

Niklas Hofmann,

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency

ECRI's Seminar with Equality Bodies, 28 September 2020

Dear colleagues,

I want to talk to you about the way FADA, as the German equality body, tries to reach a younger audience and why we use Instagram in particular.

To be clear, I am not trying to claim that we are doing anything particularly extraordinary. On the contrary, I believe it may be interesting for you to look at something that can be done with relatively little effort and resources and no full-time social media staffer.

Starting about five years ago we made the decision to include films in our social media work. The main reason was that we found them an ideal tool to tell emotionally compelling narratives to a younger audience. We have since successfully used video in various forms mostly on Facebook.

SLIDE 2

However, in the past year we have shifted most of our activities to Instagram. We have had our account for three years and now have almost 7000 subscribers, versus over 27000 subscribers on Facebook and almost 9000 Twitter followers. So our main aim now is to grow this audience.

Why do we want to focus on Instagram?

SLIDE 3

First of all: Because we manage to reach a younger audience there. Almost 34 percent of Instagram users worldwide are between 25 and 34 years old. In total, two thirds are under 34. And the numbers are similar for Germany.

There are jokes about Facebook now being only used by old people. While user statistics show that to be an exaggeration, we find that it is certainly true that the most active commenters skew older. But more importantly, it is obvious from user data that the Facebook audience is much more male. And while there is nothing wrong with that per se, it is pretty undeniable that it affects the type of discourse and the tone on Facebook. It is a tone that we find increasingly unsuitable for any form of productive discussions about discrimination and one where we have become especially reluctant to encourage people to open up about their own personal experiences.

Instagram however, is much more gender-balanced in its audience. and we find it to have a considerably more civil, accepting, encouraging and respectful culture of discourse.

At the same time, Instagram, which was originally a platform to share private photos, is of course even more visuals-oriented and less text-driven than Facebook. So we have to integrate even more of our message into (audio-)visual content. And we need to make sure we package our message in a way that is truly engaging. These are our basic considerations.

Now let me highlight two of our recent Instagram campaigns to show you what we try to do.

#### SLIDE 4

This campaign is called #BewegDeinDenken, or “Move Your Way of Thinking. The idea behind it is that we introduce the users to strong individuals that talk about experiences of discrimination. However, we don’t want to dwell on this experience so much and rather have them explain what their vision for change is. The interviews do not narrowly focus on legal discrimination under the Equal Treatment Act, but instead talk about inequalities and discrimination in a wider sense. The idea is to make the audience reflect on their own visions for a fairer, more equal society.

#### SLIDE 5

The visual idea behind it is to fully embrace the Instagram aesthetic. We opt for a carousel post that starts off with a very glossy portrait of one person, followed by two slides with video clips from the interviews, spoken straight into the camera, both slides limited to a minute each by the Instagram format. We virtually transition from the glamour shot to a human encounter. And after another swipe it ends with a second glossy photo, or rather a GIF, that also includes the hashtag #BewegDeinDenken.

We have been producing these posts in batches of three to four, focusing on one protected ground of discrimination at a time. And we have launched them on international or national days and weeks of action or commemoration. So far, we have done that on IDAHOT, German Anti-Islamophobia Day, and just today, ahead of International Day of Older Persons which comes up on Thursday. The idea is, of course, that this content can then be easily reposted on similar occasions.

While this campaign sort of “baits” the Instagram audience with the professionalism and the attractiveness of the photography, we have tried a different approach in a second campaign that I want to show you.

#### SLIDE 6

This one is called #NochNieGesagt or “Never Told You Before”. Each clip brings together two young people with widely different backgrounds, who have one thing in common: Both of them have active and successful Instagram presences.

We asked them to have a conversation about discrimination and try to find common ground in their experiences. So this campaign focuses on alliance-building and empowerment.

#### SLIDE 7

The look and feel is much more low budget, relying more on the authenticity and immediacy of the exchange. There’s even some strong language and we touch on issues like sexuality that might seem unusual to cover. The seven films that we have produced are grouped into three categories, that we believed are relevant for a younger target group: Love and Relationships, College and School and Friends and Family, and we have released them all within one week, counting on the traffic to reinforce itself.

We have found that despite the differences of these campaigns, both approaches worked for us. We feel that we have successfully promoted the equality message making use of Instagram's culture of mutual encouragement. And in so doing we have grown our audience.

What is important though is advertising. While we counted on some level of organic engagement, we used paid ads for both campaigns. And it is quite striking what can be achieved with relatively little money.

Let me just briefly touch on a few points of obvious concern:

First of all: How young are "young people" really? We have to be aware that we barely reach a teenaged audience on Instagram. If you remember my slide from earlier: Less than 7 percent of Instagram users are under the age of 18. So if it were our primary concern to mobilise actual "kids", we would probably have to be on TikTok or elsewhere. But minors are not, in fact, our target audience, and we believe that we can reach a younger, politically engaged audience through the channels we use.

Secondly: If the discourse is more positive and civil on Instagram now, can it stay that way or will it deteriorate over time? It may be too early to tell, but our experiences so far indicate that the algorithm doesn't reward controversy and conflict as much as the one on Facebook does. And even when we have used advertising, which always carries the risk of confrontational feedback from an audience that has not actively sought out our content, that has not really been a problem on Instagram. The one truly negative experience occurred when we cross-promoted the Islamophobia posts on Twitter. It simply wasn't the right message for the right medium. We received almost 800 hate tweets within two days, some of which we had to report as criminal offences. But interestingly, this remained mostly confined to Twitter and hardly spilt over to Instagram, where there was also more counter-speech.

Finally: Is it defensible to spend money on Facebook, which owns Instagram, and to even use their platform in the first place? This is a very legitimate question, given the role that Facebook has played in the rise of hate speech across the globe. At the same time, we feel that we don't want to cede social media platforms to those who use them to spread messages of hate and division. So for the time being, our position is that we will continue to be on Facebook and on Instagram as long as the Federal Government does, believing that it is important to share our message even in an adverse environment. On the other hand, we have stopped spending advertising money on Facebook itself, because we felt that the traffic it brought to our site was not conducive to the kind of climate that we want to foster. Instead we focus our resources on Instagram where we still believe we can make a difference.

Thank you for your attention!