

CASE STUDY 2

Police borders, not vaccination status!

This item was posted to the official Instagram account of the parliamentary party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) on 19th January 2022. The account had 7709 followers as of 24th February 2022.



afdnrw +++ Kontrolliert die Grenzen - nicht die Bürger! +++

🙄 Es ist doch sehr merkwürdig: Während die aufrechten Bürger in Deutschland laufend mit Corona-Vorschriften gegängelt und teilweise vollständig vom öffentlichen Leben ausgesperrt werden, stehen die deutschen Außengrenzen weiterhin sperrangelweit offen.

? Wenn der Regierung wirklich etwas an der Gesundheit der Menschen in Deutschland läge, müsste sie dann nicht auch hier Stärke zeigen und resolute Maßnahmen bis hin zur Grenzschließung treffen? Scheinbar nicht!

🗨 Das liegt daran, dass es eben nicht um die Gesundheit unserer Gesellschaft, sondern um Macht und Gehorsam geht. Und genau dieses Verhalten dürfen wir der Regierung nicht weiter durchgehen lassen!

🇩🇪 Wir müssen weiter den Widerstand in die Parlamente und auf die Straßen tragen, um den Regierenden ein für alle Mal klar zu machen, dass wir uns unsere Freiheit nicht unter fadenscheinigen Gründen nehmen lassen!

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DESCRIPTION

There are no people in the picture, just a forest in the background and a pillar in black, red and gold – the colours of the German flag – to the fore. Directly underneath the image is the AfD logo. The heading reads: “Police borders – not vaccination status!” The accompanying text claims that “upstanding” German citizens have been “pushed around and ... shut out of public life” by Corona rules, while, at the same time, Germany’s borders are “gaping wide open”. No sources are cited to back these claims.

The party then asks whether the government shouldn’t be as resolute about both situations by closing the borders. It is suggested that the borders remain open as “this is not about the health of our society, but about power and obedience”. A call to protest in the streets is made.

IMPORTANT POINTS



This is an example of [connecting two otherwise unconnected topics](#). The “facts” presented are not supported by sources.

Moreover, it simply isn't true that Germany's borders are “[gaping wide open](#)”. Refugees must officially apply for asylum, while a visa is required for other types of migrants to enter Germany. Just the borders of the EU had re-opened following a period of checks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is also confirmed by the websites of Germany's Federal Ministry of the Interior and Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

- [Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community](#)
- [Federal Office for Migration and Refugees](#)



The presented claims are connected in such a way as to steer people's anger over the Corona restrictions towards supposedly open borders and migrants. By depicting the government as power-hungry and controlling, animus towards the state is stoked. The item thus generally aims to have [emotional impact](#) with any negative feelings the reader may have directed towards migrants and the government.

This is an example of [misleading content](#) and [disinformation](#) via the spread of partially false information and the creation of erroneous connections, the aim being to harm the German government.

COMBINING FALSE INFORMATION WITH GENUINE FACTS WITHOUT ANY SOURCES

As described above, some of the posted information is false. Germany's borders are open to all *per se* but you need a residence application or an approved or residence visa to enter or immigrate to Germany. It is true that personal freedoms are partially curtailed by the relevant Corona restrictions. The [combination of false information with genuine facts](#) can have the effect of the false information being taken to be true. Furthermore, no sources are referenced (whether this is intentional is unclear), which makes fact-checking more difficult.



The reader has to activate their critical thinking autonomously, which cannot always be expected when scrolling on social media and where a confirmation bias potentially exists.

MANIPULATING EMOTIONS

This post uses very emotionally charged language by means of the following:

- 1 Many **exclamation points and question marks** serve to emphasise the emotionality of the claims, thereby creating a bond with the reader.
 - 2 Language characterised by **emotionally charged words**, for example German citizens are "upstanding" and need to act "resolutely", while the borders are "wide open" and the reasons for the Corona measures are "specious". The state allegedly strives for "power and obedience", while this post calls for "resistance". The "good" German citizen is juxtaposed against "bad" migrants and the "bad" state.
 - 3 **Images and emojis** ( ,  , pillar in the colours of the German flag) are used to manipulate perceived associations and emotions. The fist emoji  , in combination with emotionally charged words such as "resistance" and "freedom", accentuate the call for militant action while suggesting that the regime must be resisted. One is portrayed as a 'freedom fighter' with positive connotation.
- The combination of images, word choice and punctuation aims to arouse or reinforce negative emotions such as fear and anger. As such, this is an attempt to present oneself in a positive light.

READER COMMENTS

On 7th April 2022 (time of analysis) the post had 462 likes and 26 comments. All visible comments support the content of the post: for example, "TrueWords", "Fact", as well as many thumbs-up and applause emojis. It is possible that the AfD parliamentary group deleted or hid unwanted comments, as only 11 of the 26 comments were visible.

SUMMARY

From this analysis, we see how readers are addressed on an emotional level in order to distract from the questionable information and lack of sources. This is accomplished via word choice, punctuation and emojis. In addition, two otherwise unrelated topics are addressed together without any references. By integrating both topics in one post, readers are led to assume a relationship between the two.

TIPS FOR READERS / SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Watch out for lots of exclamation points, question marks and emojis in a post. These are inserted to manipulate your emotions.

A good indication of fake news is often a lack of sources to back the information being presented. It is best to check claims on official websites or reputable news portals.

If there is no obvious connection between different themes, think about why the author(s) connect them in one post. There could be a negative or manipulative intention behind this action.

- It is best not to share news without first checking the sources.
- Try to find the information in an article that is less likely to manipulate emotions, for example on official news websites (www.tagesschau.de).
- Question the intention of posts that link topics in a way that could possibly harm certain groups (e.g. migrants)