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“There is only one colour that truly matters”

**GLOBAL IDENTIFICATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN AVAAZ
DISCOURSE ON GLOBAL ACTIVISM**

University of Tampere
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Abstract

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The topic of this thesis is to study how the digital activist movement Avaaz facilitates global identification and global consciousness via their framing and discourse on various social and ecological issues in their campaigns. This case study also examines how members of Avaaz talk about the goals of the organization and their world vision in a global public sphere. By examining such discourses one can discern what kind of a common understanding among peoples of diverse national backgrounds exist.

I will look at the case of Avaaz from the perspective of world society theory and neo-institutionalism, and make comparison to perspectives from social movement theories. One of the main arguments presented is how world culture provides an important impetus for global civic activism in contrast of being simply a question of availability of political opportunities or resources as maintained by some social movement theories.

As a method of investigation, I use critical discourse analysis on texts produced by Avaaz in the form of emails, Internet web pages and comments posted by Avaaz members. As analytical tools, I make use of concepts of scripts, framing and membership categorization to showcase how a discourse plays important role in facilitating global identification and moral justification for global activism.

I argue that Avaaz uses moral frames when highlighting issues for their audiences, in particular through certain narrative structure, vernacular and via images where actors become defined belonging to certain categories that imply moral and immoral actions. Furthermore, the Avaaz rhetoric makes assumptions on the universality of values and norms and of identity and thus appeals to a "global identification" and a "global consciousness." It is through such collective

identity that global activism becomes justified as well through certain social imageries of the world that appear through narrative scripts. Furthermore, through utilizing *language of inclusion* and through offer of empowerment Avaaz frames activism as relevant on an intimate and personal level making global activism *as much about the individual as it is about the world*. Finally, I argue that Avaaz utilizes epistemic governance in their act of persuasion, that the movement utilizes moral authority which explains in part the “discursive power” of Avaaz and its appeal to global society. Thus I suggest that the significance of new digital social movements can be understood in the way they circulate and re-inforce certain discourses that tie to world culture. In addition, the act of signing petitions and participating in demonstrations are also *performances* of morality that rather than actions that are expected to bring about immediate changes.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The increasing significance of global social movements

“To President Obama, President Erdogan, President Hollande, PM May, and other world leaders:

As citizens around the globe horrified by the slaughter of innocents in Syria, we call on you to enforce an air-exclusion zone in Northern Syria, including Aleppo, to stop the bombardment of Syria’s civilians and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those most in need.” (Avaaz “Protect Aleppo’s children!”, 2016b)

The text above is a part of a campaign which in 2016 was heralded by the social activist movement, Avaaz. The intention was to collect 2 million signatures to the declaration above and then send it to various heads of state around the globe. The hope was to create a political pressure on national leaders to act and stop the bombing of the city of Aleppo in Syria. Some have termed this type of activism as “clickism”, where “armchair activist” simply need to click a mouse button to feel they have taken action on important issues. Other have hailed these type of digital activism (activism that manifests itself through digital media) as revolutionary and one that will empower global civil society to new and unrepresented levels. Shirky, for example, in his book on the impact of the Internet on mass civil movements noted that “when we change the way we communicate, we change society” (2008, p. 17). When global civic networks such as Avaaz are successful they can be understood as an important and influential actor in world politics with increasing relevance in policy debates (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

However, in order for a social movement to be successful and achieve change it has to be able to convey a common interpretation of reality, foster solidarity among members and appeal to collective identifications (della Porta et al., 2006).

Therefore, my interest in these types of civil organizations, is not on the practical outcomes of such endeavours but rather on *how* and *why* they manage to gain global appeal and obtain political influence. The purpose is to study a global movement as producer of certain kind of discourses that shape and define social realities. More precisely, the aim of this research is to perform a case study on how a civic activist organization such as Avaaz facilitates the construction of global identification and global consciousness via their framing and discourse on various social and ecological issues in their campaigns. I use the term “global consciousness” here to refer to a certain awareness of the world as a vaguely defined community and as an ideological space to be acted upon. When talking about identification I refer to the process whereby people identify with certain

group of people, making assumptions that they belong the same group and that this belonging carries implications for action and values and norms (Alasuutari, 2015a). This study also intends to examine how members of Avaaz talk about the goals of the organization and their world vision in a global public sphere. By examining such discourses one can discern which common understandings among many different nationalities exists on the topic of global activism and how such understanding appears in discourse. I will look at the case of Avaaz from the perspective of world culture theory and neo-institutionalism and utilize critical discourse analysis and membership categorization analysis.

1.2 Background: What is Avaaz?

In the late 1990's civil activism took on a new form, changing from a centralized policy oriented activism to more loosely based network activism that sought its appeal and participation from a wider base. Activism efforts moved more towards a "bottom-up" decision making process within various activist networks and with agendas being set for long-term goals with an emphasis on applying pressure on political actors (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). Avaaz is a reflection of this type of change, and of the impact that the Internet and social media has had on social movements. These changes are also reflected in the changes in the funding of non-profits in United States and Canada, which predominately, come from traditional sources such as checks and cash but are increasingly coming more from online sources. According to a report on donor trends in the United States, donations to non-profits online rose by 9.2% in 2015, a sign of a growing trend (Blackbaud, 2015). Furthermore, the share of private funding to humanitarian issues worldwide (in contrast to governmental funding) has also risen, from 17% in 2006 to 32% in 2010 (Stoianova, 2012). This is an indication of an increase in the role that individuals play in philanthropy and individuals' level of participation in tackling social issues around the world.

Avaaz, meaning „voice“ in many languages, was founded in 2007. It is a non-profit non-governmental organization (NGO) that relies wholly on donations from its members. In campaign emails Avaaz is defined as “global campaign network” but in a poll among their members most stated that they identify Avaaz as *a movement* rather than an organization (Avaaz “About Us”, 2016c). This identification is reflected in the language used in the Avaaz web pages as well and in this study Avaaz will usually be referred to as a social movement although it is, formally and legally an organization, albeit not a traditional one. The movement was created as a joint venture of two

other civic activist organizations, ResPublica and MoveOn.org. The latter is still one of the largest online activist groups in the U.S.A that openly supports liberal policy goals and thus is often associated with The Democratic Party in the United States and their agenda. The operational model of MoveOn.org served as a blueprint for Avaaz with the main difference being that the purpose of Avaaz was to operate on a global scale. In its first year, Avaaz had approximately million subscribers joining the organization, mainly through inviting members of MoveOn.org and ResPublica (Sifry, 2007). Currently the registered members are well over 44 million with the term “members” being loosely defined as individuals who have signed up to their email list, which happens automatically when someone signs a petition for the first time (Avaaz “The World in Action”, 2016a). This high number of membership ranks Avaaz as one of the largest online social movements in the world. Operations of the movement are mostly based on-line and they employ a small group of staff (in 2010 they only had 38 regular staff) dispersed around the world with national campaigners situated in different countries (Hoskins, 2013).

Unlike many other transnational civic NGOs, the focus of Avaaz is on a myriad of public issues, ranging from social justice to animal rights. For example, they have simultaneously campaigned for a ban of female genital cutting in Somalia and ending the illegal hunting of dolphins off the coast of Peru.

Avaaz is an example of a new form of activism which can be referred to as Internet activism and thus it is defined as a *new social movement* (Turner, 2013). Such “new” social movements try to reach to the net –public in order to fund and support a myriad of social issues through electronic petitions and on-line crowd funding. The benefits of this type of organizational model keeps the operation costs at a minimum while at the same time reaches out to a high number of potential supporters through communication networks such as the Internet and on social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter. The centrality of the media as a communication strategy also firmly locates such organizations in the global public sphere, where a multitude of voices partake in a certain kinds of conversations.

Avaaz describes itself as a „global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere“(Avaaz “About us”, 2016c). Their official statement of purpose is „closing the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want” (Ibid.). Hence the emphasis is on political action and civic empowerment in the form of a global mass movement.

A case study of Avaaz has the potential to reveal interesting features of global activism and what concepts like global identification can allude to. By analysing comments from Avaaz members one

can gain a unique perspective how people around the world relate to this world vision and how they relate to the idea of global identification as offered by the movement.

1.3 Main research questions and relevance of the study

The theme of this research focuses on the discourses and persuasive argumentations of these “new types” of global civil organizations, meaning organizations that operate chiefly through the Internet with the purpose of reaching global mass audiences.

Michael Billig argues that in order to understand how ideology and an ideological consciousness work one must study the role of language. Consciousness is constituted *through* language and that which takes place within a person is “socially and discursively created” (Billig, 1995). Identity and consciousness can therefore be studied by analysing language that people employ, in particular when connected to ideologies. Thus global identification and a sense of global consciousness can be studied in discourse on global activism as such ideological foundations inevitably come up in that context. Therefore, my question is how organizations are able to facilitate global consciousness and identification in a convincing way? I believe that the answer to that has implications for how we can come to understand democracy and political participation in a broader and in a *global* sense. Furthermore, this study is an attempt to outline more clearly the relationship between global activism and identity.

There is not extensive literature existing on new social movements operating on the Internet from the perspective of neo-institutionalism and world society theory although they have addressed the role of social movements (Tsutsui, 2004; 2006; Gallo-Cruz, 2016). Social movement theories have touched upon the issue of Internet activism but I found only few studies have addressed the question of the global appeal of Avaaz and their approach to global civil activism (Kavada, 2012; Hellegren, 2012). However, Internet activism is on the rise today and in their efforts to raise funds and own public profile, NGOs (in particular social movements) will increasingly make use of social networking and the Internet. There are also changes in how NGOs seek donations, with increased focus on new technologies and on individual donors. This research will therefore hopefully contribute to the study of Internet activism. Furthermore, Neo-institutionalism tends to focus on organizational structures and cultural frameworks in their analysis.

This study rather focuses on how individuals call upon certain cultural scripts which allows for the reference and utilization of global identification. Hence the following research questions are:

- 1) How does Avaaz facilitate the construction of global identity and global consciousness via their framing and discourse on various social and ecological issues in their campaigns?
- 2) How does Avaaz justify civil activism on a global scale in their texts?
- 3) How do Avaaz members themselves justify global activism and which discourses do they engage in to provide justification for global activism?

1.4. Perspectives of social movement theories: Rise and development of transnational activism

One perspective on the rise of global civic organizations comes from theories of new social movements. Some of these theoretical standpoints are in direct contrast to neo-institutionalism and world society theory while others support arguments proffered by it.

Scholars like Richard Falk (1975) and Paul Wapner (1996) argue that such movements are a part of “new politics” that involve transnational spaces and ideological commitments that relate to identity. Furthermore these new social movements are not state centered, they are not necessarily interested in working *with* governments but rather in pressuring them to particular actions. Another point Falk makes about the new movements is their non-hierarchical structures which distinguishes them from the traditional organizations and hence they need to be understood differently (Ibid.). New social movement theory differ somewhat from other more traditional theories such as resource mobilization theory which argues that social or civic movements are formed and are successful when provided adequate resources in form of money, power, media, legitimacy and support from the elite. Political process theory however emphasizes the formation of such movements when political opportunities present themselves (Janoski, 2005).

Finally a popular line of argument understands the proliferation and spread of these movements as a response to new challenges facing postindustrial societies which states are unable to provide adequate solutions too and hence civil society takes action (Wapner, 1996).

Thus there are many theoretical perspectives of why global activism developed. Yet, what were the influential factors in shaping the new trends in activism and why and how did it turn into *a global*

mass movement? In order to understand the organizational model of a non-profit like Avaaz it is useful to look at how such social movements developed and adapted in a world increasingly marked by globalization. In their writings on global activism Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow (2005) describe how a new form of social activism emerged in the late 1980s. They refer to this type of activism as

„transnational collective actions“ (which in this paper I refer to as “global activism”) which they define as the „*coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activist against international actors, other states or international institutions*“ (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005, p. 7).

What separated these new form activism from the earlier ones were several new key features. The new movements were more loosely organized structures in contrast to firmly embedded hierarchical organizations and the public sphere played an increased role. More emphasis was placed on direct action and civil disobedience as well. Another dramatic change was that the subject matter of the social movements changed from being targeted on specific issues i.e. labour rights or women’s rights towards a more generalization of issues. As has been elaborated on before these features can be used to describe the Avaaz movement.

Della Porta and Tarrow find three influential factors in the international environment as the main reasons for these developments. First they were environmental, second cognitive and third, relational changes. The environmental change came about in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union which then influenced Western governments to give support to NGOs. This was a response to increased political instability in the world due to the power vacuum left by the former Soviet Union. A side effect of this was an increase in armed conflicts and the formation of various local non-state groups. This volatile political situation then called for increased humanitarian aid in the form of NGOs (2005). The interpretation here is therefore that the spread of NGOs was tied to their practical need in these countries (rise of environmental movements have also been explained from this rational choice perspective). They further argue that technological advances in electronic communication and low-cost air travel facilitated closer and more frequent communication and collaborating among movements located in different countries. Increased migration also lead to increased immigrant activism and „diasporic nationalism“ (long distance activism) which intensified various ethnic conflicts. Finally, the rise of transnational corporations under the umbrella of neoliberalism and international institutions marked a significant change in the international environment. Gradually these international entities became perceived as a threat to diverse groups of activist who started to collaborate actions in order to curtail their power (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005).

The cognitive change refers to the mind-set of the activist and how they learned to develop the “art of protest” and activism in a changing world. Frames and tactics that were successful were institutionalized i.e. the protests against The World Bank and the IMF in the 1990s. Activist also had to adapt and respond to government and police strategies against protests and develop their strategies in return. Activist also started to learn and collaborate from people in other countries and this encouraged a more „globalized framing “of issues and strategies in how to make them locally more appealing (Ibid.).

Della Porta and Tarrow (2005) claim however that the most obvious change has been relational or the way national actors have organized themselves into *transnational* coalitions. In particular, the „horizontal“ formation of activist around „vertical“ organization stand out. By this they mean how networks of organizations form around more traditional hierarchical organizations like the UN and act as pressure groups to push their agenda forward i.e. women’s rights and rights of indigenous people. Collaboration between different groups in the network then helped forge long lasting transnational coalitions. Furthermore, the scope of these networks were not only international but also „trans-thematic“, spanning different types of social issues. As a result the dominant framework emerging through such collaboration became one centred on global social justice. Hence environmental organizations, feminist groups, youth movements and trade union organizations became united in their critique on globalization driven by neoliberal policies. Globalization became understood as a process which exacerbated inequalities and as a cause of environmental disasters. This coming together of different groups in an anti-globalization movement then prompted its description as the “movement of movements” (della Porta, 2005, p. 180).

Finally, since governments increasingly imitated each other, activist movements also became more similar in protesting against them. As movements increasingly interacted in how to protest and collaborated on common goals it gradually led to a creation of transnational organizational structures. If these social movements wanted to be successful at the supranational level they themselves had to organize internationally and opt for global strategies (Ibid.). However, it was not only *how* the movements operated that changed. Due to collaborated actions and increased cooperation between activist a common identity or a way of „framing of transnational identities“ emerged. Therefore, *who* or what the movement was and the identity of the activists themselves, as “activists” changed as well (della Porta, 2005).

1.5 Towards new forms of social movements and new emerging identities

Research by della Porta and Tarrow can be described as belonging to the new social movement theories. This approach has expanded on the more classical and dominant theories such as resource mobilization theory and political opportunity theory that emphasize the social context in the emergence of social movements. Thus, the development of such movements were seen as a result of availability of resources such as financial, technical and even availability of individuals.

For example, reflecting on the role of new media Eric Turner (2013) identifies several claims that attempt to explain the effect of the Internet on social movements. To start with, the Internet is as a fast and relatively cheap medium to use in encouraging mobilization and thus it has had a major impact on social movements, in particular due to social media. Second, Turner proposes that the usage of the new media is especially applicable to *new* social movements. He describes such new social movements as being somehow radical or oppositional to the establishment. These can be for example anti-capitalistic, anti-political or progressive and unconventional. For such radical movements the web is an ideal environment to experiment and adapt. Furthermore, how effective digital activism is should be measured by how it influences offline mobilization. Meaning we should be looking at what it actually accomplishes outside of the realm of the Internet. The invention of new web technologies also has a large impact on the capabilities of these new movements and vice versa. For instance, in the form and usage of new phone technologies and in ways to collect electronic signatures. The impact has also been felt in the incorporation of social media into politics and in how campaigns are coordinated. Finally, Turner notes that new social movements grow rapidly and for long-term effectiveness they need to be de-centralized both on a national and international scale (2013).

From the perspective of mobilization theory one would interpret the rise and success of Avaaz as the result of the spread and utilization of the Internet. Political opportunity theory however would look at how local activist groups take advantage of the opportunity created by direct involvement of global organizations that support and further their cause on a global level. New social movement theory however also paid close attention to identity politics and the changing form of organizations and the re-orientation of social movements' goals and ideology (Wapner, 1996). For example, della Porta focuses on the dynamic way social movements *themselves* construct and perceive resources and opportunities rather these being something that they simply utilize when they come available (della Porta, 2005).

Hence, della Porta looked at how identity was constructed or rather *shifted* and utilized within movements to achieve their goals. She does this on two levels, on the level of the movement identity itself and on the individual level of the activist. In her study she surveyed 2,800 activists of various nationalities that took part in the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002. She then compares her results to data from other demonstrations, those being demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa in July 2001 and at the International Day of Protests against the Iraq War on February 15, 2003 in Rome.

Based on the results of her research she claims that these activists developed *tolerant identities* as a response and adaptation of common mobilization by diverse groups of activists. This is in contrast to the more traditional model of activist movements i.e. labour movements which were characterized by homogeneity of the working class (della Porta, 2005).

She argues that this shift of activist identity assisted the movement in coming to grasp with its own heterogeneous base and as a way to view it in a favourable light.

“As we shall see, tolerant identities are characterized by inclusiveness and positive emphasis upon diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identification. They develop especially around common campaigns on objects perceived as “concrete” and nurtured by an “evangelical” search for dialogue” (della Porta, 2005, p. 186).

Diversity thus becomes understood as a source of strength for the movement and as a sign of inclusiveness – “Diversity is in fact interwoven with the search for joint action, but also for joint identity” (della Porta 2005, p. 186). She concludes that the development of tolerant identities served as a “glue” to create a sense of cohesiveness in the collection of diverse groups within the movement:

“..the development of a collective identity that is “open” and many-faceted makes it possible to hold together very different spirits, in part combining them, however gradually, and producing a high degree of identification among activists and sympathizers” (della Porta, 2005, p. 200).

Another interesting point della Porta makes here is that the activists in her study had turned away from traditional organizations which they were rather critical of. Instead the activists seemed to prefer to work directly with other individuals and groups as a form of alternative or different type of politics which they carved out by themselves in a public arena. She interprets this as a sign of rejection of conventional politics and governance by “professionals” and as a call for a more participatory politics. There was a marked decline in political relevance of social movements in the 1980s and 1990s as social movements limited themselves to the role of lobbies, voluntary groups or local associations. Moreover, the act of influencing politics through traditional protesting had

actually declined (della Porta, 2003 as cited in della Porta, 2005). Channels of political influence in a representative democracy had closed off for social movements due to increased power of the market over the state and the power of global institutions over national ones. Furthermore, the hegemony of neoliberalism in political discourse left little space for critical or alternative views to be heard. Hence new social movements became arenas where such alternatives became expressed. Yet, it was not only that alternative politics could be expressed in the movements, it also offered an arena for political participation in “the now” as a concrete activity with the promise of immediate result. della Porta terms this as “activism founded on immediate gratifying action” (della Porta 2005, p. 190) instead of being a long term project realized in the distant future.

The importance of della Porta’s research to the subject matter at hand in this study is the way she conceptualizes identity as a resource for social movements and how it facilitates the consolidation of different groups and movements. Hence identity construction becomes part of the social movement strategy in order to produce mobilization power. Avaaz corresponds to the description of a “new” type of social movement with loose hierarchical structure and broad social agenda, which fits into the framework of “global justice” in the same way the messages of the anti-globalization movement in della Porta’s study did. In this perspective it becomes interesting to see for example if Avaaz activist talk reflects these notions of “global justice” and if so in what form? Furthermore, through their website Avaaz invites anyone with access to the Internet the capability to become an “activist” but how to reach a diverse group of people and build a common ground for collective actions? Therefore, I wonder if the emphasis and function of identity in Avaaz activist discourse bears any similarities to della Porta’s tolerant identities. On the one hand, she gives an illuminating account of why the social movements developed as they did and took on a more open, participatory structure and flexible identity, both at the level of the movement (i.e. as a movement of movements) and of the identity of the activists themselves. On the other hand, the study does not answer the question of precisely why new social movements were able to construct for themselves new political opportunities and gain a foothold again in the political arena. More precisely, *what makes such movements influential and relevant to contemporary global politics and local policies?* Also, while the need for more humanitarian aid after the collapse of the Soviet Union seems plausible enough it does not explain why NGOs moved beyond the role of providing aid and started campaigning for broader social issues such as environmentalism and human rights. Neo-institutionalism and world society theory however provide interesting perspectives to those questions and that is the topic of the next chapter.

1. Theoretical framework

2.1 Neo-institutionalism, world culture and epistemic governance

Neo-institutionalism theory has emphasized the importance of organizations in forming and establishing world culture and world society. Globalization is not only about increased interconnection but there are cultural forces at work that exist *beyond* the nation state (Thomas, 2009). Cultural forces that shape and influence global norms and values but are yet external to the nation state are explained by the concept of “world culture”. This term refers to a culture that is shared *globally* between people possessing similar values and norms, a culture that is not defined or limited by location or ethnicity. The world has taken on an increasing similar form, where nation states synchronize their actions and structures via policies and political agendas, a process referred to as “isomorphism”. Neo-institutionalists claim that the reason for this synchronization is not necessarily because states individually arrive at the best possible way of doing things or because of a rational adoption of best practices but rather because of globally established *cultural norms*. These are norms and values that view certain institutional structures, laws, policies and political agendas as being based on *legitimate knowledge* (often produced by science or epistemic communities). Such knowledge when utilized in policies or in organization of society can appear as epistemic governance and when exercised as a mode of authority as epistemic capital (Alasuutari, 2015; Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014). These are concepts I will elaborate upon in later chapters.

From this neo-institutional perspective, there is no hegemonic world power that rules in a hierarchical fashion. Yet national governments conform to policies and international standards usually without coercion from other states. Instead, organizations utilize and establish “power” in the form of epistemic capital and in the production of epistemic knowledge.

For example, the World Bank and the IMF hold influence and power through status and expertise. Hence, authority and power do not lie with instrumental power *per se*, but rather on the impression individuals and organizations convey as producers of valid knowledge (Alasuutari, 2015b; 2010).

2.2 Cultural scripts

Neo-institutionalism also emphasizes the role of world cultural *scripts* through which certain ideas are evoked through. These scripts exist both on a macro and micro level, meaning on the level of formal organizations, states and corporations as well as on the level of individuals. The focus on neo-institutionalism tends to remain on organizational structures and dynamics rather than individuals who are perceived to enact elaborate scripts embodied in such structures and who circulate and originate both within local and world culture (Jepperson, 2001). In this study however I focus both on discourses produced by an organizational structure and that of individuals and I look for scripts that could be described as segments of world culture. When actors follow scripts they fulfill cultural expectations about their role and that of others which are reflected in such scripts. Hence, in the neo-institutionalized perspective the analysis focuses on the cultural framework that produces such identities and scripts.

2.3 Role of organizations in world culture

There have been many studies on NGOs and how they have shaped and changed the world, particular within neo-institutional theory. For example, John Boli and George M. Thomas through their study on the thematic topics of INGOs formed between 1875 –1973, identified five underlying principles of world culture. These principles are *universalism, individualism, rational voluntaristic Authority, human purposes of rationalizing progress, and world citizenship* (Boli & Thomas, 1997, p.171). They view these organizations as important indicators since world culture is embedded within them, hence in studying international non-governmental organizations we study world culture.

Their study demonstrated how world culture perpetuates ideas of human rights, rational organizational governance and the idea of the individual as an autonomous actor. Here culture is seen as something that builds reality and carries at its core assumptions, norms and deep-rooted values, not only about the world but also about individuals and the role they have in it.

„Actors of all sorts are oriented to ontological assumptions about identities, legitimate bases of authority, and nature. There are institutionalized global models of types of actors with

accompanying menus of interests, intentions, and scripts. They are bolstered by elaborate theories, some abstract scientific (psychology, social sciences, economics, and biology) others pragmatic that depict adherence to these models as necessary to attain a panoply of desired outcomes: freedom, equality, justice, security, development to name just a few general categories of valued outcomes.” (Thomas, 2009, p. 116).

It is from this perspective that I will conduct my study on the Avaaz movement, as arena for expression and manifestation of world culture where global identification is constructed through a discourse and where a moral dimension of such an identification is brought forward. Furthermore, one can look upon this arena as a centre for circulating and re-enforcing world cultural scripts and particular discourses. I set my task to uncover the “epistemic work” (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014) the organization engages in order to discover the strategies that make for a successful digital global movement.

In modern societies the emphasis is on the individual as an actor who has both freedom and moral responsibility to fellow human beings. This correlates with the idea of the idea of civil activism, where the individual is seen as a moral being that can and should pursue social change due to collective responsibility, enlightenment and for the ideal “good society”.

“Activists, in particular, define problems as global and identify rational goals of peace, justice, and participation as properties of a global good society” (Thomas, 2009, p. 117).

Such global cultural frames act to legitimize struggles on a local level as well and can provide resources to strengthen and further human rights objectives (Tsutsui, 2004; 2008). Hence, world culture emphasizes individualist values such as human rights. Yet, human rights are not simply cultivated in Western societies and then simply copied by other regions in the world, they exist as an idea within world culture which carries its’ own momentum. It is therefore not surprising that global social movements such as Avaaz eventually emerge and thrive within such cultural framework and campaign for issues that are seen as important for “humanity”.

Here the question of how morality and world culture come together becomes also more relevant. Reflecting on the moral dimension of globalization Boli argues that concepts of virtue and virtuosity are deeply ingrained in world culture and they are an important part of the construction of *a global moral order*. Virtue is the very embodiment of what is good and is based on normative ethics, while virtuosity is the embodiment of excellence and is instrumental and based on cognitive practices. These are qualities that apply primarily to individuals. Exemplars of good and evil are also important in the moral construction of actors. Hence “paragons” of both evil and good (i.e. Osama Bin Laden and Malala Yousafzai) reinforce the global moral order but it also serves to

locate morality within individuals rather than within states, international organizations or corporations. Boli maintains that such collectivities are amoral and not subjected to the moral order.

However, organizations that are voluntary associations and “altruistic” can be seen as being virtuous and this grants them moral authority and a status of a disinterested “other” meaning the role of speaking for certain groups or identities (Boli, 2006).

2.4 Epistemic Capital and the power of organizations

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of various types of organisations after world war II, in particular for non-profit organizations (Boli & Thomas, 1997). For example the number of non-profits in the United States increased more than sevenfold between 1943 and 1996, a tendency repeated in many other countries (Meyer & Bromely, 2014). Organized activity around specific themes such as environmentalism or human rights is one of the major hallmarks of contemporary societies. However, why do people create, promote and maintain organizations in the incredible amount we see today? Neo-institutionalism points out the role of culture as an explanatory factor in the prevalence and popular spread of organizations (Alasuutari, 2015). One purpose of organizations, Pertti Alasuutari suggest is the way we associate them with *power*.

„ Even through many organizations that aim to affect national policies do not have any formal position in , or control over, the decision making process, actors want to establish them because of a wide-spread believe that such organizations have power“ (Alasuutari, 2015, p. 118).

Furthermore the way organizations create this perception of power is by the way they establish themselves in the discursive realm of human societies. Organizations have to make themselves *heard* and accepted as voices of authority to assert their power.

„The power of those organizations is primarily based on the noise they make, but if through that noise an organization succeeds in becoming an authoritative entity that influences the way the general public and the decision-makers convey of the facts and what needs to be done, a belief in that organization’s power has become real in its consequences“ (Alasuutari, 2015 , p. 118).

Yet, how does such power work? How do organizations become *powerful* and how do they yield influence? The concept of epistemic governance calls attention to this process how it plays an important role in policy making through the act of convincing others. Alasuutari and Ali Qadir explain that -“society is increasingly managed through epistemic governance which works through actors perceptions of the world and its current challenges ” (2014, p. 67). The persuasive strategies that are employed through epistemic governance entail the ontology of the environment (the

constructed social reality in context) actors identification and norms and ideals or what is good and desirable (Ibid.). Ontology of the environment can be based on cognitive or authoritative "factual" arguments and measurements and they define what the world is. Identification is our need for identity construction of ourselves and others. Identities are continuously shaped and reformed, usually for practical purposes such as a national identity. Finally norms and values make up what we perceive as the right thing or the desirable thing to do in a given circumstances. When engaging in epistemic work, actors need to enact all these objects to sound convincing in their arguments and in their appeal for certain policies (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014). As Michel Foucault convincingly demonstrated, knowledge is a form of power which can be found everywhere but not as traditionally perceived in a hierarchical form or as a coercive device. Instead, we can think of power as a strategy or as a network of relations that are activated when the situation arises (Foucault 1997;1982 as cited in Alasuutari, 2010). This understanding of power makes it more elusive and therefore it often remains unchallenged and unquestioned. This is indeed one of the points Alasuutari and Qadir make about governance, it is by large an unconscious process where people's perception of reality are influenced to make them behave and think in a particular manner.

Epistemic governance is useful here to understand the work of persuasion Avaaz engages in because it outlines the strategies that are utilized and which components the rhetoric has to include. Epistemic governance also brings forward the importance of the connection and dynamics between construction of reality, identification and values and norms.

The concept of epistemic capital is also useful in understanding how organizations become powerful or influential. Epistemic capital is the accumulated authority that organizations carve out for themselves and it is this accumulation of authority that is the primary reason for their existence (Alasuutari et al., 2015). An example of this is how the office of children's Ombudsman has, as an institution, spread to different countries around the world. Alasuutari maintains that the reason such institution became popular is not due to its necessity or practicality but rather because it relates to image management (that of the state) and ideas of what is deemed appropriate and right course of action. This logic or a way of thinking is a part of a cultural script which is practiced around the world and explains the similarity of nation states and organizations. Furthermore, because organizations enact these scripts vigerously and with dedication they tend to be the primary carriers of world culture (Alasuutari et al., 2015).

Epistemic capital can be divided into four modes of authority which explains the mechanism of organizational power; ontological, moral, capacity-based, and charismatic. Actors often utilize more than one mode of authority at the same time, although organizations tend to „specialize“ in

specific roles. The way we understand the world and how it functions, or what has been termed as the „the ontology of the environment“ has a profound influence on our thinking and sets the rules of the game so to speak and forms the basis of our conception of reality (Alasuutari, 2015). Hence when Avaaz, through their text, describe the global corporation Monsanto as a threat to global food safety (based on scientific knowledge) they enact specific understanding of the situation which determines the role of the actors involved and their actions. It is a specific way of understanding the situation at hand and sets limits on possible selections of available discourses on the topic.

Capacity based authority is the type of authority which is perceived as being able to alter the situation at hand through conventional ideas of power such as financial or military. For a social movement such capacity based authority is manifested in mobilizing people in demonstrating, signing petitions and thus creating political pressure (Alasuutari et al., 2015). Moral authority refers to the capacity of an actor to define and re-inforce ethical norms and values which has grand implications on their behavior. Finally, charismatic authority is rooted in the social standing of a particular actor who has influence because who they are. Usually such actors are perceived as heroic or exemplary. However organizations can also have charisma through branding, public image and successful public relations i.e through appealing story line (Alasuutari et al., 2015; Alasuutari, 2015).

Another important concept relating to epistemic governance and its link to governance is imageries of the social world. A social or popular imagery is an „unarticulated mental image to describe society“ (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2016, p. 2). Richard Harvey Brown argued that people used root metaphors in order to make sense of the world, explain it to others and in rationalizing on how to change it (Brown, 1989 as cited in Alasuutari & Qadir, 2016, p. 6). Alasuutari and Qadir expand on this concept of Brown’s root metaphor when talking about imageries but they define an imagery as a configuration of metaphors that becomes articulated in political rhetoric (Ibid.). They suggest there are three common imageries found worldwide in political debates. These imageries are not contextualized in culture. Instead they are part of world culture as a „symbolic set“ that rational actors can use in their efforts to influence social change. However such imageries are not just tools to use in discourse they also constitute actors involving ideas and actions that are seen as appropriate. Actors make references to these imageries because *they expect others to see the world in the same terms* and thus the argumentation work that they do is based on those very same terms. A related concept is Charles Taylor’s ideas of social imaginary – the way people imagine their social world. This includes the nature of people’s relationship with each other, expectations that they have and the underlying normativity in both ideas and images that these expectations are based on

(Taylor, 2002). However Taylor did not describe what the social imaginary consists of nor did he consider how they function in rhetoric as a part of the persuasive work that actors engage in (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2016). Alasuutari and Qadir however identify three imageries of the social world that do just that;

- 1) Social change as driven by functional requirement: The idea that societies go through evolutionary changes in their linear development towards modernization. In order to „develop“ they need to fulfill certain functional requirements like an economic model or environmental standards.
- 2) Society as a hierarchy: Where government or the elite have most of the power and rule those „below“. In global context this means division of those who have resources and those who do not. Furthermore the world is divided into layers of hierarchy, the global, the national and the local.
- 3) Social world as a competing blocs. Where the world is seen as divided into competing blocs that are looking out for their own interests. Hence nation states are seen as competitors where „powerful“ nations do well.

These imageries, similar to epistemic governance appeal and influence people's conceptions on the world and frame what actions are desirable (and which are not). Thus Alasuutari and Qadir claim that in any discussion on how to change the world these imageries are „a key discursive ingredient for both social scientific and political actors seeking to understand and change the world“ (2016, p. 14).

2.5 Framing

Framing theory is suitable in understanding the part of the appeal and the rhetorical power of the discourse that Avaaz utilizes. Framing theory is useful here as Avaaz is an organization that handles its public relations in large part via the Internet and social media and frequently through visual framing strategies.

For Entman (1993), framing as a theoretical concept in social sciences centred on the methods of how particular issues were made salient and how they were selected. To be more succinct, how issues are framed influences how people perceive them. Yet this is not a relationship of subservience, individuals come to this interaction with certain understandings about the world and this plays its part when encountering other framing mechanisms. Furthermore, *culture provides its own powerful interpretive frames* (Ibid.). Hence a discourse on world citizenship makes sense to

those individuals who are aware of globalization processes in some form (whether they find it agreeable or not) and will place such a concept in certain context i.e. in discourses on human rights and social equality. If such framing makes sense to global audience one can argue that this is done on the premises of shared culture, namely world culture.

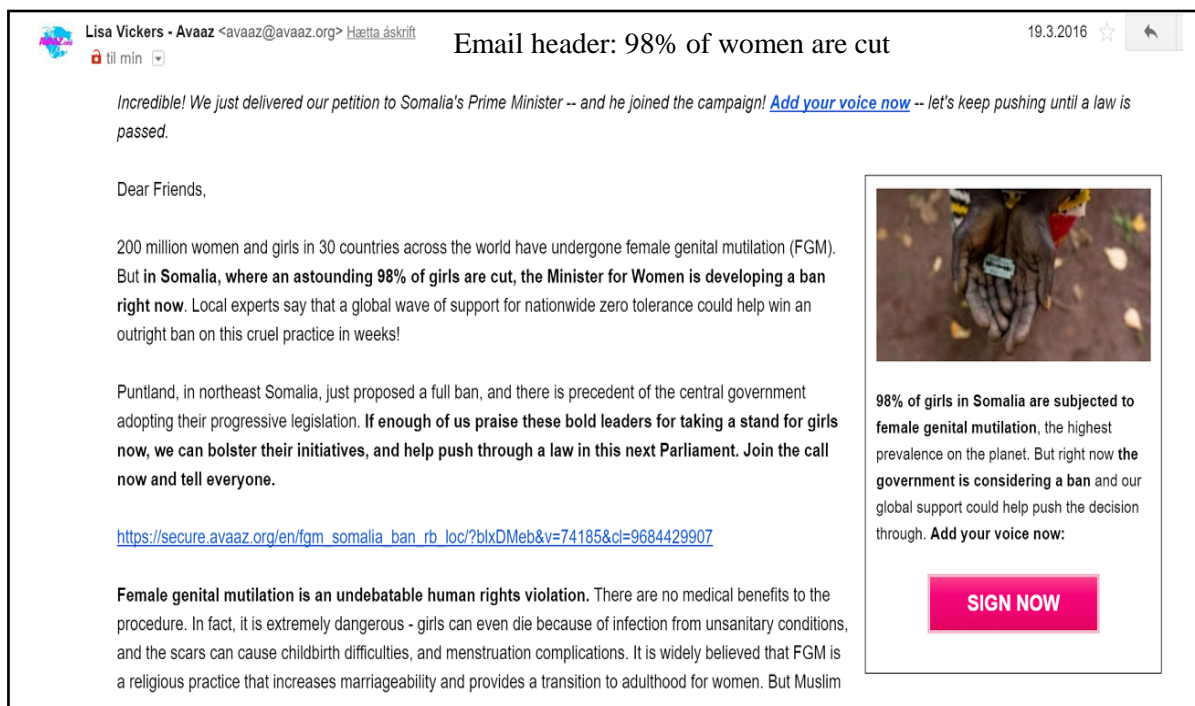
Here the idea of a “global framework” also becomes relevant when discussing civic activism. When non-governmental organizations operate outside the national framework they lay claim to morality and cultural reasoning which they portray as being universal and irrefutable. Hence when social and ecological issues are framed as global issues they can influence the mobilization of social movements. Such global social movements might even prove to be more effective since their legitimacy is seen to be rooted in universal values and norms. They might also provide access to resources and support that local activists might not have and thus the global empowers the local (Tsutsui, 2004). In relation to this study the concept of framing is important because Avaaz approaches global activism from a particular standpoint or a frame in their narrative and because they predominantly utilize framing strategies in their visual texts.

2. Methodology

3.1 The Data collection and research method

For this study I have selected to do a qualitative research in the form of a case study of the Avaaz movement. The data consists of Avaaz campaign emails from the period of 2014 towards early 2017. As a part of their operational model, Avaaz emails their members with each new campaign they have decided to pursue. As a member of Avaaz, I therefore have access to 257 emails from the organization spanning those years. From these emails, 100 were randomly selected as the data for this study. The emails are in standardized format and always include; a specific campaign headline in the subject header, a description of the issue at hand and why it is important and often links for further information. Almost all emails have at least one image, located in the upper right corner of the email with a following short paragraph underneath, summarizing the problem. A visual processing of an image is almost immediate for a viewer and therefore it is an effect way to quickly convey certain understanding of an issue via mechanism of framing. In addition, key sentences are usually written in bold font so they stand out.

Image 1: Example of Email data.



The image shows a screenshot of an email from Lisa Vickers on behalf of Avaaz. The subject line is "Email header: 98% of women are cut" dated 19.3.2016. The email body contains the following text:

Incredible! We just delivered our petition to Somalia's Prime Minister -- and he joined the campaign! [Add your voice now](#) -- let's keep pushing until a law is passed.

Dear Friends,

200 million women and girls in 30 countries across the world have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM). **But in Somalia, where an astounding 98% of girls are cut, the Minister for Women is developing a ban right now.** Local experts say that a global wave of support for nationwide zero tolerance could help win an outright ban on this cruel practice in weeks!

Puntland, in northeast Somalia, just proposed a full ban, and there is precedent of the central government adopting their progressive legislation. **If enough of us praise these bold leaders for taking a stand for girls now, we can bolster their initiatives, and help push through a law in this next Parliament. Join the call now and tell everyone.**

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/fgm_somalia_ban_rb_loc/?blxDMeB&v=74185&cl=9684429907

Female genital mutilation is an undebatable human rights violation. There are no medical benefits to the procedure. In fact, it is extremely dangerous - girls can even die because of infection from unsanitary conditions, and the scars can cause childbirth difficulties, and menstruation complications. It is widely believed that FGM is a religious practice that increases marriageability and provides a transition to adulthood for women. But Muslim

On the right side of the email, there is an image of a hand holding a small object, with a caption: "98% of girls in Somalia are subjected to female genital mutilation, the highest prevalence on the planet. But right now the government is considering a ban and our global support could help push the decision through. Add your voice now:" Below the image is a pink button that says "SIGN NOW".

("98% of women are cut" 13.03.2016")

One of the central purpose of movements like Avaaz is the process of persuading people in mass campaigns of a particular cause by using a certain rhetoric. In this sense Avaaz is an entity *continuously engaged in the act of persuasion* and in doing so they rely on certain cultural understanding of what arguments are convincing. Usually these are based on perceptions of what are the rights and obligations of the individual and what is a morally right conduct. The email material that Avaaz produces thus should reveal to some extent the epistemic work at play. In addition to this data, comments from members regarding the 2016 campaign focus and general sentiments on global activism were collected. Comments were randomly selected from a range of 1300 pages of published comments appearing on one of the Avaaz homepages under the headline “Your message to the Movement”.

Image 2: Comment Section on Avaaz Internet homepage



(Avaaz “Make 2016 Magical”, 2016d)

While comments are written in various languages only comments posted in English, German and Russian languages are part of the data for this study. By focusing on the English language, I gained

an unique input from Avaaz members from different locations around the world as English is an international language. However people commenting in English also tended to identify themselves as being from primarily English speaking countries, such as United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand. To partly make up for this bias I selected in addition German and Russian languages. I selected German because it was one of the most frequently used languages by commenters (along with Spanish but unfortunately I had no access to native Spanish translators) and Germany has a high reported numbers of Avaaz members (slightly over 2.2 million according to the Avaaz homepage). The Russian language was selected to see if there was any significant difference between Russian commenters and others due to strict regulations regarding foreign NGOs in Russia and restrictions of the Internet. According to Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization that monitors degree of freedom and democracy around the world, Internet in Russia is rated the lowest ranking of “Not Free” (Kelly et al., 2016). Yet there are over 750 thousand members of Avaaz located in Russia according to records published by the movement (Avaaz “I Just Joined Avaaz”, 2017a). (However with declining internet freedom in Russia, there are declining numbers in Avaaz members from Russia as well).

Considering the constraints global activist face in Russia I wondered if the rhetoric of Russian speaking commenters was in some ways different.

Finally, the Avaaz main web site, texts, images and graphics were used as a source material, in particular in attempt to answer the question of how the power and authority of the organization was established through such introductory material to the movement. As this is a case study, findings strictly only apply to the Avaaz movement. However, it can serve as an a example of the impact and function of digital social movements, in particular when it comes to the attempt of the social construction of global identification as appearing in discourses on the Internet.

While the form and structure of my data which could be described as “random comments on the Internet” I will argue that this sort of data is an ideal opportunity to get a truly broad sense of how people located in different parts of the world relate to the rhetoric of the movement. The material in this setting can be described as a naturally occurring data. People are self-motivated and come to the Avaaz forum on their own terms utilizing expressions of everyday language which reveals a certain format of popular discourse on global activism. The result is a brief a glance of how people understand their role in the world in the context of global social movement discourse.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

A discourse is a selective way of talking and understanding the world and as such integral part of the social construction of reality (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe also noted that identities are not merely rooted in material reality but rather constructed in discourse (1985, as cited in Rear, 2013). However critical discourse analysis also emphasizes that such discourses are constituted by social structure, the world is not all “talk”. Discursive practices in everyday life both produce and consume text and are, in themselves, an important social practice that reproduce social and cultural realities, hence “discourse is both constitutive and constituted” (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002, p. 61). As Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002) explain further;

“In critical discourse analysis, language-as-discourse is *both* a form of action (cf. Austin 1962) through which people can change the world *and* a form of action which is socially and historically situated and in a dialectical relationship with other aspects of the social “(Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, 200 p. 61).

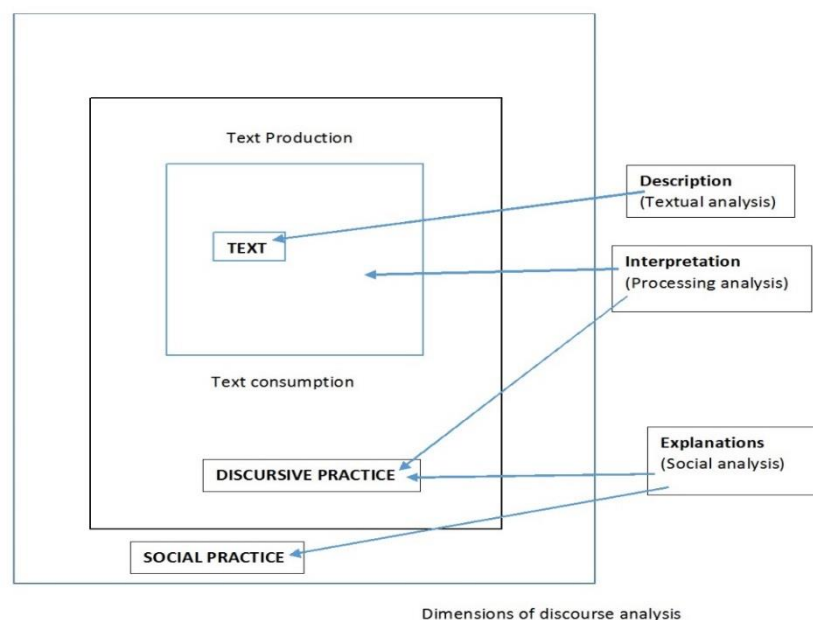
One can therefore understand Avaaz campaign emails and comments by members as a specific discourse where identity and the world are constructed in a certain way which relates to world culture (where organizations play a key role according to neo-institutionalists). Cultural assumptions and practices that are already formed are mitigated through that discourse. It is through such discursive practices that discourse and social structure are mutually enforcing and reflective of each other. The study of this process is a fascinating puzzle, in particular in time of social change or in an on-going formation of a relatively new phenomena like the emerging of global identification and global consciousness.

Critical discourse analysis is a suitable choice here when addressing questions of global consciousness and identity because it centres on the function of power in discourse, particular in the Foucauldian tradition. Although critical discourse analysis is often used to unveil unbalances in power relations and the domination of hegemonic group, the purpose here is to rather gain insight in how such power works. Inherently identity and power are always dynamically related as our sense of who we and others are always carry assumptions of what people can do or should do. Identity of groups, in particular, ascribe certain rights and obligations or their absence. By addressing issues of identity in discourse we can see how power relations are reproduced and legitimized or even challenged. Therefore, I contemplate the relationship between power and identification in talk on global activism. It also raises questions on how does a movement like Avaaz simply by “talking”

gain authority and influence over others? My interests is in how discourses that centre upon identification can serve as a tool for influence in a global public sphere and why they are an appealing choice for those who want to be instrumental in social change in a global capacity.

This means that I will exam text as a form of social practices, where identities and a particular view of reality are constructed in discourse and analyse what it means in relation to power and influence of organizations like Avaaz (Grad & Rojo, 2008). As an analytical method and approach I will make use of critical discourse analysis and Fairclough’s three dimensional model. For Fairclough any use of language is a communicative event that can be described in three dimensions and each of these need their separate analysis. Thus all spoken and written language is a *text*, a *discursive practice* (where text is produced and consumed) and finally it is a *social practice*. A comprehensive discourse analysis needs to cover all of these three dimensions and it should focus on first, *the linguistic features of the text* meaning textual analysis; what does the text say? (Description). Second, the processes related to *the production and consumption of the text*. A form of processing analysis; what does the text mean? (Interpretation). Third and last, the analysis should focus on the *wider social practice* to which the communicative event belongs to. A level of social analysis; what does it mean in the broader social context? (Explanation) (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 68).

Image 3: Fairclough’s 3 box Critical Discourse Analysis



(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Fairclough 1995, p.98)

On one hand, an analysis of discursive practice should demonstrate how such text is linked to other discourses and genres and how people who receive the text utilize other discourses and genres in the

consumption and interpretation of it. For example, emails from Avaaz and comments by members can be viewed as “social movement discourse” and “human rights discourse”. Both of these employ a certain way of talking about individual rights, particular in political context, an interpretation which guides how Avaaz discourses are interpreted and consumed (i.e. through ways of talking about “human rights” and “social justice”). The text analysis, on the other hand, is more focused on linguistic features such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. One question to ask therefore is if Avaaz utilizes a specific type of vocabulary or way of structuring its text and if so what is the significance of such selection? Social practice and text are then linked through discursive practices, texts are used and consumed in language and this text is both shaped and shapes social practices.

The focus of the analysis on Avaaz text is to see if particular discourses are instrumental in constructing global identification and consciousness and the role of world culture and epistemic work in this process. As a starting point of my analysis, I build a “word cloud” from my text data to get a quick picture of the Avaaz vernacular to see if there are some specific concepts or word that stand out in the data (this is part of the text analysis). This also gives a quick comparison between text produced by the movement in the form of emails and members’ own comments. One could also argue that the member’s comments demonstrate how Avaaz discourse is consumed and if it reflects the way the movement itself talks. In this sense, I examine how or if organizational text becomes mirrored in members’ talk through the usage of similar or same concept, scripts and categories. In the next phase, I look closer at the popular concepts to see if they are a part of a particular discourse string and relevant to the main research questions. I investigate if popular concepts are a part of discourses on identity and justification of global activism. Hence, discourse strands that centre on identity, justifications and global consciousness are collected and analysed.

In analysing these discourse strands, I finally also consider how they link to concepts of epistemic governance, epistemic capital and world culture as defined in neo-institutional theory thus linking Avaaz text to wider social practices.

3.3 The role of scripts in neo-institutionalism

A cultural script can be defined as a “culturally shared expression, story or common line of argument or an expected unfolding of events that is deemed to be appropriate or expected in a particular socially defined context, and that provides a rationale or justification for a particular issue or course of action” (Vanclay & Enticott, 2011, p. 256).

In neo-institutional theory, actions of actors are in large part seen as constituted by scripts, in particular institutionalized scripts that have become an important part of world culture. Meyer (1998) thus argued that identity itself is formed by collective-level scripting that are provided by institutions. Furthermore, institutions are seen as crucial in shaping and guiding human societies and culture by providing scripts, meanings and moral principles (Alasuutari, 2015). Therefore, when looking at the Avaaz discourse I ponder the relationship between global identification and world culture. Here I view the concept of “identity” or identification not as a fixed set of properties, transferable from one context to another but rather as a situational and discursive enterprise undertaken by speakers, usually for a particular purpose and agenda (Grad & Rojo, 2008). My stance is in the tradition with postmodern thinking where individuals are thought to possess a range of identities and the attention is on what people “do” with these identities (Hall, 1996) and how they are produced in discourse actively by speakers by laying claim to certain identities (cf. Billig, 2014).

In their research on international NGOs Thomas and Boli (1997) identified several key principles of world culture as seen in the general purpose and aim of those organizations. Among these world culture principles were universalism, individualism, voluntaristic authority, rational progress and world citizenship.

The principle of universalism presupposes that human societies everywhere need similar goals and objectives in order to be “good” and “successful”. Individualism identifies main actors as essentially individuals or collections of individuals (as opposed to see them as collective communities). By referring to voluntaristic authority as one of the core principle of world culture Boli and Thomas mean that INGOs have granted themselves an authoritative status (they are in a sense “self-authorized”). However such authority is not formal, but cultural and when such authority is challenged it can be met by moral condemnation. The principle of rational progress is linked to a strong belief in rationalization, professionalization and science. A development toward a better and healthy society is seen to be inherently linked to these processes. All these four principles then come together in the concept of world citizenship where the rights and obligations of the individual are conceptualized. As they further elaborate:

“Everyone is an individual endowed with certain rights and subject to certain obligations; everyone is capable of voluntaristic actions that seek rational solutions to social problems; therefore, everyone is a citizen of the world polity. World citizenship rules infuse each individual with the authority to pursue particularistic interests, preferably in organizations, while also authorizing individuals to promote collective goods defined in largely standardized ways.” (Boli & Thomas, 1997, p. 182).

The principle of world citizenship is for example embodied in the Universal declaration of human rights where all humans are seen to possess certain rights irrelevant of their nationality, gender or religion (The United Nations, 1948). As INGOs are the primary carriers of world culture, it often falls to them to pressure states to adhere such agreements. While these principles of world culture are not scripts per say, I would argue that the sentiments of these principles can be present in a social movement discourse, in particular when focusing on issues of human rights and environmentalism. My question though is, do these principles appear as scripts in the Avaaz discourse (as Neo-institutionalism theory predicts) and do they feature in the construction of a global identity? For example, Boli and Thomas argued that INGOs are one of the main enablers and carriers of world culture:

“INGOs are loci of transnational contextual knowledge. World level conceptions constitute the locally situated individual as someone who can, may, and should act globally; they supply the purposes and meaning of action; they provide models for global organizing, forms of discourse and communication, and avenues for influencing states and other actors. The larger cultural reality is translated by individuals into specific forms and actions that reveal broad homologies.” (Boli & Thomas.1997, p. 180).

Thus in my analysis of Avaaz discourse I will be looking for the presence of global scripts, in particular those scrips that relate to world cultural principles as discussed above. Furthermore as Boli and Thomas hint at here above, such scripts that are aimed at channelling individual agency and morality are inevitably tied to identity construction.

3.4 Membership Categorization

As a more in-depth analytical tool I use membership categorization to see how identity serves as a mechanism in talk for a particular purpose (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002; Rautajoki 2012; Rautajoki forthcoming). It is a type of an analysis well suited to ethnomethodological data with its emphasis on everyday talk and “common sense” interpretations. One of the earlier writers and original developer of the method is Harvey Sacks. Sacks (1992) took note of how people in their everyday interaction utilized social categories and how this organized social thinking or how people made sense of their social world. Making inferences about who people are fundamentally affects how we make sense of the social context and peoples motive and actions (Day, 2012). It is therefore useful here as one of the main focus of this study is on identification and what that implies. As an analytical method, the focal point of membership categorization is on how identity is established in discourse and how it ties to social organization (Lepper, 2000). Such analysis brings into light how individuals in everyday talk create social categories of people and how that subsequently brings forth a “common sense” understanding on how the world works. The language process that explains how this is accomplished is what Sacks (1992) termed as *membership category device* (MCD) and *rules of application*. Sacks elaborated further in order to explain the effect of categories with concepts such as *membership categories* and *category bound activities*. Rules of application link devices to categories of individuals or to single individuals. There are two rules of application, the consistency rule and economy rule. The economy rule “refers to the conversational process by which ‘if a member uses a single category from any device then he/she can be recognized to be doing adequate reference to a person’” (Sacks, 1992; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 61). In practice, this means that speakers refer to categorizes in talk instead of going into lengthy explanations accounting for persons and their actions. Hence sentences like “*then the lecturer entered the room and the chattering subsided*” adequately explains why people stop talking as the role of the lecturer and those who were “chattering” and why they stopped are made clear by the category of a “lecturer”. Referring to specific categories in talk thus can work as a “short cut” in providing explanations, justifications and responsibility for people’s actions. The consistency rule then stated that if “a member of a given population has been categorized within a particular device then other members of that population can be categorized in terms of the same collection” (Housley & Fitzgerald, p. 62). Following the consistency rule there is the “*hearer’s maxim*” (the way the recipient “hears” or receives such text) , whereby if two categories follow each other then the hearer should assume that they belong together (Day 2012).

Another interesting concept Sacks and colleagues introduced is the *recipient design* whereby in interaction talk is oriented and sensitive to those who are participants or receivers of such talk. Their finding demonstrated how such recipient design works through a deliberate selection of words, topics and how interaction is initiated and ended (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974).

Recipient design brings attention to how in interaction style of communication is moderated and adjusted in order for an interaction to be successful or accomplish what was intended. The point being that we adjust our talk in accordance to whom we interact with and this is usually a collaborative effort.

Essentially what Sacks is pointing out here is the implicit and unstated cultural assumptions that lie behind our way of talking and how it influences our interpretations and meaning creations or what he called “sense making”. Through such an analysis we can get into the deeper meaning construction of the social world that appear in discourse. We may uncover that which usually goes unstated and in particular how people make sense of the social world through various identities. Furthermore, categorization is also used to infer about how group of individuals will or should behave as reflected in the concept of category bound activities.

A classic example from Sacks is the sentence “ The baby cried, the mother picked it up” , most people, Sacks argues would assume that the mother is picking up *her* baby, because the words “baby” and “mommy” belong to the membership categorization device of “family”(Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002). In this example the category of “mother” and “baby” are examples of membership categories. Furthermore, inherently the hearer assumes that the baby and the mother are of the same family although it is not explicitly stated because we assume that the category of “mother” is bound by the action of taking care of babies. This is also an example of the *hearer’s maxim*.

The work of Sacks has been continued and elaborated on by many researchers who have examined the effect of categorization in various contexts. Watson wrote about *incumbency* as a type of strategy that speakers use to present themselves as being a part of a particular category or having a particular identity. Incumbency describes the process on how identity can be brought into play in interaction as a resource to achieve a particular effect. Hence identities could be understood as “situated interactional achievements” (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 63) as opposed to being fixed and stable and as a resource people utilized *in situ* in interactions with others in order to accomplish something.

Furthermore, Jayyusi (2015) has studied how issues of morality are worked through in categorization, or how people come to expect moral actions from certain categories of people. Hence from the example of above, we not only expect the mother to pick up her baby, but that she should be the one to provide comfort as that is her moral obligation as a mother. In this way, evoking membership categories in talk also brings forth a sense of moral obligations and normality. As Jayyusi explains:

“..in examining the ways in which persons are described and the ways in which such descriptions are used to accomplish various practical tasks – e.g. to deliver judgments, warrant further inferences, ascribe actions, project possible events, explain prior events, account for behaviour, etc. – it becomes clear that categorization work is embedded in a moral order , how that occurs and how that moral order operates practically and pervasively within social life.” (Jayyusi, 2015, p. 15)

By using this analytical method I hope to gain an understanding on how identity is brought into play in moral justification and in expectations of political action in activist discourse. How does Avaaz with their choice of words and when addressing their members put forward the idea of global identification and the obligations that follow? What categories do they utilize in their discourse, what are the desired effects and what kind of groups of peoples and things do they draw upon in this effort? Utilizing membership categorization analysis also links into how epistemic governance functions in a detailed manner by looking at various identifications and how they function in the rhetoric and to what end (Rautajoki, forthcoming).

3.5 Coding of the data

3.5.1 Coding of Avaaz emails

Coding of the email material was done in light of first two research questions and based on content analysis of the vocabulary in use in the emails and in the comments. Hence in my coding of the data I was specifically interested in how Avaaz goes about in constructing a global identification in their rhetoric and awareness of the world as an ideological space to be acted upon and what the justification of such acts are. I created five coding categories, I call them references to Identity, Globality, Actors, Morality and Power.

Identity: In looking at how global identification is facilitated by Avaaz I looked at the ways the movement referred to their members and how this identification was then put into play. For example, following membership categorization analysis I looked at if such identification carried

with them certain assumptions and moral obligations and if this was implicated in the Avaaz rhetoric in the emails. Hence I coded the way recipients were addressed in the beginning of the emails and how in the Avaaz discursive practice the recipients were perceived to belong to a common group of people. I further divided the text into subcategories through the reading of my data (in this sense the analysis is data driven). For example I looked at role of pronouns in the text (i.e. “we” “ours”, “us”, “them”) and in particular how the pronoun of “we” was used as a force for mobilization

and how “our” future was conceived of as a thing of contention within the realm of international politics and corporate power.

Globality: In order to answer the latter part of the question regarding “global consciousness” I reasoned that such consciousness was tied to the ideas of global community and a sense of place so I further coded all instances of where terms like “world”, “Planet” and “global” and “community” were mentioned in different contexts. Often these overlapped with category of “identity” (in particular community) but the two concepts are closely interrelated in Avaaz discourse. In addition justifications for global activism were included here.

With the second question my focus was on justification of global activism, in particular from a moral perspective. I created the categories of references to actors, morality and power.

Actors: In this category I coded all instances of where individuals, groups, countries and organizations that were included as significant actors in the social scene of activism, as either as opponents, targets or subjects to it.

Morality: In “moral referencing” I coded all explanations that were framed as being issues of morality into this category and ended up with numerous subcategories as moral framing took place through many diverse strategies and much of the text in the emails are focused on this issue. However I narrowed my analysis to several subcategories by merging them. The subcategories are not mutually exclusive but rather reflect a difference in the emphasis of each moral frame. I coded environmentalism as belonging to the category of moral referencing because this is how it is frequently framed in the text.

Power: Included all references of how Avaaz as a movement was powerful and perception of what power is. Here the term “power” might seem out of place or at least appearing inexplicitly but reading through the data it was clear that issue of power is a recurrent topic in Avaaz discourse and is linked to the purpose and motivation of global activism.

Table 1. Coding of email data

Main categories	Subcategories	Main categories	Subcategories
References to identity	How recipients are addressed. Avaazers.	References to Actors	Moral exemplars/actors. Immoral actors. Neutral actors (to be influenced). Victims. Experts/Scientists.
	Human/Humanity. Citizen. Use of pronouns. "Our" world/planet. "We" as a force.	Moral referencing	Human rights. Suffering. Injustice. Providing help. Animal rights. Environmentalism.
References to globality	Justifications for global activism. World/Planet/Earth as a place. Global. "Our" planet. The world as a community.	References to Power	Empowerment. How others are powerful. How "we" are powerful. A struggle of two opposing forces. References to "people power". To cause embarrassment. Applying political pressure.
	How anyone can be an activist. Avaaz as a portal of empowerment. Romanticising activism.		

3.5.2 Coding of the members' comments

When looking at the comments made by members the coding of the data was simpler as my research question was aimed at identifying justifications for global activism, but otherwise followed similar themes as above. I started out with simple categories such as power, identification, Avaaz (I was interested in how members perceived the movement) and justification for activism and few sub-categories but added more sub-categories as reading and analysing the data. Some categories did not “bear fruit” i.e. there were surprising few references to specific issues of global activism like Syria or Palestine, with members preferring to talk about global activism in a more general way. Furthermore, criticism of Avaaz or perceived moral dilemmas were rare. Finally, some categories and meanings are not elaborated on in this study i.e. the role of spirituality and god as the scope of this thesis is limited.

Table 2. Coding of members' comments

Main categories	Subcategories	Main categories	Subcategories
References to identification	Use of pronouns. Humanity/humankind/mankind. "Together" Community/ World as a community. Change as project of the individual. "People" Expressing hope/belief that the world can be changed.	References to Power	Power in unity Avaaz power "People power" Inequality in power Power elites
Justifications for activism	Social justice/Human rights. Betterment of the world. Responsibility for the world. Activism as a political unity. Polarization of actors (Us versus them). Love/Compassion/hope. Environmentalism and animal rights. References to Spirituality and God. Activism is a struggle. Peace and ending wars. References to specific issues.	References to Avaaz	Endorsement of Avaaz. Criticism. Discussions on agenda. Activism works. Dilemmas. Growing , getting stronger. Thanking Avaaz.

3.6 Ethical concerns

There are three main categories of ethical principles when it comes to research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences. 1) Respecting the autonomy of the research subject. This means that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent, meaning the subjects know what the study is about. 2) Prevention of harm. Negative consequence for subjects can be social, financial and mental if researchers do not treat their subjects with respect, observe strict confidentiality or are judgemental in their findings. Exemptions apply here however when researchers study and criticize the use of power. 3) Privacy and data protection. Researchers should take measures to protect their subjects' privacy through i.e. providing anonymity when suitable and handle collected data with care and confidentiality (Finnish Advisory board on Research integrity, 2012).

All the data that will be used in this research are available to the public via the Internet. The comments collected appear in a public forum on the Avaaz homepage using names and national identity they select themselves and are not necessarily accurate or “true”. Therefore protecting their autonomy and obtaining voluntary participation is not an ethical principle that is directly applicable here. However, one could argue that Avaaz members did not expect that their comments would be gathered and collected for the purpose of this study and in some countries, political dissidence can have consequences. Therefore, in the spirit of the second ethical principle, the names of commenters will be changed when quoted in the study. Emails from Avaaz and images accompanying them will be treated as public material, meaning accessible to all and thus privacy and data protection do not apply here in the strictest sense.

Finally, it should be mentioned that I am a member of Avaaz for four years now and have in the past participated in their campaigns and protests. However, for the duration of this study I have refrained from active participation in Avaaz activities and rather sought out to be reflective of my long engagement with the movement. I am therefore aware of the risk my previous experience has on my role as an objective researcher. On the other hand, this also gives advantage of familiarity with Avaaz across various platforms and inside knowledge of their organizational model. This familiarity gives also insight and ethnographic perspective of the movement, their agenda and how members themselves experience Avaaz. Paired with my academic interests it became an ideal case study for studying the dynamics between world culture and global identification.

4. Analysis – Description of the data and interpretation

4.1 The language of the Avaaz movement

Based on data from 100 emails I created a word cloud showing the most frequent words in usage by the movement in the email format.¹ The list contains the first 192 most frequently used words in the data (Top 200 were originally selected but some words were combined when the capital letter in beginning of a word was discarded). While a word cloud is not an entirely accurate content analysis of the vocabulary in use, it does give at a glance, a general idea of the language of Avaaz.

¹ Discounted from this vocabulary are; standardized text that appear in every email at the end in smaller font (A definition of what Avaaz is and the statement of purpose); links to various news articles appearing under the title “source” or “more information”, and function words. Function words are words that serve a structural meaning in a sentence, such as articles (i.e. a, the), conjunctions (i.e. as, that, but for) and particles (i.e. so, to). Pronouns however were not deleted from the word list.

This can be described as the “red thread” throughout the discourse, a central theme that emerges. Furthermore, it demonstrates the tendencies of this language toward particular terms, concepts and themes.

Image 4. Word Cloud for Avaaz discourse



The word cloud shows that among the most ten frequently used words across the email data are

- 1) “**Our**” (762²)
- 2) “**we**” (682)
- 3) “**Avaaz**” (473)
- 4) “**us**” (304)
- 5) “**World**” (276)
- 6) “**their**” (220)
- 7) “**YES, I’ll**” (208)
- 8) “**will**” (204)
- 9) “**all**” (201)
- 10) “**they**” (191).

Furthermore words like “Community”, “pledge” “climate”, “US”(United States), “them”, “people”, “global”, “hope”, “Let’s” , “get”, “click”, “million”, “change”, “help” and “together” are common (all with at least 100 instances in usage) in the Avaaz discourse.

Thus the use of personal pronouns plays a central role in the language of Avaaz as can be seen in the choice of words such as “our”, “we” “I’ll” and “their” etc. It is quite a personal style of communicating and it indicates what kind of relationship the movement is trying to establish with their supporters. The movement itself also plays a central role in the narrative as one of the main subjects since references to Avaaz itself are quite frequent, as are references to “them” and “they”. The frequent usage of “will” (also in “I’ll) and “Let’s” (Let us) also demonstrate that the language is that of action, to *do* something, which is not so surprising as Avaaz is an activist movement.

² This is the number of times the term appears in the text.

Hence “we” *will* or “I” *will* do something or the suggestive tone of “Let us”. Terms like “change”, “together”, “click”, “help” and “get” then give an indication of what “will” or should be done. The word “will” indicating a desire to do something or a sense of determination. It also indicates future action and inevitability. For example one should “click” on petition or join Avaaz in collective action to make up “a million” of people. Furthermore the selection of words such as “world”, “community”, “people”, “all” and “global” hints at the arena *where* such action is imagined to take place and by whom. It simultaneously constructs these entities and re-enforces the imagery, a mental image (Taylor, 2002) of the world *as a place that exists* and *a place to be acted upon*. There is a limit of what one can learn by examining words isolated from their context. The word cloud gives hints to the structure and the content of Avaaz discourse, but it does not tell us precisely why it takes on this appearance and how it links to discourse practices, the way text is produced and consumed in society. This is the subject of the next chapter.

4.1.1 Avaaz narrative as A language of inclusion.

The campaign emails from Avaaz usually follow a certain structure and a particular layout as seen in the image 4 above. There are a few exceptions to this rule and the structure of the text within the emails remains relatively consistent. The analysis reveals certain discursive practices, in a Foucauldian sense– a certain reality that is constructed in the Avaaz discourse.

For example, the language of the movement as appearing in the email data is primarily a *language of inclusion*. From the start the recipients of Avaaz emails are categorized as belonging to the same group as the author of the message, as it almost always starts with “Dear friends” or “Dear Avaazers”.

The authors of the emails also always sign it by using their first names, signalling again a level of intimacy and belonging. Hence there is an emphasis on establishing a perception of a personal and informal relationship, an engagement on an individual level but within a politically charged collective.

This is an interesting paradox, where recipients are encouraged to participate in a massive global movement numbering in millions but are then addressed in terms of friendship which is quite a different level of a social relationship. It is however doubtful that either the recipient or the sender conceive of the social relation between them as a “real” friendship. Why then employ such terminology? Within membership categorization analysis the focus remains on how speakers

categorize people into groups so it becomes an apparatus or a device to be used strategically in talk. Using the address of “dear friend” not only indicates inclusion to a group but it can also function, along with other similar devices, to narrow a distance between the individual and the global.

Recipient design, whereby talk is adjusted to take into account who is a part of the interaction, can also explain why Avaaz uses these particular ways to address their members. It sets a certain tone of the interaction and invites the recipients to think of their relationship with the movement, and by proxy even the world, in quite an individualistic and intimate way. Thus global issues become relevant on an individual level (i.e. through moral framing) in particular when recipient is asked to respond in a particular way (usually by signing a petition). The result can be a stronger sense of relation to global issues and problems thus reinforcing an idea that an individual action has meaning and significance on the global level. This is therefore a text that constructs individualism in tandem with global identification, but individualism is one of the core principles of world culture as argued by Boli and Thomas:

“The combination of universalism and individualism may undermine traditional collectivities like the family or clan, but it also strengthens the one truly universalistic collectivity -humanity as a whole.” (Boli & Thomas, 1997, p. 180)

A further sense of inclusion is created by emotionally charged text that sometimes turns poetic and even romantic (in the sense that it is coloured by idealism, emotional appeal and heroism). This particular communication style gives an impression of emotional engagement with and within “a community”.

Example I

“Will humanity rise? It might depend, in part, on us. There's 40 million of us now, the largest global community like this ever. This fall, millions of us changed the political game on climate change. It was magical. As inspiring as the thousands of us who put our hands up to risk our lives on the front line of the Ebola fight. And the millions of us who took action to protect our oceans and defeat a Monsanto mega-project. From politicians, media and people, I'm hearing the same thing we're bringing hope. And hope is the game changer. Hope, is how we rise.” (“Avaaz, in 2015 we rise”, 22.12.2014)

In her writings on human rights Kate Nash has pointed out how sentimental “popular cosmopolitanism” that is based on feelings of sympathy and understanding serves as a better basis for an approach to global ethics and human rights than cold “rational cosmopolitanism” (Nash, 2005). The approach of Avaaz to human rights issues could be described to rest on an emotional approach based on feelings of empathy generated by moral evaluations. This is why the language is

descriptive, evaluative (using terms like “disgusting”, ”great”, “heinous”, or the popular term of “beautiful”) and “romantic” making it appealing to the general public. Essentially these are also moralistic descriptions, in particular when assigned to actors. In this sense Avaaz plugs into people’s emotional reality and from that standpoint considering moral rights and wrongs become something that *we feel*.

The *language of inclusion* becomes more apparent through the usage of the inclusive pronouns such as “we”, “us” and “our”. Within any cohesive group using such terms can be seen as an inherent part of group communication and therefore using pronouns doesn’t necessarily imply a strongly significant social relationship. However meaning of words are not fixed but are created and utilized in unique way depending on the context (Andersen, 1988) or in the specifics of an interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Within the context of Avaaz discourse the meaning of “we” takes on a deeper significance and is given an added political dimension. The whole of the discourse is saturated with these terms so it is clearly a deliberate choice of words. This deliberate design can be seen by the frequent usage the term, for example across 257 emails the term “we” is used more than 1800 times and in 20 emails in the subject header, for example in “ Jo, We will fight for love”. As demonstrated with the world cloud the terms “we” and “our” are also the most frequent terms used in the sample emails.

The term “We” in the emails is used to refer to three groups, to the Avaaz staff team employed by the movement, to all members of Avaaz and then “we” as a general reference to humanity or the world as a whole. Sacks argued that the pronoun “we” was not simply a plural reference but also an “organizational reference” (Sacks, 1995, as cited in Silverman, 1998, p. 148) and certainly as in the first two examples “we” does refer to the members and the staff of Avaaz. However within the text of the emails the boundaries between these categories often become blurred and the reference to “we” jumps from one group to another. This frequently happens in the same email message or even within a same paragraph and thus it is not clear to which group “we” refers to.

Example II

We can win, we must, but we need to blast out of the gate in 2015 with pledges of just a few dollars/euros/pounds to support our work this year -- we'll only process the donations if we hit our goal. For the world we dream of, let's make it happen. (“10 months to save the world” , 04.02.2015)

The same happens to related grouping terms like “the world”, does “we” mean the world?

Example III

The world rejects your fear, hate-mongering, and bigotry. We reject your support for torture, your calls for murdering civilians, and your general encouragement of violence. We reject your denigration of women, Muslims, Mexicans, and millions of others who don't look like you, talk like you, or pray to the same god as you. ("Donald Trump". 03.04.2016)

At times the term "we" then blends into the same category in the Avaaz discourse. It is not something that is explicitly stated but rather that which can be inferred. In practice what it means that the term "we" becomes also a representational term for humanity and "the world", and thus the *moral authority* and the political significance of "we" increases. As a result "we" in Avaaz discourse becomes a politically charged term and unless specified otherwise by context, a synonym with humanity. Humanity here however is not a vague and distant category but very real in the sense that it carries with it certain responsibilities, rights and challenges, *it becomes one manifestation of a global identification*.

The process of the usage of the personal pronoun of "our" is similar. "Our" usually refers to the staff of Avaaz, Avaaz members in general or humanity in general and in many ways it functions similar as the term "we". It defines the "in-group" and is a part of the act of persuasion which Avaaz continuously engages in through a language of inclusion and unity. The main difference is that as a possessive pronoun the term turns even more political as it gives a perception of a commonly shared, but vaguely defined resources that naturally belong to all of "us" humankind. Hence "our" is used in the context of for example: "our planet", "our world", "our oceans" and "our coastal cities".

Example IV

"Climate change will affect all of us, starting with our coral islands, our crops, our seas, and our coastal cities, everywhere!" ("Report the Truth". 29.07.2013)

Yet this is not only a term to indicate possession and unity, it also links the state of being human to common destiny, a certain sameness of "us" and the threats "we" face. Here humanity is framed as a category of all people that share a common fate, common resources *and a common political struggle*, even a common enemy. Therefore, "we" as category of human beings is made clear and it hardly needs stating that "we" and "our" refers to humanity as a whole. From the context of the narrative it simply makes common sense and is easily inferred by the reader.

These terms and the frame they appear in thus provide an excellent building materials to create and reinforce a certain identity and this is how global identification emerges in its most strongest but understated sense, out of the narrative of the Avaaz emails.

4.1.2 Global identifications – the Avaazers and the Citizens.

Furthermore, addressing the members as “Avaazers” is an effort to create a movement identity and a feeling of community among the members. Although there is a tendency to think of the world as a physical place, in the language of Avaaz it also exist as an abstract idea, an imagined community in similar terms as Benedict Anderson (1991) explained the existence of nation states. Addressing recipients as “Avaazers” also becomes one of many ways on how the movement facilitates a global identification by making references to broad categories such as human or “we”. Avaazers” are also depicted as moral exemplars and as an answer to a world in need of a global ethical framework.

Referring to members as “citizens“ is another way to facilitate identification. The implication being that irrespective of nationality we are all *citizens* with rights and responsibilities. Both of these addresses are made incumbent with category-bound activities in the text, Avaazers as those who act and donate and citizens as those who react in time of crisis.

Example V

“At he climate march and the Ebola volunteers campaign, as well as everyone donating, are examples of how Avaazers are stepping up to an even greater level of commitment to this vessel we share.” (From Climate to Monsanto – We’re winning Big!! 16.11.2014).

“Avaaz campaigns target the most urgent needs and opportunities, showing up just when a powerful burst of citizens' attention is needed most.” (“Avaaz – in 2015 we rise- 24 hours left!” 31.12.2014).

The inference here is that we are all *world citizens*. Avaaz however is careful not to use that precise term and there is only one instance where the term world citizen appears. Instead of articulating the idea of world citizenship Avaaz rather cleverly “flags” the nation state (Billig, 2014) in various visual ways. Notably, this is done on the Avaaz web site where national flags are displayed following every single signature that is collected. Similarly, in the forum, all commenters had to identify their country and so with each post there follows a name and a national flag (See image 2 on page 20). In addition to this, map of the world where nation states are clearly defined visually by borders are displayed. At a glance this might seem as an enigma, why does a movement that places such emphasis on global identification then reinforce the idea of the nation state? One possible answer is that as a movement that seeks mass support Avaaz has to be careful not to set itself in opposition to the nation state. It cannot be conceived as a threat to such an established idea. Instead it acts to change the *meaning* of the nation state as being a separate community sovereign to

its own culturally defined morality. Essentially this is how world culture works, certain norms and values and even morality become understood as universal. Furthermore, by demonstrating, visually, that Avaaz is a truly *global* movement with members worldwide establishes the movement as being authentic and believable representative of a global civic community – a voice for the world. In this way it further builds up its epistemic capital (Alasuutari, 2016; Alasuutari et al., 2015) in the form of a moral authority to speak for the world.

4.1.3 Avaaz discourse as a narrative involving actors and roles

A standardized Avaaz email generally reads like a narrative or a story of a struggle where actors can have various roles, for example as (1) moral exemplars (2) victims (those who suffer) (3) as immoral actors (4) as neutral actors (those to be influenced) or as (5) as actors holding authoritative knowledge (experts, scientists). In the word cloud terms such as “their” and “them” were among the most common words used and essentially they refer to the actor categories above. They therefore play an important role in the discourse.

Example VI:

- 1) Edward Snowden risked everything to expose mind-boggling and illegal US surveillance – (“Send Snowden home”, 16.01.2014)
- 2) 16 year-old Amina Filali, raped, beaten and forced to wed her rapist, killed herself — the only way she saw to escape the trap set for her by her rapist and Moroccan law. (“Forced to marry her rapist – days until the big vote” 10.01.2014)
- 3) The bees are up against a well-oiled, resource rich machine that will do whatever it takes to ensure the profits of chemical companies and big agriculture don't take a hit. (“Before the bees are gone” 01.04.2014)
- 4) The US and the EU are on the verge of giving rich corporations the right to control what we all see on the Internet. It's the apocalypse of the Internet as we know it. But free speech advocates and web companies are fighting back. Click to join the largest call for a democratic and free Internet ever. (“Internet Apocalypse” 30.01.2014)
- 5) Scientists say our best chance to save our ecosystems and 80-90% of all species is giving them enough safe space to thrive, then nature uses its wisdom to regenerate. (“Before the Earth falls silent” 24.11.2016)

The distinction between actors is thus made clear and certain patterns in the roles emerge which then carry with them certain assumptions. For example organized and resource rich chemical

companies are immoral since they will “do whatever it takes”. Implication here is that large and wealthy corporations will act against nature conservation when profit margins are threatened. Indeed this is a line of argument that re-surfaces several times when corporate power and big business are mentioned in the Avaaz discourse. It becomes a script describing big and powerful corporations when they are seen as immoral actors.

This story-telling narrative is well suited to tell personal stories of injustice and suffering which then serve to frame particular social problems in different parts of the globe as essentially moral rather than, for example economic or cultural. In fact in those few instances issues of different cultures arises it is because they are unacceptable cultures, morally wrong or unhealthy. This narrative structure is also well suited to draw a distinction between groups, in particular between “us” and “them” and to frame social activism as a primarily struggle of two polarized forces. It is a story that is giving a certain idea of what the world is, an unjust imperfect community that can be changed if people unite for a common cause. Hence, it is a certain kind of social imagery of the world (Taylor 2002, as cited in Alasuutari & Qadir, 2016, p. 7) and actors within in, in context of global activism.

4.1.4 Constructing Global consciousness – The world as a community and the planet as a place.

In the Avaaz discourse the community of humans belong to an ideological place – the world. The world signifies a place, a community and an idea. As an idea the world is a project to be worked upon, a realistic utopia. The world is used also to refer to community of humans which can be changed when acted upon – hence “the world” can be “brought together” or the world can be changed into something “we”, a category Avaaz constantly refers to, dream about. The world, as a community, is seen as having agency in its unity. Hence when addressing Mr. Trump Avaaz claims that “The world rejects your fear, hate-mongering, and bigotry”.

However this holistic and abstract community resides in a certain singular *physical place*, the planet. In a similar way most nations are seen to be tied to a geographically defined area, a place of soil, the common place of belonging for humans is the planet. In perspectives on nationalism, in for example in the ethnocentric view, ties between territory and place of birth provide a powerful justification for the existence of a nation. As does legal-political community, nationalistic ideology and mass community (Smith, 2002). In fact, there are curious similarities in the way nation states and a global community are justified. In Avaaz discourse, there exist a similar link between

humanity and the planet. It is *our* planet (as in *our* country) and *our home*, and thus humans have a moral responsibility to safeguard it, as it is our duty in the nationalistic sense to protect our territory from external threats. It also lays claim to a mass community, an ideology of “globalism” and makes references to a common global legal framework in the form of international treaties like human rights. This might be a facet of how political identities are constructed, the mechanisms of persuasion being the same an example of how both national and global identification can be constructed through epistemic governance. The similarity of the rhetoric also emphasizes that essentially nations and the world are both imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) and that the rhetorical work that is needed to build, re-inforce, circulate and maintain these communities rest on the same mechanism.

Global consciousness in the form of awareness of the world and of the planet thus emerges from these type of accounts. The planet is described as a place whereby humans reside, a home, in particular when discussing global environmental problems like climate change or environmentalism. Hence the planet becomes *a subject* in discourse and in people’s awareness. It becomes understood both as a place that is perceived as belonging to humans and as a place that is threatened and needing protection:

Example VII

“Fatalism on climate change is not just futile, it's also incompetent. The hour is late, but it is still absolutely within our power to stop this catastrophe, simply by shifting our economies from oil and coal to other sources of power. And doing so will bring the world together like never before, in a deep commitment and cooperation to protect our planetary home. It's a beautiful possibility, and the kind of future Avaaz was born to create.”
 (“24 months to save the world”. 23.12.2013)

“Unless we stop this tragedy, the Earth’s delicate biodiversity could completely collapse, leaving our planet deathly silent and uninhabitable for humans. (“Before the Earth falls silent.” 24.11.2016)“

Thus discourses of global climate change and all discourses that centres on the world or the planet create a consciousness of both a community and a place. What Avaaz has managed to do in their discourse is to manifest this community and a place and to bring them into the foreground of social activism. It is the power of language in action in constructing social reality.

4.1.5 Framing global activism as a moral project (the role of images).

Images play an important role in the Avaaz discourse and almost all emails contain images. The graphical design of their web-page is also set up in a manner where images feature as a central focus. For example, the images and any text accompanying them are of large size. The central image is a moving frame that slides every 2 seconds or so, bringing another image to the screen. This increases the number of visuals available. The starting page also includes a map of the world, showing an interactive counter of the numbers of the Avaaz movement. The name of this map is “Our community”. Images are an effective way to convey messages in a fast and efficient manner as the eye processes information from such images in mere seconds. Images are also persuasive text as they are often perceived to portray an accurate and realistic account of events, a reflection of reality (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Shocking or emotionally arresting images are thus often successful in attracting the eye of the beholder. In particular membership categorization can be made fairly obvious and clear if certain framing strategies are in place. Jayyusi points out how images can provide categorical incumbencies “at a glance” and how captions and text following such images can mitigate such incumbencies (2015).

In the email data, Avaaz presents a rather limited number of contents that appear in the images and as they appear in the context of social justice and environmentalism the frames do not vary to a great degree. Across 100 emails there are 114 images, some who appear more than once in different emails. The objects in these images are usually either nature or people – they are chiefly meant to be a representation of reality rather than symbolic in the sense of the abstract. However, there are a few images holding symbolic meanings such as a pair of hand holding a razor blade meant to symbolise the barbarism of female genital cutting.

When simply looking at what is the content of the digital images they can be roughly divided into five groups of 1) Nature 2) Demonstrations 3) Actors 4) Symbolic meaning and 5) Other. The content of these five groups can then be further divided into subcategories depending on the framing mechanism in place. Framing takes place through the subject of the image (who or what is seen?), headline of the email (what is the context?) and the text that is located directly below the picture, literally framed with the image (what is the narrative?). Through these frames membership categories emerge and the roles of the story teller, the reader and the subject are made clear. Thus the images can be grouped in the following manner:

- 1) Nature: (26 images). Images of the environment and various animals, further divided into two categories;
 - a. Environment as either idyllic and beautiful or ruined or damaged. Images often used to symbolize climate change or unspoilt nature versus polluted nature.
 - b. Images of animals, often beautiful and vulnerable but also as victims of human cruelty or action that is threatening their natural habitat.

- 2) Demonstrations as a collective action: (34 images). Gathering of people for a particular cause. In majority of cases protestors or march for something (i.e. “climate justice”) or as in two images, as a show of solidarity after terrorist attacks. Frequently signs and ribbons with slogans are shown in the images. There are two types;
 - a. Demonstrators are shown as a crowd (zoomed out view).
 - b. Demonstrators are collection of few individuals (zoomed in view). When in focus, images feature women more often at the centre of the image, rather than men. In at least two images, demonstrators are children. Faces tend to be either serious, neutral or smiling.

- 3) Actors: (44 images). Images of individuals (emphasis on individuality rather than a collective as in group 2), ranging from one to ten people, who through various framing where depicted as;
 - a. Victims (27 images): Featuring images of people who were victims of social injustice, war, poverty, natural disaster etc. Victims are shown as distressed, lifeless (possibly dead) or sombre.
 - b. Moral exemplars (9 images): Featuring people who are treated as examples of individuals who do moral good and who can serve as role models for others. Shown as sombre, tragic or smiling.
 - c. Immoral actors (6 images): Featuring actors who do moral wrong. Facial expression either not shown, arrogant, or neutral expression. (One expression was hard to read).
 - d. Volunteers & Aid workers: (2 images). Featuring people engaged in voluntary activities (moving aid cargo) or rebuilding (fixing houses). Facial expression are smiling or neutral.

- 4) Symbolic meaning (9 images): Images that rather than depict a “mirror” of reality are meant to symbolize something other than specified in other categories. For example a razor blade symbolizing the horror of female genital mutilation, Collection of flags symbolizing the United Nation as a community of states, Avaaz activist viewed through a target scope signalling threat and intimidation tactics.
- 5) Other (1 image): Images that do not fall into above categories i.e. an image showing news paper articles on demonstrations for EU Net neutrality.

Image 5: Examples of images in Avaaz discourse



The role of these images are to present a certain reality of the situation at hand. Images are powerful tool in depicting what many perceive to be “reality” and inducing certain emotional responses, in particular a sense of right and wrong. Of course a pictures says more than a thousand words and is always open for multiple interpretations. However in this analysis my focus is analysing *who* are in the photographs and the moral implications they carry. For example certain categorical incumbencies are available at a glance and when followed by a caption they form together a text that conveys a lot to the viewer (Jayyusi, 2015).

These images suggest a definition or categorizations of people and problems. Through these images the Avaaz brings the issue of morality in context of global activism quite clearly out in the open. Most images display actors or certain actions and there is a clear message of what is morally good and what is not (demonstrations are, dead children are not). How is this moral framework achieved? Since Avaaz rhetoric is structured as a narrative with actors, individual stories of

suffering become compelling arguments for moral understanding of problems – hence the photographs tend to focus on the facial expression that show sombreness, sadness, distress, arrogance or joy. This assist in framing social injustice as something that happens because of moral wrongs rather than structural problems, political culture or historical social inequalities on a geo-political level. Instead, people become categorized as victims due to deeds of others and it gives an idea of a moral obligation of the reader to respond. For Avaaz this means signing petitions, donating and participating in demonstrations.

This is why most of the images centre on people and collective demonstration, the focus is on who people are (membership categorization at a glance) and what they do. Inevitably the master frame at work is a moral one because Avaaz discourse is aimed at uncovering injustice and suffering and convincing people of certain actions because such actions are just and morally good. Hence the largest group of actors are victims, in particular children (12 images) and women (10 images). Images of children and mothers and children suffering are emotionally compelling pictures and powerful tools in any rhetoric. In particular harrowing images of children who are dead, dying or suffering can carry great emotional impact, sometimes even becoming part of political discourse and re-alignment of foreign policy.

4.1.6 Avaaz as a portal of empowerment

In the early stages of studying Avaaz I was perplexed by how widely the movement had spread and by their rapid increase in numbers across multiple countries. The movement was started in 2007 but has, today, 10 years later, gathered over 44,5 million “members” across the globe. How is this possible in a world so cultural diverse and in one that is socially and politically divided?

I believe the part of the answer to this question lies within the persuasive strategies that Avaaz employs and in wider perspective of things how they do *epistemic governance* (Alasuutari, 2015; Alasuutari & Qadir, 2014). Furthermore, since world cultural values and norms are so widely spread and appeal to different actors across the globe the Avaaz discourse is effective in mobilizing these same actors.

One of the central themes in the Avaaz campaign emails is how people are powerful and how Avaaz can act as a hub for this power to bring about political change. Avaaz is also constantly engaged in defining itself as a *portal for empowerment* for the global masses. Here power is conceptualized in mainly two ways. First, as the power that is created when people come together in unity and second as the power of that unity to effect change by exerting political pressure by using

embarrassment and media attention. Much of Avaaz discourse is as focused to this line of argument as it is focused on specific campaign issues. Hence the rhetorical work of the movement is not only focused on arguing for specific policy issues. It also dedicates a substantial effort in convincing people that they have power which they can channel through Avaaz and that Avaaz can bring about actual change.

“Avaaz is on fire, doubling in the last year from 15 to 32 million people, and the pace is accelerating! It's thrilling to see our community explode, not just in size, but in depth of commitment, and determination to change the world together...

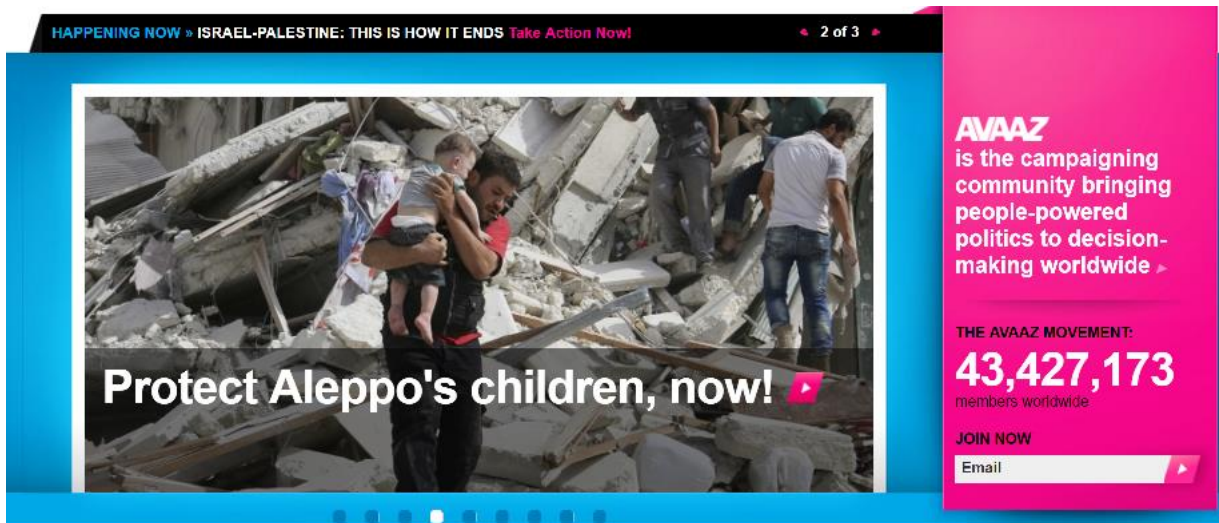
...Deep within ourselves, we are realising our own power to build the world we all dream of. And just in time. Our planet is threatened by multiple crises, and the outcome will determine whether our children face a darker world or one thriving in greater human harmony.”

(“We're on Fire”. 18.12.2013).

This is why numbers serve a significant purpose for the movement and how they frame their success and effectiveness. In the Avaaz language, higher numbers translate into greater power and thus numbers are always emphasized and brought to the foreground. The movement deploys eye-catching visual strategies in showcasing this power, both in frequent usages of images and in graphical layouts and design of their website.

For example when entering the main page of Avaaz there is a numeric counter that starts from 0 that then counts the current number of the Avaaz members. This visual counting then showcases the rising power of Avaaz. This even correlates to the rhetoric in use in emails where the movement is described as a power that accumulates and “rises”. Hence the counter is shown “live”, as the power of Avaaz constantly rises. It is an action in progress as more and more members worldwide are expected to join the movement, signalling a new era of global politics and global political emancipation.

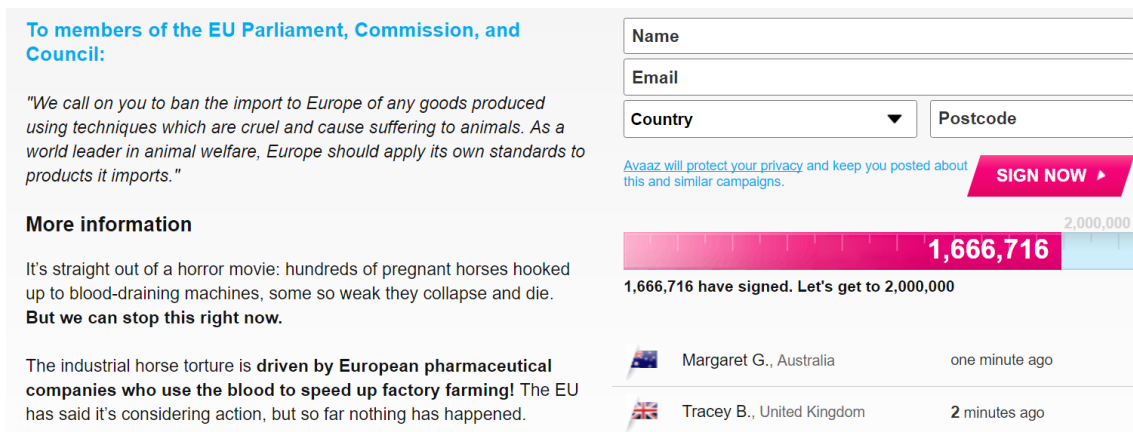
Image 6: Avaaz start homepage



(Avaaz “The World in Action”, 2016a)

The same visual strategy is then used in the collection of signatures in all of the campaigns. The visual emphasis is on how *number* of signatures rises, and thus the power of the campaign increases. Essentially this is one of the ways in how Avaaz visually frames “people’s power” (this is also done through images of protests) as a measurable and observable visual phenomena that then translates into political action and “real” power. That is, power to change or influence policy. Avaaz thus does not only offer a global identification. It offers also a sense of power that comes with that identity making it an appealing choice to individuals wanting to enforce a global standard of moral behaviour and governance. Furthermore, the accumulation of such people-power is seen as a justification for global activism, to stem against other polarized forces that do not represent people, but other forces.

Image 7: Signature counter



(Avaaz “The Secret To Factory Farming No One IS Talking About”, 2017b)

In addition words like; “change”, “one”, “will”, “together”, “make”, “better”, “planet”, “Let’s”, “work”, “need”, “hope”, “peace”, “good”, “stop” and “help” were the subsequent most commonly used words (used around 50 times or more).

This is remarkably similar to the Avaaz discourse where among the top concepts in use were also “we”, “our”, “world”, “all”, “people”, “hope”, “Avaaz”, “Let’s”, “together”, “help” and “change”.

Thus it can be said that the Avaaz movement and their members share a certain vernacular, the members talk echoes that of the movement. This is a language that is focused upon identity and agency of the speaker and the addressed. It is a vernacular that is neither neutral nor passive but laden with moral expectations and an inexplicit understanding of who “we”, “I” and “you” are as becomes clear when looking closer into the context of these terms.

The frequency of terms like “we” and “our” also demonstrate that members as the Avaaz movement itself, assumes a certain community of people. They identify with each other as a part of a particular group of people, which in their talk they most often refer to as “we” or “people”. Other terms used are world citizen, humans, humankind or mankind. Hence the members refer to “our” children, “our” earth, “our” world and “our” atmosphere. This is almost an exact replica of how Avaaz talks in their emails.

The moral dimension of this type of talk is reflected in the choice of group of words such as “need” “love” “Let’s”, “help”, “together”, “change”, “good” and “better”. In context of activism discourse and in relation to each other these are words that indicate what one *should* do, they have a moral connotation because they link to actions that carry implication of what is the right thing to do, or what needs to be done. A person who does what is *needed*, that *helps* others, that does things *together*, one who *loves*, and *changes* things for the *better*, is a force for *good*. These are words that are a part of a discourse which also defines immoral actors and actions. Thus a certain alignment has been formed, one that partitions the good and the bad by assigning categories and actions. This is how the members talk and how their rhetoric is decidedly moralistic in nature.

The popularity of the word “love” is also interesting. It is a concept that is a part of popular discourse and frequently used in many other forms of activism. It is a powerful word because of how entranced it is in popular culture (worldwide!) and how it can be flexibly used in many contexts. I suggest that in activism it is evoked to communicate solidarity and as a way to express benevolence (love is seen as a force of good, it has a moral connotation) and empathetic character of those who use the term. Implication here being that those who love are inherently good people.

The members also talk in the language of inclusion and solidarity as Avaaz does in their emails (by referring to “we”, “our”, “all”) but at the same time the role of the individual is accentuated as can be seen in the choice of “I”, and “You”. Hence, while the rhetoric emphasizes unity and a sense of community, the choice of words also demonstrates a strong sense of individualism. It is a text not aimed at anonymous masses but to the individual. Part explanation for this is the informal tone of the members. For example in daily life the uses of “I” and “you” are a normal feature of everyday talk. Here “you” can also be a way to address “everybody” i.e. other members of the movement. Yet, what are people doing when they use these pronouns? In most cases the commenters are representing themselves as individuals possessing their own perspectives and feelings on the movement and its goals. Such self-expression is inherently linked to self-identity and our sense of identity has to be conveyed to others in discourse and made sense of to ourselves as well. Commenting on the Avaaz forum is thus also a part of expressing self-identity – stating an opinion in this forum can be understood as an expression or a performance of who one is and who others are, what one believes in and what one considers right or wrong. As these comments from members are produced as monologues rather than interactive talk there is a silent moment, but felt as under the watchful gaze of others, which the members can use to convey an idea about what kind of individuals they are. Not only to other people but as I suspect, to themselves as well. Hence, inherently when talking about activism members are also stating who they are as individuals. Finally, unsurprisingly, the most common verbs are words that make sense in context of activism. These are words like “can”, “change” and “world”, together forming the sentence you “can change the world”. A common line of argument among the members and one of the primary ways in which global activism becomes justified. This will be discussed more in the next chapter.

4.2.1 Global identification and justifying global activism in scripts

How do Avaaz members justify global activism in their comments to the movement? A simple answer is that such justification rests on a moral framework and on references to identity and power. Global activism is seen as practice that gradually brings about a better world in terms of protection of the environment, peace and social justice for *all* people. Members of Avaaz refer to the world as a community and the planet or the earth as *a place*. They refer to those who inhabit it as people, humans, mankind, humankind or most often as simply “we”. These are generic terms that are difficult to refute or counter as they are based on the fundamental notion that is rooted in world culture, that all human beings are equal to one another. This is, for example, encapsulated by

the Universal Declaration of human rights where the first sentence begins with “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (The United Nations, 1948, art.1).

Interestingly enough the word “activism” does not exist in the member’s discourse. This does not mean they do not talk about activism or justification of it. Rather, they talk about it in different terms and concepts. The strong moral framework of Avaaz’ agenda frames the issues promoted by the movement as the normative way to view them. Avaaz members thus do not refer to themselves as being “activists”, but rather as people, humans or “we”. It is as if they are simply expressing and following what they believe are standard values and norms that are widely acknowledged and accepted. Perhaps this sense of normativity serves to distance members from viewing themselves as “activists” and offers a more non-confrontational labelling on what they are doing.

There are several common lines of argumentations that members use in their justification for Avaaz and its ideology (and indirectly global activism). Here the concept of a cultural scripts is useful to understand the repetitiveness and the normative aspects of such justifications. A cultural script is the “culturally shared expression, story or common line of argument or an expected unfolding of events that is deemed to be appropriate or expected in a particular socially defined context, and that provides a rationale or justification for a particular issue or course of action” (Vanclay & Enticott 2011, p. 256). I feel that the reference to scripts here is appropriate because these scripts are not confined to discourse of Avaaz members. I predict they are repeated by various other social and political activist across different civic movements, in particular global movements. For most part because they often rely cultural norms and values that can be found within world culture.

I identify six major common line of arguments or narrative scripts among the members. Together they form a particular type of a social imagery of the world as well:

1) Global activism is a moral action driven by goodwill and benevolence.

When expressing solidarity or support of the Avaaz agenda members utilize emotional sentiments such as “love” and “hope”. This is surprisingly often used as the only justification for activism. It might be that caring for others, a lack of self-centrism is seen as a prerequisite for a moral character that is needed to solve the world’s problems and in creating a better world. What kind of a person loves and hopes? A benevolent one, in contrast to confrontational of anti-globalist protests in the 90s and in the early 2000. If there is to be a revolution, it should be benign and contained within acceptable behaviours.

Example VIII

“Dear Avaaz members, I'd like to kindly ask you to think about the inner kindness, love and good for the whole world, It's the most important thing. Because we are the real force! So let's always keep it in mind and be as responsible as possible!” (E63 - Russia)³

- 2) *A belief in collective action that will change the world for the better.* Members claim that “we” can create a better world through collective action, together. Change is possible. When articulated further this means absence of war, peace and social justice. This is described as being morally just and good act. The common future of humankind is often brought up in this context.

Example IX

“Avaaz is part of the force of change with so many others to create a better world. The members of this force, young, old and everything in between are in fact the citizens of a better world and they will bring it into existence.” (E115 - Canada)

- 3) *Activism is a struggle of polarized forces.* Activism means fighting for something. When commenters articulate what they fight it is injustice. When they articulate whom they fight it is the elite, the political corrupt, the wealthy and the power holders. In this context their social position and power is then framed as immoral.

Example X

“We should fight for our right to live better, while it’s still possible to do it. We must stand for the free Internet without any ridiculous censorship, aimed to ban any sources which our government dislikes, for the clean air not contaminated with fossil fuels and waste incineration plants emissions, for the clean sea and green forests.” (R29 -Russia)

- 4) *There is power in unity.* Here the message is that normal people gain power when they organize themselves. Avaaz therefore is a movement with power because of this unity.

Example XI

“Our power is in our unity.” (R02 - Russia)

“We are strong together!” (G23 - Germany)

“Avaaz has harnessed the global power of hope and passion!” (E244 – United Kingdom)

³ E = Comment made originally in English. R = Comment made originally in Russian. G = Comment made originally in German. Name of members are coded in numbers.

- 5) *The world is a community of people.* There is a strong sense of collective identity in member's discourse who use terms such as "we", "people" "humans", "humanity", "humankind" in context of global activism. One belongs to this community for the sake of being human, and it is an identity that carries responsibility for the fate of the world. Incumbent within these categories are also human rights and rights to social justice.

Example XII

"There is only one colour that truly matters, that is red - the colour of the blood that runs through all the veins of humankind, irrespective of race, culture, beliefs, religion, country, nation, sexual orientation - too much of it is being wantonly spilled for differences that are only perceived, taught and conditioned into us. We have to rise above such needless bloodshed and evolve to a higher level of consciousness, with understanding kindness and tolerance but above all, both, compassion and wisdom.." (E138 – United Kingdom).

- 6) *Earth and the planet is an actual place that belongs to all.* The earth or the planet is described as a concrete and real place. It becomes a tangible object since the emphasis is on the needs of taking care of it or protecting it. It is also a place that belongs to all humankind, where we live and what we call home. Such statements are often made in tandem to references to environmentalism and protection of animals and nature.

Example XIII

"Brothers and Sisters, humankind and all living beings on the planet Earth were created by inexplicable, immense force of goodness. Let's together keep it safe and love this small paradise in the middle of the endless desert which was given to us only for a moment." (R59 - Russia)

- 7) *There exist a collective responsibility for the world and obligation to future generations.* Protecting the environment and making the world a better place is collective endeavour. Also, it is the inherent duty of the older generation not to damage the world for the following generations.

Example XIV

"We need to give our planet to the next generations in the state of comfortable environment". (R58 - Russia)

“It doesn't matter if you can help a lot or maybe just a little. Every little bit hurts and in the same way every effort for the better counts. Be part of the solution and not of the problem. But don't stop making the difference. Spread it out.” (E147 - Australia)

The way most of the commenters talk about global activism is rather as an abstract idea, almost as an ideology than in any concrete and practical fashion.

For most part comments are also not aimed at creating a discussion but rather to make statements in the form of monologues. In this sense, these are both interactions and performances, the text is relayed to others but a script is recited and is performed. What distinguishes this discourse from the Avaaz emails is the lack of practical approaches and descriptions of actions that constitute as global activism. Problems are described using general terms like war, peace, human rights and seldom go into specifics and although there are few exceptions it is not the general trend. Instead the idea of global activism and need for it are repeatedly brought up – it is a discourse that centres on the justification of the existence of Avaaz as a movement, the need for it and the inherent *goodness* of it. For example a recurrent theme in the comments is thanking Avaaz for their work and endorsing their agenda. Clearly many members ascribe to the moral authority of Avaaz, and view it as a virtuous actor (Boli, 2006) further legitimizing global activism. Inevitably in endorsing such ideology which rests upon a strong moral framing the role of the individual and identity are brought up so the members need also to make account of who they are and whom they are addressing. Hence most of the comments in the examples above bring forward categorizations of people which further implies ascribed actions, morality, judgement, explanations and further definitions. What it essentially shows is that within Avaaz, global activism is as much about the individual as it is about the world.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Global identification as constructed through inclusive language and through references to generic categories

The purpose of this thesis was to look at how identification and global consciousness was facilitated within the Avaaz movement and to see how it related to justification of global activism. In addition I sought out to understand how Avaaz members justified global activism. This was done by looking at the vernacular of the movement, presence of scripts and membership categorization devices. In explaining how Avaaz gains authority and influence I looked through the theoretical lens of epistemic governance and epistemic capital. I therefore analysed the rhetorical strategies employed that link together construction of social reality (i.e. through social imageries), identifications of actors and how issues of morality were manifested through categories of people.

A global identification is facilitated through frequent referencing to collective identity (among other things as a source of power) and by membership categorization. For example members are often addressed as Avaazers, citizen or “we”. These terms are meant to create collective identity that is both based on being a member of the movement, an activist and a citizen of the world. Activism was also framed as a moral endeavour of individuals with power and agency and through arguing the necessity and effectiveness of global collective action.

A content analysis of the language that Avaaz uses in their text shows that the movement uses an informal style of communicating through personal pronouns addressing the reader in an intimate and personal way. It is a language of inclusion that emphasizes both individuality and collectivism. Thus personal pronouns such as we, our and us are among the most common terms used in the Avaaz discourse. It is a language that also naturalizes the connection between member and movement and sets the stage of the interaction – as a relationship based on voluntary action and a group membership. This an example of what in membership categorization analysis is termed as recipient design, (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) an adaption in the interaction to suit the participants for a particular purpose. This way activism becomes a project of the individual rather than of a group. As argued within world society theory individualism is one of the core principles of world society (Boli & Thomas, 1997) and this is one of the ways it appears in global activism.

A comparison between movement and members shows that the terminology that both use are quite similar. Out of the list of top 25 most frequent terms used 12 of them are common to both

discourses. Hence among the most popular terms in both texts are: “we”, “our”, “world”, “all”, “people”, “hope”, “Avaaz”, “Let’s”, “together”, “help” and “change and “together”. That the terminology between the two correlate to this degree demonstrates that both movement and members talk about the same topics and that there is a circulation of terms. This implies that there is a similar understanding of the reality at hand, a shared imagery of the world. Thus, Avaaz and their members share a certain kind of understanding of the world and are in concordance, at least on a general level, on the definitions of global problems and their solutions.

5.2 Framing global activism as a moral project and justifying global activism

Moral framing of activism happens through several discursive strategies used by both members and the movement. This moral framing then serves as a justification for global activism. One discernible way of how this is done, is in how actors in the narrative of the emails become defined as moral exemplars, victims, immoral agents, neutral agents and agents holding authoritative knowledge. As Boli (2006) argued exemplars of good and evil are an integral part of how the global moral order is constructed. By defining the actors involved belonging to these categories the narrative that emerges is one infused with moral definition of acts (as good or bad). It is through this membership categorization device that several things get accomplished, - the reader makes judgements and inferences based on which groups actors belong to. When someone is a victim, one is obliged to help and sympathize, if someone is acting in an immoral way one condemns, if a neutral actor such as the state is making wrong choices it needs to be influenced by responsible citizens and so forth. Therefore, the reader is constantly evaluating, inferring, judging and reacting in a certain way. Avaaz also utilizes plethora of images, in particular of people. The centre of their web page is a frame of moving images and almost all of their emails contain an image. These images contribute to the shaping of the social reality that Avaaz describes in the narrative since photographs are often interpreted as a replica of reality. At the same time they also reinforce the categorization of people that Avaaz refers to by providing a face to victims and villains and moral exemplars. Hence victims are predictably usually women and children and villains or immoral actors, men (like Trump, or a man wearing an overall spraying chemicals on plants). The facial expression of people then assist the viewer to appropriately assign them to right categories. Consequently, categories “at a glance” like these carry with them powerful connotations and reiterate the purpose of the narrative (Jayyusi, 2015).

5.3 Justifications from members

Among members talk there were seven discernible narrative scripts that justify global activism.

1) *Global activism is a moral action driven by goodwill and benevolence.* 2) *A belief in collective action that will change the world for the better.* 3) *Activism is a struggle of polarized forces.* 4) *There is power in unity.* 5) *The world is a community of people.* 6) *Earth or the planet is an actual place that belongs to all.* 7) *There exist a collective responsibility for the world and obligation to future generations.*

The social imagery emerging from these scripts is that the world is a community residing in a common place, the earth or the planet and it is a place “we” can change through collective action. Hence, justification for activism rests on assumptions on universalism of morality, a sense of struggle against powerful immoral actors and the idea that the world can be changed through the power of unity. It is quite a similar discourse as Avaaz engages in with perhaps the main difference being that the members’ accounts tend to be more based on emotions (often passionate) and sentimentality that were tied in to the idea of being human (Avaaz emails are often emotionally expressive too, however). For example, members were prone to use words like “love” and “hope” and thus creating a sense of solidarity and benevolence in their accounts. At times, it also seemed to emphasize that this type of activism is neither aggressive or threatening to society at large.

5.4 Identifications as the central justification for global activism

What is surprising about the overall findings, notably when analysing the members’ comments, is that this is a discourse that is not focused upon particulars of global activism, such as rights of particular groups, specific conflicts or a fight against particular interest groups. Rather it is a text that is abstract in its approach to global activism, fixated on *the idea of it* and its justifications and formulated on the basis of identification. Although identification was anticipated to play an important role in justifying global activism, the extent and centrality to which both Avaaz and their members emphasize it was unexpected. Hence, in general the discourse can be described as being decidedly inward looking, towards identity of the activist, the movement and other actors, with emphasis on spatiality, morality of actions and the ties to a community. In concise terms, it is a definition of the world and the role people have in it.

Interestingly enough a global identification does not contradict a national identity, nation states are flagged repeatedly in Avaaz discourse, usually through having to state “your” country when signing petitions and commenting and through visual text of flags and maps. Essentially, the legitimacy of Avaaz as a truly global movement rests of identifying members as being from various countries in the world. Instead, Avaaz works more at changing our conception of the nation state as being a sovereign actor, in full ownership of their own laws, traditions and sense of morality. Instead, Avaaz aims to reinforce a global morality that is built on ideas stemming from world culture on human rights, social justice, humane treatment of animals and environmentalism. In face of personal narratives and images, the counter argument of cultural relativism is non-existent, in part due to the idea of “us” being at the core the same. The movement and members argue as one on this point. As one Avaaz member explains - this is why there is only one colour that truly matters, *“that is red - the colour of the blood that runs through all the veins of humankind, irrespective of race, culture, beliefs, religion, country, nation, [and]sexual orientation.”* (E138).

It is an idea entails a social justice for all and Avaaz offers it as an obtainable goal through unity in action and voice.

5.5 Reflections on the drawback of the study and speculations on further research

In my focus on discovering how Avaaz and their members constructs reality and identity the question of empowerment and participatory democracy, which movement and members sincerely believe they are doing, was largely overlooked. This is not because it is not an important aspect of Avaaz but rather my theoretical focus was elsewhere. In light of this, a suggestion for further research would be to look into links between global public sphere, participatory democracy and a sense of empowerment that movement and members lay claim to.

Furthermore, a topic for further research could be to look into the relation between identification and identity. In this thesis the two are often used interchangeably. Identity is of course is a complex subject of vast depths, while identification is easier to handle, a more surface like concept which is easy to demonstrate in text. At times, I found myself wondering about the distinctions between the two and the implications it can have on research on the formation of a global identity. For example, my thesis does not provide an in-depth account on how or if activist incorporate global identity in their self-concept. How aware are people of global identity and its political implication for example? Following this train of thought, in expanding on how world cultural values and norms and identity scripts are enacted it would be interesting to see if global identification and consciousness

are linked to political behaviour or attitudes. Does it relate to voting behaviour, cosmopolitanism, support of multiculturalism or attitude towards “moralistic” global organizations like the UN?

My data also consisted of people who have through the act of associating with Avaaz, a certain disposition towards the world. A different group might have justified global activism using different arguments, or been more critical of it. Finally, due to the diversity and scope of my data my analysis of each data set was rather one-dimensional. Due to the limitation of the scope of this study a concentration on only one data set would have been more optional. However, the triangulation of data confirmed the consistency of my results and showed for example the correlation of scripts and imageries in use between movement and members.

6. Findings and Discussion

In this chapter I will present my findings in a theoretical context and explain the link between discursive practices to wider social practices thus explaining the dynamic effect or impact of discourses on society. I argue that social movement theories do not sufficiently explain emergence of new global social movement like Avaaz and I elaborate how my findings relate to epistemic governance and epistemic capital. Through these concepts I explain how Avaaz amasses influence and why it has been successful globally in persuading individuals of the legitimacy of the movement. Finally, I explicate on how members and movement alike justify global activism.

6.1 Why social movement theories are not adequate explanation for global activism

From the perspective of different social movement theories Avaaz comes into being due to available resources, political opportunities or due to rational choice. Therefore, social movements arise due to availability of financial or material resources, or a particular political agenda arises within society (i.e. anti-corruption protest) or because there is a problem that is not being adequately addressed by existing institution, such as climate change.

Turner (2013) for example links new social movements to the emergence of the Internet and new web technologies which facilitate inexpensive rapid expansion and popularity of radical movements which otherwise would not have a forum. It is indeed difficult to vision a movement like Avaaz being successful without the medium of the Internet. Communication is essential to formation of any type of group. Anderson (2006) for example noted how the rise of print capitalism facilitated

communication between different groups which then led to the formations of the first European nation states. However, technology alone does not drive ideas and it does not explain motivation behind actions or adherence to any cause or ideology.

What these approaches have in common is that they largely ignore links between culture and organizations. Hence, for example they do not account for how social movements go about convincing others of the merit of their cause and or the importance of rhetoric and identities of both movement and activist. New social movement theories however have focused on the role of identity formation, culture and values attached to activism in explanation of rise and rapid expansion of new “types” of social movements like Avaaz (Wapner, 1996).

Della porta (2005) pointed out how globalization influenced the development of the new social movements changing both the identity of the movement and activists. In her research she noted that activists had developed *tolerant identities*, meaning they were willing to support causes of other groups and consolidate their efforts for common goals (Ibid.).

While new social movement theory brings forward issues of culture and identity it does not elaborate on how or why such culture and values have come into play on the international scene.

Neo-institutionalism and world society theory (a theoretical branch of neo-institutionalism) however are approaches that elaborate on the worldwide spread of culture and values.

Organizations are understood as main carriers of world culture, embodying some of its core values and the spread of world culture is a process that has been ongoing for decades. Thus social movement rhetoric is globally appealing as they rest on already ingrained values in world society such as universalism, individualism, rational voluntaristic authority (this refers to organizations granting themselves an authoritative status), human purposes of rationalizing progress, and world citizenship (Boli & Thomas, 1997). As the analysis shows, morality in the Avaaz discourse is assumed to be universal as its purpose is a common good for all humanity. The concept of cultural relativism does not exist in the Avaaz discourse and even when issues of cultural differences came up it was usually framed as a culture that was unhealthy or unacceptable. Individualism is also a very central idea within the text as emphasis on email recipients were first and foremost addressed as individuals with agency. This is why terms like “Yes, I’ll” are so common in the Avaaz discourse, it both appeals to and constructs personal agency. As a result, both Avaaz and members understand participation in global activism as being essentially a question of personal commitment and choice.

In neo-institutionalism actions of actors are in large part seen as constituted by scripts and even identity itself is formed by collective-level scripting that are provided by institutions (Meyer,1998).

Organizations are therefore crucial in shaping and guiding human societies and culture by circulating and reinforcing scripts, meanings and moral principles. When looking at the discourses of both the Avaaz movement and its members, it becomes evident that they mirror each other to a large extent. This is reflected in the choice of terms which demonstrate that vernacular of the movement is the vernacular of the members. Also the references to collective identities were similar, although members were more prone to refer to humanity and humankind, while Avaaz utilized terms such as “Avaazers” and “Citizens”. An analysis of the members’ talk also demonstrated that they used scripts that fitted quite well within the overall Avaaz discourse and the social imagery that Avaaz draws upon.

6.2 Epistemic governance – governing through persuasion

Avaaz engages in epistemic governance when relating their arguments to their members. They do this by appealing to the ontology of the environment, identification and values and norms.

Both movement and members draw on a specific imagery of the world that describes a global reality at hand. These imageries then contribute to the ontology of the environment, locating activism in a certain context. Alasuutari and Qadir (2016) identified three basic imageries that political actors draw upon in discourse of social change 1) Progress and functional requirement 2) Society as hierarchy and 3) World as competing blocs.

If we think of the Avaaz rhetoric in the terms of a social imagery, a mental image of the world with defined actors with expected behaviours then that imagery is a world as a *place* where *humanity* abides which belongs to all and can be changed *to the better* through social justice and environmentalism. Avaaz does however make references to the basic imageries but the actors involved and the relationship between them are slightly different (cf. Alasuutari & Qadir, 2016). For example, among Avaaz and their members the world is seen as community that has to and can change for the better. This progression is seen as linear, meaning things get better, gradually. The content of this change however is not described in concrete terms of modernization but rather it’s a moral development where goals are social justice and environmentalism rather than modernization per se. This is not to say modernization is seen as irrelevant but rather that the emphasis is on the moral dimension of the world’s development in terms of equality and human/animal rights and “environmental” justice.

Avaaz also conveys an image of society as a hierarchy, as a layer of the local, national and global. However it presents itself as an alternative to this hierarchy since people on the bottom of this hierarchy are not adequately represented. In this sense, the movement Avaaz is meant to challenge

this social order on all levels through community building (hence community can be local, national and global) and counter it as per agenda of grass-root organizations.

Avaaz and their members also view the world as place of competing forces, *however not between nations*. Instead the imagery is focused on powerful actors, like industries and corporations that have power through financial resources and often act in self-interest, ignoring the needs or rights of the community (be that local or global community). Hence it is people versus industry which accentuates the need for a global unity in order to counter powerful actors with equally powerful voice of the people. Nations or governments are usually depicted as neutral agents that however can be influenced both in negative and positive way.

Identification is accomplished through inclusive language (we, our, us) and several generic concepts which everybody by default can be belong to such as citizen, human, people, Avaazer. This identification is then tied to a spatial identity in a similar way national identities are constructed, to the planet or the earth. Evaluations of good and bad acts are then constantly brought up in the Avaaz discourse through various campaigns where the moral order is repeatedly asserted. This epistemic governance works in tandem with social imageries because the rhetoric of Avaaz is one that rest on the principles of world cultural values.

6.3 Epistemic Capital – empowerment through rhetorical means

How does a movement like Avaaz become influential and powerful? The concept of epistemic capital is useful to understand this process. Avaaz uses all four modes of authority, ontological, moral authority, charisma and to some extent capacity based authority (Alasuutari, 2016). Through the narratives in their emails the movement depicts the reality at hand and the actors and categories of people involved. Scientists for example are used as authoritative voice in explaining the direness of climate change, while moral and immoral actors set the moral alignment. Moral authority is achieved when Avaaz frames itself and Avaazers as a “virtuous” actors that serve as a moral exemplar for others. The movement position itself also as a voice for “the people”. The line between “we” as a world community, “we” as members of Avaaz and “we” as Avaaz staff are blurred. This allows Avaaz to adopt a voice for the world and in effect lay claim to a representative role and thus Avaaz grants itself and its members moral authority for global action.

In particular, it is a voice for those who suffer. This role is accentuated by images of vulnerable groups (usually women and children) which Avaaz seeks to represent in various campaigns. The

acceptance of the moral role of Avaaz can also be seen in how members continuously *thank* and endorse the movement in the comment section. Avaaz also actively sets itself the task of accumulating epistemic capital. It makes a display of rising membership of the organization as a animation, that shows a counter where Avaaz members are counted from 0 to 44 million people. It is a metaphor for rising power. Displaying images of mass protests (majority of images are of protests) in emails also conveys an image of the movement as massive and powerful and as an authentic representative of the world's people. Flags and maps are also utilized in graphics on their webpage to emphasize the truly "global" character of the movement, affirming the legitimacy of its representative role.

In addition, Avaaz builds on being charismatic. It has created a powerful brand and is active in public relations (for example appearing many times in international media such as CNN and BBC) and in many social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and MySpace. It runs an appealing agenda utilizing a language that is engaging, inclusive and relational.

Finally, Avaaz has capacity based authority through strategies of demonstrating, sending signatures in the millions, casting attention on certain issues in the media and through naming and shaming strategies.

6.4 From tolerant identities to identification as a justification

Della porta's earlier studies on the identity of activists by doing interviews revealed that identity was significant factor in how different social movement managed to organize and maintain collective efforts in a unified front. This is why activist, she explains, developed tolerant identities (della Porta, 2005). Avaaz however goes much further than encouraging mere tolerant identities and overtly links global identification *as a justification* for global activism. At times it seems as the process of formulating identification has even been somewhat reversed. Identification within Avaaz is not necessarily formed due to common issues but rather that issues are also pursued due to a common identification, that of being human or a citizen of the world. It is through this understanding that causes are then framed as being relevant to all.

Hence the Avaaz movement pursues numerous campaigns on different topics that range from animal rights to climate change marches. It is as if they were in a role of a moral watchdog bringing attention to moral wrongdoings and injustice worldwide. This might explain the heavy emphasis the Avaaz movement places on identification of itself and others in the form of the images that they use and the specific properties visible in their rhetoric (i.e. the extravagant use of

pronouns). Essentially what they try to reinforce and enforce are particular moral agendas, and morality and identity are intrinsically linked in this process.

Avaaz campaigns can also be understood as a certain kind of global collective performance of morality, as members *act* to condemn them through signatures and by casting issues in the global public sphere through global media. It is the *performance* of morality that is *as significant* and meaningful as the particular issues they movement campaigns for. Irrelevant if Avaaz is successful or not in changing actual practices the imagery of the world as a community that can and should be changed to the better circulates. I suggest that the impact and influence of discursive movements like Avaaz might rather lie in the discourses, the social imageries and scripts that they circulate and reinforce which people then get to perform through certain symbolic actions like clicking a link or demonstrating.

Also, as della Porta observed new social movements are avenues for “immediate gratifying action” (della Porta, 2005, p. 190). Avaaz facilitates immediate action in the form of signing signatures and then frames such an action as the process of changing the world. A symbolic action of signing a petition can then be gratifying, in particular in a world that seems to lack moral cohesiveness, social justice and humanism.

Furthermore, the notion that people should and can change the world can be an idea that in itself empowers individuals and encourages activism. From this perspective a digital social movement that operates to large extent through social media and the Internet could also be described as a *discursive movement* due to the focus on the movement’s rhetoric and narratives. Perhaps this is the next stage in the development of new social movements, an even stronger emphasis on collective identification and global political agenda with the goal of achieving influence and power through mass appeal through establishing epistemic capital.

Essentially, Avaaz produces and circulates utopian texts - which are texts that “seek to construct a world that is otherwise than the present and to create audience identification with this world that is otherwise” (Biesecker-Mast, 1996,p 101). However, what Avaaz emphasizes is that this is a realistic goal and provides members with definitions and instructions on how to accomplish it. These actions are then interpreted as being meaningful in the process of changing the world. This way identification can also be tied to an action, as identity is not only interpreted as something that one *is*, but something that one does as well. This relates to the simple message at the very heart of the Avaaz rhetoric tying together individualism, morality and global activism. The message being that world is what we make it to be – and understanding this, is empowerment.

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