BREAKING OUT OF THE BUBBLE:
HOW TO CHANGE THE NARRATIVE ON MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

BY ESRA KÜÇÜK AND DR ASMAA SOLIMAN

We write this foreword with the mixed feelings of disappointment and hope that shape the current moment for minorities in Europe. On the one hand, it is frustrating to witness the backlash against core values of diversity, equality, and openness. European democracies have failed to fulfil their promise of true pluralism thus far. Right-wing extremism is on the rise across Europe. In January 2024, the newsroom CORRECTIV reported on a secret meeting in Germany where high-ranking members of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany, neo-Nazis, and business people sympathetic to their positions discussed forcibly deporting people with immigrant origins. Not that far away, anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders secured the most votes in Dutch elections last year. In France we see concerns about a possible victory of the far-right politician Marine Le Pen in the next presidential elections in 2027. In the UK, a recent poll conducted by Hope not Hate found that more than half of Conservative party members think that Islam poses a threat to the British way of life. Furthermore, not only in Europe but also around the world, we sense an increase in polarisation and division. The aftermath of the Middle East conflict that has escalated since October 2023 can be felt in every part of the world and has brought debates around belonging, identity, and social cohesion back into the public sphere.

On the other hand, important milestones have also been reached, and they give us hope. Germany now has, for the first time, a federal commissioner for anti-discrimination and a federal commissioner for anti-racism who both have immigrant origins. Furthermore, in reaction to the CORRECTIV report we have seen a wave of protests across Germany which brought together various parts of society to stand up against right-wing extremism. As for the Netherlands, we would like to note that, ever since the rise of Geert Wilders, he has remained shut out, with leading parties closing their ranks to force his party to give up the premiership as the price for joining a coalition government. Poland's local elections in April 2024 are another positive example, offering

the first signs of growing power for democratic parties since the general election last year, when a liberal coalition finally ousted the illiberal Law and Justice government.

It's not only on the level of political parties that progress is being made, but also, and even more so, on the level of civil society, where several initiatives, projects, NGOs and movements across Europe are making important contributions to open, diverse and anti-racist societies. When we look at what young people are doing in particular, we can see very clearly that they are not willing to accept the status quo, thus engaging in various activities to bring about change. Yasmine Ouirhrane, who received the Schwarzkopf Foundation's Young European of the Year award, is just one example. She is a tireless advocate from France for equal rights for women and equal opportunities for migrants in Europe.

The idea that Islam is incompatible with European values is still widespread in mainstream stories. This assumption is related to the fear of the Other and also has significant racist elements. In fact, we know that there is no clear definition of Islamic values, and the same is true for European values. Both are vague collections of values that have had different meanings at different times. We need alternative narratives about Muslims that normalise the fact that they belong to Europe. We need narratives that allow us to move away from polarising discourses. We need to produce narratives showing that Muslims have been a self-evident part of European countries for a long time. Narratives that tell stories about the multifaceted contribution of Muslims to various fields, including science, technology, business, politics, civil society, and the arts, should circulate more widely in Europe's public spheres.

It is imperative that we continue to challenge and change mainstream narratives about Muslims, and this is why we see the work of the Narrative Change Academy as more important than ever. The academy aims to enact this change by acknowledging the strong influence of narratives on perceptions, attitudes, and social relations and by offering value-oriented and inclusive stories about European Muslim life. It is this strong will to bring about change that gives us hope and where the Narrative Change Academy from the Young Islam Conference makes an important contribution.

We hope the insights in the following paper will resonate with you in meaningful ways. May it serve as a source of encouragement to contribute to the reshaping of narratives around Muslims in Europe.

With warmest regards,

Esra Küçük   and   **Dr Asmaa Soliman**
Chairwoman of the Board   Programme Lead
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jasemin Seven (she/her)

Jasemin Seven is the Deputy Head of the Young Islam Conference, the Director of the Narrative Change Academy and a One Young World Ambassador. Over the course of her career, she has developed and led several projects in the field of political education. She earned a master's degree in European Studies, spending parts of her academic career in Germany, the USA, and France. In her research, she focuses on contexts of anti-Muslim racism and its potential effects on individuals and societies. Her aim is to make significant contributions to a post-migrant and anti-racist Europe.

Mouna Chatt (she/her)

Mouna Chatt is the Narrative Change Academy Fellow for 2024 and participated in the Narrative Change Academy 2023-24. She studies Sociology and Politics and is particularly interested in anti-Muslim racism, anti-immigration discourse, and intersectional feminism(s) in Scandinavia and Western Europe more broadly. She is an avid green tea drinker and, most importantly, a Fairuz enthusiast.

Kübra Sariyar (she/her)

Kübra Sariyar is a student in the European Media Studies postgraduate programme at the University of Potsdam, working in an interdisciplinary way on video, photography, technology, and ecology. She is associated with the Multispecies Care and Migrant Home-making in Germany research project led by Dr Hilal Alkan and the Professorship for Knowledge Cultures and

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David Bakum (he/they)

David Bakum is a postgraduate student in Narrative Futures at the Edinburgh Futures Institute. As a film curator, programmer, and pre-viewer for various film festivals, he raises the visibility of marginalised filmmakers, with a focus on queer cinema. They are also experienced in dialogue work, especially in interreligious and post-migrant spaces. As an NCA fellow, he supported the Narrative Change Academy during its first year.

1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Polarising, racist, and Islamophobic attitudes and discourses pose a major challenge to social cohesion in many European societies. In most integration and immigration debates across Europe, references to Islam and Muslims are presumptuous, hostile, and full of generalisations. This discourse needs a corrective element to enable factual discussions free of resentment.

The Narrative Change Academy (NCA) is the first post-migrant, European, socio-political youth platform operating across ethnic and religious boundaries, bringing together both those affected by racism as well as allies, and specifically focusing on the topic of Islam in Europe and the related question of how to shape a pluralist society. With the NCA the Young Islam Conference has created such a space and aims to use it to help counteract Islamophobic attitudes and discourses throughout Europe. As part of the first year of the academy, the participants, together with experts in strategic communication and narrative change, used the narrative change approach to develop a digital campaign. Their goal was to achieve a broader presence of value-based, post-migrant, inclusive narratives about Muslims across Europe.

This paper is organized into four sections and focuses on the questions of if and how narrative change work can contribute to transforming the narrative on Muslims in Europe through the tool of social media campaigns. What does a digital campaign look like when we choose to use new ways of thinking and stop (re)producing stereotypes?

The paper begins with an overview of the Narrative Change Academy as a programme and of how the working process within the academy was designed.

Then the preliminary considerations taken into account before we created our narrative change campaign are detailed. The next section explains the concept of a post-migrant society and discusses the narrative theory behind the approach, as well as the associated questions of what a narrative is, how narratives are created, what functions they fulfil in society, and how they can be used in the area of digital storytelling. Furthermore, the pre-existing narratives on Muslims in Europe are outlined, and the narrative change approach and the associated hope-based communications are explained.

The third section focuses on our narrative change campaign and the steps involved in creating, rolling-out, and evaluating this kind of campaign. The campaign goals are outlined, the digital campaign's target group — *The Detached* segment — is introduced and described, and the value process that determined the bridging values of the *movable middle* with the values of the participants in the Narrative Change Academy is illustrated. In addition, the idea created for the campaign is outlined. A testing process ensured that the developed campaign would resonate with the target audience, so messages and other key campaign elements could be refined. The roll-out of the campaign took place in January 2024 on Instagram with the use of both organic and paid content. The implementation of the developed creative concept for the social media campaign is outlined, and the results showing the effectiveness of the newly developed narratives are shared.

The paper concludes with recommendations for action for other organizations who would like to try out a similar approach.

2
THE NARRATIVE CHANGE ACADEMY

In the heart of Europe, we wanted to create a movement — a collective commitment fuelled by the passion of young Europeans. Their vision? A broader awareness and increased presence of value-oriented, post-migrant, and inclusive narratives about Muslim life throughout Europe.

Therefore, we created the Narrative Change Academy. A programme for young Europeans from different social groups (religion, origin, class, gender identity, etc. ...) between the ages of 18 and 27. The academy creates a safer space where the participants develop and strengthen their strategic communication skills in order to create, implement, and evaluate a digital campaign to strengthen social cohesion by reaching the movable middle throughout Europe.

LET'S DIVE INTO THE SEVEN KEY OBJECTIVES FOR THIS TRANSFORMATIVE ACADEMY:

Professionalizing Commitment
Through targeted training and mentorship, we empower our young advocates to wield their passion more effectively. They become skilled navigators charting a course towards a more just Europe.

Countering Polarization and Discrimination
Racism, Islamophobia, and polarization are threats to our societies. The participants engage in dialogue, dismantle stereotypes, and build bridges. Their weapons? Education, empathy, and unwavering resolve.

Value-Based Narratives
The participants create narratives that resonate with shared values, thereby transcending borders. They paint a portrait of Europe that embraces its rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and histories. The created campaign amplifies the voices of this Europe and weaves a new narrative — one of diversity and acceptance.

Context-Specific Conversations

Europe is not a monolith; it's a mosaic. The campaign embraces this diversity. It sparks conversations as similarities and differences intertwine, enriching our understanding.

Communication Skills

Equipped with strategic communication tools, our young advocates become storytellers. They craft messages that resonate, shift perceptions, and ignite change. The tools used are media literacy, empathy, and the art of persuasion.

European Network Building

The participants form alliances across national borders, creating a growing network and forming connections where young voices unite.

Political Visibility

Our campaign also engages with policymakers, amplifying its impact. It ensures that European politicians are aware of these narratives, dialogues, and alliances to help make a sustainable transformation possible.

The first academy year started in April 2023 and ran until February 2024. In the years to come, we hope that more young Europeans will rally behind this movement — a movement that values diversity, embraces dialogue, and creates a brighter picture of Europe.

3
PRELIMINARY CONSIDERA-TIONS

In the course of structuring the campaign throughout Europe, a strategy working group was founded in October 2022 to work on the campaign concept and framework, which serves as the foundation for the design of the narrative change campaign. Skills and knowledge were gathered regarding the concept of a post-migrant society, narratives, the narrative change approach, and anti-Muslim racism across Europe. Different experts provided a wealth of information and perspectives to build up the competence of the strategy working group.

3.1
POST-MIGRANT SOCIETY

Throughout the academy, and specifically when developing the campaign, participants worked with Naika Foroutan's (2019) conceptualization of "post-migrant societies" to formulate the campaign's goals and values. According to Foroutan (2019: 155), post-migrant societies emerge when the "dominant narrative acknowledges the reality of being a country of immigration rooted in diversity and heterogeneity". This kind of acknowledgement can, for example, take the form of official statements made by politicians.

Foroutan (2019) argues that once the dominant narrative has acknowledged the state of being a country of immigration, migrants and their descendants can lay claim to rights and representations in the political sphere. This may initiate a process of negotiation between migrants and established political authorities and actors. Thus, post-migrant societies are marked by conflict and new arrangements, simultaneously. For example, migrants and minorities may demand equality, representation, and participation in all spheres of society, thus questioning the established 'non-migrant' groups' privileges. This, in turn, can trigger the emergence of anti-immigration and anti-diversity positions from those who blame immigrants for changing society or breaking down 'national identities'. Essentially, when "demands for minority rights and representation increase, hegemonic actors that fear the loss of their status resist", and this conflict dynamic is a core part of post-migrant societies (Foroutan 2019: 156).

Nevertheless, Foroutan (2019: 151) presents the post-migrant paradigm as involving a threefold approach.

IT ENCOMPASSES

1. an empirical-analytical approach, aiming to describe how societies change after immigrants arrive,

2. a critical-dialectical approach, analysing and dissecting public discourse about migration by shedding light on underlying stereotypes and conflicts, and

3. a normative approach, advocating for moving beyond the "migrant-native divide at a time when migration and mobility constitute everyday normality" (Foroutan 2019: 151).

The academy focused on the normative approach of the post-migrant paradigm to develop the campaign. The academy narrowed down the language, values, and discourse that are important for a digital campaign seeking to overcome the "migrant-native divide" (Foroutan 2019: 151). However, it also would have been useful to simultaneously adopt the post-migrant paradigms' empirical-analytical and critical-dialectical approaches more concretely in the academy and campaign development. To lay out convincing claims for a 'normative' or 'utopian' post-migrant society, one must also be equipped to present a compelling analysis of what is wrong with our current post-migrant society. One way to do this, for instance, is to dissect problematic migration discourses and address their roots.

3.2
NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative theory examines the art of storytelling, investigating how narratives are constructed, conveyed, and interpreted. To help us learn about narrative theory and gather an understanding of narratives, narrative theory expert Marlene Gärtner introduced us to the functions of narratives in society. She holds a PhD in General Literature Studies and completed her dissertation on "Narrating migration, narrating futures. Social narratives on global power dynamics in Cameroon and the Cameroonian diaspora."
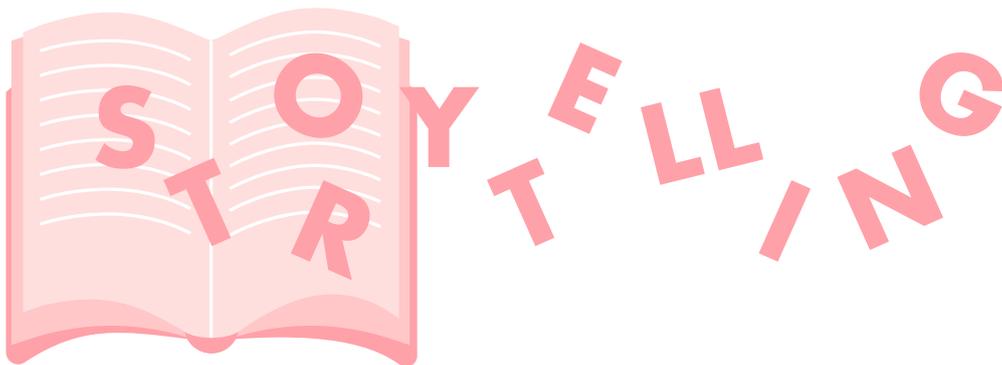
WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?
HOW ARE NARRATIVES CREATED?

A narrative is a form of communication that tells a story or recounts a series of events, often with a specific purpose or intention. Narratives can take various forms, including written stories, oral accounts, visual presentations, and more. They typically contain characters, settings, plot development, and a sequence of events that unfold over time. Narratives serve to convey experiences, ideas, emotions, and cultural values, providing insight into human life and society. Narratives play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world; they impact how we perceive and interpret the world around us and therefore have real-life consequences. The power of narrative communities is immense, as they can easily ignore logic or facts fomenting mistrust of outsiders. A simple "everybody knows that" seems to be enough.

A social narrative is a story or account of events that is shared and accepted within a society or social group. It often reflects the collective beliefs, values, norms, and experiences of the community, shaping individuals' understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them. Social narratives can encompass various aspects of life, including cultural traditions, historical events, social roles, and moral standards. They play a significant role in defining and reinforcing social identity, cohesion, and behaviour within a particular society or group.

WHEN CONSIDERING HOW WE CAN CHANGE SOCIAL NARRATIVES, THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS ARE SALIENT:

➔ Transforming them requires time, akin to the concept of change through continual repetition.

➔ A strong narrative is often resistant to contradictory facts, therefore simply acquiring more knowledge is insufficient for change.

➔ The substitute narrative must have similar characteristics and be able to fulfil similar functions (e.g. able to generate orientation or emotional legitimacy to the same extent).

➔ Cannot be completely new because people tend to resist that which they haven't previously encountered.

➔ A new narrative could also align with existing narrative patterns or draw upon resources of cultural memory.

Narration is a selective activity that constantly singles out significant elements from a mass of data, and successful plots must adapt to the predispositions of their audience. If a story runs against these familiar expectations, it is rewritten in the reception process and adapted to familiar plotlines (Koschorke 2018: 17). To understand the construction process of a narrative, its individual building blocks must be examined.
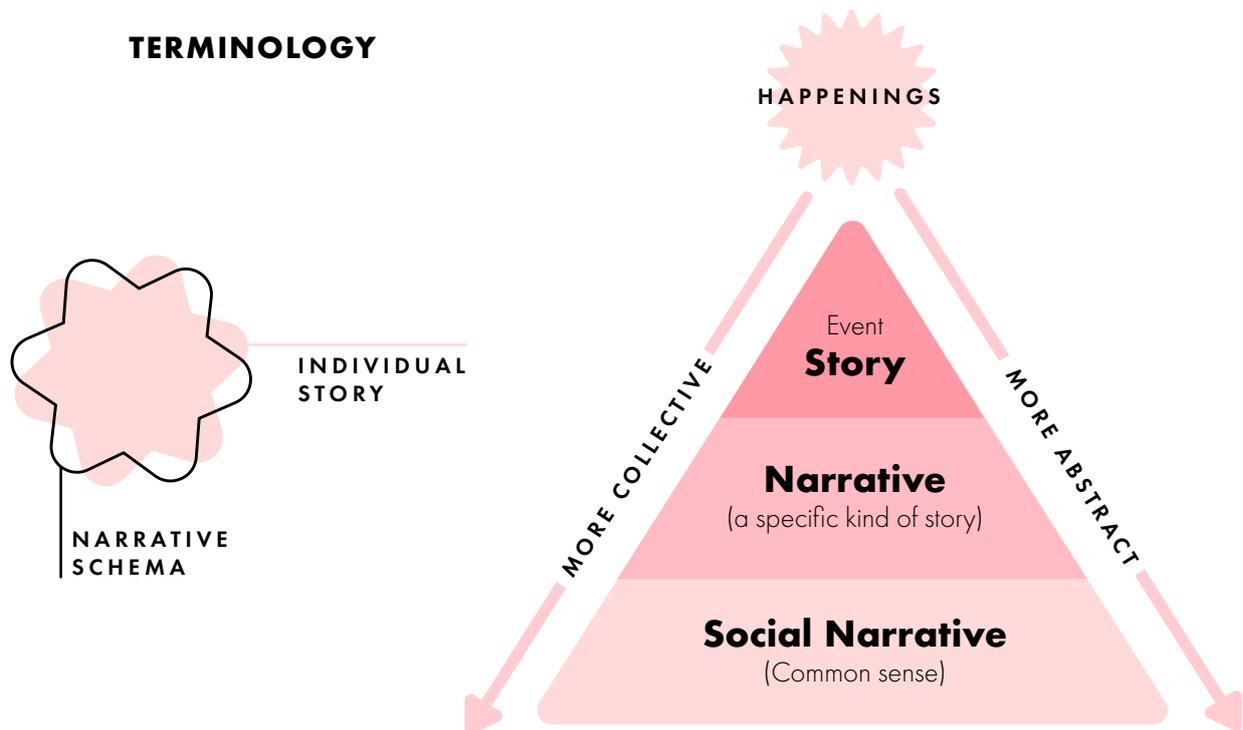
TERMINOLOGY

HAPPENINGS

INDIVIDUAL STORY

NARRATIVE SCHEMA

MORE COLLECTIVE

MORE ABSTRACT

Event
Story

Narrative
(a specific kind of story)

Social Narrative
(Common sense)

Figure 1 How is a story narrated?

Source: Gärtner, M., 2023. Presentation: The Power of Narratives. Narrative Change Academy, 12 May 2024.

The smallest element within a narrative is the event. Events are not objectively or automatically part of narratives but rather the result of selection, abstraction, prioritization, and weighting. What counts as an event is perspective-dependent, culturally specific, and historically variable. To create a story, pre-selected events are arranged in a chronological order and causally linked (Nünning 2010). A single story is not sufficient to establish a narrative. The formation of a narrative requires a large number of stories to be told over and over again in the same or similar manner (Müller-Funk 2012). Therefore, dominant story versions which are repeatedly conveyed by multiple speakers in a similar manner can set norms for a group, with consequences for its members' perceptions of reality. A pervasive narrative can be widely perceived as the truth, thereby achieving a dominant status over other narratives. To use Catharine MacKinnon's (1996: 235) words, "Dominant narratives are not called stories, they are called reality".

FUNCTIONS OF NARRATIVES:

→ **Sense-Making**
Narratives help people make sense of complex phenomena by providing events and experiences with structure and meaning.

→ **Persuasion**
Narratives are persuasive tools used to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Through storytelling, individuals or groups can advocate for certain viewpoints or agendas.

→ **Identity Formation**
Narratives play a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identities. They help people understand who they are, where they come from, and their place in the world.

→ **Social Cohesion**
Narratives foster a sense of community and social cohesion by creating shared experiences and values among individuals or groups.

→ **Empathy and Understanding**
By immersing themselves in narratives, individuals can develop empathy and gain a deeper understanding of others' perspectives, experiences, and cultures.

The function of social cohesion and the creation of group-identities and feelings of belonging are especially relevant for us because they create 'we'-narratives and therefore are closely connected to aspects of inclusion and exclusion.

Digital Storytelling

Online contexts often foster a form of storytelling called *small stories*. They usually bring together many storytellers who produce and reproduce stories. When creating the narrative change campaign, we therefore considered what makes a digital story good.

THE SUCCESS OF ONLINE NARRATIVES RELIES ON THEIR ABILITY TO BE:

→ **Authentic**
Trivial everyday activities, presented in a mode of simulated randomness (Martínez and Weixler 2019)

→ **Affect-loaded**
Emotionally resonant, stirring feelings within the audience

→ **Simple**
Straightforward, minimizing complexity

→ **Recognisable and relatable**
Familiar, aligning with existing schemata
(Georgakopoulou 2017; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2020)

→ **Re-tellable**
Easily retold, as individual stories are typically intended to persist through retelling (Martínez and Weixler 2019)

We are aware that a 'good story' does not need to be true to be good. It needs to be recognized, believed, and retold.

3.3
NARRATIVES ON MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

We talked to experts from different European countries about the narratives that exist about Muslims in Europe. Dr Alaya Forte, from Queen Mary University of London, pursued her PhD on women who identify as British Muslim, Dr William Barylo, a sociologist and visual artist, directed the documentary *Polish Muslims*, and is the author of Young Muslim Change-Makers, and Samira Brahimi researched the topic of Muslim women as part of her "Thinking of Europe" fellowship in 2022.

The experts and various surveys and studies showed that Islamophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes in Europe have been at a high level for years. Across Europe, the narratives on Muslim are very similar, with some peculiarities in individual countries.

The central (Islamophobic) narratives that are expressed in the discourse about Islam and Muslims and that characterise them as a social danger are:

- → the narrative of oppression (of women),
- → the narrative of threats to national identity,
- → the narrative of Islamism,
- → the narrative of a parallel society.

The devaluation and distancing tendencies that appear within society have hit Muslims particularly hard. Differentiated analyses of the connection between the image of Islam and socio-economic factors have shown that neither political orientation nor level of education has a significant influence on people's image of Islam (Scholz 2015: 150–151). 42 percent of those surveyed tend to have negative feelings towards Muslims – for comparison: 14 percent of the survey respondents have negative feelings about religious Christians. And as many as 44 percent of those surveyed expressly believe that religious

Muslims contribute less to society than other groups of people. In addition, we see an overall gap in understanding and empathy at this point: In times of dramatic acts of terror and violence against Muslims, less than half of the people in Germany see discrimination against Muslims as a cause for concern (48 percent) – on the other hand, far more than half of those surveyed (59 percent) declared German society to be incompatible with Islam (Gagné, Krause, Hüsson 2021).

National identity is often constructed as much around an 'out-group' as around the characteristics of an 'in-group'. A set of questions about Germans' attitude to different social groups provided valuable insights into these dynamics. Significant variability exists: The groups most likely to be regarded as an 'other', or 'out-group', are refugees and practising Muslims. Those regarded most warmly are ordinary workers and Germans without "origins in migration". Both statements are also closely related: people who believe that Islam and German society are incompatible also tend not to see any reason to worry when it comes to the rejection of Muslims. They simply have less empathy for them (Gagné, Krause, Hüsson 2021).

Another crucial aspect, when it comes to the image of Islam and Muslims, lies in the history of colonization. As an example, it's instructive to look at France and its history, particularly in the Maghreb region. The French agenda of 'saving' Muslim women from wearing veils can be traced back to a time when Maghrebi lands, resources, and labour were exploited under the guise of 'protecting' indigenous populations and 'enlightening' them. The unveiling of women was a tactic within this 'enlightenment project', associating the veil with backwardness. During colonial times, French colonizers aimed to compel Algerian women to discard their veils and adopt French customs. Today, French political discourse pressures Muslim women to conform to these expectations in a similar way (Kebsi 2021).

The social discourse about Muslims and the religion of Islam is largely determined by media images and narratives. Therefore, the public image of Islam has been dominated for years by conflicting, far-from-everyday, and often (subtly) racist narrative patterns. Negative Islamic narratives are extremely persistent, but also sometimes flexible and adaptable, as long as the dividing line between 'us' and 'them' remains intact (Hafez and Schmidt 2015).

60 to 80% of the articles in the German national press and on public tele-vision covering Islam and Muslims do so in the context of physical violence or other negative topics such as terrorism, women's oppression, fanaticism, fundamentalism, and backwardness (Hafez 2002: 92). This kind of jour-nalism presents a world of images that, above all, suggests foreignness. The viewer and the people portrayed are not on equal footing; visual strategies of anonymization, homogenization, and dehumanization are often used (Lünenborg 2019: 161–186). The media image of Islam is determined not only by the choice of topics (agenda setting), but also by interpretations and interpretive frameworks (framing). This defines the what and how of report-ing on Islam in terms of content. And it is precisely these text structures and images that are ultimately connected to structural racism in other areas of our society – in institutions, educational institutions, on the labour and housing markets. In keeping with Michel Foucault's analysis, one could speak here of a mutual influence and reinforcement of institutional and symbolic power relations (Foucault 1973).

The established narratives about Muslims in Europe are very stable and strong. We know that it is not possible to change a social narrative overnight, it takes time. A strong narrative can only rarely be invalidated just by facts: a substitute narrative is usually needed. It must have similar characteristics and be able to fulfil similar functions (e.g. generate emotional legitimacy equally effectively). A new narrative could also dock onto an existing narrative pattern or tap into resources of cultural memory.

3.4
THE NARRATIVE CHANGE APPROACH AND HOPE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS

Even though anti-Muslim sentiment is widespread in all classes and age groups, more than 60% of the German population can be assigned to the so-called movable middle (Gagné, Krause, Hüsson 2021). This group is characterised by a lack of participation in migration discourses, concerns about growing inequality, and potential susceptibility to populist ideas and similar rhetoric. At the same time, they are still willing to participate in a dialogue. Addressing the movable middle is essential if we are to succeed in realigning narratives and counteracting radicalization.

The narrative change approach focusses on values, concerns, and personal stories and thereby forms an important foundation for genuine dialogue and democratic coexistence. Using the methods of the narrative change approach (*reframing* approach), communication approaches are developed that are aimed specifically at individual segments within the movable middle. Narrative change is described by Brett Davidson (2016) as follows: "Narrative change rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that in order to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to the ways in which this takes place." With regard to the anti-Muslim positions outlined above, this means realigning (reframing) the public debates about Muslims and Islam in Europe and reaching the movable middle.

Narrative change must be understood as a continuous process. Stories and narratives are an important part of many communication measures. Narrative change is a result of a variety of interventions that are not necessarily identified as narrative change activities. To establish new narratives in a sustainable

way, repeated interventions by a large number of stakeholders are necessary. New narratives need to be 'lived' in and taken up by larger networks so that they reach many people in different ways. Only an approach that builds on itself and others with different methods can create a new narrative.

Campaigns may be an important tool, but they are not the only one. For example, narratives can also be used systematically in awareness-raising and empowerment work. Studies have shown that the identities of the senders of communication measures are a crucial part of change. Focus group tests carried out by the market research institute Ipsos in Germany in 2018 with representatives of the movable middle showed that they want to have the feeling that they are being addressed as equals and not by "those up above". Stakeholders from civil society are suitable for this role – including advocacy organizations within mainstream society and Muslim organizations. The latter can thereby show that they are willing to get closer to the moveable middle and are ready for dialogue, which has a positive effect on reaching the target group. The long-term goal of this work is to reframe the negative social discourse about Muslims in Europe and to deconstruct anti-Muslim narratives.

The narrative change approach builds on the reframing approach. In emotionally charged debates, participants' values, concerns, and personal stories turn into an important basis for real dialogue (Fischer and Gottweis 2012).

AN EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT NARRATIVE CHANGE APPROACH INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

➔ Recognizing the legitimate concerns of the target audience

➔ Building the campaign on shared, positive, unifying values

➔ Starting with solution-oriented, resonant messages that engage the audience and evoke feelings of familiarity and warmth

➔ Adding an element that challenges the audience to think differently, i.e. an element of dissonance (Young 2019)

To develop the campaign, we used the hope-based communications approach. It is a pragmatic approach that takes the narrative change approach as a starting point to win support for policies and advocacy positions by showing how they will work. It also offers a simple shift approach to changing the conversation – and the overall narrative. The approach works with the principle that we should focus on building the world we want by setting our agenda, values, goals, and missions, rather than reacting to our opponent's frames and actions (Hope-based comms 2024). The premises of hope-based communications state that we should stop countering messages or narratives that we do not want, as repeating them reinforces their salience. Instead, we should focus on setting agendas with new narratives of our own (Hope-based comms 2024). Narratives are brought to life in words, images, and stories. Thus, the hope-based approach contends that we need to be very clear about what it looks like to act on and apply our values in practice, using metaphors that relate to the daily life and lived experiences of our audiences.

4
THE NARRATIVE CHANGE CAMPAIGN

The goal of our narrative change campaign is to achieve a behavioural change within the target audience, moving them towards a better understanding of our post-migrant society. Furthermore, we wanted to create a campaign that is inclusive and consists of as many stories as possible that build on the shared (hope-based, pro-migration) narrative around the vision for our post-migrant society. At the beginning of the academy, the participants started working on the campaign to tell stories of human connection and spark curiosity and familiarity as an answer to fear.

4.1
OUR TARGET GROUP: THE DETACHED

Addressing the movable middle is essential if we are to succeed in reframing the negative social discourse about Muslims in Europe and deconstructing anti-Muslim narratives. In order to develop new, value-based narratives that resonate with the target group, it is important to understand who the movable middle is and, above all, what attitudes and values they hold regarding migration, integration, Islam, and Muslims.
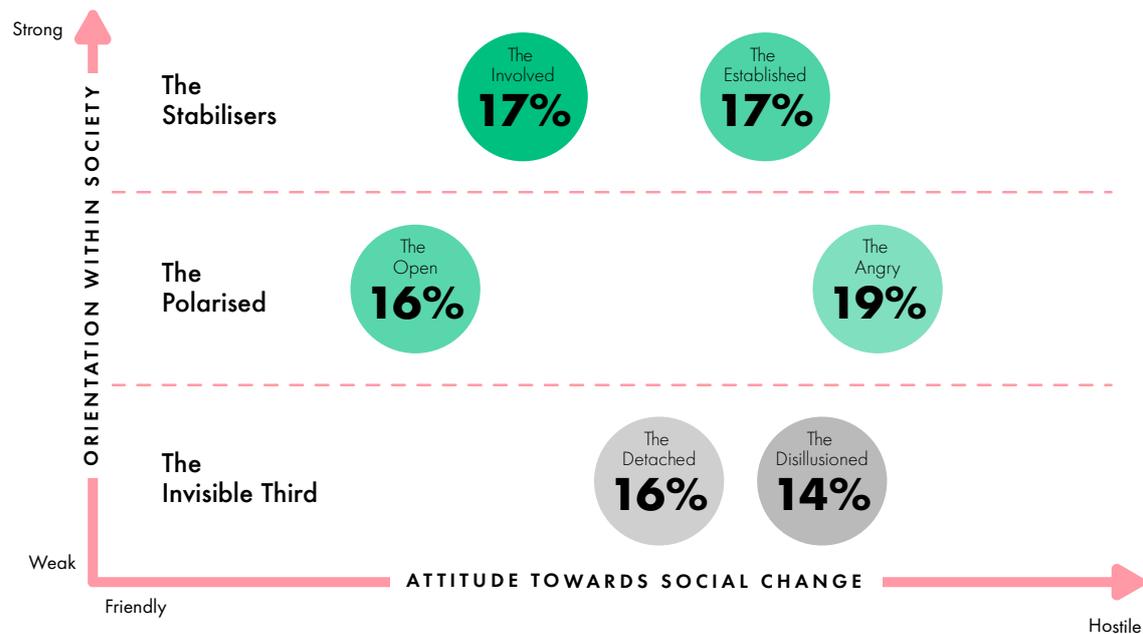

Figure 2 A graphic illustrating the segmentation analysis conducted by More in Common (2019)
Source: More in Common (2019): Fault Lines: Germany's Invisible Divides, p.7.

More in Common, an NGO working in Germany, France, Poland, the UK and the US, conducted a segmentation analysis which identified six segments based on a large-scale opinion poll of around 4,000 members of the German population. Similar segments were identified in France and the UK.

For our first narrative change campaign, we chose to focus on one of these six segments: The Detached in Germany and the synonymous segments Les Attentistes in France, and The Disengaged Battlers in the UK. Within this segment we further focused on the younger half (18–35 years old).

The Detached are part of More in Common's The Invisible Third category. They make up 16% of the population and are less socially, politically, and locally integrated and tend to fly under the radar of public attention. They find it difficult to engage in conversation with others (66%) and prefer to stick to things they already know (63%). The Detached prioritize success, personal advancement, and control over trust (More in Common 2019).

The Detached demonstrate less inclination towards abstract social concepts, show minimal interest in politics, and lack a clear or value-driven vision of political ideals. They exhibit a pragmatic rather than emotional connection to the political system and show limited interest in democratic procedures. Among The Detached's interests, politics and society rank far below food and drink, TV/movies/series, and sports.

The research indicates that The Detached can be reached through specific communication channels, such as entertainment platforms like Amazon Prime, Netflix, and Instagram. Shared content that is easily accessible and close to people's lives can serve as a better door opener than political content. The best starting point is therefore access via pre-existing shared interests and hobbies. By creating a framework of commonalities, differences can be addressed more casually, without primarily focusing on the differences between people. To improve social understanding and reduce prejudice, however, it is important to highlight different perspectives and bring them closer to the perspectives of other people, for example, through campaigns and (social) media. Although people are not brought into direct contact with one another in this way, their views and experiences can still be seen in public space and can serve as thought-provoking material (More in Common 2019).

We want the campaign to shift members of the movable middle from being *detached* to being *attached*, to being *dandelion* disseminators of our narrative: we want to activate shared values, a sense of belonging and empowerment in them (i.e. an ability to have a positive impact on society).

4.2 THE VALUE MAPPING PROCESS

Values act as a compass in all areas of life. They create identity, belonging, and meaning. They clarify the motives behind a person's actions. They often change over time and should not be seen as limiting people to certain categories or putting them in boxes. By focusing on our common experiences and values, we reduce the weight given to what we may disagree on. With our campaign, we wanted to deepen mutual understanding and empathy, while uncovering a potential for transformation. Understanding what we have in common expands our sense of empathy, community, and belonging. At the same time, we also recognized that everyone has multiple identities that influence how we want to be understood, what issues we care about, and the causes that we support. When we recognize these multiple dimensions, we can see the opportunities to build a more inclusive movement.

In order to settle on the narratives that we wanted to channel through our campaign, we conducted one round of value mapping. Through the value mapping process, we determined the bridging values between The Detached and the values of the participants in the Narrative Change Academy, as well as the narrative space we are willing to message into. Out of the matched values, we picked three values that the participants considered to be very important. Afterwards, we applied the 5 Whys technique to define our associations with these values further, asking ourselves questions about why these values are important to us.

EMPATHY is important

... because we are all going through something, and life would be easier for everyone if we could acknowledge that.

... because it enables us to be more of our true selves and feel understood.

... because it allows us to feel more at ease as we live our lives.

... because that feeling fosters creativity, innovation, peace, and security.

... because we all are human.

HARMONY is important

... because we want equity and inclusion.

... because we want a society that enables us to fulfil our aspirations regardless of our backgrounds.

... because thriving people make a happier, more creative, and more vibrant community.

... because a stable, open-minded community adapts to challenges in a resilient, considerate way by developing high-quality solutions.

... because it will lead to fair and resilient systems so future generations and the planet can thrive in harmony.

CARE is important

... because people need to be heard.

... because people experience a lot over their lifetimes that deserves to be told.

... because by sharing experiences we can learn a lot about all the facets of a life.

... because each of us is confronted with challenges we don't need to solve by ourselves.

... because being heard and sharing experiences is a crucial part of solving challenges.

... because listening to people's experiences as a collective can help solve individual challenges.

Finding common ground is a key step towards creating narrative change regarding Muslims. We want to reinforce a hope-based, pro-migration narrative built on diversity, tolerance, openness, curiosity, belonging and, above all, on our shared humanity.

THEREFORE, THE CAMPAIGN AIMED TO CREATE THE THREE CENTRAL NARRATIVE SHIFTS OUTLINED BELOW:

1. We aimed to move away from the "good immigrant" narrative. While this can be expressed in various ways, it usually emphasizes an immigrant's individual achievements and includes an element of exceptionalism. Instead, we sought to move towards a narrative of collective wellbeing, where diversity is normalized. This is one that emphasizes the commonality between human beings and encounters between people on equal footing.

2. Additionally, we wanted to move away from neo-liberal narratives and stories that only portray Muslims as worthy members of society when they add value to the dominant part of society, suggesting that migration needs to have economic benefits. These narratives usually centre on the economic or educational successes of individuals. We want to foster a narrative of collective action based on shared humanity and mutual care between people.

3. We aimed to move away from the narratives that suggest that only political or economic elites can create societal change. We wanted to channel the narrative of people power and solidarity fostering change in society.

4.3
THE CAMPAIGN IDEA

Based on the campaign goal, the participants started to work on the idea and build out the elements needed to trigger a positive response in the target segment. This includes the development of messages. We began by writing down the core ideas we wished to convey in the campaign in simple sentences. Then we developed simple stories to illustrate the points we wanted to make and humanise the focus of the campaign. We also crafted a set of short memorable phrases or hashtags to use across our campaign materials. A Germany-based social media agency, Social Social, was selected to help with this process, the content development, and the campaign roll-out. They were chosen because they had previously developed campaigns focused on social justice work.

We wanted to create a campaign where people aren't put in boxes and where their multi-layered and post-migrant identities exist and are made visible. With our campaign we wanted to foster curiosity as an answer to fear. Fear and the feeling of danger both lead to self-interest, which is why we wanted to stimulate empathy instead. Because familiarity and shared values breed trust. We wanted to create a campaign that tells stories of human connection. We did not want to create a counter-narrative but create something new instead, therefore we used not only the images but also the vocabulary that we wanted to connect to our topics and that articulated our world view. In this way, we hoped to avoid fuelling existing prejudices and stereotypes.

We wanted as many people as possible to participate in our campaign and share their stories to create a clear, compelling, and empowering image of a post-migrant society that shows how we could all benefit from it. An approach that's too theoretical does not work well with The Detached. This target audience tends to think more in terms of practical categories and everyday progress, and less so in terms of abstract categories of social justice. Therefore, it was important for us to tie their immediate reality into the campaign. For this

reason, we opted for a campaign on social media with a modern and sur-prising look that suits the 'digital native'. The language used in the campaign was intentionally kept clear, simple, and youth-oriented.

The aim of the campaign was to inspire the public to engage and share their own stories and experiences. We also aimed to make the campaign format easily reproducible for the audience and future academy years, so that more content could be produced. We rooted our concept in two pop-cultural phenomena. Essentially, we combined the *unboxing* phenomenon with the aesthetics of other contemporary social media formats. Unboxing, a well-known internet phenomenon, was used to transfer the emotions of excitement and curiosity which it usually evokes to people's personal stories and experiences.

4.4
CAMPAIGN TESTING

To ensure that we developed a campaign that resonated with our target audience, we tested the messages and other key campaign elements in several interviews with our target audience and then adapted them based on their responses. The interviews were structured in such a way that the participants were able to assess what they liked and disliked about the campaign, so that we could rework it accordingly. Some interviewees were recruited through online platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups, while others were recruited through the academy participants' social networks. The interviews were structured and followed an interview guide that was developed by the Narrative Change Academy and More in Common. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes roughly. In the following the most relevant interview results can be found summarized in an anonymous manner.

When we asked them how they like to spend their free time and if they are active on Instagram or TikTok, many users reported gravitating towards content that aligns with their interests, such as DIY tutorials, daily routines, sports, fashion, humour, creativity, travel, and music, seeking out light-hearted and dopamine-inducing material.

After a few general questions about their user behaviour, we tested both campaign ideas presented below and received the following feedback regarding their initial thoughts, emotions, associations, odds of engaging with the campaign, understanding of the campaign, thoughts about the design of the campaign, if it changed their mind and awareness, and if it triggered any action.

Idea 1: Unbox Stereotypes Carousel
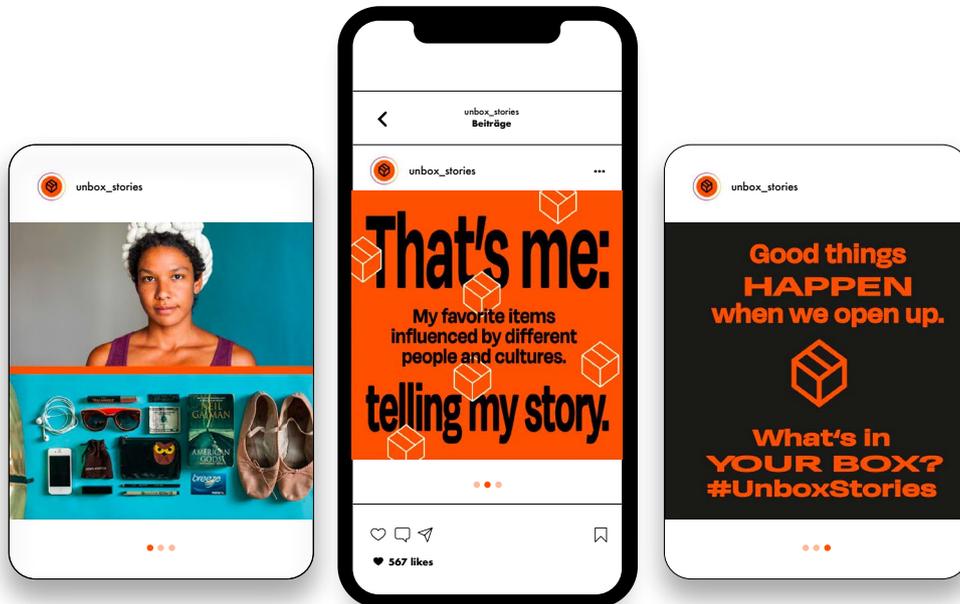
Idea 2: Unbox Stories Carousel

THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS RESONATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEES AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE KEPT:

→ The participants liked the campaign goal and thought it was a good way to show how different people are influenced by different cultures.

→ They had a high level of emotional connection with the aspect of sharing personal, treasured, and intimate experiences.

→ They thought the portrait with the objects was interesting, positive, very clear, and sparked their curiosity.

→ They liked the slogan 'UnboxStories' better than 'UnboxStereotypes'. It felt more personal and touching.

→ They understood the storytelling and the sharing element of the campaign quite well.

→ They felt like the campaign could foster bonding over shared interests and common ground.

→ They really liked the idea that it speaks to everyone, and everyone can be part of it.

THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS SHOULD BE CHANGED OR RECONSIDERED:

→ They thought the campaign looked too much like an ad and that its aim was to sell something or get something out of them.

→ The colours and designs reminded them of food delivery companies like Hello Fresh, packaging and delivery companies, Amazon, Halloween, vegetarian content, and Halal food.

→ They questioned how we would be able to replicate the unboxing process for people in real life.

→ They were unsure what our call to action was and what we wanted them to do.

→ They recommended changing the logo to an open box because the campaign's focus is on unboxing and opening up.

4.5
THE FINAL CAMPAIGN

Based on the feedback from the target group, Social Social reworked the campaign idea and the corresponding visuals. More images and videos were created based on that concept.

NEW ELEMENTS WERE BUILT OUT AS FOLLOWS:

Slogan: The slogan of the campaign is: 'Good things happen when we open up'. Since the unboxing process was central to the campaign, the slogan was intentionally based on the double meaning of 'open up'.

Call to action: The call to action is: 'What's in your box?' This was meant to encourage the broader public to share their stories and participate in the campaign.

Messengers and Supporters: We included a diverse set of messengers (influencers, NGOs, artists, politicians etc.) who are trusted voices for our target audience.

Choice of platform: We decided to conduct our campaign on Instagram, as our target audience are young and largely active on social media, specifically on Instagram and Snapchat. Furthermore, on Instagram a range of content formats can be used (videos and still images), 1.5–2-minute-long videos can be uploaded, profiles have a clear structure, the potential to go viral is higher, it is easy to work with templates to create additional content, and content can easily be reshared through multiplication across participants, networks, and influencers.

We started a new Instagram page for the campaign (@unbox_stories). We opted to create a new page for the campaign because we determined that our organization's Instagram page is mostly followed by people interested in social justice work and politics. Thus, it would be difficult to effectively get

beyond that to reach our target audience. The drawback of starting a new page, however, was that we needed to generate an organic following, starting from zero.

We redefined what objects should be featured in the testimonials produced by the campaign, so what the messengers should bring for the campaign shoot.

CONCRETELY, WE ASKED OUR VARIOUS MESSENGERS TO PACK A BOX WITH THREE PERSONAL ITEMS THAT FIT THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

1. **Something that gives you a sense of community.**

2. **Something others would not expect you to own.**

3. **Something you think the world should have more of.**

We documented the unboxing processes in short Reel-like clips. People were asked to identify the objects and the owners of the objects. In this way, the box and personal items were put at the centre of the campaign, serving as starting points for connections, interactions, and discussions between people, organized around personal storytelling.
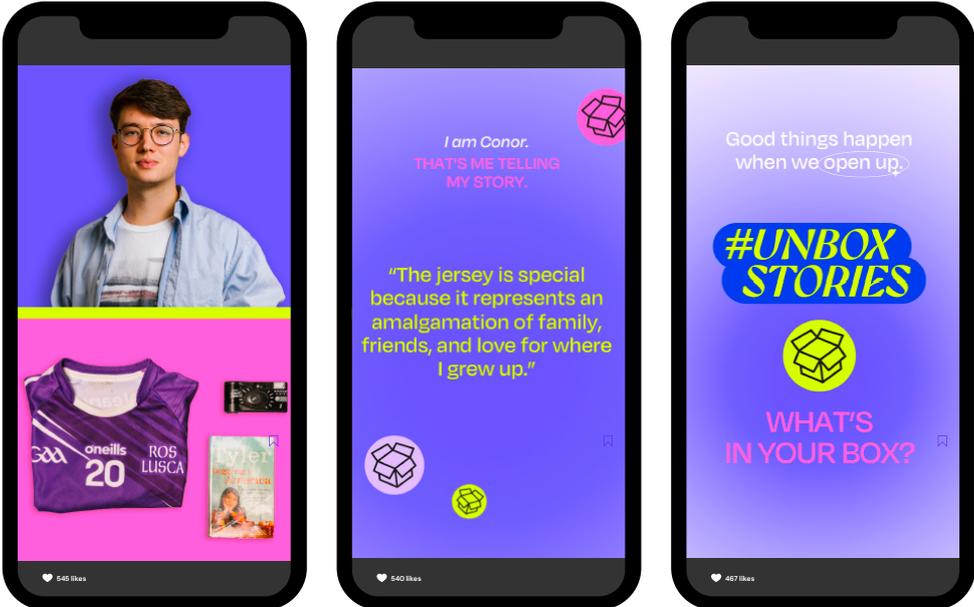
CAMPAIGN FORMAT:

We chose three different campaign formats: videos, carousels, and text slides.
Examples of each format are depicted below:

Videos
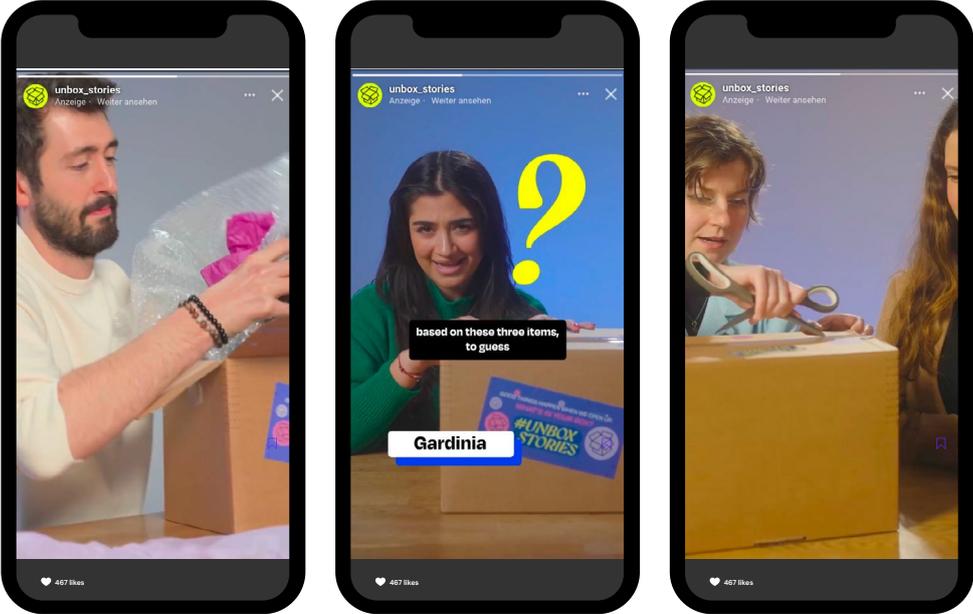
Carousels

Text slides

In addition to this, we ran paid advertisements in the form of videos, carousels, and text slides. The language used for the carousels and text slides corresponded to the countries they were distributed in. However, only one video was used for the paid advertisements. It was in German, with English subtitles, which is why no video ad was used in France. We suspect that the lack of a video as a paid ad may explain why the campaign did not perform as well in France as it did in the two other countries.

TO REACH THE TARGET AUDIENCE, THE SETTINGS FOR THE ADVERTISEMENTS ON META WERE SET TO REACH:

➜ 18–39-year-olds living in one of the biggest cities in Germany, France, or the UK.

➜ Interests were set to family, community issues, or social causes.

It was not possible to further specify the interests of the audiences that we were aiming to reach as there are limitations on how many interests Meta will specify for ads.

4.6
ROLL-OUT OF THE CAMPAIGN

The social media campaign was launched on January 31, 2024, and rolled out on our Instagram channel through March 1, 2024: @unbox_stories. Both organic and paid content was utilized. The campaign was digitally conducted in Germany, France, and the UK, using the respective national languages and implemented together with the Social Social agency. The narrative change campaign is based on stories that illustrate how, in a post-migrant society, we treat each other with care, respect, empathy, and trust and expect the kindest and best from one another.

To ensure the success of our campaign, we drew up a detailed plan of activities, communication tools, and resources needed to engage our audience enough to achieve our objectives. After building out the campaign elements, we prepared the participants for the campaign and considered potential responses. We created a comprehensive set of campaign talking points, outlining how to navigate discussions, what topics to steer clear of, and strategies for addressing challenging questions. Furthermore, the Narrative Change Academy participants were equipped with the necessary tools and information to effectively execute the campaign plan and handle potentially difficult interactions. We strategically planned the elements of the campaign, including the initial wave and subsequent phases, to maximize impact and effectiveness. We continuously monitored the progress of the campaign, keeping track of the schedule, responses, targets, and expenditures to ensure everything stayed on track. We tried to anticipate potential challenges and unexpected developments and were prepared to defend our campaign's objectives and strategies if needed. By following these steps, we were well-equipped to execute our campaign smoothly and effectively, from planning to implementation and beyond.

4.7
EVALUATION OF THE CAMPAIGN
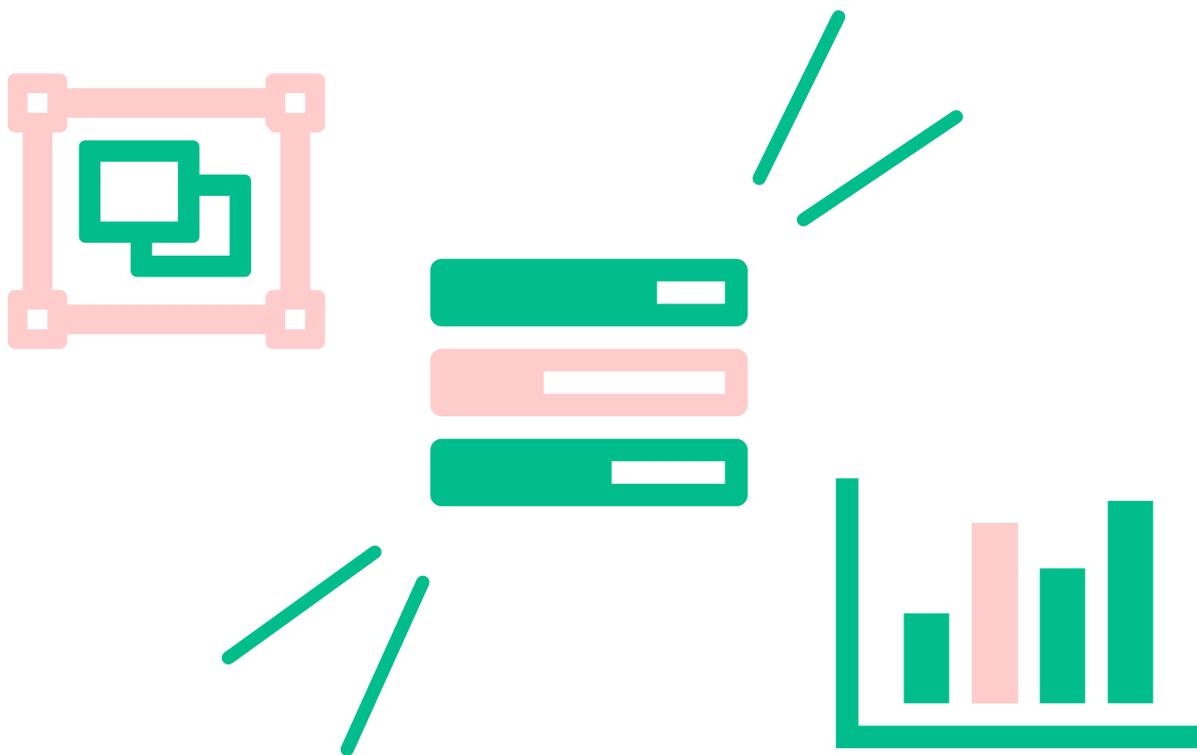
To ensure the success of our campaign and learn from the experience, we defined methods and strategies for measuring the campaign's reach, response, and uptake. We collected relevant data, shared findings with the Narrative Change Academy participants and other relevant stakeholders and reflected on the results to identify insights and areas for improvement. By following these steps, we aspired to gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of our campaign and to better equip ourselves to conduct future narrative change campaigns.

COMPARED TO SIMILAR CAMPAIGNS, THE UNBOXING CAMPAIGN ACHIEVED AN EXCELLENT VIEW RATE:

→ The ads were viewed 2.6 million times. This means that we reached more than 1.6 million people in our campaign.

→ The campaign's engagement rate was almost 9% (which is comparatively high). In the second phase of the rollout, we improved the overall engagement rate by 35% through adjustments in targeting.

→ The view rate was sufficiently high, suggesting that we told interesting, creative, and captivating stories with our videos.

→ The campaign worked best in the 25–34 age group (1.3 million impressions). In the 18–24 age group, we had 800,000 impressions.

→ We found that the number of impressions between male and female users was almost even. However, female users had a higher engagement rate than male users (+29%).

→ In total (paid and organic), 13,064 people liked the campaign's posts, 252 people loved the campaign so much that they saved it, and 174 people interacted with the campaign and responded to the posts.

TO REACH OUR TARGET AUDIENCE, WE ADJUSTED THE SETTINGS FOR OUR PAID ADS ON META AFTER THE FIRST WEEK OF ROLL-OUT TO:

→ 18–34-year-olds living in one of the biggest cities in Germany, France, or the UK.

→ Interests were set to family, football, game shows, TV comedies, yoga, pop music, community issues, or social causes.

The number of times the Unboxing Campaign was shown in someone's feed or stories.

The amount of people that saw at least one piece of content of our campaign.

2,607,896
IMPRESSIONS

1,663,971
PEOPLE REACHED

221,480
VIDEO VIEWS

232,009
ENGAGEMENTS

The number of times the videos were watched.

The number of video views, likes, comments, shares, and saves.

Figure 5 Results of the paid campaign by Social Social

5
RECOMMENDA-TIONS

As we finalize this paper on how to reach beyond our bubble and change the narrative on Muslims in Europe, it is imperative to reflect on the insights we have gained from our first Narrative Change Academy year and its narrative change campaign. Throughout this paper, we have delved into the complexities involved in changing the narratives on Muslims across Europe and scrutinized the various challenges and opportunities presented by working with the narrative change approach. Now, armed with a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand, we are ready to propose actionable recommendations that can guide policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners towards meaningful change. In this final chapter, we consolidate our findings and distil them into a set of strategic directives aimed at addressing the key issues identified. These recommendations are not merely theoretical propositions, rather, they are practical roadmaps designed to inform stakeholders in civil society about how to conduct effective campaigns and foster tangible progress in the realm of shaping inclusive, pluralistic, post-migrant European societies.

5.1
LEARNINGS FROM THE CAMPAIGN

What worked well

1. <u>Working with influencers</u>
Throughout the campaign, we found that working with social media influencers, especially those who create lifestyle content, was effective in reaching our target audience and achieving a wider range of interaction with the campaign. For example, of our carousel posts, our collaborative post with a German influencer was the one that had the most interaction.

Similarly, we found that collaborative posts were especially successful in reaching people. Instagram Collab posts involve two or more accounts co-authoring the same post, which means that the same post will appear on their pages at the same time. This means that the followers of both pages will receive the posts in their feeds.

2. <u>Creating a look that is not too 'political'</u>
Given that our target audience is generally not interested in politics or social justice work, creating a campaign through social media helped create a message that had less of a 'political' look. In essence, social media made it easier to create a campaign with a more fun and colourful image, which may appeal more to certain target audiences.

What to keep in mind

3. <u>Competing for attention</u>
Due to the fast-paced nature of social media platforms, where information can travel thousands of kilometres in seconds, and people's pages are constantly updating, it is difficult to compete for attention. Trends evolve and change all the time. We noticed this, and we found it difficult to keep adapting.

4. <u>Connecting with your target audience can be challenging</u>
We noticed that we were not reaching our target audience initially. In part, this was because we had set the age settings on Meta for 18–44. This was eventually changed to address a younger audience (18–34). At the end of the campaign, we determined that the age group we reached was mostly 25–34-year-olds.

Additionally, we found it challenging to tailor the audiences that the content reached. While Meta has some categories of interest that can be selected to make it easier to reach audiences through paid ads, these are generally quite broad, and we thought they lacked some interests that could have been useful for reaching our target audience.

5.2
LEARNINGS FROM THE ACADEMY

What to keep in mind

1. Ensure adequate representation
Increased representation of different social groups throughout the academy is necessary to ensure the participants feel comfortable, valued, and understood. This is also crucial to helping participants develop a campaign that they feel adequately reflects and represents them, their values, and their needs.

General feedback from participants highlighted the need for more experts whose lived realities overlap with theirs and who are Black, Indigenous, and/or people of colour, and ideally Muslim, too.

2. Europeanize the academy
While the campaign targeted Germany, France, and the UK, the academy ended up disproportionately focusing on Germany. This is partly due to our organisation being based in Germany, but it can also be attributed to the fact that all workshops were conducted in Berlin and that most of our service providers were based in either Germany or the German-speaking part of Europe.

To ensure that the Narrative Change Academy maintains its transnational European focus, future academies should also liaise with organizations, experts, and service providers based elsewhere in Europe.

3. Diversify the fields of expertise
Throughout the academy, we mostly worked with experts in the fields of narrative change or strategic communications. However, inviting a broader variety of experts would be beneficial for developing a more thorough knowledge base of anti-Muslim narratives and racism.

For instance, it could have been useful to include historians or sociologists to explore and explain where anti-Muslim racism stems from, how it is multiplied and intensified in Europe, and what repercussions it has for Muslim communities across the continent. Similarly, engaging with more social media activists who use anti-racist approaches or combat anti-Muslim racism may also have given us a better idea of how social media is already being used to challenge dominant narratives about Muslims.

4. Do not overfill the academy with activities
A range of workshops, lectures, and take-home exercises for participants to complete through the academy may be necessary to ensure that participants are well-trained and ready to develop a campaign. However, it is also necessary to make sure that the academy does not require too much of a time commitment and that participants can balance it with their other obligations.

In our case, for example, all participants were in either full-time employment or full-time studies. Their limited free time must be considered when planning the academy schedule and structure.

5. Make the academy accessible
We aimed to make the academy accessible and to attract participants with various academic and/or professional backgrounds and interests. Nevertheless, due to the nature of the project, it mostly attracted people who were already engaged in political or anti-racist work or who were well-versed in social and political theory. While this was an asset in terms of experience, it may have presented a barrier to people from other disciplines when they attempted to engage in certain conversations and share their knowledge.

Thus, to ensure accessibility, it is important to remind participants and leaders to avoid jargon and specialist language or to explain any words they use that may not be in people's everyday vocabulary. Similarly, it is crucial to emphasize the fact that the skills people have acquired in other disciplines, such as the natural sciences or the arts, are just as valuable and beneficial for the academy.

6
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7
IMPRINT

Junge Islam Konferenz (JIK)

The Young Islam Conference (JIK) is a programme of political education that offers platforms for exchange, empowerment spaces, mentoring, and skill development on topics related to Islam, participation, and living together in our post-migrant societies. Most JIK formats are aimed at both young people affected by racism and allies to help shape an inclusive society. As a civil society actor, the JIK reaches out to stakeholders from the fields of politics, media, and civil society.

The Narrative Change Academy is a project of the Young Islam Conference (JIK). The JIK is a major programme within the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe.

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- flickr.com/photos/jungeislamkonferenz
- vimeo.com/jungeislamkonferenz
- soundcloud.com/jungeislamkonferenz

www.junge-islam-konferenz.de/en

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