"A man is
great by
deeds, not by
birth"
-Chanakya

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## KEY ELEMENTS OF COMPASSION ROUSING COMMUNICATION: LESSONS FROM MEDIA REPORTS ON ASIAN TSUNAMI IN INDIA

**Dr. Latha Poonamallee**[1]
**Simy Joy**[2]

[1] Associate Professor of Management and Social Innovation, Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy, The New School, New York, NY 10011, USA. Email: poonamal@newschool.edu

[2] Faculty Fellow, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, IIMK Campus P. O., Kozhikode, Kerala 673 570, India. Email: simyjoy@iimk.ac.in

# KEY ELEMENTS OF COMPASSION ROUSING COMMUNICATION: LESSONS FROM MEDIA REPORTS ON ASIAN TSUNAMI IN INDIA

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## Abstract

Presence and pervasiveness of human suffering at organizational and societal levels necessitates rousing of collective compassion in order to alleviate it. Although communication has been found to be instrumental in rousing collective compassion, there is a dearth of studies that examine what constitutes compassion rousing communication. Our thematic analysis of media reports on Asian Tsunami in India revealed that they contained a number of compassion rousing elements, which were grouped into four categories – attention drawing elements, cognitive framing elements, affective arousal elements and behavior modeling elements. We argue that these elements have potential to influence individual compassion processes of noticing, appraising, feeling and acting respectively. This has implications for designing compassion rousing communication both at organizational and societal levels.

**Key words:** Compassion, collective compassion, compassion rousing, communication

## INTRODUCTION

Compassion entails feeling others' pain and acting in a manner to ease the suffering (Dutton et.al., 2006; Kanov et.al., 2004). Recognition of our organizations and societies as a site of human pain and suffering has lead to the acknowledgement of the need for collective expressions of compassion to alleviate such pain and suffering. Empirical studies have found communication as important in rousing collective compassion. However, studies that explore what constitutes compassion rousing communication are scarce.

In this paper, we seek to address this gap in literature. We present the findings from our study of the contents of media reports on Asian Tsunami, which was one of the largest natural disasters in the history, but generated unparalleled levels of compassionate responses all across the globe (Inderfurth, Fabrycky & Cohen, 2006). We discovered a number of compassion rousing elements in the media reports, which we grouped into four categories – attention drawing elements, cognitive framing elements, affective arousal elements and behavior modeling elements. We argue that these elements have potential to influence individual compassion processes of noticing,

appraising, feeling and acting respectively. This has implications for designing compassion rousing communication both at organizational and societal levels.

## UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE COMPASSION

Compassion is commonly defined as a social process consisting three sub-processes – 'noticing another's pain, experiencing emotional reaction to the pain, acting in response to pain' (Kanov et al,2004, p. 808, based on Clark, 1997). Foundational to this definition is the interrelationship between self and other (Lilius et al., 2011a), which enables individuals to notice cues of pain in others, feel the pain themselves and take action to alleviate the pain. Based on studies in psychology (for a review see Goetz et al., 2010), Atkins and Parker (2012) point out that compassion equally involves individual level psychological processes. According to them, observers go through a cognitive process of appraisal about relevance of the sufferer to them, deservingness of the sufferer and their own self-efficacy to cope with the feelings (Goetz et al., 2010), which generates compassionate feelings and the determination to act. They advocate a four-part definition of compassion that encompasses both social and psychological sub-processes viz. noticing, appraising, feeling and acting.

Although originally conceptualized as individual level phenomenon, scholars now claim that compassion can be a collective and shared phenomenon (Kanov et al., 2004). Kanov et al. (2004, p.808) suggest that collective compassion 'exists when members of a system collectively notice, feel and respond to pain experienced by members of the system'. Empirical evidence suggests that collective compassion can occur at organizational level (Dutton et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2011b) or societal level (Argothy, 2003). This is not to suggest that collectives (organizations or societies) are actors that notice, feel, appraise and respond; it is the individuals within collectives who do that, and compassion is an individual level phenomenon in that sense (Madden et al., 2012). It must also be noted that collective compassion does not mean that all members of the system possess compassion capability in equal measures or will display it each time. Collective compassion just means that a relatively higher proportion of individuals within that system shows compassion.

Collective compassion is seen as generative force both at organizational and societal level. It has been found to produce positive outcomes for organizations, such as increase in organizational commitment and citizenship behavior, lower turnover (Lilius et al., 2011a), and increased organizational capability for cooperation by generating relational resources (Dutton, Lilius & Kanov, 2007). The generative capacity of compassion is even more crucial at the societal

level.  Alleviation of many of the sufferings that affect a society (e.g. natural calamities, poverty, habitat destruction, environmental degradation, epidemics) often requires more material and human resources than most governments and public agencies can provide, and generation of such resources often is a result of compassionate responses from the members of the society. As a result, one of the important questions that scholars seek answer for is how to rouse more collective compassion within our organizations and societies so that we can benefit from its generative capacities (Lilius et al., 2011a).

## ROUSING OF COLLECTIVE COMPASSION – ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

Models have been proposed (e.g. Madden et al., 2012) and empirical research undertaken (Dutton et al., 2006, Lilius et al., 2011b) in order to explore how compassion can be made a more collective capacity. Both human agency and social architecture are identified to be important in transforming individual compassion to a social reality (Dutton et al., 2006). The agency exercised by individual actors, who first notice the suffering of others that they interact with and engage in actions beyond their role requirements, is a pre-requisite for collective compassion. However, that is not sufficient to make it collective. Rousing of collective compassion requires alerting the other members about the suffering, so that a process of collective noticing, appraising, feeling and acting is activated. Therefore, a crucial element of the social architecture that transforms individual level compassion to a collective reality and social force is communication. Communication facilitates propagation of information about the suffering, the sufferer and their needs, legitimates the expressions of feelings and actions taken, and enables co-ordination of action among various actors. Compassion rousing communication is all the more important in large organizations or society in general, where lack of personal connections between members may result in sufferings going unnoticed by the vast majority.

Organizational level studies focusing on compassion rousing communication are scarce, although empirical studies do allude to various forms of communications that shaped the nature of collective responses. In organizations, compassion rousing communication can be direct or indirect, formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal, and among peers or involving people in formal or leadership roles. Lilius et al. (2011b), in their study of an organizational unit that was known as exceptionally compassionate, found that informal conversations were the means to propagate information when it was discovered that one of their co-workers was suffering. Dutton et al. (2006) mention how powerful a speech from the dean of a business school was in rousing the compassion of the school community towards three students who had lost all their belongings in a fire, by

legitimizing the feelings for the victims and actions to help them. In the same study, they found a substantial reliance on community emails as the ongoing co-coordinating mechanism that kept the community updated on the victims' needs and status and help needed. The email system was perused by both informal and formal actors including peers who had close contact with the victims, peers who acted as self-appointed co-coordinators, and people occupying formal roles and responsibilities.

The most prevalent form of communication studied at societal level is mass media. Gamson's and Modigliani's (1987) study treated framing by the media not only as organizing and interpretive mechanisms but also as "central organizing ideas" that can steer an audience while providing meaning in a particular form. Hence, contents of media reports impact how a disaster or a misfortune and its victims are perceived and responded to by the society at large. Garfield (2007) found that many media accounts unwittingly passed on exaggerated, factually inaccurate and/or unbalanced information on what happened to African American disaster victims in New Orleans, and that this distorted disaster coverage often contained negative stereotypes historically ingrained in American culture (p .59-60). Dyson (2006, p. 164)) observes that, "the media was critical in framing perceptions of people and events surrounding the [Katrina] catastrophe" and chronicles numerous ways in which these perceptions led to chronic failures in rescue and triage efforts on behalf of poor and African American victims of Katrina.  In contrast, Argothy (2003) highlights how newspaper articles after 9/11 emphasized the altruistic side of volunteerism and framed patriotism has a key value made it a consensus disaster – one which brought people together around common goals and demonstration of compassionate behaviors.

Although communication thus proves to be important in rousing (or limiting) collective compassion, there has only been limited exploration of what constitutes compassion rousing communication. The organization level studies hardly examine how the content of the communication contributes to triggering various individual level compassion processes, even when they recognize it as pivotal in transforming individual compassion to a collective force. Societal level studies have established the positive impact of the volume of media coverage on compassionate acts such as donations (e.g. Brown & Minty, 2006), however they are still limited in the exploration of how content of media reports could contribute to rousing of compassion (Yan, 2012).

In this paper, we seek to address this gap. We take an extreme case of a collective suffering, the victims of which received an unprecedented amount of collective compassion from the other

members, and perform a content analysis of the communication that provided the others information about the suffering and the victims, in order to identify the elements that may have contributed to rousing of compassion.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This exploratory study made use of qualitative thematic analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984) of the content of early print media coverage of the Asian Tsunami 2004 in India. We explain the rationale for the choice of the case, data sources and data analysis methods in the following sections.

### Choice of the Case – Asian Tsunami 2004

We made use of an 'extreme' case, i.e., Asian Tsunami in India in 2004 for this study. Extreme cases have both limitations and advantages. Their extremity makes them 'inflated examples' (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 63), thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. However, such extremity becomes a great advantage in exploratory studies intended for developing nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and building empirical models (Eisenhardt, 1989), as demonstrated in compassion studies by Dutton et al. (2006) and Lilius et al. (2011b). The choice of Tsunami as the case for this study was based on the extremities it had on the scale of the suffering it caused and of the compassionate responses it generated, as explained below.

#### Scale of the suffering

The Asian Tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean on the 26 of December 2004. This was known as the biggest earthquake in 44 years reaching a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale and had released the energy of 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs, making it one of the deadliest disasters in modern history (US Geological Survey). The casualties in the end included 186,983 dead and 42,883 missing, for a total of 229,866. Measured in lives lost, this is one of the ten worst earthquakes as well as the single worst Tsunami in recorded history. The United Nations declared that the relief operation would be the costliest ever and reconstruction would probably take between five and ten years.

India was one of the countries affected by disaster. In India 12,405 lives were lost, 157,393 homes were destroyed, which forced 730,000 Indians to leave their houses. The fishing industry was severely hit, since 83,788 boats were damaged or completely destroyed. Besides that, 39,035 hectares of cropped areas were damaged. Entire villages were washed away.

#### Scale of compassionate responses

As Athukorloa and Resosudarmo (2005) pointed out, the 2004 Tsunami was a global

disaster not only because it affected multiple countries in two continents but also because it generated a global response. Inderfurth, Fabrycky, and Cohen (2006) in their Tsunami Report Card in the Foreign Policy Magazine give Tsunami a grade of "A" and write that Tsunami will be remembered as a model for effective global disaster response, especially in the outpouring of compassionate offers from all over the world. In total, a stupendous sum of $12,225.34 million was raised for immediate relief efforts for tsunami victims (which was much more than that could have been spent for rescue, relief and rehabilitation). It was one of the few disasters in which private donations (67% of total donation pledges (Matsuura, 2006)) surpassed donations made by governments. A substantial portion of relief efforts were done with the help of individual volunteers, which even led to the term 'disaster volunteer' because of the rising interest among ordinary people to contribute to social wellbeing (worldvolunteerweb). International organizations such as the UNDP, Doctors without Borders, and Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery worked alongside local volunteers in each of the affected community.

As a tsunami stricken nation, India relied primarily on material and human resources raised within the nation for relief work (Matsuura, 2006). The challenges within India were to rescue and provide infrastructural support and basic needs for the survivors, reclaim the dead and prevent the potential outbreak of epidemic in tsunami-hit areas. The first author was personally involved onsite in India as a volunteer in organizing and distributing relief supplies to survivor camps and counseling survivors.

**Data Source**

Based on existing research, we took mass media as the chief form of communication relevant to scenarios of sufferings like this. Media reports are often the primary source of information during disaster onset and immediate response, and media reports on the disaster event have been shown to profoundly shape emotional response to affected populations (i.e., compassion for disaster victims or sufferers) and the nature and quality of humanitarian assistance (appropriate, timely, and effective disaster triage). The tsunami coverage dominated worldwide media attention for over a month, much longer than any other natural disaster in modern history (Wynter, 2005). About 3.5% of all internet blogs referenced the disaster in the last week of 2004 (Nielson Buzz Metrics, 2005). Media data has been extensively used in disaster studies over the last few decades (Argothy, 2003; Brown & Minty, 2006; Garfield, 2007).

In India, extensive media coverage of the disaster brought in help from various quarters, individual citizen volunteers, aid organizations, and government and non governmental entities,

thus enabling raising of substantial amounts of resources from within the country. We selected three leading national newspapers in India as the source of data. The newspapers chosen were the Times of India, The Hindu, and the Indian Express, which together had a national circulation of over 10 million across 25 cities in the country.

Disaster scholars suggest that media reportage is particularly salient during the initial stages of a natural disaster (Garfield, 2007; Poonamallee & Howard, 2010) and compassionate responses are found to keep increasing and peak in the first week (Brown & Minty, 2006). Since we wanted to study this particular period when compassionate responses are at the peak, we focus on a one week, seven-day time frame beginning on the first day of onset of Tsunami in India (Sunday, December 26, 2004 - Saturday, January 1, 2005).

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis had two stages. In the first stage, we did an inductive thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984) of the media reports. First, the front desk reports from the three newspapers were open coded and a coding framework was developed. Using this coding framework, all remaining print news content was coded next with an eye to identifying any new emergent codes and making any needed refinements to the coding framework (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The open codes were then iteratively collapsed into thematic categories based on similarities and differences between them.

In the second stage, we used the existing theory to verify the relevance of the emergent themes to compassion. Guided by literature, we further grouped the themes into four categories depending on their relevance to the individual compassion processes. Themes that were related to *noticing* were grouped as 'attention drawing elements', those relevant to *appraising* as 'cognitive framing elements', those linked to *feeling* as 'affective arousal elements', and those connected to *acting* under 'behavior modeling elements' (Figure 1). Together the constitute compassion rousing elements in communication.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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**FINDINGS**

In this section, we describe each group of compassion rousing elements that were present in the media reports.

**Attention Drawing Elements**

Tsunami was the topic the most extensive coverage in the three newspapers in the 7-day period that we studied. The volume and spread of Tsunami related reports was such that it would have drawn the attention of even the most non-attentive reader. The impact of the disaster (including human toll, economic impact and destruction of civic infrastructure) was a recurrent core theme. The information about the various types and extent of impact serves to alert the reader about the magnitude of the suffering.

### Volume and spread

The Indian Express had published 142 separate news items, the Hindu 192, and the Times of India 168 over the first 7 days of Tsunami. This equate to a daily average of 20.28, 27.43 and 24 reports respectively. Every section of the newspapers (Front page, National, International, Local, Business, Sports, Editorial, and Columns etc.) had reports or at least references to Tsunami.

### Disaster impact

The magnitude and seriousness of a disaster is assessed through the extent of losses it creates to the society as a whole. Analysis showed that newspapers reported human toll, economic impact, and destruction of civic infrastructure, each informing the reader of nature and extent of losses.

*Human toll.* Human losses could be enormous in natural disasters and these include deaths, potential epidemics, emotional disturbances, potential relocation and providing care for survivors. During the Asian Tsunami, more than 200,000 lives were lost. Newspapers carried ongoing reports on human toll. Instead of merely reporting the statistics of the dead, injured and missing, the reports contained narratives that painted a vivid picture of the total annihilation caused by Tsunami, as the snippet below shows.

*'More than 2,400 people died in this city on Sunday morning, a majority of them women and children unable to fend off the three waves that struck in succession, tossing dozens of fishing trawlers around like playthings and dropping one upside down on the pedestrian bridge that joins two parts of the port.' [The Indian Express, 12/28]*

*Economic impact.* Economic losses include loss or damage of property, business, insurance related losses and market response to disasters. This highlights the far-reaching impact of disaster that the general public may not think about in the first instance, and serves to accentuate the magnitude and seriousness of the disaster. For example, the Indian Express reported thus on 12/28, *'Even as the human toll mounts along the Tsunami-hit coast, India Inc. is counting the economic costs of Sunday. Initial industry estimates say the damage could be well over Rs 2,000 crore,*

*excluding business lost over two Tsunami-stuck days during the peak tourist season. Industry association Assocham, the first to estimate all-round losses, said shipping and tourism would suffer the most. "There are more losses to human life than the economy, since neither manufacturing nor other economy activity have suffered long-term losses. But three ships have been damaged at Chennai port and a major part of Port Blair has been severely damaged. This could amount to Rs. 150 crore," said an Assocham spokesperson.'*

*Destruction of civic infrastructure.* Finally, disasters also cause a devastating blow to the civic infrastructure causing prolonged interruption of normal operations and it could take years before a community can rebuild the lost infrastructure. The reports illuminate the difficulties this causes in organizing relief operations. But the nature of damage reported alerts to the efforts needed to get the society's life back in order and signifies the long-term nature of the impact.

*'No team either from the civil administration or the Defense forces has so far been tasked to visit villages like Malacca, Lapatty, Perka, Kanka, Arong – each of them has an average population of 1500. ~~ Of these 38, only about 10 have been "preliminary assessed," the rest remain to be reached, even aerially. "Every infrastructure has collapsed," Chief Secretary V B Bhatt told The Indian Express. "From roads to communication networks, from power to fuel- storage tanks and landing jetties."' [The Indian Express, 12/29]*

**Cognitive Framing elements**

Analysis showed that the themes of the media reports included human-nature relationship, and moral characterization of victims and affected populations. These themes were presented in the media in a way that framed the disaster as extremely serious and in no way preventable, and the victims as innocent and of sound moral character.

**Human-nature relationship**

The reports portrayed nature as having immense force over humans. This was done through narrations of strength of the forces of nature. Any attempt of humans to face that was presented as heroic.

*'On a dark, grim Sunday, as the Earth moved- literally- just off Indonesia, disaster and tragedy swooped down on the India's eastern coast, riding the crest of 30- foot high tidal waves. Nature's double whammy- and earthquake at sea near Sumatra, leading to tides that cut into the peninsula of India- killed at least 9,500, as per agency estimates, across southeast Asia.' [The Indian Express, 12/27]*

News coverage kept emphasizing that there was nothing that could have been done to

prevent the tsunami implicating that the victims really did not have any control over what befell over them. But they also indicated what was humanly possible in curbing the secondary effects of the disaster, thus indicating where the responsibility of the society lay.

*'There was nothing we could do to prevent the tidal waves; nature can unmake in moment what man has built up over centuries. But we can prevent an epidemic.'[The Indian Express, 12/31]*

### Moral characterization of victims and affected populations

The reports portrayed the affected communities as brave, helpful, and compassionate. The communities were presented as inclusive disregarding religious divisions and identities.

*'Caring has no religion, ask this Jamaat chief in a Cuddalore corner*

*By noon the Jamaat on its own had organized milk for a few hundred babies, and food for over 3,000 survivors. By evening, about 3,000 Muslim men were tending to over 10,000 Hindus and Christians in makeshift camps in the local schools.'[The Indian Express, 12/30]*

## Affective Arousal Elements

Affective quality of the reports was evident in the narrative approach to reporting and use of emotions in coverage. Narratives reconstruct the experience of the sufferer, and allow observers to relive their experiences and to feel for themselves what it means to go through the suffering. Reports also described the emotions that the victims displayed and this has the potential of rousing mirror emotions in the reader.

### Narratives of individual suffering

In contrast to the objective, fact based reports that described 'what happened in the disaster', the narratives provided very subjective stories from victims about 'what happened to them'. The stories named the individual victims and relayed their personal account of what they went through. They make the physical, mental and emotional trauma of the victims come alive in how they unfold the events of the day that wiped out the life that they had built so far - their personal encounter with forces of nature, their fight for survival, desperate efforts to save their loved ones and losing out in that battle, witnessing the loss of life of their near and dear and disappearance of material possessions. In the depiction of victims as parents, sons and daughters, they are made to sound like normal humans like the readers than faceless statistic. Stories give hints about their life before (e.g. homes, livelihood) which portray them as regular people who went about their lives. All these highlight the similarity of the victims with readers. The narrations of their desperate struggles to save the loved ones and self-doubt if they fought hard enough when they lost, enable readers to put themselves in the victims' shoes and they may realize that they

would do and feel the same under the circumstances. Our data contained a large number of narratives. We provide one that is very telling.

*'Kumar's mother, Uma, was nearby when the first wave came out of nowhere and crashed down on the family's two-story brick home, knocking half of it down. The waters left several hulking fishing boats up to 48 feet long in the street out front and in the backyard, beside smashed cars. When the family saw the tsunami racing toward the shoreline about 100 yards away, it was already too late to do anything but stand in terror. "It was 9 o'clock sharp when we heard people running, yelling and wailing," she said, and her voice broke. "And then, without a moment's notice, the horror struck is. I was thrown almost 20 feet up and then back down. This happened three or four times before I could hug a bamboo pole and escape." Kumar was asleep when he heard what he thought was a loud cracking noise, as if an enormous fire was racing through the port. "I came to ask my mother in our snacks shop what the burning sound and the commotion I heard were," he said. "At that instant, the angry sea invaded our little house like a thick black mass of water." His son was swept away as the wave retreated. At least 15 minutes later, another surge smashed into the home. "The sewage systems collapsed. The saltwater and sewage choked out mouths and nostrils, and the tide was overwhelmingly powerful. I could only hold on to my wife and daughter, and we were thrown about 300 yards before we formed a chain with other adults to hold onto anything sturdy." Kumar's wife was seriously injured and hospitalized. But their 18-month-old daughter, Bhakiyalakshmi, was small enough for him to hold tightly like a ball and not let go. She survived.'[The Indian Express, 12/28]*

### Expressions of emotions

Reports contained references to a range of emotions that the victims displayed. It varied from a sense of loss, sadness, shock and disbelief to acceptance, determination to face life and even hope for future. Reporting of emotions can trigger similar emotions in those who read them.

*'Ravi Francis, 33, lost his four children to the three waves, which he said hammered his village on Kallarriver next to Nagappattinam every 30 minutes. The first hit as the family was eating breakfast. In the last seconds that Francis saw his three daughter alive, Maniyarasi, 3, Prema, 8, and Sivashankari, 10, were desperately trying to hold on to the windowsill as the water pulled at them. The body of their brother Vilayabalan, 9, hasn't been found. But two of the girls' corpses were found half a mile away from their home, dumped by the retreated waves near the river. Another was stuffed deep inside a tangle of thorn bushes. "My daughters are together with the human rubble in mass graves now," Francis said. "But I have decided to pick up the threads of*

*my life once again.  At least I have my wife and mother to turn to.  I console myself with that thought."'[The Times of India 12/27]*

**Behavior Modeling Elements**

This thematic category includes instances of responses by various actors. This includes actions by actors with formal responsibility, symbolic actions by nation's leaders, voluntary responses of organizational actors including NGOs and public and private sector companies, and voluntary actions by individuals. Since actors and actions are tightly bound we will discuss them together.

### Formal actions by actors with responsibility

Central and state governments and their ministers, government departments and other administrative bodies and their officials, and armed forces and police could be regarded as the actors with formal responsibility to respond. They were involved in the declaration of emergency, deployment of federal resources and further planning of action. Reports on their responses were in the lines of assuring the public that appropriate actions were being taken by the authorities to address the devastating effects of the disaster. They also talked about how India was helping other countries.

*'Around 56 IAF personnel also arrived on the island today to take part in rescue operations.  As Engineering Corps column in Chennai was also dispatched to Nagapattinam, while a 7 J-K Rifles column was sent to Kalpakkam. ~~ Assistance to Sri Lanka (code name Operation Rainbow) included Dornier aircraft sorties with medical supplies, apart from four Naval ships sent to Trincomalee and Galle ports.  The first of three Western Naval Command vessels dispatched to the Maldives will be reaching the island at 8 am tomorrow. ~~ Coast Guard vessel Durgabai Deshmukh provided assistance at Kollam in Kerala today, while two choppers are in Chennai. Three Coast Guard ships in Port Blair have been sent to Campbell Bay.  Several ships are now off the coast of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa.'[The Indian Express, 12/31]*

### Symbolic actions by nation's leaders

The symbolic actions by nations' leaders found a place in the reports. President of India called off the customary New Year party. Irrespective of the ideological differences, all political leaders and parties were reported to engage with the relief operations. The actions included symbolic participation in the grieving process, making donations to relief work, providing leadership in carrying out relief and rehabilitation work.

*'On Wednesday, the Communist Party of India State secretary, R. Nallakannu, said his party MPs*

*and MLAs would contribute one-month's salary for the rehabilitation. He visited the affected areas in Cuddalore. The CPI leader suggested formation of "village committees" to coordinate relief measures and distribute assistance.' [The Hindu, 12/30]*

**Voluntary responses from organizational actors**

Organizational actors included NGOs as well as private and public sector companies. NGOs of all sizes from all over the country were reported to provide and coordinate various kinds of help including evacuation, cleaning up of the debris, raising of funds and supplies, organizing of relief camps, and provision of food, clothing and medical care.

*'The Environment Support Group (ESG) has formed a network with five NGOs and some colleges in the city to co-ordinate efforts for relief work in the areas affected by the tsunami.*

*"The first step will be to give information to people on the nature of relief material that is necessary in places hit by the disaster. We are posting information on the Internet on the kind of medicines, shelter material and food that will be of immediate need. We are in touch with the National Fishworkers' Forum, as most of the destruction to life and property is in coastal areas. The forum is giving us information on aid needed," Leo Saldanha, co-ordinator of ESG (ph: 26534364) said.' [The Hindu, 12/27]*

Many of the major public and private sector corporations were reported to have made donations to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund. In many of these organizations, employees had donated part of their salary for this. Some organizations chose to be involved with the rescue and relief operations more directly.

*'Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (Bhel) has also contributed Rs 5 crore to the PM's Relief Fund. Minister of state for heavy industries & public enterprises Sontosh Mohan Dev presented the cheque for the said amount to the PM on Wednesday. Bhel's manufacturing plant at Tiruchi, which is closest to the affected areas, swung into action on Monday and handed over relief material including clothing and medicines to the district authorities. Trucks went around Bhel townships to collect relief materials from the employees and their families. The company has provided 20,500 food packets and 70,000 pieces of clothing.*

*The 38,000-plus employees of the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) have donated their one day's salary (which adds up to Rs 2 crore) towards relief efforts. The company has so far distributed around seven thousand food packets in the Nagapattinam-Karaikal area of Tamil Nadu. The petroleum major has also offered its helicopters for rescue operations and has decided to provide three meals every week for the victims in Chennai.' [Times of India, 12/31]*

**Voluntary responses from individual actors**

Media reported some individual actions that were truly inspirational. There were also stories of individuals who chose to take time away from their normal lives and engage in volunteer work. Some of them used their professional expertise in assisting relief work.

*'2 techies open window of hope*

*Sriram Raghavan, president, Conmat Technologies, and his colleague Sudhakar Chandra are helping the Cuddalore administration create a database of relief requirements from various areas, apart from updating stocks of clothes, food, water and medicines. Chandra, who works as Chief Evangelist at the IT firm that focuses on e-governance said the database will help the administration know from time to time, where medicines, food and other requirements are needed the most and identify areas where goods have been sent.'[The Hindu, 12/31]*

Media reports contained information on avenues for those who might be moved to respond.

*'...Those who want to help can call Human Rights Protection Front (26724472), the Bridge Foundation (51100000) that has made arrangements to collect clothes with the Spot City Taxi, Indian Disabled League (9844011910) and Karnataka State Human Rights Trust (9343795738).'*
*[The Hindu, 12/27]*

## DISCUSSION

Past research recognizes communication as crucial in rousing compassion at a collective level, however hasn't explored what constitutes compassion rousing communication. Our analysis of media reports reveal a number of compassion rousing elements, which were grouped into four categories viz. 'attention drawing elements', 'cognitive framing elements', 'affective arousal elements', and 'behavior modeling elements'. Extant literature shows that these elements have the potential to influence individual compassion process constituted of noticing, appraising, feeling and acting. Based on this, we present an integrated model for rousing collective compassion through communication by incorporating our empirical findings to the individual compassion process model proposed by Atkins and Parker (2012) (Figure 2). In the following paragraphs, we will discuss how the presence of each group of compassion rousing elements in the communications of the suffering and the victims may aid triggering of the corresponding individual compassion process in the other members of the collective.

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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**Attention Drawing Elements and Noticing**

Attention drawing elements may prompt people to take notice of the suffering of others. In circumstances where there is personal interaction and connection between the observer and the sufferer, noticing of the suffering may be spontaneous (Lilius at al., 2011b). In other circumstances, attention needs to be drawn to the suffering and sufferers, as the observers may not be aware of even the existence of the sufferer or the suffering. Also, Individuals tend to vary in their motivation and skills to notice (Clark 1997). Many tend not to notice when they are busy with other things and may actually require others to call their attention to it (Kanov et al., 2004).

The quantity and spread of newspaper reports may serve to call the attention and sustain it. Several researchers have found direct correlation between the extent of media coverage of disasters and the donations raised (Brown & Minty, 2006; Simon, 1997). Brown and Minty (2006) found in their study on the impact of media coverage of Tsunami 2004 on the donations to relief agencies every additional minute of nightly news coverage led to increase in donations by 13.2% of the average daily donation and an additional 700-word story in the New York Times or Wall Street Journal raised donations by 18.2% of the daily average. Simon (1997) provides evidence that more extended coverage of an earthquake has a strong positive relationship with private contributions supporting those affected. It is observed that the donations are greater in the early stages of disasters when media focus is high and diminish as the media focus starts to weaken. Also, disasters or sufferings that attract more coverage receive more compassionate responses than the ones that do not (Yan, 2012).

Media reports contained information on the disaster impact including human toll, economic impact and destruction of civic infrastructure. The extensiveness of the impact conveys the seriousness of the suffering. It is seen as an objective measure of the magnitude of the harm or loss caused by the suffering (Nussbaum, 2001). Physical severity is reported as a primary indicator of seriousness and is seen as positively related to compassion (Weiner, Graham & Chandler, 1982). In their study of collective compassion shown to victims of fire, Dutton et al. (2006) found that instant recognition of fire as a severe misfortune that can cause immense harm to the victims was instrumental in triggering community-wide compassion.

**Cognitive Framing Elements and Appraising**

Cognitive framing elements provide information about various aspects of the suffering and the sufferer that individuals consider in appraising the situation and making judgments about their own responses. Appraisal phase of compassion involves top-down or deliberate thinking based

responses to considerations such as sufferer's deservingness and the relevance of the sufferer to themselves (Atkins & Parker, 2012; Goetz et al., 2010).

Meta-analysis by Rudolph et al. (2004) reveals that observers made judgments on deservingness based on the notions of controllability of the suffering and personal responsibility of the sufferer for their suffering. When victims suffered from misfortunes they could not control, they were seen as 'not responsible' for their plight and hence deserving of compassion. Or else they were blamed and invited anger as a response (Rudolph et al., 2004). In the study of an organizational unit that demonstrated collective compassion capability without any fatigue, Lilius et al. (2011b) observed that colleagues who did not take personal responsibility to work on their plight were seen as undeserving of others' compassion in the long term. The media reports in this study talked about human-nature relationships, and were categorical in saying that humans could have no control of a natural disaster like Tsunami, thus promoting a more favorable appraisal.

Moral characterization of victims is another factor that has been identified in literature as influential in determining their deservingness (Goetz et al., 2010). Sufferers who are altruistic, cooperative and of good character are thought to deserve compassion as opposed to those who are selfish, competitive and untrustworthy (Goetz et al., 2010). In presenting the victims as brave, helpful and compassionate themselves, the media reports in this study attribute favorable moral characteristics to them, which might increase their chance of receiving compassion. In contrast, Cuddy, Rock and Norton (2007) report that a survey conducted two weeks after Hurricane Katrina found that white and non-white participants who did not dehumanize the affected disaster population were more likely to offer help to Katrina victims; participants who did dehumanize disaster victims were less likely to offer help.

**Affective Arousal Elements and Feeling**

Affective arousal elements carry the potential of stimulating compassionate feelings in the readers. Feeling prompts the observer to 'suffer with' (Solomon, 1998) the sufferer. Affect plays an important role in the decision to help others (Batson, 1990). However, there is a substantial proportion of people who do not feel anything when they notice the suffering of others (Kanov et al., 2004), especially when the sufferer is not personally relevant to them (Goetz et al., 2010).

The elements in the media reports in this study that can induce feelings in such circumstances include narratives of the victims' experience and describing their emotions. Narratives present 'imaginative reconstruction of the experience of the sufferer' (Nussbaum, 2001, p.327). Imagery (both images and words (Osgood, 1969)) is found to be very powerful in

generating affect (Kosslyn, 1980). They gives the observer a sense of what it means for the person to suffer, and connects himself to that person's situation and prospects (Kanov et al., 2004, p. 813). Organizational researchers have found narrations and emotionally expressive communication essential in developing a collective appreciation of the sufferers' experiences (Kanov et al., 2004; Lilius et al., 2011a). This may make them reminisce personal experiences of harm and loss that they have had, such as pain of physical injury, losing loved ones, and losing homes, and thus make it more real. People tend to show compassion when they have experienced similar pain (Clark, 1997).

Explicit descriptions of emotions that victims experience may prime similar emotions in the readers. This may start 'emotional contagion' (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994) as readers unconsciously catch the sufferers' emotions. Observer who feels emotional distress in others' suffering is moved to compassion (Singer & Frith, 2005).

**Behavior Modeling Elements and Acting**

Action is an important aspect as it the only outward sign that a person is feeling compassion (Kanov et al., 2004). Moreover, it is through compassionate responding that the feeling transforms to a collective 'social force' that compels social solidarity (Clark, 1997, p.56-57). Behavior modeling elements can facilitate that transformation. When they come across reports on a range of responses from various actors in the society (including formal actors, leaders, NGOs, business organizations and individuals) geared towards alleviating suffering, the readers may feel encouraged or even inspired to follow their footsteps. Witnessing others engaging in virtuous action makes people feel elevation (Haidt, 2003), which prompts others to want to engage in similar behavior (Lilius et al, 2011a). This adds to 'upward emotional spirals' (Fredrickson, 2003), and creates a 'bandwagon effect' (Flint & Goyder 2006, p. 13) that makes compassion more collective and shared, and creates a virtuous cycle (Poonamallee, 2011).

Compassionate responses take many forms (Dutton et al., 2006) and require various kinds of resources or expertise from the observer (Madden et al, 2012). Media reports in this study provide a range of responses with varying degrees of personal involvement that may enable readers to choose from. The reports also inform the reader of the sufferers' needs as well as nature of support or supplies needed. Knowing the sufferers need is seen as an important aspect of effective responding (Kanov et al., 2004). By telling the reader how support can be delivered (personally or through NGOs or the organizations they work with), these reports almost create an expectation from the reader to act, be it in a big or small way.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Our study set out to answer the important question as to what constitutes compassion rousing communication. We hope that the compassion rousing elements that we discovered in this study will form the foundation for a beginning model of compassion rousing communication. The qualitative, exploratory approach of our study focused on an extreme case enabled bringing out a rather comprehensive list of the elements present in compassion rousing communication.

We hope that this study would encourage further studies on how organizational or societal communication systems could rouse compassion and inspire future researchers to focus more on the content of compassion relevant organizational communications. Although our findings are based on media reports in the instance of a suffering that roused societal level collective compassion, the elements that we have identified may be generic enough to be applied in analyzing compassion rousing communication at organizational level as well. Similarly, they may be applied to analyze the contents of other forms of verbal and written communication including speeches, emails, blogs etc. Future researchers could use the elements discovered in this study to create constructs and variables in designing quantitative studies that examines the relative impact that each element and/or its sub-elements on each of the individual compassion processes. This may be an important line of inquiry for practice as well as it would help us understand the optimum levels of each element to be included in communication to produce the desired impact.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The study offers insights relevant for practice as well. The findings provide practical pointers for designing compassion rousing communication. Each group of compassion rousing elements indicate various aspects of communication that need to be emphasized - right quantity and spread of messages make sure that they catch people's attention; information about the seriousness of the suffering and its controllability as well as moral portrayal of the sufferers enable make them decisions about deservingness of the sufferer; emotional cues and stories may stimulate mirror emotions in the observer; and presenting them with ranges of behavioral responses may prompt them to choose one or the other according to their abilities and life's circumstances. This is very important in modern day organizations as many of the current organizational designs (e.g. virtual organizations) and work practices (e.g. flexi-hours, teleworking, job-sharing) do not allow for face-to-face interaction, and hence communication channels within organizations may have to be specially tailored to contain all cues, information and stimuli to trigger compassion. At the societal level, collective compassion may not even exist without appropriate means of

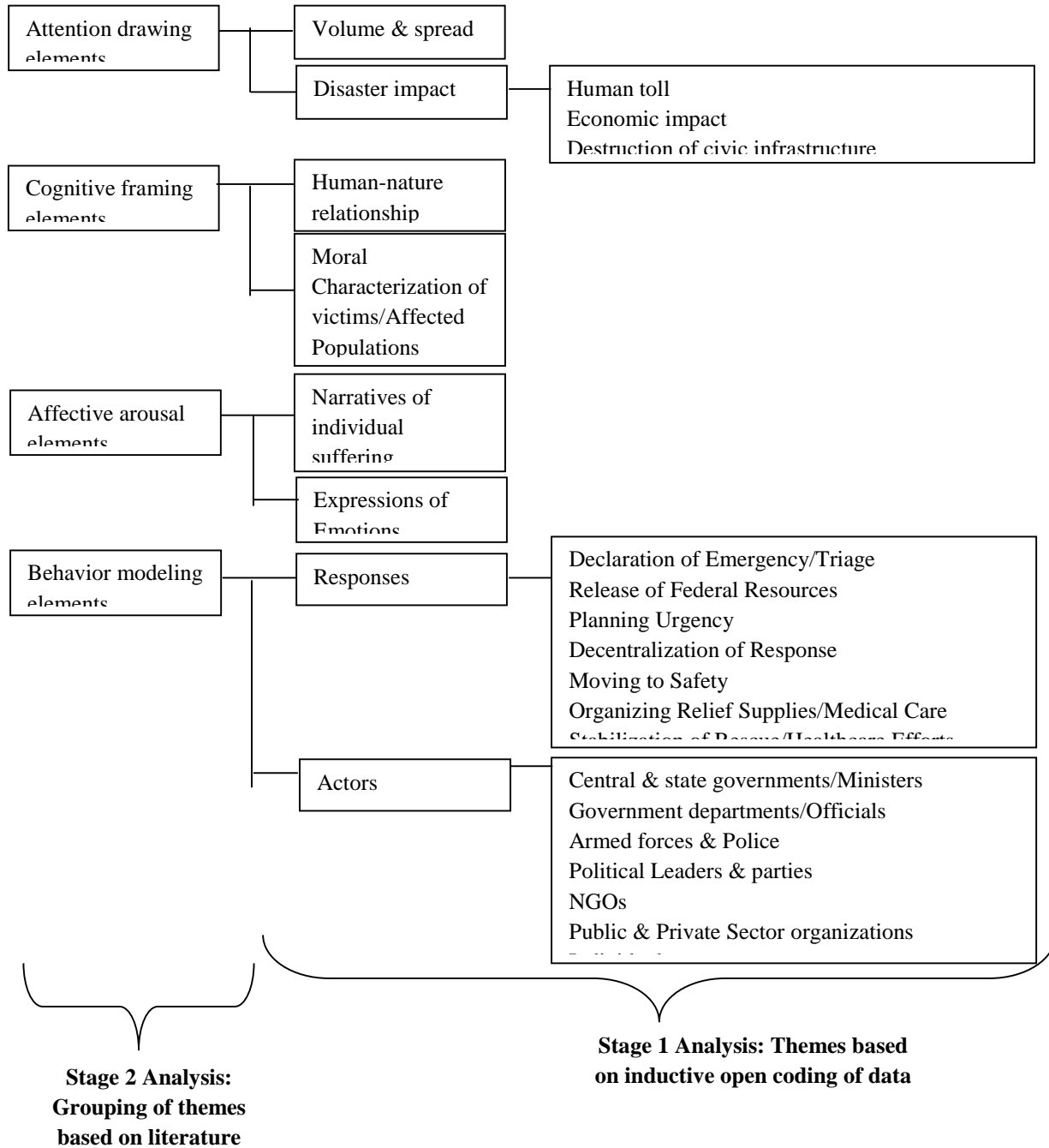communication that can alert people of others' sufferings and needs.

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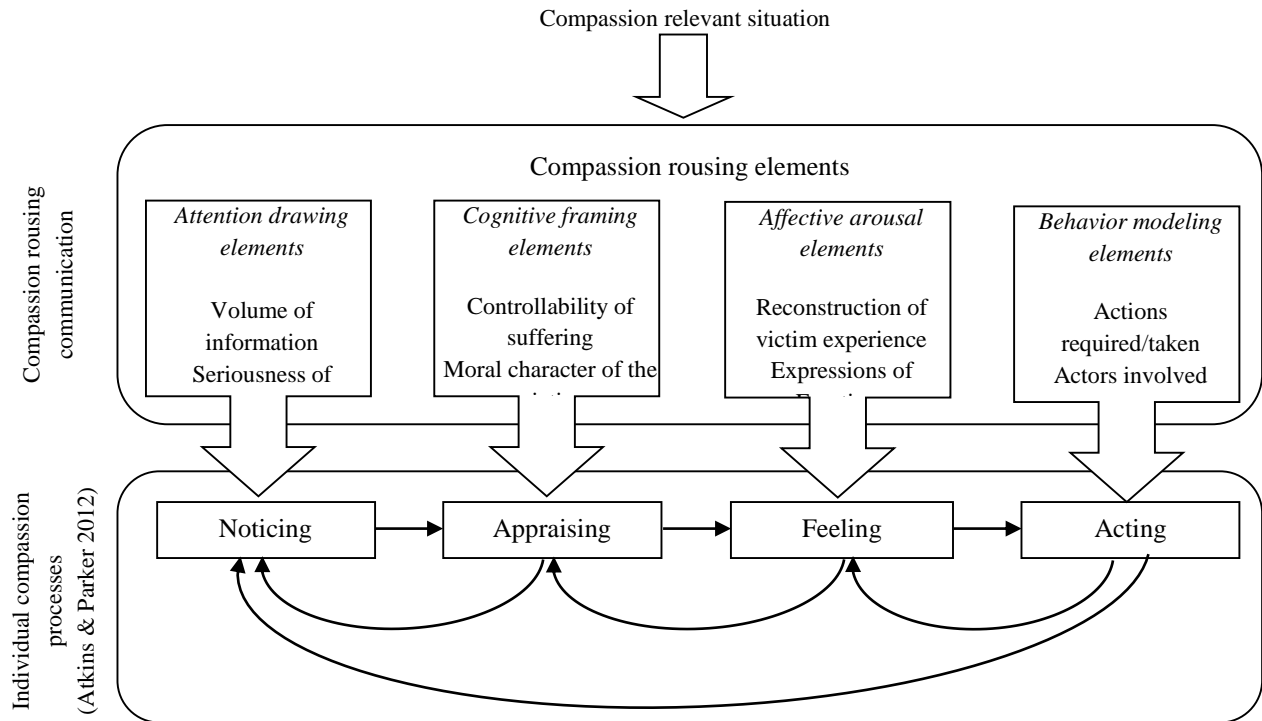Neilson Buzz Metrics. (2006*). Intelliseeks Blogpulse Database vs. "Tsunami-related buzz spiked starting Dec 26, 2004 and into 2005*. http://tsumani.blogpulse.com

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**Figure 1. Thematic Structure**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Attention drawing elements | Volume & spread | |
| | Disaster impact | Human toll<br>Economic impact<br>Destruction of civic infrastructure |
| Cognitive framing elements | Human-nature relationship | |
| | Moral Characterization of victims/Affected Populations | |
| Affective arousal elements | Narratives of individual suffering | |
| | Expressions of Emotions | |
| Behavior modeling elements | Responses | Declaration of Emergency/Triage<br>Release of Federal Resources<br>Planning Urgency<br>Decentralization of Response<br>Moving to Safety<br>Organizing Relief Supplies/Medical Care<br>Stabilization of Rescue/Healthcare Efforts |
| | Actors | Central & state governments/Ministers<br>Government departments/Officials<br>Armed forces & Police<br>Political Leaders & parties<br>NGOs<br>Public & Private Sector organizations |

**Stage 2 Analysis: Grouping of themes based on literature**

**Stage 1 Analysis: Themes based on inductive open coding of data**

**Figure 2. Integrated model for rousing compassion through communication**

Compassion relevant situation

Compassion rousing elements

Compassion rousing communication

| *Attention drawing elements* | *Cognitive framing elements* | *Affective arousal elements* | *Behavior modeling elements* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Volume of information Seriousness of | Controllability of suffering Moral character of the | Reconstruction of victim experience Expressions of | Actions required/taken Actors involved |

Individual compassion processes (Atkins & Parker 2012)

| Noticing | → | Appraising | → | Feeling | → | Acting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Research Office

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode

IIMK Campus P. O.,

Kozhikode, Kerala, India,

PIN - 673 570

Phone: **+91-495-2809238**

Email: research@iimk.ac.in

Web: https://iimk.ac.in/faculty/publicationmenu.php