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The "Who is Who" of Migration Information Campaigns on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates online campaigns targeting potential migrants to inform them about and dissuade them from irregular migration to the EU. By focusing on social media networks, this article traces the different actors who circulate such campaigns online and asks how they relate to each other. Applying social network analysis on three different campaigns on Facebook and Twitter respectively, we analyze both overall network structures across social media platforms and the actor types engaged in sharing campaign content. Based on Critical Border Studies, we suggest that migration information campaigns should be understood as bordering practices, and empirically investigate them in terms of their informal performance of borders. By shedding light on the ways in which informal performance takes place in such campaigns, our article highlights how migration governance actors construct borders in their own interest, and so contributes to shedding light on migration campaigns as one of the most evasive tools in migration governance.

Introduction

The salience of irregular migration has increased in EU and national discourses, both in policy and public debates, in particular since Europe's "migration crisis" from 2015 onward. At least 130 information campaigns have been implemented in 2015–2019, of which at least 104 are from or with the involvement or support of EU governments (European Commission 2018; National Contact Point in the European Migration Network 2019). In this paper, we investigate migration information campaigns by migration governance actors as "soft tools" of border externalization (FitzGerald 2020), which warn (potential) migrants about the risks of irregular migration towards Europe. As social media have become vital for migrants today (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Borkert, Fisher, and Yafi 2018), information campaigns increasingly try to reach migrants directly via these platforms and tools. Migration governance actors today

dispose of new modes of dissemination for such campaigns and can target migrants more specifically.

Overall, migration research is mostly critical about such campaigns. Information campaigns are criticized regarding their effectiveness (Tjaden and Dunsch 2021; van Bemmel 2020) and ethical undercurrent (Brändle 2022a; Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020; Oeppen 2016). Furthermore, research has shown that migration information campaigns are highly performative: they disguise their dissuasive messages about irregularity and risks through seemingly humanitarian content (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007; Oeppen 2016), embedding reductive understandings of migrants' information levels about the risks of irregular pathways (Vammen et al. 2021) and undermining a focus on rights (Bishop 2020). In these ways, these campaigns reiterate and reconfirm European migration policies while declaring to be in the potential migrant's best interest (Brändle 2022a). Migration information campaigns can therefore be understood as bordering practices (Musarò 2019).

While this increasing body of work helps to situate information campaigns on social media within the context of migration governance and externalization tools, we lack empirical knowledge about the actors disseminating these campaigns and how they engage in bordering practices by means of these campaigns. Against this background, we formulate the following research questions: (1) What kinds of actors engage in the dissemination of information campaigns on social media? (2) What kinds of patterns between different types of migration governance actors emerge?

In this paper, we draw from Critical Border Studies to "decentre the border" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728), i.e. to step away from taking borders for granted and understanding them as constructs that are "in a constant state of becoming" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728). Borders do not describe static delimitations but expressions of power that need to be performed (e.g. Paasi 2021) and contribute to the "b/ordering and othering" across and beyond the state (van Houtum 2005, 2021). From this vantage point, we can zoom in on social media to understand how exactly migration information campaigns perform borders underneath the surface of their publicly declared humanitarian character.

We argue that migration information campaigns need to be understood as prime examples for informal performances of the border. We suggest understanding informal performance as a potentially additional but strongly related type of border performance to Salter's (2011) categories of formal, practical, and popular performativity. Informal performance of borders via such campaigns happens in an anticipatory, "just-saying" kind of way – without actual implementation or defense of borders in practice – informally.

Empirically, we apply a multi-case study design and focus on three high profile campaign initiatives, *Rumours about Germany*, *Aware Migrants*, and *The Migrant Project*. This selection covers a broad range of campaigns with different actor constellations behind them: direct implementation by state actors, by international organizations, and completely outsourced on the local level. To identify these actors and analyze emerging patterns between them, we employ social network analysis on Facebook and Twitter and inductively categorize actor types of the most coherent components of the respective networks to analyze their dissemination patterns.

Our article contributes to an increasing body of work that brings together novel understanding of the entanglements of different modes, scales, practices, and actors out of which contemporary European border regimes are formed. A Critical Border

Studies approach helps to uncover the evasiveness of migration information campaigns with which Critical Migration Studies currently grapples, so far considering campaigns only as tools for externalization and policies of in- and exclusion.

In doing so, we will first discuss and conceptualize information campaigns within three broader themes of Border Studies: we elaborate on the perspective from which we approach the campaigns (migration governance actors), contextualize the place within which such bordering practices take place (social media), and then introduce the category of informal border performance. Following this, we will report on the methodology we applied for our empirical investigation and report and discuss our findings. In particular, we find how migration governance actors use notions of territory, danger or an absence of borders strategically for their own interests instead of for the benefit of migrants. We conclude by summarizing and contextualizing our findings in relation to the shift from understanding "the state" as the main actor regarding bordering and migration governance to seeing the state as one among many actors and beyond a territorially defined notion of "the state", unveiling bordering practices, their sites and contestation in a more holistic way.

Theorizing Migration Information Campaigns as Bordering Practices: Perspective, Place And Performance

We structure our theoretical argument about campaigns as bordering practices by means of three concepts or themes that Johnson and Jones (2011, 62) have suggested to make sense of the interdisciplinary research in the field of (Critical) Border Studies: perspective, place, and performance.

Taking these three themes as a starting point for developing the argument of this paper allows us to contextualize information campaigns as bordering practices by, first, clarifying the *perspective of the actors* that disseminate them; second, by elaborating on the role of social media as *place* for such campaigns; and third, by proposing how the ways in which such campaign networks are disseminated among actors, making the *informal performance* of borders visible.

From the Perspective of Migration Governance Actors

Following Pécoud (2021, 4), governance of migration refers to the governing of migration by a multitude of different actors, not only state actors but non-state actors such as international and supranational entities, civil society and the private sector, as well as to the multi-levelled context in which governance takes place, such as local, national, regional, or international and the interrelations between these scales. The role of state actors can consequently vary from campaign to campaign. State actors might be invested in such campaigns but outsource their dissemination to others or decide to disseminate them themselves. To understand the perspective of migration governance actors in relation to migration campaigns we need to establish what kinds of bordering practices they represent.

Based on the existing literature on information campaigns for potential migrants, we know that these campaigns are highly dissuasive and reinforce existing official border control discourses. Information campaigns for potential migrants are considered to be

indirect instruments of migration governance and deterrence (e.g. FitzGerald 2020). Information campaigns have emerged in the 1990s using posters, flyers, and traditional media (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007).

Against this background, information campaigns aim at responding to the increasing numbers of asylum applications, border crossings, and unprepared intake capacities in European border zones by highlighting people's supposed lack of knowledge, unawareness or misinformation regarding irregular migration and "smuggling" – an understanding among policy actors that is overly simplistic (Vammen et al. 2021). Despite their publicly formulated objectives to inform migrants on irregular pathways about the associated dangers and risks, they are not necessarily or exclusively a means to communicate new policies to (potential) migrants but can especially be understood as attempts to reaffirm existing border and immigration regimes (Brändle 2022a), and as "soft tools" of remote border control (FitzGerald 2020). In European contexts migration policies and official discourses construct the meaning of ir-/regularity and are often framed in ways that attempt to harmonize security concerns with humanitarian engagement (Geddes, Hadj Abdou, and Brumat 2020; Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2017).

Information campaigns as bordering practices narrate and re-produce the dichotomies in European migration policies between regularity and irregularity and between who has access to safe passages toward Europe and who will be declined entry (Musarò 2019). Depending on the forms and activities of such campaigns, they "bring the border deeply into the everyday space of local communities before migrants even attempt to cross it" (Vammen 2022, 1412). In other words, from the perspective of migration governance actors, such campaigns serve as instruments to convey and discursively construct a border and persuade potential "irregular" migrants that there are only very few, improbable options that would allow them to cross that supposed line.

The fact that non-state actors and even ordinary citizens can engage in bordering practices (Rumford 2008) as well as in migration governance (Pécoud 2021; Triandafyllidou 2022) works well for this purpose of migration information campaigns: Migrants tend not to find information by governments particularly trustworthy, but favor information from local support groups and peers (see Alencar 2018) In so far, some organizations suggest to consider government visibility when branding the campaigns (Seefar 2021).

Information campaigns are therefore a prime example of soft tools for border externalization and the blending of securitization and humanitarian discourses, as their content can usually be summarized by 'Don't come here, it's for your own good'. These ways of "communicating borders" (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020) illustrate how externalization policies in Europe are not only implemented through harsh policies and border controls but also through ambiguous discourses expressed by a multitude of different governance actors, both state and non-state actors.

Social Media as a Place for Border Performance

Social media have become crucial for contentious politics (Bennett and Segerberg 2012), democratic movements against oppression, but also for clandestine political campaigning about immigration and, most prominently, in relation to "fake news" and targeted disinformation (e.g. Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Moreover, public and political

communication on social media, and also by governments, to inform about policies and legitimize them, play an essential role in governance today (DePaula, Dincelli, and Harrison 2018). Social media allow circulating campaigns to specific target groups, such as potential migrants, at relatively low cost (Howlett 2009).

Considering the vital role social media play also for (potential) migrants, migration governance actors increasingly launch their campaigns on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media enable migrants to access information, navigate through citizenship and border regulations or build support networks (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Borkert et al. 2018). In this way, social media enable governance actors to reach beyond state territory to communicate policy-defined discourses between regular and irregular migration.

Via social media, official migration policy discourses can be disseminated in various ways, for example, directly communicated by a government, shared by peers or other actors that are in one way or another involved in migration governance, such as international organizations, civil society, private enterprises, and online groups formed around specific interests or activities. State actors also have the option of funding campaigns by private actors or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and so to disappear behind the campaigns. Social media therefore work as facilitators of bordering practices as they enable migration governance actors to decouple bordering from a specific territory whenever it suits their strategy (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012). Bordering practices on social media, in the form of migration information campaigns, therefore also reflect what Amoore (2011, 63) has called "spatial stretching": not only do such campaigns present attempts to externalize border control (FitzGerald 2020), they also reach into the intimate spaces where people socialize, get informed, create and modify content, and have become an ubiquitous part of daily life (Borkert et. al 2018; Williams 2020).

So far, we do not know who engages in their dissemination and what kinds of dissemination patterns emerge that serve these actors' aims to border. In this paper, we understand social media as the place from where migration governance actors can perform borders, stretching border spatiality as it suits them and externalizing border controls in informal ways. In what follows, we will elaborate what we mean by informal border performance as final part of our theoretical framework.

Conceptualizing Informal Performance of the Border

So far, we have elaborated on the perspective from which we investigate information campaigns as bordering practices – migration governance actors as campaign initiators and disseminators, and on the place where this bordering practice is particularly prevalent, yet under-explored – social media. In the following, we now turn to describe how migration governance actors disseminate these campaigns on social media and thus, how they perform borders.

In particular, we suggest considering the option of an additional type to Salter's (2011) three types of performances (formal, practical, popular), which we here refer to as informal performance of borders. We argue that migration information campaigns are informal bordering practices because they perform the border in anticipation, hereby reaching far beyond formal border controls, but without legal or "official" acts and consequence for migrants, yet (re-)producing an idea of a border in a "just saying-kind of way".

Critical Border Studies approaches the border "not as taken-for-granted entity, but precisely as a site of investigation" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728). In this sense, borders are increasingly understood as phenomena that can be symbolic or manifest, but that are constantly in the making. Referred to as a "decentring" of the border, Critical Border Studies

> urges two twinned moves: a shift from *the concept of the border* to the *notion of bordering practice*; and the adoption of the lens of *performance* through which bordering practices are produced and reproduced (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 729).

In other words, "there is nothing inherent about the character or nature of borders" (Green 2012, 579), which allows powerful actors to adapt the meaning of borders in favor of their political interests, performing borders as it suits them (Brändle and Eisele 2023).

According to Salter (2011, 66), there are three types or "registers of border performativity" which are all based on the notion that the maintenance of state sovereignty requires (re-)articulation. Salter refers to "formal performance" as "the description or defense of particular territorial borders", denoting an inside and an outside, a borderline; "practical performance" describes the actual implementation (inclusion, exclusion, filtering) of this borderline, for example, via border control and passport checks, but also the handling of visa applications as externalization practices; "popular performance" highlights the public and political contestation of the meaning of the border, suggesting that borders are also publicly negotiated between those who control and those who wish to cross the border (Salter 2011, 66–67).

While each of these registers of performativity deserves a discussion in its own right, for the purposes of this paper, we will use them as a starting point for developing an additional type: informal performance. We argue that migration information campaigns cannot entirely be theorized with these three types of border performativity because of their evasiveness in several ways. Migration information campaigns can (but do not have to) describe sovereignty or territory (formal performance), often by reproducing existing migration policy discourses (Bishop, 2020; Brändle 2022a). However, they do so without legal acts and beyond a territory, i.e. on social media where this formality is anticipated, not yet enacted, since the campaign aims at dissuading migrants from reaching the border. Similarly, they can (but do not necessarily have to) anticipate or warn potential migrants about the practical implementation of the border as a filtering mechanism (for example, Visa regulations or family reunification) (e.g. Oeppen 2016; Musarò 2019), but do not perform the border in this practical way. Finally, migration information campaigns can (but do not have to) be contested by migrants, NGOs, or ordinary people, even by members of parliament (Brändle, 2022b). Yet, such campaigns do not reflect and inform about this contestation, providing migrants with only limited information in these regards, and so also limiting their options to contest the campaigns.

In this sense, migration information campaigns by migration governance actors on social media are evasive in their enactment of sovereignty in the formal, practical, and popular registers that Salter (2011) describes. While they serve as prime examples of how state borders can be decoupled from territory (see Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012), particularly in reference to the EU border regime with its extensive border externalization practices (FitzGerald 2020; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Tan 2017; Moreno-Lax

and Lemberg-Pedersen 2019), their evasiveness so far limits their theoretical and empirical investigation. By adding the option of informal performance, this conceptual evasiveness of migration information campaigns can be pinned down and made visible.

As we have elaborated above, information campaigns denote borders by anticipating them and so informally maintaining their existence without performing them in a formal, practical or popular kind of way (see Salter 2011). For lack of a better word, we refer to them as bordering practices through the informal performance of borders not to distinguish them from the other three types of border performativity, but to make their evasiveness visible.

In our empirical analysis, we will look at the informal performance of the border by migration information campaigns by investigating who borders, i.e. who the disseminating actors on social media are and what kinds of dissemination patterns evolve.

Methodology

In order to answer our research questions about the central actors of the campaigns and their dissemination patterns on social media, we apply a multiple case study design and conduct social network analysis on Facebook and Twitter, based on which we will inductively code and then analyze actor types.

Cases

A multiple case study design enables us to trace various expressions of information campaigns selecting cases that are initiated and implemented by different migration governance actors. (Yin 2018). While this design allows potential difference and similarities to be highlighted between the cases, its focus lies on reporting each case as its own entity as an expression for a broader phenomenon, thus providing more robustness for our analysis (Yin 2018, Ch. 6), here migration information campaigns by different migration governance actors.

We focus on three information campaigns: *Rumours about Germany*, *Aware Migrants*, and *The Migrant Project*. All three campaigns have been launched after 2015 and differ in the actor types. Furthermore, all three are prominent, well-known campaigns, serving as appropriate examples for such campaigns in their different forms. They address (potential) migrants before their arrival in the EU where they, in principle, have the right to apply for asylum. The three campaigns pursue similar objectives: the announced goals are to inform migrants about the risks of irregular migration to support them in their informed decision-making about migrating (especially about irregular pathways) to counter rumors about migration, and to provide information on alternatives to irregular migration. They all host main websites and website content is distributed on different social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

The campaigns also differ in an important aspect for our paper i.e. their institutional set-up and thus the visibility of different actors behind the campaigns. *Rumours about Germany* is led, initiated, branded, and implemented by the German Federal Foreign Office, Germany's Foreign Ministry (Federal Foreign Office 2022). Launched in 2017, the website provides the centralized content platform for the German governments' communication efforts toward (potential) migrants. The campaign falls under the

competencies of the foreign ministry's strategic communication abroad, a branch within the ministry that is also concerned with diplomacy and issues such as disinformation, nation branding, and communication with non-state actors.

The *Aware Migrants* Campaign is initiated and funded by the Italian Interior Ministry and hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (International Organization for Migration 2022). According to Pécoud (2018, 1622), the IOM is "an intergovernmental organization, but at times seem [*sic*] to function like a private company, while also competing with civil society groups and NGOs." The relationship of the organization to sovereign states is a matter of debate: while its status as an intergovernmental organization means that it is governed by its member states, the lack of a binding agreement on migration[1] enables the IOM to take an "entrepreneurial attitude" (Pécoud 2018, 1626). In this sense, *Aware Migrants* is not a purely governmental campaign but a collaboration with one of the major players in international migration governance. The Italian Interior Ministry is mentioned on the website but not explicitly included in the campaign branding.

Finally, *The Migrant Project* has the least visible connection to EU governments (The Migrant Project 2022). Though not declared prominently on the campaign website, *The Migrant Project* is a strategic communication project run by Seefar, which describes itself as a "social enterprise" working also in the field of migration (Seefar 2022a). Seefar is funded by several supporters, among them EU ministries, UN agencies, foundations, and NGOs (Seefar 2022b). *The Migrant Project* is composed of a collection of several temporary campaigns in specific regions or countries and has, according to its website, staff on the ground and an info hotline for migrants.

In sum, all three campaigns have been engaged in strategic communication that addresses migrants outside of the EU directly about irregular migration post-2015. They are initiated and/or implemented by different types of migration governance actors, thus representing a broad sample. While explicitly government-branded campaigns (such as *Rumours about Germany*) might be shared more among other governmental actors, one could expect that *Aware Migrants* and even more so *The Migrant Project* will be circulated more by non-governmental actors.

Sample and Method

Data on these three separate campaigns were collected across Twitter and Facebook. Twitter Academic Research API was used to obtain Twitter data, while Facebook data

Table 1. Search Strings.

Campaign	Twitter	Facebook
Rumours about Germany	(#rumoursaboutgermany) OR ("rumours about germany") OR (rumoursaboutgermany.info)	#rumoursaboutgermany OR ("rumours about germany") Domain: rumoursaboutgermany.info
Aware Migrants	(#awaremigrants) OR ("aware migrants") OR (awaremigrants.org)	#awaremigrants OR ("aware migrants") Domain: awaremigrants.org
The Migrant Project	(@MigrantPrjct) OR (@migrant_project) OR (#themigrantproject) OR ("the migrant project") OR (themigrantproject)	"the migrant project*"

were queried using CrowdTangle, a public insights tool owned and operated by Facebook (CrowdTangle Team 2021). To establish the search strings (see Table 1), we screened the different campaigns on both Facebook and Twitter.

Social network analysis is well suited for the analysis of such data because it allows not only to investigate the type of information shared, but also the relational nature of the data – for example, who shares what with whom; the latter being particularly relevant for the purpose of this paper. Specifically, social network analysis is often used to analyze information spread on social media (e.g. Himelboim et al. 2017; del Vicario et al. 2017).

A total of 887 Facebook posts and 2569 tweets were collected for *Rumours about Germany*, 1519 posts and 2236 tweets for Aware Migrants, and finally, 1901 posts and 551 tweets for *The Migrant Project* campaign. The decision was taken to create networks based on URL co-occurrence in posts and tweets (for Facebook and Twitter data, respectively). Thus, if a Facebook profile A and a Facebook profile B share the same URL in one of their posts, the edge between node A and B is created. For Twitter, the procedure was virtually identical, but retweets (posts that contained @RT:) were filtered out, because they would artificially inflate the number of edges that the original account is connected to.

The resulting networks that were formed using this method consisted of multiple components (subgraphs that are disconnected from each other), the vast majority of which were consisting of two nodes (i.e. two accounts that shared the same link, but that no other account in the network had shared). All the campaign networks have a significantly lower density (the ratio of existing edges to all possible edges) that one would expect if edges were formed randomly. The full networks were 12.3 and 6.66 times less dense than random networks with the same number of nodes for the *Aware Migrants* networks (Facebook and Twitter, respectively), 8.71 and 1.73 times lower for the *Rumours about Germany* networks (Facebook and Twitter, respectively), and 15.12 times less dense for *The Migrant Project* Facebook network. All results are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The density comparison was done with a simple conditional uniform graph test. Therefore, a decision was taken to focus on the largest connected component (i.e. the largest collection of interconnected nodes). This would allow us to focus on an uninterrupted information spread of the campaign. The visualization of the component sizes and full networks is presented in the Appendix (see Figures A1 and A2). The largest components for *The Migrant Project* Twitter network consisted of only 6 nodes, therefore it was not further analyzed. The descriptives (node and edge counts) for these networks are provided in Table 2 below.

Once the networks were formed, nodes were manually categorized into one of the following categories: "Migration campaign", "non-state actors", "political/state/governance actors", "public profiles", "unidentified". These actor types were established through a three-step process which included the inductive coding and subsequent merging of

Table 2. Node and Edge Count for the Largest Components.

Campaign	Twitter Network		Facebook Network	
	Nodes	Edges	Nodes	Edges
Rumours about Germany	255	13962	114	1665
Aware Migrants	98	739	75	323
The Migrant Project	6	15	46	231

these codes into broader categories and finally developing actor types (see supplementary Table A1).

First, the accounts were screened and inductively coded according to their institutional affiliations (if any) and organizational features. In a second step, we merged some of the fine-grained codes, such as different media types, different government actor types, Facebook groups based on various interests (e.g. religion, hobbies, music), or charities into larger categories (e.g. media, government, interest groups, civil society). This process enabled us to gain detailed insights about the actors in the networks by merging the fine-grained, inductive codes into categories of actors. We also acknowledged the accounts that are typical for specific platforms, such as "public profiles" on Twitter which consist of an individual who tweets in their own interest, which made up a large group of the sample. Finally, we categorized these types further into governance/state/political actors to which we will refer to as "state actors" given that no political actors (e.g. parliamentarian) exists in the largest components and "non-state actors" including types such as migrant groups, media, volunteers etc. We will keep the types for "migration campaign" separately to account for accounts that do not reflect state actor involvement (but who might still be behind the campaigns) (see supplementary Table A1).

Findings

To identify actor types and understand the campaign dissemination patterns between them, we first report the results for identifying the most central actors for each campaign. After that we analyze the patterns of campaign dissemination on social media by these central actors and interpret how these patterns express informal border performance.

Central Actors

As a precondition for the robustness of our analysis we made sure that the ways actors share the campaigns are intended and not a random pattern. Visualization of the campaign networks is provided in Figure 1. A simple conditional uniform graph test showed that the density is 4.30 and 3.22 times lower for *Aware Migrants* largest component (Facebook and Twitter, respectively), 1.94 and 1.16 times lower for the *Rumours about Germany* largest component (Facebook and Twitter, respectively), and finally 2.25 times lower than a random network for *The Migrant Project* Facebook largest component. All results are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Lower density may indicate that the actors find forming a new edge (sharing a URL in this context) quite a costly action, meaning that for the largest components of the networks the actors deliberately chose to share the URLs with the campaigns and not share other unrelated URLs. Based on this precondition, we can safely assume that the networks of the campaigns we analyze are intended, i.e. URLs in relation to the campaigns are shared to actively disseminate their messages.

We now turn to looking at the centrality of actors within the largest components. Specifically, we investigate betweenness centrality (e.g. Wasserman and Faust 1994). Betweenness centrality is a measure of how well the nodes are structurally positioned with respect to the complete network. For example, a node that scores higher on betweenness centrality is in a structurally advantaged position because it interconnects
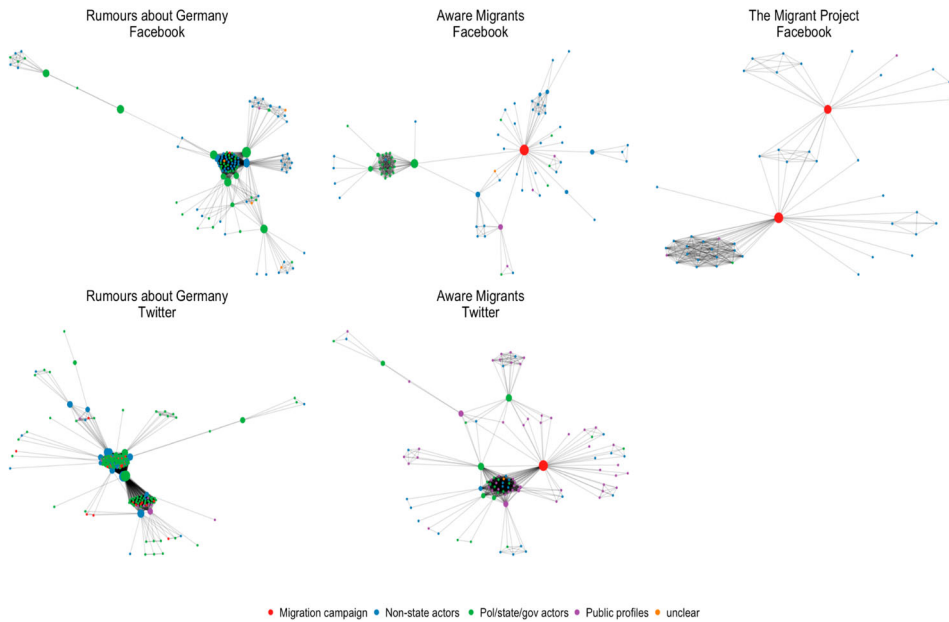
Figure 1. Visualization of the Campaign Networks.

other nodes and subgraphs in the network. The nodes in Figure 1 are sized according to their betweenness centrality scores. Additionally, we can see different types of actors dominate the top-10 list for different types of campaigns. We find that betweenness centrality is a concentrated resource within the campaign networks. This can also be seen in
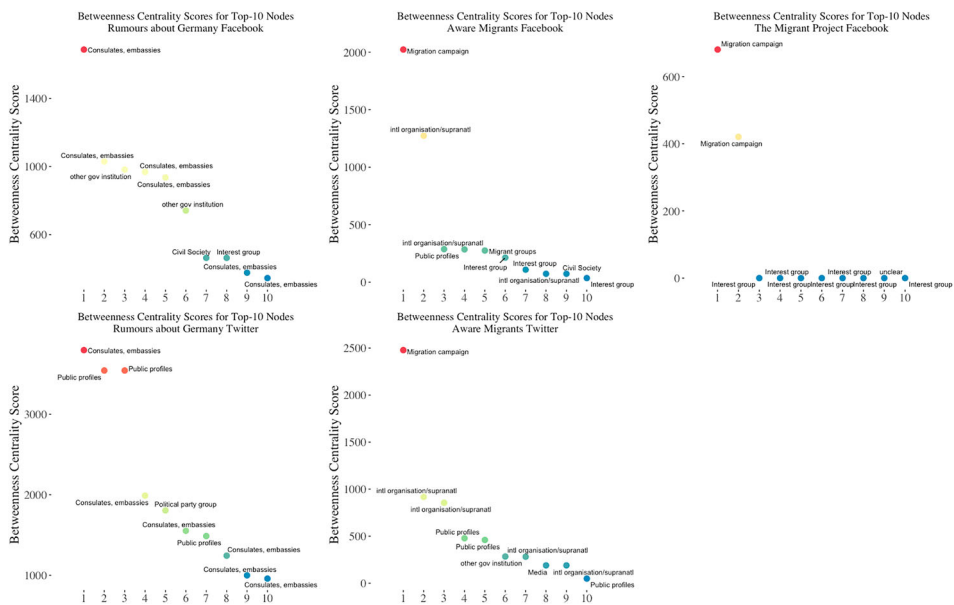

Figure 2. Betweenness Centrality of Top-10 Nodes Across the Campaign Networks.

Figure 2 below (showing less aggregated actor types for more detailed description, see also Appendix Table A1), where a sharp drop off is visible after the initial few nodes. Central actors, therefore, are more likely to spread information to different parts of the network or create a "bridge" for the information flow.

Based on these centrality scores, we can therefore identify the dominant actor types, i.e. the drivers, that disseminate each campaign. State actors, especially German embassies and consulates are central actors in *Rumours about Germany*. For *Aware Migrants*, UN and IOM organizations are main disseminators. *The Migrant Project* only focuses on its campaign accounts as central actors and non-state actors further disseminate the campaigns. In the following we will analyze these variations in further detail, providing insights into how the patterns emerging from the analysis make the ways in which the campaigns informally perform borders visible.

Dissemination Patterns and Informal Border Performance

Regarding *Rumours about Germany*, actor types and their dissemination patterns suggest a focus on performing the border by means of high visibility of state actors, a focus on "facts" provision about border controls, and so the rearticulation of national territory. The information flow of the *Rumours about Germany* is dominated by political/state/governance actors who occupy high betweenness positions – eight out of 10 nodes in the Facebook network are political/state/governance actors, the other two are non-state actors. For the same campaign on Twitter, seven out of ten are political/state/governance actors, the other being public user profiles. In the Facebook network (see Figure 1), the main domain "rumoursaboutgermany.info" is shared the most by state and political actors as well as a variety of interest groups. The presence of German embassies and consulates in San Francisco, Nicosia, but also Kampala, Yerevan or Islamabad suggests no clear patterns in distributing only in countries of origin or transit of irregular migration. Besides the centrality of state actors, especially German consulates and embassies, in disseminating the campaign, we also find non-state actors, for example, accounts affiliated with the right-wing party Alternative for Germany and German local voluntary support groups for refugees and asylum seekers. These non-state actors use associated campaign content (not a link from the main website) to publish support petitions for individual migrants or an early poster of the campaign. On Twitter the German Embassy in Afghanistan is among the most central actors, confirming the initial target region of the campaign since 2016. *Rumours about Germany* is frequently shared by individual Twitter accounts (public profiles) with embassies as central disseminators again. Most frequently, they disseminate the URL of the first published post from the campaign website, entitled "The biggest lies told by traffickers" (Federal Foreign Office 2020). Some of the users behind public profile accounts provide information that they work within institutions of the German government or are migration researchers.

The dominant role of state actors points to the attempt of the campaigners (the German government) to present the campaign to have an "official", purely informative character. The presentation of the campaign as official, authoritative information about laws and rules of immigration disseminated merely mostly among German state actors points to what Salter (2011, 66) has described as "formal performance" – the demarcation and enactment of an actual territory, made visible through the presence

of consulates. However, *Rumours of Germany* is also an expression of informality because, from the perspective of these actors, they are "merely" informing about the border for potential migrants without the actual enactment of such laws. *Rumours about Germany* therefore anticipates a specific territory, warning potential migrants of the formal procedures that start at the border. In other words, the campaign is directed at those who are thinking of reaching Germany and so no legal action can be taken before this border crossing happens. Information campaigns on social media for potential migrants are therefore not only a means of externalization (FitzGerald 2020), but a means of performing a supposed "line in the sand" – the territorial border – in an informal way, that is, not legally binding, but hinting at the laws that will be enforce once government and migrant meet via border controls.

Turning to *Aware Migrants*, the category "Migration Campaign" (i.e. an *Aware Migrants* social media account) holds the highest position with respect to betweenness in the Facebook component. Three political/state/governance actors are included in the top-10, the rest being non-state actors and one public profile. The Twitter network is quite similar in its actor composition (at least for the top-10 nodes) – the most strategically prominent place is occupied by the migration campaign node, with five political/state/governance actors, three public profiles, and one non-state actor in the top-10 (see Figure 2). National IOM branches (state/pol/governance actor type) and UN accounts ("IOM-UN migration", @UNmigration) are central disseminators. In a few instances, we also find public profiles with affiliations to the Italian government as disseminators. On Facebook, we find that campaign content is loosely shared by a diverse bunch of otherwise unconnected interest groups centering, for example, around groups engaging in religious practices, left-wing groups, or groups with a focus on anarchist politics, but also a few migrant groups. Furthermore, we also see that international organizations share amongst themselves with hardly any connection to more on-site, local accounts. Most frequently, IOM and UN Facebook accounts share an awareness-raising video[2] about the high death rate among people on irregular pathways, especially from Northern Africa over the Mediterranean.

The dominance of IOM and UN actors as disseminators points to a performance of the border through highlighting risks of irregular migration and international aid. Unlike *Rumours about Germany*, *Aware Migrants* does less evoke a territorial "borderline" but instead creates an image of a Mediterranean "borderzone", a space where bordering practices, governance actors, migrants come together, what relates to a more practical performance of borders that Salter (2011, 66–67) has described as the actual implementation of borders, especially when seen, as in our focus, from the perspective of migration governance actors. Nevertheless, this performance remains informal because it warns about and anticipates the actual implementation of borders. This warning particularly performed the border through the presence of IOM and UN actors and the focus on awareness-raising about the dangers of irregular migration: death, the necessity of aid, the absence of territories and so also of rights and safety. Migrants on irregular pathways are often aware of the dangers of their pathways and understand the presence of organizations such as IOM and UN on the ground to reflect humanitarian emergency (Vammen et. al 2022). The association of migration with humanitarian emergency where the border becomes "mobile" and detached from state territory (Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015), arbitrarily moved and expanded to

irregular pathways where migrants find themselves in danger and are stuck in transit. This evoking of emergency borderscapes on social media can be understood as an informal performance because it blurs the line between public and private lives, almost encroaching potential migrants' "intimate spaces" on social media with affective border discourses (Williams 2020, 1200). Furthermore, the dangers of these borderscapes are, once again, anticipated in these campaigns for the people who are still merely considering migration. The border is performed informally, warning and anticipating the dangers of irregular migration.

Finally, the Facebook network of *The Migrant Project* campaign is somewhat unique compared to the previously described networks in that only two nodes have any betweenness centrality scores – both of them are the official Migration campaign pages, the rest of the nodes in the network have 0 centrality. For *The Migrant Project* we could only identify a network that is connected to two specific areas where the initiative is active. The Facebook accounts "The Migrant Project – Edo" and "The Migrant Project – Lagos" are central disseminators on Facebook.[3] State actors and intergovernmental organizations are absent in this network. The two Facebook accounts have different national focal points but are connected by interest groups which share links to the pidgin language version of the campaign site. This campaign is the only one which links to organized Facebook events, which forms the most interrelated component of the network and is shared among local interest groups. The Facebook event advertises a lecture on "Local and foreign educational opportunities as an alternative"[4] to irregular migration, suggesting the initiative's more "hands-on" approach to irregular migration, engaging with local communities onsite. This suggests that *The Migrant Project*, although funded by national governments (among others) and (sub-)contracted by them, is more focused on local areas and getting in touch with migrants offline. The absence of any state actors in the form of international organizations or governments and the focus on offline events for opportunities in countries of origin almost suggests the aim to distract people from migrating and bordering on a local level.

One might argue that this is the most informal way of how borders can be enacted and performed: by providing potential alternatives to migration and anchoring campaigns within local space, *The Migrant Project* aims to push the border, this time as a potential destination for migrants, far away. Local get-togethers without the visible involvement of state actors but solely disseminated by non-state actors therefore almost disguises the objective of *The Migrant Project* – to dissuade migration. This, however, remains a performance since the campaign is funded by governments and international organizations engaged in migration governance (Seefar 2022b). This strategy is highlighted by the implementing actor behind the campaign itself, Seefar (2021), providing evidence that branding a campaign with political, state or governance actors decreases migrants' trust in the provided contents. In this case the border is performed as absence, helped by the presence of non-state actors and peer groups, instead of state actors, who take on "borderwork" on a local scale, close to people's daily lives (Rumford 2008). At the same time, *The Migrant Project* shows how the border can be performed through decoupling it from geographical territory in circumstances, the state (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012). *The Migrant Project* is a case of informal border performativity because it deformalizes the border, i.e. detaching it completely from "the state" and so working in the favor of the state actors behind the campaign. In other words, *The Migrant Project*

performs the border by deciding to not mention it and avoiding anything that suggests border controls, laws, and other bordering practices.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have empirically investigated migration governance actors' information campaigns as bordering practices that support the ongoing externalization of EU borders. We have focused on such campaigns on social media, as a so far under-explored link to facilitate the performance of borders from the perspective of governance actors, drawing from Salter's (2011) types of border performativity (formal, practical, popular). In particular, we have identified the central actors as driving disseminators of such campaigns on Facebook and Twitter and have analyzed the dissemination patterns in further detail. Each campaign highlights distinct patterns that all speak to what we suggest an informal performance of borders, which is characterized by bordering via informing and warning or distracting from the border and its rules (*Rumours about Germany*), border controls and violence (*Aware Migrants*), as well as making the border invisible (*The Migrant Project*). A focus on such informal ways of performing the border highlights the otherwise evasive nature of migration information campaigns, which governance actors frame as "mere" information, in a "just-saying" kind of way. A focus on how such campaigns nevertheless perform the border – exactly through such informality that does not have any immediate consequence on migrants – sheds light on the powerful strategy of evasion behind such "soft tools" of bordering. Besides unearthing such a strategy, a Critical Border Studies approach highlights how migration governance actors push, construct, or hide borders and notions about territory in order to manage migration.

Our findings therefore speak to the existing literature on borders as mobile, performed, intended, and fluid constructs (Amilhat Szary and Giraut 2015; Paasi 2021) – they are constantly in the making (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728), "sutured" into place (Salter 2011). Seen from the perspective of migration governance actors, we see that often, but not always, the idea of the border as a "line" that cannot be crossed is intended, although other ways such as evoking "borderzones" or even hiding the border are used to dissuade migration by "merely warning" about the risks of irregularity. In this way, our findings also highlight that migration campaigns as bordering practices serve as flexible tools for such actors to construct the meaning of "border" and "territory", thus helping powerful governance actors to use the notion of borders as it suits them (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012).

Having said so, it is important also to discuss the limitations of our analysis. We have focused on specific campaign cases to trace content that was produced with the involvement of governmental actors (e.g. through authoring or funding) from Europe. As with all social media data, we do not claim representativeness nor completeness of the networks. Data accessed via CrowdTangle and the Twitter Researcher API are limited by interaction thresholds. Nevertheless, we provide a first exploration of such campaigns which can be used for the development of more comprehensive sampling strategies to build a knowledge base about the connections and boundaries that have emerged around dominant migration and border policy discourses. Furthermore, although our case selection covers a range of different degrees of governmental involvement in such

campaigns, our sample is limited to three cases. In addition, given our focus, we can only provide a snapshot of communication evolving around governing irregular migration on specific social media, where we know that the campaigns have been disseminated first. We cannot say to what extent the messages were distributed on WhatsApp, Instagram, and on more local social networks. Our analysis cannot and does not attempt to make assumptions about the responses to the campaign messages from those actors involved in their dissemination on Facebook and Twitter. In this sense, it can neither define whether and what kind of border regime these campaigns constitute – nor whether they can constitute a "regime" in and of themselves.

More research should focus on the dimension of development over time, and also engage with the contestation around these campaigns that is possible on social media through subverting or countering campaign content through a critical post, for example. Future research could consider the contestation and subversion potential around social media in relation to information campaigns from the angle of borderscapes and the possibilities to reinvent or modify current official border discourses (Brambilla 2021). Furthermore, having contributed to grasping the evasiveness of such "soft tools" for bordering purposes, this research delivers important empirical insights that provide a steppingstone for much-needed future fieldwork on bordering practices on social media, as increasingly important sites of migration management, from a perspective of implementation as outlined by Côté-Boucher, Infantino and Salter (2014).

Having shed light on informal border performativity via migration information campaigns, a Critical Border Studies approach allows us to go beyond what is said and done to include or exclude via borders by dragging evasive bordering practices out in the open. In this way, a focus on bordering practices and border performativity also contributes to making migration governance more transparent which, ultimately, is also a necessary precondition for more accountability.

Notes

1. Unlike for asylum seekers and refugees.
2. For further information and as illustration, the video can be watched here: https://www.facebook.com/IOM/videos/10154456240144021/
3. Note, again, that we could not identify a coherent network for this case on Twitter, confirming the local, more event-based focus of the initiative that the campaigners did distribute on Twitter only to a limited degree. Twitter is furthermore not a particularly prominent platform for forming groups.
4. For illustrative purposes, the event invitation can be accessed here: https://www.facebook.com/events/3278918022171795/

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