

Article

Digital Communication and Social Organizations: An Evaluation of the Communication Strategies of the Most-Valued NGOs Worldwide

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Abstract: The communication of organizations with their audiences has undergone changes thanks to the Internet. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as influential groups, are no exception, as much of their activism takes place through grassroots digital lobbying. The consolidation of Web 2.0 has not only provided social organizations with a new and powerful tool for disseminating information but also brought about significant changes in the relationship between nonprofit organizations and their diverse audiences. This has facilitated and improved interaction between them. The purpose of this article is to analyze the level of interactivity implemented on the websites of leading NGOs worldwide and their presence on social networks, with the aim of assessing whether these influential groups are moving towards more dialogic systems in relation to their audience. The results reveal that NGOs have a high degree of interactivity in the tools used to present and disseminate information on their websites. However, not all maintain the same level of interactivity in the resources available for interaction with Internet users, as very few have high interactivity regarding bidirectional resources. It was concluded that international non-governmental organizations still suffer from certain shortcomings in the strategic management of digital communication on their web platforms, while, on the other hand, a strong presence can be noted on the most-popular social networks.

Keywords: digital communication; NGO; interactivity; website; social media



Citation: Moreno-Cabanillas, A.; Castellero-Ostio, E.; Castillo-Esparcia, A. Digital Communication and Social Organizations: An Evaluation of the Communication Strategies of the Most-Valued NGOs Worldwide.

Future Internet **2024**, *16*, 26. <https://doi.org/10.3390/fi16010026>

Academic Editors: Domenico Ursino, Francesco Cauteruccio and Luca Virgili

Received: 15 December 2023

Revised: 9 January 2024

Accepted: 11 January 2024

Published: 13 January 2024



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1. Introduction

NGOs, as organizations situated in the so-called third sector, i.e., organizations not belonging to either the public or private sectors, are entities whose comprehensive definition is complex due to the variety in their objectives, formats, structures, and roles they play [1]. To clarify the term, the United Nations [2] defines an NGO as follows: any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national, or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, [...] perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, monitor policies, and encourage political participation at the community level. Provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms, and help monitor and implement international agreements, including Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. Typically, they are organized around specific issues, such as the UN pillars of peace and security, human rights, and development.

Considering various guidelines and definitions gathered in the literature, Tarazona [3] (p. 28) summarizes the following characteristics that NGOs must fulfill to be considered as such: NGOs must be voluntary formal organizations; have institutional, political, and financial independence from public or private powers; engage in activity focused on social, political, economic, or development welfare; be non-profit, not seeking personal benefit; and carry out operations at the local, national, or international level.

For decades, NGOs have been the primary means of realizing humanitarian projects for the aid and protection of the most disadvantaged groups [4]. However, it was not until the 1970s, partly due to the circumstances generated by the welfare state crisis, that a true increase in these organizations' numbers at the global level began to be noticed [5]. However, it was in 1982 that they gained an influential role internationally thanks to the World Bank integrating them into its working structures as tools for aid to alleviate the social crisis caused by economic regulations [6].

Initially, NGOs' *raison d'être* lay in taking on a greater number of functions, neglected by the state, to try to alleviate social problems. Additionally, on the international stage, they assumed mediation functions in conflicts [7]. As suggested by Castillo et al. [8], they began their journey in social environments wherein public authorities did not engage optimally for various reasons related to the deficient management of social situations.

Currently, one of the existing and most exhaustive official records on NGOs worldwide is offered by the UN [9]. According to the data presented, as of May 2023, they have identified 14,955 civil society organizations, with the majority constituting NGOs (12,516), and nearly half of them operating in Africa (48.51%). Among these organizations, those dedicated to economic and social activities, sustainable and social development, and gender-related issues stand out.

These social organizations need effective communication strategies to achieve their main objectives: highlighting social injustices, raising awareness about unmet humanitarian needs, mobilizing citizens for engagement, and building strong connections with their social projects, as well as conveying the benefits of their activities [4]. NGOs, usually due to their needs, are already influential strategic communicators using international public relations strategies and tactics [10–12]. However, it is also crucial for them to have a solid image that fosters trust in society so that support for their activities is desired [13]. In this sense, the digital landscape has significantly contributed to shaping the image of NGOs, allowing this communicative space to enrich connections with diverse audiences and keep them properly informed, increase acts of citizen mobilization, and facilitate fundraising [14]. In relation to this last aspect, authors like Carbajo et al. [15] point out that the fundraising sector has been increasing in Europe in recent decades to raise funds for third sector organizations, thanks in part to the use of new information and communication technologies (ICT).

Considering the advantages offered by the online sphere, including reaching a considerable audience via its being a cost-effective communication tool [16–18], and the current digital communication practices of the public, NGOs have understood that it is essential to manage communicative strategies that incorporate digital tools to adapt to the needs of new audiences. Websites and social media profiles are the online environments that offer the greatest possibilities for third sector organizations to achieve their educational and humanitarian purposes [19]. However, various studies suggest that while these two online platforms are compatible and complementary, they have diverse uses. Castillo et al. [8], in their study comparing Spanish and Brazilian NGOs, note that digital media is primarily used by NGOs for informational purposes, prioritizing the unidirectionality of communication and underutilizing interactive possibilities.

On the other hand, other studies assert that social media is used by NGOs to build community and for collective action, while websites are more limited in this regard [20,21]. Initially, the dialogic theory, from the perspective of public relations [22], pointed out that the digital environment favored interaction and dialogue between organizations and their audiences; this is feasible when not only monological actions are carried out but also when there are online listening and interaction processes carried out by organizations towards their relational universe [23–25]. This problem, materialized in the unidirectional use of the digital sphere by various organizations, has been widely noted by the research community [26–30]. Moreover, European communication professionals confirm, in this regard, that they are not making proper use of the tools provided by social networks [31]. Some studies also point out that organizations do not make an effort to encourage interactivity

through their own channels, as could be achieved through the creation of forums, leading to the generation of new behavior patterns; rather, they take advantage of spaces on social platforms to join conversations that have already been started, a fact that does not provide a real opportunity for interaction that allows for a stronger relationship in terms of engagement and dialogue [32]. Other studies have shown that new technologies, although they have a great dialogic capacity, are used in a high percentage of cases for product promotion or online advertising in a monologic format, leaving aside the possibilities of bidirectional communication that can cement lasting relationships [33]. Some authors even consider that dialogue in social platforms is not possible, given that, although bidirectional communication is usually practiced—either asymmetrically or symmetrically—normally, in these spaces, it is engaged in with a marked persuasive or promotional character, for which the aim is to achieve organizational objectives, instead of focusing on interaction and understanding that characterize dialogue [34,35].

Web 1.0 allowed an informative and monological relationship with internet users, but the advent of Web 2.0 opened greater possibilities for dialogical and bidirectional communication [36,37], allowing and, at the same time, requiring organizations to manage communication from a more active, conversational, and interactive perspective [22,38–43]. It is for this reason that, although numerous studies still show that the advantages and potential of the digital medium are not being exploited, the new circumstances of Web 2.0 mark a new, more optimal path in the management of online relations and communication.

Several preceding studies concur that the most used social media platforms by NGOs are Facebook, the most used social network for capturing and mobilizing audiences [18]; Twitter [8,44]; and, more recently, Instagram [14]. This reflects an increase in the presence of these organizations on these social networks, mainly driven by the situation regarding the pandemic, as these profiles became informative channels for gathering support and awareness at times when physical presence was restricted. However, while social media contributes to connecting with various spatially distant audiences, digital activism depends largely on the proximity to and interest that can be generated in audiences for these connections to be maintained in the long term [45].

Today, third sector organizations are considerably aware of the importance of optimal communication management in the digital space in order to achieve their main objectives with their diverse audiences. Therefore, this research is necessary to determine if, despite this knowledge, they take advantage of the dialogical possibilities offered by this medium.

The main purpose of this research is to understand how social organizations manage digital communication. In contrast to previous studies, it focuses on the interactive and dialogical aspects of these advocacy groups and analyzes the current state of their strategic communication management worldwide. To achieve this overall objective, the following specific objectives (SO) were established:

- SO1—Determine which social networks have greater usage by social organizations.
- SO2—Investigate whether international non-governmental organizations have evolved towards more interactive and dialogical communication models on their digital platforms (web 2.0) or if, on the contrary, they still use monological communication models (web 1.0).
- SO3—Analyze the unidirectional tools used by social organizations on their websites to disseminate information.
- SO4—Study the bidirectional resources used by these advocacy groups to interact and engage with virtual users.
- SO5—Evaluate the degrees of interactivity and dialogical communication implemented in the digital environment through these NGOs' official websites.
- SO6—Identify which social organizations offer the best opportunities for engaging with different audiences through their websites.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the objectives outlined in this study, a mixed-methodology approach based on both the quantitative and qualitative content analysis of various websites was employed. Specific analysis templates were used to collect relevant information about the study subject in each case. The suitability of this methodology is supported by its use in previous research on the evaluation of website interactivity [28], adapted to the type of organization under consideration. Additionally, the organizations' social media profiles were inspected to assess their presence on these platforms.

A classification was conducted based on the level of commitment and interaction that social organizations provide to visitors of their websites, with the aim of categorizing the communication tools used by each organization. To execute this, 12 typologies of unidirectional information tools directed towards the public were identified, and, on the other hand, 20 tools aimed at promoting interaction and dialogue with internet users were identified.

To systematize the categories of communicative elements present on websites, the resources used by NGOs to present and disseminate information were investigated. Unidirectional (monological) tools were identified (see Table 1), which were characteristic of informative and linear structures, requiring minimal participation or involvement from the receiving audience. In this type of communication, the flow of information is directed in one direction, and the NGO, rather than the website user, has almost complete control over the established communication. The main objective is to establish a connection with the web visitor but only to showcase, disseminate, or broadcast institutional information and keep internet users informed. The level of user participation on websites is very limited, and the communication flow passes from NGOs to users, who cannot send or modify any information on the website, implying a lack of feedback. The following three categories were identified:

- (1) Expository—encompassing resources that favor the dissemination of information to a primarily passive and receptive user. This category includes text, graphic, and audiovisual tools.
- (2) Hypertextual—referring to the use of links that redirect to other websites, allowing for greater interaction than expository resources. This facilitates the active search for additional information and contributes to the investigation of topics related to an organization.
- (3) Participative—including tools that encourage more active interaction from the internet user compared to the previous categories. These resources are aimed at more active and participatory web visitors and include interactive elements (graphics and infographics) and participatory resources (buttons to follow an account on social media), allowing the user to enhance their interaction with the site's content and show greater interest in an organization.

On the other hand, the classification of resources used by NGOs on their websites to interact and engage with web visitors was carried out, identifying bidirectional (dialogical) tools (see Table 2). These tools are based on both asymmetric and symmetric bidirectional communication structures, allowing for increased interaction and dialogue with various possibilities for information exchange, discussion, and collaboration—fundamental characteristics of dialogue. The following categories are presented based on the degree of involvement and participation provided or sought for the web visitor:

- (1) Connect: This category encompasses tools that simply request information from the user, showing a very low level of interaction and involvement.
- (2) Share: This category includes tools that enable users to distribute and share information from the NGO, as well as follow the content that interests them, customizing tracking options. These tools facilitate mild involvement and participation on the part of a website's public users.

- (3) Review/Comment: This category encompasses tools that allow web users to review, comment, evaluate, and respond. NGO users gain some freedom in consuming content and begin to participate slightly in communication. Ultimately, these tools involve actions taken by internet users with a medium–low level of interaction and participation.
- (4) Participate: This category represents two-way communicative flow with feedback, but the relationship between communicative actors is still unbalanced in favor of the NGO. Although greater involvement and initiative on the part of the website user are encouraged, they still do not have control over the communication process or website content. These tools provide a high level of reciprocity between communicative actors.
- (5) Collaborate: In this category, spaces are provided where users can co-create website content and establish an equitable communication flow between both actors, constituting a fundamental characteristic of dialogue. Tools or spaces are provided where audiences can modify or add information without direct control by NGOs. User involvement and initiative are absolute, representing the highest degree of interactivity that a given organization can offer through the digital medium.

Table 1. Types of one-way (monologic) tools used on NGO websites.

Categories		Tool Types	
One-way (monologic) tools	Presenting and disseminating information	Publications: studies, thematic reports, books, articles, periodicals (journals)	
		Information brochure (NGO presentation)	
		Institutional yearbooks (annual reports)	
		1.1. Informative	Text and graphic
			Publication of an events calendar
			Online pressroom (press releases)
			Blogs not allowing users to comment
			News published on a website
		1.2. Hypertextual	Photographs and images
			Audiovisual
			Multimedia files embedded in a website (audio files, videos)
		1.3. Participatory	External links to other websites or institutions
			Interactive resources (graphics and infographics)
		Participatory resources (“follow” on social media buttons/tools)	

Source: authors’ own compilation based on the work of Capriotti et al. [28].

Once the analysis categories were established, a Likert scale was implemented to assess the level of interactivity by assigning a weighted value to each type of identified tool. The scale used ranges from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to very-low interactivity, and 5 corresponds to very-high interactivity.

To determine the presence or absence of these tools on each analyzed NGO website, a dichotomous “yes/no” structure was used. A value of 1 was assigned to presence, and 0 was assigned to absence. Using this measure, a relationship was established with the categories previously defined based on the potential interaction of the websites, considering the unidirectional (monological) tools used to present and disseminate information (see Table 3). In this way, 1 point was assigned to “text/graphic tools” (very low interactivity), 2 points were assigned to “audiovisual tools” (low interactivity), 3 points were assigned to “hypertextual tools” (medium interactivity), 4 points were assigned to “interactive resources” (high interactivity), and 5 points were assigned to “participatory resources” (very high interactivity). Additionally, to evaluate the level of interactivity offered by different websites in terms of tools allowing interaction and dialogue with visitors, weighted values

were assigned to each of the established categories based on their interaction potential. A score of 1 (very low interactivity) was assigned to “connect”, 2 (low interactivity) was assigned to “share”, 3 (medium interactivity) was assigned to “review and comment”, 4 (high interactivity) was assigned to “participate”, and 5 (very high interactivity) was assigned to “collaborate”.

Table 2. Types of two-way (dialogic) tools used on NGO websites.

		Categories	Tools
TWO-WAY (Dialogic) TOOLS	2.1. Connectivity (asymmetric two-way)		Subscription forms for content syndication (social media/newsletters)
			Intranet registration
			Web search engine
			File download
			Members’ area
	2.2. Sharing (asymmetric two-way)		Button/tool for tagging or sending information to external sites
			Button/tool for sharing on social networks
			Content personalization (follow favorite authors, posts, etc.)
	2.3. Reviewing/commenting (asymmetric two-way)		Surveys
			Option to leave comments on the website
			Blog allowing user responses
			Option to evaluate or rate web content
	2.4. Participatory (symmetric two-way)		Shop section
			Signing users’ petitions
			Section for requesting to attend events in person or online
			Enquiries section
			Online section for offering support, donations, or sponsorship
	2.5. Collaborative (symmetric two-way)		Suggestions section
			Forums (online discussion sites)
			Section for collaborating as an online expert or volunteer or for uploading content (co-creation of web content)

Source: authors’ own compilation based on Capriotti et al.’s work [28].

Subsequently, the weighted sum of each resource on each NGO’s website was averaged, allowing for the determination of the degree of interactivity for each. This degree was measured on a scale of 0 to 3 points, where a score of 0 to 1 is considered “low or poor interactivity”, that of 1.1 to 2 is understood to be “medium interactivity”, and that of 2.1 to 3 is considered “high or significant interactivity”.

To validate the design of the analysis templates, a preliminary exploratory study of ten NGO websites was conducted. This initial evaluation allowed for the consideration of the appropriateness of the methodology, making modifications and adjustments to elements that could hinder the achievement of the proposed objectives.

Table 3. Evaluation of the interactivity levels of NGO websites according to one-way (monologic) and two-way (dialogic) tools.

	Tools for Presenting/Disseminating Information	Interactivity Scale (Likert Scale)	Assigned Value (AV)	Presence (P)	Points	Interactivity Scale (Likert Scale)
One-way (monologic)	Text/Graphics	Very low	1	0-1	AV × P	=Mean (\bar{X}) (PO/5)
	Audiovisual	Low	2			
	Hypertextual	Medium	3			
	Interactive	High	4			
	Participatory	Very high	5			
Two-way (dialogic)	Connectivity	Very low	1	0-1	AV × P	=Mean (\bar{X}) (PO/5)
	Sharing	Low	2			
	Reviewing/commenting	Medium	3			
	Participatory	High	4			
	Collaborative	Very high	5			

Source: authors’ own compilation based on the work by Capriotti et al. [28].

Lastly, it is worth noting that a representative sample was studied, consisting of the 30 most influential and important NGOs in the world according to a combination of the Top 20 International NGOs worldwide [46] and the 15 Biggest NGOs in the World rankings [47]. The difference between the top “20 international NGOs” and the “15 largest NGOs” lies in the selection criteria: the former are selected because of their global reach and impact, while the latter might be based on factors such as size, budget, and geographic scope. It is logical that some NGOs appear on both lists, as large NGOs are generally international due to their capacity and resources. Accordingly, the overlaps of organizations between the two classifications have been eliminated to avoid duplication, resulting in the list presented in Table 4.

Table 4. International NGO with greater impact and their websites.

NGO	Website
Transparent Hands	https://www.transparenthands.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Wikimedia Foundation	https://wikimediafoundation.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
BRAC	http://www.brac.net/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Acumen Fund	https://acumen.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Danish Refugee Council	https://drc.ngo/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Partners in Health	https://www.pih.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Ceres	https://www.ceres.org/homepage/ accessed on 6 September 2023
CARE International	https://www.care-international.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Doctors Without Borders	https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/ accessed on 6 September 2023
Cure Violence Global	https://cvg.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Mercy Corps	https://www.mercycorps.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Apopo	https://apopo.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Root Capital Handicap Internacional	https://rootcapital.org/es/ accessed on 7 September 2023
International Rescue Committee	https://www.rescue.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Barefoot College	https://www.barefootcollege.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Landesa	https://www.landesa.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Ashoka	https://www.ashoka.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
One Acre Fund	https://oneacrefund.org/ accessed on 7 September 2023
Clinton Health Access Initiative	https://www.clintonhealthaccess.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Heifer International	https://www.heifer.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Save The Children	https://www.savethechildren.es/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Oxfam International	https://www.oxfam.org/es accessed on 8 September 2023

Table 4. Cont.

NGO	Website
World Vision	https://www.wvi.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Catholic Relief Services	https://www.crs.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Amnesty International	https://www.amnesty.org/es/ accessed on 8 September 2023
ActionAid International	https://actionaid.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Direct Relief	https://www.directrelief.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Action Against Hunger	https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Anti-Slavery International	https://www.antislavery.org/ accessed on 8 September 2023
Plan International	https://plan-international.es/ accessed on 8 September 2023

This sampling approach was intentional and based on the mentioned studies, which are benchmarks in this field across the globe. The reports provide various rankings based on different criteria. Thus, the sample is as follows.

3. Results








3.1. Presence on Social Media

Initially, the aim was to determine the social media presence of the most globally impactful international NGOs. As shown in Table 5, most of these organizations have profiles on five social media platforms: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. In this regard, 96.67% ($n = 29$) of the NGOs have a presence on Twitter and Facebook, except for Landesa for the former and CARE International for the latter. A similar pattern can be observed for Instagram, where 83.33% ($n = 25$) of the social organizations are established. On YouTube, a platform for audiovisual content, 80% ($n = 24$) of the analyzed NGOs are present, while on LinkedIn, a platform designed for business use, 66.67% ($n = 20$) are present. It is noteworthy that two non-profit organizations, in addition to having profiles on the platforms mentioned above, are present on others. The International Rescue Committee is present on TikTok, a platform for sharing short videos that is currently popular, and Doctors Without Borders has links to the blog-based social network Medium, created by the co-founders of Twitter with a similar purpose but without character limits, on its website. Regarding the NGO with the least presence on social media, CARE International, is only present on Twitter and YouTube. It is worth noting that none of them utilize social media platforms such as Telegram or WhatsApp, which provide bidirectional communication with the public.

Table 5. Presence of NGOs on social media.

NGO							
Transparent Hands	X	X	X		X		
Wikimedia Foundation	X	X	X	X			
BRAC	X	X	X	X	X		
Acumen Fund	X	X	X		X		
Danish Refugee Council	X	X	X	X			
Partners in Health	X	X	X	X	X		
Ceres	X	X		X			
CARE international	X				X		
Doctors without borders	X	X	X	X	X		X
Cure Violence Global	X	X	X	X	X		
Mercy Corps	X	X	X				
Apopo	X	X	X	X	X		
Root Capital Handicap Internacional	X	X		X	X		
International Rescue Committee	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Table 5. Cont.

NGO							
Barefoot College	X	X	X	X	X		
Landesa		X	X	X	X		
Ashoka	X	X	X	X	X		
One Acre Fund	X	X		X			
Clinton Health Access Initiative	X	X	X	X	X		
Heifer International	X	X	X				
Save the children	X	X	X		X		
Oxfam international	X	X	X		X		
World vision	X	X	X	X	X		
Catholic Relief Services	X	X	X		X		
Amnesty International	X	X	X		X		
ActionAid International	X	X			X		
Direct relief	X	X	X	X	X		
Action Against Hunger	X	X	X	X	X		
Anti-Slavery international	X	X	X	X	X		
Plan international	X	X	X	X	X		

3.2. One-Way (Monologic) Tools

The results regarding the interactivity exhibited by different social organizations on their websites, considering monological resources and thus unidirectional communication, are quite revealing (see Figure 1). In this regard, it can be observed that most social interest groups have very high interactivity, specifically, 83.33% ($n = 25$), falling within the range of 2.1 to 3, which represents the maximum level established on the scale. On the other hand, 16.67% ($n = 5$) are within the range of 1.1 to 2 in terms of interactivity, indicating a medium level of interactivity corresponding to organizations such as ActionAid International, Wikimedia Foundation, the Acumen Fund, Plan International, Ashoka, and Anti-Slavery International. It is noteworthy that none of the NGOs have low interactivity, with all of them positioned at 1.1 or higher on the established interactivity scale regarding one-way tool.

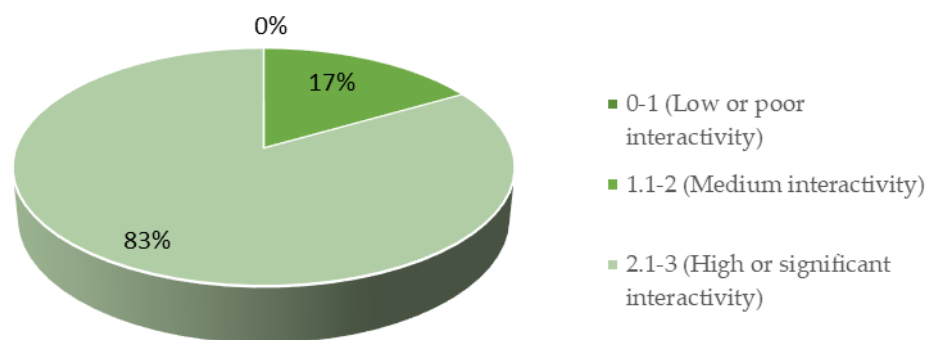


Figure 1. Levels of interactivity for one-way communication tools on NGO websites. Source: own elaboration.

Another aspect sought to be understood was which tools for unidirectional interaction with website visitors are most used by non-governmental organizations on their websites. Upon observing Figure 2, one can see that there are essential tools on the websites of these organizations concerning information dissemination: informational brochures or presentations about the NGO, published news, photographs and images, and participatory resources such as the social media follow buttons seen earlier. All the studied NGOs use these tools on their websites.

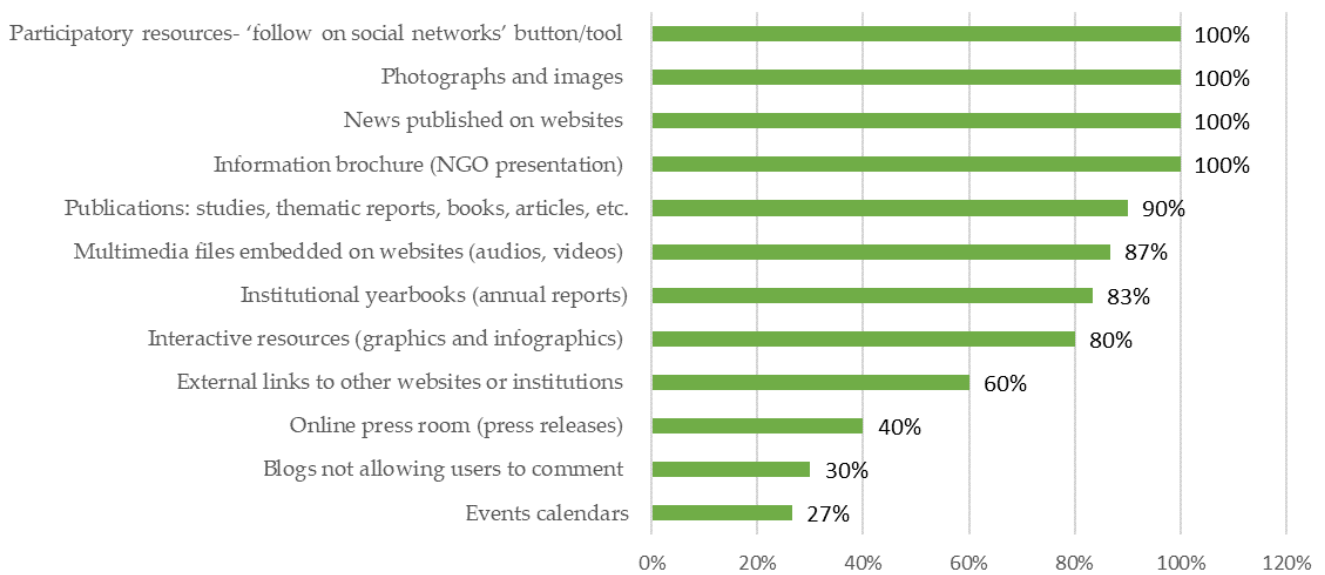


Figure 2. Use of one-way tools (monological) tools on NGO websites. Source: own elaboration.

Ninety percent ($n = 27$) also publish studies, reports, articles, or their own magazines on topics related to the issues they address as social organizations, while 86.77% ($n = 26$) use multimedia resources through audio and/or videos to create richer content. Interactive resources like graphics or infographics are also widely used by NGOs (80%, $n = 24$), in addition to the presentation of annual reports (83.33%, $n = 25$) to promote transparency and make annual performance publicly accountable.

To a lesser extent, the NGOs integrate links on their websites, connecting them to other institutions in the same field or other websites (60%, $n = 18$). Finally, not many social organizations have press rooms where they include press releases and statements for the media and interested audiences, with only 40% ($n = 12$) having this feature. Likewise, the publication of an events agenda or the creation of a blog without user response capability are tools used less frequently by the analyzed NGOs, with corresponding values of 26.67% ($n = 8$) and 30% ($n = 9$), respectively.

3.3. Two-Way (Dialogic) Tools

The interactivity related to the use of resources that facilitate bidirectional communication is quite different from the interactivity of monological tools. In this regard, in Figure 3, it can be observed that most NGOs have moderate interactivity, falling within the range of 1.1 to 2, specifically corresponding to 76.67% ($n = 23$). On the other hand, 13.33% ($n = 4$) of the analyzed social organizations have very high interactivity, ranging between 2.1 and 3 but never reaching the maximum score on the scale. Only 10% ($n = 3$) of them obtained the minimum score in interactivity related to resources that promote dialogue and interaction.

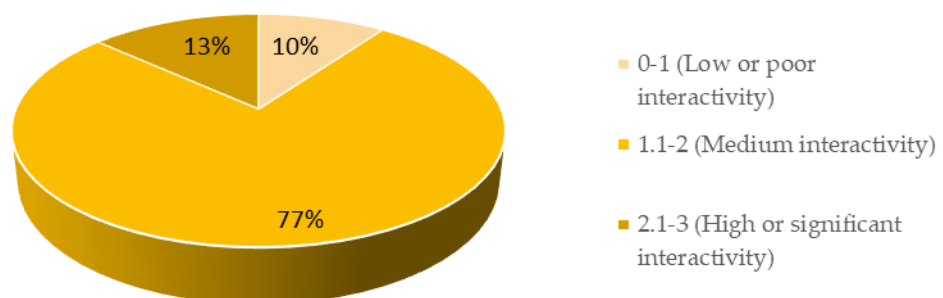


Figure 3. Level of interactivity of two-way communication tools on NGO websites. Source: own elaboration.

The most-used tools for two-way communication can be seen in Figure 4. While different resources essential to the websites of the analyzed organizations are highlighted, there are also certain tools that do not find a place on the webpages of international social organizations. In this way, nearly all NGOs have dedicated sections for inquiries and spaces for support, economic donation, or sponsorship (100%), as well as features such as a website search tool and file downloads, including annual reports or conducted studies and reports (96.67%, $n = 29$).

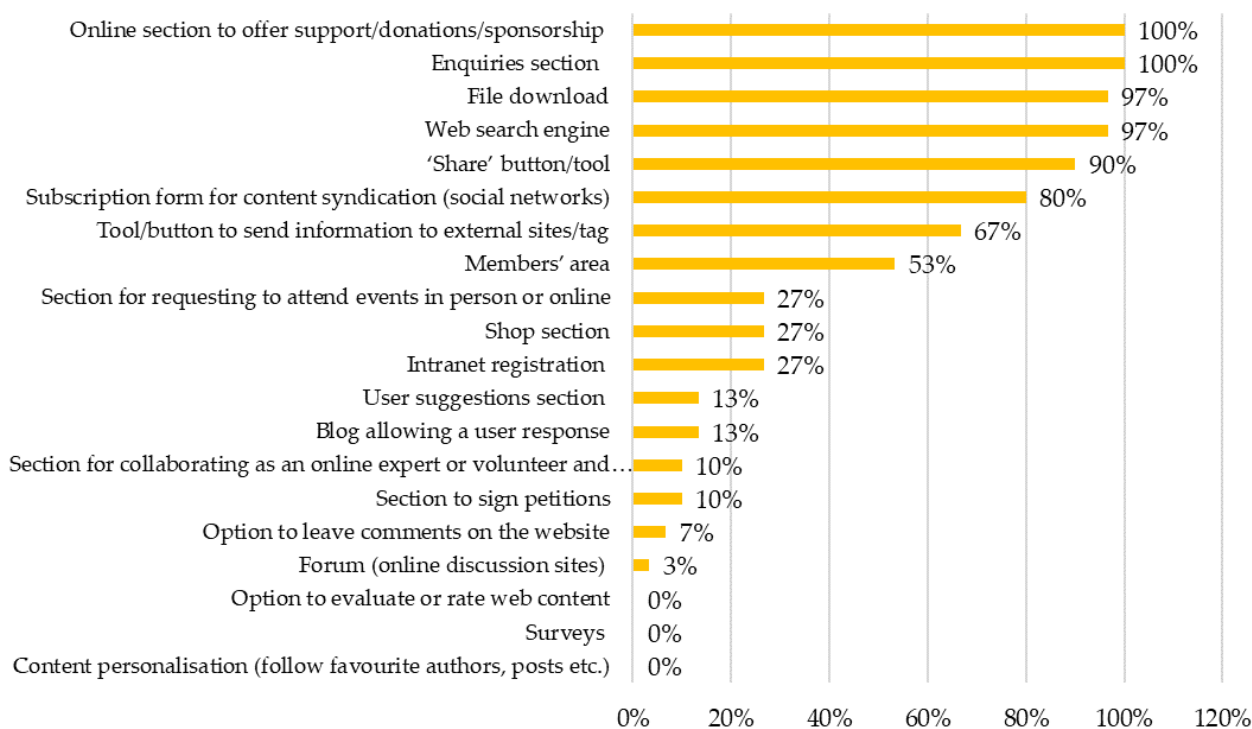


Figure 4. Use of two-way tools (dialogic) tools on NGO websites. Source: own elaboration.

Other frequently used tools on the websites of these organizations include buttons allowing users to share content on various social media platforms (90%, $n = 27$) as well as newsletter subscriptions (80%, $n = 24$) to keep website visitors informed of any new content or news and provide continuous updates on relevant topics. To a lesser extent, buttons for sharing website content on external sites, such as via email, are used (66.67%, $n = 20$).

Approximately half of the analyzed social organizations dedicate space on their websites for user affiliation or membership (53.33%, $n = 16$). About 26.67% ($n = 8$) of the NGOs use tools such as online stores on their websites, usually for “charitable gifts” that do not involve the delivery of any physical products. Similarly, the use of intranet registration and space dedicated to user requests for participation in events or requests to view them online can be observed.

Tools belonging to bidirectional symmetric categories of participation and collaboration, such as sections for signing petitions (10%, $n = 3$), space dedicated to user proposals (13.33%, $n = 4$), and space for online expert/volunteer collaboration to upload content and co-create website content, are very rarely used by social organizations (10%, $n = 3$). Also, bidirectional asymmetrical tools like blogs allowing for user responses (13.33%, $n = 4$) in the “comment” category are scarcely employed.

The resources not found on the websites of these international NGOs correspond to bidirectional asymmetrical tools. On the one hand, in the “share” category, the personalization of content is unavailable, and, on the other hand, in the “review/comment” category, tools like surveys and the possibility of evaluating and/or scoring website content are absent.

3.4. Comparison of the Communication Tools and Interactivity Levels of NGOs

Considering the interactivity of both unidirectional tools and bidirectional resources employed by each of the studied social organizations, the organizations with higher interactivity on their websites were ranked in descending order (see Table 6). This allows for the verification of which NGOs exhibit high, medium, or low levels of interactivity and if there is consistency between different types of monologic and dialogic resources, in addition to reviewing the differences among them. In this regard, only two of the analyzed organizations—Direct Relief, dedicated to improving the lives of people experiencing poverty or in emergency situations by providing them with appropriate medical resources, and Action Against Hunger, which aims to end world hunger—achieved the maximum level of interactivity in both types of resources.

Table 6. Ranking of NGO websites according to their level of interactivity based on their use of monologic and dialogic tools.

NGO	Interactivity Monologic Tools	NGO	Interactivity Dialogic Tools
Direct Relief	3	Direct Relief	2.4
Action Against Hunger	3	Action Against Hunger	2.4
CARE International	3	Wikimedia Foundation	2.4
Doctors Without Borders	3	Heifer International	2.4
Transparent Hands	3	Transparent Hands	2
BRAC	3	BRAC	2
Mercy Corps	3	Root Capital Handicap Internacional	2
Ceres	3	Landesa	1.6
Partners in Health	3	Partners in Health	1.4
Apopo	3	Apopo	1.4
Barefoot College	3	Barefoot College	1.4
One Acre Fund	3	One Acre Fund	1.4
Oxfam International	3	Oxfam International	1.4
World Vision	3	World Vision	1.4
Save The Children	2.6	Save The Children	1.4
International Rescue Committee	2.4	International Rescue Committee	1.4
Clinton Health Access Initiative	2.4	Clinton Health Access Initiative	1.4
Catholic Relief Services	2.4	Catholic Relief Services	1.4
Amnesty International	2.4	Amnesty International	1.4
Danish Refugee Council	2.4	CARE International	1.4
Root Capital Handicap Internacional	2.4	Ashoka	1.4
Landesa	2.4	Doctors Without Borders	1.4
Cure Violence Global	2.2	Mercy Corps	1.4
Heifer International	2.2	Ceres	1.4
ActionAid International	2	ActionAid International	1.4
Wikimedia Foundation	1.8	Plan International	1.4
Acumen Fund	1.8	Acumen Fund	1.4
Plan International	1.6	Danish Refugee Council	1
Ashoka	1.6	Cure Violence Global	1
Anti-Slavery International	1.6	Anti-Slavery International	1

Most NGOs exhibit monologic interactivity with a maximum score of 3 points, but in terms of dialogic interactivity, they are usually at the intermediate level with a low score of 1.4 points. Cases like ActionAid International (M = 2; D = 1.4), Acumen Fund (M = 1.8; D = 1.4), Plan International (M = 1.6; D = 1.4), and Ashoka (M = 1.6; D = 1.4) fall within intermediate levels in both categories of resources.

Anti-Slavery International is positioned as the NGO with the lowest interactivity because, although it is at the intermediate level in terms of monologic tools, it achieved this

attribution with the lowest score of 1.4 points, and in dialogic resources, it is at the lowest level of interactivity, with 1 point.

Several cases are worth highlighting, such as that of the Wikimedia Foundation, whose interactivity in the use of bidirectional resources related to dialogue is high: 2.4 points. However, for unidirectional tools, it is positioned at an intermediate level, with only 1.8 points, which is uncommon. On the other hand, the opposite case was observed for organizations like the Danish Refugee Council and Cure Violence Global, whose interactivity regarding tools related to information dissemination is high, amounting to 2.4 and 2.2 points, respectively, while in terms of bidirectional interactivity, they rank last, with the lowest score, i.e., one point in the very-low interactivity level.

Regarding the information dissemination tools used by the top two NGOs in the ranking (see Table 7), which correspond to the highest scores obtained, both organizations have most resources falling into this category. However, the two organizations agree that they do not have events calendars to inform web users, and neither of them have a blog for which responses be left. On the other hand, only Action Against Hunger has a press room for the media where informational material such as press releases can be found. Thus, Action Against Hunger has the highest number of unidirectional tools, specifically, 83.33% ($n = 10$), compared to Direct Relief, which utilizes 75% of the resources in this category ($n = 9$).

Table 7. Monologic tools used by the websites with the highest levels of interactivity.

Typology of Tools		Direct Relief	Action against Hunger
1.1. Expository	Publications: studies, thematic reports, books, articles, etc.	1	1
	Information brochure (ONG presentation)	1	1
	Institutional yearbooks (annual reports)	1	1
	Text/Graphics		
	Events calendars	0	0
	Online press room (press releases)	0	1
	Blogs on which users cannot comment	0	0
	News published on websites	1	1
Photographs and images	1	1	
Audiovisual	Embedded multimedia files on websites (audio, videos)	1	1
1.2. Hypertextual	External links to other websites or institutions	1	1
1.3. Interactivity	Interactive resources (graphics and infographics)	1	1
1.4. Participative	Participatory resources, such as ‘follow on social networks’ buttons/tools	1	1

Regarding the resources for dialogical communication used by these NGOs (see Table 8), although both achieve the same level on the scale, Direct Relief (50%, $n = 10$) has more tools on its website than the website of Action Against Hunger (40%, $n = 8$). In this regard, it can be observed that they share the same bidirectional resources, such as subscription to content through newsletters, web searches, file downloads, social media sharing buttons, space for inquiries, donation possibilities, economic support or sponsorship, space for user proposals, and even co-creation of the website space with users through content uploads. However, there are two tools that Direct Relief uses and Action Against Hunger does not. The first, related to the “Connect” category, is the option to join the association, and the second, corresponding to the “Share” category, is a button to share content not only on social media but also on an external site.

Table 8. Dialogic tools used by the websites with the highest levels of interactivity.

	Typology of Tools	Direct Relief	Action against Hunger
2.1. CONNECT	Subscription form for content syndication (social networks)	1	1
	Intranet registration	0	0
	Web search engine	1	1
	File download	1	1
	Members' area	1	0
2.2. SHARING	Tool/button with which to send information to external sites/tag	1	0
	'Share' button/tool on social media	1	1
	Content personalization (follow favorite authors, posts, etc.)	0	0
2.3. REVIEW/COMMENT	Surveys	0	0
	Option to leave comments on the website	0	0
	Blog allowing user responses	0	0
	Option to evaluate or rate web content	0	0
	Shop section	0	0
2.4. PARTICIPATE	Section to sign petitions	0	0
	Section for requesting to attend events in person or online	0	0
	Enquiries section	1	1
	Online section for offering support/donations/sponsorship	1	1
	User suggestions section	1	1
2.5. COLLABORATE	Forum (online discussion site)	0	0
	Section for collaborating as an online expert or volunteer and to upload content.	1	1

However, even though these are the organizations that have scored the highest in interactivity, there are others that use a greater number of both monological and dialogical resources, although the category type of resources to which they belong does not result in a higher level of interactivity.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Through the conducted research, the goal of understanding how international NGOs leverage the digital environment to disseminate their work, convey their ideas, and establish connections with their online audiences has been achieved. This study reveals the communication tools used by organizations on their websites and the social media platforms where they are most active. It also identifies entities that exhibit higher levels of interaction.

The results show that the vast majority of the analyzed NGOs have a presence on the selected five social media platforms, with Twitter and Facebook being the most used, aligning with the findings reported by Vu et al. [18], Castillo et al. [8], and Quintana [44]. Additionally, some NGOs have embraced emerging platforms such as TikTok or Medium, aiming to innovate and reach a different, younger audience. However, it is notable that none have opted for social media platforms like Telegram or WhatsApp, which allow bidirectional and more-personalized communication with users.

The social organizations analyzed show a high degree of interactivity, but it is geared toward the use of monologic resources, which allow them to disseminate information to their audiences effectively on their websites. Most NGOs harness the possibilities offered by digital tools to create dynamic and engaging content, reflecting their social commitment and transparency. Only a few organizations exhibit moderate interactivity, which might indicate less adaptation to the demands of contemporary society. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that social organizations use their websites as a crucial channel with which to disseminate their missions, values, and activities. The most frequently used tools are those allowing the presentation of the NGO, its news, photographs, and social media, underscoring a commitment to showcasing their identity, objectives, and carried-out activities.

Regarding the interactivity of dialogical tools, NGOs present moderate interactivity, indicating room for improvement in fostering dialogue and visitor participation. It is undeniable that most social organizations lean toward symmetrical and bidirectional “participation” resources, such as sending queries, support, economic donations or sponsorship, web searching, and file downloads, reflecting an orientation toward resource acquisition and information dissemination. However, attention to the asymmetrical and bidirectional “review/comment” category, encompassing tools enabling users to review, comment on, evaluate, and respond to an organization’s web content, is limited, especially concerning surveys and the ability to evaluate said content—resources that could facilitate increased interaction and feedback from users.

International social organizations exhibit different levels of interactivity on their websites depending on the type of resources they employ. Only two organizations, Direct Relief and Action Against Hunger, reach the maximum level of interactivity in both unidirectional and bidirectional resources, indicating their superior utilization of digital tools for communication with their audiences. Most organizations have high interactivity in unidirectional resources but moderate or low interactivity in terms of bidirectional resources, suggesting a greater focus on information dissemination than on dialogue and user participation. To address this, more tools facilitating dialogue with and the participation and collaboration of website visitors, as well as personalization, evaluation, and the scoring of web content, could be employed. These tools could enhance user satisfaction, loyalty, and trust, fostering increased user engagement and social commitment.

Achieving an effective balance between a strong social media presence and the need for more interactive communication on their websites would require a complementary approach to both channels, as social media and websites play different roles. While social platforms are ideal for rapid interaction, the dissemination of information, and the immediate and direct participation of an audience in real time, websites allow for a more detailed presentation of the missions, projects, and achievements of NGOs, encourage participation in specific activities, as well as favoring spaces that allow the acquisition and management of support, donations, or sponsorships. On the other hand, incorporating interactive sections on websites, such as discussion forums, blogs, online surveys, comment forms, and community participation tools, allows an audience to actively contribute to and feel part of an NGO’s online community. Another communication strategy that contributes to this balance is the integration of social media content into the website, and vice versa. This can include social media widgets on a website, links to social media from the website, and embedding social media posts on specific pages of a website. In addition, engagement in transmedia campaigns and actively listening to audiences through social media to understand their needs and concerns, and then channeling that feedback to develop interactive content and resources on their websites, are strategies that also help to ensure that the use of both channels—web and social media—is balanced and complementary.

In general, social organizations are increasingly aware of the potential of Web 2.0 for establishing virtual dialogue and interaction with users, allowing for co-creation and active participation on their websites through the inclusion of initiatives and ideas. Therefore, we conclude that international non-governmental organizations still suffer from certain

shortcomings in the strategic management of digital communication on their web platforms. Simultaneously, a strong presence on the most popular social networks was observed.

As future lines of research to be explored in the field of online communication, we can point out the following: investigating how digital tools affect the participation of stakeholders, attracting donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries, taking into account the use of tools that involve greater dialogue and participation. In the specific case of social platforms, the impact of online interaction on perception and trust towards INGOs could be assessed.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; methodology, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; validation, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; formal analysis, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; investigation, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; writing—original draft preparation, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; writing—review and editing, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; visualization, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E.; supervision, A.M.-C., E.C.-O. and A.C.-E. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was supported by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation (Spain) State I+D+i. Program 2020. (Project code: PID2020-118584RB-I00). Project Lobby and Communication in the European Union. Analysis of their communication strategies.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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