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Avaaz Inclusive

A Case Study of a Representative of Global Civil Society

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Abstract

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Purpose of Study:	This study intends to investigate <i>what level of inclusiveness Avaaz offers its members in terms of accessibility of participatory features throughout its online platforms</i> . By the application of a theoretical framework of political and communication theory, this thesis aims to define the democratic model most applicable to Avaaz, in regards to its displayed inclusiveness.
Methodology:	Case Study and Qualitative Web Content Analysis (Feature Analysis)
Unit of Analysis:	Avaaz
Units of Observation:	Avaaz Active Online Platforms
Conclusion:	After evaluation of the features offered online throughout Avaaz' platforms, Avaaz can be argued to be of a two-way asymmetrical participatory character as the communication remains unbalanced. There are elements of deliberative discussions although these are not sufficient to characterize the organization. There are also elements appearing closer to the one-way communication models.
Keywords:	Global Governance, Global Civil Society, Participatory Democracy, Deliberation, Democratic Models, Online Activism.

Executive Summary

Our globalized world, where we are increasingly connected, has brought attention to matters of international character. Important questions of global governance and the role of a global civil society have been raised, and expectations on the Internet and its political potential are high. These ideas are arguably based on assumptions of increased participation and deliberation, through the rise of social media and its interactive features (Kavada, 2005).

Out of many organizations advocating different agendas of social justice, Avaaz is the largest online activist group existing today, in terms of members. Avaaz, which means “voice” in several languages, advocates for change on a global level. With over twenty million members, the online activist group campaigns for what they refer to as a better world, through online petitions and other methods. With so many members, the question of the possibility for members to participate in the organization and its activities becomes pertinent in relation to democratic models.

This study intends to investigate *what level of inclusiveness Avaaz offers its members in terms of accessibility of participatory features throughout its online platforms*. By the application of a theoretical framework of political and communication theory, this thesis aims to define the democratic model most applicable to Avaaz, in regards to its displayed inclusiveness. This is relevant to investigate in order to get a better understanding of the role of global civil society in a globalized world and its democratic procedures (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 333).

The theoretical framework combines communications theory, using the four models of public relations by Grunig and Hunt, with political theory, referring to four models of democracy outlined by Strömbäck. The investigation is carried out as case study using Qualitative Web Content Analysis (or feature analysis) to examine the features offered by the organization to its members throughout its online platforms. The framework for data-collection is set in relation to the theoretical models applied. One of the foremost strategies in analyzing the collected data in a case study is to rely on the theoretical framework (Yin, 2009, p. 130). By comparing the allowed communication of these features, to the democratic models presented, the applicable democratic model will more easily be determined to this case of display of inclusiveness.

Significant earlier research has been done within the area, notably Kavada’s multiple case study of Amnesty International, Oxfam and the World Development Program, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Kavada, 2005). She has also carried out important research on Avaaz, although focusing on engagement and identity throughout the platforms. The methods applied in her work are however similar to this study.

Some results indicate an inclination towards a one-way communication model although there are also some significant deliberative elements to find. Some sites do not allow any public expression or interaction, whereas all sites provide information about how to join or participate in the campaigns. The findings suggest however that the features to be found throughout Avaaz' online platforms are of a participatory character, allowing certain measures of participation and consulting its public regularly.

With regards to Habermas' theory, it is indicative and not used as a measurement in the analysis of the findings. This thesis highlights that the trends outlined by Habermas may be changing again. Mixed methods would have been preferable as it can bring valuable information, which is unattainable through the chosen method. Suggested areas of future research that has appeared relevant, would be to study the actual participation, whereas now the study investigates what features are offered for participation, to understand Avaaz' participatory display. The number of members participating in campaigns would have been equally interesting in question of legitimacy. Qualitative interviews would have been preferable to provide information about how the organization deals with feedback, which would have been highly valuable for a greater understanding.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. A Global Civil Society	1
1.2. Avaaz as a Representative of Global Civil Society	3
1.3. Relevance	4
1.3.1. Societal Relevance	4
1.3.2. Academic Relevance:.....	4
1.4. What is Avaaz?	5
1.5. Purpose of investigation	6
2. Theoretical framework	6
2.1. Introduction to Theory: Political Theory and Communication Theory	6
2.2. Political Theory	7
2.2.1. Four Models of Democracy	8
2.3. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere - Jürgen Habermas	10
2.4. Communications Theory	10
2.4.1. Four Models of Public Relations	11
2.5. Earlier research	13
3. Method	15
3.1. Defining the Scope of the Study	15
3.1.1. List of platforms.....	15
3.2. About the Method - Case Study and Web Content Analysis (Feature Analysis) .17	
3.2.1. Case Study	17
3.2.2. Web Content Analysis (Feature Analysis) – as a data collection strategy.....	17
3.3. Designing the models	19
3.3.1. Defining the variables for data collection.....	19
3.3.2. Combining the Theoretical Models for Analysis.....	20
3.4. Collecting and presenting the data	22
4. Validity and Reliability	22
5. Results	24
5.1. Accessibility	24
5.1.1. Contact information	24
5.2. Feedback	24
5.2.1. Public Expression.....	24
5.2.2. Direct Contact.....	25
5.3. Interaction and Deliberation	26
5.4. Participation in Activity	26
5.5. An attempt to reach the organization	27
6. Analysis	27
6.1. The Press Agency Model and Procedural Democracy	27
6.2. The Public Information Model and Competitive Democracy	28
6.3. The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model and Participatory Democracy	28
6.4. The Two-Way Symmetrical Model and Deliberative Democracy	30

7. Conclusion	31
8. Discussion.....	32
9. Suggestions for Future Research	33
References.....	34

Appendix A	Avaaz - Statements and Goals	37
Appendix B	General Information About the Platforms' Original Inclusive Functions of Relevance	38
Appendix C	Results Table	40

List of Tables

Table 1.	List of Units of Observation	16
Table 2.	Kavada's Measures of Participation	19
Table 3.	Variables for Data-collection	20
Table 4.	Theoretical Models for Analysis	21
Table 5.	Data-collection Results	Appendix C

1. Introduction

1.1. A Global Civil Society

In an increasingly interconnected world, society has been going through structural reform, moving from an industrialized society of a national character, to what today can be referred to as a “network society” of an international character (Castells 1996, 2004a, cited in Castells, 2008, p. 79). As this reform is still in progress, questions about local as well as global governance and how this should be performed are of increasing importance.

Although unevenly distributed, the Internet allows people around the globe to access a rich amount of information as well as new ways of communicating. Since its introduction, it has changed considerably in character, moving from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. This transformation has allowed many interactive features, characteristic of social media, which incorporates user-generated content.

Where politics generally used to be only of local concern, globalization is giving rise to an increasing demand for globalized political systems, where global issues, which are of concern to citizens around the world, can be addressed (Latham, 2001, p. 34). It has become an “arena for a renewal of the public sphere. An arena for new social movements, more issue oriented, both local as well as regional and transnational” (Falkheimer, 2001, p. 136).

“The public sphere is the space of communication of ideas and projects that emerge from society and that are addressed to the decision makers in the institutions of society”

(Castells, 2008, p. 78)

When referring to civil society and its political role, its aim is not to gain political power or control, but to influence “through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere” (Cohan and Arato, 1994, p. xi). It may also be defined, and in this study is referred to, as the organized expression of the views articulated in the public sphere (Castells, 2008, p. 78). Civil society therefore exists within the public sphere.

The term civil society may refer to many different aspects of society as a whole. Most importantly, civil society should be categorized as part of democratic theory and democratic societies, although it can be argued whether it can be applied to non-western democratic societies and what meaning the term implies in countries that do not have democratic political systems (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2013).

The Internet's network structure has given rise to several optimistic beliefs in its potential of strengthening the public sphere and civil society (Kavada, 2005). This technological evolution is also strongly associated with globalization. The effects of this globalization process have brought the public sphere from a national level to a global, where the demand for a global civil society has become even more prominent (Castells, 2008, p. 78). Our current society, also referred to as "the network society" (Castells 1996, 2004a, cited in Castells, 2008, p. 79), has constructed and organized this public sphere around global communication networks, in a way that has never been possible before (Lull 2007, Cardoso 2006, Chester 2007, cited in Castells, 2008, p. 79).

Global communication media channels are efficient tools to share information and knowledge but "it is how they are used and what kind of information and knowledge is transmitted that is important in terms of politics" (Langdon Winner, 1986, cited in Lipschutz, 2005, p. 27). They enable people to cooperate and work towards shared visions and goals in order to change society, "especially the two-way kind" (Lipschutz, 2005, p. 31).

"Whether the flow of information and knowledge is one-way or two makes a difference in terms of who that news affects, how resulting effects come about and how those affected might respond"

(Lipschutz, 2005, p. 18)

The beliefs in the Internet as a political platform for the public sphere and for a global civil society are related to, and arguably based upon, ideas of participation and deliberation online (Kavada, 2005), bringing the people closer to the decision-making processes. Although network-based governance may hold this potential for inclusion, there is no guarantee that it is actually exercised (Lupel, 2005, p. 127).

Thus, network forms while non-hierarchical are not necessarily inclusive; they may serve as tools of exclusion as easily as they can provide avenues for the proliferation of political participation; they are in effect normatively ambivalent"

(Lupel, 2005, p. 128)

1.2. Avaaz as a Representative of Global Civil Society

“The global civil society is the organized expression of the values and interests of society”

(Castells, 2008, p. 78)

Most analysts refer today to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with an international agenda addressing global issues, as “global civil society” (Kaldor, 2003, cited in Castells, 2008, p. 84). There are many online activist organizations and communities that are transnational or global today, working together towards different goals. Avaaz is the world’s largest online activist organization. The organization has considerable reach and is uncontested by other similar organizations in membership size. With over 20 million members it is arguably the priori example of global civil society in terms of size and reach. Through campaigns and petitions, collecting millions of names, they influence policy-makers globally when timing is crucial. The success of Avaaz can partially be attributed to the Internet, allowing such an exchange of information. Interactive communication is therefore significant for similar organizations.

“This participatory function is particularly important in the current political climate, whereby the professionalization of NGOs has raised questions about their democratic potential”

(Kavada, 2005, p. 209)

Organizations such as Avaaz can now communicate directly with their audiences, and this feature is “of crucial importance for political organizations” (Kavada, 2005, p. 209). Criticism to similar online activist organizations often mean that the membership is foremost based on donations, where the members do not participate in the decision-making processes (Ward, 2001). Due to Avaaz’ estimated importance for global civil society and the expectation that the Internet can deliver greater public participation, studying the inclusive features offered by the organization to its members can be considered of importance. Inclusiveness is an inherent measure of democracy and by performing this research, a greater understanding can be created for what democratic characteristics a representative of global civil society is displaying in its communication between the organization and its members.

The combination of different models enable the creation of guiding principles of different types of democracies based on participatory features offered by the organization. These various models include democratic models and their normative expectations on their citizens, as well as communication theories defining various levels of interactivity with regards to the directional communication.

1.3. Relevance

1.3.1. Societal Relevance

“If network governance is only potentially a democratic form of transnational politics, how do we distinguish its democratic form from its exclusionary cousin?”

(Lupel, 2005, p. 128)

The role of global civil society in a globalized world is yet to be determined. There are however certain beliefs that it may lead to the “democratization of global governance”, by participating in international legislation. This is only possible if it exists within “a framework of normative rules and egalitarian institutions that ensures equal access to all” (Lupel, 2005, p. 129 - 130).

Therefore, the importance of what kind of democracy this global civil society will bring about is very high (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 338). Due to the interconnectivity of online media, an online activist group such as Avaaz may play a significant role in contributing to future democratic outcomes. According to Lupel, global civil society has been criticized for not living up to its normative expectations and of being governed by powerful interests. Its representative status has also been put in question, as its members often participate simply by donating and as its policies often are “the product of specialized professionals and not public deliberation”. It is therefore dangerous to claim that the international arena will be democratized simply by its existence (Lupel, 2005, p. 129-130).

Many different questions can be posed in terms of democratic values and ideals, to understand what kind of civil society Avaaz represents and promotes—accountability, transparency and legitimacy within the organization are all important aspects. The understanding of the organization’s internal inclusiveness may not determine what democratic model it promotes for society as a whole. It may however contribute to a greater comprehension of its democratic values and ideals, which are of great relevance to the inquiries of what kind of global civil society is on the rise.

1.3.2. Academic Relevance:

“Early case studies predicted the rise in online activism evident today”

(Hallahan, 2010, p. 636)

The recent and yet ongoing technology revolution has rapidly changed the ways people communicate globally, increasing the belief in the power of online media. This has augmented the need for further understanding and research combining the fields of communication studies and political science. Media’s capacity to empower the public has brought attention to existing ideas and concepts of public relations between organizations and its public (Hallahan, 2010 p. 638). Awareness of the power of media and journalism

when it comes to setting the agenda for the public debate is of particular relevance (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987, McCombs et al., 1997, Protes and McCombs, 1991, cited in Strömbäck, 2005, p. 338). Additionally there are also concerns about why the question of “how that power is used, consciously or unconsciously, in order to promote or oppose different concepts of democracy, has not been raised more often than it has” (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 338).

The need to better understand public relations media has been created due to the great variation of media now available and its increasing complexity, as the world today finds itself composed by “human and electronic networks that will only grow in complexity in the future” (Hallahan, 2010, p. 639). Research within this field may contribute to a greater understanding of the “dynamic nature of activism and its influence on public relations practice and, ultimately, society itself” (Smith & Ferguson, 2001, p. 300, cited in Smith & Ferguson, 2010, p. 405). Moreover, these results may be perceived as underlying material, and hopefully provide a meaningful contribution, to further research, with the possibility of being applied to other organizations.

1.4. What is Avaaz?

“Avaaz has a simple democratic mission: close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want”

(UN, 2013)

Avaaz is an “international advocacy organization” but may also be referred to as a “social justice movement” (Kavada, 2012, p. 28) who claims to be the “campaigning community bringing people-powered politics to decision-making worldwide” (Avaaz.org, 2013). The word Avaaz means "voice" in several European, Middle Eastern and Asian languages (Avaaz.org, 2013). Campaigning to create a better world, as expressed by the organization, Avaaz uses methods such as online petitions, YouTube campaigns, and electronic disobedience - where they flood companies with emails – and may even take it offline to the streets (Kavada, 2005, p. 222). Membership is achieved by entering an e-mail address on the organization’s website.

Co-founded in 2007 by MoveOn, Res Publica, and GetUp.org.au, Avaaz works as a virtual organization with its head quarters in New York, operating in 16 different languages (Kavada, 2012, p. 30). With a small professional team situated in six different continents (Avaaz.org, 2013), it is in comparison to its large number of members, a rather centralized organization. In this study Avaaz will not primarily be regarded as an activist group, but as an organization representing civil society. The fact that they are an activist organization should not be ignored, considering the nature of their methods, but in order to stay focused on the area that will be investigated, it has been put aside for this study.

For mission statement and more information, see Appendix A.

1.5. Purpose of investigation

This study intends to investigate *what level of inclusiveness Avaaz offers its members in terms of accessibility of participatory features throughout its online platforms*. By the application of a theoretical framework of political and communication theory, this thesis aims to define the democratic model most applicable to Avaaz, in regards to its displayed inclusiveness.

In order to acquire relevant information for the purpose mentioned above, the following research questions will be used while studying the organization.

- *What contact information is accessible for members?*
Whether this information is easily accessible or not is important in determining the organization's openness and encouragement of direct contact and feedback.
- *What features are available for members to interact, discuss and express their point of views publicly and directly with the organization?*
Features available for members to give feedback, interact, and to participate in deliberative discussions with the organization are imperative to measure the level of participation the organization offers to its members.
- *Through what functions can members participate in and affect the organization's activities?*
The possibilities offered to members to participate in the activism and in determining what the organization should work for are relevant in determining what expectations the organization has on its members.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction to Theory: Political Theory and Communication Theory

The nature of this study requires a combination of political theory and communication theory. These two fields can be argued to be slowly merging, as the current social and technological developments are increasingly compatible.

Four models of democracy will be presented together with four models of public relations. The democratic models range from low normative expectations of its citizens demanding no participation but respecting the basic democratic rights, to inclusive deliberation with expectations of full participation. The level of participation within a democratic structure will in this study be compared to the flow of communication within an organization, i.e. the four public relations models. Whether the communication is of a one-way or a two-way nature is essential to its participatory and inclusive character. One-way communication does not value interaction or participation from its public, whereas two-way communication does to a further extent, with the level of participation depending on the model used for comparison.

These theories are applied in order to allow a structured analytical process during the study. The findings will be interpreted in relation to these models in order to measure the organization's displayed level of inclusiveness.

2.2. Political Theory

Political theory on democratic models is a vast field with great variations. The democratic model to which a similar organization should adhere to is problematic to define, as there are several applicable indicators of democratic structures. There are many existing different views on what democracy should be and the following is not intended as an absolute definition of types of democracy. Instead this chapter aims to outline four very common definitions, summarized and complemented with additional information from different authors, in order to suit the range of this study.

Firstly, there has been a growing consensus of what criteria needs to be fulfilled by a nation for it to be perceived as democratic:

“(1) the political decision-makers are elected by the people in free, fair and frequent elections,
(2) there is freedom of expression, of the press and of information,
(3) citizenship is inclusive,
(4) everyone has the right to form and join organizations of their own choosing, and
(5) society is law-governed”

(Dahl, 1998, 1999, Dworkin 1996, Hadenius, 2001, Karvonen, 2003, Sartori, 1987, cited in Strömbäck 2005, p. 333)

All of these criteria are basic and could be investigated in order to achieve higher value in this study, but due to the scope of this investigation this will be left as an opportunity for future research. As the element of inclusiveness is one of the founding criteria in this definition, this study will examine the level of inclusivity in the Avaaz organization, as one of the determining factors of its democratic character.

The four models of democracy that are to be presented are referred to as the “most important and commonly discussed” and have been argued to be a consensus reached among scholars (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 333). As each of the four democratic models possess “different normative expectations on citizens and politicians” (Strömbäck 2005 p.333), they can be generalised into specific categories. These four categories are then complemented with additional elements from James S. Fishkin. This way the models focus on the “the procedures for and processes of political decision-making” (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 333).

2.2.1. Four Models of Democracy

Procedural Democracy

In the procedural model, democracy is perceived as a novelty, or the first stage of a democracy. It is highly normative and expects its citizens to respect and follow the laws and procedures of the democratic process. Basic democratic rights such as the right to vote and freedom of expression are to be protected (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 334). What is of importance in this model is that citizens have the right to act but are not required to. It would be too much to expect all citizens to participate in public life or in elections.

Competitive Democracy

Elections play a significant role in a competitive democracy, where political candidates or parties compete for the public's votes. In this model, politicians act, whereas the public reacts. It can also be seen in market economic terms, where the political elites act as producers and citizens are seen as consumers of their products. It is through elections that the will of the people shall be heard (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 334), the "public will" is not really of interest and the model does not promote political equality. Citizens are not able to deal with complex policy issues so there is no use in fostering deliberation (Fishkin, 2009, p. 66-67).

However, it does require some basic knowledge of the political and societal environment. Nevertheless, it does not require citizens to be active in the public sphere, as it is of greater importance that the political elite represents competitive alternatives and that the public participate in the democratic procedure by voting.

Fishkin adds another model after this one called Elite Deliberation. This model can in many ways be compared to competitive democracy in its non-commitment to participation from the public, as well as in its lack of political equality. Instead, elite representatives deliberate in a small groups and "filtrate" and "refine" the public views (Fishkin, 2009, p. 71-72).

Participatory Democracy

Participatory Democracy is a "value-laden system with a strong ethos of political equality and tolerance". This model of democracy does not content itself with citizens simply voting positively or negatively to pre-existing alternatives (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 335). It encourages and expects the public to participate in the public sphere and political procedures—believing that democracy is built by "the actions of a large number of people" (Amnå, 2003, Jarl, 2003, Pateman, 1970, cited in Strömbäck, 2005, p. 336). However, it does not "require that all decisions be made directly by the people" (Fishkin, 2009, p. 76).

Civil society plays a very important role in this model where the public will develop common attitudes and norms (cf. Putnam, 2000, cited in Strömbäck, 2005, p. 336) by cooperating and participating in societal and democratic procedures. This will-formation is meaningful to the participatory model and the public is to be consulted often (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77). Participation in this sense is to be considered “a token of consent to the overall system, to which all are equally subjected as a matter of right” (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77).

Participatory democracy values, as the name implies, participation, engagement and a certain level of political equality (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77). The normative expectations on citizens in this model are far more elevated than in the two previous models. The public is expected to be informed of how to participate, as well as of their societal and political surroundings and environment (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 336).

Deliberative Democracy

“The deliberative model of democracy can be seen as an extension of the participatory model of democracy”

(Strömbäck, 2005, p. 340)

Deliberative democracy is based on collective decision-making, preceded by deliberative discussions and can be seen as “an extension of the participatory model” (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 340). These discussions, held in the public sphere, are to be rational, impartial and equal, where the people are to set the agenda. They are equally important as the actual decision-making process, being the underlying reason behind the decision being made. They allow the creation of a consensus, as the participants with different points of views will eventually reach a mutually acceptable agreement through discussion (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 336).

This model holds the highest expectations of its citizens, where there should be “trust, integrity and tolerance” as well as openness to the exchange of opinions and point of views (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 337). Political equality is combined with mass-participation. In practice, this model has its limitations with regards to its actual feasibility, as it demands full public engagement (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77).

2.3. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere - Jürgen Habermas

Jürgen Habermas, one of the most prominent philosophers on the subject of the public sphere, describes in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* how the modern view on the public sphere derives from the emerging bourgeoisie during the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. This development was to bring about deliberative democracy, ultimately achieving consensus through discussion and communication (Retzlaff, 1984, p. xxi).

Habermas believes this development to decline with the introduction of mass media and communication, which has created a “mass-media dominated public sphere” (Habermas, 1991, p. 216). Due to the practice of one-way communication through television and radio, the possibility of open discussion and dialogue is lost and citizens cannot participate in decision-making processes (Retzlaff, 1984, p. xix).

The public has instead assumed the role of consumer (Habermas, 1991, p. 156) adapting to a “plebiscitary acclamation”, where the public sphere has been replaced by non-governmental organizations and institutionalized parties (Retzlaff, 1984, p.xx).

The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere must be viewed in context. When it first was published in the 1960’s and later revised in the 1980’s, financial markets, consumerism and advertising on a freer market prospered. The idea of losing the bourgeoisie public sphere, or that of the public sphere becoming part of our private sphere (in front of the television in our homes), or even of that of citizens losing the possibility to participate in the public debate, appears more applicable to a society where mass-communication is very dominant.

Today’s Internet is a public/private one-way or two-way means of communication (Falkheimer, 2001, p.133), which allows new forms of public participation and engagement. Habermas’ theory of the transformation of the public sphere may therefore need to be revised in light of the Internet era.

2.4. Communications Theory

The “directionality” of communication has long been of great interest to public relations theorists, where it has often been argued that “public relations should be equally involved in listening to as well as talking at constituents” (Hallahan, 2010, p. 636). This scenario has previously been nearly impossible to achieve due to communications structures in society. In contrast, “today’s interactive media enable exchanges (including actual conversations) to take place between organizations and their publics and among members of important public using a single medium” (Hallahan, 2010, p. 637). The selected communication theories have also been the cause of extensive further research, each of which has been developed in various ways. However in order to create a comprehensible model suitable for this study, the presentation of these models has been limited to including only their original characteristics.

2.4.1. Four Models of Public Relations

In James E. Grunig's and Todd T. Hunt's *Managing Public Relations*, there are four models of public relations as part of their excellence theory. First of all, it is important to clarify how Grunig and Hunt refer to the term public relations in order to facilitate an understanding of why these models can be argued to be applicable to Avaaz as an organization:

“public relations activities are part of the management of communication between an organisation and its publics”

(Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.7-8)

Avaaz being an online activist group, one of their audiences would be those subject to the change they wish to accomplish (governments, companies, etc.). This thesis does not however focus on the organization's activity as activists, but as a representative of global civil society, involving over twenty million people. From a public relations perspective, their member base therefore constitute their main public as for communication between the organization and their members. Communication and public relations theories are therefore highly relevant and applicable to the organization as it communicates with its audience or public. What in these models can be referred to as audiences, will in this study be equated terms such as the public and citizens to comply with the terms used in the four models of democracy.

The following four models describe the direction of the communication, one-way or two-way as well as the “balance of the intended effect” (Grunig & Grunig, 1989, p. 30), such as symmetrical or asymmetrical.

The Press Agency/Publicity Model

The press agency model, or publicity model, is often referred to as the most popular model and continues to represent many organizations' approach to public relations and communication even today (Hallahan, 2010, p. 637). The flow of information is here only in one single direction, from the public relations experts to the audience or public.

This model demands media attention using propagandistic public relations (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169) and is described as manipulative, as it aims at transferring the organization's values, thoughts or products onto its audience. It does not value feedback or reviews from the second party. Examples of the type of communication include “bulk e-mails where replies are not permitted” and “microblogging” (Phillips, 2009, cited in Hallahan, 2010, p. 637).

Sender → Receiver

Public Information Model

As the names suggests, the public information model is characterized by “one-way transfer in a journalistic form” (Pang et al, 2010, p. 19), or journalists circulating information about the organization among the public. The information is in general truthful and serves a positive purpose for the organization. It does not however emphasize negative information (Grunig et al 1995, p. 169).

For this model press releases, news releases, newsletters or other material that can be circulated in media, is favoured.

Sender → Receiver

Two Way Asymmetrical Model

“Is the epitome of much of modern, sophisticated public relations practice”

(Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169)

The two-way models are based on both parties being senders and receivers of information. The asymmetrical model is unbalanced, as the organization usually does not emphasize or value the feedback from its public although it is accessible. Instead, the organization expects the audience or public to behave as the organization intended it to behave, as it uses “research to identify the messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behaviour of the organization”. By manipulating the audience like this, the effects become rather asymmetrical as the behaviour is not necessarily in the best interest of the public (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169). It is common to apply surveys and polls to better understand how to persuade its public (Pang et al, 2010, p. 19).

Sender ↔ Sender/receiver

Two way Symmetrical Model

The two-way symmetrical model depends on the free flow of information between the organization and its public. It promotes open and equal communication between the two parties and feedback from the public is valued (Hallahan, 2010, p. 638).

Discussion and negotiation is used to solve any disagreements in order to “bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviours of both the organization and its publics” (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169). The effects of this model are to benefit both parties (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169) and there is an assumption that this is the ideal model to apply when practicing public relations (Grunig, 1992, Grunig & Hunt, 1984, cited in Hallahan, 2010, p. 638).

Media today allows organizations to engage directly with their constituents through email exchanges, comments, chats, and threaded discussions in online forums” (Hallahan, 2010, p. 637). Other features allowing participation are public forums such as chats and discussion groups (Hallahan, 2010, p. 638).

Sender/Receiver \leftrightarrow Sender/Receiver

Organizations who apply the one-way models usually have in common that they distribute information about the organization to their public, but they do not request information from their audiences “through research or informal methods” (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169), in that they are based on one-way communication. Other organizations often combine the asymmetrical and symmetrical two-way communication models, as well as some combine the two one-way communication models (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 170).

“Two-way approaches have been promoted as the ideal way to practice public relations”

(Grunig, 2001, cited in Hallahan, 2010, p.637)

To further specify the application of these models to this study, the possibility of interaction and participation encouraged within the models will be highlighted in order to correspond to the purpose of the investigation. The models could however also be fully applied if investigating the actual participation, by studying the flow of communication coming from the organization and how it deals with feedback.

2.5. Earlier research

There is extensive research in the field and online media is constantly being investigated. For exact relevance to this particular study, earlier studies have been carried out on similar organizations such as Amnesty International, Oxfam and the World Development Program, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Kavada, 2005). Avaaz has also been subject to research before.

Using content analysis of the organizations’ websites, Anastasia Kavada analyzed their functions, based on a schedule developed by Gibson et al (2001) (Kavada, 2005, p. 210). Thereafter complementary qualitative interviews were carried out with the web coordinators.

These findings showed that the Internet “constitutes a new political space which is open to all organisations to publish their opinions” (Kavada, 2005, p. 219). Many voices are represented although they are not all equally strong, which is mostly due to better resources and visibility of their respective websites. However, “the internet seems to replicate the power structures of the offline media” (Kavada, 2005, p. 219).

Although these studies are rather recent, Internet as accessible for the general population was still at the time a rather recent medium (Kavada, 2005, p. 215). It is therefore important to keep in mind the rapid development of communication technologies as well as the ability to incorporate interactive functions to a desirable extent. The findings do however express certain doubts of whether such a development is to take place due to the organization structure and a desire within the organizations to control the flow of information:

“However, it is questionable if they ever will, as this greater interactivity may be unsuitable for their communication culture. This is because interactivity increases the control of the user on the communication and information flows and challenges the existing dynamic of communication. This could prove very problematic, particularly for organizations with tighter and more centralized systems of information management”

(Kavada, 2005, p. 215)

The very same author has also performed research on Avaaz, which differs in matter of research angle from this study. In “Engagement, bonding, and identity across multiple platforms: Avaaz on Facebook, YouTube, and MySpace”, Kavada has focused on how the organization’s image is constructed throughout its various media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. It investigates how a collective identity is created and its importance for strengthening the community as an activist organization. This study aims instead at investigating the inclusiveness of the points of contact from a democratic value aspect, which in part can also be found within Kavada’s research.

3. Method

3.1. Defining the Scope of the Study

Once the purpose of the investigation was fully formulated the units of observation could more easily be defined. While taking into consideration the boundaries of the study, such as the research questions to be answered, the given time period of the study and accessibility to units to investigate, the final units of observation could be significantly narrowed down.

While performing a case study, the unit of analysis will be the same as the “case” (Yin, 2009, p. 30), the case in question here is Avaaz. The units of observation are then selected with regards to the chosen research questions. As a first step, all the online channels and tools of communication that Avaaz use to interact with its members are to be mapped. These include the Avaaz.org website together with its homepages and interconnected online communication sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. These will define the population, and therefore the units of observation. The selected units are very concrete (Yin, 2009, p. 33) and do not demand much interpretation but instead require an understanding of what to look for. These units are exclusively web-based, including no other devices such as smartphones and tablets, as no such apps are yet developed.

Avaaz operates in many languages, but due to its global character and to the scope of this study, the examined platforms will be exclusively in English, as this study will focus on the international version of the platforms. Additionally, a lack of various language skills by this researcher in all the relevant languages is to be considered. Therefore, the units will be investigated as for their current state, during the period of time that this research is performed (April 2013 – May 2013).

3.1.1. List of platforms

A list on Avaaz’ Facebook page displays the following platforms where Avaaz can be reached:

- <https://www.facebook.com/Avaaz>
- <http://twitter.com/Avaaz>
- <http://youtube.com/user/AvaazOrg>
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/avaaz/>
- <http://www.bebo.com/Avaaz>

(About Avaaz, Facebook, 2013)

However due to various reasons explained below, this investigation uses a modified list of units:

Table 1. List of Units of Observation

Avaaz.org main website and webpages http://avaaz.org/en/
Avaaz.org Stories of Us http://avaaz.org/en/stories_of_us_hub/
Avaaz Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/Avaaz
Avaaz LinkedIn Company profile http://www.linkedin.com/company/avaaz.org
Avaaz LinkedIn Group profile http://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=40167&trk=anet_ug_hm
Avaaz Flickr profile http://www.flickr.com/photos/avaaz/
Avaazorg YouTube channel http://youtube.com/user/AvaazOrg

Stories of Us is a new feature, introduced as the organization passed over 20 million members. It can be found on the main website but as an exclusive site. *LinkedIn* as a platform was added as the organization could be found registered both as a company as well as a group.

Facebook app, *Twitter*, *Avaaz Daily Briefing* and *Bebo* are not to be used for the analysis. The Facebook app is a mirror site (Businessdictionary, 2013) for their main website. Twitter was originally part of the study but has been removed due to the nature of the platform and its limitations. On Twitter you may tweet to the organization by mentioning @Avaaz in your message. This message will be published on your Twitter profile and Avaaz will be notified. You may also retweet a message that they have published. These functions are the same for all members on Twitter. The platform is, in this matter, different to the others due to its nature of communication and can therefore not provide further information that will alter the result of to which degree Avaaz displays itself as inclusive. Twitter would nevertheless be of interest to investigate if measuring the organization's methods of dealing with feedback. The *Daily Briefing* is still in Beta mode, meaning that it is not yet fully developed, which implies that it cannot be used to draw any conclusions. Bebo was originally part of the study but has been removed due to the absence of activity for over a year. Avaaz' profile had on May 21, 2013, only had 7 profile visits with 7 videos, all uploaded over a year ago (Bebo, 2013). A very important note when considering these units is that the selected online platforms vary in nature of possibilities of interactivity (see Appendix B).

3.2. About the Method - Case Study and Web Content Analysis (Feature Analysis)

3.2.1. Case Study

Due to the nature of this research a case study approach is more suitable, as it aims to answer questions such as “how” and “why” (Yin, 2009, p. 9). It is also the preferred method when investigating a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, this research proposal may best be answered and illustrated through the work of a holistic single-case study of the organization Avaaz, which is the most appropriate method when “examining the global nature of the organization” (Yin, 2009, p. 50). The case study will mainly consist of a Web Content Analysis of Avaaz.org, their main website, and their interconnected online channels of communication, as listed above.

Single case studies are appropriate when the case represents an “extreme” or “unique” case (Yin, 2009, p. 47). This is highly relevant to the case of Avaaz, given that the organization has an impressive amount of members and influence and no similar contemporaries in this field of the same size or with the same reach. The same study could potentially be reproduced to study other similar cases, which would then make it a part of a multiple-case study (Yin, 2009, p. 47). In this study however, only Avaaz will be investigated.

Preferably the study would have been based on ten qualitative e-mail interviews with employees at Avaaz.org and presumably complemented with the information available at Avaaz.org website and other online channels. However, due to an inability to source a contact with a representative or any individual working for the organization (further explained in chapter 5.5.), the empirical data was derived exclusively from a content analysis of the selected online forums.

Research has been made using similar methods on organizations of comparable nature to Avaaz, as well as on Avaaz, as mentioned above. Noteworthy is the method used by Kavada, in the multiple case study of Amnesty International, Oxfam and the World Development Movement (Kavada, 2005). Kavada applies a content analysis of the organisations’ websites to analyse the functions of the websites in order to reach a better understanding of their performance (Kavada, 2005, p. 211).

3.2.2. Web Content Analysis (Feature Analysis) – as a data collection strategy

Content Analysis, hereafter referred to as CA, was among the first methodologies to be used for analyzing websites and webpages, as it appears perfectly suitable for a communications tool such as the web (Bates and Lu, 1997, cited in Herring, 2012). Using the same methods or methods similar to those that are commonly applied to analyzing traditional media, facilitates a comparison between the findings from different studies. This can possibly increase further understanding of trans-media (Herring, 2012, p. 4).

The method is often applied to studies in political communication, where it appears appropriate as it intends to answer research questions investigating frequency or scope of a certain phenomenon (Esaïsson, et al., 2007, p. 223). Herring presents content analysis under the field of Communication studies, but states that it is commonly used in many other disciplines as well. Contrary to traditional CA, WebCA “considers content to be various types of information "contained" in new media documents, including themes, features, links, and exchanges, all of which can communicate meaning” (Herring, 2012, p. 11). This implies the analysis of features being present, or not, on the websites or platforms.

In this particular case, the research will refer to structural features such as e-mails, comments, links, likes and other manifestations of different levels of interaction (Herring, 2012). Through the application of the WebCA throughout the different online platforms, the presence or non-presence of features that serve as expressions for the level of inclusiveness, as well as the possibility of equivalent expressions of two-way communication, will be determined. By way of explanation, this study will examine the manifest content through a qualitative WebCA.

This method requires the creation of a clear code frame, or a scheme for the analysis, which will be further explained under “Designing the models”. This scheme is also of great importance to the reliability of this study as a case study, in order for it to be properly reproduced if necessary (Yin, 2009, p. 45).

3.3. Designing the models

3.3.1. Defining the variables for data collection

It is essential to develop theories for case studies and therefore, through these theories, to attempt to describe and explain Avaaz' display of inclusiveness (Yin, 2009, p. 35-36). This study will base its model on the categorizations used by Kavada during the data-collection process. However, Kavada's measures of participation do not appear sufficient for this study, but are used as base for the new categories formulated. Kavada uses in her study from 2005 the following measures of participation:

Table 2. Kavada's Measures of Participation

Openness
"count of email contacts to distinct units or branches within the party or organization listed on site."
Feedback
(1) Email address on the site (2) Email address explicitly focused on soliciting comments (3) An online form to submit views offered
Opinion polls
Present or absent
Interaction
(1) Games/gimmicks to play (2) Bulletin board or guest book to post views (3) Chat room for real-time discussion

(Kavada, 2005, p. 214)

In her study of Avaaz in 2012, she uses a table to collect data about displays of connections (Kavada, 2012, p. 52). In this process, every selected platform is examined to find features displaying connections in terms of comments and likes. Although based on and inspired by Kavada's earlier work, a new table is created to investigate the level of participation and inclusiveness for the purpose of this study. This table categorizes all possibilities for communication on the chosen platforms between the organization and its members. The non-presence of selected features will only be mentioned when the platform can offer such a feature, as some platforms offer specific functions not available on other sites. There is, however, no certainty that these features will be present. The chosen variables have been created to gather relevant information to answer the research questions. These are as follows:

Table 3. Variables for Data-collection

Contact Information
Email addresses, physical addresses, phone numbers or other contact information listed on site.
Public Expression
Likes or equivalent, the possibility to comment or any other means of expression that can be displayed in public on the site.
Direct Contact
Email forms to contact the organization directly, opinion polls or any similar possibility to express yourself directly to the organization.
Direct Interactivity/Dialogue
Chats, discussion forums or other forms of interactivity.
Participation in Activity
The possibility to sign petitions, participate in campaigns, or other display of how to take part in Avaaz' activities.

Contact Information can be used as a measure of “the organization’s effort to decentralize the process of information provision”, connecting members of the public with the representatives of the organization directly (Kavada, 2005, p. 214).

Public Expression will be used in order to measure the possibility to give feedback publicly, which also allows other members to partake in each other’s points of view.

Direct Contact serves the same purpose as contact information, although the features offered for direct contact are different, as it brings the members closer to the organization. *Direct Interactivity/Dialogue* is highly relevant to measure the level of possible participation in a discussion between members as well as between members and organization. Finally, *Participation in Activity* will be used to measure members’ possible participation in the organization’s work and missions. See Table 5 for data-collection table and results.

3.3.2. Combining the Theoretical Models for Analysis

The analytical process will be on-going throughout the data-collection process and will be based on the theoretical framework introduced above. The following summarizing table combines the four democratic models with the four public relations models. These models are put in relation to each other to illustrate the comparison of level of participation and communication between the two parties.

Table 4. Theoretical Models for Analysis

Public Relations Models	Democratic Models
<p>Press Agency Model</p> <p>One-way communication Demands media attention Propagandistic/Manipulative No feedback/reviews</p> <p>Example: Bulk e-mails, microblogging</p>	<p>Procedural Democracy</p> <p>No expectations on citizens to act or participate Highly normative Expects citizens to respect and follow laws and procedures Basic democratic rights protected</p>
<p>Public Information Model</p> <p>One-way transfer of information in journalistic form Circulating only positive information</p> <p>Example: Press releases, news releases, newsletters</p>	<p>Competitive Democracy</p> <p>Competitive elections Politicians act the public reacts No political equality Does not value the public will Voting seen as participation</p>
<p>Two-way Asymmetric Model</p> <p>Unbalanced two-way communication Feedback possible although not valued by organization. Audience expected to behave as organization intended.</p> <p>Examples: Opinion polls, surveys, referenda.</p>	<p>Participatory Democracy</p> <p>Encourages and expects citizen participation in the public sphere and political procedures Certain level of political equality Strong civil society Public is to be consulted often Does not require all decisions to be made by the people Participation to be seen as “consent to overall system” Will-formation meaningful</p>
<p>Two-way Symmetric Model</p> <p>Free flow of information Open and equal discussion and negotiation to solve disagreements Feedback is valued Search for consensus Beneficial for both parties</p> <p>Examples: Public discussion forums, chats, direct contact with policy-makers</p>	<p>Deliberative Democracy</p> <p>Collective decision-making Deliberative discussions to be rational, impartial and equal Discussion equally important as decision Political equality Consensus Trust, integrity and tolerance Openness to changing opinion Demands full engagement of the public</p>

3.4. Collecting and presenting the data

By using the above-illustrated table (Table 3) the empirical data will be collected by thorough investigation of all units of observation. The presence or non-presence of mentioned features, as well as additional features, will in this manner be properly documented with the possibility of reproducing the exact same study. See Table 5 for data-collection table and results.

One of the foremost strategies in analyzing the collected data in a case study is to rely on the theoretical framework (Yin, 2009, p. 130). The analytic strategy applied in this research paper is based on the research questions that, together with Kavada's earlier model, are reason for the categorization in the constructed codes. The analysis will be carried out in the context of the research questions in mind whilst simultaneously applying the theoretical propositions. After the collection of data, the findings will be analyzed with the help of the theoretical framework (see Table 4) while also keeping the features expected to be available on the various platform in mind (see Annex B). The public relations models will be used to categorize the intended direction of the communication in the offered features and will together with the democratic models and their level of expectations on their public be used to interpret the results.

Due to the nature of the study, the criteria for the different models of democratic and communication theory will be compared with the patterns found in the empirical results. Although the different platforms will be investigated individually as units of observation, the overall findings will determine the basis for the analysis, in order to provide a conclusion about Avaaz's displayed inclusiveness.

4. Validity and Reliability

In a case study like this one, the aim is not to bring forward generalizable results, but to shine light on this particular case, in order to stress the need for further investigation within the field (Esiasson, et al., 2007).

The units of analysis are not chosen as sampled units representing a population in order to produce a statistical generalization. Statistical generalization is a common mistake made in case studies, as "analytical generalization" is preferred (Yin, 2009, p. 38). By applying analytical generalization the findings of the study are compared to existing theories. If the applied method can be properly replicated on other similar cases, it can then be used to generalize (Yin, 2009, p. 44).

The operational measures were stated before carrying out the study in order to increase the construct validity. This was done by clearly defining the variables for the investigation as well as the steps of the data-collecting process. The four models of democracy as well as the four models of public relations also play an important role in determining the measures. This study measures the inclusiveness in terms of expectations of the audience or public through the possibility of participation and two-way

communication among others, which are criteria defined in the above-mentioned models. The chosen models can be argued to measure the displayed inclusiveness offered by the organization by means of the chosen units of observation, although more aspects included in these models would need to be measured to be able to apply them fully as representative of the organization's behaviour.

It has therefore become clear that the usage of multiple sources of evidence would have been necessary. Sources such as for example interview transcripts, would benefit the study's construct validity, as it would allow more well defined measurements. To better illustrate this, qualitative interviews would as an example have allowed a greater measurement of how the organization values feedback from its members.

Another important angle would have been to measure not only what features the organization provides to allow participation, but also the actual participation of members in the organization's activity and policy-making by examining campaigns carried out. This would, once again, have required the insights given by complimentary sources of evidence, such as interviews with individuals working for the organization. This would have been equally recommended for the reliability of the study. Single sources have nevertheless been regularly used for case studies (Yin, 2009, p. 114).

Objectivity is another element of importance while performing the research (Yin, 2009, p. 41). However, it can be stated that the research has been carried out with full objectivity. The research has not been done by assignment by Avaaz or any other organization. It was selected out of interest for Avaaz' position in a future global development as a representative for a global civil society. Internal validity is based on the pattern matching analytic technique (Yin, 2009, p. 138) of the chosen models in the theoretical framework and the actual case investigated.

The replication of the very same case study following the same procedures would be necessary for the reliability of the case. This is often a criticized aspect of case studies (Yin, 2009, p. 45), as extensive documentation of the procedures is of even higher importance in case studies to ensure the reliability. Protocols are very useful as they guide the investigator during the data collection (Yin, 2009, p. 79) but have not been created for this specific case, as the content would essentially have been a reproduction of the methodology and the documented procedure within the thesis.

5. Results

5.1. Accessibility

5.1.1. Contact information

Most platforms have generally published a link to Avaaz' main website, as well as options to connect with the organization through the other platforms. However, the social media platforms provide less contact information than Avaaz' website and the LinkedIn group does not even provide a link to the website, but to an inactive Google group.

Nevertheless, the LinkedIn group together with Flickr are the only platforms to provide a list of the other members of the group. These are, however, features of the platforms. The LinkedIn group also gives the name of the owner of the group including the link to his profile. On Avaaz' home page the links to contact information are easy to identify, although no information is published there directly except from the "connect with" option, which is an ongoing theme throughout the website's footer. This feature connects you to Facebook and Twitter.

The highest level of contact information can be found in one of Avaaz.org's webpages, *Press Centre*. Under *Media Contacts*, three phone numbers are available as well as one general email address (media@avaaz.org). Two of these numbers go to the media team, and the third will presumably take you to the media director.

Overall, there are only three direct numbers to be found, and only one direct email address displayed, which all can be found on one single page, although links to other platforms as well as links to Avaaz' home page always can be found. This can be perceived as a very low level of contact information to be found throughout their platforms.

Although contact information may be perceived as more difficult to find, information about the organization is rather easily obtained. The website provides information about campaigns, advertisements, press releases, news and other material promoting the work of Avaaz.

5.2. Feedback

5.2.1. Public Expression

Although there are many links throughout the Avaaz.org pages of how to like or follow Avaaz on many other platforms, there are very few instances where the possibility occurs directly on their main website. On Avaaz.org homepage, such an option is not available.

An important link however, is "join the conversation" found on their home page. This will bring the user to "Stories of us" where members are allowed to write about themselves and upload a picture. Writing your own story is the most expressive feature,

as it allows the voices of members to be heard, written in their own words. This feature may create a sense of community, but does not necessarily increase the opportunity to interact, as it remains limited. Another member may although “heart” a story, which can be compared to a “like”, which is an expressive feature posted publicly.

Facebook may be argued to be the platform most allowing of public expression, due partially to its social nature. It allows likes, comments and individual posting of material. Flickr is of similar character as users may like, comment and favourite uploaded pictures and videos. The possibility of uploading your own material is also available. LinkedIn provides the expected features, such as likes, comments and follow, although the company page only allows following. YouTube also fulfills its expectations, with the most prominent feature being the comments allowed on posted videos.

5.2.2. Direct Contact

Most platforms do not offer any feature allowing direct contact, whether it is a function that the platform provides or not, notably Facebook. On its Facebook page, Avaaz does not allow the messaging function although Facebook pages do offer this (About Pages, Facebook, 2013).

What is exceptional in these findings is what can be found on Avaaz.org website. Besides offering the main email form service, sorting the emails by *Topic area* (Avaaz.org, 2013), making sure that the information reaches the concerned department within the organization, there is also a significant poll.

The *New Year poll: Setting the Agenda for 2013* is a poll of great interest, as this function appears to be one of the strongest participatory elements throughout all the platforms. The poll asks the users, as the name implies, what kind of issues should be on the organization’s agenda during this year. This poll can be taken at any time with the possibility of leaving comments. These comments will not be published publicly on the site but sent to the organization as feedback. The total results of how the other members have voted are displayed as well.

Additional polls relevant to mention are those carried out by the organization on 10.000 randomly chosen members in order to test which campaigns will gain support. These polls are not available on the investigated platforms and not done on member’s initiative. They can only serve as additional information to consider.

Concerning *Stories of Us*, direct contact does not occur. An interactive map is presented with member stories from around the world. The interaction is of a passive nature in regards to the communication, as no opportunity to respond to the stories is offered except from by “hearting”.

It may be of importance to mention that on less developed versions of the site, the email addresses to different departments are displayed instead of the “Area Topics” categories in the international version of the site. This can be found in the Canadian “Contact Avaaz” section: <http://www.avaaz.org/ca/contact.php>, where a physical address to an office in New York also is shown. This study however, focuses exclusively on the international version of the site.

5.3. Interaction and Deliberation

On Avaaz website a highly interactive feature called *Avaaz 2013: Poll and discussion*, can be found. The link to this feature is incorporated into a text situated in the New Year poll section, which can be found on the *About us*-page. There are no direct links to it on the home page or any other page for that matter. The accessibility of this discussion is important in relation to the fact that it is the only interactive, seemingly equal, discussion within the website. In this discussion you can leave three different types of comments; general comments, specific campaign suggestions and ways to improve Avaaz (Avaaz.org, 2013).

Through Facebook, members are allowed to post material. An important observation is that no posts are issued by any other part than Avaaz during this time period. On the other hand, comments on posts allow a higher degree of discussion.

On most other platforms certain levels of discussions can be started through the act of commenting, which is a feature provided by the platforms. However, a few of the Avaaz groups in the social media platforms have so few members, that the meaning of such a deliberative (if fulfilling the demands of equality) discussion becomes insignificant when attempting to categorize the display of inclusiveness of the entire organization.

In the LinkedIn group for example, there is a higher possibility of interactivity than on the other platforms, as members may start discussions and create their own polls, although this group remains rather inactive (approximately five posts during the time period April – May 2013). In this group there are 426 members, compared to over 20 million on the main website, which diminishes the actual importance of this platform.

5.4. Participation in Activity

On Avaaz’ main website there is a large amount of information about how to participate as well as direct links to different ways of participating. These links include information about how to join the community, how to donate, where you can sign petitions or participate in other online activism as well as how to share campaigns through other platforms. On all other platforms the focus lies exclusively on sharing.

5.5. An attempt to reach the organization

As this study originally intended to use qualitative interviews to collect data for the analysis, it is important to mention the absence of any reply when trying to reach the organization. At several occasions, various attempts have been made to come into contact with the organization through several different channels, without any result.

When trying to reach their media contacts by calling one of the phone numbers displayed on Avaaz.org website, preceded by a North American country code, you reach an automatic answering system giving you three options (Press 1, 2 or 3). 1 if you are from the press, 2 to donate, 3 for any other inquiries, you are then welcome to leave a message. Several messages have been left with inquiry and contact information following option 1 and 2. No reply or feedback has been received in any form.

The other number, preceded by an English country code, does not offer these options. However, after several attempts of trying to get in contact, a voice finally answered, only to refer to a general email address; info@avaaz.com.

“Avaaz cherishes feedback of all kinds. While we can't respond to every message, we do our best to review them all, and we take them very seriously”

(Avaaz, 2013)

Several emails have been sent to this address, together with other email addresses accessible through press releases, stating the purpose of this study and how additional information or involvement would be valuable. Emails have equally been sent through the email forms on their websites, using different categories, without any result.

6. Analysis

6.1. The Press Agency Model and Procedural Democracy

Procedural democracy does not expect any participation from the public, which does not correspond to the nature of Avaaz as an activist organization. The access to campaigns and petitions to sign, as well as many other features available on their platforms allowing participation allows this model to be excluded when examining the different models of democracy. In this respect, the results also show that the press agency model, which suggests more propagandistic methods (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169), also can be dismissed, as it prevents any feedback or participation from its audience, whereas Avaaz does allow participation through above-mentioned features.

6.2. The Public Information Model and Competitive Democracy

The public information model is closer to Avaaz' organization with regard to its circulation of information. The distribution of information around the organization appears to be more important than feedback, as the low level of contact information available indicates a lesser encouragement of contact from members. The information available, mostly in shape of links to other platforms, navigates the user to more information on the sites or in press releases and campaigns, but not necessarily to further contact information. Links to Avaaz and its different platforms are found throughout all different units of analysis, linking all platforms together but primarily sending the user to Avaaz.org, the organization's main website. Information about the organization is therefore very accessible and positive. This model however, does not request information from the organization's members using any "research or informal methods" (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169), which cannot be said to be the case of Avaaz with regards to its opinion polls. As for the features used by the organization, this model cannot be fully applied to the organization.

Avaaz appears to share many characteristics of a competitive democracy, where the politicians are those acting, whereas the public is reacting. As the scope of this study is limited to investigating the inclusive elements of the organization, procedures such as election of the representatives, are not examined. Avaaz' campaigns however, can be compared to the elections referred to in the competitive democracy, as it is through them that the will of the people shall be heard (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 334). Although there are often an important number of members signing different petitions, there are no expectations on members to participate in other ways than signing, as such features are not as easily accessed, which can be compared to the procedure of voting. Political equality is not promoted, as the representatives are those dealing with the issues, which can be related to the idea that the public is not capable of handling such complex issues (Fishkin, 2009, p. 66-67). In this aspect transparency would be relevant to further investigate.

6.3. The Two-Way Asymmetrical Model and Participatory Democracy

Throughout the platforms, different features allow public expression such as likes, and comments, notably on Avaaz' Facebook page. On the main website though, there exist very few locations to publicly express yourself. The important number of members of the community on Avaaz.org compared to the organizations' followers on the social media platforms such as Facebook plays an important role in the value of these features when attempting to describe the organization. Avaaz Facebook page holds 624, 438 likes (Facebook, 2013) and Avaaz.org over 21 million members (Avaaz.org, 2013) at the time of writing. The fact that members cannot write direct messages to Avaaz through the Facebook page also indicates a lesser value of feedback from its audience.

The other platforms appear to be of lesser significance, in matters of inclusiveness and participation, as for their inactivity and low numbers of members (e.g. LinkedIn group 426 members). They do not contribute to the activism as an activity and can be assumed to be of lesser importance for their work.

Stories of us on the other hand is a very expressive feature, albeit very limited interaction. There are no features allowing direct contact with other members and email addresses are not shown out of respect for the protection of privacy. A similar application could have been expected to encourage a higher level of interactivity.

All these elements indicate an inclination towards the model of participatory democracy. Whether it corresponds fully or not to this model, is more difficult to determine, as it requires more than mere participation by voting yes or no to a proposition (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 335). Avaaz does, in this respect, offer the possibility to participate in many more ways in the work of the organization. The poll is undoubtedly a participatory function of importance, compatible with the model of participatory democracy, as it serves to develop a will-formation where the public is consulted on a regular basis (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77). The fact that it is not very accessible, as for its location on the site, indicates a lesser encouragement of participation from the organization, although such a judgement is difficult to justify.

This does still not oppose the values of the participatory model in the sense that not all decisions have to be made directly by the public (Fishkin, 2009, p. 76). Whereas the poll can be said to impart a sense of consultation for a decision-making process, petitions and campaigns serve a more direct participation, close to voting, as mentioned above. As the participatory democracy expects its citizens to participate in the public sphere, and that participation can be seen as “a token of consent to the overall system (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77), the findings of the study suggests that Avaaz can be placed rather close to this model.

The model also implies a certain degree of political equality, which cannot be determined through this study, although it may be argued that there are certain expectations of the public to express itself, to participate and to be informed (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 336). These expectations can be compared to participation in campaigns, signing petitions and taking polls, features offered by the organization, in comparison to the above mentioned models where this is not an expectation.

The arguments presented above equally correspond to the comparison with the two-way asymmetrical model. Similarly, the organization allows feedback, although it is not necessarily valued. Although evidence supporting this claim cannot be fully determined, as it was not the element to be investigated, this researcher can anecdotally claim that the impossible task of trying to reach someone within the organization suggests that this may be the case.

Just like the participatory democracy model, the two-way asymmetrical model presupposes a higher level of engagement and participation, as the communication goes in both directions. Nevertheless, these models are not fully equal in communication aspects or in the decision-making processes, but consult the public or audience to a certain degree. This model also uses “research to identify the messages most likely to produce the support of the public without having to change the behaviour of the organization” (Grunig et al, 1995, p. 169). This can be compared to the use of polls by the organization to better understand its members (Pang et al, 2010, p. 19), which is the case for Avaaz.

6.4. The Two-Way Symmetrical Model and Deliberative Democracy

The discussion on Avaaz.org website is the most participatory and deliberative element found. Although similar functions are available on other platforms, the low number of members and activity in those groups make those features almost insignificant in terms of actual participation and generalizability of the organization, as argued above. Whether this discussion remains rational and equal, and whether it is used to set the agenda, are factors which are not examined in the study. It therefore remains difficult to determine how deliberative this particular discussion is and how determining it is for the organization. The discussion itself cannot be argued to be characterizing of the organization’s main website, due to its relatively low accessibility and other dominant features of the website. This decreases the meaning of the discussing feature as a generalizing one. Deliberative democracy demands full engagement of the public (Fishkin, 2009, p. 77), which cannot be said to be the case of Avaaz, even if many members sign petitions.

Concerning the two-way symmetrical model, it cannot be argued that Avaaz promotes open and equal communication (Hallahan, 2010, p. 638) between the organization and its members. The lack of features allowing you to publicly express yourself as well as getting into direct contact with the organization suggests that the communication is not fully equal and therefore not symmetrical. Further research would however be necessary to determine the evaluation of feedback within the organization.

7. Conclusion

There is no clear distinction allowing a direct categorization of Avaaz into the chosen models of comparison. Certain features imply an inclination towards one-way communication and low expectations of its members. Other features are examples of participatory and even deliberative elements incorporated into the platforms.

It can be argued however that Avaaz' display of inclusiveness is of a participatory character, and therefore closer to the two-way asymmetrical model, due to certain features constructed to consult the organization's members. The activist nature of the organization presupposes a certain amount of participation, although signing a petition may suffice. In certain aspects such participation is closer to the competitive model of democracy. The platforms do however offer the possibility to participate more, which comes closer to the participatory model.

The restricted amount of points of access to the organization implies a greater flow of information coming from the organization to its members, than feedback received from members. Many pages do not allow any participation at all. The ease of access to information from the organization, which is generally positive, can also be compared to the public information model. Features allowing feedback of different kinds can be found though, which eliminates the one-way communication models to a certain extent for this study. This is in further alignment with the two-way asymmetrical model, as it remains unbalanced. It can also be stated that the organization's use of polls, a highly participatory element, corresponds to this model, as they intend to gather information about what the public wants.

It has become clear that Avaaz.org website is the platform of significant importance, due to its size of membership compared to the other platforms, but also due to its explicit features. As all other platforms link to the Avaaz.org as the main source of information and contact, and participation in the organization's activities is mainly done through this platform.

Many of the other investigated platforms have an insignificant number of members in comparison to the total amount of members of Avaaz.org. This is an important aspect to consider if this study would be further developed to studying the actual inclusiveness as it may alter the value in studying these units of observation. There is also a possibility that other models would be more applicable to this organization if the actual inclusiveness were to be investigated.

8. Discussion

In hindsight, the purpose of investigation almost appears too narrow in relation to the theories applied for the study. If the research questions would have been broader, other angles could have been studied to bring about a better understanding for the organizations position in relation to the different democratic and public relations models presented. Other measurements such as transparency and efficiency spring to mind when discussing models of democracy. These would have been of importance to better complete this investigation.

The complication of applying Strömbäck's models of democracy and their normative implications on media and journalism is that his article refers to news journalism in particular. Seen that Avaaz.org should be seen foremost as an activist organization and not as news media, the nature of the media is different. It can still be argued that the same generalizations as made by Strömbäck, can be applied to Avaaz, due to the organization's function as a political media platform for citizens around the world. The theoretical framework could also preferably have been completed with the democratic models by David Held, for a broader and deeper understanding for the categorization. With regards to Habermas' theory, it is indicative and not used as a measurement. This thesis highlights that these trends may be changing again.

Concerning the choice of method, mixed methods would have been preferable as it can bring "a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be accomplished by any single method alone" (Yin, 2009, p.63). There are also risks in using a holistic single-case design, as "the study can become too abstract and not give sufficient data on specific phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 50). To better be able to speak of these types of organizations as phenomenon, an embedded (multiple units of analysis) single-case design (Yin, 2009, p. 46), or a multiple-case design, may be preferable. There are also expressed wishes for a broader definition of web content analysis, so that it incorporates methods from several disciplines to better qualify for web research (Herring, 2012, p. 11). The choice of units of analysis is also important to mention, as the main website is not the same in nature as social media, which may affect the findings.

There may be many reasons for why Avaaz would chose to adhere to a participatory democratic model or an two-way asymmetrical model in their display, as well as for why they would chose to be more or less participatory in action. Plausible reasons for why such an organization would chose not to have stronger interactive presence with their members would be a simple matter of cost, effort and efficiency. An activist group needs to be efficient and Avaaz use the power of the many through their campaigns. Kavada's research becomes relevant in answering the question of "why" a similar organization would not adapt more deliberative elements.

"Moderating comments and managing the interaction on different platforms is also a resource-intensive process and impossible to sustain for some organizations"

(Fenton & Barassi, 2011, cited in Kavada, 2012, p. 32)

An assumption that could be made is that the participatory elements may not appear as necessary for an activist group as its primary aim would be to achieve direct change. A higher level of participation in decision-making processes may harm the efficiency, although this also affects the democratic structure of the organization's relationship to its members. Social media has therefore created a dilemma for political organizations:

“between a desire to maintain control over messages and resources and the generally decentralizing dynamic of Web-based communication”

(Foot & Schneider, 2006, p.6)

It is thus still of relevance to continue investigating the nature of the level of participation within similar organizations as it remains highly relevant on a societal level as for the development of a global civil society.

9. Suggestions for Future Research

For the currently chosen purpose of investigation, qualitative interviews would have been able to provide information about how the organization deals with feedback, which would have been highly valuable for a greater understanding of its communication model and democratic structure.

It would also have been preferable to investigate further other aspects of the organization's communication, focusing on the flow of information in one-way as well as two-way. In the current state this study only questions what features are accessible for making two-way communication possible to therefore measure its inclusiveness. It would also have been very helpful to further examine the communication coming from Avaaz. The organization's "core tool" is its email alerts list, from which they send email alerts regularly to its members (Kavada, 2012, p. 52). As a member you cannot reply to this email, which is an important aspect when analyzing Avaaz' position among the democratic and public relations models. It calls attention to the least participatory models such as Procedural and Competitive democracy, or the Press Agency Model, where the flow of information goes in one direction and does not necessarily value feedback.

Another angle that has appeared relevant or maybe even more valuable than the chosen one, would have been to study the actual participation. Instead of investigating what features are offered for participation to understand how participatory Avaaz is, the number of members participating in campaigns would have been interesting in question of legitimacy. Transparency and efficiency as mentioned above would be equally important and interesting to investigate in order to compare Avaaz to democratic models. This would require more than communication theories for analysis. This change in our social environment on a global level is ongoing and shows no trend of slowing down. Not only is it of relevance to further investigate organizations like Avaaz and their inclusiveness towards their members, but it is also highly important to study their potential role in global governance and its implications.

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Appendix A

Avaaz - Statements and Goals

About Avaaz

“We're a massive, high-tech, people-powered, multi-issue, global advocacy organization with over 20 million members” (Facebook, 2013).

“Avaaz.org is a community of global citizens who take action on the major issues facing the world today. The aim of Avaaz.org is to ensure that the views and values of the world's people shape global decisions. Avaaz.org members act for a more just and peaceful world and a globalization with a human face” (LinkedIn, 2013).

Mission statement

“Avaaz has a simple democratic mission: close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want. Our community is unique in its ability to mobilize citizen pressure on governments everywhere to act on crises and opportunities anywhere, within as little as 24 hours” (UN, 2013).

“Our aim is to ensure that the views and values of the world's people -- and not just political elites and unaccountable corporations -- shape global decisions. Avaaz members are taking action for a more just and peaceful world and a vision of globalization with a human face” (Facebook, 2013).

Millenium development goals

“Develop global partnership for development, promote gender equality and empower women, ensure environmental sustainability, eradicate extreme poverty and hunger“ (UN, 2013).

Funding structure

“Avaaz is 100% funded by small, online donations from our 13 million members around the world” (UN, 2013).

Appendix B

General Information About the Platforms' Original Inclusive Functions of Relevance

Website

Avaaz Main Website, Webpages and Stories of Us

- Optional for website creator.

Facebook Pages

Avaaz Facebook Page

- Pages look similar to personal timelines, but they offer unique tools for connecting people to a topic you care about, like a business, brand, organization or celebrity.
- Pages are managed by admins who have personal timelines. Pages are not separate Facebook accounts and do not have separate login information from your timeline.
- Pages provide insights to help admins understand how people are interacting with the Page.
- You can “like” a Page to see updates in News Feed about brands you care about.
- When you like a page, you make a connection, your “like” may be displayed on your timeline, in your news feed, on the page that you liked and in advertisements about the page that you liked, depending on your own settings.
- You can also share the page on your own timeline, on friends’ timelines, in groups or in private messages.
- You can tag a page in a photo, but what page can be tagged depends on what category the page belongs to.
- When you post a comment it becomes public.
- You can turn off and on notifications from the page in your settings.
- You can send a private message to the page and when doing so, they can answer your message.

(Facebook, 2013)

LinkedIn

Avaaz Company Page and Group Page

- List of other members in the group.
- *“Invite to connect”* with other members.
- You can follow groups and companies and comment on conversations.
- In the group page you may start a discussion or a poll.

(LinkedIn, 2013)

Flickr

Avaaz Flickr Group

- *“Groups can either be public, public (invite only) or completely private. Every group has a pool for photos and/or video and a discussion board for talking. There are administrators and members, and... that's about it!”*

(Groups, Flickr, 2013)

Youtube

AvaazOrg YouTube Channel

- You can like and add to favourites as well as share the content through other social networks.
- You may subscribe to a channel to receive automatic updates.
- You may yourself upload content.
- You can comment and rate content uploaded by others.

(Youtube, 2013)

Appendix C

Results Table

Table 5. Data-collection Results

	Contact Information	Public Expression	Direct Contact	Direct Interactivity /Dialogue	Participation in Activity
Avaaz.org Home Page	* "Contact Avaaz" (bottom page) *"Press Centre" (top) *"Connect with Avaaz" (bottom)	X	X	X	* "Join now" Join the community by entering your e-mail * Donate/* "Take action now" * Sign petition * Create petition * Share (Through social media)
Avaaz.org Webpages	* "Contact Avaaz" (bottom page) *"Press Centre" (top) *"Connect with Avaaz" (bottom) *Media Contact: - Sam Barratt, Media Director: phone number - Media team: Two phone numbers, England and US. - media@avaaz.org	*"Let's be friends" - Like on Facebook - Follow on Twitter *"Join the conversation" - Link to "Stories of Us" *"Tell your story" Possibility to add photo. Possibility to "heart" (like a digital hug) to be compared to a liike. *Sign petitions and retweet tweets from Avaaz. *Poll and discussion posts publicly comments. Even adds "highlights".	*Email forms categorized by Topic Area *"New Year poll: Setting the agenda for 2013" - Take the poll, with possibility to leave comments - See results	*"Avaaz 2013: Poll and discussion" You can leave three different types of comments: 1. General Comments 2. Specific campaign suggestions 3. Ways to improve Avaaz <i>Through "Tell your story", you are told that you can send a private message to another member. Link not to be found.</i>	* Join the community (by entering your e-mail) * Donate * Sign petition * Create petition * Share (Through social media) * Send e-mail * Copy link to share * Download logo *Download/watch ads
Stories of Us	X "Connect with" remains the same at the bottom as the other pages of the website.	* "Tell my story" Short stories written by members about themselves, * Heart the story - "Like a digital hug" - Display of hearts given by others (not available to click) - no comment possible	* "Interactive" map of members with stories. Click on member to read story. Passive interaction. *You are supposed to be able to "send a personal message" to someone who wrote a story, as such a thing is not to be found, interpreted as hearts.	X	X "Share" remains the same at the bottom of the page as the other pages of the website.

Facebook Page	email: info [at] avaaaz.org or * "Contact Avaaz" (http://www.avaaaz.org)	*Like *Comments allowed on published content. * Can NOT tag Avaaz in photos.	X (no message option available)	*Post on page function available (no posts by others than Avaaz is to be found during the time period concerned). *Published comments allows discussion through moderation.	* Join the community *Post (no posts to be found other than Avaaz). *Share
LinkedIn Company Page	*Website address	*Follow	*Request products	X	X
LinkedIn Group Page	*List of members *Link to inactive Google group (no subjects): https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/avaaz-group *Name of owner of group and link to his profile (Vic Gaffney).	*Like *Comment *Follow	*Invite to connect with other members.	*Start a discussion *Start a poll	X
Flickr Group	*Link to website *List of contacts	* Upload pictures and videos "Favorite it" * Comment * Add as a contact - keeps you up to date with their photos. *Add pictures to pool.	*Membership by invitation (send email through form).	*Start a discussion	*Upload pictures and videos *Share
YouTube	*Link to website	*Subscribe to channel *Comment	X	*Discussion through comments	*Share *Add to playlist in public channel