



HATE ONLY ?

REFLECTIONS

**ON GERMAN
ONLINE
MEDIA**

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BRICKS

BUILDING RESPECT ON THE INTERNET BY COMBATING HATE SPEECH

National Study Germany

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By the beginning of the BRICkS project, hate speech was a regularly recurring topic of public awareness but by no means one that dominated even mainstream media discussion. In the course of 2015, influenced by societal and political developments in relation for instance to the increasing number of refugees in Europe, both the amount of hate speech in social media and in the comments section of online newspapers as well as medial and political discussion of the phenomenon of hate speech grew significantly.

The results of the BRICkS German round table on that topic as well as the media research and especially the interviews with editors, representatives of specific associations and social media managers confirmed both a rise in numbers of publicised comments as well as an alarming increase in degrees of hate conveyed in these messages.

A typical case of hate speech published in social media or online comments sections deals only to a certain point with what is actually said e.g. in an article. The “normal” development seems to be that the article only triggers prejudice, hate and mindsets already at work in people’s heads. A fruitful discussion, helped along by either moderators on the newspapers staff or fellow commentators, regularly fails in the face of the massive onslaught of emotions, provocations or rants on the hate speakers’ side.

Most of the interviewees nevertheless agreed on moderation being the most helpful solution, deleting comments or banning commentators always being the very last resort in dealing with discussions that turn destructive.

The possible necessity of legal steps were publicly discussed by autumn 2015, when it became clear that e. g. Facebook’s set of netiquette rules (including the deletion of comments) proved to be too slow or lax or too undetermined to effectively control massive violations of public discussion. This – so the discussion goes - is not only and not necessarily a result of a lack of interest on the company’s side nor a proof of inability to deal with the amount of comments or similar reasons: It seems that the line between freedom of speech, censorship and fight against violations of human rights needs to be redefined in a very careful manner in order not to damage democratic basic rights as well as to protect the public sphere from destructive agitation.

During the course of the project the German team was contacted by a growing number of individuals and groups (teachers, youth workers, social media experts and representatives of the educational sector etc.) who showed much interest in learning about the project and the instruments that were being developed since they, too, were faced with the phenomenon and consequences of increasing hate speech and felt the need to be informed as well as equipped with various possible solutions to address the problem.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Hate speech in Germany, even though it was present long before that, became a major topic in 2015, both on a political level as well as in public discussion. Before the summer of 2015, typical hate speech comments were predominantly directed at Muslims, for instance in the context of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, at homosexuals, at specific or unspecific (ethnic or religious) minorities, at women.

By early summer 2015, hate speech comments were increasingly directed at refugees, especially Muslim refugees. This development was clearly related to the European refugee crisis which not only led to a surprising amount of civic support but regrettably also to an increase of hate speech in social media. Not only the quantity of comments that undeniably violated the boundaries of freedom of speech, but also the intensity of hate visible in these comments got to a point where politicians of (almost) all political factions demanded solutions and instruments that would help to minimise or control this form of destructive public discussion.

Hate speech comments from then on were not only addressing refugees themselves but also people acting in favour of them, civic supporters, volunteers, politicians, activists.

Heiko Maas, the German Minister of Justice, appealed to representatives of Facebook Europe (Dublin) and Germany to revise possible means to simplify procedures of deleting hate comments published on Facebook, since this platform proved to be a hot spot for right-wing extremist, racist posts recently. The German public prosecution department investigated several Facebook managers in Germany in order to find out whether the company can be held responsible for not dealing with hate speech in an appropriate manner. Facebook representatives announced that a revision of the rules and procedures would be agreed upon shortly (as of Dec. 2015).

For the first time, individuals were investigated and / or prosecuted for publication of hate speech [e. g. http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/hetze-bei-facebook-4-800-euro-geldstrafe-oder-gefaengnis.1818.de.html?dram:article_id=329294] or lost their job [e. g. <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kommentar-gegen-fluechtlinge-awo-kuendigt-mitarbeiterin-a-1049774.html>].

Additionally, a rising number of civic activists or groups as well as well-known public figures (actors, comedians, writers) raised their voices against hate speech. “Perlen aus Freital” [Pearls of Freital, Freital being a small community in East Germany where massive incidents against refugees occurred] as only one example collects hate speech posts and investigates and publishes the original others, in a sort of virtual pillory [<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/blog-perlen-aus-freital-morddrohung-gegen-fluechtlingsaktivisten/12048210.html>].

In the judicial context, “hate speech” is not a legal term in Germany; this is why the law only differentiates between acceptable and unacceptable expression of opinion, which makes it difficult to adequately define and come to terms with hate speech in a judicial sense.

The German constitution and specifically the Federal Constitution Court emphasises the admissibility of freedom of speech. According to the Federal Constitution Court, freedom of speech is, in a sense, the basis for freedom itself. This is why the constitution provides everyone with the right of “free expression of opinion via speech, scripture and picture”, but this freedom is not without restrictions. The constitution says that the restrictions are there to protect the youth as well as the personal honour of the individual in general. So basically hate speech can harm either someone’s honour or the public interest and the state can interfere as long it adheres to the “general” legislation.

Legislation is considered as “general” when it is devoid of opinion, that is: neutral. A law prohibiting incitement to violence is valid for right-wing, left-wing or altogether non-political offences. A law which hypothetically prohibits only the dissemination of left-wing political views would not be general and therefore not in accordance with the constitution.

This procedure applies to everything in German legislation with the exception of sedition [Volksverhetzung], which is an element of crime which is not “general” when punished because of a necessary national-socialistic motivation that leads to prosecution. This exception has been deemed justified because this (the total rejection of national-socialistic body of thought) is defined as imminent to the German constitution in opposition to the totalitarianism of the Nazi regime. Sedition is de facto what comes closest to hate speech in a non-judicial understanding of hate speech but only covers a small part of the restriction of free expression of opinion.

In practical application, the important restrictions on free expression of speech are found in the right of personal honour / personal rights because opinions often violate those rights. Prosecutable violations include untruthful statements, libel and statements which have lost all reference to the issue at hand and solely aim at attacking another person, but in the interest of freedom of speech prosecution always depends on the context of the matter, where each incident has to be examined carefully.

One of the many practical problems of pursuing hate speech incidents, is that the actual authors can rarely be held accountable since the identity of users on web pages, blogs and in forums is hard to investigate and determine. Here, the issue arises whether or not the one operating the forum etc. in question can be held responsible to remove law-infringing content. The Federal Constitution Court has decided that the forum operator is accountable only when they have neglected duties of necessary monitoring of content.

Should the operator have been notified of law-infringing content he is responsible for its possible removal. In this case the operator has to contact the author of the statement and ask for an adequate response. If the statement in question is not compliant with the German law, then the operator is required to delete it. [Source: <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/hatespeech/hate-speech-im-internet-eine-rechtliche-einordnung/>]

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The articles for the cases were chosen due to the impact they had in German media. The reason for their selection were either :

German celebrities were involved, or

the topics themselves regularly generate a debate in Germany, so in a sense are “typically German” or

the media coverage was extensive.

The topics covered in the selected articles represent typical German arguments, controversies, discussions, etc. The articles were published on several social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and various news sites. This ensured a large amount of comments for analysis.

The first case study is about a comment by German anchorwoman Anja Reschke on the occasion of Auschwitz Memorial Day. She is a member of the “ARD” editorial team, the largest public broadcasting service in Germany. In the evening news she criticised the opinion held by many Germans that “it is time to forget the past and to move on” in regards to the Auschwitz death camps and Nazi history in general.

This started a Germany-wide discussion about the current generation’s responsibility to remember what happened and it raised the question whether this part of history is and remains part of the “German identity”. This story was published on the hosts’ news website, ARD.blog, and shared in several media, generating more than 7,000 comments alone on Facebook.

The analysis shows that there are several different groups of commentators:

- People who agree with what is said, written, shown, who want to articulate their approval and support of what was posted.
- Commentators who are in disagreement with what is said and become quite vocal about it, leaving angry and / or hateful comments.

Of course there are factual comments and people who try to start a meaningful debate, but quite often you find people who use this opportunity to deliberately start fights, spread lies and try to put fuel to the fire simply for their own entertainment. The Facebook post was monitored by the ARD editorial staff who intervened on several occasions, reminding the community to follow the guidelines of the netiquette. Although some extreme comments were deleted, the content they had dealt with was merely picked up by other users and thus the profanity and hate still remained. This is one of the reasons why

some news editors and social media managers debate turning off the commenting functions on Facebook altogether because it seems to be almost impossible for editorial staff to monitor the thousands of comments quickly enough.

The second case was about the well-known German-Turkish actress Sıla Şahin who played a religious woman in a German TV show and posted a picture of herself wearing a headscarf for her role. This struck a nerve with people as she had been the first German-Turkish model covered on the front page of the German “Playboy” magazine. The story was shared among numerous news sources, media outlets and social media and generated hundreds of comments.

The case was selected because of the media attention it generated and because the topic of “headscarf and Islam” is frequently debated among German and Turkish citizens. The analysis shows that the comments generated on Instagram were often very harsh, hateful and aggressive. This is probably due to the fact that most celebrities do not moderate their accounts and do not delete what is written by others. Therefore discussions may easily get out of hand and as the commentators lose track of the actual discussion and fight about unrelated issues the discussion heats up even further.

The general debate is whether or not the account owners or the platform are the ones responsible for the content. It is interesting to observe that commentators write hateful comments although many of the Instagram accounts in question are public and anybody can look up the identity of the users. The often-referred-to anonymity of social media is not quite as valid on Instagram as it seems. Celebrities would probably benefit from employing staff to manage their accounts and from inserting themselves in the debate, reminding the people that they are not just some TV character but an actual person who wants to be treated accordingly.

The Sıla Şahin incident was also reported on by the well-known German newspaper “FOCUS” online. They employ an extended editorial staff to moderate their articles and it is easy to see the difference that makes. The commentators have to register to comment, blatant hate speech is deleted and the editors’ presence is constantly felt since they remind users of the netiquette and insert themselves into the debate. Then again when FOCUS posted the article in question on Facebook the same hate comments as on Instagram appeared, proving again the impossibility for editorial staff to have a complete overview on what is happening.

The third case is about a young Lebanese gay man from Berlin who filed a lawsuit against his family for attempting to force him into an arranged marriage and kidnapping. His sexual orientation, his religion and his origin were reason enough for a huge medial outcry and horrendous harassment on very much every platform. The story was first published by the “Berliner Zeitung” (BZ) on their website. The comment section was disabled but the linked Facebook post drastically showed what happens when there is too little moderation by external mediators.

Most of the hate comments have been deleted by now but as the saying goes, “the internet never forgets”, and thus other commentators still reference what has been said. Readers can find various remarks by the BZ on Facebook reminding people to keep in mind the netiquette. The BZ also repeatedly remarked on their shock regarding the massive amount of hate. Many users agree but there is also a bulk of commentators who urge the newspaper to leave the hate comments on the Facebook feed for people to realise what gay people have to face everyday so the media does not down-play the issue anymore. Others think that the newspaper’s interference hinders freedom of speech.

This controversy demonstrates how close to impossible it is to find a universal solution that helps fight hate speech and makes everyone agree. What does come up is the question whether newspapers should avoid posting articles about sensitive topics such as sexual orientation or religion on social media and focus on leading a structured and monitored discussion on their own websites.

There was another newspaper, “Die WELT”, which wrote about the story but had close to no hate speech on their webpage and only very little hate speech on Facebook, due to their modernised and bold approach on moderating. Die WELT has an editorial staff of more than 20 people whose only job it is to moderate, look at comments and delete, comment and reply. They have gained an almost iconic reputation on social media for their memorable, funny and sometime rude replies to users. Their presence is clearly felt and they are known to observe the comment feeds until the hate has died down.

The fourth case was about Tuğçe A., a young woman who died after trying to intervene during a dispute between several young women and men. She fell after receiving a blow and died from a fatal head trauma. The article referring to that case announced that charges had been brought against the defendant. The story circulated in German media for several months and the numerous related debates generated hundreds of comments. This particular article was chosen for the analysis because although it is only a short, almost trivial post, it initiated around 80 comments in two days including comments that were almost completely unrelated to the actual content of the article itself.

This article is a good example of what can happen when there is no moderation on the web pages of newspapers. Without moderation, discussions are very likely to drift away from the actual topic and the users are more aggressive and less factual in their responses. But it also shows that even if there is no moderation, users are capable to react to hate speech. A number of people out there try to remain factual, level-headed and non-discriminatory and they help to cool down the situation and keep the conversation from getting totally out of control.

The fifth case uses three articles on the Charlie Hebdo attack for its analysis. One was about a Carnival float, which was not part of this year’s carnival after all because it depicted a caricaturist stuffing a pencil down a gun barrel held by a jihadist. The other two articles dealt with the anti-Islamic group Pegida’s attempt to benefit from the Charlie Hebdo attack, by trying to exploit the tragic events for their personal political profit. To no surprise the topic generated a medial outcry and thousands of comments. Similar to the other cases, the discussions got really heated when sensitive issues, like religion for instance, were twisted and distorted to fit the haters’ arguments and often just to agitate the other commentators.

With adequate moderation impertinent comments were corrected, deleted and included into the discussion rather than being used to troll other commentators into a verbal altercation. When other users tried to correct and reply to hate comments they were really not taken seriously to some extent or met with outright harassment.

One has to keep in mind that especially for the Pegida posts it is not surprising that there was a large amount of right wing, anti-Islamic comments. Here at least some moderation was absolutely necessary to make sure the commentators refrained from too much personal antagonism (even though the latter was still the dominant impression throughout the entire discussion).

In conclusion one could say that there is no one-way approach to deal with hate speech. There are factors such as the medium, the community tone (with or without explicit netiquette), the amount and mode of moderation and the topic itself which all play important roles in the discussion taking place and the amount of hate evolving (or not). There are arguments for and against moderation, for and against using social media as publishing tools and more.

A) CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

I) Commentary Anja Reschke

“Tagesschau Blog”: <http://blog.tagesschau.de/2015/01/29/antisemitische-reaktionen-auf-tagesthemen-kommentar/>, Jan. 29, 2015 - Anti-Semitic reactions after “Tagesthemen” comment

Background / Context:

After reporting on the movie “Night will Fall”, a documentary about the cameramen who filmed the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, the German news anchorwoman Anja Reschke used the format of a commentary to voice her disappointment about many peoples’ opinion, that “it is time to forget the past and to move on”. This started a Germany-wide discussion about the new generation’s responsibility to remember what happened and raised the question whether this part of history is and remains part of the “German identity”.

II) Sila Şahin

www.focus.de/kultur/vermishtes/sila-sahin-das-sagt-sie-zum-kopftuch-shitstorm_id_4510733.html and www.facebook.com/FOCUSOnlineKultur/posts/737049073070725, Apr. 2015 - Sila Şahin: What she said about the headscarf (online) backlash.

Background / Context:

After posting a photo wearing a headscarf, the German-Turkish actress Sila Şahin was confronted with an intense backlash of verbal harassments in social media. Sila Şahin’s reaction on the matter was published in several newspapers and magazines.

III) Nasser

1) “Die Berliner Zeitung (BZ)“: <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/klage-vor-gericht-in-berlin-ein-schwuler-sohn-wehrt-sich-gegen-zwangsheirat,10809148,29969838.html>, Feb. 25, 2015 - A gay son fights against arranged marriage. Lawsuit was filed in a court in Berlin

2) “Die Welt“: www.welt.de/vermishtes/article138350318/Muslim-schwul-der-Zwangsehe-knapp-entkommen.html and „Die Welt“ Facebook post: [www.welt.de/vermishtes/article138350318/Muslim-schwul-der-Zwangsehe-knapp-entkommen.html](https://www.facebook.com/diewelt/posts/10153456789012345), March 16, 2015 / Muslim, gay, narrow escape from arranged marriage. At 15 Nasser came out as gay. Then he was kidnapped by his Lebanese family, to be forced into an arranged marriage. Nasser manages to escape. The court now tried his case – with a surprising outcome.

Background / Context:

Nasser, a young Lebanese gay man from Berlin, filed a lawsuit against his family for attempting to force him into an arranged marriage and kidnapping. His sexual orientation was reason for his religious family to threaten and abuse the young man. Newspapers are still following up on Nasser, even after the court reached a verdict. Nasser’s family members, responsible for kidnapping and threatening him, have been sentenced to pay a fee of 90 daily rates of 15 Euro by the Berlin court. The story has created a medial outcry and debate in Germany but also started horrendous harassment on news sites and Nasser’s personal Facebook page.

IV) Tuğçe A.

“Die Zeit“: www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2015-02/tugce-a-offenbach-justiz / Feb. 03, 2015 - Public Prosecutor Presses Charges. In the case of Tuğçe A., an 18-year-old has to answer for bodily harm resulting in death. He is accused of manslaughter.

Background / Context:

Tuğçe A. intervened during a dispute between several young men and women, the latter allegedly being harassed by the former. She received a blow that sent her to the ground and was seriously injured by the resulting head trauma. Life-sustaining measures were terminated a few days later. Tuğçe A. was a German citizen of Turkish origin, born in Germany; the suspect is purportedly of either Serbian or Bosnian descent; it remains unclear whether he was born in Germany or in the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

V) Charlie Hebdo

A) Charlie Hebdo and the Carnival float

“Die Frankfurter Allgemeine“: www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/koeln-karneval-stoppt-charlie-hebdo-motivwagen-13396890.html / Jan. 29, 2015 - Carnival stops Charlie Hebdo float. The Cologne Carnival does without the Shrove Monday float, which was supposed to satirically depict the terror attack on the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo”.

Background / Context:

The German Carnival has made it a tradition to use controversial topics from preceding years as material to build satirical floats. This year one float was supposed to depict a caricaturist who stuffs a pencil down a gun barrel held by a jihadist. This float was then banned from the parade causing a Germany-wide debate.

B) Charlie Hebdo and Pegida

1) “Die ZEIT“: www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-01/frankreich-charlie-hebdo-karikaturen-pegida-paris-dresden#cid-4309207, Jan. 12, 2015 - French caricaturists fight against Pegida. “Pegida get lost”: French caricaturists use cartoons and pamphlets to fight back against Pegida and its exploitation of the Paris attacks.

2) “taz. die tageszeitung“: www.taz.de/!152463/, Jan. 08, 2015 - Plenty of false friends. The Pegidas of this world do not have the right to exploit the murdered satirists. Who ever condemns the crime adding the term “but” vindicates it.

Background / Context:

The anti-Islamic group Pegida (Pegida stands for Patriotische Europäer gegen Islamisierung des Abendlands, translated: Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident) has been trying to profit from the Paris attacks, asking protesters to wear black ribbons at the upcoming protest. The group is accused of exploiting the tragic events for their personal political benefit.

B) CASE STUDIES IN DETAIL

I) Commentary Anja Reschke

Online Newspaper (Title and link):

“Tagesschau Blog”: <http://blog.tagesschau.de/2015/01/29/antisemitische-reaktionen-auf-tagesthemen-kommentar/> (including the original video that caused the discussion)

Date of publication: Jan. 29, 2015

Date of collection: March. 03, 2015

Headline and subheading of the article:

Antisemitische Reaktionen auf Tagesthemen-Kommentar

Translation:

Anti-Semitic reactions after “Tagesthemen” comment

N. of shares on Facebook: 55,092 shares on Facebook

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks): 34 shares on the Twitter account of the ARD blog, https://twitter.com/tagesschau_blog/status/560851304163966977,

and 61 retweets on the Twitter account of ARD press, https://twitter.com/ARD_Presse/status/560473229715070976

N. of likes: 80,405 likes on Facebook

N. of Comments: 7,127 comments on Facebook, 47 comments on ARD.blog

Background / Context:

After reporting on the movie “Night will Fall”, a documentary about the cameramen who filmed the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, the German news anchorwoman Anja Reschke used the format of a commentary to voice her disappointment about many peoples’ opinion, that “it is time to forget the past and to move on”. This started a Germany-wide discussion about the new generation’s responsibility to remember what happened and raised the question whether this part of history is and remains part of the “German identity”.

Explanatory Note:

The article mentioned above only generated 47 comments since it was a sort of summary of what reactions were triggered by the publication of the video comment and related articles. Those (the latter) were broadcast on TV and published on YouTube, Twitter, the ARD blog etc. The following analysis deals with exemplary comments that reacted to what was posted in all these formats and channels.

Note:

The sheer mass of comments made a quantitative analysis impossible. Therefore, the following annotations only aim at delivering a general impression on the two dominant attitudes of the commentators, concentrating on the Facebook posts.

Introduction:

For the past decades there has been an on-going discussion in the German public on whether the remembrance of Auschwitz as a symbol for crimes against humanity remains a collective responsibility for all Germans, including generations too young to have been alive during the 3rd Reich. It is a topic that regularly leads to vehement disputes between two main fractions; one claiming that the enormity of what happened was too much to put “behind us”, explaining that while no-one accused all Germans alive today to be guilty of what happened then, it was still all Germans’ responsibility to keep the memory alive. The other fraction pleads innocent of what previous generations had to account for and demands to “be left in peace with the past” and to be allowed “to move on”.

Analysis of Facebook comments:

Whereas a fair number of commentators (a quantitative examination was not possible, see above) congratulated the author / speaker (Anja Reschke) on her original comment (see for instance the comment that started the entire discussion), the majority (this is a subjective assumption after scanning about 800 out of more than 7.000 comments on Facebook) of the posts were variations of a more negative reaction. This reaction ranged from comments acknowledging the necessity of remembrance but rejecting personal responsibility to violent objections to being reminded of anything that referred to the 3rd Reich.

From what was to be deduced from the comments’ content mostly young or younger people were quite willing to keep the memory alive but asked to be excluded from all assignments of guilt or responsibility emphasising their young age. Some of those (including presumably elder people, too) pointed out other countries’ “atrocities” to explain that while Germany’s crimes were still hateful others were guilty of “comparable” deeds. Further commentators did so in an obvious attempt of watering down Germany’s crimes, listing numbers of victims allegedly slain by countries such as the United States of America, Belgium, Portugal and many more. Those numbers in their majority were either wrong to start with, or they referred to a very long period in history. Some commentators confused entire ethnic groups involved; e. g. one comment accused the Turks of massacring the Aramaeans (instead of Armenians).

A large number of comments lament Germany’s fate after the 2nd World War, using terms and expressions such as “must we be still on our knees” or “slaved”, “humiliated”, “denunciated”, “hounded” or “discriminated”. Many similar comments that seem more harmless at first glance (by e.g. admitting that it was “a horrible incident”) end with phrases such as “that was 70 years ago”, “I simply can’t listen to this anymore” or “I simply don’t want to hear Auschwitz mentioned anymore – enough is enough”. A fair number of these commentators seem to derive an accusation of a personal guilt from the request for remembrance. Some of their reactions are harsh, insulting the original author (Anja Reschke), the broadcasting studio (ARD), politicians or the press in general.

Some of the contributors accuse the press to debase the PEGIDA movement. This a relatively new social movement with undemocratic and xenophobic elements; PEGIDA stands for Patriotische Europäer gegen Islamisierung des Abendlands, translated: Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident. They are known for organising so-called “walks” of citizens who claim to be worried

about topics such as allegedly growing numbers of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees; about the allegedly growing attempts of Muslims to influence German society, traditions, values; about European politics which they define as hostile etc.

They are known to tolerate right-wing activists in their ranks and are united by a refusal to communicate with the press which they denounce as “liars’ press” (“Lügenpresse”). Several commentators deny a explicit sympathy with or membership in PEGIDA but continue their statements with variations of “but”-phrases.

Some comments quite obviously have been deleted by the editors; some comments that respond directly to the former still exist, illuminating how notably hostile those comments must have been. One of them (as summarized by a responding commentator) must have published a post claiming that if Hitler and his associates had won the war “we wouldn’t have to pay for that and there would be no conflict in Gaza”. Two posts emphasise that Hitler was Austrian and not German.

Several commentators introduce the topic of hostile “foreigners”, especially Muslims into the discussions, claiming “they” were unwilling to integrate. They derive a right to defend their own culture etc. against those alleged attempts to change, undermine or overthrow German society / identity. The very first post quoted here was apparently published by a woman who calls herself a “foreigner” and says: “Everybody who comes to this country and thinks he can trample our laws, exploit us who work honestly and hard (no matter if German or not) and behave in a criminal way must be deported! Period! And that – dammit – has nothing, nothing at all to do with the fate of the Jews!” Others defend the “right” to speak up against “criminal foreigners or refugees”.

One says (responding to a previous post): “I hope for you that things develop the way most Germans expect them to. Islamisation, then a high percentage of Muslims, then no more requests by the Central Council of Muslims but resolutions and then the sharia. If you haven’t converted until then you will lose your head. All jokes aside. This is actually no joke but will be real. I am scared of this development!” Another contributor claims her son purportedly was no longer allowed to bring a bacon sandwich to school, out of consideration for Muslim fellow pupils since bacon is pork. She quite obviously works herself into a rage culminating in “A few day ago I heard Muslims are part of Germany. That is a lie!!! Ever since we defined ourselves as Germans we were Christians – before that we were heathens. If e. g. a Turk leaves his native country - for reasons whatsoever – then he shall look for a country that is Muslim if he has a problem with my son eating a bacon sandwich!”

Another one says that he must adapt to a foreign country’s traditions and values when he travels there so he expects everybody to do the same when he / she comes to Germany. He refers to a recent discussion in some (pre-school) circles to rename certain traditions (winter celebration instead of Christmas) in the light of a growing number of non-Christian children attending. He says Christian belief is trampled by such attempts and continues then: “And yes, I am of the opinion that extremely criminal foreigners shall be deported because they will prosecuted there for their deeds and more severely than in Germany, too.”

Yet another commentator agrees: "... and even though I think your belief is crazy, come live here and hold on to your religion if you don't know better. But be sure to adapt in OUR country. And if only the word 'Islam' evokes the thought of terror, suppression of women, burkas, and the abolition of Christmas markets, St. Martin etc., then no-one should be surprised that some people summon up the courage to stand up in the defence of the freedom and culture of our country."

And finally one commentator reacts to a discussion between two others, addressing one of them with the following: "What I see is a Muslim fellow-citizen who starts to shoot [a German expression that means to react in a very aggressive way] immediately as soon as someone says anything against the likes of him. Easy, man, not all Muslims are the same, YOU are no terrorist, the others are."

One very strange comment asks where the broadcasting studio was when Nazis came into power in Ukraine, where the president is Jewish and has Israeli citizenship. Another "non sequitur" comment refers to sinking pensions in Germany (in the context of financial aid for refugees).

Another topic that is dealt with extensively evolves around Jews and Israel. Some speak of "the permanent American and Israeli aggression that is still here today on a massive scale", they say that "Israel is not ashamed either of what they do with Palestine", they ask "do you feel pity as well with people from Palestine?", or claim that it was "the poor Jews who perished. The ones who have claims are the rich Jews who could relocate themselves to the USA". One says: "If asked what happens today in other countries, for example what Israel, a state that exists since 1949, does with its neighbours, and we are paying for the whole shit and shut up! You wimps, grow up and face reality."

Still another post reads as: "You should take a look at the ca. 5.000 dead in the unjustified attack of the Israelis against Palestine last year - children with torn-off limbs, mothers' torsos etc.! And what do our media do - they relativise those murders because after 70 years we still have to tolerate everything that is happening in Israel! And those dead are only the tip of the iceberg!" The same commentator claims to have seen in a video how Israeli snipers [soldiers] kill Palestinian adolescents, cheering among themselves when they killed one.

Another commentator points out how Israel is involved in the killings of "millions of people" in Muslim countries. Another says that the holocaust was financed by Jewish bankers, "Zionist that belong to the financial elite even today", claiming he has seen proof of that in the memorial place of Yad Vashem. Another simply says: "And what with Gaza? But the Jews are allowed to slaughter the Palestinians and drive them from their own land or what?"

Another one asks: "How do you want to explain to today's youth that Germany still pays reparations to Israel which (what irony) invests this money into armament for the war against Palestinians?" Another post reads as: "Has a Zionist forced you to say that?", referring to the original comment broadcast on TV. Quite a few more claim that Israel should have learned from what has been done to "them" and is instead still involved in "massive slaughter".

Summary / Conclusion:

The comments summarised above are to be judged as the more drastic sort of posts that were found in the long list of reactions to the original article. The complete list consisted of reactions that were either congratulatory or grateful as well, pointing out the necessity to keep both the remembrance as well as the discussion alive. Other commentators repeatedly tried to add a more objective, a more conciliatory or a more balanced level to the discussion.

But all that said, the most vehement sort of reaction that dominated the list of posts was published by people who heatedly demanded the discussion and the remembrance to be over, who refused to feel responsible either for what happened 70 years ago or respectively for their demeanour (as Germans) today, who denied that the German past has had any influence on their identity as 2nd or 3rd generation Germans or who in general refused to be held accountable for anything related to the 3rd Reich. Although some contributors pointed out that even though they did not feel responsible or even guilty for past crimes they still acknowledged the need to keep the memory alive, an unexpectedly high number of commentators simply violated all common rules of an even remotely civilised discussion: They verbally abused each other as well as the author of the original comment, they gave voice to every imaginable prejudice, they insulted political opponents as well as members of minorities.

The overall impression after scanning around 800 comments is that the majority of contributors considered matters related to keywords such as Holocaust, 3rd Reich, Nazi Germany connoted to remembrance, guilt, identity, responsibility as a German as extremely controversial, leading them to react on a exceedingly high emotional, and oftentimes very aggressive level.

There was a certain amount of editorial intervention. There was only one post found that said:

“ARD: Liebe User, bitte haltet euch an die Netiquette. Wir dulden bei ARD.de grundsätzlich weder rassistische, sexistische, antisemitische, hetzende noch beleidigende Kommentare. Wir bemühen uns, solche Beiträge schnell zu löschen und sind dankbar über Hinweise, falls wir bei der Fülle der Wortmeldungen etwas übersehen haben: <http://x.ard.de/s/kontaktformular> / 16
• 30. Januar um 05:33 • Bearbeitet”

(**Translation:** “ARD: Dear users, please heed the netiquette. At ARD [the broadcasting station in question], we generally tolerate neither racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, incendiary nor abusive comments. We strive to delete such articles quickly and are grateful for any notice in case we overlooked such a post in the mass of contributions.”)

Nevertheless, some posts have been deleted as could be derived from users’ reactions to comments that were no longer found in the list.

II) Sila Şahin

Online Newspaper (Title und Link):

Focus Online

*www.focus.de/kultur/vermischtes/sila-sahin-das-sagt-sie-zum-kopftuch-shitstorm_id_4510733.html
www.facebook.com/FOCUSOnlineKultur/posts/737049073070725*

Date of publication:

01.03.2015 (focus Facebook)

02.03.2015 (focus.de)

Date of collection:

16.03.2015 / 02.04.2015

Headline and subheading of the article:

Sila Sahin: Das sagt sie zum Kopftuch Shitstorm.

Sila Sahin: What she said about the headscarf backlash.

After posting a photo wearing a headscarf, the German-Turkish actress Sila Sahin was confronted with a backlash of verbal harassments in social media. Sahin's reaction on the matter was published in several newspapers and magazines.

N. of shares on Facebook:

2000 shares on the Focus Online website

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks):

No twitter share of the Focus article

N. of likes: 112 likes on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/FOCUSOnlineKultur/posts/737049073070725>
3 shares

N. of Comments: 309 comments on Instagram

<https://instagram.com/p/zj4cnaOg73/?modal=true>

22 comments on the Focus Online page

226 comments on Facebook: 96 comments and 130 replies

Analysis and Background

Sila Şahin is a 29-year-old actress of Turkish origin. She is known for her role in a German Telenovela as well as minor roles in TV productions. In May 2011 she was the first German-Turkish model covered on the front page of the German "Playboy" magazine. On 26th February 2015 she was involved in a shooting of the TV Series "Lindenstraße" in which she plays a role of a Muslima. During a break of the shooting she posted a photo on Instagram, posing as a Muslima with headscarf accompanied by the hashtags "#headscarf something new #fun #happy".

After this photo was posted an intensive debate ensued and more than hundreds of comments were published on Instagram. Due to the fact that Instagram accounts have to be monitored and managed by the account owners, there is little to no interference with the comments and the hate speech.

Besides some positive responses from her fans (“it suits you”, “perfect”, “beautiful”) and some mediating, balancing remarks (“She has posted this for her job”), substantial negative feedback could be observed: pejorative prejudices against so-called “Islamic life” (“Will you be forced to marry?” by one user) or strong negative responses about the discrepancy between her appearance in the media (in particular with reference to the nude photos in Playboy) and the religious life of a Muslima (“You bitch shame on you – first Playboy then headscarf” by another user).

Furthermore there are mediating comments from apparently Muslim side, too, recommending to calm down and stop accusing and judging her. Soon after publication, a “shitstorm” (German expression for online backlash) of comments continued to be added to Sila Şahin’s Facebook account. The same photo, originally posted on Instagram, and the linked comments were deleted shortly after by her.

Later Şahin was quoted in an interview with a newspaper: “I posted a photo of myself with a headscarf and then all hell broke loose.” She said that she was insulted and a lot of comments were written in the most evil and profane language. Furthermore the actress criticized the communication online, because “commenting takes place anonymously and partially in an aggressive and insulting way.”

References to the backlash and parts of the interview can be found in various newspapers and lifestyle magazines (FOCUS, BILD, STERN, GALA, INTOUCH, etc.).

In the following the comments of the FOCUS article will be analysed in more depth. In contrast to the not moderated Instagram account, the reader’s comments are supervised by the editorial team of the FOCUS website. The netiquette of the FOCUS website states:

“In the interest of all users, the editors reserve the right to examine and edit posts or reject it if necessary. [...] Comments / reader reports are deleted when they discriminate against gender, age, language, origin, religious affiliation or beliefs of other. Demagogic, sexist or racist remarks lead to the immediate deletion of the comment / report and to immediate termination of the account.”

As of April 2015, 21 comments were published by readers of the article and were eventually edited by the FOCUS editorial team, although there are no signs that comments have been edited subsequently. Commentators of the article need to register and seem to use their real name. The following examples demonstrate the aggressive mood:

On 02.03.2015 one user wrote:

“... by now I regard a headscarf as a declaration of war...”

The a second user answered: “Declaration of war is the right word for Ms Sahin’s behaviour. Even if they try, these people will not succeed to whitewash the Islam.”

On the official FOCUS fan page on Facebook the debate continued with more entries and in a less mon-

itored way than the FOCUS website. More examples of insults and verbal harassments can be found among the hundreds of Facebook comments. The following examples of statements and their replies illustrate the use of hate speech in this context. After posting a pejorative comment with a general degradation of the Islam, six replies were posted which directly yield to personal insults:

On 01.03.2015 at 22:22 one user wrote:

“Typical FOCUS agitation news. Why do you offer them a platform. 95 % have understood that in Islam there is no multi-culture but only violence.”

A second user replied: “Islam agitator”.

The first user replied: “aha, there is another violent actor nobody needs!”

A third female user replied to the first user: “Asshole. Go and sleep with your mother.”

A fourth user replied to the first user: “I feel pity for your so ignorant so primitive thinking but okey one should take away your Har[t]z4 peace out little you”.

The first user replied to the third user: “Great: the TURK [Name of the third user] let’s play culture again. Forgot the mention above; your culture, as we can read right now, is always insulting. But that fits with the face!”

User one replied to user number four: “yes, learn how to walk upright and to go to the potty by yourself before tangling with adults. Maybe someday you will pay your mobile phone bill with your own money, till then you depend on the community, you gnome!”

In the following example deliberately misspelled language is used in a comment in order to insult non-native German speaker of Turkish origin, who then, in this case replied in the same rhetoric style with a strong defamation:

On 02.03.2015 at 09:20 user one wrote :

“Why you not go Durkey?? But Stanbull not wanne see lot of veils and headscarfs :))” [“warum du nix gehen dürgei ?? aber stanbull nixe wolle sehe fiele sleier und gopfe tuch :-))”]

Another user replied: “Why you not fuck your mother in arse” [„Warum du ficken nicht deine mutter in arsch“]

A third user replied: „Why don’t you learn decent German, [Name of user one] ??????”

In the last reply of the example above the user seems ignore the intention of user one who deliberately misspells German words in order to use language as a tool of humiliation.

Further Articles about the topic:

ABENDZEITUNG MÜNCHEN: www.abendzeitung-muenchen.de/inhalt.fuer-lindenstrasse-rolle-sila-sahin-das-sagt-sie-zum-kopftuch-shitstorm.8d2ee2ab-ac18-420a-891e-b118cc87943e.html

AUGSBURGER ALLGEMEINE: www.augsburger-allgemeine.de/panorama/Playboy-Fotos-und-Kopftuch-Sila-Sahin-im-Shitstorm-id33226452.html

BILD: www.bild.de/bild-plus/unterhaltung/leute/sila-sahin/internet-hass-wegen-kopftuch-fo-to-39970070

EXPRESS: www.express.de/promi-show/ex-gzsz-star-sila-sahin--erst-nackt-im-playboy--jetzt-mit-kopftuch-in-der-lindenstrasse,2186,29986184.html

GALA: www.gala.de/stars/news/sila-sahin-ihre-antwort-auf-den-kopftuch-shitstorm_1220044.html

HUFFINGTON POST: www.huffingtonpost.de/2015/03/02/sila-sahin-kopftuch-shitstorm_n_6783212.html

INTOUCH: <http://intouch.wunderweib.de/stars/starnews/artikel-3492715-starnews/Sila-Sahin-traegt-jetzt-Kopftuch.html>

OK MAGAZIN: www.ok-magazin.de/krasse-typ-veraenderung-sila-sahin-traegt-jetzt-kopftuch-32269.html

STERN: www.stern.de/lifestyle/leute/sila-sahin-ex-gzsz-star-wegen-kopftuch-foto-im-shitstorm-2176984.html (5 shares on Twitter) (766 recommendations on Facebook)

TZ MÜNCHEN: www.tz.de/stars/sila-sahin-shitstorm-wegen-bild-kopftuch-4782073.html

In summary several observations can be made in the context of this “Sıla Şahin“ case study:

As the chronological spreading of the online communication reveals, the starting point of the hate speech respectively “shitstorm” can be identified as a single published photo on a social media platform. From there, the online communication has moved to other platforms, in particular to Facebook. The interview given by Sıla Şahin stimulated traditional and established news media to report on the “shitstorm” event which then in turn produced even more attention and comments in the social media channels of the news publishers.

Shitstorms and hate speech are topics for the media, in particular when referring to celebrities. But even a general debate on the rise of hate speech can be observed in the media (e.g. public reading of hate speech by journalists, so-called “hate-speech poetry” or documentary formats on the topic). The strong reactions from Germans as well as (Turkish etc.) Muslims has to be interpreted in view of past media coverage of Sıla Şahin. Two iconic media events, the previously published nude photos in the Playboy magazine and the present headscarf photo, offer a projection screen for heterogeneous cultural prejudices and biases.

Form and content of the comments on the moderated and edited news site and the accompanied social media sites (Facebook) differ substantially. Users tend to harass and insult each other more intensively on less or non-moderated social networks.

Taking these examples, various sequences and patterns can be distinguished: users who address other users directly by uttering insults, e. g. with sexual content, or users who misapply language by using socio-linguistic prejudices. In spite of the specific and relevant context - an actress of Turkish origin wearing a headscarf -, the discussion takes on a meaning of its own and comments often contain discriminating and generalizing prejudices.

III) Nasser

Online Newspaper (Title and Link):

1. “Die Berliner Zeitung (BZ)”: *www.berliner-zeitung.de*

Article: <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/klage-vor-gericht-in-berlin-ein-schwuler-sohn-wehrt-sich-gegen-zwangsheirat,10809148,29969838.html>

Berliner Zeitung Facebook – *<https://www.facebook.com/BLZonline?fref=ts>*

2. “Die Welt”: *http://www.welt.de*

Article: <http://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article138350318/Muslim-schwul-der-Zwangsehe-knapp-entkommen.html>

Welt Facebook post – *www.facebook.com/welt?fref=ts*

Date of publication:

BZ - Feb. 25, 2015, Die Welt – March. 16, 2015

Date of collection:

BZ, Facebook - March. 14, 2015, Die Welt – March. 20, 2015

Headline and subheading of the article:

1. Ein schwuler Sohn wehrt sich gegen Zwangsheirat. Klage vor Gericht in Berlin (BZ)

Translation: A gay son fights against forced marriage. Lawsuit was filed in a court in Berlin (BZ)

2. Muslim, schwul, der Zwangsehe knapp entkommen. Mit 15 outet sich Nasser als schwul. Dann entführte ihn seine libanesische Familie für eine Zwangsheirat. Nasser kann fliehen. Nun verhandelte ein Gericht den Fall – mit überraschendem Ausgang. (Welt)

Translation: Muslim, gay, narrow escape from forced marriage. At 15 Nasser came out as gay. Then he was kidnapped by his Lebanese family to be forced into an arranged marriage. Nasser manages to escape. The court now tried his case – with a surprising outcome. (Welt)

N. of shares on Facebook:

7,923 Facebook recommendations on the BZ website

225 shares of the BZ Facebook post, 128 shares on of the Welt Facebook post

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks):

89 shares on Twitter (BZ), 9 shares on Twitter (Welt)

N. of likes:

1487 likes on Facebook (BZ), 708 likes on Facebook (Welt)

N. of Comments:

535 comments on Facebook post (BZ), 141 comments on Facebook (Welt) , 29 comments on the Welt website

Background / Context:

Nasser, a young Lebanese gay man from Berlin, filed a lawsuit against his family for attempting to force him into an arranged marriage and kidnapping. His sexual orientation was reason for his religious family to threaten and abuse the young man. Newspapers are still following Nasser, even after the court reached a verdict. Nasser's family members, responsible for kidnapping and threatening him, have been sentenced to pay a fee of 90 daily rates of 15 Euro by the Berlin court. The story has created a medial outcry and debate in Germany but also started horrendous harassment on news sites and Nasser's personal Facebook page.

ANALYSIS

In the following, the analysis reconstructs the comments on the media coverage about Nasser's case on three levels:

The Berliner Zeitung published the first article on Nasser's case, which was also the starting point for the media coverage. Several German newspapers continued to report on the court trial and the case of Nasser became well known beyond Berlin (see further articles above). There has been no debate on the Berliner Zeitung website itself but strong hate comments on the accompanying Facebook channel. The newspaper website "Die WELT" was chosen as an example for an in-depth analysis of the discussion threads. Strictly speaking, the discussion took place on an embedded debating system named "Disqus" in the frame of the WELT website.

The accompanying Facebook Die WELT channel serves as a further layer of analysis. In particular, the way and the style in which the WELT editorial team interferes and interacts with the commentators has gained much attention in the social media scene.

Berliner Zeitung and BZ Facebook

The Berliner Zeitung was the first to report on Nasser's story. The website offered no functionality for readers to comment the article, but the linked Facebook post showed drastically what happens when there is only little moderation by external mediators.

Although the most harassing comments have been deleted in the meantime, the remaining comments and the references to the netiquette demonstrate the presence of hate speech.

On 27th February 2015 the editorial team of Berliner Zeitung posted on Facebook:

"In light of the circumstances, we would like to once again remind you of the rules of our Netiquette: On our Facebook page we are pleased about stimulating discussions and objective criticism and a friendly interaction. As with any other services from Berliner Zeitung, we make sure that our community rules are observed: Keep a respectful tone. Even if you choose to write under a pseudonym, please don't publish anything which you can't put your good name behind.

The responsibility for the published comments and their possible consequences remains with the Facebook users themselves. In the comments section everyone should be allowed to express his

opinion at liberty. But there are limits whose violation we do not tolerate. This includes all racist, right and left-wing, homophobic or sexist remarks. The defamation of minorities, marginalized groups or people with disabilities are not accepted. In addition, no author or fellow commentator should be personally insulted or exposed. Please keep in mind that insults and allegations of fact can also be justiciable. Also avoid spam messages and promotional items. In these cases, our admins and moderators reserve the right to delete individual posts.”

In an earlier post *Berliner Zeitung* stated that “We were shocked about the homophobic comments under this post” [posts deleted since original collection]. In response to this and to the post above Facebook users replied:

“Then you can delete about 70 % of all comments here.”

“A bit late. Is your site not moderated? Embarrassing!”

“I think these [comments] should be left there. Everybody should drop their mask and show which kind of person he is” / “No deleting!!! Pointing out!!!”

“After reading here for a few minutes, I also came to the conclusion that deleting [comments] isn’t effective, rather hides how many people call for violence or threats with violence and write horrible things. I also think that legal measures should follow.”

Facebook users active in this thread stated that they have made screenshots to document hate speech. Other users criticize the role of the editorial team at *Berliner Zeitung* with regard to their activities against hate speech and suggest to take legal actions and to publish examples of hate speech in a newspaper article.

Furthermore, several hate speech incidents can be found on the Facebook channel as for example the discussion initiated by user one which had five replies. It seems to be that the quoted comment by another user was deleted:

User number one: “Oh god, and people ask why you have prejudices against Turks etc. Just read the comments. Nothing else needs to be said.”

Reply number one: “You can do nothing about being homosexual, and you can do nothing about your origin. I am Kurd and I found it absolutely unfair that one cannot live according to their sexuality. Your comment against Turks is unnecessary... I know many Germans who are also against ‘gays’. Try to be factual and do not paint everyone with the same brush.”

User number one again: “With insults you will not get far.”

Reply number two (quoting meanwhile deleted comment of another user): “Stupid whor[r]e, you just showed that you were probably fucked by so many Turks’ And somebody like you WORKS in a travel agency. It is so bitter.... Where shall this end?!!! And I am not only referring to the German spelling...”

Reply number four: “I would recommend to get some information first and then open your mouth. Your comment is really stupid and unnecessary. One could say you were German, a special need

student, and a scruffy CHILD. So how do you like my prejudices??? P.S. Just an example for you that you realise that it has nothing to do with Turks and above all, there are still Germans who are against gays.”

Die WELT Website

The discussion on the WELT website comprises 29 entries, 23 comments and 6 replies. As of April 2015 the comments have been closed. One comment was deleted, although the reference is still available. On average the text length of comments is longer than in the Facebook channel (see below); some consist of one or two longer paragraphs of text.

By structuring the comments, some thematic threads can be distinguished:

The court decision was criticized as a “joke” or as a “shame”. The verdict was considered to be too lenient in comparison to other criminal offences such as tax frauds, driving without licence or killing an animal.

Commentators assess the alleged minor degree of penalty as a result of the cultural family background and suspect a “bonus for migrants”. One commentator even regards this court decision as a “complimentary ticket for all Muslims to force their daughters into a marriage”. This could be fertile ground for racist followers to use as an incentive to join the discussion.

In the case the German law enforcement is regarded as “helpless” as a result of a “decadent decay of the constitutional state”.

Some comments revolve around a common “understanding” that, “Muslims who don’t abide to German law can get lost” or should be “deported”.

On the other hand many commentators use the opportunity to wish Nasser luck and offer their respect for his courage to speak up.

In general the debate on the WELT website does not contain personal hate speech which targets a participating commentator. The statements nevertheless contain cultural stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims.

As many German news sites have come to the conclusion that increased comment-feed monitoring and interference from the editorial staff is a solution to reduce hate speech on their websites, the WELT newspaper is in this respect no exception to that. The editorial staff of the WELT takes care of the moderation of the comments during working hours. Commentators on the Disqus platform who do not abide by the newspapers netiquette are banned from the discussions and comments will be deleted. According to the terms of use, “critical comments and discussion are welcome, abuses and insults will be deleted” (the full terms of usage can be found here: www.welt.de/debatte/article13346147/Nutzungsregeln.html).

In comparison to the embedded debate on the online newspaper’s website (www.welt.de), the linked Facebook channel of WELT (level 3 of analysis) differs in terms of commenting style, editing culture.

As mentioned above, the tone of the participants on the WELT discussion is more respectful and there is close to no swearing and insults. Apart from one notice “This comment was deleted” there is no sign of interference and editing in the analysed part on the WELT discussion.

Facebook WELT

This differs from the Facebook WELT channel. The WELT has almost gained an iconic reputation among social media users because of their modernized approaches and the bold, sometimes rude comments the editorial staff write during Facebook discussions. This “WELT-phenomenon” is talked about in other media as well (see for example the fanpage www.facebook.com/fansdesjournalistenzirkels). The example from the WELT Facebook page is an exemplary case of such editing and commenting culture. Whether this method of answering comments is successful lies in the eye of the beholder but in comparison to other Facebook pages there seem to be less extreme hate speech comments.

The comment-feed begins with one user predicting “anti-Muslim comments in 1...2...3”.
The WELT editorial staff replies

“No, not today. Whoever wants to agitate against Muslims and homosexuals today, can just let it be”.

Further along the first user insults a female commentator by writing:

“[Name of another user] the only thing I will shout is allahu akbar or if I am hungry so someone will cook for me you bitch”.

The editorial staff then intervenes by writing

“Another one of those comments and you will definitely not cook on this page anymore”.

They continue by writing

“Absolutely! What we don’t want here is hate directed towards Muslims”

and directed at the first user,

“How about you read the Article [name of user one]! We are pretty sure you haven’t done that yet. It’s all about Nasser and his story. He is a Muslim and his religion plays a big role. That’s not irrelevant!”

Later the first user writes

“WELT [name of another user] insulted me deport him”

To which the WELT replies

“Deportation? We don’t do that. Well just turn off your light here, if you don’t behave. So: how about you step outside and get some fresh air?”

From then on the first user does not stand out with any further comments. It is disputable whether or not these editorial staff reactions are helpful or give the commentators a wrong idea of their own importance and a validation of their opinion. But where the editorial staff seems to take ample amount of time to reply to one commentator, it overlooks others who say even more drastic things, such as:

“The fucking WELT who do you think you are talking to, who do you want to hush you piss child [“pisskind” German demeaning swearword]. I don’t tolerate fags that’s it and who wants to can, but I won’t”

There are commentators that try to calm down the situation, any time the racist and homophobic comments are made:

“Chill you guys” or “For Putin homosexuality isn’t funny either, don’t always head the list with Muslim countries please...!” and “Someone who doesn’t even understand the title won’t be capable of cooking his own soup...” (referring to the WELT comment)

In summary several conclusions can be made in the context of this “Nasser“ case study:

The editorial staff of online newspapers is dealing with hate speech on several levels, various technical platforms as well as on different language and harassment levels.

In general, on social media platforms like Facebook the level of hate speech and aggression is more visible and more directly targeted towards individual users.

The staff of newspapers are challenged not only with questions of deleting inappropriate comments but also with initiating legal measures. Some users of the online community demand for additional measures and suggest a public discourse on hate speech.

New approaches by newspaper’s editorial staff, e.g. the usage of irony and sarcasm against trolls and haters, could yield to a new culture of commenting. Although this requires a more in-depth analysis to be confirmed as an effective and sustainable method.

Further articles:

FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE (FAZ): www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/menschen/schwul-sohn-zieht-gegen-seine-eltern-vor-gericht-13477491.html

DER TAGESSPIEGEL: www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/polizei-justiz/entfuhrung-des-schwul-sohnes-geldstrafen-fuer-vater-und-onkel-im-nasser-prozess/11493900.html

BILD.DE: www.bild.de/regional/berlin/prozess/strafbefehl-im-prozess-um-homosexuellen-moslem-nasser-40123718.bild.html

STERN: www.stern.de/panorama/schwul-libanese-18-jaehriger-nasser-verklagt-seine-familie-2179701.html

Berliner Morgenpost: www.morgenpost.de/berlin/article138323483/Entfuehrt-weil-er-schwul-ist-Geldstrafen-fuer-Vater-und-Onkel.html

IV) Tuğçe A.

Online Newspaper (Title and link):

“Die Zeit”: www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2015-02/tugce-a-offenbach-justiz

Date of publication: Feb. 03, 2015

Date of collection: Feb. 05, 2015

Headline and subheading of the article:

Staatsanwaltschaft erhebt Anklage. Im Fall der Studentin Tuğçe A. soll sich ein 18-Jähriger wegen Körperverletzung mit Todesfolge verantworten. Er soll die junge Frau niedergeschlagen haben.

Translation: Public Prosecutor Presses Charges. In the case of Tuğçe A., an 18-year-old has to answer for bodily harm resulting in death. He is accused of manslaughter.

N. of shares on Facebook:

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks):

N. of likes:

N. of Comments: 79 (44 comments on the first day of publication, 34 on the second day, one more on day 3).

Background / Context:

Tuğçe A. intervened during a dispute between several young men and women, the latter allegedly being harassed by the former. She received a blow that sent her to the ground and was seriously injured by the resulting head trauma. Life-sustaining measures were terminated a few days later.

Tuğçe A. was a German citizen of Turkish origin, born in Germany; the suspect is purportedly of either Serbian or Bosnian descent; it remains unclear whether he was born in Germany or in the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Analysis:

Some contributors show indignation about supposedly milder convictions for people who harm others as opposed to offences such as abuse of controlled substances. Another suggests the suspect should remove graffiti as a suitable punishment. Yet another complains about the possibility to apply Juvenile Law in cases such as this and suggests to take into account the numbers of years that an average person could have lived had he or she not have been killed. This number of years should be the equivalent of the years in prison. Others speak of a “cuddly” sort of justice dealing with either migrants or adolescents (the context remains unclear) and how the suspect will be treated to a “sailing therapy” to Spain or Florida in the course of social reintegration.

One of the more aggressive commentators claims some deeper knowledge of the suspect (which in fact he does not have at all). In an elaborate example of stereotyping he describes how this incident will only be the starting point of a criminal career. The commentator says he is willing to bet money on the

suspect having been involved in acts of “massive violence” before and never having to deal with the consequences. He claims knowledge of hundreds of such cases in Germany every year since he purportedly “knows” the type. He says: “The guy will say in court that he is very sorry for it all and he only meant to slap the victim’s face and that she just fell in an unfortunate way ‘sob’. That will work as well this time and the culprit will have difficulties not to laugh about the sentence while still in the courtroom.”

A fair number of comments deal with statements as the ones presented above and try to point out various aspects of the law as it is actually practised in Germany, e. g. how manslaughter / homicide / accident are defined and what legal measures are appropriate in each case. Further statements emphasise the unimportance of the nationality of the suspect. They answer to more aggressive posts that focus on the alleged origin of the suspect by pointing out that he was born and raised in Germany or that Serbia is a European country, too, or that manslaughter / homicide are criminal offences in Serbia as well (thereby pointing out that societies elsewhere follow the same societal values and rules).

One commentator (the one with the most – 7 – posts) repeatedly tries to discuss in a more level-headed manner with the more aggressive and / or (apparently) racist contributors. In one post he points out that liberty, democracy and similar values are not typically German and murder is universally ostracised. Therefore, comments that insinuate that “primitive cultures” constantly kill each other (e. g. “at home”, in Serbia) are - he concludes - simply disgusting. Others try once again to explain how the incident is in all likelihood either a tragic accident or assault causing death. (It seems as of yet unconfirmed whether the suspect hit the victim or pushed her; the fall resulted in her death.)

One comment, possibly even meant as sympathetic or conciliatory, points out that the suspect came from a “culturally more testosteronised world where honour plays a stronger social role”. Another commentator bristles at the supposedly excusatory character of referring to testosterone as a cause or an excuse in matters such as this. More comments introduce terms such as “migrant”, “culture” (meant as: culture deviating from “our” culture) into the discussion, repeatedly combined with demands to expel people “such as these” from the country (Germany). Even a post that seems to mourn the loss of the young girl at first glance stresses that she was well “integrated” [as opposed to others who are not?]. One of the commentators calling for deprivation of citizenship ends his post with: “We can well do without criminals, troublemakers and alcoholics - no matter where those people come from.”

One of the most aggressive posts directed at “migrants” states as follows: “The fellow is a Bosnian Serb. He was socialised in Germany but apparently did not pick up any German values (probably that is quite difficult when you hang out with people of your own culture and molest girls at McDonald’s). Certain Balkan countries may nominally belong to Europe, but European values have not arrived in these almost primitive societal structures yet.” Later on, the same contributor adds that unlike other commentators he does not “drown in submissive self-hatred” (as a German citizen) and that he is no racist if he condemns “brutal, misogynistic cultures and inhuman cultures”.

A further post claims that even if the suspect is “from another world” he still lives “here” and has to behave accordingly. And another contributor holds the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) respon-

sible for the general development, saying that thanks to SPD “such subjects” are able to obtain double citizenship so that politicians can shift the numbers of multi-criminal (migrant) offenders if politically advisable.

A few entries lament the dangers of moral courage, that is: standing up in the defence of others. Another complains about the journalistic code of conduct of not publishing suspects’ nationalities; this would only lead to the public’s conclusion that suspects are non-German or - more specific - from a different “cultural” area (quotation marks as used in the comment). Another commentator explains why it supposedly is important to name the suspects’ nationality in the press: He claims that the majority of readers automatically assumes a foreign origin of the offenders in a violent attack; the “foreigners” (the “southerners”, as he put it in the post) would not mind such a procedure - since they could only win from that. Another post asks if it might have been a racist attack against a “Turkish” woman, suspecting that referring to the suspect as simply “the man” is aimed at trivialising the deed (in earlier articles the suspect allegedly was stereotyped as “a foreigner”).

The comment-based discussion involved 43 people all in all. 26 of them delivered a single comment, 8 of which qualified as milder or stronger versions of hate speech (racist), 3 were in favour of a [unjustified] strict interpretation of law, and 14 of which were directed at pacifying the more heated arguments or disagreeing with discriminatory statements (3 of the latter in an explicit anti-racist manner). One was unspecific. Of the remaining 17 contributors with two or more comments, one person published as many as seven statements, all of which aimed to add a level-headed, non-discriminatory tone to the entire discussion. His almost direct opponent however – represented with 5 contributions – proved to be one of the most obstinate commentators, insisting on (supposedly) superior knowledge and insight into the suspect’s motives and convictions.

5 commentators published 5 or more posts. One of them explained legal differences between murder and manslaughter with no reference to the victim’s or suspect’s nationality or origin, remaining noticeably neutral in contrast to others. Among the other four, two were persistently racist (and somewhat undemocratic), and two were very much opposed to the formers’ contributions.

Throughout the entire discussion no editorial intervention occurred. Contributors reacted to each other, often referring directly to previous posts. The reactions were not directly triggered by content, style or wording of the article in question, this being only a short text, carefully neutral in phrasing.

No editing / deletion of comments at editor’s level took place. Several contributors self-deleted their posts for reasons unknown.

V) CHARLIE HEBDO

Introduction to “Charlie Hebdo” Case Studies

Among the many publications (articles, commentaries, blog posts etc.) that evolved in the days following the attack on the editorial team of “Charlie Hebdo”, two topics could be identified that highlighted an especially “German” approach to the public reception.

One was an early attempt to exploit what happened by the relatively new movement Pegida, which stands for “Patriotische Europäer gegen Islamisierung des Abendlands”, translated: Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident. This is a populist right-wing movement that expresses concern over allegedly growing numbers of “foreigners”, especially Muslims, who they claim are less and less willing to acknowledge “typical” German or European values and sets of behaviour.

The other topic evolved around the annual celebration of German Carnival, a historical tradition that plays a major role in some regions in Germany and is taken very seriously by those who organise and participate in it. It involves a parade with floats, one of which was supposed to be dedicated to the remembrance of the killed cartoonists, sporting a caricature that presented a pencil as being the stronger weapon in the end. However, after some consideration the organisers decided not to show this float, claiming it could initiate public unrest.

Since these two aspects seem to be quite particular for contemporary Germany, the analysis concentrates on a small number of articles dealing with these.

A) Charlie Hebdo and the Carnival float

Online Newspaper (title and link):

“Die Frankfurter Allgemeine”: www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/koeln-karneval-stoppt-charlie-hebdo-motivwagen-13396890.html

Date of publication:

Jan. 29, 2015

Date of collection:

March. 04, 2015

Headline and subheading of the article:

Karneval stoppt “Charlie Hebdo”- Motivwagen. Der Kölner Karneval verzichtet auf einen Rosenmontags-Wagen, der den Anschlag auf das französische Magazin “Charlie Hebdo” satirisch aufgreifen sollte.

Translation: Carnival stops Charlie Hebdo float. The Cologne carnival does without the Shrove Monday float, which was supposed to satirically depict the terror attack on the French magazine “Charlie Hebdo”.

N. of shares on Facebook: 1,034 Facebook recommendations on the FAZ website

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks): 67 twitter shares on FAZ.de

N. of likes: none

N. of Comments: 71 Website comments, no Facebook post

Background / Context:

The German carnival has made it a tradition to use controversial topics from preceding years as material to build satirical floats. This year one float was supposed to depict a caricaturist who stuffs a pencil down a gun barrel held by a jihadist. This float was then banned from the parade causing a Germany-wide debate.

Analysis:

39 of all in all 71 website comments were taken into account. The discussion basically followed two main threads, one being in favour of the committee’s decision, one being vehemently against it. Several sub-threads were added where cross-references to e. g. the rightwing movement Pegida (see analysis of Charlie Hebdo Pegida) were published.

One commentator claimed the idea of stopping “crazy” terrorists with pencils was craziness itself. Others regretted the decision of the committee, pointing out the idea that in the end it would not be terror that prevails but “the democratic mindset that is expressed with the help of pens and caricatures”.

Several commentators express their antagonism against Islam in general. They imply that Muslims as such are opposed to criticism. One of them reacts to the post of a Muslim: “Why are your feelings hurt by a float depicting a terror attack that is thwarted [by the pen]? Who is excluded, judged or vilified because of his origin, religion or colour of skin by this motive? If you mind that brutal Islamic fundamentalists are made fun of then simply admit your sympathy with them. Because this is what your jabbering sounds like.”

Some Muslim commentators were in favour of a solution in form of a float that would have shown all democrats to rise against terrorism. “This caricature implies that Europeans / Christians stop them [the terrorists] and the Muslims are not there.”

Others define the float in question as comparatively harmless and do not understand why Muslims should be opposed to that. Some lament the alleged over-sensitivity of Muslims (in general, as they claim), saying “where is the limit”?

One particular post lists a number of incidents where – he says – Muslim feelings were supposedly hurt: caricatures of Mohammed, caricatures of the Paris assassins, satire in general, traditional carnival dancers [who appear in stage in very short skirts], women without scarf, women without Chador, Burka etc.,

women without male supervision, women in profession, Christians, Alevis, Jews, atheists. He aggressively turns toward a Muslim contributor who protested the float in a comparatively moderate manner before and asks him: “Where – once and for all – is your limit? Or don’t you have one?”

He is immediately applauded by the following commentator and several other posts who agree that the committee’s decision to ban the float was to be defined as relenting to terrorists’ claims and proof for on-going “Islamisation” of Germany.

Summary:

A remarkably large number of commentators entered posts into the discussion that referred to Islam and / or Muslims in general. Every attempt on behalf of participating Muslims to (moderately) try and explain why they thought that the caricature / float in question was either not helpful or possibly insulting was met with posts that bordered on contempt. Additionally, a notable number of posts cross-referenced the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Pegida and the alleged threat of an Islamisation of Germany in a manner that is not founded by a realistic observation of societal and cultural developments. Pegida supporters in particular added posts along the lines of “I rest my case”, claiming that current incidents were proof of their fears and warnings, thereby trying to legitimise their public appearances.

B) Charlie Hebdo and Pegida

Online Newspaper (title and link):

No. 1:

“Die ZEIT”: www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-01/frankreich-charlie-hebdo-karikaturen-pegida-paris-dresden#cid-4309207

No. 2:

“taz. die tageszeitung”: www.taz.de/!152463/

No. 1:

Date of publication: Jan. 12, 2015

Date of collection: March. 26, 2015

No. 2:

Date of publication: Jan. 08, 2015

Date of collection: March. 27, 2015

No. 1:

Headline and subheading of the article:

Französische Karikaturisten wehren sich gegen Pegida. “Pegida verschwinde“: Mit Zeichnungen und einem Flugblatt wenden sich französische Karikaturisten gegen die Vereinnahmung der Pariser Attentate durch die Organisation.

Translation: French caricaturists fight against Pegida. “Pegida get lost”: French caricaturists use cartoons and pamphlets to fight back against Pegida and its exploitation of the Paris attacks.

No. 2:

Headline and subheading of the article:

Jede Menge falsche Freunde. Die Pegidas dieser Welt haben kein Recht, die ermordeten Satiriker zu instrumentalisieren. Und wer die Tat mit “Aber” verurteilt, rechtfertigt sie.

Translation: Plenty of false friends. The Pegidas of this world do not have the right to exploit the murdered satirists. Who ever condemns the crime adding the term “but” vindicates it.

No. 1:

N. of shares on Facebook: 15,647 Facebook recommendations on the Zeit website

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks): 1,025 twitter shares on Zeit.de

N. of Comments: 760 Website comments, no Facebook post

No. 2:

N. of shares on Facebook: 37,718 Facebook recommendations on the TAZ website

N. of shares on Twitter (or other social networks): 212 twitter shares on TAZ.de

N. of Comments: 294 Website comments, no Facebook post

Background / Context:

The anti-Islamic group Pegida (Pegida stands for Patriotische Europäer gegen Islamisierung des Abendlands, translated: Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident) has been trying to profit from the Paris attacks, asking protesters to wear black ribbons at the upcoming protest. The group is accused of exploiting the tragic events for their personal political benefit.

Explanatory Note:

The first article (ZEIT) documented caricaturists' protests against the exploitation of the Charlie Hebdo attacks by populist rightwing demonstrators who join ranks in the relatively new movement Pegida. They accuse the latter of "mourning" writers and cartoonists they would have otherwise considered their political enemies in order to strengthen their protests against purportedly growing numbers of radical Islamic fundamentalists who they think present a threat against German society and culture.

The second article is a commentary on the same topic. The author emphasises the same populist exploitation as mentioned above, but criticises other groups in society as well, especially those who condemn the killings but continue with a – as he puts it – "but", as e. g. in "but they (the cartoonists) have provoked. But one has to respect religious values and feelings". The author addresses Muslims, too, saying that simply insisting on the formula "the attacks had nothing to do with Islam" was not helpful in the current societal discussion.

The lists of comments referring to both articles discuss the role of Pegida extensively, either blaming the supporters to misuse the attacks to fuel their own mission, or defending the supporters as honourable democrats who rightfully exercise their right of free speech.

Analysis:First article:

This analysis gives attention to 37 of all in all 760 website posts that illuminate the on-going discussion quite well. 32 people were active in this particular thread of the discussion with most of them adding only one post. Just three of them repeatedly intervened, elaborating what was said before or clarifying their own statement. One of those three published as many as four comments, pointing out that people or institutions who Pegida tried to misuse for their own ends were not willing to comply with the movement's expectations, and criticising other (supposedly pro-Pegida) commentators.

The posts can be classified as anti-Pegida (moderate & explicit), as pro-Pegida (moderate & explicit) as well as "other" (unrelated comments that made more or less sense in the entire discussion). Of 32 commentators, 18 wrote anti-Pegida posts (5 moderate, 13 explicit), 9 published pro-Pegida opinions (4 moderate, 4 explicit), and 6 more expressed unrelated ideas. There was one editorial intervention, asking the commentator to refrain from personal antagonism.

The article in question was published only 5 days after the attack on the editorial team of “Charlie Hebdo”. It is notable that the majority of commentators reacts with a more or less heated resentment against Pegida’s efforts to exploit what happened in their favour. It may be presumed that the impression of what took place in Paris less than a week earlier was still strong enough to evoke a genuine dislike against persons and groups who tried to misuse this for their own goals, that is in this case: to exclude others from being a part of Germany.

The pro-Pegida posts either lamented that “Islamic fundamentalists kill and one minds the people who are upset about that”, or that Pegida allegedly “was not allowed” to demonstrate their support of a free press or freedom of speech, or pointed out (in an attempt to be ironic) that “tolerant Muslims and left-extremist anti-Pegida supporters” had taken part in a 2014 rally against Jews. Another commentator said that it was a “central difference between Muslims and ‘non-believers’ like us, that we get satire and don’t kill anyone because of it”.

One last contributor compared the opponents of Pegida with Nazi methods of muzzling unpopular opinions. He concludes with: “I will take to the street now against this new way of ‘opinion fascism’. With Pegida. All peacefully. And [I will] look the thugs of the Antifa (anti-fascist movement) in the eye.” This post is directly followed by “‘And [I will] look the thugs of the Antifa (anti-fascist movement) in the eye.’ That won’t work. Their faces are covered up so they don’t show. But of course they are on the ‘good’ side with their stones as cases in point”.

The anti-Pegida posts point out that Pegida would not tolerate immigrants or people with comparable backgrounds in Germany, mock the lament of Pegida supporters that their offer of “co-mourning” is not respected and that people / groups they want to exploit for their cause refuse to be used; they accuse Pegida of employing cheap propaganda, or point out that Charlie Hebdo would have targeted Pegida and their supporters in their satire, therefore being more of an “enemy” to Pegida than a potential sympathiser.

Other commentators explain that Pegida is not about freedom of speech but about excluding certain groups of society, or stress that freedom of speech does not mean condoning (in this case) Pegida’s point of view. A very ironic post mocks Pegida laments saying that for weeks now Pegida’s “walks” (this is the term supporters use for their rallies) have been permitted and still supporters claim they were not allowed to do so, that they propagate their opinion freely and still claim they were prohibited to do so etc.: the post concludes that no-one hinders the supporters to voice their beliefs, but that it was an audacity to do so “in Charlie’s name”.

Another one adds: “Of course you can voice your Pegida opinion. We just do not want to hear it!” and continues with: “And we are ashamed of you” since they damaged Germany’s reputation. But just because “we” would prefer you to be silent, he says, does not mean “we want your actions to be prohibited”.

The second article resulted in partly quite aggressive comments quite a few of which addressed the Turkish origin of the author. 57 comments were taken into account. Since the content was far more diverse than that regarding the article above, the evaluation will emphasise the quality of the posts instead of the quantity of opinions expressed.

Some commentators mocked the fans of conspiracy theories and extremists who added to the discussion. Others pointed out that the ethnic or cultural background or origin of the author was irrelevant to the original article's value – or contradicted this point of view. Some commentators started a thread discussing – rather heatedly – various (supposedly) leftwing reactions to the article and to the attack of Charlie Hebdo itself.

Others defended the freedom of speech (in regard to the caricatures) and emphasised that this freedom does not take into account that people need to “like” the results. Still other contributors repeat the necessity of the right of free expression but seem to use this as an opportunity to criticise Muslims in general.

Another commentator added artists' points of view to the discussion; he asks about the most sensible approach if someone judges art as “ingenious” whereas others call the same object “infamous”. Others pick up that line of thought but claim that non-Muslim viewers react more tolerantly when confronted with controversial art: “In the worst-case scenario the artist would be faced with a fine, but he would not have to expect being shot to pieces by a crackpot fundamentalist.” The same post deals with the alleged over-sensitivity of Muslims in general who – so they seem to think – are easily insulted with anything that has to do with their traditions or beliefs.

Another one partially blames the caricaturists themselves for what happened, saying that people who insult others on purpose act like Barbarians.

The author of the original article addressed Muslims, too, warning them to add the word “but” when talking about the attacks. Some commentators react to that, defending the rejection of a general freedom of expression when religious sensitivities are involved, denying Charlie Hebdo all traits of “heroism”, and relating the support of freedom of expression to an “Islamophobia”. Another one asks the author which Islam he is referring to, listing Sunnis, Shiites, Wahhabi, Alevi and Ismaili, emphasising that Islam is not just a “mass” but consists of different branches, accusing the author of simplifying matters – but adding then that most terrorists follow the Wahhabi Islam.

Another refuses to see a context between the attack and religion, saying that “the madmen” who were responsible for the killings were no part of Islam but simply using it “for their fascism”. Another contradicts him by saying that if there are various branches of Islam following different sets of “rules” and interpretations then a very radical form of Islam that could lead to incidents such as the one in Paris needs to be fought against by liberal and secular Muslims, too. One commentator says he / she is an observant Muslim and that he or she sees the necessity indeed to stand up against deeds such as this.

Others insult both the commentators with (supposedly) Muslim background as well as the author by saying e. g.: “Some people want to be more German than Germans”. Another addresses the author, asking whether the author as a native Turk (which is not correct) has faced the “Erdogan problem”. A few more posts introduce the topic of Pegida to the discussion. There were three editorial interventions, deleting part of the posts in question.

Summary:

Both articles dealt with aspects of the attack against the “Charlie Hebdo” editorial team in Paris. The first article produced posts that referred less to the incident as such but evoked a discussion about the current German phenomenon of Pegida. The discussion consisted of rather passionate exchanges of pro and con opinions whether the movement itself and its goals were legitimate or not, radical or not, democratic or fascist, driven by level-headed citizens or by rightwing anti-democrats. The Charlie Hebdo context was used to confront the opponents with one’s own political conviction.

The second article met with a response relatively closer to its actual topic: People indeed discussed the role of caricatures in a democratic society, the necessity and (possible) limits of freedom of speech, the existing or non-existing responsibility to distance oneself from peer groups (here: religious groups) in incidents as this. Just as the contributors to the first article did, they, too, antagonised their fellow commentators in a discussion that crossed the line to open hostility quite frequently.

As a result it can be confirmed that both discussions show various degrees of antagonism between political points of view, but also towards ethnic or religious groups. What appears as striking is the continuous need to define whoever is opposing one’s own opinion as “the other” or “the stranger” or “the one who does not belong here and / or has to adapt to rules”.

INTERVIEWS' RESULTS

The interviewees were chosen after extensive research. Some were victims of hate speech and featured in recent media. Others were chosen for their expertise in journalistic, editorial and medial fields. A few have published material or done research on hate speech themselves. The interviews were then divided into three categories; media experts, organisations and editorial staff.

Media Experts

The category for media experts includes social media managers, a feminist web activist, journalists, a twitter expert, a marketing firm, a business academy and others. The general consensus, when they were asked how they define hate speech, was that it is some form of discrimination, mostly against minorities. It was however difficult to create a distinct separation for example between hate speech and trolling. One interviewee stated that he, as a white male, did not feel that insults directed at him can be defined as hate speech. To him, they felt more like trolling. Another interviewee, a white female, stated that she considered insults directed at her to be hate speech.

All of the media experts said that one of the most important tools against hate speech is a good relationship with their online community, as a healthy and critical community is capable of reacting to hateful comments on their own, without a constant interference of a mediating party. A community that shows solidarity and speaks up loudly against hateful comments, while staying factual and objective, is a powerful tool. Many of the media experts felt that it is the users' right to write about what they want, as long as it is in agreement with the rules of the platform that is being used.

Deleting comments should be used as a last resort, as a hate comment can be a good opportunity to "educate". One interviewee said that, when he sees hate comments, he privately contacts the author, asking the person to reconsider their position and refrain from hate in the future. When this person continues to submit hate comments, the interviewee says that he publishes those comments. This is in line with another media expert, who said that people are very "brave" behind a computer screen but when their comments are made public, when they are laughed at and commented on by the community, then they usually stop to post hate speech in the future or change platforms.

One media expert said that she does want to delete as few comments as possible, but that she is definitely not obligated to argue with her followers and that she only allows constructive critique and comments that are following the netiquette on twitter. This is the case for most of the media experts, as they manage their own accounts and do not have the resources, i.e. manpower or time, to sift through hundreds of comments.

Organisations

The category for organisations includes interviews with a consumers' advisory centre and an initiative for civil society and democratic culture. The initiative stated that their definition of hate speech is group-based misanthropy, which is an umbrella term that includes homophobia, racism, misogyny,

anti-Semitism and others. They also said that hate speech as a term has gained much more recognition in German media and society itself and more and more people know what is meant by it. In the context of social media, the advisory centre defines hate speech as debasing comments directed at one person, a few people or larger groups or organisations.

Both organisations differentiate between hate directed at themselves and hate directed at others, specifically their users, when it comes to reacting to hate comments. Hate directed at themselves or at the service they provide is usually answered with a factual reply or deleted. When it comes to hate directed at their users, the organisations are more careful and strict, because they want to create a safe environment. An important part of fighting hate speech is education, providing tools and mechanisms which users can use to react to hate speech. This is why the initiative has created several brochures, manuals and many more publications on the topic. They put a big focus on creating pamphlets which have an all-embracing view on topics such as racism, homophobia, immigration and more. This gives users factual arguments when they want to react to hate comments.

Similar to the media experts both organisations said that it is important to have a strong community that is able to fight against hate, to help mediators in creating a good and constructive communication. Users who stand up to haters and react by using factual information should be rewarded by the organisations, by liking the comments and highlighting them, so that the favoured tone on the platform is clear to any new user and commentator. The advisory centre emphasised that it is useful to have a clearly visible link to the netiquette so that there is no doubt for users as to what is allowed and what is not. It is also useful to publish answers to comments timely as hate speech tends to create momentum and often leads to very heated arguments which can easily be nipped in the bud.

Editorial Staff

The category for editorial staff includes interviews with editors and social media managers related to prominent German news papers. All interviewees stand by the opinion that all online article comment sections must be moderated. Many newspapers require commentators to register and most of them say that screening comments is a must and deleting some is inevitable. A clear and precise netiquette is very important to make sure that all users know what guidelines they have to follow. Highlighting precise, factual and good comments is also a good tool to clarify what the wanted platform climate is. What becomes very clear in these interviews is that newspapers have to make social media management a high priority.

Many editors said that newspapers benefit from a high social media management budget and good staff. One interviewee stated that even though she is part of a large newspaper, it is almost impossible for their editorial staff to filter all the comments on Facebook. Many newspapers support the decision to make registration to the news site mandatory before being able to comment. This makes the editorial staff's job easier to filter everything that is written. A useful tool on Facebook are word filters which prevent posts with certain key words to be published. Similar to the media managers the newspapers define a good relationship to their community as one of their priorities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media websites, forums, blogs, web pages, etc. should adhere to a few hints and rules when they set up the general terms and conditions (netiquette) for users. The regulations should be comprehensible and should provide an overview. They should also be precise and short enough, so that the user is not thrown off by technical terms or too elaborate wording. The editorial staff should not shy away from encouraging users to use the netiquette as a base for their argumentation and to make use of the rights they have.

Furthermore, it is helpful to create and keep a good relationship with the online community. A community should be able and willing to act against hate speech without exclusively relying on a mediating party. The community should be encouraged and rewarded to think and write critically and factually and should set the tone by showing solidarity to victims of hate speech and speaking up while staying objective and level-headed.

Editorial staff should reward such behaviour by highlighting and liking, sharing good comments and points in case. On the other hand comments which do not follow the guidelines should not automatically be deleted unless they clearly violate law because they can a) be used as a teaching tool to show the community what is unwanted and b) this also ensures that the editorial staff is not seen as this “superior power” but as an equal who is willing to give everyone the chance to voice their opinion.

Especially those services that which have adequate resources should make use of an editorial team because even if the community generally has a healthy communication there will always be someone who is either there to provoke others, spread hate or discredit other users. This can be inhibited by previewing comments, making the commenting function only available to registered users and through staff that follows the conversations and arguments on a long-term basis.

Media experts but also private individuals can use word filters on social media to help them for example weed out hate speech. When it comes to sensible topics some people, newspapers, media experts might want to consider refraining from posting the article on social media and only on moderated websites or altogether turning off the comment section.

BRICKS

BUILDING RESPECT ON THE INTERNET BY COMBATING HATE SPEECH

National Study Germany

Grimme Institute, Dec. 2015

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