventive, proactive and creative, refugee organizations try to present them as likable to the western public and respond to traditional news media conventions that circulate (Ongenaert et al., 2022).

In sum, all aforementioned strategies are very relevant to the present study and provide a basis for further exploration, however, it must be acknowledged that literature on the positioning of refugee organizations' brand and their corresponding communication strategies remains scarce. Therefore, the present study will merge concepts from nonprofit and humanitarian branding together with the aforementioned representation and argumentation strategies to explore refugee organizations' brand positioning on social media.

3. Methodology

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

To investigate refugee organizations' branding strategy, a qualitative approach was deemed necessary to allow for an in-depth understanding. Thereby, more latent and subtle meanings could be identified (Queirós et al., 2017) which were needed to answer the research question accordingly. More specifically, a quantitative approach would not capture the construction of meaning which plays a key role in the branding practices of refugee organizations. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) was deemed as an appropriate method. It allows the researcher to examine discourses in given contexts which are needed to understand the meaning making (Schreier, 2013). In the case of refugee organization's branding, the Ukrainian conflict represents an important contextual element in their content whereas factors such as the financial dependence on donors, dependence on volunteers should also not be neglected in their branding strategy. The context is hereby crucial in understanding the intended meanings of the sender of the message (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Furthermore, CDA also offers the advantage to investigate power relations. According to Fairclough (1989), power differences are communicated through discourses. Thus, identifying discourses such as the hero and the sufferer as pointed out by Mittelman (2020) is possible by utilizing this method. To examine the full context of the message, a multimodal approach to CDA was deemed appropriate. MCDA enabled the researcher to examine both textual and visual data.

Due to the narrow scope of literature in the field of humanitarian NPO branding and the branding of refugee organizations in particular, the present study drew on case studies. Case study research offered tools to engage with more complex issues and fields that require knowledge advancement (Queirós et al., 2017). According to Yin (2009), case study research is most suitable when (1) there is a need to answer 'why' and 'how' questions, (2) the researcher has only a limited amount of control over events, and (3) contemporary phenomena are studied in a real-life context. All criteria can be applied to the present study which showcases the suitability of case studies to examine refugee organizations' branding strategies. To increase the validity, multiple cases were selected as opposed to a single case study. In the following, the context of the study and each of the selected cases will be outlined more extensively.

3.2 The Context of the Ukraine Conflict

Among many other humanitarian crises, the 'refugee crisis' is one of the largest the world is facing today. According to the Global Trends Report published by the UNHCR (2022), at the end of 2021 worldwide 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced. This high number reveals the importance of international refugee organizations taking action in supporting forcibly displaced people and was thus the focus of the present study.

Since World War II, no other 'refugee crisis' in Europe has grown so fast (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Therefore, the Ukraine-Russia conflict was chosen as it represents a reasonable context for the scope of the present study. While the conflict between Russia and Ukraine already started early with a key event in 2014, the annexation of Crimea, the declaration of war or as Putin referred to a "special military operation" followed almost a decade later in February 2022 (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). This event caused for more than seven million refugees (as of April 2023) to flee their home country Ukraine and spread out across Europe (UNHCR, n.d.-a). While refugee organizations were and still are doing their very best in supporting these forcibly displaced people, the European Union also made changes with the introduction of new regulations to support the displaced (European Commission, n.d.). Nevertheless, refugee organizations are often the initial voice in shaping public opinion and appealing to politicians in changing regulations (Chouliaraki, 2012; Ongenaert, 2019, Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). Their content revolves around crisis situations such as the conflict in Ukraine (e.g., International Rescue Committee, n.d.-a; Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-a; UNHCR, n.d.-b) and it was thus relevant to investigate how they position their brand in the context of such crises.

3.3 Examined Organizations

For the present study, three influential and internationally relevant refugee organizations were chosen to be subject to analysis: UNHCR, IRC, and NRC. All these organizations have focused on helping displaced people around the globe in 40 to 60 countries and employ 16,000 to 19,000 humanitarian aid workers (International Rescue Committee, n.d.-a; Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-a; UNHCR, n.d.-b). Each of the organizations were largely involved in the Ukrainian crisis and communicated about it extensively on Instagram (International Rescue Committee, n.d.-b; Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-b; UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, n.d.) which was essential for this study. The organizations were also chosen due to their complementary nature with regard to geographic and thematic focuses (cf. infra) which gave insights into how the given characteristics influence the organizational

branding strategies. We now briefly discuss these organizations' geographical and thematical focuses and other relevant characteristics to contextualize each case. We start by introducing the largest organization, the UNHCR, continue with the IRC and finally present the smallest organization, the NRC.

First, the UNHCR was established in 1950 after the Second World War with their first mission to help Europeans who lost their homes and fled. Since then, the organization supported many refugee crises around the globe which was recognized through two Nobel Peace Prizes. Today, more than 18,879 people work at UNHCR in 137 countries. The budget grew consistently to US $8.6 Billion in 2019. So far, over 50 million refugees have been helped over the lifetime of the organization (UNHCR, n.d.-b). The UNHCR ensures the rights of forcibly displaced people to seek asylum, find safe refuge in another country with the possibility to integrate, resettle or return home. Transportation and assistance packages for those returning home and income-generating projects for refugees that resettle also belong to the organization's core tasks. In times of crisis, the UNHCR assists with clean water, healthcare, sanitation, shelter, blankets, household items and food.

Second, the IRC was founded in 1933 to help people in humanitarian crises. The organization focuses on five support areas: safety, health, education, economic wellbeing, and power (ensuring that people have a say in decisions affecting their lives). With a staff of more than 17,000 (International Rescue Committee, n.d.-a) and a budget of US$939 Million (International Rescue Committee, 2022a) the organization is active in over 40 crisis-affected countries and bases its efforts on creating the biggest impact. Every year, the IRC compiles a list of the top 20 humanitarian crises that are expected to deteriorate in the upcoming year. This guides the organization in their action plan (International Rescue Committee, n.d.-c). According to the most recent IRC emergency watchlist, the 20 top listed countries are only the home to 13% of the total population, however, 81% of those are forcibly displaced. Therefore, IRCs mission is to reduce human suffering and take action in these countries (International Rescue Committee, 2022b).

Third, the NRC started their relief efforts after the second World War. Today approximately 16,000 humanitarians are employed at the organization within 40 countries around the globe. The organization's mission is to protect and support displaced people by specializing in six areas: (1) education, (2) food security, (3) legal assistance, (4) shelter, (5) camp management, as well as (6) water, sanitation, and hygiene (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-a). Their budget in 2021 accounted for NOK 5.68 billion which can be estimated to US$544 Million (Norwegian Refugee Council, n.d.-c).

Finally, to answer the research question, the refugee organizations' branding strategy was analyzed through their Instagram accounts. Each of the organizations' Instagram accounts were verified (visible by the blue tick) and had a following of more than 30,000. While the NRC presented the lowest number of followers (32 thousand), the IRC was situated in the middle ground with a follower count of 278 thousand. Among the three organizations, UNHCR represented the highest number of followers with 1.9 million. The number of likes and comments also resembled the follower count with the UNHCR showcasing the highest number of likes and comments and the NRC the lowest. In addition, the Instagram accounts provided a solid basis for analysis due to them depicting a total of over 1500 posts each. Hereby, the UNHCR represented again the highest number with 6,700 posts. The NRC followed with 2,052 posts and finally the IRC with 1,790 posts. An overview of the cases is provided in Figure 2.

Humanitarian Organization	Instagram Account	Number of Followers	Total Number of Posts	Average Number of Likes	Average Number of Comments
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency*	@refugees	1.9M	6,700	2,362.31	29.81
International Rescue Committee**	@rescueorg	278K	1,790	927.19	14.38
Norwegian Refugee Council***	@nrc_norway	32K	2,052	235.56	6.06

* Data retrieved from Social Blade (2023a); ** Data retrieved from Social Blade (2023b); *** Data retrieved from Social Blade (2023c)

Figure 2: Overview of humanitarian organizations

3.4 Research Units, Data Collection & Sampling

The research units subject to analysis were 90 Instagram posts with their full captions published by each of the aforementioned refugee organizations: UNHCR (N = 30), IRC (N = 30), and NRC (N = 30). In order to gain comprehensive multimodal insights on the key topic, images and their corresponding captions were analyzed in-depth by making use of diverse discursive devices. The sample size ensured an in-depth understanding of each organization's branding strategy. To ensure an equal number of posts per organization, the researcher decided to only focus on the first image presented in carousel posts, as it would otherwise lead to an unequal sample of posts per organization. Videos were excluded from the analysis for reasons of focus and feasibility. In addition, the "analytical focus" could be ensured by only

focusing on image and text, as too much material in the analysis might lead to a lack of depth (Bateman et al., 2017, p. 215). Comments were also excluded and deemed as irrelevant to the present study, as the focus is on understanding the branding strategies of refugee organizations rather than the audience's perception. The posts were retrieved via screenshots and stored in an Excel file for further analysis. Hereby, the posts were numbered from 1 to 90 with each row containing the screenshot of the post, caption, date and tagged Instagram accounts (if applicable). Furthermore, it was documented in another column whether the post made use of so-called CTAs (call to actions). Examples could include 'link in bio', 'swipe', 'share' or 'donate'. Analyzing the use of CTAs also plays a relevance in the engagement of the audience, as it can drive people to sign a petition, donate, or become a volunteer (Hou & Lampe, 2015) – contributing to the ability of refugee organizations to fulfill their mission. To determine the specific sample of posts for analysis, the purposive sampling method was used (Sarstetd et al., 2018). As the focus has been placed on how refugee organizations brand themselves in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, the sample was narrowed down by analyzing only posts with the portrayal of a Ukrainian refugee and/or humanitarians with direct reference to the Ukraine conflict. Thereby, only posts were included that contained the Ukrainian crisis as the main topic of the post. Posts which included the Ukrainian conflict in an equal share with other conflicts from other countries were disregarded to keep the internal validity. Given the focus on a specific event, the Ukrainian crisis, the timeframe for data collection was set to the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022). Hereby, the first 30 posts (images, first image of carousel posts) thematizing the Ukrainian crisis were collected from each of the three refugee organization's Instagram accounts. By focusing on the same 'refugee crisis' in all cases, better comparison among the organizations' Instagram content was possible and contributed to the societal relevance of this study, as the conflict in Ukraine was still present at the start of data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis & Operationalization

The analysis was conducted by employing the methodology of MCDA – drawing on textual and visual discursive tools provided by Machin and Mayr (2012), as well as Ledin and Machin (2018). The method was chosen to ensure an in-depth understanding of the discourses communicated within the branding strategy of refugee organizations. The platform Instagram offers various textual, visual and audiovisual affordances that could be explored in detail with a multimodal approach to CDA – enabling an in-depth critical analysis of both textual, visual and audiovisual components. The analysis for each Instagram post was conducted in two

stages, considering media genre-specific characteristics. As discourses are generally communicated through visual elements, the visuals of the posts were analyzed first. The second stage was characterized by analyzing textual data. In combining both linguistics and visuals, the MCDA allowed for a better in-depth understanding of the communicated discourses in refugee organizations' branding strategy.

First, the visuals were examined through denotation and connotation (Machin & Mayr, 2012). While denotation refers to descriptive characteristics, connotation aims to explore the symbolic values and ideas that are visually present (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Ledin and Machin (2018) have provided different discursive tools to specifically analyze visuals from which several were chosen that provided use in answering the research question. Each discursive tool was analyzed according to its denotative and connotative meaning. More specifically, the following discursive instruments were applied to examine the visual dimensions of the selected Instagram posts.

Objects. By analyzing the objects, the researcher could identify the presence or absence of branded objects (e.g., logo is visible on the vest of a humanitarian worker; name of the organization visible on a truck).

Color. According to Ledin and Machin (2018), colors can be useful in linking different sorts of elements, create contrasts and bonds, moods and associations. They can be modified in different ways: (1) modulation (light and dark is removed through which the image appears more flattened, connotes idealization), (2) saturation (more saturation connotes increased emotions such as energy, vibrancy; muted colors connote reserved and mellow moods), (3) purity (pure colors connote truth and simplicity; impure colors connote complexity), (4) range (large color range connotes fun and playfulness), and (5) coordination (colors being used to form a coherent picture e.g., linking objects to each other with the same colors). Through the use of color as discursive tool, the researcher could identify the presence and meaning of them in the image (e.g., yellow and blue for Ukraine, blue as color of UNHCR). Furthermore, modifications could give insights about the positioning of the brand in the context of the Ukrainian conflict (e.g., modulation to idealize the brand, large color range to imply fun and playfulness after refugees' rescue).

Settings. If particular events take place in images, this can also have different denotative and connotative meanings for the positioning of refugee organizations' brand on Instagram. Thus, the researcher identified the present settings in the images to identify patterns (e.g., humanitarian worker 'on site' connotes immediate help in crisis area).

Participants. By analyzing the people present in the picture, discourses that are reinforced by refugee organizations can be identified. More specifically, it can be differentiated between: (1) individuals / groups (individualization draws viewer closer to represented individual; groups have a depersonalizing effect and suppress diversity, further homogenization can be achieved through same clothing, poses or action), (2) categorization (cultural categorization represented by hair, clothing, body adornment; biological categorization represented by stereotyped physical characteristics), and (3) generic / specific (levels of genericity can be enhanced through the reduction of details).

Actions and indexical links. The analysis of actions and corresponding indexical links can give insights in the different representation strategies used to represent the brand. Specific focus is drawn on representational characters of the organization (e.g., humanitarian workers, celebrities). Hereby, the researcher made distinctions in which the facial expression and pose index one of the following processes: (1) emotional processes (e.g., man raising his arms indexes freedom), (2) mental processes (e.g., person is looking off frame and appears to be thinking), (3) verbal processes (e.g., people talking indexes a social space), and (4) material processes (an action that unfolds over time, e.g., humanitarian worker is shown to give food to forcibly displaced people, connotes aid and indexes an invitation for the viewer to donate).

Positioning of the viewer. By analyzing the positioning of the viewer, persuasive techniques can be analyzed that are used to engage the viewer with the organization's content and brand. Hereby, angles (vertical, horizontal, oblique) and proximity (distance, gaze) can influence the positioning of the viewer. More specifically, (1) vertical angles can be useful to communicate superiority or inferiority and strength or vulnerability, (2) horizontal angles help in communicating involvement or detachment, and (3) oblique angles (which are often combined with vertical and horizontal angles) to create and playfulness, whereas the use of blurriness or grain can help to communicate spontaneousness. With regard to proximity, (1) distance can be communicated via close, medium and long shots to convey intimacy or isolation, and (2) gaze which captures whether a person looks at the viewer (demand vs. offer images, e.g., refugee looks at viewer to 'demand' a donation).

The second stage was characterized by analyzing the textual data (including captions, hashtags and tags) with the following discursive tools: (1) *connotation* (implicit meanings within the text), (2) *overlexicalization* (abundance of specific words which may be persuasive or represent ideological meaning), (3) *suppression* (silence / absence of implicit representations), and (4) *structural opposition* (refers to opposites which can also be ideological) (Machin & Mayr, 2012). In sum, the discursive tools for visual and textual data

allowed to analyze the strategies that refugee organizations use to brand themselves in the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

3.6 Validity, Reliability & Ethics

As with any empirical research, it is important to ensure the reliability and validity of the study (Silverman, 2011). Most importantly, transparency is key in deploying a data analysis characterized by reliability. Therefore, this study adopted a transparent approach by outlining the MCDA for each post extensively via an excel sheet. This transparent approach was also key in trying to limit the subjectivity in conducing the MCDA. Generally, subjectivity is a critique to any qualitative study and the researcher must acknowledge this tendency, however, it also offers the advantage to uncover phenomena in-depth which was the aim of the study. Further limitations of the study were reflected upon during and after the analysis process and outlined accordingly in the limitation section of the present study. Validity was ensured by drawing upon existing theory while also merging patterns within the data, as Silverman (2011) has also suggested. The researcher also reflected on her own research positionality. In that regard, reflexivity plays an important role as it acknowledges the character traits and involvement of the researcher in the study and considers the influence it can have on the interpretation of findings (Holland, 1999). First and foremost, the researcher's Western point of view must be acknowledged in the analysis of humanitarian content. Furthermore, the interest in the research topic was sparked by literature in the field of humanitarianism and was further intensified by the researcher following specific aid organizations on Instagram. The context of the Ukrainian conflict was chosen due its recency and societal relevance. By focusing on the branding strategies, not only the researcher's interest in and practical experience with branding but also the gaps in scholarly literature were acknowledged. To the researcher's knowledge, no research has been conducted yet on international refugee organizations' branding strategies which ultimately lead to the research area of the present study. A continuous reflexive approach to data analysis ensured the validity and reliability of the results. In regard to the ethical standards, the present research was carried out following the ethical guidelines suggested by the Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, as presented by the Netherlands Association of Universities (VSNU).

4. Results

The MCDA of Instagram posts published by the UNHCR, IRC and NRC, revealed four dominant strategies through which international refugee organizations position their brand on Instagram in the context of the Ukrainian conflict. First, organizations strategically communicate their *brand purpose* on Instagram through emphasizing the severity of the Ukrainian crisis and storytelling. Second, refugee organizations are keen on communicating regularly about their *brand mission*, in which the organizations' presence, efforts and measures are communicated. Furthermore, the emphasis on solidarity, external actors, financial objectives and visibility are further part of strategically communicating the brand mission. The use of organizational colors and logos contribute to the third strategy, namely *visual branding of the organization*. The last strategy that was identified and contributes to reinforcing the organization's brand purpose is the use of *humanitarian discourses*. Structural oppositions between the organizations and forcibly displaced people, the representation of forcibly displaced families and generic masses fleeing contribute to this. In sum, the branding strategies guide the positioning of the refugee organization's brand on Instagram and contribute to shaping the external perception of the brand – the brand image, as proposed by Garg and colleagues (2019). The following section will cover the four strategies in more depth and discuss previous findings in relation to the present study.

4.1 Highlighting the Brand Purpose

The first strategy through which refugee organizations position themselves in the context of the Ukrainian conflict is represented by the communication of the organization's brand purpose. This involves the impact of the brand on the lives of people (Quinn & Thakor, 2018). In order to highlight their brand purpose, refugee organizations make use of (1) statistics, specific wordings and visuals to emphasize the severity of the crisis and (2) storytelling about forcibly displaced people and brand origin. Together they reveal the reason for the organizations to act – the brand purpose of the organization. The patterns could be found in the content of all examined organizations to varying degrees. In the following each of the underlying strategies will be elaborated in more detail.

4.1.1 Emphasizing the Severity of the Ukrainian Crisis

The MCDA identified that the use of statistics to emphasize the severity of the crisis was prevalent in all organizations' posts. Hereby, specific numbers about forcibly displaced people were revealed such as the number of internally displaced, people fleeing the country

Ukraine or killings. In comparison to the IRC and NRC, UNHCR most frequently made use of statistics through both visual and textual elements (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Emphasizing the severity of the crisis by statistics and words (UNHCR, 2022, March 7)

The NRC showed a similar approach by highlighting the severity of the crisis both in the photo and caption on Instagram, although the pattern did not emerge as frequently in the organization's content as opposed to the UNHCR. The IRC represented the only organization communicating about statistics only within the captions of the Instagram posts.

Aside from statistics, the strategic use of words (e.g., "fastest growing refugee crisis", Figure 3) and the use of overlexicalization was utilized to reinforce the severity of the crisis: "2.5 million refugees have fled Ukraine. 2.5 million refugees who are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. 2.5 million refugees who are teachers, nurses, journalists" (IRC, 2022, March 12). This pattern could be found for all three organizations. Taken together, the use of words and statistics implied on a connotative level the severity of the crisis and the resulting importance that the organization itself and their target audiences (e.g., donors, volunteers) should act. Specifically, the UNHCR utilizes statistics and words as central strategy to communicate the crisis severity. The use of overlexicalizations reinforced this message and ultimately contributed to the organization's brand purpose – helping forcibly displaced people. Because the UNHCR used this strategy most dominantly, statistics can be seen as central element in communicating the brand purpose.

Similarly, the visual analysis revealed the use of different discursive devices to reinforce the message of the Ukrainian conflict being a severe crisis. The most dominant pattern and discursive device could be seen when analyzing the participants visible in the posts. Out of the entire sample of Instagram posts that depicted participants (people) in the photo, only two photos did not visually depict forcibly displaced people. The large majority of

photos thus included the portrayal of at least one forcibly displaced individual (e.g., Figure 4) or a group of forcibly displaced people (e.g., Figure 5).
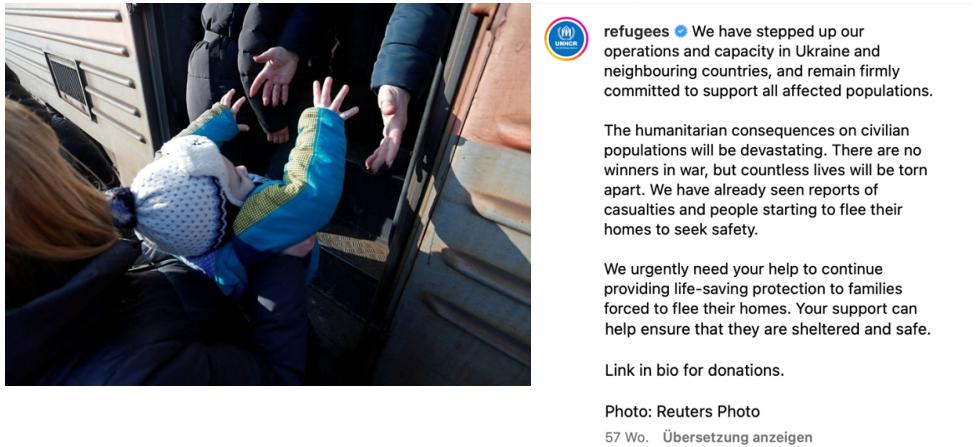

Figure 4: The portrayal of an individual refugee (UNHCR, 2022 February 24)

Figure 5: The portrayal of a group of forcibly displaced people (NRC, 2022 March 7)

By portraying forcibly displaced people as participants in nearly all Instagram posts identified as photo-based (in which objects or people were visible)[2], the UNHCR, NRC and IRC show their main focus of humanitarian aid and reinforce their main purpose of helping people being forcibly displaced. Furthermore, the way in which forcibly displaced people are represented also contributes to the communication of their brand purpose. By making use of discursive devices such as the strategic use of particular objects, settings, actions, as well as the positioning of the viewer, the severity of the crisis could be further emphasized. For instance,

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[2] The researcher identified images containing only text as text-based Instagram posts (e.g., Figure 3). Images that portrayed a setting with participants, objects or both were identified as photo-based Instagram posts (e.g., Figure 5)

forcibly displaced people were commonly displayed by all examined organizations as wearing winter clothes (e.g., thicker jackets, hats, boots) to show the cold weather conditions under which Ukrainian refugees are fleeing. When portrayed in groups with high levels of genericity (e.g., faces could not be identified), objects such as suitcases and backpacks reinforced their portrayal as refugee, contributing to the communication of the brand purpose (Figure 5). The settings shown in the images usually implied a scene during their journey of fleeing (e.g., streets, busses, tents) and their actions were mostly represented by emotional processes in which facial expressions and poses implied an emotional state (Ledin & Machin, 2018). This was for example illustrated through hugging which implied a scene of saying goodbye to each other. Although not as frequently utilized, the discursive devices of mental processes (e.g., people appear to be thinking) and verbal processes (e.g., people engage in social interaction with others) (Ledin & Machin, 2018) were also used in occasional instances when portraying forcibly displaced people. However, by mostly using emotional processes, a more intimate connection with the portrayed refugee in the photo could be invoked, making the communication of the brand purpose more persuasive to the audience. Intimacy could thereby also be reinforced by positioning the viewer within close proximity and mostly in a horizontal angle, letting the audience participate in the scene (Figure 6).

4.1.2 Storytelling about Forcibly Displaced People and Brand Origins

The second underlying strategy that could be identified in communicating the brand purpose is storytelling. This strategy could be identified through stories about forcibly displaced people and by stories about the brand origin. The pattern was specifically uncovered in the captions of the examined organizations and is reinforced by displaying the participants in visuals. While all organizations make use of storytelling, the IRC is the organization that uses this strategy the most. Hereby, stories about forcibly displaced people are shared and accompanied by direct quotes as testimony. On a connotative level, these stories are useful to highlight the burdens and obstacles forcibly displaced people are facing on their way to seek refuge in another country. When taking a broader perspective, they also contribute to communicating the severity of the crisis and reinforce the brand purpose of the organization, however, can be distinguished in showcasing specific representations in both visuals and text (as opposed to more generic representations, cf. supra). The visual element of the post reinforces the storyline by displaying the participants of the story in the photo. As the participants are commonly forcibly displaced people, certain discursive devices such as the position of the viewer are utilized. However, in contrast to the other organizations deploying

more generic representation strategies, IRC makes use of specific representations in the photo when sharing a story in the caption (e.g., faces could always be identified, representation of individuals, mentioning their names). The tendency to use close shots in this context further contributes to the specific representation of forcibly displaced people and enables the audience to sympathize with the represented people. Additionally, the use of gaze in the form of demand images, where forcibly displaced people are looking at the audience to ask something of them (Ledin & Machin, 2018), was prevalent in all storytelling posts of the IRC (Figure 6). They could be interpreted as an urgent call for help, reinforcing the brand purpose of the organization while also contributing to the organization's mission (cf. 4.2 Highlighting the Brand Mission).

Figure 6: IRC using proximity, specific representation, gaze & storytelling (IRC, 2022, March 19)

Aside from the storytelling about forcibly displaced people, the IRC also stood out as communicating their brand purpose through the storytelling of the brand origin. In one of the posts, the organization positions its founder Albert Einstein, a physicist and refugee as the central participant (Figure 7). The IRC further highlights the purpose for its establishment, namely "to rescue Jews fleeing Nazi Germany". While the times have changed since the establishment in 1933, and the conflict in Ukraine has become "the biggest refugee crisis in Europe", the brand purpose remains the same on a connotative level - in each conflict, the organization aims to support forcibly displaced people on their journey to seek safety.
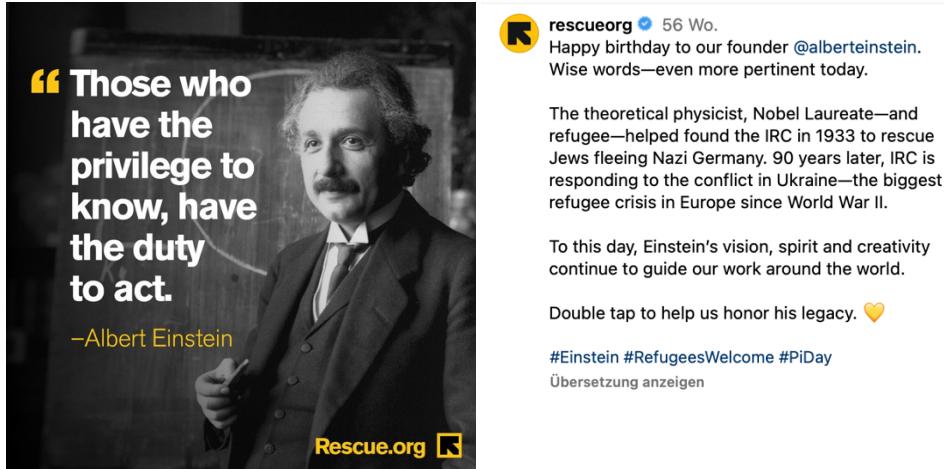
Figure 7: Storytelling about brand origin (IRC, 2022, March 14)

The communication about the brand origin is also visible in one of the posts of the NRC. Similarly, the NRC also communicated about its establishment after World War II and emphasized in the same posts the severity of the crisis. More information about its founder or other information relating to the brand origin could not be identified. The UNHCR is the only organization that did not communicate about the brand origin and thus only used forcibly displaced people as participants in the storyline.

In sum, the brand purpose is communicated to the audience through two different strategies. The most dominant strategy is represented by communicating about the severity of the crisis which is underlined in a more general sense through statistics, wording and portrayal of forcibly displaced as groups and individuals. The second but less dominant strategy in the total sample of posts is presented by storytelling in which specific stories about forcibly displaced people are presented to the audience and the origin of the brand is communicated to emphasize the organization's purpose. When connecting this back to previous literature, the present study corresponds with Ongenaert and colleagues (2022) pointing out that refugee organizations commonly emphasize the magnitude of current crises and outline the consequences of negative political action which could also be seen in the sample of Instagram posts collected by the UNHCR, IRC and NRC. Furthermore, the episodic and thematic frames as proposed by Gross (2008) can be applied. Both frames are visible in the organization's content. Thematic frames, in which topics are situated in a broader social context, can be seen with the communication about the crisis' severity. Episodic framing is visible when refugee organizations focus on storytelling in their content on Instagram, as specific stories and examples are shown. However, the findings contradict recent scholarly literature which indicated that episodic frames are more frequently present in humanitarian content on

Instagram (Guidry et al., 2018). Even though the importance of storytelling as pointed out by several scholars (e.g., Ongenaert et al., 2022; Waters & Jones, 2011) is acknowledged with the communication about forcibly displaced people (Guidry et al., 2018) and the brand (Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018) in the content of the three examined organizations to varying degrees, the dominance of thematic frames confirms early research by Iyengar (1991) suggesting to use thematic frames to enhance support levels by external stakeholders. Thus, it can be concluded that the findings to confirm recent scholarly work on the emphasizing the magnitude of crises (e.g., Ongenaert et al., 2022) while confirming earlier research by Iyengar (1991) on framing.

4.2 Highlighting the Brand Mission

The second branding strategy that could be identified in refugee organizations' content on Instagram is highlighting the brand mission which involves the boundary of services that are provided (Brown & Iverson, 2004). The brand mission is presented to the audience through three different underlying strategies. The first being characterized by showing presence on site and pointing out the efforts and measures executed for forcibly displaced people. The second underlying strategy is formed by emphasizing the organization's own solidarity and trying to influence external actors such as the audience to do the same, while also calling for peace towards decision makers in politics. Lastly, refugee organizations highlight their brand mission through driving the financial objective of the organizations by including call-to-actions in the Instagram posts which ultimately also contributes to the daily operations of the organization – the brand mission. In the following each of the underlying strategies will be discussed in more depth.

4.2.1 Showing Presence, Efforts and Measures

Each organization communicated their presence in Ukraine differently. The UNHCR makes use of photo credits to connote its presence in Ukraine and at borders. Hereby the photo credits are given to one of their humanitarian workers (Figure 8). While the other organizations also made use of this strategy in some instances, the UNHCR used this strategy most dominantly.

Figure 8: Presence on site represented by photo credits (UNHCR, 2022, February 27)

The IRC and NRC made use of other strategies more frequently to emphasize their presence on site. The IRC hereby focused mainly on mentioning the organization's presence through textual elements in the caption of the posts: "We met Maria on the border with Poland, where she was waiting for transportation with her daughter and dog, Tyson" (IRC, 2022, April 6). By saying how the IRC 'met' the forcibly displaced people, the organization shows how they are present on site. The visual, however, only includes the portrayal of forcibly displaced people without humanitarian workers – the same strategy UNHCR also adopted throughout their posts. In contrast, the NRC is the only organization that visually portrayed a humanitarian worker of the organization, the Secretary General, in several posts to emphasize the organization's presence and aim to help the displaced (Figure 9). The caption further contributes to the message and clarifies that not only the Secretary General is on site but the "teams across the country" are also scaling up to respond to the Ukrainian conflict. Quotes by a humanitarian worker in a senior position reinforced the message – a pattern that could also be found for the UNHCR and IRC.

Figure 9: Presence on site represented by (senior) humanitarian worker (NRC, 2022, April 22)

Next to the presence, the efforts and measures of each organization are also highlighted in the Instagram posts. More specifically, the analysis revealed that all examined organizations outline their efforts and specific measures through different techniques. The UNHCR most dominantly puts emphasis on highlighting the needs of refugees in their visuals to connote the measures the organization adopts to help forcibly displaced people. The caption then emphasizes their measures on site (e.g., "we (…) assist the most vulnerable groups and individuals with specific needs who had to flee from Ukraine") (Figure 10).
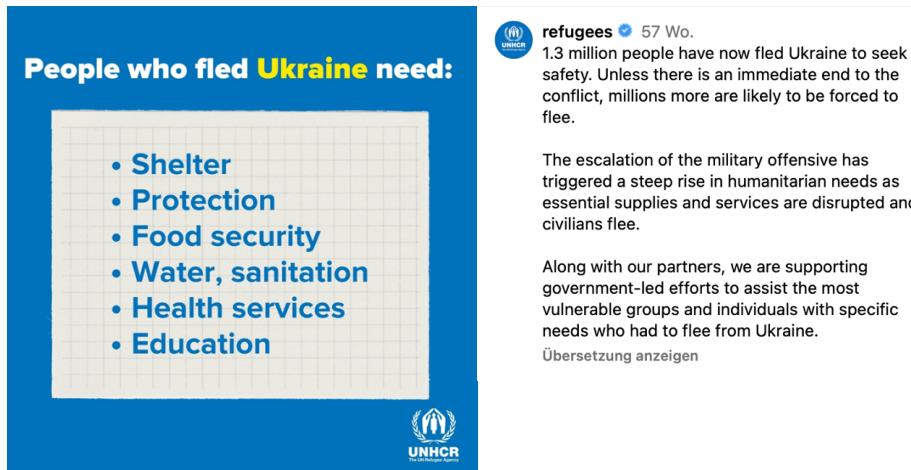

Figure 10: UNHCR's efforts and measures (UNHCR, 2022, March 5)

While the NRC also provides an overview of the general measures (e.g., distribution of food, winter aid packages, information, legal aid), the organization mostly focuses on representing specific measures which are commonly accompanied by storytelling about forcibly displaced people (cf. supra) and quotes as testimony. As Figure 11 illustrates, the NRC provides a transit centre for internally displaced in which the staff provides "daily assistance and help". The specific storyline with quotes and the visual portrayal of a married couple highlights the usefulness of the aid provided by the NRC.

Figure 11: NRC's efforts and measures (NRC, 2023, February 26)

The third organization, namely the IRC, shows a combination of the strategy adopted by the UNHCR and NRC. While the IRC outlines the needs of refugees (e.g., "clean water, emergency shelter, food, health assistance, sanitation and hygiene, protection and trauma counseling", NRC, 2022, March 12), the organization also provides specific examples such as providing cash assistance for a forcibly displaced person to pay for her cancer treatment (Figure 12) or psychological support to children – which is usually also accompanied by quotes of the people receiving the aid.

Figure 12: IRC's efforts and measures (IRC, 2022, December 9)

The specific storylines adopted by the NRC and IRC in showcasing their measures intensify the message by appealing to the emotions of the audience. Both stories in the captions indicate severe setbacks in the lives of the represented forcibly displaced people (Figure 11: heart attack of the son; Figure 12: cancer of the woman). By showing visuals of the characters in the story and the setting, the storyline becomes better contextualized and more relatable. Furthermore, by indicating specifically how the organizations (IRC & NRC) are helping, their measures become more tangible to the audience. As the UNHRC does not make use of such specific examples, the organization takes a more objective stance when communicating its measures. In contrast, the IRC and NRC represent themselves with higher emotional appeal to persuade their audience.

4.2.2 Solidarity & Influencing External Actors

Another strategy contributing to the brand mission is represented by emphasizing the organization's own solidarity. The examined organizations all make use of this strategy with different textual elements that are repeated across their posts. For instance, the NRC included

sentences in their captions such as "We won't stop now" (NRC, 2022, February 26) or "We are not leaving anytime soon" (NRC, 2022, October 13) or emphasized their solidarity through textual elements in the photo posted (Figure 13).

Figure 13: NRC emphasizing its solidarity (NRC, 2022, February 26)

The IRC also emphasized its solidarity via Instagram posts, especially months after the beginning of the conflict in stating that they "*still* stand with people affected by the war in Ukraine" (Figure 14). This pattern could be seen across a diverse set of posts from the IRC.
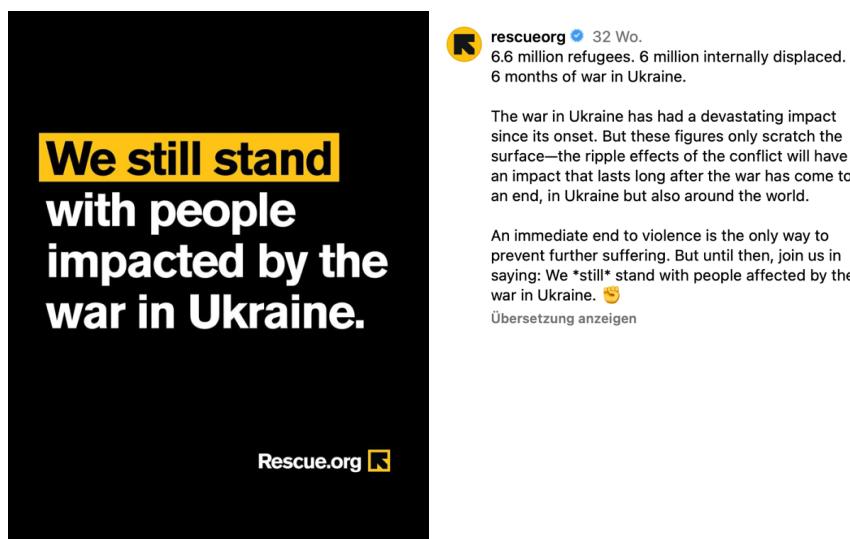
Figure 14: IRC emphasizing its solidarity (IRC, 2022, August 24)

The UNHCR was the only organization to implicitly state their solidarity. Across the dataset, posts by the UNHCR about solidarity rather emphasize the solidarity of other actors instead of its own (e.g., "International solidarity has been heartwarming", UNHCR, 2022, March 3) and prefer to focus mainly on its general measures to only implicitly show their solidarity (cf.

supra).

Aside from the organization's own solidarity (whether implicitly stated as seen with the UNHCR or explicitly stated as seen with the IRC and NRC), the organizations also call for solidarity among their audience and other external actors such as host countries. Hereby, the levels of facilitating engagement differ among the organizations. While the IRC adopts a very engaging strategy through 'small acts of engagement' (Picone et al., 2019) in which they ask their audience to leave a yellow heart if they stand with refugees and often include the hashtag #RefugeesWelcome in their captions (Figure 15), the NRC only calls for solidarity without driving the audience to make a comment. The organization rather emphasizes the importance of solidarity and includes the hashtag #RefugeesWelcome in their posts. Similarly, the UNHCR emphasizes the importance to "stand with refugees" (UNHCR, 2022, March 16) without explicitly calling for a specific action to show solidarity among the audience. Thus, the IRC positions itself as a more active organization, trying to incorporate and influence their audience in the organization's mission. In contrast, the UNHCR and NRC rather play a more informative role in the call for solidarity with forcibly displaced people.

Figure 15: IRC calling for solidarity by audience (IRC, 2023, February 22)

Another underlying strategy which contributes to the brand mission is the organization's attempt to influence external actors, specifically politicians. Hereby, a specific pattern could be found across all three organization's Instagram posts, namely that all organizations call for peace and indirectly try to persuade and influence external actors (e.g., politicians) in their decision making to stop the war. By making use of suppression, in rarely mentioning the warring party Russia in the context of peace, the organizations put emphasis on the consequences forcibly displaced people from Ukraine are facing (Figure 16). If they

would specifically address their call for peace towards Russia, they would take a political position and their branding focus on humanitarian aid would be neglected. Thus, the tactic use of suppression, enables the audience to make the connection mentally themselves (suggesting the use of the so-called montage technique as proposed by Vestergaard, 2010) and the organizations are able to further highlight their mission while still implicitly riving for a positive change in the conflict and reduce human suffering.

Figure 16: UNHCR calling for peace (UNHCR, 2022, March 18)

4.2.3 Collaboration with Other Stakeholders

Another underlying strategy through which the organizations highlight their mission is through the collaboration with other stakeholders such as local partners, other NPOs or the local authorities and government. Hereby, the organizations emphasize the importance of other actors which play a relevant role in the mission of the organizations. Next to this, specifically the UNHCR adopts the strategy to also tag their partners as seen in Figure 17. By tagging other accounts, the visibility of the NPO can be increased.

Figure 17: UNHCR emphasizing collaborations with other stakeholders (UNHCR, 2022, March 2)

With regard to the other examined organizations, the IRC rather showcases specific measures implemented together with their partners through textual elements (e.g., "Last year, the IRC and its partners provided: 31 million people with access to health services, 1.1 million people with cash relief, 819,500 children with schooling and education opportunities… among other assistance around the world", IRC, 2022, February 28). By referring to past successful missions with partners, the organization emphasizes the good relationship with its partners. The NRC takes this strategy a step further in their posts on Instagram by not only mentioning their partners through the captions but also presenting their partners in the visuals of the posts (Figure 18). By portraying the local partners visually and mentioning them in the caption, the collaboration becomes more tangible to the audience and the appreciation of the partner is enhanced on a connotative level. In sum, each of the organizations show an effort to highlight the collaboration with other stakeholders in the communication of the organization's mission. Although it should be acknowledged that NRC showcases more details (visually & textually) about the collaboration with other stakeholders in opposition to the other organizations to highlight the appreciation and importance. The UNHCR rather utilizes the collaboration as means for visibility (by tagging partners) and the NRC rather draws the audience's attention towards the operational measures achieved with the help of their partners.

**Figure 18:** NRC visually portraying their local partner (NRC, 2022, October 13)

4.2.4 Driving Financial Objectives and Visibility

The last underlying strategy identified in the brand mission of the three examined refugee organizations is represented by driving the main objectives of the brand. A very dominant pattern that could be found in this regard is the use of CTAs. This strategy is

specifically utilized when the refugee organizations try to drive their financial objectives – asking for donations to fulfill the brand mission. Figure 19 illustrates an example by the UNHCR in which textual elements such as "Donate today" and "Link in bio" are CTAs directed at the audience. The message is intensified by the portrayal of forcibly displaced people in an emotional process (two people hugging each other with tears).
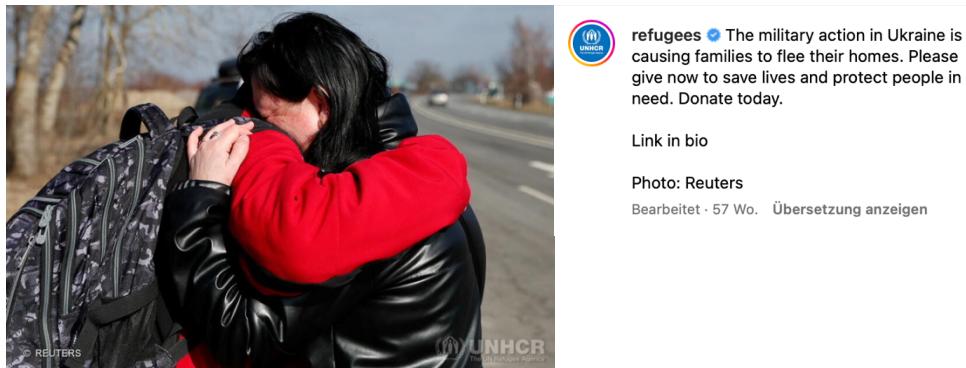

Figure 19: UNHCR using CTAs to ask for donations (UNHCR, 2022, February 25)

Similarly, the IRC also utilizes the captions to call for donations (e.g., "Please donate today", IRC, 2022, February 28; "Click the link in our bio to donate", IRC, 2022, December 28), although the organization also calls for donations often implicitly (e.g., "Help us provide Ukrainian families with..." IRC, 2022, December 22). The NRC is the only organization that refers to donations in rare instances. While the organization does state the financial objective explicitly in one post (e.g., "Donate (…) through the link in our bio!", NRC, 2022, February 26), and highlights an event fundraiser in another post (NRC, 2022, March 9) the pattern could not be found for other posts of the NRC. This could imply a donation strategy based on a more connotative level. The content offered by the NRC is supposed to mentally construct the urgency to donate in the mind of the audience, in opposition to the other two organizations, explicitly calling for donations by the audience.

Another underlying strategy which is also closely connected to the use of CTAs within the brand mission is represented by enhancing the visibility. This strategy is specifically utilized in the captions of Instagram posts published by the IRC and in some instances also the UNHCR. Through wordings such as 'share', the organizations persuade the audience to share the post and thus enhance the visibility. Figure 20 illustrates an example of a CTA for means of visibility, as they urge the audience to "share this illustration" if they stand with refugees. Ultimately, increasing visibility can also potentially increase the amount of people donating to the organization. It can therefore also be seen as an underlying strategy that the IRC and

UNHCR adopt to be able to fulfill their brand mission. Again, it should be acknowledged, however, that the NRC does not make use of such CTAs – whether for purposes of donations nor visibility - which can be criticized as the organization does not use the platform to its full potential.

Figure 20: IRC using the CTA 'share' for visibility (IRC, 2022, March 5)

Reviewing earlier scholarly literature, the findings of the present study showcase the content strategies outlined by Water and Jones (2011) in practice. The scholars already argued that NPOs commonly demonstrate or refer to their mission and future work. More specifically, NPOs content usually involves their services and programs, advocacy, volunteer accomplishments and recruitment as well as fundraising (Water & Jones, 2011). While the organization's presence, efforts and measures closely resemble the aforementioned content, the use of social media for means of recruitment could not be seen in NPO's content within the scope of the present study. The portrayal of celebrities as argued by several scholars (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019; Water & Jones, 2011) could also not be supported. However, quotes by the senior staff were included as means for testimony, corresponding with the theory by Water and Jones (2011). The findings therefore illustrate how Water and Jones' theory is presented in practice.

The findings further extend the research by Ongenaert and colleagues (2022) on the brand positioning. The scholars have highlighted how the audience is often times put in the position of a forcibly displaced person and calls for solidarity are communicated. This strategy could also be confirmed by the findings of this study. While the IRC and NRC have shown to explicitly adopt this strategy and ask for the audience's solidarity, the UNHCR rather calls for solidarity on a connotative level (e.g., communicating how other actors show

solidarity). Thus, both practices use solidarity (whether implicitly or explicitly) as a strategy in communicating their brand mission.

Aside from this, the strategy of collaborations with other stakeholders contributing to the organization's mission, being commonly underlined by testimonials (Ongenaert et al., 2022) could also be confirmed by the findings of the present study. While the IRC and NRC made use of testimonials to highlight the collaborative nature of fulfilling their brand mission, the UNHCR rather focused on the drive for visibility by for example tagging partners. This enables the organization to tap into the potential of new audiences from other organizations' networks (Burton et al., 2017). The organization leveraged the potential of co-branded promotion and thereby extended previous literature by Burton and colleagues (2017) which acknowledged the potential but rather criticized the untapped potential of NPOs co-branded promotion. Additionally, the findings further contribute to the engagement in humanitarian policy interventions, as pointed out by previous research (Guidry et al., 2018; Iyengar, 1991). While the drive to influence political decision makers by calling for peace and making use of suppression has not been outlined by previous research specifically, it can be seen as an extension to the existing academic debate on refugee organization's efforts to engage in policy interventions.

Lastly, the findings of the present study further confirm previous literature on NPO branding, which already suggested that NPOs commonly include CTAs in their posts to drive their objective of receiving donations (e.g., 'donate') and gaining visibility (e.g., 'share') (Water & Jones, 2011). Further CTAs as outlined by Water and Jones (2011) such as for volunteering opportunities, signing petitions could, however, not be supported by the data of the present study. Additionally, Vestergaard's (2010) research can be applied to NRC's strategy of driving its financial objectives. While the other organization explicitly call for donations, the NRC takes the knowledge of the audience about persuasive tools for granted and rather tries to not risk its credibility by forcing the audience to construct a new meaningful relation in their mind. Hereby, the content offered by the NRC is supposed to suggest the need for donations without referring to it explicitly in most instances.

4.3 Branding the Organization Visually

The third strategy through which refugee organizations position themselves on Instagram is represented by visual branding. Hereby, the organizations specifically use the visual element of the Instagram post to brand themselves. This is done through two underlying strategies: (1) the use of organizational colors and (2) the strategic positioning of

the logo. The strategy enables for the organization to be recognized in their posts and set themselves apart from other NPOs in the competitive landscape, as each organization uses a different logo and colors. In contrast to the previous strategies used the elements in more indirect, implicit and latent ways, this strategy involves the use of organizational colors and logos more directly, manifestly and explicitly to brand the organization.

4.3.1 Use of Organizational Colors

The MCDA revealed that each of the examined organizations strategically use colors in their Instagram posts. Especially text-based posts are dominantly characterized by utilizing the colors of the brand. To be more specific, the UNHCR uses the colors blue and white, whereas the IRC most dominantly uses the colors yellow, black and white. Lastly, the NRC uses orange, white and grey. For each organization, a unique color is part of their visual branding – the UNHCR using blue (Figure 21), the IRC using yellow (Figure 22) and the NRC using orange (Figure 23). By using these colors, the organizations strategically differentiate themselves. Furthermore, by using pure colors, truthfulness is conveyed towards the audience (Ledin & Machin, 2018).

Figure 21: Organizational colors by the UNHCR (UNHCR, 2022, February 27)

Figure 22: Organizational colors by the IRC (IRC, 2022, March 1)
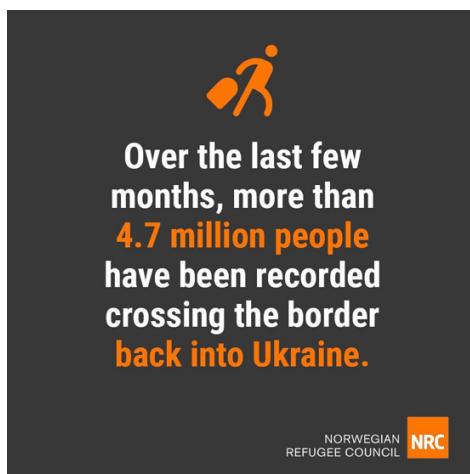
Figure 23: Organizational colors by the NRC (NRC, 2022, September 11)

While the use of organizational colors for the organization was very dominant, only one organization also situated their brand with colors that can be related of the Ukrainian conflict. Namely, the UNHCR made use of the colors blue and yellow which could imply the simultaneous representation of the colors from the Ukrainian flag (Figure 21). Because the organization's main brand color is blue, the organization might have strategically used this as an advantage and incorporated yellow to connote solidarity with the country and the forcibly displaced people. Although further investigations into colors in the context of other crises would be needed for purposes of verification.

Another pattern that could be found in the captions of the refugee organization's Instagram posts is the use of emojis represented in the organizational colors. Specifically, the IRC and NRC make use of a heart emoji in their brand color. Thus, the IRC commonly uses

yellow hearts in their captions, whereas the NRC also uses on occasional instances an orange heart. Only the UNHCR does not make use of such emojis to reinforce their own brand color. This may be also explained through their dominant use of organizational colors in the visuals of their posts. In comparison to the other two organizations, their use of text-based posts with organizational colors is utilized more frequently. Thus, reinforcing the organizational colors in the captions is not deemed as necessary by the UNHCR.

4.3.2 Strategic Positioning of the Logo

Another underlying strategy through which refugee organizations brand themselves visually on Instagram is through the strategic positioning of the logo. Hereby three patterns can be differentiated which will be elaborated in the following. First, a common pattern of the refugee organizations is to position their logo in the bottom of their posts (Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 23). This enables the organization to be recognized by their audience and to strategically differentiate themselves from the other refugee organizations. Especially when the content is shared by the audience with other Instagram users, the portrayal of the logo can increase recognizability as opposed to when only the Instagram username of the organization would be portrayed. Thus, chances for higher visibility can be increased. The second pattern that could be identified is the presence of the logo on objects depicted in the photos of the Instagram posts. From the three examined organizations, NRC most frequently depicted this pattern by displaying care packages in the form of white boxes with NRC's logo printed on them (Figure 24) or by positioning their logo on a tent to communicate ownership of their measures on site.

Figure 24: Branded objects by the NRC (NRC, 2022, December 29)

The UNHCR and IRC do not use the strategy as frequently but still position their logo on objects that are given to forcibly displaced people. While the UNHCR also portray large of numbers of care packages, the IRC situates the care packages within a different setting. The IRC not only shows the branded care package or item with the logo but also together with the refugee, showing on a connotative level that the care packages and items are going where they are supposed to go. By depicting forcibly displaced people through a positive emotional process (e.g., smiling) the positive effects of the organization's measures are communicated implicitly (Figure 25).

Figure 25: Branded objects by the IRC (IRC, 2022, December 28)

The third pattern that could be identified in the visual branding of refugee organizations is the presence of humanitarian workers with branded clothing. Hereby, humanitarian workers are represented with a clothing item that depicts the logo of the brand, often also accompanied by the main brand color of the organization. From the examined organizations, the NRC made most dominantly use of branded clothing. This is also closely connected to the higher numbers of humanitarian workers in their Instagram posts. Figure 26 illustrates the use of such branded clothing in the visuals of the NRC.

Figure 26: Branded clothing by the NRC (NRC, 2023, January 31)

The IRC and UNHCR also represented humanitarian workers of the organization with branded clothing in their Instagram posts, although not very frequently. Furthermore, the IRC only depicted humanitarian workers with branded clothing in groups of people, including forcibly displaced people. This reinforced their stance on showing how humanitarian workers are not only distributing care packages where necessary but also send humanitarian workers where needed.

In sum, the visual branding of the organizations is done through the strategic use of organizational colors in photos and captions, as well as the strategic positioning of the logo inserted the bottom of mostly text-based images, on objects and clothing of humanitarian workers. When reviewing previous literature, the findings confirm Martin and Brown's research (2021) as the present study illustrates how logos are strategically utilized to communicate the support as humanitarian organization to the distant audience. Furthermore, the placement of logos within a high number of posts enhances the visibility of the organization (Waisbord, 2018) while producing more brandable results as means for reputation and financial support (Gent et al., 2015). The interest to create a public spectacle should therefore also not be neglected as previous research has already criticized (Wilkins, 2018), and specifically the NRC presents reason to believe so as humanitarian workers are frequently portrayed with branded clothing in the organization's Instagram posts. However, previous research has not yet pointed out the strategic use of colors in humanitarian branding. The findings can therefore be seen as an extension to the previous research by Martin and Brown (2021) amongst other scholars.

4.4 Reinforcing Humanitarian Discourses

The last strategy in refugee organization's branding practices on Instagram is represented by reinforcing three humanitarian discourses to represent the organization and forcibly displaced people in particular. The discourses can thereby also be seen as a strategy through which the organizations implicitly refer to their brand purpose and brand mission (cf. supra). The first discourse identified is presented by structurally opposing the refugee organization with its humanitarian workers against forcibly displaced people. The second being represented by placing forcibly displaced people in the context of families. The third discourse is showcased by generic masses fleeing. Each discourse will be discussed more extensively in the following together with its implications for the positioning of refugee organizations' brand.

4.4.1 Organization vs. Forcibly Displaced People

The first strategy, namely the structural opposition of the organization and forcibly displaced people was prevalent in the content of all examined organizations. The textual analysis hereby revealed that all organizations make use of the narrative 'us', referring to the organization and its workers and 'them', referring to forcibly displaced people – e.g., "We stand with them" (IRC, 2022, February 24); "We stand in solidarity with those affected by the war in Ukraine" (NRC, 2022, February 26); "UNHCR is working with partners and local authorities to provide humanitarian aid and support those in need" (UNHCR, 2022, February 28). While 'us' frequently refers to the organization, in some Instagram posts it also referred to other active doers, namely external partner NPOs, host governments, local authorities or volunteers, as seen with the former quote presented by the UNHCR. The external partners are, however, still represented as being on the organization's side, as they presented a united front together to help forcibly displaced people.

The visual analysis revealed that photos in Instagram posts are also used as means for structural opposition, although this strategy is only adopted by one organization – the NRC – which is in line with their more frequent use of depicting humanitarian staff (cf. supra). The Instagram posts by the NRC thereby focuses on representing a humanitarian worker in a senior position next to a group of forcibly displaced people. Figure 27 illustrates an example of this visual structural opposition. By displaying the humanitarian worker in branded clothing (dark grey, orange), the structural opposition is further highlighted.

Figure 27: Visual illustration of a structural opposition by the NRC (UNHCR, 2022, April 22)

In contrast, the other organizations avoid the visual representation of humanitarian workers together with forcibly displaced people. Only the captions emphasize the structural opposition between the parties involved.

4.4.2 Forcibly Displaced Families

The second strategy that could be identified through the MCDA of Instagram posts is the representation of forcibly displaced people in the context of their families. Hereby, the examined organizations utilize the caption for storytelling in which specific stories are highlighted about families or family members fleeing from Ukraine. The visuals in the posts are characterized by a set of discursive devices to reinforce the representation of forcibly displaced people within a family context and engage the audience. While the positioning of the viewer is commonly utilized, the representation of forcibly displaced people also plays a role in reinforcing the family narrative. Figure 28 showcases an example of how the organizations typically represent forcibly displaced families. Hereby, refugee organizations show to make use of horizontal angles in which the viewer can view the scene from the front. This enables the audience to feel involved in the scene (Ledin & Machin, 2018) and drive engagement, similarly to the use of close or medium shots which could also be identified as a pattern among the posts. Next to this, gaze is also a discursive practice that could often be found with posts reinforcing the representation of forcibly displaced families. Hereby, the use of both offer images (i.e., represented people look off frame) and demand images (i.e., represented people look at audience) – as described by Ledin and Machin (2018) – are visible in the organization's Instagram posts. While offer images show forcibly displaced individuals commonly in an emotional or mental process with their family members, the demand images contributed to the organization's communication of brand purpose and main objectives (e.g.,

to demand a donation for forcibly displaced people like this family). The use of individualization and specification is thereby also very dominant in the portrayal of refugee families, as the posts focus on portraying specific details. Although it should be acknowledged that the common portrayal of forcibly displaced people in winter clothes contribute to a more generic representation.

Figure 28: Reinforcing the representation of forcibly displaced families (UNHCR, 2022, March 17)

4.2.3 Generic Masses Fleeing

Especially when forcibly displaced are represented as groups of people, the strategic use of generic representations can be seen across the posts of all examined refugee organizations. Thus, the researcher identified generic masses fleeing as third strategy in reinforcing humanitarian discourses. Especially the UNHCR makes use of this strategy most dominantly. Figure 29 illustrates how refugees are represented through a large group of people. While different biological categorizations can be made (e.g., younger children, adults), the representation of a forcibly displaced families is at the same time reinforced. Through similar clothing (e.g., winter jackets, hats) and the engagement in a similar action (e.g., standing in line, fleeing together from Ukraine) they are homogenized, leading to the depersonalization of forcibly displaced people (Ledin & Machin, 2018). Furthermore, the faces of the refugees can either not be identified at all or only parts of the face are visible. This contributes further to the generic representation of refugees.

Figure 29: UNHCR portraying generic masses fleeing (UNHCR, 2022, March 17)

The NRC uses a similar strategy and thus also contributes to the representation of generic masses fleeing. In contrast, the IRC does not reinforce the discourse through the same discursive devices. The organization rather depicts smaller groups of forcibly displaced with more details accompanied by storytelling and quotes of the people being forcibly displaced (Figure 30). While they are still homogenized to some extent through their clothing, leading the effect of depersonalization (Ledin & Machin, 2018), the caption decreases the levels of generic representation.

Figure 30: IRC portraying forcibly displaced people in smaller groups (IRC, 2023, March 18)

Linking the findings to previous literature, specifically with regard to research on discursive strategies used by refugee organizations, the findings can confirm and extend the current state of research in certain areas. More specifically, the research by Ongenaert and collegues (2022) could be supported in terms of the strategic use of 'us-them' portrayals in the

context of pity-based solidarity discourses in which 'us' refers to the organization and potentially other partners, whereas 'them' refers to forcibly displaced people. The additional pattern that Ongenaert and colleagues (2022) addressed about 'we' sometimes also referring to the unity of refugee organization's workers and forcibly displaced people as opposed to state authority or traffickers could not be supported by the findings of this study. Aside from this, other studies such as the one by Mittelman (2020) could be confirmed. More specifically, the scholars' claims on the representation of humanitarian workers as 'heroes' and forcibly displaced people as 'sufferers' could be supported by the Instagram posts of the NRC, whereas the other examined organizations rather avoided such structural oppositions.

The strategic use of forcibly displaced families has not been illustrated in previous research on refugee organizations communication and branding practices yet, although the underlying patterns of this strategy have been identified to some extent. For instance, earlier studies (Höijer, 2004; Johnson, 2011) have highlighted the individualization of forcibly displaced people in the context of presenting them as 'ideal victims' and specifying their relatives. While the 'ideal victim' is enhanced using storytelling in the present study, the specification of relatives is shown through the portrayal of family members in the photos published by the organizations on Instagram. Through the use of more individualized representations, the organizations further facilitate relatability and identification which can be considered as more humane (Chouliaraki, 2012; Ongenaert et al., 2022). Other discursive devices such as the strategic use of proximity which influences audience engagement, degrees of association and power relations (Hansen & Machin, 2019) is also illustrated by the refugee organization's Instagram posts in the present study. Furthermore, angles are used to facilitate relatability and identification among the audience. Specifically, the use of horizontal angles via front views has already been pointed out by Ongenaert and collegues (2022) to influence the degrees of audience engagement (Ongenaert et al., 2022). Thus, it can be concluded that the examined organization illustrate these strategies in practice and the theories by the aforementioned scholars could be supported. The last strategy identified to reinforce humanitarian discourses, namely the generic representation of forcibly displaced people, has also been pointed out by Ongenaert and colleagues (2022). Thus, the presence of this strategy could be confirmed with the analysis of refugee organization's Instagram posts. The scholars further point towards the generic representation of forcibly displaced people when celebrities or humanitarian workers are displayed which could, however, not be confirmed.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how international refugee organizations strategically position their brand on Instagram in the context of the Ukrainian conflict. Hereby, the Instagram posts of three internationally recognized refugee organizations were examined: UNHCR, NRC and IRC. The MCDA revealed that the organizations position their brand through four dominant strategies: (1) highlighting the brand purpose, (2) emphasizing the brand mission (3) branding the organization visually and (4) reinforcing humanitarian discourses.

First, the brand purpose is highlighted by emphasizing the severity of the Ukrainian crisis. While previous research has not specifically studied the context of the conflict yet, the research by Ongenaert and colleagues (2022) can be confirmed as the scholars have already pointed towards refugee organizations' tendency to emphasize the magnitude of crises. Furthermore, this study also illustrates the strategic use of storytelling, confirming earlier literature in humanitarian communication (e.g., Ongenaert et al., 2022; Waters & Jones, 2011) and showcases refugee organizations' contribution to reinforcing broader crisis and emergency discourses (Ongenaert, 2022). The second strategy adopted by the examined organizations is the communication of the brand mission towards the audience on Instagram. By showing the organization's presence on site, efforts and measures, the findings correspond with Water and Jones (2011). Furthermore, research on the use of solidarity discourses (Ongenaert et al., 2022) and collaboration with other nonprofit organizations could be confirmed (Burton et al., 2017). Although it should be acknowledged that the implicit aim of the examined organizations to influence political actors, has not been pointed out by scholars yet. Lastly, the strategic use of CTAs as pointed out by Water and Jones (2011) could also be illustrated in the present study by specifically driving financial objectives and visibility in the scope of organizations' brand mission. The third strategy, namely visual branding practices deployed by refugee organizations through organizational colors and the strategic positioning of the logo confirms and further extends research in humanitarian branding. While logos represent a way for humanitarian organizations to communicate their support for good causes (Martin & Brown, 2021), the use of the logo can also help an organization in the context competition and funding challenges (Waisbord, 2018). It can differentiate themselves from their competitors. However, the use of organizational colors has so far been neglected in the academic debate. Thus, the findings show an additional nuance of visual branding which should not be neglected. Lastly, the fourth strategy part of refugee organizations' positioning on Instagram, the use of humanitarian discourses is closely tied to common patterns in refugee

organizations' public communication practices. While the 'us' vs. them discourse confirms existing literature (Mittelman, 2020; Ongenaert et al., 2022), similar to the portrayal of generic masses (Ongenaert et al., 2022), the representation of forcibly displaced families has only been covered via the use of storytelling as a narrative technique. However, family narratives being a dominant representation in humanitarian organizations' content has not been explicitly brought forward by scholarly literature yet.

When taking the strategies together, the present study not only contributes to the general advancement of humanitarian branding literature and nonprofit branding but also closes the gap of refugee organizations' branding strategies on Instagram. As resources of nonprofit organizations are often limited and rather directed towards fulfilling their mission, the present study offers a directive for humanitarian communication and branding practitioners. Specific examples further illustrate the practical use of branding strategies. This can help refugee organizations to critically review common patterns in their branding activities and potentially improve future content on visual-based social media platforms. However, a few limitations should be acknowledged for the present study. The research drew on the method of case studies in which three specific organizations were examined. While the sample was chosen according to different predetermined criteria and the number of posts analyzed per organization was equally distributed, the use of case studies is often criticized for its generalizability (Queirós et al., 2017). This limitation could be diminished by future research in analyzing a larger sample of posts and more importantly include a higher number of organizations in the study. Comparisons with other refugee crises aside from the Ukrainian conflict could also offer valuable insights about refugee organizations' branding practices, as the strategies might differ depending on the context (e.g., potential to uncover biases). Furthermore, given the current economic and political instability with increasing polarizing conflicts, refugee organizations might change the strategy over the course of time which could add a further directive for future research. Aside from this, the limited amount of research in humanitarian branding contributed to a more data driven approach in the analysis of data, even though this was not intentionally planned. This can however also be seen as an opportunity for future researchers as more studies are deemed as necessary in the field of humanitarian branding. The concept of branding has so far mostly gained its attention in the commercial setting, although the importance of branding in the nonprofit sector is steadily increasing and the drive to establish a valuable brand purpose to the audience has become essential in gaining a competitive advantage.

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Appendix

Given the size of the data set (Annex 1) and coding sheet (Annex 2), it has been decided to upload the files separately to the Thesis Management System.

A) Number of Active Users on Social Media Platforms
(Statista Research Department, 2023)

Platform	Number of active users in millions
Facebook	2,958
YouTube	2,514
WhatsApp*	2,000
Instagram	2,000
WeChat	1,309
TikTok	1,051
Facebook Messenger	931
Douyin**	715
Telegram	700
Snapchat	635
Kuaishou	626
Sina Weibo	584
QQ	574
Twitter	556
Pinterest	445

Number of active users in millions