



**EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO FACT-CHECKING IN THE  
UKRAINE WAR:  
A CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
CONTENT**

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# BACKGROUND



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# RESEARCH QUESTION

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- ▶ In the context of censorship and information warfare: How do Twitter users react emotionally to in-group and out-group fact-checking and how consistent is the reaction across countries?
  - ▶ A) How do fact-checking organization address disinformation in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland and Sweden around the beginning of the war?
  - ▶ B) How do the respective Twitter populations react emotionally to fact-checks debunking Ukraine-supportive vs. Russia-supportive disinformation?



# BACKGROUND

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- ▶ Emotions play a role in international politics (e.g. La Cour 2020)
  - ▶ Emotions play a role in how quickly information spreads in social media (e.g. Vosoughi et al. 2018)
  - ▶ Fact-checking an important mean to fight disinformation (e.g. Iosifidis & Nicoli 2021)
  - ▶ Disinformation differs in the different European countries and also reactions (e.g. Erlich & Garner 2021, Fomina 2016, Lucas & Poneranzev 2016)
- ➔ Our study adds to the understanding of fact checking as a mean to address disinformation in a crisis in Europe



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# DATA



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# DATABASE

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A) Fact-checked stories from Italy, Germany, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark

- Collected via Google Fact Check Explorer using date information and language adjusted keywords (Ukraine/Russia/Kiew/Selenskyj)
- Collected via EDMO Fact-checking Repository
- Collected from websites of IFCN fact-checkers in the countries
- From December 2021 to March 2022
- Information collected: publishing date, URL, Headline, publisher

B) Twitter data collected based on the collected URLs



# A) CODING FACT-CHECKS

|                      |                         | claim level      |                   |             |
|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------|
|                      | fact-check story level  | addresses Russia | addresses Ukraine |             |
| Information Disorder | Fact-check rating False | positive         | positive          | coding      |
|                      | Fact-check rating False | negative         | negative          | pro-Ukraine |
|                      |                         |                  |                   | pro-Russia  |

positive claim shows respective country/allies in a positive light

negative claims shows respective country/allies in a negative light

→ pro-Ukraine story: Debunks disinformation that potentially harms Ukraine, from which Russia benefits

→ pro-Russia story: Debunks disinformation that potentially harms Russia, from which Ukraine benefits



# A) CODING EXAMPLES

|       | Coding      | Story title   | claim   | comment   |
|-------|-------------|---|---|---|
| Exp 1 | pro-Ukraine | Sure, Russian citizens continue to be treated in this Munich clinic                     | A Munich clinic would no longer treat Russian citizens  | claim shows <b>Russia</b> in a <b>positive light</b> as Russian citizens are punished for Russia's actions by foreign power, debunked as false information, therefore pro-Ukraine             |
| Exp 2 | pro-Ukraine | No, this video does not show media staged mass panic in Ukraine                         | Western media staged mass panic in Ukraine  | claim shows <b>Ukraine</b> in a <b>negative light</b> as country that is supported by the spread of false information by foreign powers, debunked as false information, therefore pro-Ukraine |
| Exp 3 | pro-Russia  | U.S. Secretary of State Blinken showed no photo from Ukraine at the UN Security Council | Blinken showed a photo at a U.N. Security Council meeting on the Ukraine conflict that proved an alleged attack by pro-Russian separatists on a kindergarten. | claim shows <b>Ukraine</b> in a <b>positive light</b> as victim of the Russian army and supported by western politicians, debunked as false information, therefore pro-Russia                 |
| Exp 4 | pro-Russia  | No, Russia's UN ambassador was not talking about toppling Donald Trump                  | Russian UN ambassador allegedly talking about former US president Donald Trump being overthrown   | claim shows <b>Russia</b> in a <b>negative light</b> as one representative spreads false information/ is overly optimistic, debunked as false information, therefore fact-check pro-Russia    |





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# PRELIMINARY RESULTS



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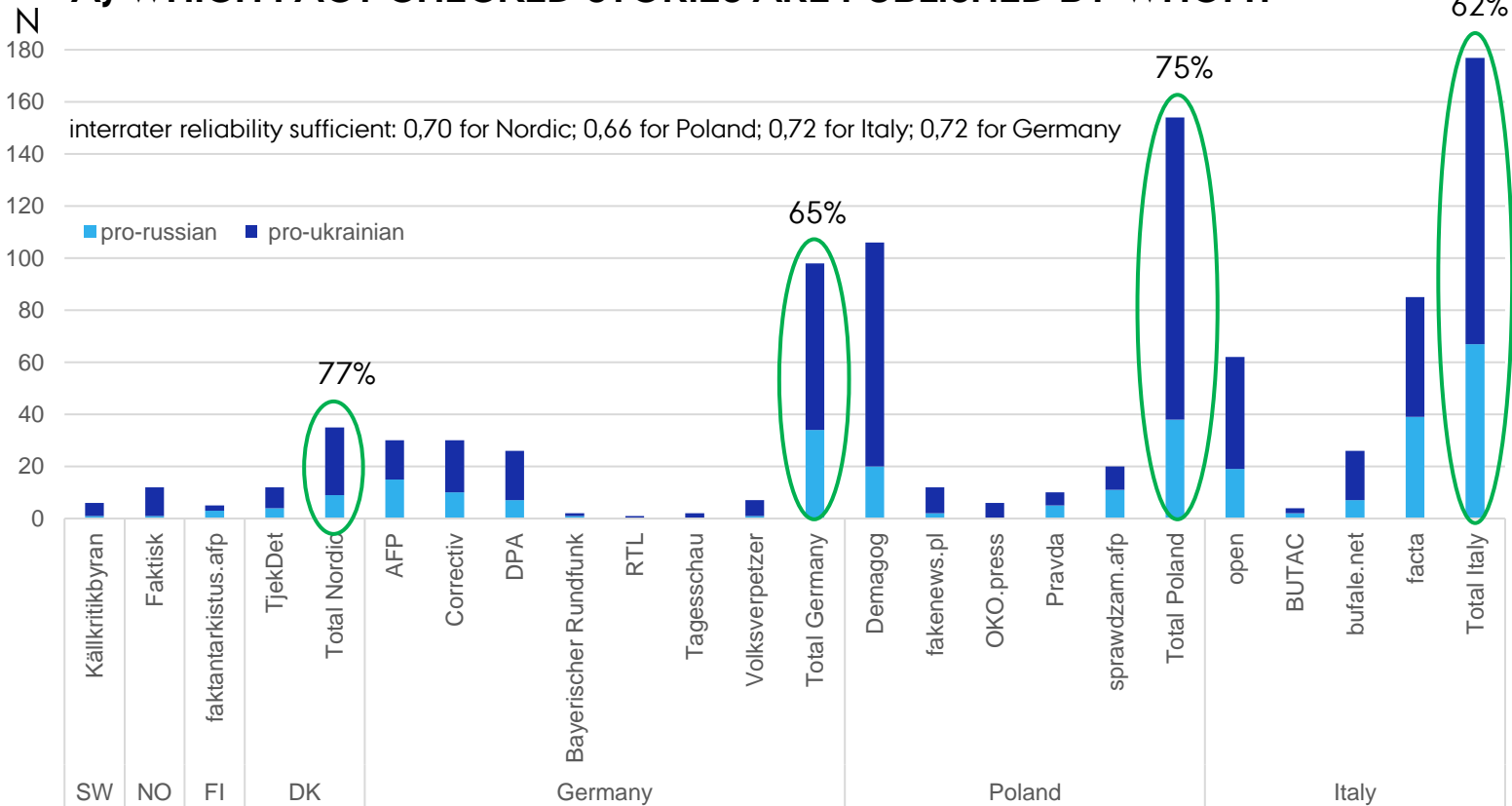
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# A) STORIES FOUND

- ▶ 464 stories published
- ▶ 304 unique stories of which 75% are debunked only once, ~14% twice and ~11% three times or more
- ▶ 68% of stories are pro-Ukraine



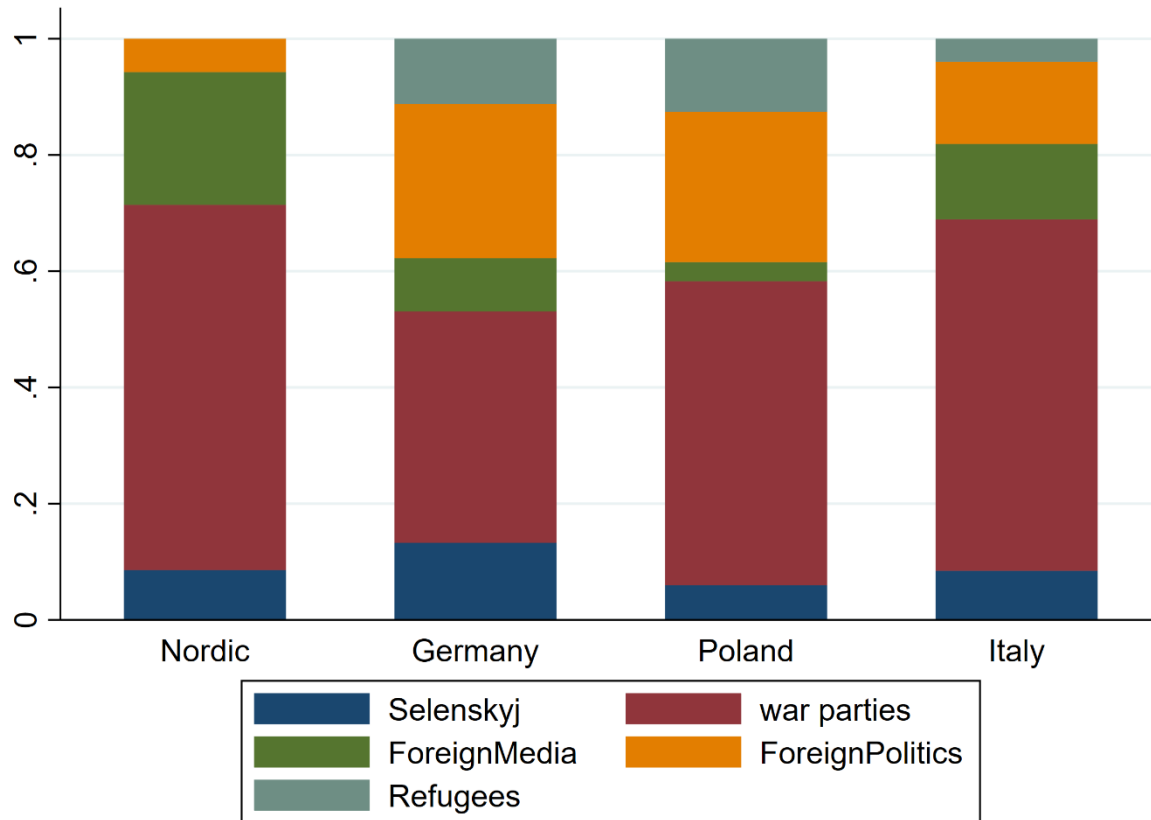
# A) WHICH FACT CHECKED STORIES ARE PUBLISHED BY WHOM?



→ Country differences in number of fact-checked stories

→ No differences between portion of pro-Ukraine stories (except Italy/Poland)

## A) WHICH TOPICS ARE ADDRESSED AND ARE THERE COUNTRY DIFFERENCES?



### Selenskyj:

Manipulated image shows the Ukrainian president holding a national team shirt with a swastika

### War parties:

No, no, no. This is not a video of the pediatric hospital bombed in Mariupol

### Foreign Media:

CNN tweet about destroyed hotel in Ukraine is fake

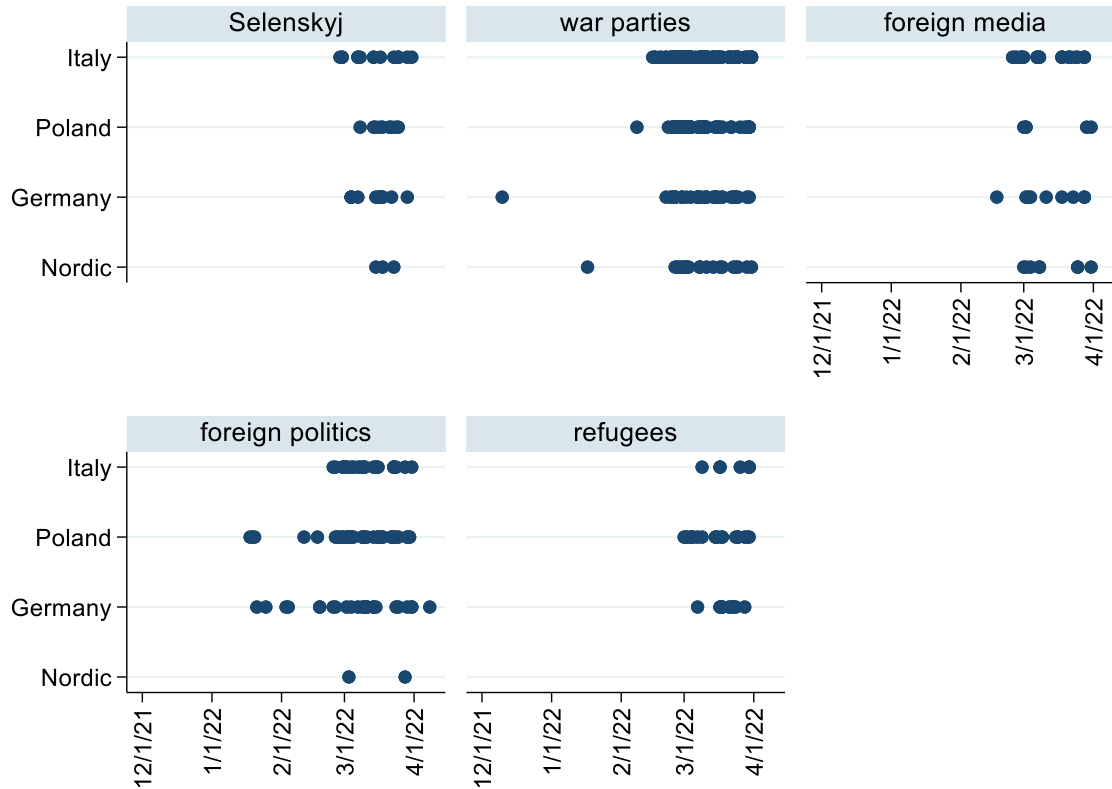
### Foreign Politics:

No, Swedish military aircraft have not "appeared" in Russia

### Refugees:

Do refugees get free housing? Fake news!

## A) WHEN WERE STORIES PUBLISHED?



→ Foreign Politics addressed earlier in Poland & Germany

→ Selenskyj/ foreign media & refugees later addressed than war parties & foreign politics

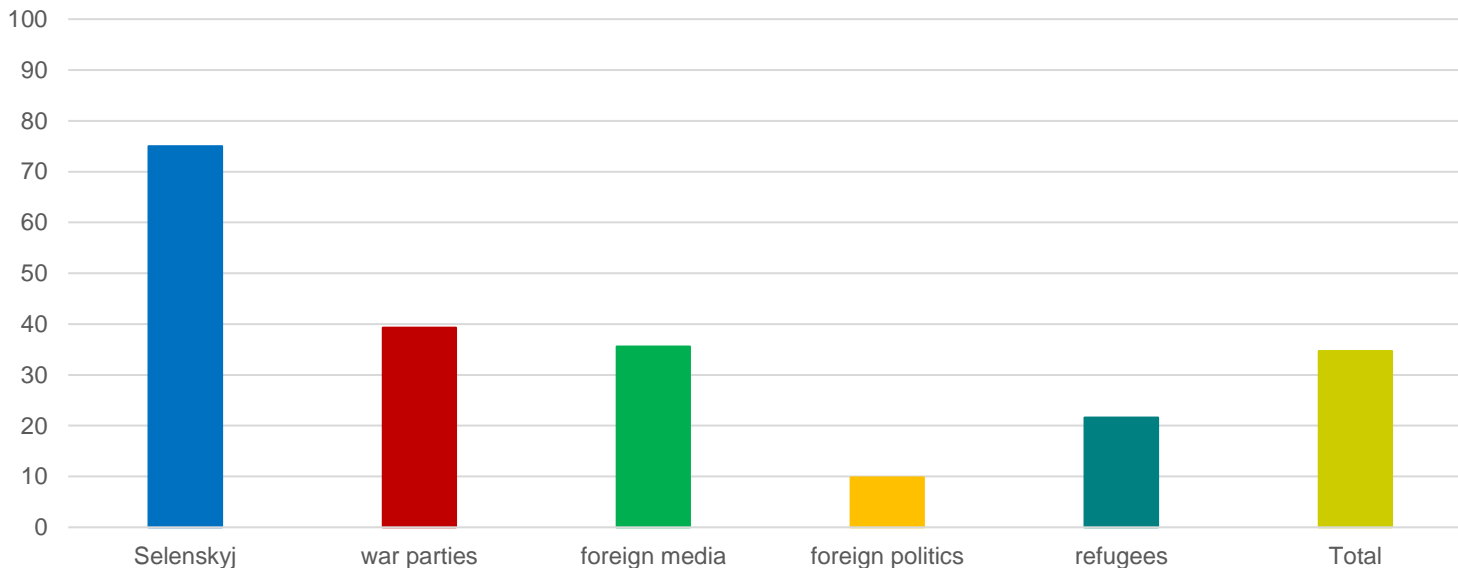
## A) CROSS-COUNTRY FACT CHECKING

- ▶ ~65% of stories are only reported in one country (~15% in 2; ~14% in 3; ~ 4% in 4; ~2% in 5 countries)
- ▶ ~52% of stories are reported more than once
- ▶ ~26% of stories that only are reported in one country are reported by several fact checkers in that country (DE: ~46%, Nordic: 0%, PL: ~ 21%, IT: ~24% )



## A) WHICH TOPICS ARE ADDRESSED IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES?

Percentage of stories debunked in more than one country by topic



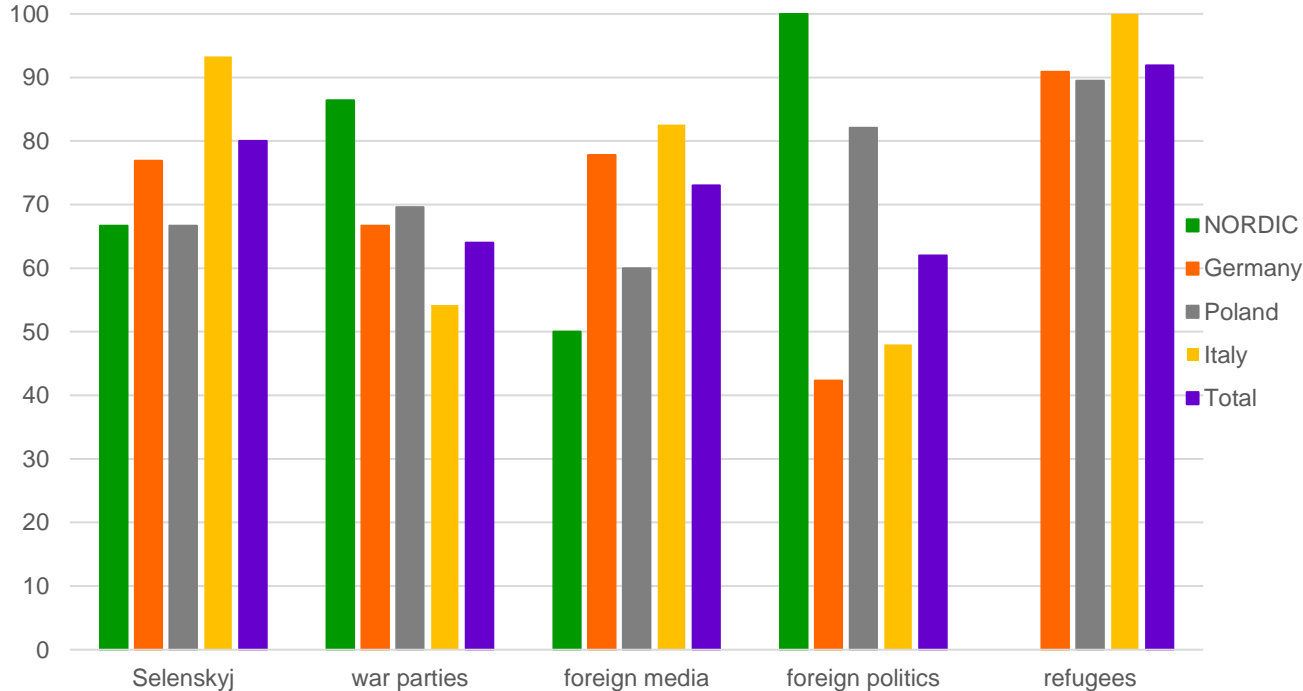
## A) EXAMPLES OF STORIES DEBUNKED IN MORE THAN ONE COUNTRY: MOST FREQUENT

| Story   | Fact-Checked         |
|---|----------------------|
| Journalist Bernie Gores died in both Afghanistan and Ukraine, CNN reports.      | IT→IT→IT/PL→DE/NO→DK |
| Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has fled Ukraine.                       | IT/DE→DE/DK→IT→PL→IT |
| Russia is spreading propaganda about Ukrainian bioweapons                       | SE→IT→NO→PL          |
| Misinformation on the victim of bombing in Ukraine is being disseminated online | IT→IT/PL→DK/FI→IT    |





## A) PERCENTAGE PRO-UKRAINE BY TOPIC AND COUNTRY



→ Selenskyj: pro-Ukraine, but less so in Nordic/Poland

→ War parties: bit less pro-Ukraine, but more so in Nordic/ Poland

→ Foreign media: more pro-Ukraine in Italy/Germany

→ Foreign politics: least pro-Ukraine, more so in Nordic/ Poland

→ Refugees: pro-Ukraine



## B) EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

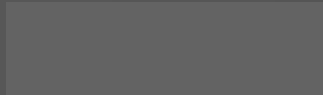
- VADER analysis:
  - Findings for Poland indicate that sentiments to pro-Ukraine and pro-Russia stories do not differ
  - Sentiments in Poland mostly neutral



# SUMMARY

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- More pro-Ukrainian stories: slight topic/ country differences
- Country differences in topics: e.g. Refugees less relevant in Italy and Nordic countries
- Reporting follows war: e.g. Refugees stories later
- More stories are country specific
- Those debunked in several countries: Selenskyj/ war parties less refugees/ foreign politics
- For Poland no differences in sentiments for pro-Ukraine/ pro-Russia stories



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# NEXT STEPS



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## A) FACT CHECKING

- How were claims disseminated → potentially analyse hyperlinks to sources
- More robust analysis for which stories are pro-Russian, travelling across countries

## B) EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

- Sentiment analysis for the other countries





# THANK YOU



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