The good, the bad, and the ugly

Anti-Ukrainian narratives on Polish Twitter

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The article focuses on anti-Ukrainian narratives spread on Twitter. We performed a Thick Big Data analysis of words and hashtags connected with anti-Ukrainian narratives. We collected 16,700 tweets from 25 January 2023 to 22 February 2023, focusing on the most popular and commented ones. Furthermore, we conducted multi-modal narrative and rhetorical analyses to distinguish the typology of narrations. This article sheds light on how vital narration in disinformation campaigns and media warfare on social media is. Most tweets contained narration highlighting the alleged appropriation of Polish culture by displaying Ukrainian nationality. Such narration strongly influences a sense of insecurity and alienation in one's own country. We discovered that Ukrainian-related posts have negative sentiment and frequently spread disinformation.

Keywords: narration, Twitter, disinformation, war, Ukraine

1. Introduction

Following the Russian incursion into Ukraine, many data analyses emerged, examining the magnitude and sentiments of tweets pertinent to the conflict (Shevtsov et al. 2022). Additionally, studies scrutinizing pro-Russian narratives within the context of Crimea's annexation were published (Golovchenko 2020). However, there needs to be more scholarly work focusing on the evolution of social media content regarding Polish-Ukrainian relations post-2022. Conducting such research is necessary to monitor the social change taking place in the perception of refugees from Ukraine, especially in Poland, which is the country hosting the highest number of them.

Polish-Ukrainian relations have long been marked by contentious historical events, such as Operation Vistula, the Massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, and World War II (Copsey 2008; Motyka 2018). These events have left

deep scars and have often been used as a tool for building exclusionary narratives in international relations and political communication. As Krzyżanowski (2020) highlights, anti-immigrant discourses in Poland frequently draw upon traditions of anti-pluralism, which favour a homogenous national identity over multicultural integration. This historical backdrop is reactivated and manipulated in modern social media narratives, often to mobilize negative sentiments against Ukrainian refugees.

Moreover, as Bilewicz highlights, due to the lack of opportunities of sharing the trauma of World War II, Poles continue to carry the feeling of being victimized (Bilewicz 2024). According to him, the unpredictable scale of help and assistance to war refugees, was caused precisely by evoking images and memories of Poland being invaded by Russia, just like Ukraine in 2022. An additional mobilizing factor was the lack of faith in the government's effectiveness, after all, no country would be able to take in a million refugees at a time.

According to a report compiled by the Polish fact-checking organization and the Institute of Media Monitoring (Demagog 2023), in November 2022, approximately 73.5 thousand Polish-language social media posts and comments negatively referenced Ukraine and Ukrainians. The volume of such posts witnessed an 88% surge compared to the preceding month, with Twitter identified as the platform hosting a staggering 92% of all anti-Ukrainian posts.

This social media activity could increase political polarization in light of the upcoming parliamentary elections and referendum in Poland in October 2023. It is connected with the eight years of governance by the conservative party (Law and Justice Party — Prawo i Sprawiedliwość). It promoted negative messages about refugees and, in previous electoral campaigns, warned of refugees and shared xenophobic and Islamophobic content (Krzyżanowski 2018).

However, anti-Ukrainian narratives in Poland are not a novel development within the sociopolitical landscape, primarily attributed to enduring historical disputes (Copsey 2008; Motyka 2018). Polish-Ukrainian relations have been invariably entwined with contentious historical events, such as Operation Vistula, the Massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, and World War II.

Pre-2022, Polish interaction with Ukrainians was primarily limited to economic migrants seeking employment opportunities (Konieczna 2019). Recent data from CBOS reveal an upsurge in Polish empathy toward Ukrainians over the years (CBOS 2022). However, the statistics for January 2023 depict a concerning 8% shift in public sentiment regarding the treatment of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. In January 2023, 10% of survey respondents perceived the Polish attitude towards Ukrainian refugees as negative (a stark rise from 2% in April 2022), and a further 1% classified the sentiment as strongly negative (an increase from 0%).

Olchowski (2019) posits that social media platforms serve as conduits for the spread of pro-Russian narratives and misinformation about strained Poland-Ukraine relations. He identifies bots and trolls as the primary facilitators of such actions, designed to incite instability and manipulate public opinion. Debates about immigration held on Twitter spread widely and often gather extreme emotions and polarized views (de Rosa et al. 2021). Moreover, we have to acknowledge that Twitter as a social media was used as an online propaganda tool. Previous research, covering the subject of war between Russia and Ukraine, signalizes that the most widespread narrative portrayed Ukraine as a victim in this conflict (Suciu 2022).

Our research aims to shed light on the anti-Ukrainian narrative proliferating on Twitter after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This exploration fills a critical research void, as social media has become a crucial information source regarding the Ukrainian conflict. We employed qualitative research methodologies to discern a typology of narratives, identifying three predominant anti-Ukrainian narratives within our study's scope. Moreover, we investigated disinformation trends within the specified content.

RQ1: Which narratives are exposed in anit-Ukrainian discourse on Polish Twitter?

RQ2: How anti-Ukrainian narratives can be situated in Polish political discourse?

Coinciding with the advent of innovative information technologies is the concurrent emergence of sophisticated disinformation strategies (Chamberlain 2010). Disinformation has become an important tool in the information warfare arsenal (Steinfeld 2022; Golovchenko, Hartmann, and Adler-Nissen 2018). Sowing fear and disparagement narratives are included in military training and exercises (Ventsel et al. 2021), and winning in persuading the Western audience is critical in many international military conflicts (Hauter 2023; Asmolov 2021), including the war on Ukraine (Makhortykh and Bastian 2022). Overall, exposing information warfare strategies requires detailed analyses based on narrative ontologies (Wagnsson and Barzanje 2021).

According to van Dijk (van Dijk 1993), "narratives are forms of discourse that enact and reproduce social and political power, used by dominant groups to legitimize their control and by marginalized groups to challenge it". Thus, in this research we define narratives as a way to construct identities, power relations, and social realities. Narratives in discourse analysis are fundamentally about the intentional construction of meaning, where different actors — be they state institutions, media, or individuals — deploy narratives to advance specific agendas or challenge dominant power dynamics. By structuring discourse in a way that

emphasizes certain facts or viewpoints while omitting others, narratives play a critical role in influencing public opinion and reinforcing or undermining political power.

To distinguish one narrative from another, we followed a set of criteria based on both content and form (Riessman 2014). The first criterion is the themes or central topics that the narrative addresses. For example, in anti-Ukrainian discourse, recurring themes might include concerns about national security, economic strain, or cultural differences (Somers 1994). The second criterion involves the framing of these themes — whether Ukrainians are framed as victims, aggressors, or competitors etc. (Ottatti, Renstrom, and Price 2014; Entman 1993). Another important factor is the emotional appeal of the narrative, such as fear, sympathy, or resentment. Emotions play a crucial role in understanding how these narratives gain traction and influence public opinion. It can be said, that they are strategically embedded within the discourse to elicit specific responses from the audience. Finally, we distinguished the use of rhetorical strategies such as metaphors, repetition, and symbolism helps distinguish how a narrative is constructed and how it seeks to influence its audience.

2.   Discursive Traditions and Anti-Pluralism in Poland in the context of relations with Ukraine

To fully understand the anti-Ukrainian narratives and broader anti-immigrant sentiments present on Polish social media, it is essential to situate these within Poland's historical and contemporary discursive traditions. As Krzyżanowski (Krzyżanowski 2020) argues, anti-immigrant discourses in Poland and Central Europe often follow established traditions of anti-pluralism, characterized by the rejection of multiculturalism and a defence of an ethnically homogenous national identity. The concept of anti-pluralism plays a significant role in understanding the discursive traditions underlying anti-Ukrainian narratives in Poland. Anti-pluralism is characterized by a rejection of diversity, an emphasis on cultural homogeneity, and an opposition to the coexistence of multiple ethnic or cultural groups within a society. These narratives are frequently de-contextualized and re-contextualized across different social and political moments, shaping public perceptions and state policies toward immigrants, refugees, and minorities.

Anti-immigrant, xenophobic and racist discourse was widely distributed in Polish media starting from 2015, when the PiS (Law and Justice Party) won the elections (Krzyżanowski 2020). In their emotional messages, refugees from Africa were a threat to Polish values, families and safety, leading to the creation of a moral panic and a discursive shift, which was also later described as 'new normal',

due to the normalization of radical ideas and ideologies in the mainstream politics (Krzyżanowski et al. 2022).

In the case of Polish-Ukrainian relations, historical grievances, stemming from World War II and post-war resettlement, have been reactivated and manipulated to fit current anti-immigrant and anti-refugee discourses (Bilewicz, Cichocka, and Soral 2015). The Polish right-wing political landscape has capitalized on such discursive traditions, framing Ukrainian refugees not only as a burden but also as potential threats to Polish identity and resources, thus aligning with broader narratives of exclusion and xenophobia that have dominated much of the anti-pluralist rhetoric in Poland promoted by right-winged parties.

On the other hand, the increasing pervasiveness of disinformation across social media platforms has evolved into a potent instrument for public opinion manipulation, particularly discernible in election cycles and broader political contexts. Noteworthy instances include the propagation of Russian propaganda during the 2016 U.S. elections (Badawy et al. 2019) and orchestrated narratives around the former Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny (Alieva, Moffitt, and Carley 2022). By 2023, disinformation regarding the war in Ukraine has surfaced as the preeminent subject of fraudulent news, as per EDMO reports (EDMO 2023). This particular disinformation subject was notably impactful on political discourse in Poland, which has the biggest number of border crossings with Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees per country (UNHCR 2023).

Moreover, it must be stated that a minority of research covering anti-refugees Twitter narrations concentrate on refugees from Ukraine. Earlier studies conducted on hate speech against Ukrainians indicated increases in supporting anti-migrant attitudes, even in the years 2014–2016 (Winiewski et al. 2017). Now we can observe further development of this phenomenon. Anti-Ukrainian tweets are reaching wide followers and due to controversial, strong beliefs are causing strong emotional responses and comments.

There are papers covering the dichotomy of refugee narrations between mainstream media and Twitter, focusing on Syrian refugees (Nerghes and Lee 2019). There are also studies on the refugee crisis narratives on Twitter in the years 2015–2016 (Siapera et al. 2018; Gualda and Rebollo 2016) and anti-refugee mobilization in social media after attacks in Koln in 2015 (Ekman 2018). Thus, it is significant to conduct research concentrated on war refugees from Ukraine, which will broaden the picture of the public debate in this area in Poland and fill the research gap.

3.   Methods

We agree with the statement by Denzin and Lincoln that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods has never been more blurred (Denzin (ed) and Lincoln 2005). This state of affairs got more complicated when computational methods were widely employed in the field of social science. In this paper, we implemented mixed methods research combining quantitative and qualitative approaches — Thick Big Data (Jemielniak 2020). This method is based on computational analysis of large datasets combined with qualitative analysis (Jemielniak and Stasik 2021). Jemielniak argues that the traditional division between qualitative and quantitative methods limits the potential insights we can gain from research. "Thick big data" bridges this gap by using computational tools to analyse vast amounts of data (quantitative) while also applying ethnographic, interpretative methods (qualitative) to understand the context and deeper meanings behind the numbers. Thus, we performed a quantitative analysis of anti-Ukrainian tweets, utilizing the manual coding of the purposive sample. We studied their performance and reception, and used the results as a pilot for a narrative study of their content. According to the classification of mixed methodology, this approach can be described as explanatory sequential mixed methods (Creswell, John W., J. David Creswell 2017).

Mixing computational and ethnographic approaches is increasingly popular (Bornakke and Due 2018; Charles and Gherman 2019), as possibly being the best of both worlds (Ophir, Walter, and Marchant 2020; Ducheneaut, Yee, and Bellotti 2010) and allowing a more targeted qualitative focus to meaningfully selected parts of larger quantitative datasets (Ganczewski and Jemielniak 2022; Górska, Kulicka, and Jemielniak 2022).

In the view of sociolinguistics, the analysed stories can be classified as small stories; therefore, fragmentation and differentiation of stories can be observed (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2019). As the researchers observe, *small stories then frequently emerge as the counter-stories, the stories that are not encouraged or allowed in specific environments, that do not fit expectations of who the tellers should be and what stories they tell* (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2019). In this context, the anti-Ukrainian narration shared in social media can be seen as breaking the social taboo in Polish society (Nerghes and Lee 2019). This taboo is created by official government positions, which, from the very beginning of the war, declare support for refugees from Ukraine.

To probe the proliferation of anti-Ukrainian narratives on Twitter in Poland, we employed an array of strategies, including hashtags such as #StopUkrainizacjiPolski (#Stop the Ukrainianization of Poland), #ToNieNaszaWojna (#It isn't our war), #NiedlaWojny (#No for war), and keyword searches including "Ukry"

(Ukrainians), "Ukraińcy" (Ukrainians), "ukraińscy faszyści" (Ukrainian fascists), "Wołyń" (Volhynia), "bandera" (Bandera), "banderowcy" (banderists), "Wielka Polska" (Great Poland), "UPA" (The Ukrainian Insurgent Army), "Ukropolin" (Ukrapolish) and "fuck Ukraine." We also utilized the snowball method to identify interconnected accounts, broadening our analytical scope. We relied on a Python scraper for data collection — as it allowed us to gather the full spectrum of data beyond the limits of the available API at the time. The scraper code was based on the SNScrape script.

For the subsequent analysis of the extracted tweets, we calculated and selected the most engaging Tweets for more nuanced qualitative research (Philipp, 2014). The dataset of all tweets containing the chosen hashtags comprised 16,700 tweets collected from January 25 to February 22, 2023. Our primary objective was to obtain content published by users with selected hashtags. We meticulously selected the 50 most popular and extensively commented tweets from this corpus, for our in-depth multimodal narrative and rhetorical analysis to identify salient features of disinformation and hate speech. The analysis included a qualitative sentiment analysis. Such an approach was also presented in research covering anti-refugee discourse (Kreis 2017; Avraamidou and Ioannou 2022). Furthermore, we closely examined the content of each Tweet at the multimodal level.

We established a coding key derived from observations on the most widely engaged tweets to codify the data effectively. This key was bifurcated into five distinct sections: Metadata, Contents, Basic Message, Narrative, Rhetorical Analysis, and Visual Analysis. Each section encapsulated specific interrogatives and categories tailored for a thorough narrative and rhetorical examination (see the supplement for coding details). We utilized a thematic analysis framework to examine the narratives present in social media content, focusing on recurring motifs and linguistic markers. The thematic analysis allowed for a systematic identification and categorization of anti-Ukrainian narratives, employing inductive coding to allow themes to emerge directly from the data rather than imposing predetermined categories. To strengthen the robustness of the study, we also employed iterative coding, which involved repeated cycles of coding to refine and validate the identified themes.

We followed with a narrative analysis of the content of the selected tweets. Narratives are vehicles of meaning by which we organize our understanding of the world (Czarniawska and Gagliardi 2003). Zeroing in on emerging narratives, as well as studying their types and recurring stories, helps in understanding the deeper layers of the social fabric (Lewis 2017; Avital, Jensen, and Dyrby 2023; Patuelli and Saracco 2023), allowing for decoding and interpreting of the culture war (Thomas 2016; Alieva, Robertson, and Carley 2023). Twitter's narrations differ from those individuals tell (Sadler 2018). Stories found in social media

can reach various types of users; the user isn't defined as in traditional conversation. Thus, users with large audiences can change the social debate and influence their followers. Sadler (2018, p. 2) claims that "such collective action, and the influence of elite users with large followership, loosely defined, but nonetheless relatively stable, narrative constellations — groups of tweets loosely bound together through the repetition of keywords and hashtags and connections established through networks of retweeting and favouring — emerge over time". In the context of those interconnections, we can distinguish diverse categories of narrative structures typical for specific thematic threads. According to the assumptions of this method, it is first necessary to distinguish "the noise" of irrelevant entries to the topic and extract those having an essential role in the database. Conducting a narrative analysis on Tweets is bounded by the characteristics of this medium. Twitter promotes posts with strong emotions and dynamic discussions (Bouvier and Rosenbaum 2020). Therefore, our research included a comprehensive analysis of emotions bounded by images and texts appearing in posts.

4.   Analysis

4.1   Metadata

Within the analysed corpus, the tweet with the highest popularity, gauged by likes and retweets, amassed 2,328 likes and 772 retweets. This tweet was published on February 13, 2023. It was a tweet about the Ukrainian restaurant in Warsaw called "Lviv Table" ("Lwowski Stolik"). The author of this tweet pointed out that the restaurant has decorated the entrance with the colours of the UON-UPA (The Ukrainian Insurgent Army). "I appeal to the residents of Warsaw to urgently intervene. The peak of the insolence of Ukrainians living in Poland reaches its zenith!!!" — wrote the author.

The mean count for likes stood at 961, with a standard deviation of 428, while the retweets averaged 205, with a standard deviation of 127. As for replies, the most engaging tweet attracted 683 replies and was published on February 14, 2023. The mean reply count was 123, with a standard deviation of 116. These statistics elucidate a substantial variability in the popularity of the analysed posts.

Our examination revealed that a mere two tweets within the analysed set were retweets, underscoring a preference for original content among users. Furthermore, a significant proportion of tweets, though not retweets in the strictest sense, incorporated screenshots of content from other accounts. Notably, our analysis illuminated that the majority of user dialogues were located within the comment sections rather than dispersed across user profiles via the retweet functionality to

comment on others' tweets. This finding suggests a tendency for discourse to be contained within the context of specific posts.

4.2   Contents

In the coding category contents, we included information about types of multimedia in each tweet, such as videos, texts, meme, photos, hashtags, links and mentioned profiles. Every tweet in our analysis contained textual content and diverse forms of media were interspersed: 23 tweets incorporated photos, 14 featured videos, one deployed a meme, and six referenced an external link. When considering the volume of likes, tweets interspersed with photos or videos consistently outperformed those devoid of additional media content. In contrast, hashtags did not appear to hold significant sway within our dataset, with a sparse utilization of only three unique hashtags. Moreover, user mentions were similarly scarce, with only five distinct profiles invoked. Notably, the profile of the Law and Justice (PiS), the right-wing populist ruling party was cited in three separate tweets, standing out in the modest pool of profile mentions.

4.3   Basic message

The coding category "Basic Message" encompassed a wide range of elements that described the core themes and underlying messages present in the tweets. Specifically, this category examined the main subject of each tweet, which appeal to society, politics, energetics, or culture, with a maximum of two themes identified per tweet. Additionally, it included an analysis of whether there was an explicit conflict present in the tweet. The coding also identified characters depicted in the tweets, both in positive and negative light, and paid particular attention to the use of anti-Ukrainian nouns and negative adjectives, which helped in understanding how individuals or groups were described derogatorily to evoke hostility toward Ukrainians. This analysis also incorporated the presence of calls to action, and provided descriptions of up to three main anti-Ukrainian arguments and pro-Russian arguments present in each tweet.

Moreover, the coding category focused on identifying specific historical references and symbols that often appear in the analysed tweets, such as references to Nazism, Bandera, UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), or the Wagner Group, all of which serve to invoke negative historical associations. The inclusion of references to historical trauma (e.g., the Volhynian massacre or World War II) further allowed us to understand how historical grievances were employed to strengthen the narrative of distrust and hostility. Finally, the emotional tone of each tweet was categorized into four main emotions: fear, anger, indignation, and contempt.

These emotions were coded to understand the primary affective strategies used to persuade or manipulate the audience, with particular attention to how these emotions were utilized to mobilize anti-Ukrainian sentiment and legitimize exclusionary discourses. This multi-faceted coding framework provided a nuanced understanding of the underlying mechanisms in anti-Ukrainian narratives and how these messages were structured to influence public perception and incite negative reactions.

The majority of the analysed tweets delved into societal and political discourse. We discerned a variety of primary themes within some tweets, such as politics blending with society or culture merging with societal elements. Culture, as a category, was generally deployed in instances where users broached national cultural themes, often representing culture as a sphere of Polish life and tradition being eclipsed by the influx of Ukrainian refugees.

Among the 50 scrutinized tweets, 46 underscored some form of conflict, consequently portraying negative characters. This content is not only spreading hate speech against Ukrainians but also violates taboos, as mainstream media and government promote support for Ukraine and war refugees. The positive portrayal was predominantly reserved for Poles staunchly defending their national values, with Russia and Hungarian politician László Toroczkai being exceptions. In contrast, negative portrayals extended to Ukraine, President Zelensky, Ukrainian refugees, President Joe Biden, President Andrzej Duda, the Polish government (given their support for Ukraine), Law and Justice Party (PiS) politicians, and Polish celebrities Radosław Majdan and Małgorzata Rozenek-Majdan, as well as the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA, Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiia). While the prevailing sentiment within the analysed material was negative, only 9 tweets explicitly called for action.

Linguistically, anti-Ukrainian sentiments manifested in 27 tweets through derogatory nouns and in 18 tweets via denigrating adverbs. Typical instances involved replacing negative adjectives with deprecatory phrases like "Ukrainian," "savages from Ukraine," or labeling Poles aiding Ukrainian refugees as "Ukrophiles." Curse words associated with Ukrainians surfaced in some tweets. Though the emotional spectrum was broad, indignation (17) and anger (15) were most prominent. Other sentiments included contempt (11) and fear (8), the latter often elicited by narratives about crimes committed by Ukrainian refugees.

Indignation and anger frequently surfaced in relation to narratives of Ukrainian cultural "appropriation" and the display of Ukrainian national symbols. Historical events, like the Volyn Massacre or attacks by the UPA on Polish troops, often elicited these emotions. References to national traumas occurred in 11 tweets, with 6 alluding to the UPA and 4 invoking Stepan Bandera (leader of OUN-B), indicating a deliberate effort to heighten the polarity between Poles and

Ukrainians. Notably, the pro-Russian narrative positions Poland and Ukraine as adversaries (Olchowski 2019), and the mention of Stepan Bandera is considered a crucial element in narratives framing modern Ukraine from a Polish perspective, given the historically negative context.

We identified anti-Ukrainian sentiments in 48 tweets, categorizing these arguments into six main themes, encompassing the display of Ukrainian culture, the establishment of Ukrainian restaurants in Poland, crimes committed by Ukrainian refugees, financing the Ukrainian war through Polish taxes, perceived hypocrisy of Polish politicians supporting Ukrainians, and a perceived dismissal of past Ukrainian crimes against Poles. Pro-Russian arguments, identified in 7 tweets, primarily justified Russian military actions and cautioned against provoking a nuclear-armed Russia.

Moreover, the discourse identified in the analysed tweets can be situated within the Polish political scene by considering the alignment and contradictions between popular social narratives and official government stances. The majority of the tweets present anti-Ukrainian sentiment and paint a narrative in stark contrast to the Polish government's official support for Ukraine and its acceptance of Ukrainian war refugees. This reflects a broader tension between mainstream political endorsements of support, led by the former government from with the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and President Andrzej Duda, and grassroots or opposition voices that criticize such actions, often positioning themselves as defenders of Polish national values. The analyzed content revealed the existence of a significant counter-narrative that utilizes historical grievances, national traumas, and fears of cultural displacement to frame the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees as a threat to Polish society. Such a portrayal directly contrasts with the Polish government's outward display of solidarity and positions segments of the population against these political initiatives.

4.4   Narrative and rhetorical analysis

Within the subsequent section of our coding key, we delved into the textual content of the tweets, delineating rhetorical and narrative techniques therein. Our primary observations culminated in the creation of a typology for the three most prevalent narratives, a methodology grounded in critical discourse analysis, which asserts that language itself is a conduit of ideology, and it "occupies a pivotal, yet often overlooked, role in perpetuating, producing, and reproducing societal inequalities" (Lin 2014). We classified the narratives into three principal categories:

1. Narratives centred around crimes committed by Ukrainians — encapsulated in 5 instances.
2. Narratives highlighting the alleged appropriation of Polish culture by displaying Ukrainian nationality — observed in 37 instances.
3. Narratives invoking historical trauma within Polish-Ukrainian relations — present in 13 instances.

Additionally, narratives featuring pro-Russian sentiment were represented in 3 cases, while a single case conveyed an anti-war narrative. The three narrative types we identified align with findings from research on hate speech and disinformation pertaining to Ukraine (Sęk 03.2023). The total does not amount to 50, as multiple narrative types were often present within a single tweet. Previous research into hate speech targeting minorities in Poland (Winiewski et al. 2017) discovered that approximately 80% of hate speech directed at Ukrainians was rooted in historical events, with 12.5% associated with criminal activity.

Notably, the facility with which emotionally powerful narratives can be generated is underpinned by historical contexts that have been sources of conflict over the years. For example, Narrative 3 often highlighted the longstanding historical conflict between Poles and Ukrainians, centred around events such as the Volhynia Massacre, the actions of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, and the January and Kościuszko Uprisings. In these examples, we can also notice re-contextualization of historical events and relating them to contemporary events and relationships between the nations.

Meanwhile, the strategy of inciting fear within the Polish populace through the news of violent crimes committed by Ukrainians mirrors narratives propagated during the 2015 European migrant crisis (Grabowska 2022). All tweets encompassed within Narrative 1 highlighted the brutality of Ukrainian refugees, reporting severe crimes, including assaults, murders, and instances of evading justice. This narrative is based on the inner fear of losing security in the country.

Narrative 2, alternatively, capitalizes on a fear of cultural appropriation of Polish traditions. This is exemplified in the display of Ukrainian flags and symbols, the establishment of Ukrainian restaurants, and participation in Ukrainian cultural events in Poland. Users advancing this narrative often urged Poles to remove Ukrainian flags and boycott Ukrainian restaurants. This narrative extended to instances such as the Royal Castle in Warsaw adorned with Polish and Ukrainian flags.

In our analysis, we identified rhetorical devices associated with amplifying emotional responses, including hyperbole (21 instances) and exclamation (10 instances). Additional figures of speech were also deployed, such as metaphor (16), irony (7), ellipsis (15), rhetorical question (16), comparison (7), metonymy

(2), synecdoche (1), labelling (5), anaphora (1), apostrophe (2), periphrasis (1), enumeration (4), and diminutive forms (1). We found out, that words connected to Ukraine were often juxtaposed with expressions of threat and danger. Besides, there were noticed dehumanizing and marginalizing metaphors, such as "ukraińskie szmaty" (Ukrainian rags) to describe Ukrainian flags. Another example in the sample referred to the "Płońsk incident", where a "drunk Ukrainian pushed a Pole out of a hotel window". Further in this tweet, there is a metaphor suggesting that Ukrainians will soon be pushing Poles out of hospitals, offices, universities, and companies. This metaphorical escalation is used to imply that Ukrainians are not only committing individual acts of violence but are systematically displacing Poles from various facets of society. Those types of metaphors are an effective rhetorical strategy, amplifying anxiety among the audience, turning an isolated event into a symbol of an alleged larger societal takeover. Such use of rhetorical devices in the analysed tweets appears to be a deliberate strategy to amplify potent emotions such as indignation, anger, fear, and contempt, which we previously discussed.

Further, metaphors were also often used to depict Ukrainians as "invaders", "savages" or "parasites", invoking imagery that emphasizes threats to Polish sovereignty or culture. This creates a vivid and emotionally charged representation, dehumanizing Ukrainians. Further, hyperbole was frequently employed to exaggerate the perceived negative impact of Ukrainian refugees, such as describing their presence as an "invasion" or "occupation," which serves to amplify public fears and contribute to a moral panic. Analogies often draw parallels between current events and historical conflicts, such as comparing Ukrainian refugees to historical adversaries like the UPA or invoking the trauma of the Volhynian massacre. These analogies aim to re-contextualize present circumstances within emotionally laden historical grievances, thus reinforcing the antagonistic stance towards Ukrainians.

Irony, on the other hand, is used to ridicule Polish government officials and supporters of Ukrainian refugees, portraying them as naive or traitorous to Polish national interests. Overall, these rhetorical figures function as strategic tools to legitimize exclusionary discourses, manipulate public sentiment, and create a polarizing narrative that pits Polish national identity against Ukrainian presence. By leveraging these rhetorical devices, the tweets aim to shape perceptions and mobilize audiences towards negative actions or attitudes against Ukrainians, contributing to broader anti-pluralist ideologies in Poland.

From a sociological perspective, anti-Ukrainian sentiment appears to unify lower and middle-class populations in Poland (Sadura 2022). Many instances of anti-Ukrainian rhetoric and hate speech are disseminated via social media and everyday conversations. The anonymity provided by the internet often facilitates

the sharing of socially disapproved opinions. This is evident in the simplistic sentences and unsophisticated vocabulary of anti-Ukrainian tweets, often demonstrating a lack of respect toward the criticized group. Notably, Poles aiding Ukrainian refugees were frequently labelled as hypocrites.

It is essential to underline that these observed characteristics align with the attributes of hate speech. According to Twitter's researchers, the platform itself amplifies hate speech through the retweeting feature (Kwok and Wang 2013). We align with the definition of hate speech as "any speech which attacks an individual or a group with an intention to hurt or disrespect based on identity of a person" (Chetty and Alathur 2018). Hateful texts in the researched database inflict direct and indirect harm upon Ukrainians, with their principal aim being to propagate hateful beliefs. Moreover, as Poland participates in the information war with Russia and confronts fake news about the war, hateful Tweets influence the online discourse and impact social opinions (Nerghes and Lee 2018). Thus, a huge number of Tweets with negative narratives about Ukrainian refugees can increase doubts about the government's policy and manipulate the users.

It should be also noticed that all three narrations are associated with stereotypes created in discourse and are strongly bounded by negative emotions. In this context, we perceive stereotypes as simplistic thinking based on cognitive errors (Hilton and von Hippel 1996). Stereotypes make information processing easier because they are based on socially transmitted knowledge. Moreover, stereotypes serve a particular function depending on the context in which they appear. In the analysed Tweets, stereotypes simplify the social reality, which can contribute to the maintenance of hateful attitudes and prejudices.

In this case, we should deepen the meaning of stereotypes in narrations. Undoubtedly, the anti-Ukrainian discourse is based on stereotypes, and it is an example of exclusionary discourses similar to racism (Wodak and Chilton 2005). In the context of the three distinguished narratives, each corresponds with different levels of perceived security breaches. The first narrative, centred on potential victimhood due to crimes perpetrated by Ukrainians. The second narrative engages with the usurpation of Polish culture and national symbols by demonstrating Ukrainian national symbols, a concern grounded in current societal apprehensions following the influx of Ukrainian refugees in Poland post-war. The last narrative engages historical events and unresolved issues in Polish-Ukrainian political relations, thereby resurrecting fears from past events like the Volyn massacre.

According to Tajfel and Biling's sacrificial lamb model, collective aggression against the selected social group results from collectively shared ideologies adopted to explain large-scale social events (Glick 2009). In our case, it could be the war in Ukraine, the influx of many refugees, or rising inflation in Poland.

Based on this model, we observe that if many individuals are affected by the same social changes, they will seek an explanation at the collective level. The scapegoated group according to Glick is believed to be very dangerous and powerful. This power is often overestimated in the scapegoating ideology, which justifies aggression against the chosen group. In our case, such ideology appeared mainly in narratives 2 and 3. In narration 1, Ukrainians were portrayed as dangerous people, who commit brutal crimes against Polish people. This narration was already used in Poland regarding immigrants from Africa and the Middle East. However, overall in examined narrations, we observed only two out of four factors of scapegoat theory.

Moreover, many years before the war started, Ukrainians were migrating to Poland due to economic reasons. In the report about hate speech in Poland from 2016, we can read that there were cases of verbal and physical assaults on people from Ukraine (Winiewski et al. 2017). One of the strongly resounding conclusions from the report is that the main source of hate speech in Poland is the Internet. During the two-years-period 2014–2016, the percentage of adult Poles who have been exposed to anti-Ukrainian content on the Internet has increased from 46.2% to 70.7%. Thus, we must admit that public sentiment is not only related to the war, but it is part of a long-term process of attitude formation. In the context of the discourse analysis, it should be affirmed that the anti-Ukrainian narrative can be a way of understanding the world around us and a mirror of public sentiment.

Stereotypes that appeared in anti-Ukrainian narrations can also be placed in the stereotype content model by Susan Fiske. In this model, stereotypes are settled in two axes — warmth and competence (Fiske 2018). Warmth is associated with friendliness and trustworthiness, competencies based on capability and assertiveness. In this model, immigrants from Ukraine should be defined as a group with low warmth and low competences. According to Fiske, such groups evoke such emotions as disgust and contempt. History also enhances polarization between "we" — Polish people as in-group and "they" — Ukrainians as out-group. This type of narration enhances polarization in the Polish political scene, which is strongly defined between two main parties and their allies — conservative Law and Justice (PiS) and centrist Citizens' Party (PO).

The above analysis can be complemented by additional concept of power structures in discourse that are distinguished by Van Dijk. In this model (Van Dijk 1989) power holders can produce and reproduce social power structures. Furthermore, in this discourse language can be characterized as a power structure itself, because means of languages express emotions and build narrations. In this sense, language as a power structure in discourse can shape opinions and attitudes.

4.5   Visual analysis

The final portion of our coding key involved an analysis of the visual elements present within the tweets. This category in the coding scheme was designed to capture the visual aspects of the tweets, helping to understand how images and symbols reinforced or modified the verbal content. This category included the identification of the main character depicted in the visualization, as well as any other characters present, which could serve to provide additional context or contrast. The scenery was also noted to describe the background or setting, providing insights into the environmental or symbolic context that framed the visual narrative

Photos were featured in 23 tweets, while videos were incorporated in 14. A singular tweet showcased a meme. The two most popular tweets within our data sample combined text and images. The narrative at the core of the message was frequently amplified through visualization; in 34 out of the 50 analysed tweets, we observed a syncretism between text and image, inducing cognitive reinforcement.

Further, images were used to increase credibility and illustrate examples of described narratives. For instance, one of the tweets contained a video of children holding Polish, Ukrainian and American flags, standing in front of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, during the Joe Biden's visit. The video was added to the tweet's text:

> Is this still Poland? One child with a Polish flag, the rest with flags of uroine (contemptuous term for Ukraine) and USA 🤦 🤮

One of the videos illustrated the "Ukrainian pigsty", by showing a street entirely covered with Ukrainian flags and posters supporting the Ukrainian fight, some of them were ripped and lying on the sidewalks. The video was also accompanied by a heavy-metal Ukrainian song. The user added this video as the context for the tweet, with a warning to ban all pro-Ukrainian accounts. There were also a few videos showing Ukrainian soldiers' exercises in Poland and military equipment purchased with "Polish taxes" for Ukraine. One of these videos was posted with a focus on the fact that Poland delivered tanks for free because of "the US orders".

In another tweet, there was shared a lecture of a Polish historian describing Ukrainians as naturally "cruel" and Cossacks as a "wild and anti-religious" man. He also mentioned the brutal Volynia murders, comparing them to "genocide" and the Nazi crimes. At the end of this video, a plaque commemorating the murder of Lviv professors is visible, with the sprayed inscription in Ukrainian "Death to laches" (Lach — former name for a Pole). This monument is shown in order to illustrate the tensions and historical conflicts between two nations.

The next example of a tweet based on the video message was a post illustrating anti-Ukrainian and anti-war protests in Germany during Munich Security Conference. Numerous posters depicting anti-American slogans were visible at

the demonstration. On one of them, President Zelensky was depicted as a red octopus reaching for various demands, such as American money. The phrases and text bubbles around Zelenskyy include slogans such as "Ich will alles! Ich will alles! Und zwar sofort!" ("I want everything! I want everything! And right now!") suggesting that Zelenskyy is portrayed as demanding and insatiable. There are also various references to "50% von Deutschland" and "Genau! Geld! Geld! Geld!" ("Exactly! Money! Money! Money!"). The video is marked with the logo of "Russia Today", which is a Russian TV channel spreading kremlin propaganda,

The most interacted-with tweet, accumulating 2,328 likes, 187 responses, and 780 retweets, revolved around — again — a Ukrainian restaurant in Warsaw named "Lviv Table" ("Lwowski Stolik"). The restaurant's entrance was adorned with red and black balloons, colours the author claims represent the UPA. The author implored the Warsaw authorities to close the restaurant and encouraged negative reviews on Google Maps. This tweet embodies Narrative 2.

Another highly engaged tweet featured a photo of celebrities Małgorzata Rozenek-Majdan (journalist) and her husband Radosław Majdan (soccer player), alongside their children, each brandishing Ukrainian flags. This tweet elicited 1,625 likes, 683 responses, and 157 retweets, exemplifying Narrative 2, emphasizing the display of Ukrainian flags. The photo was taken during a campaign where celebrities were aiding Ukrainian refugees. In this context, merely holding a flag evoked negative commentary.

Frequently, the focal subject of the photo or video related to President Biden's visit to Poland in February 2023, including images of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Andrzej Duda with Joe Biden, etc. Positive symbolism was depicted through the Polish flag and the eagle, while negative connotations were linked to Ukrainian national symbols such as the flag and coat of arms. In three instances, both the American and Ukrainian flags were presented negatively due to Joe Biden's visit. The only example of Russian symbolism was negatively portrayed via a Russian flag featuring a black swastika at the centre.

Overall, visuals included in these tweets were instrumental not only in supporting verbal narratives, but also in advancing independent stories by providing tangible examples and pictures that resonated with or heightened emotional reactions. These visuals played a key role in framing anti-Ukrainian messages, and invoking historical traumas to reinforce the broader narrative and anti-pluralist sentiment in Polish social media.

5.   Discussion and conclusions

Our analysis carried out on Tweets selected by Thick Big Data method illustrates three main narratives with anti-Ukrainian character. Various sociological and discursive models demonstrate that such narratives are based on negative stereotypes and can develop or perpetuate attitudes of resentment towards migrants from Ukraine. Such attitudes can escalate and spread to mainstream media and empower conservative parties supporting anti-migration policy in the electoral campaign. Moreover, this narrative strategy can be used in other countries, where many refugees migrated after war. By framing anti-Ukrainian sentiment as a natural and justified reaction to current events, these tweets are attempting to establish a "new normal" of radical exclusionary views (Krzyżanowski 2020).

We found out that crucial political events, such as diplomatic visits by heads of state — President Biden's visit to Warsaw, during which topics related to the war in Ukraine were discussed, served as a catalyst for the proliferation of anti-Ukrainian publications. Big political events can be a flash point and a breeding ground for controversial views that are far from political correctness. Moreover, a series of 10 Tweets concentrated on President Biden's visit to Warsaw could have been part of a disinformation campaign because their message was very similar and contained a strong negative bias towards President Joe Biden and the war in Ukraine.

It is also crucial to understand the broader socio-political environment and how the distinguished narratives align with the current ideologies and strategies employed by political actors. Anti-Ukrainian narratives on Polish social media can be situated within a longstanding tradition of anti-pluralism, national conservatism, and a rhetoric of protecting national sovereignty. In recent years, the political climate in Poland has become increasingly characterized by right-wing populism, where maintaining a homogeneous national identity is portrayed as vital to national security. This ideological background offers fertile ground for the proliferation of anti-Ukrainian narratives.

We must admit that anti-Ukrainian narration is officially spread only by one political party — a strongly conservative Confederation (Konfederacja). Thus, this kind of narrative shared in social media is an outlet for political correctness for people who are afraid to be negatively judged in public for their opinions. The official discourse shared by political officials is strongly supportive of Ukraine, so consequently, it is marginalizing individuals holding dissenting views. As a part of the spiral of silence, Polish people who are not supporting the Ukrainian war refugees share their views online, remaining anonymous.

On the other hand, we observe another spiral of silence that excludes anti-Ukrainian views and people who have a different opinion about helping Ukraine

(this is also the official government narrative) from the official discourse and the old media — TV, press. Twitter is a place where controversial opinions are spread to find other users thinking alike or to enhance the cultural and political war. Most of the Tweets (37) contained narration highlighting the alleged appropriation of Polish culture by displaying Ukrainian nationality. Such narration strongly influences a sense of insecurity and alienation in one's own country, which is already present in places with a high percentage of people from Ukraine. The results confirm a theory that social media narrations and political elites took advantage of a crisis mentality (Esses, Medianu, and Lawson 2013). Conservative parties engaged their followers in content based on hateful rhetoric and associated with cultural and historical appropriation to create and enhance the enemy figure. In the particular case of Poland, this mentality is not only based on the typical refugee fear but also on historical events from the relationship between Poland and Ukraine.

From research conducted in the United States, from March to May 2022 (Li et al. 2023), we know that attitude towards Ukrainian refugees was positive. However, it has to be mentioned that the data were collected directly after the Russian invasion and Americans do not have as many reference points and common historical events as Polish. The study also confirmed that mediated contact with refugees through social media can positively or negatively affect their public perception. The authors described the mechanism of perceived threat, which is based on the belief that the characteristics of one group can affect the well-being of another group. Researchers found that "interactive mediated contact (IMC) on social media predicts more positive attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees indirectly through reduced perceived threat" (Li et al. 2023, p.1).

Regarding our results, it can be concluded that Narrative 1 was intended to increase the sense of perceived threat and worsen attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees. In this case, social media narratives self-reinforced the perceived threat of the Polish, which already existed in the society before the war started.

In all narratives, Twitter can be described as a media power structure, because on this platform were the insights published. Twitter has the power to share and block information and influence the political discourse. Our results align with the observation that Twitter is a medium, where anti-migrant narrations are commonly shared and shape the public debate (Masroor et al. 2019). Moreover, our results reveal another facet of the anti-immigrant discourse in Polish politics after the migration crisis in 2015 (Krzyżanowski 2018).

Further research on Polish-Ukrainian relations would enhance the understanding of each other's struggles. The results presented in this article could be complemented by an analysis of narratives from traditional media to juxtapose them with narratives from Twitter. It is necessary to monitor online platforms

for hate speech and reflect on the consequences of spreading such discourse. We must admit that all three narrations refer to different periods and outline the complicated picture between the two nations. Ongoing sociodemographic changes are impacting the resulting social discourse in Poland; social media platforms like Twitter can provide valuable insights about them. Poland is particularly vulnerable to disinformation campaigns with an anti-Ukrainian narrative. Furthermore, future researchers should consider conducting in-depth interviews to gain a broader understanding of anti-Ukrainian attitudes and the prevalence of hate speech in Poland. Perception of refugees plays an essential role in creating migration politics and processes of social integration. In this year's elections, political parties used anti-refugee narration again. For instance, Law and Justice party's election slogan was "A secure future for Poles", which appeals to the need for state security connected to the Russian war and the migration crisis. Future studies of political discourse should observe the relationship between anti-refugee and anti-Ukrainian narratives and the Polish and European migration politics.

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The author(s) declare no competing interests.

Ethical statements

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