

# Digitally Mobilizing the Global Solidary



A study of framing, global solidarity and online media in the context of *Adopt a Revolution*



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# Digital Framing: Mobilizing the Global Solidary

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## Preface

In many cases the subject of a thesis research is picked first, after which a research internship is searched for within the reach of the subject. With me it went the other way around. I was first offered an internship position at IKV Pax Christi in Utrecht on the theme of online political activism and consequently decided to follow this path for my thesis as well. The original set-up consisted of organizing an online demonstration in support of an anti-mining manifestation in Cajamarca, Colombia organized by local youths. This online demonstration would function as an experiment of digital activism and this would be the topic of my thesis. Unfortunately, after the first month of my internship this plan had to change due to a combination of a postponement of the demonstration in Colombia and internal reasons of IKV Pax Christi. Together with my internship supervisor, Sofie Smeets, we decided to adjust my work at IKV Pax Christi and do an evaluative study of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign. This is of course less exciting than experimenting with new forms of activism, but it was the best option at the time. I am nevertheless proud of the result of my internship and master research: this thesis.

However, I wouldn't have been able to write what I have written without the helpful and very constructive (sometimes confronting...) suggestions, comments and feedback of my thesis supervisor, Mathijs van Leeuwen. He made me realize that getting high grades for essays is something different from writing a master thesis. I also want to express my gratitude towards Marijke and Sofie Smeets who together made it possible for me to do my research internship at IKV Pax Christi. In addition, I want to thank Sofie Smeets for making me feel welcome in Utrecht, being very flexible after the turn of events with the online demonstration and for making it possible to investigate *Adopt a Revolution*.

I have received much support from my friends and family during the times during the difficult moments with writing or when I got stuck. I want to thank my father Paul, mother Hilde, Lars, Peter, Elise and Eskander on which I can always build and who have always supported me with all my decisions. I specially want to thank my father for keeping me healthy with unimaginably big courgettes and tasty sprouts from his garden and my little brother Eskander who always makes me realize the important things in life. I also want to thank Thijs for the countless cups of coffee joined during lunch breaks which made me going for the rest of a working day; Elwin, Tarja and Suus for the fun trip to York and Nick and Thijs for the 'old-times-sake' in

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Lastly, I especially want to thank Sofie who has kept on listening to me complaining about this thesis and believing in my scientific skills even more than I did.

Thank you all,

Jelle Eshuis

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## Executive Summary

One of the sectors influenced by processes of globalization and the internet revolution is political activism. In this master thesis research these defined developments in the field of political activism are explored in light of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign of IKV Pax Christi. The aim of this research is to acquire knowledge about the influence of practices of framing on processes of mobilization within contemporary global political activism. To investigate this, I explore how global social movements frame societal issues to influence feelings of global solidarity of their target audience. Attention is also given to the use of online media for this purpose.

These theoretical questions are investigated in light of the case of *Adopt a Revolution*. The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is aimed at supporting Syrian peace activists, who organized themselves in Local Civil Comities (LCCs), in the Syrian revolution. Dutch citizens can support these LCCs through signing an online petition or donating money to any of the participating LCCs via the *Adopt a Revolution* website.

The central research question, *what is the influence of framing, using online media, on global solidarity within contemporary global political activism?*, is answered through focusing on three central concepts: framing, global solidarity and online media. First of all, framing is the construction and representation of a problem or issue towards a target audience. In the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign, the Syrian revolution is represented, or framed, in light of ‘western’ values of freedom, (democratic) reform and human dignity in order to align the issue with the Dutch target audience and mobilizing as many Dutch citizens as possible to join with *Adopt a Revolution*. Furthermore, IKV Pax Christi represents the Syrian revolution as based on a peaceful and non-violent foundation in contrast to the violent story of the mainstream Dutch media. Thereby IKV Pax Christi balances between the positions of supporting the Syrian opposition and being a neutral peace mediator. Through emphasizing that peaceful activism in Syria is occurring they try to keep the support of both donors, public and (international) partners.

Secondly, the *Adopt a Revolution* frame plays into the perception of global solidarity of the Dutch target audience. Global solidarity is a form of solidarity without a victim-savior dichotomy which is not centered on feelings of solidarity with ‘familiar’ people like ones

(cultural) relatives, co-workers or fellow nationals, but with people with whom no apparent direct relation exists. The *Adopt a Revolution* frame mobilizes people who already perceive themselves solidary on a global scale. The frame does not create global solidarity; it is the perception of global solidarity of the participants that the frame plays into and thereby triggers those people who want to do something to make the world more peaceful. Global solidarity appears to be central in the motivations to join *Adopt a Revolution*.

Thirdly, the central platforms of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign are online media. Online media have been used for spreading and sharing information, for promotion purposes and to execute activities. These online activities have resulted in actual contributions to the LCCs in the form of the donation of money. The offline impact of this online act consists of the activities that the LCCs conduct in Syria. However, the signing of the online petition is not translated into actual offline outcomes, because the online petition is not translated into actual offline activism. Organizing online activism in the case of *Adopt a Revolution* has both resulted in activism and ‘slacktivism’ when considering the actual offline outcomes in Syria.

To strengthen the use of online media in campaigns such as the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign, I recommend that the actual goal of a campaign needs to be defined clearly. In the case of *Adopt a Revolution*, the ultimate goal of the campaign seems to be helping the LCCs in Syria. In that case, I would recommend to either doing something useful with the online petition or stop with the online petition at all. If the most important goal of *Adopt a Revolution* is to promote IKV Pax Christi as a social movement, then it would make sense that IKV Pax Christi is only using the online petition to commit Dutch civilians to the movement. In order to make useful recommendations on the use of online media, the exploration of these questions are necessary. Furthermore, the framing of global solidarity in the campaign needs to be in line with the target group of the campaign. In order to mobilize a wider Dutch public, IKV Pax Christi needs to play into those aspects of the Syrian revolution that do not only trigger people who already have affinity with the issue.

Further research is needed to investigate the truth of the assumption that global solidarity, in contrast to local solidarity, is not based on (perceived) shared direct grievances, but grounded in more fundamental notions of norms and values perceived to be universal.

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## 1. Political Activism in a New Age

The extensive technological advances of the last decades in the fields of communication and transportation have led to new connections between people. It has become possible to fly to the most desolate corners of our planet and to communicate with people from all nationalities. This trend is visible in the accelerating development of online social media, like facebook or twitter. These online platforms are gaining tremendously in popularity. The encounters facilitated by these media have changed our conception of the world, which has become more encompassing. People are becoming more aware of happenings on the other side of the world and as a consequence become more engaged with others across the globe.

Based on these new experiences, existing ideological and social ties are revised. The implications of these new ideas can be seen in many sectors of our daily life. Think for example about conceptions of global citizenship or cosmopolitanism which in the process create new conceptions of a global identity. But an opposite movement is apparent too. New encounters bring about questions about the self, which for some raises insecurity about one's 'known' world, deconstructing the self. Some react by grasping back to national identity, whereas others react by putting oneself above social ties (Norris 2005, 23).

One of the sectors influenced by these 'global' developments is political activism. Political activism transcends local, regional and national levels. Take for example the Dutch social movement IKV Pax Christi, who supports local peace programs in Syria, the Sudans and the Democratic Republic of Congo or Amnesty International pushing the agenda of human rights all around the globe. Furthermore, the growing use of online media is affecting the way people practice political activism. Although most users of these new cyberspaces apply them for recreational activities, online media are increasingly used for political and social ends as well (Shirky 2011, 32). Extensive political use of online social media is visible in the revolutions of the so-called Arabic Spring. For example, online social media have been central to the preparation of the Egyptian uprising in January 2011 (Al-Ani et al. 2012; Iskander 2011). Through the use of blogs, stories of the atrocities committed by the Egyptian government were spread among the population and the social media site 'facebook' was used to mobilize people for demonstrations at the Tahrir square in Cairo.

Another example of the political use of online social media is the successful media campaign 'Kony2012'<sup>1</sup>. A short movie on YouTube was spread through facebook and twitter,

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.kony2012.com/> (reviewed on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

in which the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony is presented as the ultimate evil. The movie reached millions of people around the world and thousands took to the streets on the night of April 20<sup>th</sup> 2012. A third illustration is the online social movement AVAAZ<sup>2</sup>. Through the use of social media, AVAAZ mobilizes civilians, gains popular support and holds numerous online petitions in order to change legislation worldwide concerning environmental issues or human rights violations.

Both increased globalism and the use of online media can be found in contemporary political activism. Within this context, the issue that is central in this thesis is how a global social movement can mobilize people for contemporary political campaigns. The focus thereby firstly lies on how a social movement can present a certain political issue. The process of making (strategic) choices about how to present a certain political issue is also known as ‘framing’ (Benford and Snow 2000). These practices of framing are then investigated in light of its effect on the solidarity of participants in a campaign. The solidarity investigated here is global solidarity. Lastly, I wonder how online media can be used in such global political campaigns. In this master thesis research these issues are explored through investigating the IKV Pax Christi campaign *Adopt a Revolution*. Before elaborating further on these issues attention is given to *Adopt a Revolution*.

## **1.1 Adopt a Revolution**

The IKV Pax Christi campaign *Adopt a Revolution* originates from the German version of *Adopt a Revolution*. In 2011 German and Syrian activists launched the *Adopt a Revolution* project after peaceful uprisings in Syria were violently put down by the Assad-regime. The project’s aim is to financially and mentally support Syrian Local Civil Committees, or LCCs, that organize peaceful protest activities. International solidarity based on peaceful support is strived for in order to lessen chances of military escalation.

The German-Syrian project has taken form in a website named ‘[www.adoptarevolution.org](http://www.adoptarevolution.org)’. On this website, people can donate funds to a specific LCC, sign an online petition to declare ones solidarity with the LCC and find information regarding the situation in Syria. The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign became quite successful in Germany and is currently supporting twenty-nine Syrian LCCs on a monthly basis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.avaaz.org> (reviewed on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see: [www.adoptarevolution.org](http://www.adoptarevolution.org) (reviewed on 25th September 2012)

Based on this success, IKV Pax Christi launched a Dutch *Adopt a Revolution* campaign on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2012. The former head of the *Adopt a Revolution* team, Mayke<sup>4</sup>, explained that when members of IKV Pax Christi noticed the German success, they became very enthusiastic about the concept. This ultimately led to the decision to join the project and to set up a Dutch version of *Adopt a Revolution*. The Dutch version is based on the original German project, but modified in several ways. IKV Pax Christi has taken over the layout of the site, the contacts and certain background information. The goals of the German campaign have been copied as well. The goal of the campaigns is to gain support for the LCCs. The biggest difference between the German and Dutch version is that the former supports twenty-nine LCCs, while the latter only supports four. This decision was made due to the estimation that probably no more than 10.000 euro would be raised, which can only support four LCCs for three months.

Initially the campaign would be run for a period of three months. However, after five months of campaigning donations were still dripping in, so IKV Pax Christi decided to extend the campaign for another period. At the time of writing the campaign is still up and running, supporting the four LCCs in Syria financially.

## 1.2 Relevance

Investigating the influence of framing on global solidarity in contemporary political activism is relevant in several ways. In the first place, this research might be helpful for any social movements interested in managing global political activism. As Goodwin and Jasper (2003, 4) point out that when someone is politically interested in changing society, one can learn from techniques/tricks of informing, mobilizing, organizing and influencing media used by social movements. The analysis of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign of IKV Pax Christi is such an example which sheds new light on mobilization, and particularly on the use of framing and the effect on global solidarity. My research is therefore relevant for any political actor, be it an individual, non-governmental organization, social movement or governmental body, interested in managing global political activism.

More concretely, this research is relevant for IKV Pax Christi. I have conducted the research on the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign as a research intern of IKV Pax Christi. As is explained above, IKV Pax Christi has decided to extend the campaign for another period. To

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Mayke on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2012. In chapter 2 more information on the ‘adopt-team’ and its members can be found.

strengthen their campaign, they have asked me to evaluate the campaign and to incorporate their campaign in my research about political activism, global solidarity and online media. They especially want to know what the participants of *Adopt a Revolution* think of the campaign, the website, the accessible information found on the website and the effects of this on the participant's perception of the revolution in Syria.

Interestingly, the first results of a quick analysis of the website have already been fruitful. Based on a first visit to the website of *Adopt a Revolution*, I have given several recommendations for the website from the position of a campaign participant. At the end of my research internship, and the start of writing this thesis, several changes have been made on the website, such as an expansion of IKV Pax Christi's explanation of the choice to support peaceful LCCs. In chapter three I will elaborate more on this matter. This master thesis research is thus very relevant for IKV Pax Christi and for any other social or civic organizations and movements organizing similar campaigns.

Next to societal relevance, this research is also relevant from a scientific point of view. As mentioned above, the process of globalization and the rise of online media have a certain impact on contemporary global political activism. Multiple scientific corners are explored and investigated in light of *Adopt a Revolution*.

In the first place, this thesis is scientifically relevant from the perspective of mobilization theory. Social movement's strategies of mobilization can be studied from several angles. Social movements are studied by focussing on the effect of resources necessary for mobilization or from the scope of the effects of political processes on mobilization. Others study social movements from the perspective of movement identity or by focussing on the impact of place and space on mobilization strategies (Benford and Snow 2000; Leach and Scoones 2005, 10-13; Oberschall 2000). In this research, strategies of mobilization are studied from a fifth perspective, namely framing. The study of mobilization through the scope of framing practises is not new. However, the relevance of this research in this field of study lies in combining the concept of framing with global solidarity. Strategies of framing in mobilization theory have been studied based on the viewpoint of activists with direct grievances (Leach and Scoones 2005), but not from the perspective of mobilizing people who are not directly involved in a certain issue as is the case with the Dutch participants of *Adopt a Revolution*.

The focus on global solidarity is the second way in which this research is scientifically relevant. In the field of solidarity theory the classical theories of social solidarity are mainly

focused on dichotomies of rational versus emotional solidarity and Durkheim's distinction between mechanical (based on equality) and organic (based on difference) solidarity (Crow 2002, 11-28). In this tradition, solidarity is seen as existing within a community and based on social relations or connections. Feeling solidary with 'unknown' people with which no apparent social relation exist is a rather new phenomenon. Olesen (2004) names a similar form of solidarity 'global solidarity' and puts it in contrast to material solidarity and rights solidarity. However, as will become visible in this research, in the case of *Adopt a Revolution* the form of solidarity central in the frame of IKV Pax Christi is slightly different from the different forms of solidarity that Olesen (2004) distinguishes. This research is relevant for it enriches the debate around global solidarity.

### **1.3 Research Goal and Questions**

The aim of this research is to acquire knowledge about the influence of practices of framing on processes of mobilization within contemporary global political activism. To investigate this, I explore how global social movements frame (or present) societal issues to influence feelings of global solidarity of their target audience. Thereby, attention is given to the use of online media for this purpose. This theory-oriented part of the research is focused on theory development, in which indicated problems in the scientific literature are explored.

Based on the acquired theoretical knowledge, several recommendations are given for mobilizing people for political activities in the global sphere, partly through using online media. This is based on the combination of the above mentioned literature study and a case study of the campaign '*Adopt a Revolution*' set up by IKV-Pax Christi. As a research-intern of IKV-Pax Christi, I had direct access to all the data surrounding this fundraising campaign. The practices and knowledge derived from an evaluation of this case study are compared with the scientific theories identified in the first part of the research. Hence this research consists of an interrelated theory oriented- and practice-oriented part (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2010, 31-63).

From this research goal follows the central research question:

- *What is the influence of framing, using online media, on global solidarity within contemporary global political activism?*

To answer this question it is necessary to investigate how global solidarity works and in what way it is related to strategies of framing societal issues. Secondly, I will investigate the link

with online media by investigating the use of online media on both the strategies of framing and global solidarity. The following two sub questions arise from these theory-oriented issues:

- *How do a social movement's framing of a particular societal issue and global solidarity with that issue influence each other?*
- *How can online media be used for a social movement's framing of a particular societal issue to influence global solidarity with that issue?*

The focus here will be on how social movements frame societal issues to mobilize people, whereby *Adopt a Revolution* is the central case study. The answers of these sub questions put together will lead to a full picture of the issue at hand to a final answer on the central research question. Based on these results, several recommendations for social movements, especially IKV Pax Christi, are formulated to mobilize people for political activities in the global sphere.

#### **1.4 Structure**

This thesis is structured in the same chronological order as the sub questions. Before starting with the sub questions attention will be given to the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. In this chapter the conceptual framework will be presented in which attention is given to three central concepts of this thesis: framing, global solidarity and online media. Subsequently, the research methods and methodology will be described in chapter 3. In chapter 4, the frame of *Adopt a Revolution* itself is described and analyzed. Furthermore, I will elaborate on the relation with global solidarity. Next, the attention will change in chapter 5 to the use of online media in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign and a discussion of the debate around 'slacktivism'. In chapter 6, conclusions are discussed, an answer is formulated to the central research question and several recommendations are presented.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this section we will dive into the scientific literature to delineate ‘the state of the art’ in the field of theories around political activism, solidarity, online media and framing. These central concepts are derived from the central research question: *what is the influence of framing, using online media, on global solidarity within contemporary global political activism?* In order to find answers to the central research question it is necessary to elaborate on these significant concepts underlying the central research question. On the basis of these theories, the case of *Adopt a Revolution* will be analyzed in the following chapters.

In this chapter I will first elaborate on global political activism, after which I will give attention to the three central concepts separately. In the last part, I will investigate the links between the concepts. Before identifying these three concepts and exploring the underlying links, the central research question will be positioned within the existing scientific field of political activism. In what way has political activism been studied? And can contemporary political activism be studied through existing theoretical insights or are we dealing with a new kind of political activism?

### 2.1 Global Political Activism

Political activism is a term for a wide range of different forms of activities with a political goal. These can include strikes, demonstrations, protests and more conventional activities like voting or writing letters to parliament (Norris 2002, 4). In most cases, political activism is executed by a group of people, but this is not the rule. Furthermore, one can distinguish between a single action, namely a political/social protest, and a more sustainable form of activism, namely a social movement. Goodwin and James (2003, 3) clearly define both forms of political activism. Whereas political/social ‘protest’ concerns an “*act of challenging, resisting, or making demands upon authorities, powerholders, and/or cultural beliefs and practices by some individual or group*”, a social movement refers to “*a collective, organized, sustained, and non-institutional challenge to authorities, powerholders, or cultural beliefs and practices*” (Goodwin and James, 2003, 3).

IKV Pax Christi is an organization that challenges governments or other political actors who commit social atrocities. IKV Pax Christi organizes global political activities like the Adopt a Revolution campaign. In this campaign they challenge the powerholders in the violent Syrian conflict by supporting Syrian peace activists. Based on the above definition of a social

movement, IKV Pax Christi is partly a social movement, but they also support other social movements struggling for similar issues. The fact that IKV Pax Christi is mainly active in the global sphere is no obstacle for using contemporary theories of social movements. The above definition of a social movement describes no boundary of space for the activities of social movements. These theories will be used to partly define the central concepts of this research.

## **2.2 Framing a Problem: Mobilizing People**

Much and more has been written about social movements (Diani 2000; Goodwin and Jasper 2003; Leach and Scoones 2005; McAdam et al. 1996; McAdam et al. 2001). Several authors have categorized the main perspectives of social movements in this field of research (McAdam et al. 1996; McAdam et al. 2001, 14). Leach and Scoones (2005, 9-16) give a clear-cut overview of the main perspectives used for studying social movements.

Firstly, Leach and Scoones (2005, 10-11) distinguish the perspective of *resource mobilization*. This perspective raises attention to the balance of costs, benefits and incentives, which influences people's decision to join in a struggle. Through this economic, rational actor model social movements are understood in light of the availability of personal resources and financial support. These are deemed vital for the creation of a social movement.

Secondly and related to the former perspective, Leach and Scoones (2005) discern political process theories. When studying social movements from this perspective, the attention lies with the political and institutional context of a social movement. These contexts are considered to be decisive for the development of a social movement. Scholars that are studying social movements from the two aforementioned perspectives, try to understand when and how social movements occur from a rationalistic, functionalistic point of view.

Thirdly, Leach and Scoones (2005) identify perspectives of social movements that focus on theories of framing. From this perspective, social movements are understood in light of a movement's practices of establishing and promoting definitions of meanings and problems as legitimate. Scholars applying this perspective regard ideas, meanings and moral problems as social constructions. Compared to the functionalistic perspectives that focus on when and how social movement occur, constructivists ask questions such as 'how do social movements present themselves?' and 'what strategies do social movements use to further their goals?'

Fourthly, in theories of movement identity, social movements are understood through the study of everyday symbolic and cultural practices within movement processes, in which common identities are formed, dissolved and reformed. Like the perspectives of framing, this

identity-related perspective is based on a constructivist perspective. However, the focus of the perspective of movement identity is on how social movements mobilize people and the strategies used to maintain cohesion among its members (Leach and Scoones 2005, 11-13), while the former perspective is more centred around strategies of a social movement to legitimize itself towards the outside world.

Lastly, in theories of space, place and network, social movements are understood through the impact of the spatial context of a social movement, in which place, power and networks are central (Leach and Scoones 2005). Social movements are not seen as local, single units, but are understood in connection with the global. This perspective highlights the influence of new information technologies and global media networks on processes of mobilization. Here, social movements are understood from a spatial/communication perspective through which scholars try to understand how social movements mobilize people and resources in a globalizing world of increasing technological development. This perspective highlights the recent development of the use of online media by social movements. In this sense it is unique in that it considers social movements to transcend boundaries of space and place.

When relating back to my research on global solidarity and online media in contemporary political activism, this last perspective seems fitting. It coincides with my research in that it incorporates the process of globalization and online media in the study of strategies of mobilization. However, it does not pay particular attention to distinctions between audiences and thus different strategies of mobilization. The theories of space, place and network described above concentrate on how local social movements use the global space for their strategies of mobilization, while my research focuses on social movements active in the global arena who attempt to mobilize people from a local context.

Especially the perspective of theories of framing is useful for my research. When social movements apply strategies of mobilization, be it for whatever audience, the particular contentious issue central in a campaign is presented in a certain way towards the audience. This construction of a particular contentious issue by a social movement, called framing, influences the involvement of the audience with the people of the particular issue. Therefore, theories of framing are a valuable perspective to create an understanding of the mobilization strategies used by social movements. As Abelmann (In: Mills 1999, 187) explains that “to investigate social movements and activism, as they shape...the subjectivities of their constituent actors, it is essential to situate them discursively by their reigning social imaginaries...their vocabularies, their grammars, their aesthetics, and their historical consciousnesses.” The impact of a frame of a societal issue is thus related to the success of a social movement’s mobilization actions.

So what is framing exactly? And how does framing influence the participation with political activism? The concept of frame in the context of social movements is derived from the work of Goffman (In: Benford and Snow 2000, 614) who denoted frames as “‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and world at large.” The verb ‘framing’ thus refers to meaning construction or, in the words of Leach and Scoones (2005, 11), as “the construction of, particular ideas, meanings and cognitive and moral constructions of a ‘problem’.” Benford and Snow (2000, 614) further explain that in constructing reality both agency and contention are central. Agency is involved since the one who produces the frame influences the way people ‘receiving’ that frame perceive reality. The construction of reality, or framing, is contentious because frames are interpretative representations of reality that inevitably differ and challenge existing ones. The result of this framing process in the context of social movements is referred to as the making of ‘collective action frames’. It are these collective action frames that “are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement...” (Benford and Snow 2000, 614)

This process of constructing reality is also about omitting parts of reality from the construction. Van Leeuwen (forthcoming) understands framing as a practice of ordering that helps to create an understanding of the world through constructing coherence out of fragmented experiences, practices and ideas. This results in a simplification of reality. “However, as framing always simplifies, it may result in that important parts of reality may be lost.” (Van Leeuwen forthcoming, 9) The ignored parts of reality impact the way in which people act. Framing is not only about a certain interpretative construction of reality, but also about leaving out parts of reality.

Benford and Snow (2000, 615-618) distinguish three core framing *tasks*, namely diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing, in order to attend to the problems of ‘consensus mobilization’ and ‘action mobilization’. Diagnostic framing is the construction of a contentious issue whereby the attention lies at what the particular issue or problem entails and the definition of the actors involved. Diagnostic framing consists of a blame and responsibility component and an injustice component. Whereas the former constructs the ones responsible for a problem, the latter identifies the victims of a certain injustice and amplifies this victimization. Thereby boundary framing takes place, in which boundaries between good and evil, protagonists and antagonists is drawn. Especially the problem of consensus mobilization is addressed here. The second core framing task is prognostic framing. Prognostic framing entails

the articulation of a solution to the issue or problem. It thereby takes care of both consensus mobilization, the perception of one solution creates consensus among actors, and action mobilization, a consensus about the solution can lead to collective action towards the common goal. Motivational framing is the third and last core framing task. This form of framing provides the ‘vocabularies of motive’ or the rationale for collective action. Four vocabularies of motive are discerned here: urgency, severity, efficacy and propriety. Particularly the problem of action mobilization is addressed with this last core framing task (Benford and Snow 2000, 615-618). In order to make sense of the different framings used by IKV Pax Christi in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign, these three core framing tasks are used to structure IKV Pax Christi’s narrative.

Framing is thus central in strategies of mobilization and has an important influence on the perceptions of its target audience. But how can the effectiveness of frames be analyzed? As mentioned above, a frame is the representation of reality. This representation is materialized through a narrative that is told. In the case of *Adopt a Revolution*, this narrative is told on the website and in the blog messages also found on the website. It is this narrative and the underlying decisions that the frame is consisting of.

To analyze this story, a helpful framework provided by Johnston and Noakes (2005) is used. They (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 15) define three qualities, or criteria, to determine the resonance of a frame. For a frame to be effective it needs to have a sound resonance. Firstly, a frame, and the symbols used, must be culturally compatible with a target audience’s cultural stock. Furthermore, the actions of a social movement must be consistent with a movement’s ideology, beliefs and claims. And in addition, a frame must be relevant to the target audience’s daily lives (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 15). The frames that are used by IKV Pax Christi during the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign are analyzed in light of these qualifications.

### **2.3 From Social Solidarity to Global Solidarity**

The second concept that will be explored is global solidarity. Before moving to the global, let us first investigate the term ‘solidarity’. When regarding the central research question, solidarity must be thought of in the context of mobilizing people. To mobilize people, a social movement needs to ‘win the hearts and minds of the people’. The people need to be in accordance with the issues a social movement is challenging, to speak in Goodwin and Jasper’s (2003) terminology. In other words, participants of political activism need to feel/be solidary with the people the social movement struggles for if a social movement wants to mobilize

them. In the case of IKV Pax Christi campaign *Adopt a Revolution* Dutch citizens must experience some form of solidarity with the Syrian population for them to join in the campaign. So what is solidarity? What has been written about this phenomenon? And how does it relate to the global space?

### **2.3.1 Social Solidarity**

Social Solidarity is a sociological term that has been central within the discipline of sociology since the start. Celebrated scholars like Durkheim, Marx and Engels, Tönnies and Weber have written about the social phenomenon (Crow 2002). Until now, solidarity is one of the most important themes within sociology (De Beer and Koster 2009). Solidarity is generally defined as a shared feeling or unity of action among individuals/within a group with a common interest<sup>5</sup> (Crow 2002, 1). This definition is comparable with the definition given by Bhattacharyya (1995, 61), who explains that solidarity is based on a “deeply shared identity and code for conduct. Interestingly, in both definitions solidarity can be based on two different components, namely a shared feeling/identity and unity of action/code of conduct. Solidarity exists when either one or both is present between people.

A person thus feels or acts solidary with others when identifying with those others. Eriksen (2004, 157) writes that “[s]ocial identification has to do with which groups a person belongs to, who he or she identifies with, how people establish and maintain invisible but socially efficient boundaries between *us* and *them*.” He (159) further explains that identifications happen through establishing both perceived similarities and differences with others. Contrasts are crucial here, Eriksen emphasises, because without the other I cannot be myself. This is the same for groups of people (Eriksen 2004, 159). People cannot be Dutch if no other nationalities exist. To be Dutch would then have no meaning whatsoever. When accepting this line of reasoning, to feel solidary with some necessarily leads to not feeling solidary with others (Bhattacharyya 1995).

The forming of social groups is grounded in this process of identification (Bhattacharyya 1995, 61). A person can belong to different groups and thus have different identities. For example, a person can at the same time be Dutch, a colleague, Muslim, basketball player, father, son and so on. One does not exclude the other and ones identities are variable. Identification is thus both relational, it establishes in relation to others, and situational, it can be created, changed and recreated (Eriksen 2004, 159; Oberschall 2000). If the basis of

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<sup>5</sup> See: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/solidarity> (reviewed on May 10th 2012).

solidarity, a shared identity, is a social construction and is changeable, feelings of (group) solidarity are changeable and constructible too (Doreian and Fararo 1998, 61).

### **2.3.2 *Litany of declining solidarity***

A central debate of solidarity scholars accumulates around the question if solidarity is declining. In many cases, solidarity is referred to as a thing that existed way back when people still stood up for each other. Interestingly, this view is as old as the literature on solidarity itself (De Beer and Koster 2009, 10).

Contemporary debates centre on the statement that the process of individualization in welfare states leads to a decline in solidarity among citizens (De Beer and Koster 2009, 71; Crow 2002). Scholars of the communitarian line of thought argue that the growth of welfare states gives people the space to become more individualistic, which consequently leads to a decline of the moral grounding of social solidarities (Crow 2002, 31-32). Bhattacharyya (1995, 61) argues that most social changes associated with modernity are held responsible for the declining of solidarity. The rise of the nation state is but one example of these. Others are the centralization of community functions, the homogenization of cultures and the suppression of languages (Bhattacharyya 1995, 61).

Others argue against this ‘litany of lost community’. These scholars argue that communitarian thinkers are backward looking, because communitarians fail to recognize emerging forms of new solidarities (Crow 2002, 32-33). Beck (In: Crow 2002, 33-39) for example, argues that community is less tied to place, because globalization is breaking down local communities. He explains that this does not necessarily lead to a destruction of solidarities, but opens up space for new social bonds and new forms of community. Castles (In: Crow 2002, 33-39) reacts by questioning if local solidarities are actually weakened by globalization. He argues that the relation between the global and the local is paradoxical. On the one hand local bonds are broken down by globalization, though on the other hand many people react to this insecurity with a defensive reaction of strengthening existing bonds of locality or nationality. Internet can be seen as an example of this paradoxical influence of globalization (Crow 2002, 33-39).

In the above debate, solidarity is seen as existing in relation to a community, be it for example a national or trans-continental community, and based on social relations or connections. The form of solidarity central in this research, namely feeling solidary with ‘unknown’ and faraway people, seems a rather different phenomenon. Global solidarity is not tied to a specific community based on ethnicity or religion. In the case of *Adopt a Revolution*,

there apparently exists no direct social relation between a Dutch participant of the campaign and a Syrian activist. So what then is global solidarity?

### 2.3.3 *Global Solidarity*

As we have seen above, scholars generally perceive solidarity to exist on the basis of social relations that are grounded in a shared feeling/identity and/or a unity of action. The solidarity central in this research is not centered on feelings of solidarity with ‘familiar’ people like ones (cultural) relatives, co-workers or fellow nationals, but with people with whom no apparent direct relation exists. This form of solidarity is called ‘global solidarity’ and relates closely to the kind of ‘global solidarity’ Olesen (2004) refers to. It is global solidarity that social movements, such as IKV Pax Christi, are aiming for in campaigns like *Adopt a Revolution*.

Although global solidarity is different from social solidarity, can it still be explained on the basis of social solidarity theory? Global solidarity can be partially explained through the perspective of social solidarity theory. Within social solidarity theory, solidarity is based on a shared identity. People identify with others, create social relationships and form social groups. On this basis, social solidarities are perceived and expressed. Eriksen (2004) explained that in this process of identification, the *other* is essential in creating a self or a social group.

This process of identification is the same basis on which global solidarity originates. As described above, social solidarity is based on a process of identification in which a person or group defines itself in *contrast* with another person or group. However, global solidarity is not based on these mechanisms of exclusion, but only inclusion (Abizadeh 2005). A direct social relationship between people is absent, because people who express global solidarity base this on a common ground of humanity. Because they do not have a direct relation with the people they identify with, as people who express social solidarity do, people expressing global solidarity exclude no others.

From the point of argumentation of social solidarity, global solidarity is not feasible, because it is impossible to define a self or collective identity without contrasting it with others. However, Abizadeh (2005) argues that this is untrue due to a compositional fallacy. He (2005, 48-49) argues that the exclusion claim does not distinguish between individual and collective forms of identity. A human being needs another human being to define the self, but “a collective identity can receive either the external recognition of an external other or its own constituent parts, and the latter does not necessarily depend on the former” (Abizadeh 2005, 48). The individuals of a collective identity have each other to define the self, so consequently a collective identity does not necessitate the existence of another collective identity. This does

not mean that a shared global identity is easy to accomplish, but it is not metaphysically impossible (Abizadeh 2005).

Global solidarity is thus not based on identifications with ethnicity, religion or nation citizenship. What then could be the foundation of global solidarity? In his book on global justice, Caney (2005) describes a likely common ground for a global collective identity. Although the purpose of his argument, and the context in which it is written, is different from the context of global solidarity, his point is very relevant here. In his case for the existence of universal principles of justice, Caney (2005, 36) argues that persons have an equal moral standing, because persons share a common ground. This common ground entails that all persons have common needs and vulnerabilities. We all suffer from physical pain, need air to breathe, food to eat and water to drink if we are to survive. This commonality is the basis on which we can identify us as human (Caney 2005) and on which a global identity can be founded.

Caney's (2005) moral common ground is comparable to Olesen's (2004) notion of global solidarity. He (Olesen 2004, 259) argues that "global solidarity is an expression of a more extensive global consciousness that constructs the grievances of physically, socially and culturally distant people as deeply intertwined." This form of solidarity emphasizes the similarities between distant peoples instead of constructed in contrast to others on the basis of equality (Olesen 2004, 259).

Olesen (2004, 258-259) contrasts his notion of global solidarity with material and rights solidarity in which inequality between giver and taker is present. Material solidarity is directed at victims of (manmade) disasters, like earthquakes or floods, but violent conflicts as well (259). *Adopt a Revolution* could be regarded as a form of material solidarity, but we will see in chapter 4 how this takes form. Rights solidarity is concerned with human rights abuses and the protection of it. This theory is rooted deeply in ideas of Christianity and Enlightenment. Human beings are seen as endowed with certain universal rights in which global consciousness is central (258). In the case of *Adopt a Revolution* the protection of human rights is one of the pillars of the campaign.

Nevertheless, the global solidarity pushed for by IKV Pax Christi in *Adopt a Revolution* is related to material and rights solidarity, but not fully explained through them. Although the Dutch citizens here are supporting Syrian activists, the solidarity pushed for by IKV Pax Christi is not based on a victim-savior dichotomy which is part of the concepts of material and rights solidarity. Global solidarity is based on a deeper notion of humanity. It is thus a relational and situational concept, which can be created, recreated and is therefore manageable. In what ways

does the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution* play into people's global solidarity? And what have been the effects of this frame on the perception of participants of the campaign?

## **2.4 Online Media: space of (dis)connections**

New generations within global political activism are more likely to express themselves via new social movements, transnational policy networks and internet activism. Online media play a central role in this new development. But what are online media exactly?

### **2.4.1 Online Media**

Online media fall into a digital space described in different ways, like 'cyberspace' (Leach and Scoones 2005, 25), the 'virtual' (Iskander 2011), or more concrete terms like 'computer mediated communication' (Diani 2000) or simply 'the Internet' (Polat (2005)). The digital or cyberspace is an electronic world in which the internet sites, blogs, email, Facebook<sup>6</sup>, Twitter<sup>7</sup> and so on, are located. One can also add mobile telephone networks to this list, because of the possibility of surfing the internet on your mobile phone.

The research of Diani (2000), Leach and Scoones (2005) and Polat (2005) originate from before the emergence of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, and solely refer to the digital space in the sense of the Internet, blogs and the use of email as the latest technology. When considering more recent academic works on political activism, the term 'social media' pops up immediately (Al-Ani 2012; Howard and Hussein 2011; Iskander 2011; Shirky 2011; Valenzuela et al. 2012). Social media are generally regarded different from other online media. Shirky (2011, 29) defines social media as 'social media tools', which include text messaging (via mobile phone), email and social networking.

A distinction between internet and social media could be based on the work of Polat (2005, 443-444) who explores the link between the internet and communication capacity based on Weare's typology of communication. Four forms of communications are distinguished, namely one-to-one (conversation), many-to-one (information aggregation), one-to-many (broadcast) and many-to-many (group dialogue). When applying this to internet and social media, it occurs to me that the internet in general can only facilitate a conversation or broadcast, social media can also facilitate information aggregation and group dialogue. Online media is thus a collective term which includes all four of the above communication capacities.

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<sup>6</sup> See: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (reviewed on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) (reviewed on April 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

### ***2.4.2 The Online Media Effect***

The use of online media by political activists does not necessarily produce a ‘single preordained outcome’ (Shirky 2011, 29). When reviewing the academic literature, it becomes clear that before strong contrasts existed between so-called cyberoptimists, who perceive online media, especially social media, as the breakthrough for activists and the cause of contemporary political activism, and those who see it as a hype with little positive effect for activists, named cyberpessimists. Nowadays a more nuanced view of the effects of online media on political activism is common among scholars, in which online media are regarded as being a useful tool in political activism, but not deemed to have a catalyser effect (Valenzuela et al. 2012, 4).

Still, it occurs to me that many contemporary scholars on social media are quite optimistic about the political power of social media. In her lecture on social media and democracy, Halsema (2012)<sup>8</sup> explains that this optimism is due to the uprisings of the Arabic Spring, which have been widely perceived as quite successful. She clarifies that before the Arabic Spring, scholars were more pessimistic about the power of social media, especially after the failure of the Green Revolution in Iran in 2009, but after the occurrences of the Arabic Spring many scholars turned to a more optimistic stance. How can online media be used for contemporary political activism?

Several positive influences of online media on contemporary political activism can be distilled from the existing debate. Firstly, many scholars seem to agree that online media supports the spreading and sharing of information in contrast with cases of political activism where social media was not used (Howard and Hussain 2011; Iskander 2011; Shirky 2011, 34; Valenzuela et al. 2012). When one defines information as news and narratives, online media can be regarded as an ‘alternative public space’ (Al-Ani et al. 2012, 9) where information can be spread and shared across time and space much faster than traditional channels of media.

Secondly, in the context of the uprisings of the Arabic Spring, it is argued that social media enables people to evade traditional gatekeepers to information (Iskander 2011, 1227). Iskander (2011) describes the example of computer-literate Egyptian youth who were forced out of “traditional avenues of participation in the public sphere” and used online media to construct an online public space. In the third place, and related to the former, online media has been used as a medium to express ‘counter-narratives’ to oppose the censorship and propaganda of radio, television and printed media (Al-Ani et al. 2012, 8).

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<sup>8</sup> Vrede van Utrecht – lecture: ‘Diplomacy 2.0’ by Femke Halsema (April 11<sup>th</sup> 2012). For more information, see list of references.

Fourthly, online media improve communication among people. It is a platform that facilitates group dialogue (many-to-many communication), and therefore strengthens people's ability to converse and discuss societal issues (Al-Ani et al. 2012, 9; Iskander 2011; Valenzuela et al. 2012). Through conversing and discussing, people give form to their opinions. Shirky (2011, 34) explains that opinions are first transmitted through media, and then get echoed by relatives, friends and colleagues. It is in this second step that political opinions are constructed. Online media can play an essential role in strengthening this process of forming opinions (Chu and Tang 2005, 850).

Furthermore, through the discussions and the exposure to counter-narratives, people find like-minded people and connect with them. In this way, social media supports the creation of networked communities, through the promotion of constructing collective identities (Howard and Hussain 2011; Iskander 2011, 1227; Valenzuela et al. 2012, 4). Online media can support a shared awareness among people, meaning that each member of a group understands the situation and knows that the other members know it too (Shirky 2011, 25).

Sixthly, social media improves coordination for mobilizing the critical mass (Valenzuela et al. 2012). Through online media, one has the ability to facilitate access to a large number of contacts (4). In addition, these contacts can be reached easily, since online media are not bound to time and place. One can send a message to anyone in the world and for the receiving of a message time is no restriction (Howard and Hussain 2011, 36). Shirky (2011, 35) further explains that the costs of coordination can be reduced through the use of social media.

Next to these positive functions of online media on contemporary political activism, there is scepticism to be found as well. An important counterargument against the optimistic stance of many scholars is the critique of ineffectiveness, also known as 'slacktivism' (Gladwell in: Shirky 2011, 38). It is argued that through online media participants can find low-cost activities and thereby do not commit to useful political actions. Shirky (2011) counters this point of critique by arguing that social media can still be an effective tool for coordination and communication. In addition, Christensen (2011) argues that as long as online activism causes no harm and contributes to any form of offline acts, online activism can be very valuable. Valenzuela et al. (2012, 13) explains that online tools do not create new forms of political protest, but amplify traditional forms of protest. Activism is not confined to the online or offline sphere, but online interactions can aid offline activism, through the online media's communication and coordination function. As Chu and Tang (2005, 850) conclude that "it is through interactions between the online and offline discourses and actions that the new

technology has exerted the greatest impact on civil society.” How do these different possibilities play a role in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign?

## **2.5 Linking Framing, Global Solidarity and Online Media**

What are the links between the concepts and what questions evolve out of these links in the context of *Adopt a Revolution*? The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is firstly taking place in the global sphere, between Dutch citizens and Syrian peace activists. Secondly, the campaign is organized in the online sphere of the internet and thirdly IKV Pax Christi is constructing a story of the Syrian situation in order to mobilize as many Dutch citizens as possible.

As explained above, global solidarity is a social construction based on a perception of belonging which can be (strategically) created, changed and recreated. This construction is based on a person's perception of an issue. The way in which an issue is presented, or framed, inevitably shapes the way people perceive the issue. Leach and Scoones (2005, 16-20) further explain that 'politics of knowledge', meaning the framing of grievances, group identity and the opponent, are central in dynamics of mobilization. Through the politics of knowledge mobilization strategies are shaped and thereby hold networks and solidarities across global spaces together. Relating this to the context of *Adopt a Revolution*, the question rises here how the narratives formulated in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign frame the Syrian revolution and what the implications have been on the perceptions of global solidarity of the participants.

Global solidarities thus can be influenced by framings in order to mobilize people, but where does that framing take place? This question is related to the discussion around spaces for mobilization. The connections between spaces range from the local and global, from the formal to informal, from the bottom-up to the top-down. With the rise of the internet, contemporary forms of political activism also use cyberspaces, such as online media. Online media have several positive impacts on mobilization, such as a function as an alternative public sphere in which people can form their perception of a certain issue. However, in forms of global activism and the widening of the social field, dangers of fragmentation and disconnection can arise. The same goes for activism via cyberspace, of which Bauman (In: Leach and Scoones 2005, 25) explains that cyberspace is not capable of producing a kind of social solidarities that produce a collective political vision to change the world (Leach and Scoones 2005, 22-26). This is the same point that Gladwell (2010) raises with his critique of 'slacktivism'. How have the website and blog of *Adopt a Revolution* been used and what has been the effect of that use on the participation with the campaign?

When viewing this discussion in the context of *Adopt a Revolution*, I wonder how IKV Pax Christi has framed the conflict in Syria and what the effect have been of that representation on the global solidarity of people. How IKV Pax Christi has used the online space to present their campaign and in what ways the online space could be used to influence perceptions of global solidarity. It is to these questions that we will turn to in the next chapters.

### 3. Methods & Methodology

#### 3.1 Methods

In this research two different research strategies are used and later on in the research combined to answer the central research question. As could also be deduced from the introduction, this research is divided in two parts: a theory-oriented and a practice-oriented part. The first part consists of a theory-oriented study in the form of a desk research. Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010, 194) define desk research as “*a research strategy in which the researcher...uses [empirical] material produced by others.*” This is where theory-oriented research differs from practice-oriented research, because when using the latter a researcher produces one’s own research material.

The material used during the desk research is scientific literature on the themes of global solidarity, online media and framing. The focus lies on a literature study aimed at a thorough assessment of the collected materials through qualitative content analysis (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2010, 195). The advantage of this strategy is that a large amount of research can be used within a short time period, so that a wide exploration of the aforementioned themes is possible in the time span of this thesis research (198).

Literature is a source of knowledge for it contains theoretical insights (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2010, 217). The scientific literature used in this study has been found through using a variety of search methods. Firstly, I have used different electronic search engines, such as Web of Science, Radboud University Catalogus and GoogleScholar to scientific literature in the forms of electronic articles and books. Keywords that I have used for this search are terms in the sense of, or a combination of, solidarity, global, social media, online, blogosphere, revolution, political activism, framing, social movement, and etcetera. Through reading the abstracts of the literature found, I have made a selection for reading and later on analysis. Secondly, I have used the so-called ‘snowball principle’ to find new publications. Through the bibliographies of publications read, new publications have been found (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2010, 229-230). The results of the first explorative search for literature have been used to build the research proposal on, while a more extensive, deeper search has led to a more complete set of theories that have been presented in the previous chapter.

The knowledge acquired via this desk research will be compared with a practice-oriented research in the form of a case study. The analysis and results of the case study are expounded in the second part of this thesis. In a case study “*the researcher tries to gain insight*

*into one or several objects or processes that are confined in time and space.*” (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2012, 178) In this way, an understanding of a practical, everyday phenomenon can be achieved. Since this research is partially meant for IKV Pax Christi, the case that is central here is the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign that is executed by IKV Pax Christi. For the study of this case I have used a qualitative and quantitative set of data and research methods consisting of several semi-structured interviews, a survey among participants of the campaign and a content analysis of the website *www.adoptarevolution.nl*, which consists of both written and visual material.

As a research intern at IKV Pax Christi, I have worked under different departments of the organization performing multiple minor tasks. In so doing, I had direct access to documents concerning the build-up and evaluation of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign. These have been analyzed together with the website of the campaign: *www.adoptarevolution.nl*. The website is analyzed for the first time in the beginning of my internship in order to view it with the scope of a participant of the campaign. This research method can be seen as a form of participant observation, which is the study of a social setting through participating in that social setting (Spradley 1980, 53-62). By doing this at the beginning of my internship, I had but little more foreknowledge about the situation in Syria and the campaign than regular visitors of the site. In this way, my first impressions of the site have barely been influenced by my position at IKV Pax Christi. Later on, I have analyzed the website more thoroughly in order to compare the contents with the outcomes of both the interviews and the survey.

However, during my internship at IKV Pax Christi, some background information has been changed on the website. Based on my first visit to the website and the analysis made on the findings, I have given some feedback from the position of *Adopt a Revolution* participant. The *Adopt a Revolution* team has used the feedback to make several changes in the information on and the lay-out of the website. The information concerning the differences between armed and non-armed resistance in Syria has been expanded and recent developments in the revolution have been integrated. Furthermore, several minor changes have been made concerning the lay-out of the website, such as the first slide that is showed when visiting the homepage.<sup>9</sup> In the beginning, this was a random slide of the six possible ones, including the banner of the campaign and several news items. Now it is always the standard campaign banner that is showed first so it is clear what the website is about. In the analysis of the website material, only the information after the change is used. The reason for this is that the substance

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<sup>9</sup> See, <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/> (reviewed October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012)

of the message of *Adopt a Revolution* or the message of ‘armed and non-armed resistance’ is not changed whatsoever. IKV Pax Christi has only elaborated a bit more on these issues. It is nevertheless always pleasant for a researcher to notice the changes that are made based on his work. I am confident that the end product of this research will lead to more reflection on the side of IKV Pax Christi.

The fact that my early findings have already had an impact during my research could have been problematic. This would have been the case when I was in the middle of analyzing the content of the website and blog. Fortunately, these changes of the website have occurred before I started a deeper investigation towards the contents of the website. After I found out that several (minor) changes had occurred I decided to use the new contents as the basis for my analysis. This was possible because the actual message of the campaign did not change. IKV Pax Christi only elaborated a bit more on some issues which were only been mentioned before. An example of this is the explanation of the support of peaceful LCCs. The emphasis upon the peace aspect was already prominent before the alterations of the website.

One slightly negative side effect of these changes has been that one of the questions of the online survey has become less useful than aimed for. Question 26<sup>10</sup>, concerning people’s understanding of certain background information, became less relevant after IKV Pax Christi extended the explanation of the particular issue. Nevertheless, this survey question has proved to be still relevant for this research as we will see in paragraph 4.3.

Next to doing content analysis of the website, I have done several qualitative interviews with IKV Pax Christi employees. To be exact, I have held one informal and four in-depth interviews with (ex) employees of IKV Pax Christi. Together with another intern which I have not interviewed, the four employees formed the ‘adopt-team’ that has created and is managing *Adopt a Revolution*. I have chosen to do these interviews to acquire more in-depth information about the choices made around the representation of the campaign and the situation in Syria. The first interview was held with Evert-Jan. At the moment he is the supervisor of the campaign and he is the employee with in-depth knowledge of Syria. Therefore he also carries out the communication with Syria. The second interview was held with Mayke, who was the supervisor of the campaign until the moment the campaign was launched. Nowadays, she no longer works for IKV Pax Christi. Evelien is running the *Adopt a Revolution* website and rewrites all stories that are published there. She furthermore has given me several statistics

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<sup>10</sup> Question 26: answering the statement: “The background information about ‘armed or unarmed’ on the website is confusing”. Translated from Dutch by current author.

about click rates concerning the campaign. Lastly, I have interviewed Sabita, who works at the sponsoring department. She holds account of all donations and is the contact person for participants of the campaign.

Although this seems to be a relatively small number of interviews, I have actually interviewed all the people within IKV Pax Christi that are/have been directly involved with the campaign. Interviewing people twice would have given me extra material to validate my findings on the basis of comparing the answers of both interviews. However, due to the short time period of my research and the quite encompassing answers I received during the interviews, holding a second interview could have harmed the relation I had build with the members of the adopt-team. They could have interpreted it as mistrusting towards them and as I had the position of an intern I was not really in the position of doubting their reliability. In a future research, I would try to create more time for my research and divide the interview questions in two so I have a good reason to interview someone twice.

To investigate the perspective of the participants of the campaign, I have organized an online survey among participants of *Adopt a Revolution*. A participant of the campaign is someone who has either donated funds or signed the petition on the *Adopt a Revolution* website. The goal of this survey is to gain knowledge of the impact of the chosen representations on the site on the participants. The implication of this method is that the people who participated are probably positive about the campaign otherwise they would not have participated. Consequently, the answers given are biased. Nevertheless, the answers are useful when regarding that through the survey an indication can be made of the impact of the information on the website for the participants who did participated in the survey.

The online survey is send to 425 participants of *Adopt a Revolution* who, both or either, donated money or signed the online petition and consists of 30 questions. In total, 25 of these 425 participants have actually completed the online survey. To determine if these 25 partakers are representative for all the *Adopt a Revolution* participants they need to be close to the variables of the total population (here 425 individuals) (Te Grotenhuis and Van der Weegen 2008, 55). Normally, when the random sample of a population consists of 30 or more individuals, one can measure if a random sample is representative through the so-called ‘central-limit theorem’ (55). However, in the *Adopt a Revolution* sample the random sample only consists of 25 individuals. This random sample is therefore only representative for the whole population if the variables are approximately the same for both the whole population as the random sample (Te Grotenhuis and Van der Weegen 2008, 52-55).

Participants who signed the petition	382 [90 %]
Participants who donated money	144 [34%]
<b>Total number of participants in random sample</b>	<b>25 [100 %]</b>
Participants in random sample who signed the petition	24 [96%]
participants in random sample who donated money	15 [60 %]

The variables on which the random sample and the population are compared are the signing of the petition and the donation of money to a LCC. These variables are the most decisive in the survey questions. Of the total of 425 persons, 90 percent has signed the online petition and 35 percent has donated money to any of the LCCs (see table 1). The percentages of people who signed the petition between both groups are more or less similar: 90 percent versus 96 percent. A big difference occurs between the groups on basis of donating money. Here the 35 percent of the *Adopt a Revolution* participants who donated money contrast with the 60 percent of the random sample group that has donated money. The random sample group is only partly approaching the total population on the basis of these variables. This implies that the random sample is thus not representative enough to be a foundation for general statements about the total population of *Adopt a Revolution* participants (Te Grotenhuis and Van der Weegen 2008, 55). Because the group who donated money is much bigger in the random sample group, the answers of the survey can be more positive if we assume that the people who donated money are more positive about the campaign than people who signed the online petition. However, the answers given during the survey can still give insight into the perceptions of the ones filled in the survey. As long as one takes account of the limitations of these answers, the answers are useful to a certain extend. Especially in chapter 4 we will see the value of these limited answers.

In the ‘ideal’ situation I would have organized in-depth interviews with a number of participants to overcome the above problems, but IKV Pax Christi is against approaching participants more than necessary. In their eyes, participants could get frustrated when approached too often. So the ‘approach-rate’ should be kept to a minimum. Hence, they regarded that a survey would be enough and in light of this I have decided not to move against my internship organization. The implications of this decision are that I only have the results of the survey and thereby cannot retrieve background information regarding the choices made by participants. I have tried to overcome this problem by inserting three open-ended questions. The answers given on these questions are valuable to a certain extend. Some of the answers have given insight in the motivation of particular participants, but the answers are in most cases

not longer than a few words. Therefore, the answers miss in almost all cases the profundity that can be achieved through actual qualitative interviews.

Furthermore, I had no opportunity to partake in any of the meetings of the adopt-team about *Adopt a Revolution*. At the moment I decided to investigate this campaign, the build-up phase of the campaign was already finished and the adopt-team was not actively working on the campaign. The campaign was running its own course. Therefore, I can only rely on data about the choices of the adopt-team based on the qualitative interviews and the information that is presented on the website. This kind of data would strengthen the validity of my findings, because then I could compare the findings of observations of such build-up meetings with the findings of the qualitative interviews. Still I was able to validate my findings based on comparisons of the answers given during the different qualitative interviews.

The use of different methods in multiple cases, called ‘triangulation of methods’, has the advantage that one can compare the outcomes of the different qualitative and quantitative methods used and analyze the validity of the obtained data (Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010, 179). The outcomes are more valid when different methods produce the same outcomes. Furthermore, validity can be analyzed through using different sources, triangulation of sources, of data. In the theory-oriented part of this research this has been done through the use of different articles and books. In the practice-oriented part, triangulation is achieved through questioning co-workers of IKV Pax Christi who set up the campaign, holding a survey among participants of *Adopt a Revolution*, as well as analyzing the site.

### **3.2 Global Solidarity, Framing and Online Media**

How do these research methods relate to the central concepts of global solidarity, online media and framing? A person’s perception of global solidarity is hard to measure. Global solidarity is a complex social concept which can have a different meaning for each person. Global solidarity is defined here as a shared feeling of identity or unity of action with people with whom no apparent direct relation exists. Perceptions of solidarity are personal experiences, so to measure global solidarity of participants of *Adopt a Revolution* it is important to know what the participants themselves perceive. However, in the thesis the focus lies not on how global solidarity is perceived on a personal level, but on acts of solidarity. In the context of *Adopt a revolution* these acts of solidarity are signing the online petition and donating money to LCCs. Global solidarity is thus measurable through the participation of Dutch citizens in *Adopt a Revolution*.

The second concept, framing, is in need of operationalization as well. As mentioned earlier, framing is the construction of certain ideas or problems. This construction can be found in the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution* presented on the website and blog. Using the terms construction and narrative does not implicate that the framing of a certain issue inherently does or does not correspond with reality. A constructivist scope is maintained here in that everything we see around us is represented by us in words or images. This representation is sensitive to interpretation, thereby reality is always, consciously or not, represented differently. There does not exist a right or wrong representation of reality, but the representation influences a listener's/reader's view of reality. So the representation of the conflict in Syria by IKV Pax Christi in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign has its impact as well on the perception of the target audience.

Framing will be investigated in light of global solidarity and online media. Norris (2002, 2-6) explains that political activism can be understood by analyzing it through the domains of agency, repertoires and targets of social movements. Here 'agency' entails the organizational structures of mobilizing people. Secondly, she differentiates 'repertoires', which stands for the ways in which people choose to politically express themselves. And lastly she discerns 'targets', which are actors, such as a government, or a societal issue, that people try to influence. Processes of framing occur throughout all three the domains described by Norris (2002). In the first place, I investigate the repertoires used by IKV Pax Christi to mobilize people by influencing their global solidarity. Thereby, IKV Pax Christi is expressing itself concerning the (political) situation in Syria. The target that IKV Pax Christi is trying to achieve is to mobilize as many Dutch civilians in order to change the current situation in Syria. In that way, IKV Pax Christi presents or frames the situation in Syria in a certain way in order to achieve its target, namely: the mobilization of Dutch civilians. The domain agency focuses on the organizational structures of which online media could be seen as one. Online media is a space in which these framings play an important role. In the case of *Adopt a Revolution* the website and E-letters are examples of this. Therefore, the three perspectives outlined by Norris (2002) are used to investigate the campaign. In addition, the three core framing tasks defined by Benford and Snow (2000) are used to explore the repertoires of Norris (2002).

Lastly, the use of online media in the *Adopt a Revolution* is investigated in light of its function to form a platform on which IKV Pax Christi can present their constructed frame. In order to promote the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign the site [www.adoptarevolution.nl](http://www.adoptarevolution.nl) and the blog *Nassama* have been used. Both this website and the corresponding blog are the concrete elements through which online media are represented.

### 3.3 Analysis

The methods for analyzing the research material largely depends on the data the researcher finds during the research (Verschuren and Doorewaard 2010, 239). Analyzing the content of data is made through the use of the method of content analysis described by Verschuren and Doorewaard (2010). Based on the content of the interviews and reports of the website, a categorical system is created. The acquired data has been characterized on the basis of this categorical system. So for example, I have found out in the data of the website and the interviews that there lies a strong emphasis on peaceful activism. Based on this a discourse analysis is made to formulate an answer to the first sub question, whereby the content of the representation of the Syrian revolution is investigated. Discourse analysis is about studying and analysing the use of language (Hodges et al. 2008). Based upon this, I have described the different framings used by IKV Pax Christi of the Syrian revolution after which I assess the effects of the framings.

However, I am not able to compare the narrative of IKV Pax Christi with the real situation in Syria simply because I have no source of objective information about the situation there (even if such an objective source even exists). I also have not been able to do fieldwork in Syria, so I am not able to point out which parts of happenings in Syria IKV Pax Christi is withholding in their representation of the Syrian revolution. The only other comparable source for the IKV Pax Christi narrative is the mainstream media, who can also not be regarded as an objective information source. Still, I can reflect on what IKV Pax Christi is presenting as the Syrian revolution. As mentioned above, representations of reality are never objective, thus when presenting reality on inevitably frames reality. In addition to describing the representations by IKV Pax Christi, I investigate the discrepancies with what the mainstream media is presenting about Syria. This viewpoint is relevant for this research, because I assume that the mainstream media and IKV Pax Christi are the only sources of information for the majority of *Adopt a Revolution* participants. To understand their scope on the Syrian revolution and their perceptions of global solidarity there is no urgent need for a comparison with the ‘real’ situation in Syria.

Another analysis which is in need for further reflection is the analysis of the IKV Pax Christi framings of the Syrian revolution in light of the framework of Johnston and Noakes (2005, 15) for exploring a frame’s resonance.<sup>11</sup> This exploration is based on the above described IKV Pax Christi framings. Because I have no hard evidence of the effect of the framings on the target audience of the campaign, the Dutch population, paragraph 4.2 should be

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<sup>11</sup> See paragraph 4.2 for the analysis itself.

regarded as a tentative exploration of the IKV Pax Christi framings. I have no evidence about the cultural background and common norms and values of the Dutch population other than my own experiences and personal knowledge as a Dutch citizen. Therefore, only suggestions can be made regarding the resonance of the IKV Pax Christi framings on the Dutch population.

Although this research has several limitations, due to multiple reasons, some very interesting findings are distinguished based on the outcomes of the different research methods used. It is to these findings that we will turn in the next chapters.

## 4. Frame a Revolution: Mobilize Support

A year after the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, the UN reported that over eight thousand people were killed as a result of the conflict (Buckley 2012, 81). At the time of writing, the situation in Syria is more and more leaning towards a full-out civil war. Evert-Jan, who is campaign leader of *Adopt a Revolution*<sup>12</sup>, explained that the question is not if the regime of al-Assad will fall, but when and with how many deaths. The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign of IKV Pax Christi is aimed at promoting a peaceful transition from the al-Assad regime towards a new (democratic) government.

In this chapter the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is used to explore the way in which IKV Pax Christi presents the Syrian conflict. IKV Pax Christi narrates the Syrian conflict towards the public, partners and donors, whereby choices are made about what is and what is not told. Through this construction of reality, a certain representation of an issue is made, through which the issue is understood. So first, a short outline of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign of IKV Pax Christi will be presented. Thereby the scheme of Norris's (2002) is used, which is aimed at analyzing practices of framing through three domains, which are defined in chapter 3. The chapter then continues with describing how the Syrian revolution and related issues are actively framed by IKV Pax Christi. In light of the structure of Benford and Snow (2000), who distinguish several kinds of framing with specific functions<sup>13</sup>, this is described. After describing this frame, the focus of this chapter will change towards analysing the impact of the frame on the perception of global solidarity of the participants of *Adopt a Revolution*. To make an analysis of the possible impact of the frame, it will first be compared to the framework of Johnston and Noakes (2005) to determine the frame's resonance<sup>14</sup>. Then the results of the survey will be compared to these findings. This chapter ends with elaborating on the relation between global solidarity and the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution*.

### 4.1 Adopt a Revolution

As mentioned earlier, framing is the construction of reality through the eyes of the narrator. IKV Pax Christi, more specifically the adopt-team, is that narrator in the case of *Adopt a*

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Evert-Jan on July 10<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>13</sup> In chapter 2 more information can be found regarding the structure of Benford and Snow (2000).

<sup>14</sup> More information regarding the framework of Johnston and Noakes (2005), see chapter 2.

*Revolution*. Within the campaign several elements are represented by the adopt-team in order to promote the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign. Using the scheme of Norris (2002) the different elements are explicated.

As mentioned earlier, Norris (2002, 2-6) notes that political activism can be understood by analyzing it through the domains of agency, repertoires and targets of social movements. The target of the campaign is twofold. In the first place, IKV Pax Christi wants to influence the Syrian revolution to proceed as peaceful as possible. Related to this, they aim to achieve this by mobilizing as many Dutch civilians as possible to support Syrian peace activists. Both targets are advanced through different repertoires of framing and it is in the latter that global solidarity is important.

The adopt-team is representing several related issues and relations. To begin with, they represent the Syrian revolution itself. They explicate certain parts and leave out other elements. This frame of the Syrian revolution is related to two relations that are central in promoting the campaign. The first relation is the connection between IKV Pax Christi and the Syrian revolution. This connection is formed by the campaign itself, which is represented in a certain way. It is here that agency plays an important role. Agency entails the organizational structures for mobilization through which IKV Pax Christi strategically represents itself in order to maintain or strengthen their public position. Secondly, the relationship between the target audience, Dutch civilians, and the Syrian population, concretely represented by Syrian peace activists that form the local civil committees, is projected. Later in this chapter we will notice that global solidarity plays an important role in this last relation.

#### **4.1.1 Framing the Syrian Revolution**

When determining the message they wanted to present in the campaign, the adopt-team made several important decisions. First of all, they have chosen to give the campaign the subtitle: “*support the Syrian spring*”<sup>15</sup>. In this way, they connect the happenings in Syria with the uprisings of 2011 in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt during the so-called ‘Arabic Spring’. The general message that has been presented in the western media is of populations rising up to fight for freedom, democracy and human rights. The choice of using this subtitle presents the Syrian revolution in relation to the Arabic Spring and that in Syria the same values of freedom, democracy and human rights are fought for. This is related to a second choice of the adopt-team. Evert-Jan<sup>16</sup> explains that the adopt-team has explicitly chosen the side of Syrians fighting

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<sup>15</sup> See, [www.adoptarevolution.nl](http://www.adoptarevolution.nl) (reviewed September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>16</sup> Interview Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

in favor of these values. Thereby, the adopt-team is opposing the regime of Bashar al-Assad who is in favor of conserving the status-quo, thus keeping power through an authoritarian form of government. As Evert-Jan puts it eloquently: “*we choose for the people, against the dictator.*”<sup>17</sup>

The most important element that comes to the fore in both the interviews and the website is the explicit emphasis on peaceful, non-violent forms of activism. On the homepage of the website IKV Pax Christi states that:

“In hundreds of Syrian cities and villages civil comities organize peaceful resistance. Massive peaceful resistance gives the best chance to an end of the dictatorship and the rebuilding of a free and democratic Syria. The protests go on despite the violence and the repression. Every day again. We help the civil comities in their struggle for freedom and justice.”<sup>18</sup>

This message is also clearly formulated in the interviews with Evert-Jan, Evelien and Sabita<sup>19</sup>. Mayke<sup>20</sup> clarifies that in the western media only stories of violence are told, but that the non-violent forms of protest and demonstrations were not shown in the media. In other words, the western media were representing the Syrian revolution as very violent<sup>21</sup>, while the majority of protests, especially at the beginning, were non-violent. The adopt-team explicitly stresses that non-violent civilian resistance still occurs in many parts of the country.

It is not that the adopt-team thereby ignores the violence, killings and human rights violations that are committed by both the regime of al-Assad, the Shabiha and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The adopt-team explicitly states on the site that violence is occurring on a massive scale. It is stated on the website that: “the armed groups have made themselves guilty of severe human rights violations and crimes of war.”<sup>22</sup> However, they emphasize that the Syrian revolution has a peaceful, non-violent nature and that this basis should be guarded.

They further explain that this line between violent and non-violent opposition is sometimes difficult to draw. The opposition of the al-Assad regime consists of civilians from

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012. Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/> (reviewed October 18<sup>th</sup> 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with Evelien (July 24<sup>th</sup> 2012), Evert-Jan, (July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012), Sabita (August 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Interview Mayke on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>21</sup> See also numerous articles in the Dutch newspapers: ‘De Volkskrant’, ‘NRC handelsblad’, ‘Trouw’ and ‘Algemeen Dagblad’ in the period of 2011 and 2012 concerning Syria.

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/waaromsteun/> (reviewed October 18<sup>th</sup> 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

all ethnic and religious groups present in Syrian society. Some of them organize themselves in peaceful LCCs or in armed civil guards, while others join the FSA. The LCCs that are executing the non-violent forms of protest are difficult to distinguish from violent groups. The FSA is actually formed in order to protect the peaceful street protesters from violent attacks from the Syrian army. However, as the conflict lingered on, the FSA not only protected civilians, but started to attack the Syrian army as well. Some LCCs take up weapons, while others stick to non-violent principles. Nevertheless, IKV Pax Christi explains on the website that they have sufficient information sources in order to ensure that only peaceful activists are supported through the campaign. Where before the changing of the website only two paragraphs were devoted to explaining this point, now they have devoted a whole page to explaining the situation. Moreover they have given special attention towards their sources of information in the subsection named: "Reliability of information".<sup>23</sup> In this section it is explained that IKV Pax Christi is no research institute, but uses numerous of Syrian contacts and reports of organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the United Nations and Amnesty International to determine which LCCs to support. In this way, they legitimize their campaign towards the Dutch public and thereby strengthening their narrative of the peaceful revolution in Syria.

The last element represented explicitly by the adopt-team is urgency. They illustrate that the LCCs are active for over a year and are running out of funds. These peace activists still stick to a peaceful struggle for a free and just Syria, even when the violent repercussions of the al-Assad regime are steadily increasing. Therefore, financial and moral support is urgently required. It literally states on the website: "urgent financial help is needed now."<sup>24</sup> However, the adopt-team, both Evert-Jan and Evelien<sup>25</sup> have raised this point in the interviews, does explicitly mention that the Syrian peace activists should NOT be seen as victims of the conflict. The Syrian peace activists are fighting for a better Syria on their own account and know what they are doing. This does not mean that they cannot use help. The adopt-team is thereby trying to overcome the victimization of the Syrian population and trying to maintain the message of urgency for the purpose of mobilization.

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<sup>23</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/waaromsteun/> (reviewed October 21th 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>24</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/adopteer-een-comitee/> (reviewed October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Evelien (July 24<sup>th</sup> 2012) , Evert-Jan (July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

When comparing this narrative to the structure of framing tasks outlined by Benford and Snow (2000) I notice two interesting things. Firstly, the representation of the Syrian conflict is a pure form of diagnostic framing, which consists of a ‘blame and responsibility component and an ‘injustice component’, whereby the boundary between protagonists and antagonists is central. Although the boundary between peaceful and armed LCCs is sometimes difficult to draw, the distinction between the antagonist, the al-Assad regime, and protagonist, the (peaceful) opposition, side in the conflict is not. On the one hand, the blame and responsibility component is present. One side of the conflict is presented as evil and carrying the blame for the conflict, namely the al-Assad regime. They are presented as using excessive violence against its own population. On the other hand, the injustice component is apparent as well, though there is difficulty in defining it. The peaceful protesters are unquestionably presented as being the good ones that experience grave injustices. However, the victimization of this group is actively avoided by the adopt-team. Evert-Jan<sup>26</sup> explains that the Syrian peace protesters are strong enough to fight for their own future and are not helpless. They can only use some financial and mental support. Furthermore, this boundary framing is not as easy as it looks. The excluding of the violent opposition from the campaign already points to the direction of a more complex reality. However, black and white framing of the conflict between antagonist and protagonist is a clear example of a diagnostic framing (Benford and Snow 2000).

The second interesting thing present in this frame is the undertone of urgency in the narrative. Urgency is one of the four vocabularies of motive that is categorized by Benford and Snow (2000) as motivational framing. Thereby, IKV Pax Christi is not presenting a solution in the form of prognostic framing, but is sketching a bad situation in which urgent help is needed. From this point of view, the Syrian revolution frame “redefine[s] social conditions [in Syria] as unjust and intolerable with the intention of mobilizing potential participants” (Tarrow: In Demmers 2012, 94).

#### **4.1.2 Positioning IKV Pax Christi**

This frame of the Syrian revolution is connected to the strategic positioning of IKV Pax Christi in relation to the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign. As revealed earlier in this chapter, the process of constructing reality, the choices about which parts of reality to illuminate and which parts not, is not simply a matter of coincidence. In many cases these choices are strategically made in order to achieve a certain purpose (Benford and Snow 2000, 624; Van Leeuwen, forthcoming). In the process of building *Adopt a Revolution*, IKV Pax Christi is strategically presenting itself

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<sup>26</sup> Interview Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

towards the Dutch public, its partners and donors. Thereby several difficulties needed to be overcome.

The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign itself, and thereby IKV Pax Christi is presented in light of the central value that it disseminates: peaceful activism. On the website, one can read that the donations go to LCCs who only execute peaceful activities. IKV Pax Christi explains on the site: “Donations are intended for specific civil comities and are not intended for things that do not correspond to the goals of the campaign. It is out of the question that the money is for instance used for weapons or the armed struggle.”<sup>27</sup> The choice to only support peaceful activism has been most complicated and led to several discussions among the adopt-team. Evert-Jan<sup>28</sup> explains that as a peace organization, IKV Pax Christi is in a position in which it cannot choose between two sides in a violent conflict. A choice between supporting either the al-Assad regime or the opposition could undermine the mediating position of IKV Pax Christi and would be harmful to the organization as a whole. Therefore, only peaceful activism is supported and the distinction between the peaceful and violent opposition is made. The choices made in the frame of the Syrian revolution as described in the above paragraph are central to the strategic choices the adopt-team makes to maintain IKV Pax Christi’s position in the eyes of the Dutch public, its partners and donors.

During the campaign, more and more (members of) LCCs turned from peaceful activities to more violent forms of protest. Some LCCs developed their own civil guard, while others joined the FSA. This distinction between violent and non-violent LCCs was not only very difficult to determine, because of the blurring of LCC activities, but was too presumed, by the adopt-team, very complicated to explain to the public. The adopt-team had to be careful to prevent complications in both internal and external legitimization. In the mainstream media, the Syrian conflict has been presented as a very violent one in which two violent factions, the al-Assad regime and the opposition, are fighting. This last year, no mention in the media is made of peaceful protests occurring in Syria. Evert-Jan<sup>29</sup> explains that to state as IKV Pax Christi that ‘we only supports peaceful activities and are against violent resistance’ in such a repressive environment would seem very naïve in the eyes of the public. The adopt-team therefore decided to explain their position to the public. IKV Pax Christi does only support LCCs who organize peaceful activities and not the LCCs who are involved in violence. IKV Pax Christi

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<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/transparantie/> (reviewed October 18<sup>th</sup> 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>28</sup> Interview Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Interview Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012. Translated from Dutch by current author.

thereby perceives the peaceful activists, though protected by armed opposition forces like the FSA, to be a separate faction in the conflict. But, as described above, IKV Pax Christi does not reject violent resistance in times of need. The choice to support only peaceful activism is in line with the expectations of IKV Pax Christi's followers. In addition, it is understandable for its partners in Syria and the movement is, by not supporting any violent faction in Syria, not losing its position as a mediating organization in the international arena and towards its donors. Thereby, IKV Pax Christi made the strategic decision to highlight the peaceful component of the revolution and using this component to its own advantage.

To determine if a certain LCC only organizes peaceful activities, a strict analysis had to be made of every LCC before joining in the campaign and donations to be collected. This analysis is based on direct contact with the concerning LCC and information from other global organizations<sup>30</sup>. On the *Adopt a Revolution* website, it states that this contact runs directly from IKV Pax Christi to the LCC, but in reality this contact runs via the German *Adopt a Revolution*. The effect of this is that the organization seems more trustworthy in their analysis of those LCCs. Evert-Jan<sup>31</sup> clarifies that this is needed, since it is already difficult to show examples of demonstrations or photos of LCC-members. The repressive al-Assad regime forces LCCs to be clandestine in their work. The implication of this is that little proof can be published of the actual members and work of the supported LCCs.

In framing the campaign, the adopt-team is using what Benford and Snow (2000) have defined as prognostic framing, which is the articulation of a solution to the problem. A plan of attack is constructed by IKV Pax Christi in which they consider supporting the peaceful LCCs as the best solution to push for a peaceful transition in Syria. Although the adopt-team had difficulties in concretely representing the work of LCCs, the solution is clearly formulated in the campaign. IKV Pax Christi explains: "We, and our partners, are convinced that these civil groups within the revolutionary movement offer the best chance for a better future for Syria, and they therefore deserve our support."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, this prognostic framing is not only a useful in the sense of consensus mobilization, because IKV Pax Christi goes for the simple singular goal of peaceful activism, but too for action mobilization. The singular choice for peaceful activism gives people a simple goal to follow.

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<sup>30</sup> See the above paragraph.

<sup>31</sup> Interview Evert-Jan on July 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>32</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/waaromsteun/> (reviewed October 21<sup>th</sup> 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

### ***4.1.3 The Dutch audience and the Syrian population***

The philosophy of equality of IKV Pax Christi plays an important role in the construction of a relation between the Dutch audience and the Syrian population. This principle is based on the perception that all of humanity should be treated with the same norms and values of freedom and human dignity. This message is not explicitly mentioned on the website of the campaign or any other medium, but is implicitly present throughout the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution*.

In this narrative, the Syrian population is rising up against the al-Assad regime to fight for freedom, dignity and (democratic) reforms. The Syrian population has been repressed for years by the al-Assad regime and now the population wants more freedom and a democratic government. After the violent interference of the street protests by the al-Assad regime, the call for dignity has been added to the list. This narrative of fighting for values like freedom, (democratic) reform and dignity, explicitly mentioned on the website, is presented as the main reason for the revolution in Syria. IKV Pax Christi considers these values to be the same as the Dutch audience perceives as important. This similarity can construct a relationship between the two on the basis of shared values.

Furthermore, special attention is given to the Christian minority in Syria. In a special subsection called “Christians and other minorities”<sup>33</sup>, the situation of this Christian minority and other minorities is discussed. It is explained that the position of these minorities is rather precarious. The LCCs are generally including all people regardless of ethnicity or religion. The subsection concludes with the argument that therefore the support of LCCs is the best way to protect these minorities. This is interesting when realizing that IKV Pax Christi is consisting of two former Christian movements: IKV and Pax Christi. Sabita explains that a major part of the IKV Pax Christi followers has a Christian background as well. Evelien<sup>34</sup> adds that these followers are an important part of the *Adopt a Revolution* target group. The explicit attention given to Christian minorities in Syria gives the Christian audience something to relate to.

The relation between the Dutch audience and the Syrian population seems to be based on the representation of the Syrian population as fighting for similar values as the Dutch audience. Freedom and human dignity are perceived as proper, thus the Syrian population is struggling for a proper cause. This can be regarded as a form of motivational framing, which provides the audience with motivations to take action. Thereby vocabulary of motive is used in the form of propriety (Benford and Snow 2000). Also special attention is given to the Christian

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<sup>33</sup> See: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/waaromsteun/> (reviewed October 21th 2012). Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>34</sup> Interview Evelien on July 24<sup>th</sup> 2012.

minority in Syria is in line with this motivational framing as the Christian followers of IKV Pax Christi may regard the presence of fellow Christians in Syria as an extra motivation to take action.

## **4.2 Resonance**

Has the frame of *Adopt a Revolution* the potential to influence the decision of Dutch civilians to participate in the campaign? The *Adopt a Revolution* frame will be compared to the model of Johnston and Noakes (2005, 15) to tentatively explore the resonance of the frame. Johnston and Noakes have defined three clear qualities, ‘cultural compatibility’, consistency’ and ‘relevance’, a frame needs to possess in order to have a good resonance.

For a frame to have a good resonance it firstly must have the quality of ‘cultural compatibility’. The narrative needs to be in line with the cultural mindset of the target audience. When regarding the *Adopt a Revolution* frame, the narrative, as described above, seems to be in line with the cultural mindset of the Dutch audience in several ways. Firstly, IKV Pax Christi considers the values that the Syrian peace activists are calling for to be the same as the values the Dutch audience perceives to be important. The terminology of freedom, (democratic) reform and human dignity are used to build a relationship between the Dutch audience and Syrian population. Furthermore, the narrative is in line with the Christian background of IKV Pax Christi’s rank and file, who are a part of the target audience. The fact that IKV Pax Christi gives attention to the Christian minority in Syria in a special subsection indicates that they try to take account of their target audience’s background. In light of the values of human dignity and freedom, the boundary framing too seems to be in line with the cultural background of the Dutch audience. In this boundary frame the al-Assad regime is presented as evil and the one responsible for the Syrian conflict. In the eyes of the Dutch audience the al-Assad regime is regarded as evil too, since the regime forsakes the values of freedom and human dignity and standing against democratic reform.

The second criterion, as defined by Johnston and Noakes (2005), is ‘consistency’. They explain that there needs to be consistency between the beliefs, claims, ideology and actions of a movement. Inconsistency of a frame can undermine the frame itself (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 15). The ideology of IKV Pax Christi is based on its past as a Christian peace movement. Originally both IKV and Pax Christi worked on the basis of Christian values of human dignity. Nowadays these values are still central in the ideology of the movement. In the *Strategisch*

*Meerjarenplan*<sup>35</sup> it states that the central values of the movement are human dignity and solidarity with peace initiatives and victims of war. IKV Pax Christi's belief and ideology are along the lines of their claim regarding the Syrian conflict. With the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign, IKV Pax Christi actually claims that supporting the peaceful LCCs is the best way to push for a peaceful transition in Syria. The beliefs, claims and ideology of IKV Pax Christi seem to correspond with the actions that they organize. *Adopt a Revolution* is such an action in which these beliefs, claims and ideology of the movement are translated. Supporting peaceful LCCs appears to be directly related to the movement values of freedom, human dignity and peace.

Lastly, a frame must have the quality of 'relevance' (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 15). A frame is useful when it has the capacity to make sense of what is happening in the target audience's daily lives. Sabita explains that it is essential for a campaign to succeed to promote it when the regular media are also reporting on the same issue. She clarifies that the timing of the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign could have been better. Although the issue in Syria was on the 'news agenda' for over a year, with weekly reports, the public was already leaning towards satiation on the issue. So on the one hand, the Syrian conflict was present in the daily lives of Dutch people and it therefore made sense to their daily lives. But on the other hand, people were overloaded with the atrocities in Syria seen in the news. The relevance was there but in a negative way, since the people were tired of hearing the same sad story over and over again.

When analyzing the *Adopt a Revolution* frame in light of the three criteria of Johnston and Noakes (2005) the frame seems to correspond to the qualities of cultural compatibility and consistency completely and the quality of relevance partially. However, from the interviews it has not become clear if the adopt-team has given significant attention towards the frame they constructed. Sabita and Evert-Jan<sup>36</sup> have only raised attention towards the last criterion of Johnston and Noakes, namely the relevance of a frame in the target audience's daily lives. They both point out that the timing of the campaign could have been better. The above comparison is therefore purely an exploration of the *Adopt a Revolution* frame in light of the criteria of Johnston and Noakes. How do these points relate to the experiences of *Adopt a Revolution* participants?

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<sup>35</sup> IKV Pax Christi: 'Met het oog op vrede: Strategisch Meerjarenplan 2011-2015'.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews with Evert-Jan (July 12th 2012), Sabita (August 16th 2012).

### 4.3 Framing Implications

To get a picture of the experiences of participant of *Adopt a Revolution* with the campaign, an online survey was held among them. As mentioned in chapter three, I only had permission to organize an online survey and not for holding qualitative interviews. Therefore, the investigation of the experiences of participants is solely based on the answers received through the survey. What's more, only 25 participants out of a total of 425 have actually completed the survey. As is discussed in chapter three, the survey is only representative to a certain extent. Therefore, no hard statements can be made based on the results. However, some interesting suggestions can be made on these findings. Before discussing these findings, I want to stress that only participants who read the monthly update can participate in the survey. Hence only committed participants fill in the survey, which results in a rather biased view. Nonetheless, among those participants some interesting points come to the fore.

The first relevant point here is that most participants have signed the online petition or donated money out of reasons such as “to support a good cause” or out of “solidarity”. Only three out of twenty-one participants explicitly mentions Syria in their answer. It seems as if most committed participants partake in the campaign out of a general motive of solidarity, while only a few partake out of a concrete motive of this particular issue. This finding suggests that the general picture of peaceful activists fighting a cruel dictator has more weight in the *Adopt a Revolution* frame, than the concrete situation in Syria.

Comparing this conclusion to the results of survey question 20<sup>37</sup> about the general commitment of participants with other people around the world, this conclusion becomes more apparent. Three-quarter of the participants have declared that they feel committed or concerned with people on the other side of the world even if they do not directly know those people. The other quarter does not agree or disagree with this proposition. Two of the three participants who mentioned Syria in their motivation to participate fall within this quarter. The results of survey question 20 do correspond with the conclusion that most participants partake in the campaign out of general reasons of solidarity.

This conclusion is supported by the results of survey question 8<sup>38</sup>. On the question if the contributors of money to a specific LCC among the participants who donated money still remember to which LCC they have donated, only two out of eleven still remember. This could point to the direction that participants do donate out of general motives.

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<sup>37</sup> Question 20, answering the statement: ‘Even if I do not know them personally, I feel very engaged with people on the other site of the world.’ Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>38</sup> Question 8: ‘Did you specifically donated to one or more Local Civil Committees?’ Translated from Dutch by current author.

Next to the trend that participants have donated out of general reasons of solidarity, a second trend is visible. In the answers to several questions, more than half of the participants declare they do not know of specific information on the website or have not read specific information on the website about Syria or related issues. Take for example survey question 26<sup>39</sup>. Only seven out of twenty has read the information about armed or non-armed resistance. Of the thirteen participants remaining, only four know of the existence of the information. Survey question 27<sup>40</sup> about reading the *Nassama* blog has roughly the same outcome. Eight out of twenty participants has ever read the blog, while the same number of people were not aware of the existence of *Nassama*. The fact that such a modest number of participants has read, or is even aware of, the information about Syria on the website, raises the question if the *Adopt a Revolution* frame has had but a minor impact on the global solidarity of Dutch citizens.

IKV Pax Christi has mobilized many Dutch civilians for *Adopt a Revolution*. But due to the actual number of participants that has filled in the survey and due to the small part of that group that has shown their commitment through actively following the Syrian issue on the website, it seems that the framing of the Syrian conflict has little impact on the extend of global solidarity of the *Adopt a Revolution* participants. This suggests that the majority of the participants partake not based on the specific case of Syria, but on the grounds of solidarity in general.

#### **4.4 Mobilizing the Global Solidary**

Through the *Adopt a Revolution* frame 425 Dutch citizens have participated with the campaign. Although the frame appears to have, based on the framework of Johnston and Noakes (2005), potential to mobilize Dutch civilians, this is not solely achieved through this frame. In the above paragraph it is suggested that *Adopt a Revolution* participants partake on grounds of solidarity in general. What kind of solidarity has been at play in the frame and how does this relate to the global solidarity of the majority of the participants?

To determine what kind of solidarity has been at play here, I will use three kinds of solidarity defined by Olesen (2004). As described in chapter 2, these are material solidarity, rights solidarity and global solidarity. In a way one can maintain that in the *Adopt a Revolution*

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<sup>39</sup> Question 26, answering the statement: ‘The background information on the website about ‘armed or unarmed’ is confusing.’ Translated from Dutch by current author.

<sup>40</sup> Question 27, ‘How many times in the last six months have you read the *Nassama* blog.?’ Translated from Dutch by current author.

campaign material solidarity plays a central role. Material solidarity is characterized by a savior-victim dichotomy and the transfer of material support, such as money or food. Although the money donated in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is a material form of support, the petition is a mental form of support. Furthermore, the victim-savior dichotomy is not fully present here. The Syrian peace activists are not put in the position of victims. They are fighting for their cause on their own account and strength and thereby Dutch citizens can support them though not from the role of a savior. The peace activists are not fully dependent on the support they achieve through *Adopt a Revolution*. The same goes for rights solidarity. Rights solidarity is based on the idea that every human being has human rights and those should be protected. Although this (Christian) notion, Syrians are fighting for freedom and human dignity, is present in *Adopt a Revolution*, here too the Dutch citizens are not in the savior position of saving the Syrian population.

Most central in the frame of *Adopt a Revolution* seems to be global solidarity. As Olesen (2004) also explains, global solidarity rests on an inherently human connection on which solidarity is carried out without the victim-savior dichotomy. Based on the above conclusions, it seems that the majority of the *Adopt a Revolution* participants partake on these grounds of motivation. The answers of some participants in the survey illustrate this point. Participant G motivates her decision to sign the petition by claiming to do it out of “common humanity.” Participant J explains that he signed because “they fight for a better world, just like me.” Participant H elaborates on it eloquently: “to support the population there, what would we expect when we are in the same situation, support of others, right?”

Global solidarity thus appears to be central in the motivations to join with *Adopt a Revolution*. In the different framings of IKV Pax Christi, as described in the first section of this chapter, we have seen that IKV Pax Christi has played into this idea of global solidarity. An example is the emphasis that is laid on ‘universal’ values, such as human dignity, freedom and democratic reform. IKV Pax Christi considers these values to be the same as the Dutch audience perceives as important. Furthermore, and related to the last point, the notion of peaceful activism is central in the framings of IKV Pax Christi. We have seen that IKV Pax Christi has chosen to make a distinction between the peaceful and violent opposition, whereby they emphasize the peaceful political acts in Syria. Global solidarity rests on an inherently human connection in which these ‘universal’ values and peaceful activism seem to be an important factor.

However, it is not as unproblematic as it seems. IKV Pax Christi needs to position itself in relation to the Syrian conflict and thereby also needs to legitimize the *Adopt a Revolution*

campaign. As the Syrian revolution seems to become more violent with the week, if the mainstream media are to be believed, it becomes difficult for IKV Pax Christi to uphold their message of the peaceful, non-violent nature of the Syrian revolution towards the Dutch public. Since IKV Pax Christi stands for peaceful activism, they can only legitimize this campaign if the Dutch public and IKV Pax Christi's donors believe that peaceful activism exists in Syria. Despite these difficulties, IKV Pax Christi keeps on balancing between these different interests of acting in Syria, legitimizing these actions and mobilizing people.

*Adopt a Revolution* is therefore a good example of a frame for mobilizing people who already perceive themselves solidary on a global scale. The frame inherently puts the message of global solidarity forward in the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution* and thereby triggers those people who want to do something to make the world more peaceful. The frame does not create global solidarity; it is the perception of global solidarity of the participants that the frame plays into.

## 5. Online Mobilization

Many social movements use the online space of the Internet to organize campaigns and mobilize people. *Adopt a Revolution* is a good example of an activity of a social movement that is taking place in the online sphere, because the main activities and the promotion both take place on the internet. In this chapter I explore the use of the online space by IKV Pax Christi in their campaign *Adopt a Revolution*. In what ways has IKV Pax Christi used the online space for *Adopt a Revolution*? After exploring this question an investigation is made in what ways the online campaign is leading to activism or slacktivism.

### 5.1 An Online Campaign

*Adopt a Revolution* is primarily an online campaign. As mentioned before, the website, [www.adoptarevolution.nl](http://www.adoptarevolution.nl), is the place where people can show their support towards the LCCs by signing the online petition and where money can be donated to a specific LCC. But the promotion of the campaign has been done in other parts of the online space as well, like social media sites and specific websites and blogs. Furthermore, the *Adopt a Revolution* website and the *Nassama* blog have been used to spread information. In this section I will elaborate on each of these online media functions.

In the first place the online space is used to spread information by IKV Pax Christi. This entails information about the campaign, general information about the situation in Syria, the specific LCCs and IKV Pax Christi. The spreading of information is regarded as one of the major advantages of the online space (Howard and Hussain 2011; Iskander 2011; Shirky 2011, 34; Valenzuela et al. 2012). Moreover, the information about the Syrian conflict that is presented on the website is an alternative view on the conflict to the general message portrayed in the mainstream media. IKV Pax Christi highlights the peaceful activism present in the conflict and puts it in the context of the wider struggle.<sup>41</sup> A more nuanced view of the conflict is presented in contrast to the violent story of the main stream media. In this sense, the website can be regarded as an ‘alternative public space’, through which alternative stories, or ‘counter-narratives’, can be presented (Al-Ani et al. 2012, 8-9). Thereby traditional streams of media, such as the Dutch mainstream news reports that focus primarily on violent clashes in Syria, are countered. New forms of awareness are created in this way.

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<sup>41</sup> The content of this information is presented in Chapter 4.

In addition to the information on the website, the *Nassama* blog is another way through which information is spread. It is mostly opinion pieces that are presented here. Take for instance the guest blog of Maarten Zeegers who has written about the lost peaceful ideal of the revolution.<sup>42</sup> The extra value in comparison to the website is that people can react on posted messages and discuss the theme or issue that is covered. Through these reactions and discussions space opens up for anyone willing to share their opinion or alternative knowledge. This gives the alternative public space of the website more depth. People are not only able to receive news, but can add news and discuss new items with others. Next to an information and public space function, this adds a communication function as well. However, this last function is not much used by visitors of the blog. If one takes in account that the website has been visited more than



Figure 2: www.adoptarevolution.nl (11-10-2012)



Figure 1: www.adoptarevolution.nl /ikvpaxchristi/ (11-10-2012)

6400 times in the last five months, only a handful of visitors have actually posted reactions to blogs on the website.<sup>43</sup> The opportunity for group dialogue, as distinguished by Weare (In: Polat 2005, 443-444), is therefore not used here. The construction of collective identities and networked societies, which are regarded as strengths of using online media (Howard and Hussain 2011; Iskander 2011, 1227; Valenzuela et al. 2012, 4), are thus not fully exploited.

Secondly, the online space is used to promote the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign. One of the major advantages of using the online space as a promotion tool is that one is able to do targeted promotion. Targeted promotion is advertisement that is placed on media platforms with a specific audience, such as a website for dog owners or a professional journal for peace scholars. A fitting example of this kind of promotion is 'banering'. Banering is the placement of banners on such specific websites. If people are attracted to your banner, they can click on it which will lead them through to your website. An example of the *Adopt a Revolution* banner

<sup>42</sup> For the guestblog of Maarten Zeegers on Nassama, see: <http://ikvpaxmenablog.wordpress.com/2012/08/24/gastblog-maarten-zeegers-het-vreedzame-ideaal-van-de-revolutie-is-verloren/> (reviewed October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

<sup>43</sup> See, <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/> (reviewed September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

can be seen in figure 2. IKV Pax Christi has placed this banner on websites such as *Sargasso.nl*, *welingelichtekringen.nl*, *speld.nl* and *wereldburgers.tv*.<sup>44</sup> The adopt-team regarded these websites to be places where people that could be interested in the campaign are to be found. The themes of these websites are in line with the theme of *Adopt a Revolution*. For example, both *welingelichtekringen.nl* and *speld.nl* are alternative news websites which correspond with the alternative story of peaceful activism in Syria.

The campaign is also promoted through using the personal facebook and twitter accounts of IKV Pax Christi, its employees and contacts. Through both social media sites messages were spread calling upon people to join the campaign by signing the petition or donating money. Examples of these messages can be found in figure 3. The advantage of using these social media sites is that the social networks of IKV Pax Christi employees and contacts are utilized to promote the campaign. Moreover, the people that have been reached this way are able to spread the same message to their social network and so on. To achieve this snowball effect, on twitter there is an



Figure 3: <https://twitter.com/IKVPaxChristi> (11-10-2012)

application through which people can ‘retweet’ a certain message. Sending that original message to all their ‘twitter-followers’. In this way, vast numbers of people can be reached within a very short time span. As Valenzuela et al. (2012, 4) explain that through online media, one has the ability to facilitate access to a large number of contacts without restrictions of time and place. Online media thus have the ability to quickly mobilize critical mass (Valenzuela et al. 2012).

A last way to promote *Adopt a Revolution* by using online media is through electronic newsletters. The electronic newsletter of IKV Pax Christi is send to anyone who has subscribed and is interested in the work of the movement. In these letters, extra information is given on the work and activities of IKV Pax Christi through which the movement is presenting itself more personally to followers. In this way, a big pool of interested followers of IKV Pax Christi is reached.

<sup>44</sup> See, “Campagneplan Adopt A Revolution.nl” by IKV Pax Christi, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Next to the functions of promotion and the spreading of information, the online space is used to raise support for the LCCs. On the *Adopt a Revolution* website people can sign the online petition. When signing that petition people declare themselves solidary with the peaceful activists of the LCCs, thereby letting the activists in Syria know that they are not standing alone in their struggle for peace. If people want to go a step further in their support they can also donate money to one of the four LCCs that are presented on the website. The actions and goals of the LCCs are presented in a short paragraph for each LCC. People have the choice to which LCC they want to donate money.

Not only is the online platform used for organizing and promoting the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign itself, but as well used for IKV Pax Christi to present itself towards the public and its donors, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ‘V-fonds’<sup>45</sup>. As mentioned in chapter 4, strategic choices are made in order to present IKV Pax Christi as lucratively, both towards the public, its partners and donors. The online platform is used to present the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution*. As mentioned above, information is spread among people through the website, social media like facebook and twitter and electronic newsletters.

The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is primarily taking place in the online space of the internet and can be defined as an online campaign. Where in the Netherlands the campaign is solely taking place in the online space of the internet, this online campaign is translated to offline activities in Syria. The activities of the LCCs in Syria, like printing a newspaper or documenting human rights violations, are the offline outcomes of this online activism.

## **5.2 Activism and Slacktivism**

What are the implications of doing these online activities on the outcomes of the campaign? In other words, what are the actual actions, or contributions, made by participants of *Adopt a Revolution* to the LCCs? To investigate this question, results of the campaign are analyzed and put in perspective of the debate around slacktivism (Christensen 2011, Gladwell 2010).

The central argument in the ‘slacktivism debate’ is the ‘critique of ineffectiveness’. It is argued that people can easily participate in online forms of activism like signing petitions or ‘liking’ a campaign on facebook and feel content about it. At that moment, people feel content about themselves, having taken action against an issue which grieves them, and subsequently take no further action. Therefore, these forms of online activism are regarded as being ineffective. In this context, activism is a low cost activity, with little actual outcomes other than

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<sup>45</sup> For more information about the V-fonds, see: <http://www.v-fonds.nl/> (reviewed October 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

the petition itself or the ‘liking’ of a facebook-page. Gladwell (2010, 45) explains that the reason for this is that the platforms of social media are built on weak ties. For the creation and spreading of new ideas the online platform is useful, because one is able to connect with a great many people. People are able to share ideas on a scale never seen before. However, Gladwell (2010) argues that online activism never leads to high-risk activism. The strong ties based on trust which are essential for high risk activism are absent in the online space. Therefore, he argues that online activism never directly leads to traditional forms of activism. Through online media you get many people to join, if the thing they need to do is easy. “Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice, but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice” (Gladwell 2010, 46-47). When little actual contributions are made by participants of online activism, an online campaign is producing slacktivism instead of activism (Christensen 2011; Gladwell 2010).

The *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is built around two central actions in which people can partake, namely signing an online petition and donating money. Both can be regarded as easy things to do. To sign the online petition to support the cause of the LCCs, someone only needs to click the link and fill in their name, place of residency and email address.<sup>46</sup> It would take a person less than a minute to be an activist. The same goes for donating money to a specific LCC. One chooses a LCC that one wants to support, fills in the amount of money one wants to donate and fills in their personal information (name, address, place of residency and email address).<sup>47</sup> It would take a person two minutes to become an activist. Nevertheless the fact that these activities conform to the kind of easy online activism Gladwell (2010) speaks of, does not verify that *Adopt a Revolution* produces slacktivism. An activist who partakes in such a short, low cost activity can still be contributing to the campaign and/or cause.

However, an online activity is only producing ‘slacktivism’ when no or little actual contributions are made to a campaign (Gladwell 2010). Donating money to *Adopt a Revolution* is making an actual contribution to the cause, since the money is used by the LCCs for offline activities, such as the production of a local newspaper. One of the four LCCs that can be supported through *Adopt a Revolution* is Deraya. This LCC is producing a local newspaper

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<sup>46</sup> For the application form of the online petition, see: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/solidair-met-de-syriers/> (reviewed on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2012)

<sup>47</sup> For an example, see: [https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/adopteer-een-comite/?campaign\\_id=32](https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/adopteer-een-comite/?campaign_id=32) (reviewed on October 16<sup>th</sup> 2012)

'Aineb Balady'<sup>48</sup> aimed at informing local citizens and mobilizing people for peaceful protests. For an example of a Dutch translation of this newspaper see figure 4. In this way, *Adopt a Revolution* is making a difference. Or as Valenzuela et al. (2012, 13) would explain that online tools do not create new forms of political protest, but amplify traditional forms of protest.

On the other hand, the signing of the online petition to show ones solidarity with the cause of the LCCs is not making an actual contribution towards their cause. In most cases, petitions are presented towards a public figure or a political authority that has some form of power to contribute to a cause. The online petition of *Adopt a Revolution* is not used in any such way. The only function of the *Adopt a Revolution* petition seems to be for the Dutch public to express their sympathy or solidarity with the cause of the LCCs and to show the LCCs that people in the Netherlands care about their cause.

However, I doubt if the results of the online petition ever reach Syria, because there has not been any direct contact between IKV Pax Christi and the LCCs in Syria.

So when we consider the online petition to be a slacktivism activity and the act of donating money to be a form of activism, how then does this relate to the actual acts of the participants of *Adopt a Revolution*? As presented in chapter three, of the 425 participants of the campaign, 382 persons have signed the online petition and 144 persons have donated money. This means that 281 participants have signed the online petition, but have not donated any money to the LCCs (See table 2). In the eyes of Gladwell (2010), the 66 percent of the participants of *Adopt a Revolution*, who only signed the online petition, would not be making any actual contribution to the campaign and be defined as 'slacktivists'. The other 35 percent, who thus donated money, are in this light considered to be activists.



Figure 4: <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/wpcontent/uploads/2012/09/Syrische-Krant-p1NED.pdf> (16-10-

<sup>48</sup> Translation of *Aineb Balady* = Inheemse Druif. <https://www.adoptarevolution.nl/gevraagd-persvrijheid-in-syrie-2/> (reviewed October 16<sup>th</sup> 2012)

<b>Total number of participants</b>	<b>425 [100 %]</b>
Participants who only signed the petition	281 [66 %]
Participants who only donated money	43 [10 %]
Participants who both signed the petition and donated money	101 [24 %]

**Table 2: Participation results.** Source: Evelien

Christensen (2011) argues that for online activism to be really effective it needs to be translated to offline activism. In that sense, Christensen would agree with Gladwell (2010). Yet, Christensen (2011) is less strict with his conclusions as Gladwell (2010). Christensen (2011) argues that a campaign is making a difference whatever the impact in an offline setting is. As long as acts cause no harm, why then would we be so negative about it? “They at least pursue their political goals by any means possible” (Christensen 2011). To characterize the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign as causing slacktivism would be unconvincing for Christensen (2011). Those participants that have donated money have given significant support to the LCCs in Syria which translate those online acts to offline actions. The 66 percent of the participants who have signed the online petition are not causing harm that way. From Christensen’s point of view, the campaign is causing no harm and thus no slacktivism. Maybe the *Adopt a Revolution* participants would not have taken any actions concerning Syria without the existence of the campaign. However, when taking actual contributions as the means to identify activism from slacktivism, the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign is resulting in both forms.

### **5.3 Helping LCCs or Promoting IKV Pax Christi?**

In this chapter we have seen how IKV Pax Christi has used online media for the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign and what the possibilities are of using the online platform. Three functions of online media have been used, namely for spreading and sharing information, for promotion purposes and to execute activities. These online activities have resulted in both actual contributions to the LCCs, the donation of money, and no real contributions, the signing of the online petition. Both acts together are defined as being contributions on the grounds of the translation of those activities in actual offline activities of the supported LCCs. Important is thus to consider the consequences of the different online activities in the offline setting.

Based on the finding that both activism and slacktivism have resulted from the campaign, I wonder what the most important goal of IKV Pax Christi is with this campaign. Is the central goal of the campaign helping the LCCs in Syria? When that is the case, why then is IKV Pax Christi not using the petition to push for political action? Or is the *Adopt a Revolution*

campaign in the first place a way to promote IKV Pax Christi as a social movement? It would then make sense that IKV Pax Christi is only using the online petition to commit Dutch civilians to the movement. Exploring these questions is necessary when trying to understand the impact of using online media on the campaign.

## 6. Discussions, Recommendations and Conclusions

In this thesis I have investigated the central research question: '*what is the influence of framing, using online media, on global solidarity within contemporary global political activism?*'. I have firstly focused on exploring the link between framing and global solidarity central in the first sub question. Secondly, the attention has shifted to the link between global solidarity and framing on the one hand and online media on the other. The second link is central in the second sub question. Together the findings of these sub questions form an answer to the central research question of this thesis, but before answering the central research question, the different findings are discussed and recommendations are presented.

### 6.1 Discussion of Findings

The first sub question that will be discussed here is: *how do a social movement's framing of a particular societal issue and global solidarity with that issue influence each other?* The relation between framing and global solidarity is two-sided. Where practices of framing play into the global solidarity of a target audience, these same framings shape the way in which a target audience views issues on which their global solidarity is based.

In chapter 2 we have seen that global solidarity is a social construction which can be (strategically) created, changed and recreated. This construction is partly based on a person's perception of an issue. The way in which an issue is presented, or framed, inevitably shapes the way people perceive the issue. Through these so-called 'politics of knowledge' mobilization strategies are shaped and thereby hold networks and solidarities across global spaces together (Leach and Scoones 2005, 16-20).

As we have seen in chapter 4, politics of knowledge play an important role in the narrative of *Adopt a Revolution*. IKV Pax Christi represents the Syrian revolution as based on a peaceful and non-violent basis. They thereby keep on reminding that the majority of the Syrian protests are non-violent and peaceful. A distinction is made between peaceful and violent opposition, whereby IKV Pax Christi emphasizes the peaceful political acts in Syria. However, the mainstream Dutch media are reporting only about violence in Syria which makes it difficult for IKV Pax Christi to uphold their message towards the Dutch public of the peaceful, non-violent nature of the Syrian revolution. Regardless of which is the 'true' story, IKV Pax Christi is actively promoting their story of the Syrian revolution through which they aim at shaping the

way the Dutch public is perceiving the issue. In the terminology of Benford and Snow (2000), this kind of framing is named ‘diagnostic framing’.

IKV Pax Christi’s politics of framing is not merely a struggle to tell their story to the Dutch public. It is as well influenced by the position the movement takes in the international political field. On the one side, IKV Pax Christi presents to the Dutch public that they support the (peaceful) opposition and are against the al-Assad regime. On the other hand, IKV Pax Christi is internationally positioned as a neutral peace movement which aims at mediation. The movement is dependent on this neutral position for their peace programs around the world. Their way to hold both positions of ‘neutrality’ and to be against the al-Assad regime, is to focus on peaceful activism. The al-Assad regime is presented as being excessively violent, so supporting peaceful activism inherently means not supporting the al-Assad regime. This also means supporting that part of the opposition who execute peaceful political acts. IKV Pax Christi seems to balance between both positions through emphasizing that peaceful activism in Syria is occurring.

Another element that is central in the *Adopt a Revolution* narrative are ‘universal’ values of human dignity, freedom and democratic reform. IKV Pax Christi explains that the Syrian revolution has originated because of these values and they thereby relate it to the revolutions of the Arabic Spring. As a result, IKV Pax Christi seems to connect with the cultural background of the Dutch public. They consider these ‘universal’ values to be the same as the Dutch audience perceives as important. These universal ‘values’ seem to form a basis for a relation between the Dutch public with peaceful Syrian LCCs. IKV Pax Christi’s notion of universal values is comparable to Caney’s (2005) idea of a common ground for a collective identity, which entails the notion that all persons have common needs and vulnerabilities. Examples are that all humans suffer from physical pain and need air to breathe, food to eat, water to drink if we are to survive. Although Caney’s (2005) examples of commonalities are more fundamental than the universal ‘values’ that are central in the *Adopt a Revolution*, the latter has the same function as the former.

We have seen in chapter 4 that in the motivations to join with *Adopt a Revolution* participant’s feelings of global solidarity appear to be central. The relation between framing and global solidarity is not solely one-sided in the sense that framing influences people’s perceptions of the world and the actions they take based on these perceptions. This relation is more complex. IKV Pax Christi mobilizes people who already perceive themselves solidary on a global scale through the above mentioned elements of the *Adopt a Revolution* frame, such as ‘universal’ values and peaceful activism. The frame does not create global solidarity; it is the

perception of global solidarity of the *Adopt a Revolution* participants that the frame plays into and thereby triggers those people who want to do something to make the world more peaceful. It is thus not only that frames influence and reconstruct perceptions of global solidarity, frames are also constructed around existing perceptions of global solidarity.

Secondly, the link between global solidarity and framing on the one hand and online media on the other is central in the second research question: ‘how can online media be used for a social movement’s framing of a particular societal issue to influence global solidarity with that issue?’. If one wants to determine if online activism is effective for the ultimate goal of a certain political campaign, the actual effects of the campaign need to be taken into account. Gladwell (2010) argues that an online activity is producing ‘slacktivism’ when no or little actual contributions are made to a campaign and Christensen (2011) adds that online activism is only effective when it is translated to offline activism. Considering the actual offline outcomes in Syria of *Adopt a Revolution*, the campaign has resulted in both activism and slacktivism. The use of online media for political activism can result, to certain extends, in activism and slacktivism.

In the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign online media are used to organize an online petition and to raise donations for LCCs. These online activities have resulted in actual contributions to the LCCs in the form of the donation of money. The offline impact of this online act consists of the activities that the LCCs conduct in Syria, like the production of a local newspaper. However, the signing of the online petition is not translated into actual offline outcomes, because the results of the online petition are only presented on the *Adopt a Revolution* website. The results of the online petition are not used for any political acts. Organizing online activism, in the case of *Adopt a Revolution* thus results in both activism and slacktivism when considering the actual offline outcomes in Syria.

However, the question if the *Adopt a Revolution* frame itself has caused both activism and slacktivism cannot be answered based on the collected data. This has more to do with a technical choice of IKV Pax Christi for certain online activities, than with the *Adopt a Revolution* frame. When regarding the outcomes of the online survey, the influences of online activism causing activism or slacktivism on global solidarity seem to be little; especially when considering that little difference exists between participants who signed the petition and those who donated money on their perception of global solidarity.

Nevertheless, online media do have several advantages for spreading and promoting a social movement’s framing of societal issues. Chapter 5 shows that the *Adopt a Revolution*

campaign is organized through different online platforms. Especially the *Adopt a Revolution* website and *Nassama* blog have been used. In chapter 2, several advantages and disadvantages of online media have been defined. These are elaborated upon based on two different online media functions that are used in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign.

In this campaign, online media are firstly used for the spreading and sharing of information. Al-Ani et al. (2012, 9), Iskander (2011), Shirky (2011, 34), and Valenzuela et al. (2012) all explain that online media have the advantage over other media, because there are more ways in which one can communicate with others. In this sense, mainly the broadcast form of communication, one-to-many, that Polat (2005, 443-444) describes on the basis of Weare's typology of communication, is aimed at. This communication function of online media is especially used for the spreading and presentation of the *Adopt a Revolution* narrative.

As described above, the different elements of the *Adopt a Revolution* narrative are partly contradictory with the image of the Syrian revolution that mainstream Dutch media outline. Al-Ani et al. (2012, 8) explain that online media are frequently used to promote counter-narratives to oppose the narratives of radio, television and printed media (or mainstream media). As we have seen above, this is exactly what IKV Pax Christi is doing in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign.

Secondly, online media have been used for promotion purposes. The advantages of online media for the promotion of a campaign are quite similar to that of the purpose of spreading and sharing information. We have seen that one of the advantages is targeted promotion through the use of banners. Furthermore, in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign social media, like facebook and twitter, are used to promote the campaign via known contacts. Through 'retweeting' on twitter and 'sharing' on facebook, one can easily reach people in social networks of acquaintances. The advantage of this is that one is able to facilitate access to a large number of contacts without restrictions of time and place (Valenzuela et al. 2012, 4).

## **6.2 Recommendations**

This study has resulted in an analysis of IKV Pax Christi's practices of framing and the relation with global solidarity. This was then investigated in light of the use of online media. Furthermore, the results of this research can function as an interesting example of the mutual influences of both framing practices and perceptions of a target audience. Based on these insights, interesting recommendations can be formulated for any political actor, be it an

individual, non-governmental organization or governmental body, interested in managing global political activism.

To make recommendations for IKV Pax Christi to strengthen the use of online media for the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign, the most important goal of the campaign needs to be clear. If the ultimate goal of the campaign is helping the LCCs in Syria, I would recommend to either doing something useful with the online petition or stop with the online petition at all. For if any political actions are taken with the online petition, the people who signed cannot be disappointed about it as now nothing is done with the results of the petition. Furthermore, the people who feel content after signing the petition are less inclined to also donate money. They already have satisfied their feeling of ‘doing something for the LCCs’, while actually their action of signing the online petition is currently not contributing to the LCCs in any substantial way. However, as mentioned in chapter 5, if the central goal of *Adopt a Revolution* is to promote IKV Pax Christi as a social movement, then it would make sense that IKV Pax Christi is only using the online petition to commit Dutch civilians to the movement. What can be recommended for global social movements in general is that when organizing online activism, the aims of particular online activities need to be investigated beforehand. If the ultimate aim of a campaign is to change something in society, attention needs to be given to the offline effects of online campaigns.

Regarding the mobilization of Dutch civilians through playing into the perceptions of global solidarity, IKV Pax Christi can improve. As has become clear in chapter 4, the *Adopt a Revolution* narrative and the perceptions of global solidarity of the participants are interrelated in the sense that both influence each other. The frame has triggered those people in participating that already feel affinity with the issue central in *Adopt a Revolution*. This is an important element of framing that needs to be taken into account when evaluating or investigating practices of framing by a social movement.

In order to mobilize a wider Dutch public, IKV Pax Christi needs to play into those aspects of the Syrian revolution that do not only trigger people who already have affinity with the issue. A clear investigation is needed of the target group, whereby the different criteria for a frame to have a good resonance defined by Johnston and Noakes (2005) can function as a helpful tool. They (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 15) explain that a frame generally has a better resonance if it is culturally compatible with a target audience’s cultural stock, consistent with a movement’s ideology, beliefs and claims and relevant to the target group’s daily lives. I believe this not only to be an area where IKV Pax Christi can improve if they want to mobilize a wider

Dutch public, but as well a relevant point for any global social movement who wants to mobilize a wide global public.

However, it is, based on this research, not possible to make recommendations about the use of online media for contemporary global social movements. The acquired data during my fieldwork was not the data I needed to fully investigate the use of online media and its effect on the mobilization of Dutch citizens by IKV Pax Christi. Other than the descriptive analysis of the use of online media in the *Adopt a Revolution* campaign and the theoretical discussion of 'slacktivism', I am not able to make any statements concerning online media.

Next to these recommendations for global social movements, two points for further research come to the fore. As mentioned earlier, the study of mobilization through the scope of framing practises is not new within the scientific world. The relevance of this research lies in its focus on global rather than local solidarity, which so far has been the primary concern of scholars investigating social movements. Strategies of framing in mobilization theory have been studied based on activist with direct grievances, like actors within a civil war (Leach and Scoones 2005; Oberschall 2000). In contrast, the strategies of framing in mobilization theory have not been analyzed from the perspective of mobilizing people who are not directly involved in a certain issue, as is the case with the Dutch participants of *Adopt a Revolution*. This changes the relation between framing and solidarity. When framing an issue to mobilize actors in a civil war, the framings play into the direct grievances of the target audience (Oberschall 2000). In the case of framing an issue to mobilize people without these connections, as is also the case with *Adopt a Revolution*, these direct grievances are absent. To mobilize the target audience the connection of the audience with the issue seems to need to be constructed first. The case of *Adopt a Revolution* has shown that this especially can be achieved with people who perceive themselves connected to the people with direct grievances.

Based on the findings, it seems that global solidarity, in contrast to local solidarity, is not based on (perceived) shared direct grievances, but grounded in more fundamental notions of norms and values perceived to be universal. An example is Caney's (2005) notion of a common ground for a collective identity, which entails the notion that all persons have common needs and vulnerabilities. Therefore, this finding of this research may enrich the debate around global solidarity. Where Olesen (2004) describes global solidarity to be based on a global consciousness in which the grievances of distant people are intertwined, I assume that global solidarity is grounded in more fundamental notions of norms and values perceived to be universal. Further comparative research is needed to investigate the truth of this assumption.

### **6.3 Concluding Remarks**

So what is the influence of framing, using online media on global solidarity within contemporary global political activism? Practices of framing and perceptions of global solidarity are intertwined and influential in both directions. Perceptions of global solidarity are altered through the representations of reality on which perceptions of global solidarity are based. In order to strengthen the resonance of a frame, practices of framing take perceptions of a target audience in account or use those representations as a starting point. Online media are a contemporary platform on which these ‘politics of knowledge’ occur. These media therefore seem to be a useful tool for contemporary global political activism. The growing use of online media in contemporary global political activism appears to change the world of activism, but offline outcomes remain essential for actual social change to happen.

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(reviewed October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

## Appendix A

### Example of Interview Guide

This interview guide is used for the interview with Mayke on 25-07-2012 and is translated from Dutch by current author.

#### Interview Guide

What has been your role within the adopt-team?

What was the target group of *Adopt a Revolution*?

How was the situation in Syria explained on the website?

Can you give an example?

Why?

Which aspects were thereby important to mention?

Why?

Did you also leave out information on purpose?

If yes: Which information?

Can you give an example?

Why?

Why have you chosen for four LCCs?

And why these four LCCs and not others?

What is the goal of the texts at the LCCs?

Why?

Who wrote those texts?

How did you write those texts?

How did you decide what to mention and what not?

What do you think to be the effect of these texts about the LCCs on the participation of website visitors?

What is the goal of the **Nassama blog**?

What kind of information are you trying to pass through the blog?

What has been the goal of the text about 'armed/unarmed'?

What do you believe to be the effect of the text on the participation?

Which promotion platforms have been used during the campaign?

How did you use those tools?

Why those?

Which people did you expect to reach with this?

Evert-Jan told me that facebook and twitter had been used as well.

How have facebook and twitter been used?

Which message did you tried to spread?

Which people have you tried to reach?

What is the effect?

Why?

Where there difficulties within the team in this process of making choices?

Can you give me an example?

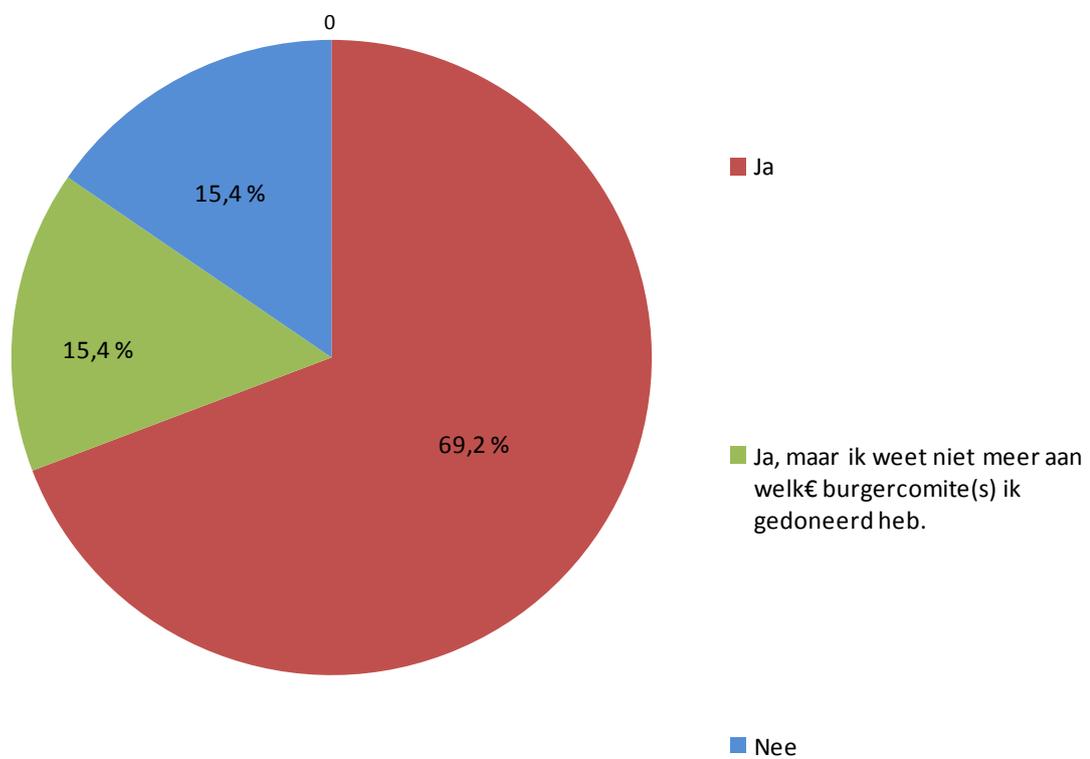
When looking back, would you do things differently?

Why?

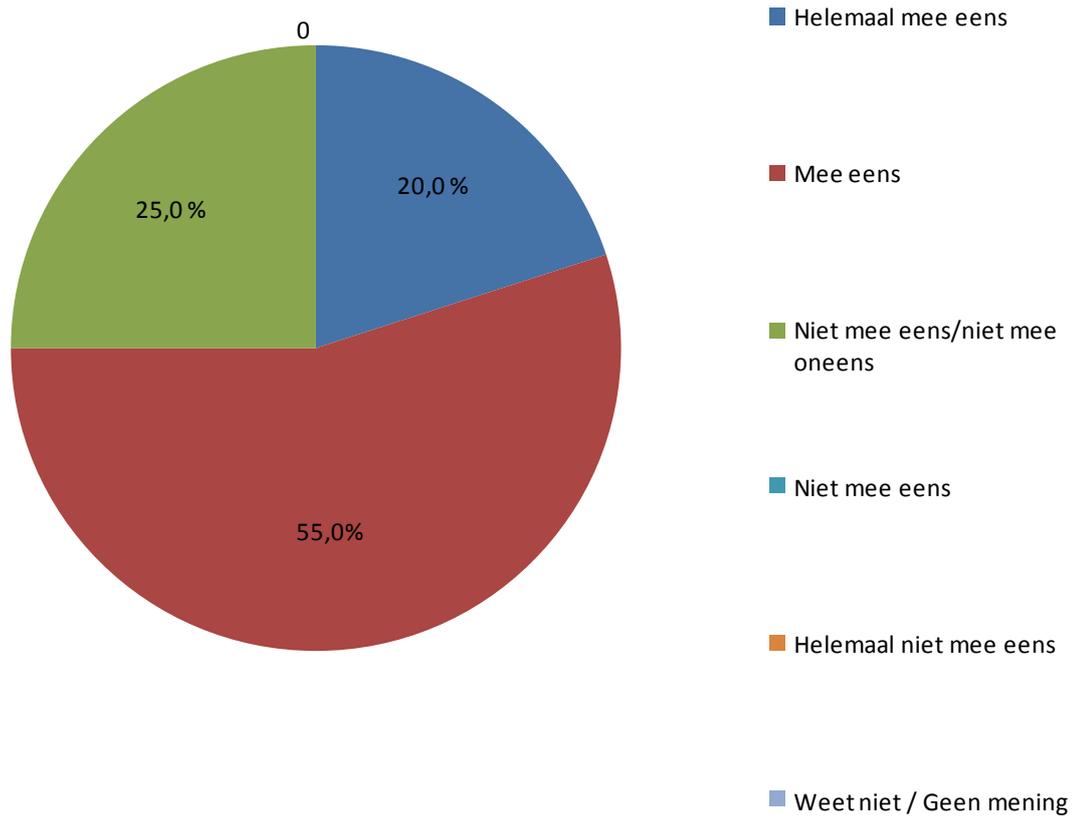
## Appendix B

### Results Relevant Survey Questions

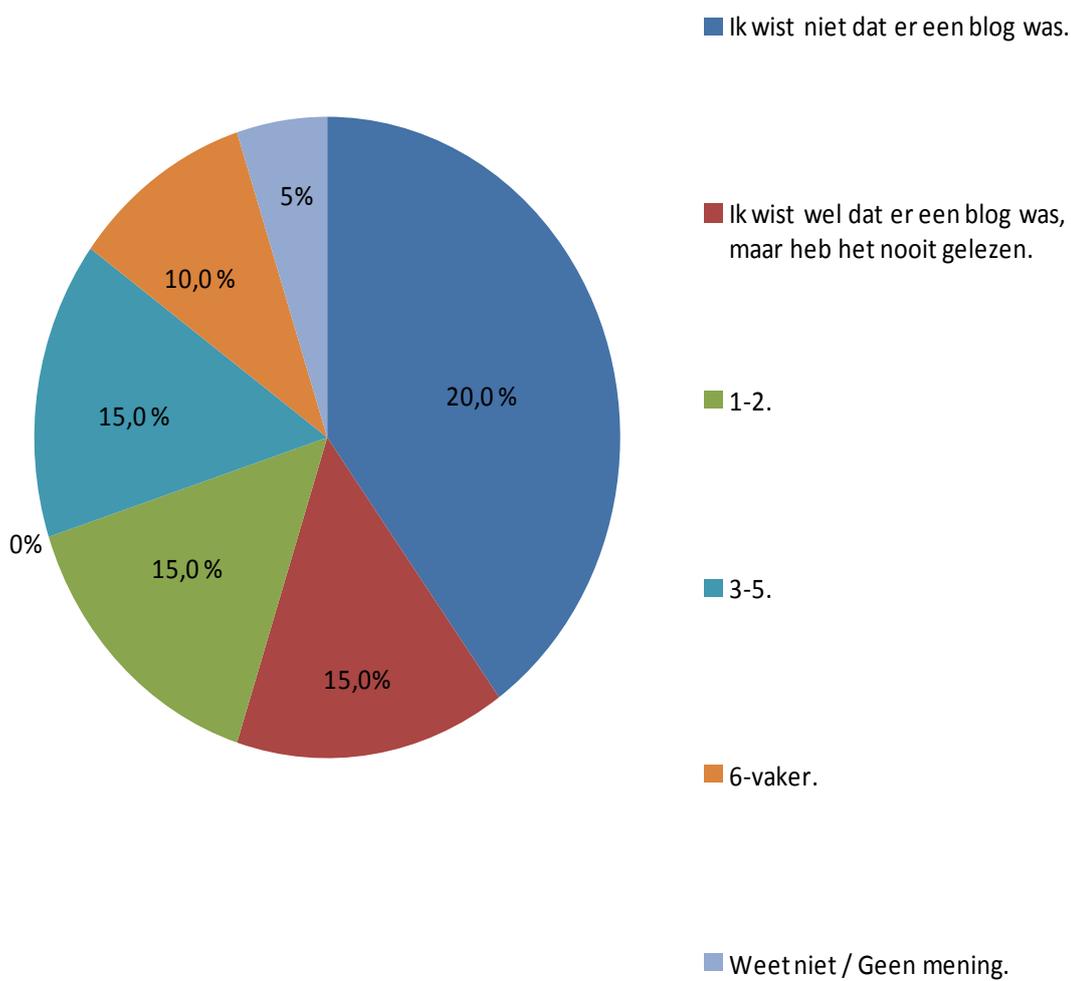
Question 8: **Heeft u specifiek aan een of meerdere burgercomites gedoneerd?**



**Question 20: Ik voel me erg betrokken bij mensen  
aan de andere kant van de wereld ook al ken ik ze  
niet persoonlijk.**



**Question 27: Hoe vaak heeft u het blog Nassama in de afgelopen zes maanden bekeken?**



### Question 26: Ik vind de achtergrondinformatie over bewapend of onbewapend op de site verwarrend

