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Yesterday I refused to participate to a @TEDx event. I honestly thought it was no big deal. Discussing with people made me discover that, apparently, TEDx has a lot of prestige -and reinforced my conviction to not participate.

A thread. 1/ <https://t.co/MIXA87Vxss>



The organizers invited me to participate. I had little knowledge of TEDx, I only knew they were brief conferences. I thanked them and, as usual, asked them to confirm there was an expenses refund and a cachet.

First bad surprise: speakers are unpaid. 2/

As a freelancer, my time is literally money.

I sometimes participate to events for free, if it's no profit stuff and I support the initiative. But it's my choice, not a given.

Anyway, since the location was close to my parents' home, I figured ok, why not. 3/

I then answer we should then agree on a date, and see if there is one good for both.

Second bad surprise: I cannot choose a date. It's an already planned event. 4/

And then, third bad news. I am expected to work with a team of their choice, to prepare a text of my talk. With a strict deadline, months before the event.

I speak in public since 20 years and I've never had to do that. I know how to prepare a talk by myself. 5/

To be clear: it's not a matter of pride.

It's a matter of *unpaid work*, that wasn't clearly defined up front.

As I said, my time is money. I'm not rich. I need to pay rent. The hours I spend doing this for free could be spent doing paid work. Or something that I love. 6/

So I told them that no, I'm not going to participate with these conditions, and that they should learn to respect the time and work of their guests, not treat them like employees. 7/

When I shared on Facebook my experience, among friends, many said that while they understood my POV, they considered TEDx to be a worthwhile investment in terms of visibility. 8/

Some people lamented that well, I refused something they could only dream of!

I was utterly confused. 9/

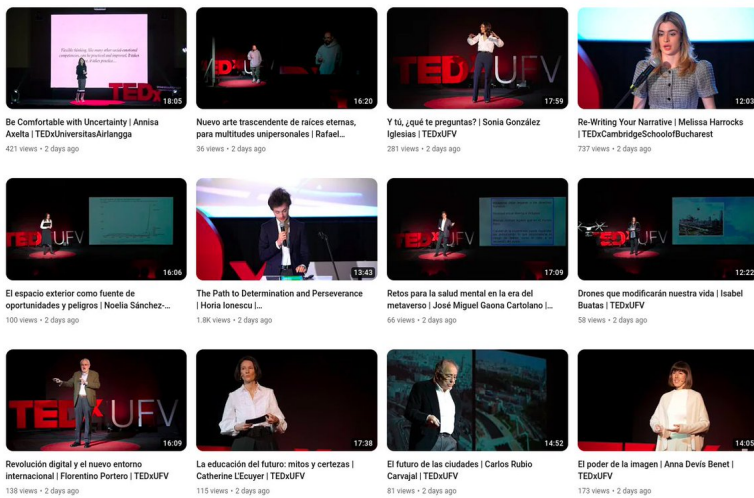
TEDx is no guarantee of excellence. They're literally chapters of volunteers, that organize events provided they follow TED guidelines. Anyone can organize short talks and brand them as "TEDx". 10/

It's no different from participating to a conference organized by your local chapters of mushroom enthusiasts, adhering to a short format. The only difference is the brand. 11/

Well, but then is TEDx guaranteeing you exposure? A channel followed by 38m people?

Apparently, nope. Most TEDx talks struggle to gather a few hundreds views on Youtube.

I have much more guaranteed exposure with people following my Instagram stories! 12/ <https://t.co/CqW7JtxXQW>



I have a science communicator friend who did a TEDx three years ago. Their video now has less than 2k views on Youtube. Good? Yes. But another video, of the same period, on a similar topic, with an Italian science youtuber made more than 7k views. 13/

So, TEDx is no guarantee of quality. There are lots of truly bad and useless TEDx talks out there, and it's not surprising, since they're basically amateur events. 14/

<https://hbr.org/2013/04/when-ted-lost-control-of-its-crowd>

All that TEDx is, is the brand.

It basically allows everyone to glow in the glamour of the TED brand, with no guarantee or significant added value.

But people fall for this, and get starry-eyed. 15/

But is this brand a net positive? I'm not so sure.

First of all, TEDx rules explicitly ask to *not* pay speakers. This basically means that "ideas worth spreading" are only the ones of privileged people, who can afford to work for free in the name of the TED brand. 16/

Second, I doubt that fueling an empty brand based on making knowledge and inspiration come from short, fancy talks is a positive.

Nothing against short talks in themselves, but that they become *the* glamorous format is problematic. Sometimes ideas need time and depth. 17/

TEDx rules explicitly disallow Q&A from the public, panels, and in general requires a rigid format, with talks prepared with a staff. All of which IMHO is the opposite of what is needed to spread ideas. 18/

Most problematically, while TEDx are not for profit, they often require paid tickets to attend. Rules say, no more than 100 people can attend a TEDx event.

So it's an event for privileged, by the privileged, that fosters a culture in which... 19/
...speakers work for free, while the public pays tickets.

Exactly the opposite of what it should be, ideally: free events to spread culture to everyone, with fairly paid speakers. 20/
And don't give me the «it's a no profit» excuse.

I bet TEDx events have to pay catering, hotels, venues etc.

Why not paying who delivers their content? Worst of it, why is it a *rule*? 21/

Refusing TEDx led me to discover it's even worse than I thought. An exploitative and elitist culture, founded on empty marketing, that I don't feel at all comfortable supporting. 22/

I can be glad to offer my time for free sometimes, but for true community, grassroots events. Schools and libraries for examples, or activist organizations, are welcome to propose! 23/

Of course, this is my own personal take on TEDx. If you feel it is, for you, a great opportunity, go for it! I'm not asking anyone to boycott anything. I just wanted to share why I am skeptical of it. 24/24