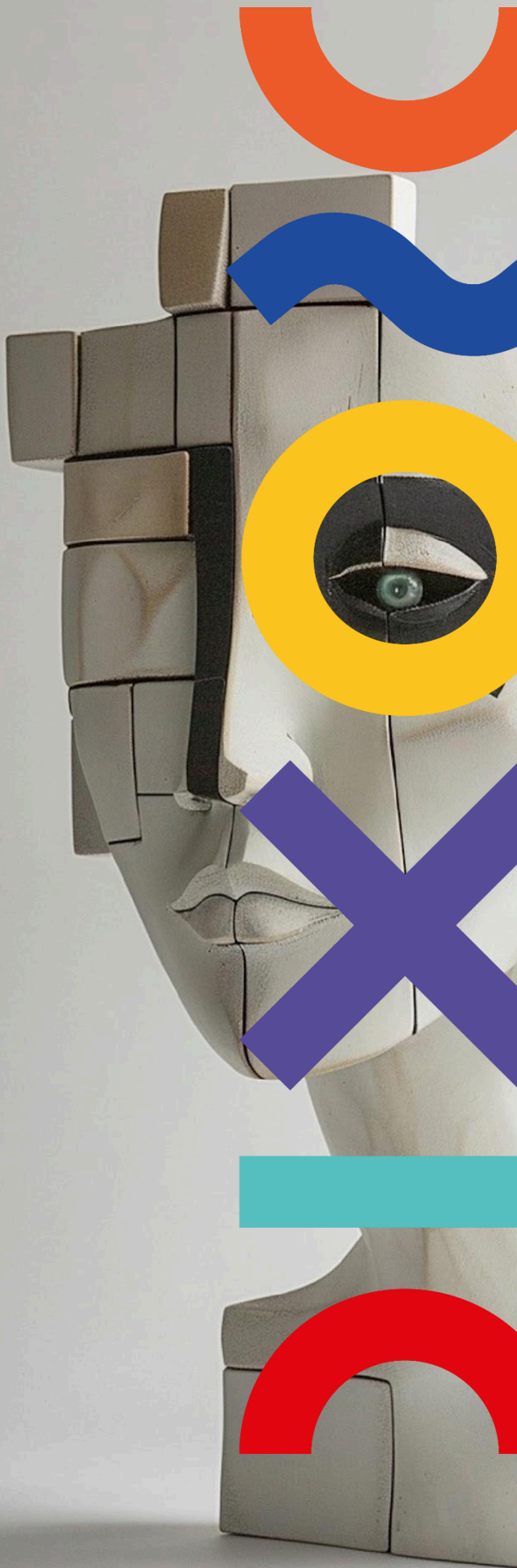
ENCODE

D5.1

Emotions and cognitive and learning effects



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D5.1 Emotions and cognitive and learning effects

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ENCODE - Unveiling emotional dimensions of politics to foster European democracy consumers

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DISCLAIMER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores how emotions embedded in digital political communication shape political learning, engagement, and responses to misinformation. It provides a systematic account of findings from three cross-national online experiments (total number of participants = 5,951) conducted in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland within Task 5.1. Together, the studies examine how distinct emotional cues influence cognitive processing, information seeking and avoidance, and citizens' willingness to engage constructively with political content in social media environments. By comparing positive and negative emotions across elite political communication and citizen-to-citizen interaction, the report advances a nuanced understanding of how affect operates in contemporary digital information contexts.

Across the three experiments, the findings show that emotions regulate political engagement through distinct pathways. Experiment 1 demonstrates that both positive and negative emotions enhance approach motivation and reduce avoidance motivation toward political content, but only positive emotions translate this reduced avoidance into deeper cognitive processing of political information, highlighting the relevance of a positive emotional turn for a comprehensive understanding of political engagement. Experiment 2 demonstrates that emotional feedback to misinformation correction shapes emotional exhaustion and in turn disengagement. Angry feedback increases exhaustion, which subsequently predicts greater avoidance of future correction efforts. Contrary to expectations, correction confidence does not buffer this effect, but rather strengthens the association between exhaustion and avoidance. Experiment 3 finds that emotional reactions of surprise and anxiety increase felt social approval, which is consistently associated with stronger intentions to correct misinformation, fact-check political information, and participate politically online.

By integrating evidence across three experiments, the research carried out within Task 5.1 contributes to a deeper understanding of emotions as mechanisms that regulate political learning and participation in digital environments. The findings have important implications for research and practice. They highlight the need to move beyond simplistic positive versus negative distinctions and to account for emotional exhaustion and social approval as key processes shaping engagement. More broadly, the results suggest that fostering emotionally sustainable forms of political communication may be critical for supporting informed and constructive democratic participation in an increasingly polarized and emotionally charged online public sphere.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE ENCODE PROJECT

The ENCODE project, titled "Unveiling Emotional Dimensions of Politics to Foster European Democracy," aims to explore and decode the role of emotions in political discourse and their impact on democratic processes. Recognizing that emotional appeals have significantly influenced political movements and voter behaviour, ENCODE seeks to understand the interplay between emotions, values, and identities. The project's primary goal is to create new positive narratives that can foster trust and engagement in European democratic processes, thereby counteracting the negative emotions that often dominate political discussions. Through innovative methodologies, including social media sentiment analysis, biometric research, and surveys, ENCODE aims to provide policymakers with tools and strategies to better incorporate the emotional needs of citizens into governance, ultimately enhancing democratic resilience and fostering a more inclusive political environment.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE DELIVERABLE

- To analyze how emotions in political communication influence cognitive processing and political learning, including knowledge acquisition and information seeking.
- To examine the effects of positive and negative emotional appeals across different communicative contexts, such as elite political communication and citizen-to-citizen interaction on social media.
- To investigate the role of emotions in the evaluation of disinformation and misinformation, focusing on fact-checking intentions, credibility assessments, and perceived control.
- To provide cross-national experimental evidence from Bulgaria, Poland, Austria, and Denmark, to advance theory-driven research on emotions in digital political information environments.

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE DOCUMENT

The document is structured around the three experiments conducted within Task 5.1. The description of each experiment includes the following components:

2. **Introduction and background**, outlining the research question, state of the art, and objectives
3. **Theoretical framework**, including the relevant theoretical approach and the formulation of hypotheses
4. **Methodology**, summarizing the research design, data collection, and sampling procedures
5. **Findings and discussion**, describing the main results and discussing their broader implications

The three experiments are described sequentially, following a consistent structure. The document concludes with an integrative section that synthesizes findings across experiments and discusses overarching implications.

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1.4 RELATION TO OTHER TASKS

Insights from the desk research conducted within WP2 informed the experimental planning under Task 5.1. In particular, the scoping review on the intersection of emotions, media, and politics strengthened the conceptual grounding of the task and supported the development of a more focused and methodologically robust experimental design.

In addition, findings from WP3 directly shaped the selection of emotions examined in the experimental studies under Task 5.1. Deliverable 3.3 identified fear/anxiety, happiness/enthusiasm, and anger as central emotions in contemporary political communication. Building on these results, Task 5.1 incorporates these emotions into its experimental design to examine their causal effects on information processing and political learning across four national contexts. Additionally, Task 5.1 leverages insights from research on emotional elicitation carried out within WP4 to guide the choice of emotion-induction methods in the experimental studies.

Results from Task 5.1 directly contribute to Task 8.4 by providing experimentally grounded evidence on the effects of emotions in political communication, forming a core empirical basis for academic dissemination and public engagement activities. Findings from Task 5.1 will be disseminated through peer-reviewed journal articles, conference presentations, and policy-oriented outputs that address emotional dynamics in digital political information environments.

Moreover, the insights from Task 5.1 can be used in WP6 and WP7 to guide the design and evaluation of citizen innovation labs, narrative co-creation, and vignette-based policy scenarios, particularly by distinguishing emotional appeals that reduce disengagement from those that merely capture attention without fostering learning. In this way, Task 5.1 contributes to the broader ENCODE objective of translating experimentally validated knowledge on emotions into actionable tools for democratic communication, depolarization strategies, and policy-relevant future narratives.

2. EXPERIMENT 1

2.1 BACKGROUND

Since its emergence, social media has prompted sustained debate about its implications for citizens' political knowledge and sense of efficacy. Some scholars argue that it lowers barriers to information and participation (Boulianne, 2015), whereas others highlight its role in fostering misinformation, polarization, and superficial engagement (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). At the center of this debate lies not simply exposure to political content, but whether such content captures attention, is retained, and ultimately supports learning.

This question is particularly salient in a media environment dominated by emotionally charged political content. Although prior research demonstrates that high-arousal emotions drive online engagement (Berger & Milkman, 2012), far less is known about how such content shapes citizens' motivation to engage with political information and their subsequent learning. This gap is notable given the increasing use of emotions such as anger and fear in contemporary political communication, including negative campaigning

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and populist discourse (Gerbaudo et al., 2023). Despite calls for experimental research that systematically compares the effects of distinct emotions on political learning (Graf et al., 2024), empirical evidence remains scarce. Existing studies often rely on text-based prompts or reflective tasks that struggle to isolate discrete emotions, frequently producing emotional spillover or weak differentiation (Clifford & Jerit, 2018; Vandenbroek, 2011; Wisneski et al., 2020).

To address these limitations, we experimentally examine how distinct emotions elicited by realistic social media content influence political learning. Focusing on anxiety, anger, disgust, and enthusiasm, and drawing on affective intelligence theory (AIT; Marcus et al., 2000), the behavioral immune system framework (Schaller & Park, 2011), and control-value theory (Pekrun, 2024), we conceptualize political learning as a two-stage process encompassing information-seeking intentions (approach and avoidance motivations toward political information, hereafter referred to interchangeably as *approach* and *avoidance*) and information processing. Learning outcomes, in turn, are measured through headline recognition and news comprehension tasks. Conducted across four European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland), the study provides rare cross-national evidence on how emotions shape both the motivational and cognitive dimensions of political learning, offering a more systematic comparison of discrete emotional effects within a single experimental design.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to AIT (Marcus et al., 2000), emotions are not incidental by-products of political cognition but core mechanisms guiding information processing and political behavior. Anxiety is particularly central because it is triggered by uncertainty or threat and disrupts habitual processing, motivating individuals to seek new information and learn about unfamiliar issues (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). Empirical research supports this logic: anxiety is associated with greater campaign attentiveness and monitoring of political debates (Valentino et al., 2008) as well as increased information seeking, especially regarding threatening content (Gadarian & Albertson, 2014). Whether these mechanisms operate similarly in social media environments, where political information is often encountered incidentally, remains unclear. We therefore hypothesize:

H1a: Social media–induced anxiety increases approach toward political information.

Because anxiety sustains engagement with potentially important information, we further propose that it reduces avoidance tendencies:

H1b: Social media–induced anxiety decreases avoidance of political information.

Although anger is not a core emotion in the original formulation of AIT, subsequent research situates it as reinforcing habitual and defensive responses. Anger leads individuals to dismiss incongruent information and seek confirmatory evidence, thereby reducing exploratory learning and balanced information seeking (MacKuen et al., 2010; Valentino et al., 2008). Because existing research on anger is largely confined to highly partisan, polarized campaign contexts, and its effects in less polarized, issue-based social media environments remain theoretically indeterminate, we pose a research question rather than directional hypotheses.:

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RQ1: How does social media–induced anger influence (a) approach toward political information and (b) avoidance of political information?

Beyond anxiety and anger, disgust has received limited attention in political information-processing research and is primarily examined through the behavioral immune system framework (Schaller & Park, 2011). This account links disgust sensitivity to pathogen avoidance and support for social boundaries and exclusionary policies (Aarøe et al., 2017). While prior studies focus largely on dispositional disgust and political attitudes (Aarøe et al., 2017; Clifford & Piston, 2017), less is known about how state disgust affects engagement with political information. Drawing on evidence that disgust reduces information seeking in health contexts (Clifford & Jerit, 2018), we propose that disgust discourages engagement with aversive political content:

H2a: Social media–induced disgust decreases approach toward political information.
H2b: Social media–induced disgust increases avoidance of political information.

In contrast, positive emotions such as enthusiasm remain underexplored in political learning research. A recent meta-analysis shows that enthusiasm is examined in only a small share of studies and that experimental evidence of its effects on learning is scarce (Graf et al., 2024; Brader, 2005; Weber, 2013). Within AIT, enthusiasm activates the disposition system, sustaining engagement when political information aligns with expectations and goals (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993). This may foster continued attention and interest, although direct empirical tests in social media contexts are lacking. We therefore hypothesize:

H3a: Social media–induced enthusiasm increases approach toward political information.

Because enthusiasm signals alignment between political stimuli and prior orientations, it should also reduce avoidance:

H3b: Social media–induced enthusiasm decreases avoidance of political information.

Political learning encompasses not only information seeking but also retention and recall. Prior research shows that motivated information seeking enhances recall, recognition, and political knowledge (Huang & Price, 2001; Kitchens et al., 2003). These findings suggest that approach motivation facilitates deeper cognitive processing. Whether this relationship holds in fragmented social media environments remains uncertain. We therefore hypothesize:

H4a: Approach motivation toward political information increases processing of political content.

Conversely, we expect avoidance motivation to impede learning:

H4b: Avoidance motivation toward political information decreases processing of political content.

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Finally, control–value theory (Pekrun, 2024) suggests that emotions influence learning indirectly by shaping motivation and attention. Applied to political learning, this implies that emotions affect information processing through approach and avoidance motivations. However, such mediating pathways remain understudied in political communication research. We therefore ask:

> RQ2: How is processing of political content (a) influenced by social media–induced emotions and (b) mediated through approach and avoidance motivations?

2.3 METHODOLOGY

2.3.1 DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The study employed a 1 × 5 between-subjects design and was fielded by a professional polling company in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland. Data were collected between September 1 and September 8, 2025, following approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Vienna (see Annex 1.1). The description of the data management is provided in Annex 1.3.

2.3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Quota-based samples representative of gender, age, and education were recruited in each country. Eligibility criteria included citizenship and residency in the respective country, age between 18 and 69, recent social media use, and informed consent. Participants were excluded if they failed both attention checks, completed the survey faster than one-third of the median completion time (Greszki et al., 2014), or reported gender as “other,” due to insufficient group size for analysis. Based on a priory power analyses, the final sample comprised N = 2,430 participants (Austria: n = 608; Bulgaria: n = 602; Denmark: n = 605; Poland: n = 615). Demographic details are reported in Table 1. Table 2 reports the number of participants per condition in all four countries.

2.3.3 COUNTRY SELECTION

In line with the GA and DoA, country selection aimed to capture variation in public responses to two high-salience political developments of recent years: the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU’s position on Russia–Ukraine relations. This variation was operationalized using two aggregate indicators: the share of the population that had received at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose as a proxy for trust in government pandemic policies, and the share of citizens expressing support for the EU’s position as an indicator of alignment with Ukraine.

On this basis, four country profiles were selected: Bulgaria (low vaccination uptake and low support), Poland (low vaccination uptake and high support), Austria (high vaccination uptake and low support), and Denmark (high vaccination uptake and high support). Together, these cases capture distinct configurations of public trust and political alignment, enabling analysis of emotional and attitudinal dynamics across diverse societal contexts during periods of heightened tension, when publics may be more receptive to populist narratives and conspiracy beliefs.

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2.3.4 PROCEDURE AND EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION

All materials were developed in English and translated into German, Bulgarian, Danish, and Polish using collaborative translation and independent back-translation performed with the help of ENCODE consortium partners from the respective countries.

Participants completed an online experiment and were randomly assigned to one of five conditions: anxiety, anger, disgust, enthusiasm, or a neutral control. The procedure consisted of four stages: exposure to an emotional manipulation, a manipulation check, measurement of approach and avoidance motivations toward political information, and two political learning tasks.

Emotional stimuli were developed in line with predictions from WP4 regarding effective emotional elicitation techniques. In particular, emotional manipulations consisted of two fictitious Twitter/X-style posts with accompanying user comments, designed to resemble everyday social media content. Posts addressed healthcare policy and were tailored to elicit the target emotion; the control condition viewed neutral content. Visual stimuli depicted facial expressions consistent with the intended emotion. All structural features of the posts were held constant across conditions. The materials underwent extensive pretesting (N = 1,504), which showed that the posts about healthcare produced the most distinct emotional responses compared to immigration and public safety. As a next step in the experiment, a brief self-reflection task followed the exposure to reinforce the emotional state.

2.3.5 MEASURES

Approach motivation was assessed with four self-developed items capturing participants' intention to seek additional information about the issue addressed in the social media posts. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Does not apply at all, 5 = Fully applies; e.g., "I am interested in following future political developments related to this issue").

Avoidance motivation was measured using four self-developed items assessing participants' inclination to avoid further information about the issue depicted in the social media posts. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Does not apply at all, 5 = Fully applies; e.g., "I would prefer to block or hide similar posts in the future").

Processing of political information was captured using two complementary behavioral recall measures: a headline recognition task and an article comprehension task.

Headline recognition was assessed in two stages. First, participants were presented with 14 news headlines and indicated which ones they would be interested in reading. Next, they viewed a mixed list of seven previously shown headlines and seven new headlines and were asked to identify those they recognized from the first stage. All headlines were thematically related to the topic of the social media posts. Participants' performance was summarized using signal-detection sensitivity scores calculated from hit and false-alarm rates following standard signal-detection procedures (Stanislaw & Todorov, 1999), with higher values indicating better discrimination between previously seen and new headlines.

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Article comprehension. To assess article comprehension, participants read a short mock news article about a proposed EU health access card developed for this study. They subsequently answered four single-choice questions assessing recall and understanding of the article's content.

2.3.6 COVARIATES

Analyses controlled for gender, age, education, political orientation, perceived trustworthiness of the posts, political knowledge, and media diet.

2.3.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Manipulation checks were conducted in two steps. First, participants identified the dominant emotion expressed in the posts. Second, they reported experienced emotions using visual analogue scales. Scores were z-standardized within countries, and planned contrasts confirmed that the intended emotion was highest in each condition, despite some overlap among negative emotions in specific countries. Robustness checks collapsing negative emotions yielded substantively identical results.

We estimated a path model in R using full-information maximum likelihood to handle missing data (Lee & Shi, 2021). Experimental conditions were dummy-coded against the control group. Approach and avoidance motivations served as mediators, with headline recognition and article comprehension as outcomes. Indirect effects were estimated using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Cross-country differences were examined using multigroup analyses with sequential path constraints (Hayes et al., 2013). All covariates were included in the model.

2.4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

2.4.1 RESULTS

The main findings of the path analysis for all countries are displayed in Table 3. Figure 1 visualizes these findings, and the mediation results are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

H1a was supported across all countries, while H1b was supported in all countries except Austria, suggesting that social media–induced anxiety increases engagement with political information and reduces avoidance.

For RQ1a and RQ1b, anger increased approach motivation in all countries and reduced avoidance motivation in all but Austria.

H2a and H2b were rejected. Disgust either increased approach motivation in Austria, Bulgaria, and Denmark or had no effect in Poland, and it tended to reduce rather than increase avoidance in Bulgaria and Denmark.

H3a and H3b were supported, as inducing enthusiasm increased approach motivation and decreased avoidance motivation.

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Regarding information processing, H4a was rejected: emotion-driven approach motivation did not account for processing outcomes, predicting lower headline recognition in Denmark and showing no effects elsewhere. By contrast, H4b was supported, as greater emotion-driven avoidance was associated with poorer headline recognition and article comprehension

2.4.2 DISCUSSION

The present research aimed to examine how distinct emotions embedded in social media content influence political learning, conceptualized through information seeking and processing. For this purpose, we conducted a cross-national online experiment that varied exposure to specific emotions (anxiety, anger, disgust, and enthusiasm) relative to a control group. We then investigated whether such exposure increased participants' desire to approach similar political information or, conversely, to avoid it, and the extent to which these approach and avoidance motivations, in turn, shaped processing of political information, measured through recognition of political headlines and comprehension of a news article.

Consistent with AIT (Marcus et al., 2000), anxiety increased approach motivation and generally reduced avoidance. Anger showed a similar pattern, suggesting that in issue-based, nonpartisan contexts, it operates as a mobilizing force rather than merely reinforcing partisan bias (MacKuen et al., 2010; Weeks, 2015). Contrary to expectations from the behavioral immune system account (Schaller & Park, 2011), disgust did not promote withdrawal and instead often increased approach motivation, challenging earlier findings (Clifford & Jerit, 2018). Enthusiasm produced the most consistent effects, reliably increasing approach and decreasing avoidance across all countries, extending prior work on positive emotions (Lee et al., 2019).

Learning outcomes revealed a clear asymmetry. Approach motivation did not reliably enhance processing, whereas avoidance consistently impaired headline recognition and article comprehension. Mediation analyses showed that reduced avoidance, especially following enthusiasm, was the primary pathway linking emotions to political learning. Reduced avoidance primarily reflects a decrease in disengagement and defensive withdrawal, which may facilitate information processing without necessarily increasing active information-seeking. In this sense, learning appears to occur less because individuals are motivated to approach political information and more because emotional cues, particularly enthusiasm, lower the threshold for remaining cognitively open to it.

Theoretically, the findings challenge distinctions among negative emotions, highlight emotional valence as central to learning (cf. Mather & Sutherland, 2009), and identify avoidance as a key yet overlooked mechanism. Practically, the results suggest that negative emotional appeals may capture attention without fostering learning, whereas positive emotions reduce disengagement and, through lowered avoidance, support cognitive processing.

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3. EXPERIMENT 2

3.1 BACKGROUND

The growing prevalence of misinformation on social media presents a major challenge to democratic discourse and informed political decision-making. Social media facilitates the rapid and large-scale diffusion of misinformation: despite citizens' unprecedented access to information, users are simultaneously exposed to biased and false content that they often amplify through sharing and reposting (Aïmeur et al., 2023). False news spreads faster than factual information (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Weismueller et al., 2024), particularly within algorithmically reinforced echo chambers that isolate users from opposing viewpoints (Lazer et al., 2018), fostering the uncritical and large-scale circulation of misinformation (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022).

A particularly pressing issue lies in how difficult misinformation is to correct (Chan et al., 2017). Although social media platforms have invested in automated moderation and algorithmic detection, such technological solutions face both empirical and ethical limitations. Automated systems cannot cope with the sheer scale and complexity of online information, and concerns persist about granting private companies the authority to define misinformation (Bode, 2020). Hence, a purely technological response remains insufficient. Consequently, user-driven correction, where individuals actively challenge or correct false information shared by others, emerges as an essential complement to platform-based moderation. Research suggests that algorithmic and user-led corrections are similarly effective in mitigating misperceptions (Bode & Vraga, 2018). However, relatively little is known about what motivates or hinders users from engaging in misinformation correction, with emerging findings suggesting that emotional costs play a central role (Gurgun et al., 2025, Olley & Ikerodah, 2025).

However, most research on misinformation correction focused on expert interventions rather than corrections by ordinary users (e. g. Bautista et al., 2022). Moreover, existing studies have predominantly emphasized whether corrections effectively change others' beliefs (e. g. Masullo & Kim, 2021; see for a review, Ecker et al. 2022), while overlooking the emotional and motivational factors that shape individuals' willingness to engage in corrections themselves. To date, there is no experimental research examining these intrapersonal processes. In particular, little is known about how the emotional tone of other's feedback contributes to emotional exhaustion and how such emotional responses influence individuals' future tendencies to correct misinformation online.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychological barriers are central to users' hesitation to correct misinformation online, as emotional feedback on social media functions as a powerful affective regulator that shapes subsequent emotions and behaviors (Johnson & Connelly, 2014; Stsiampkouskaya et al., 2021). Social media reactions typically involve approving or disapproving responses that vary in affective tone and intensity. In psychological research, conformational messages are linked to adaptive coping (Dailey, 2023). Similarly, according to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions expand individuals' cognitive and behavioral repertoires, fostering resilience and personal resources. In social media contexts, such

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feedback, through likes or encouraging comments, has been shown to evoke excitement and sustain engagement (Stsiampkouskaya et al., 2021). Drawing on Hobfoll's (2001) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, approving feedback represents a form of resource gain, providing acknowledgment and validation that help maintain emotional reserves. In contrast, angry feedback leads to resource loss, draining emotional energy and undermining users' sense of competence and social efficacy. Negative emotional feedback often prompts users to adjust their communicative behavior (Stsiampkouskaya et al., 2021) and can trigger reciprocal anger (Johnson & Connelly, 2014). This aligns with findings that high-arousal negative emotions, particularly anger, are consistently linked to emotional exhaustion (Li et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2022). Disapproval, by comparison, reflects a neutral evaluative stance, signaling disagreement without hostility. Research confirms that civil disagreement elicits significantly less emotional discomfort than uncivil disagreement (Chen & Ng, 2017).

Together, these frameworks suggest that negatively charged emotional social media interactions can lead to emotional exhaustion, a state that impairs individuals' ability to cope with further emotional demands (Emerson et al., 2023; Gonçalves & Matos, 2025). Although prior work has shown that social media use can induce such exhaustion (Bright et al., 2015; Sheng et al., 2023; see Zheng & Ling, 2021 for a review), the specific emotional tones of feedback that drive this process, especially when it comes to misinformation correction, remain underexplored. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

> H1: a) Enthusiastic, b) approving, and c) disapproving feedback to misinformation correction induce less emotional exhaustion than angry feedback.

Emotional exhaustion, as outlined above, represents not only an outcome of emotionally charged online interactions but also a critical predictor of subsequent user behavior. According to COR (Hobfoll, 2001), individuals who experience emotional depletion seek to protect their remaining resources by avoiding further emotionally taxing situations. Empirical research supports this view: emotional exhaustion resulting from social media use has been shown to reduce individuals' willingness to share knowledge (Zhao, 2024) and to increase withdrawal from online interactions (Maier et al., 2012). These avoidance-oriented tendencies are particularly relevant in the context of misinformation correction. Previous studies highlight that individuals frequently hesitate to correct others online due to concerns about social consequences and the acceptability of such actions (Gurgun et al., 2025). Beyond these social considerations, qualitative evidence emphasizes that emotional exhaustion itself constitutes a central psychological barrier to corrective engagement (Olley & Ikerodah, 2025). Thus, emotionally exhausted users are motivated to conserve their limited emotional and cognitive resources, reducing their willingness to engage in future correction efforts that could provoke further conflict or strain.

> H2: Emotional exhaustion leads to higher misinformation correction avoidance in the future.

While emotional exhaustion fosters avoidance tendencies, not all users may respond to depletion in the same way. According to COR (Hobfoll, 2001), individuals with greater internal resources are better equipped to cope with emotional strain. In a misinformation correction context, one such resource might be correction confidence, the belief in the accuracy and effectiveness of one's corrective action, which may buffer against withdrawal effects of emotional exhaustion. In occupational and health psychology, self-efficacy and

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self-confidence are negatively associated with work and social withdrawal (Ahmed et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2023; Zhong et al., 2023). Similarly, in digital environments, higher confidence predicts stronger social media engagement (Saidah & Hariyadi, 2023). Accordingly, we propose that individuals who are confident in their corrective abilities should be less deterred by emotional exhaustion, thereby maintaining engagement despite emotional strain.

> H3: Correction confidence moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and misinformation correction avoidance in the future, such that higher correction confidence reduces the effect of emotional exhaustion on avoidance.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

3.3.1 DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The study used a 1 × 4 between-subjects design and was conducted by a polling company in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland. Data were collected between December 22, 2025 and January 12, 2026, following approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Vienna (see Annex 1.2).

3.3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Sampling criteria and exclusion rules were identical to those described in Section 2.3.2. The final sample comprised N = 2001 participants (Austria: n = 494; Bulgaria: n = 501; Denmark: n = 505; Poland: n = 501), based on a priori power analyses. Sample details are displayed in Tables 6 and 7.

3.3.3 COUNTRY SELECTION

Country selection followed the same rationale and criteria outlined in Section 2.3.3.

3.3.4 PROCEDURE AND EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION

All materials were first developed in English and translated into German, Bulgarian, Danish, and Polish using AI-assisted translation tools (DeepL and ChatGPT). Native-speaking ENCODE consortium partners reviewed and verified all translations to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence with the original English materials.

The study was conducted online. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four feedback conditions: enthusiasm, approval, disapproval, or anger. The experimental procedure followed a fixed sequence for all participants. After providing informed consent, respondents completed introductory questions on demographics and social media use. Subsequently, they participated in two experimental rounds with identical procedures. In each round, participants were first exposed to a fabricated Facebook-style misinformation post concerning artificial intelligence and the labor market. They were then instructed to correct the misinformation by selecting one of nine predefined correction options (e.g., “No legitimate source backs up that statistic” or “Evidence from experts does not confirm that claim”). These response options served solely to create the perception of agency, as the

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specific choice did not influence subsequent stimuli or outcomes. After completing the correction task, participants were presented with a simulated comment section supposedly showing reactions from other users to their correction. To increase ecological validity, participants were informed that the comments reflected typical responses from citizens of their own country, based on a pretest of reactions to similar correction statements (total *N* for Experiments 2&3 = 419). Each comment section consisted of seven user comments: five reflected the emotional tone corresponding to the assigned experimental condition (enthusiasm, approval, disapproval, or anger), and two were neutral filler comments included to enhance realism. These comment sets were pretested to ensure that they accurately conveyed and elicited the intended emotional tone in each condition. Consistent with WP4's methodological framework, emotional cues were embedded in simulated social media environments designed to closely resemble users' everyday online experiences, thereby balancing experimental control with platform authenticity. After viewing the feedback, participants completed a series of feedback-related measures assessing their emotional and cognitive reactions. After the second experimental round, the experiment concluded with general questions on misinformation engagement and political attitudes.

3.3.5 MEASURES

Emotional exhaustion was assessed using four items adapted from Maslach et al. (1997) and Han (2018). Participants rated how they felt after reading others' comments (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; e.g., "I feel emotionally drained", "These comments put too much stress on me").

Future misinformation correction avoidance was measured with four self-developed items (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree) assessing reluctance to correct such misinformation again (e.g., "I think correcting misinformation on this topic is not worth my time"; "I prefer to stay silent to avoid arguments").

Correction confidence captured participants' perceived confidence in the accuracy and effectiveness of their correction. Participants rated four self-developed items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; e.g., "I chose a decent response option to correct the misinformation.", "My correction effectively corrected the misinformation.").

3.3.6 COVARIATES

Gender, age, education, political orientation, social media literacy, perceived accuracy of misinformation, and fact-checking intentions were included as covariates.

3.3.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

A manipulation check evaluated if the predominant emotion conveyed in the experimental comment conditions was accurately identified by participants. Within each country, emotion ratings were z-standardized, and planned contrasts verified that the intended emotion was rated as most salient in its corresponding condition.

The proposed model was analyzed in R using full-information maximum likelihood estimation to address missing data (Lee & Shi, 2021). Experimental conditions were

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dummy-coded with the anger condition as the reference group. Emotional exhaustion functioned as a mediator, misinformation correction avoidance as the dependent variable, and correction confidence as a moderator of the link between emotional exhaustion and misinformation correction avoidance. Indirect effects were assessed using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Cross-country variations were explored through multi-group analyses with sequentially constrained paths (Hayes et al., 2013). All relevant covariates were incorporated in the model.

3.4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.4.1 RESULTS

Results are displayed in Tables 8 and 9. Path analysis results are illustrated by Figure 2.

Consistent with the assumptions of H1, in Austria, Denmark, and Poland, enthusiasm, approval, and disapproval (relative to anger) significantly and negatively predicted emotional exhaustion. In Bulgaria, disapproval (relative to anger) similarly predicted lower levels of emotional exhaustion, whereas the effect of enthusiasm and approval (relative to anger) was nonsignificant. Thus, H1c was supported across all four countries, while H1a and H1b received support in all countries but Bulgaria.

H2 was supported in all country samples: emotional exhaustion significantly predicted higher levels of misinformation correction avoidance.

In contrast, H3 was not supported in any country. In Austria, Denmark, and Poland, correction confidence was negatively associated with misinformation correction avoidance but functioned as a positive moderator between emotional exhaustion and correction avoidance, contrary to the hypothesized moderating effect. In Bulgaria, correction confidence showed no significant moderating effect.

3.4.2 DISCUSSION

This study investigated how emotional user reactions to misinformation correction shape individuals' psychological responses and subsequent correction behavior intentions. Using a cross-national experimental design, we manipulated emotional feedback (enthusiastic, approving, disapproving, and angry) and examined their effects on emotional exhaustion and the tendency to avoid future misinformation correction.

Consistent with H1, results demonstrated that feedback containing positive emotional or emotionally neutral cues induced significantly less emotional exhaustion than angry disapproving feedback. This finding underscores the central role of emotional tone in users' psychological reactions to corrective interactions. In line with affective resource theories (Fredrickson's, 2001; Hobfoll, 2001), positive and neutral negative feedback may conserve emotional energy by signaling social approval or constructive disagreement, whereas anger-charged responses deplete emotional resources due to their confrontational and hostile character.

In support of H2, emotional exhaustion emerged as a consistent predictor of misinformation correction avoidance. Participants who reported higher levels of emotional

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exhaustion were more likely to avoid engaging in future correction attempts, confirming that emotional fatigue functions as a psychological barrier to corrective action. This finding extends prior research on social media fatigue (Bright et al., 2015; Maier et al., 2012; Sheng et al., 2023; Zhao, 2024) by demonstrating that emotional exhaustion not only affects general engagement but specifically undermines users' willingness to correct misinformation.

Contrary to expectations, H3 was not supported in the hypothesized direction. While correction confidence was expected to buffer the impact of emotional exhaustion on misinformation correction avoidance, it instead amplified this relationship in almost all country samples. Specifically, the negative effect of exhaustion on future correction engagement was stronger among individuals with higher correction confidence. This pattern suggests that confident users, who invest greater emotional and cognitive effort in crafting accurate corrections, may experience stronger discouragement when faced with hostile feedback. Therefore, among individuals with high emotional exhaustion, high confidence in one's own correction may be more likely to trigger disengagement by prompting doubts about the value of continued corrective efforts. This interpretation aligns with evidence that higher self-efficacy can exacerbate social media fatigue (Bright et al., 2015).

Taken together, the findings extend existing misinformation correction research by highlighting the emotional consequences for correctors themselves, rather than focusing solely on the belief outcomes for recipients (Ecker et al., 2022; Masullo & Kim, 2021). Our findings highlight the emotional costs of engaging in misinformation correction and emphasize the importance of affective dynamics in shaping users' corrective behavior online. Emotional exhaustion emerged as a robust outcome of feedback tone and a direct predictor of future correction avoidance, suggesting that the tone of user interactions can significantly influence the sustainability of corrective efforts. The unexpected moderation effect of correction confidence further illustrates that high confidence does not necessarily buffer against emotional exhaustion but may instead intensify its association with misinformation correction avoidance.

4. EXPERIMENT 3

4.1 BACKGROUND

Correction of misinformation on social media has become a prominent theme in both the scholarly literature (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Bode & Vraga, 2018; Walter & Tukachinsky, 2020) and policy discourse (European Commission, 2022) over recent years. While many institutional actors emphasize that social media platforms should bear primary responsibility for mitigating misinformation (European Commission, 2022; UK Government, 2023), existing research also points to the value of encouraging user-driven misinformation correction (Heiss, 2021). Beyond considerations of accuracy (Bode & Vraga, 2018) and effectiveness (Vraga et al., 2020a; Vraga et al., 2020b), user-driven corrections of political misinformation may contribute to democratic outcomes by supporting more constructive online public deliberation and facilitating civic learning, for instance by prompting observers to attend to accuracy, consult sources, and reflect more carefully on political information.

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Engaging in corrective behavior can, however, be costly. Potential costs include social backlash, emotional strain, and uncertainty about whether the effort will have any payoff, particularly when others contest the correction or portray it as misleading (Pasquetto et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2020). As outlined in Section 3.1, such emotional costs are likely to be central to individuals' decisions about whether to correct misinformation, yet causal evidence directly testing this mechanism remains limited. To address this gap and complement the results of Experiment 2, the present experiment focuses on two emotions that have received comparatively little attention in research on emotions in political communication and that are associated with high situational uncertainty—surprise and anxiety (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

4.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Symbolic interactionism offers a foundational account of how society is continuously produced and sustained through everyday interactions between individuals. From this perspective, the self is not an isolated or fixed entity but a fundamentally social phenomenon, formed and regulated through ongoing interpretation of others' responses in interaction. Individuals evaluate themselves by imagining how their actions appear to others, inferring the judgments implied by those reactions, and experiencing corresponding self-feelings, such as pride, satisfaction, or discomfort. Through this process, social feedback becomes a central mechanism through which individuals assess the social meaning and impact of their behavior (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Thus, felt approval reflects an internalized assessment of one's social impact as inferred from others' emotional responses.

Individuals have a fundamental need for social approval and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), making social feedback a powerful mechanism for reinforcing behavior. In social interactions, emotional expressions serve as social signals that convey information about acceptance and rejection, with, for example, happy expressions typically indicating approval and angry expressions signaling disapproval (Heerdink et al., 2015; Hareli & Hess, 2012). Existing research, however, has focused primarily on emotions with clear evaluative valence, leaving emotions characterized by uncertainty, such as surprise and anxiety, comparatively underexplored.

In interpersonal exchanges, responses like surprise can function similarly to positive social cues, signaling warmth or care and prompting recipients to interpret the reaction as a sign of interest and attentiveness (Liu et al., 2023). Surprise captures attention and redirects cognitive resources toward unexpected stimuli (Loewenstein, 2019), which allows expressions of surprise in information exchange to function as an implicit form of social validation, signaling that the information was noticed and regarded as meaningful.

In the context of misinformation correction, reactions of surprise to such interventions can be interpreted as signals that the correction introduced novel or informative content, indicating that the corrective effort was noticed and cognitively engaged with. Thus, we hypothesize that surprised reactions are likely to foster a sense of social approval among those who correct misinformation.

H1: Exposure to surprised reactions to one's correction *increases* felt approval.

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Research on the relationship between anxiety and cooperation-related behaviors has largely examined individuals' experienced or dispositional anxiety (Cao et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013), with far less attention paid to anxiety expressed by others as a socially evaluative cue. However, unlike surprise, anxious reactions are likely to undermine felt approval because they can signal interpersonal discomfort and social unease rather than affirmation of the corrector's action. Research on emotional expressions shows that fear or anxiety communicates vulnerability, concern, and uncertainty (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), but not endorsement of the interaction partner. In social exchanges, such reactions may shift attention away from the corrector's competence or contribution and toward the emotional burden imposed by the information itself. As a result, the person who provided the correction may infer that their intervention caused distress, creating ambiguity about whether it was socially welcome. In online political contexts, expressions of anxiety may therefore be interpreted less as validation and more as an indication that the correction disrupted social harmony, thereby decreasing the corrector's sense of being socially approved. This connection, however, has not been empirically tested, which is why we hypothesize:

H2: Exposure to anxious reactions to one's correction *decreases* felt approval.

Feeling socially approved can have powerful downstream effects on one's willingness to engage in future behavior. According to classic reinforcement and social exchange theories, behaviors followed by rewarding feedback (such as social approval) are more likely to be repeated (Homans, 1958; Bandura, 1977). When individuals who correct misinformation receive signals of approval, they should be more inclined to continue those corrective behaviors (Oktavianus & Bautista, 2023). Feeling approved likely boosts one's self-efficacy and commitment to the cause, which in the context of misinformation correction would translate to greater intent to correct others in the future. Moreover, when individuals believe that others appreciate careful and informed contributions, they are more likely to invest effort in verifying information before engaging, consistent with evidence that perceived social rewards increase motivation for accuracy and information-seeking behaviors (Yu & Yan, 2024).

Taken together, these findings indicate that felt approval is likely to foster greater engagement in related civic behaviors. Someone who feels approved after correcting misinformation will be more inclined to correct others in the future (seeing it as a positively reinforced behavior), to seek out fact-checks (since their diligence is socially valued), and to express their political views (because they do not fear social sanction and instead feel support). We therefore expect a positive association between felt approval and each of these proactive intentions.

H3: Felt approval is *positively* associated with (a) future correction intentions, (b) fact-checking intentions, and (c) political expression intentions.

4.3 METHODOLOGY

4.3.1 DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

The study used a 1 × 3 between-subjects design. Data collection procedures were identical to those described in Section 3.3.1.

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4.3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Sampling criteria and exclusion rules were identical to those described in Section 2.3.2. The final sample comprised N = 1520 participants (Austria: n = 385; Bulgaria: n = 376; Denmark: n = 378; Poland: n = 381), based on a priori power analyses. Sample details are displayed in Tables 10 and 11.

4.3.3 COUNTRY SELECTION

Country selection followed the same rationale and criteria outlined in Section 2.3.3.

4.3.4 PROCEDURE AND EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION

The experimental procedure and manipulation followed exactly the rationale outlined in Section 3.3.4. The only difference lies in the emotional manipulation of the user feedback comment conditions. In the present experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: surprised, anxious, and neutral feedback (control). Each comment section comprised seven user comments, five of which reflected the emotional tone of the assigned experimental condition (surprised or anxious), along with two neutral filler comments included to enhance realism. The control condition comprised seven neutral comments. All comment sets were pretested to confirm that they reliably conveyed and elicited the intended emotional tone for each condition.

4.3.5 MEASURES

Felt approval was measured with a single self-report item asking participants to indicate how strongly they felt approved after reading the other users' comments. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely).

Misinformation correction intentions were assessed using four self-developed items capturing participants' future willingness to correct misinformation. Participants indicated their agreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; e.g., "I will actively correct misinformation on this topic if I encounter it again", "I feel a responsibility to speak up and correct false information on this topic").

Fact-checking intentions were measured with four items informed by prior work on online information credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000), capturing participants' intentions to verify information following exposure to feedback in the comments. Participants rated the extent to which the feedback would motivate them to engage in the following actions on a five-point scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely; e.g., "Check to see if the information I posted to correct the misinformation is current", "Check to see that the information I posted to correct the misinformation is complete and comprehensive").

Political expression intentions were assessed using four self-developed items capturing participants' future willingness to express political opinions online. Participants indicated how comfortable they would feel engaging in various forms of political expression on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very uncomfortable, 5 = Very comfortable; e.g., "Openly expressing my political opinions online", "Posting a comment on a political post").

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4.3.6 COVARIATES

Gender, age, education, and political orientation, social media literacy, perceived misinformation accuracy, and prior AI knowledge were controlled for as covariates.

4.3.7 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To verify the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation, participants rated the dominant emotion they perceived in each comment condition. Emotion ratings were z-standardized by country, and planned contrasts confirmed that the targeted emotion was most strongly recognized in its respective condition.

The hypothesized model was estimated in R using full-information maximum likelihood to manage missing values (Lee & Shi, 2021). Dummy coding was applied to the experimental conditions, with the control group serving as the reference category. Felt approval were specified as mediators, while misinformation correction intentions, fact-checking intentions, and political expression intentions were modeled as outcome variables. Indirect effects were derived from 5,000 bootstrap samples, and cross-national variation was evaluated using multi-group analyses with stepwise path constraints (Hayes et al., 2013). All designated covariates were included in the final model.

4.4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.4.1 RESULTS

Results are displayed in Tables 12 and 13. Path analysis results are illustrated by Figure 3.

H1 was supported in all countries except Poland. Although the effect was not statistically significant in Poland, it was highly significant elsewhere, indicating that receiving a surprising reaction following a correction leads to higher felt approval. H2 was rejected across all countries, suggesting that an anxious reaction likewise increases felt approval.

H3a, H3b, and H3c were supported in all countries. Taken together, these findings show that greater felt approval in response to others' surprised and anxious reactions to a correction is associated with a stronger inclination to correct misinformation in the future, to fact-check information, and to express political opinions online.

4.4.2 DISCUSSION

The present research aimed to examine how emotional reactions to misinformation corrections shape perceived social approval and subsequent engagement. For this purpose, we conducted a cross-national online experiment that varied exposure to surprised and anxious reactions following a correction, relative to a neutral reaction condition. We then examined whether these reactions influenced participants' felt approval and how this perceived approval, in turn, was associated with individuals' inclination to correct misinformation in the future, to fact-check political information, and to express political opinions online.

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The findings indicate that emotional reactions to misinformation corrections operate as social signals that shape perceived approval and subsequent engagement. Both surprised and anxious reactions were associated with higher felt approval, potentially suggesting that in mediated interpersonal communication, perceived impact may matter more than emotional valence. Observing that a correction elicits an emotional response may signal that the information was noticed, taken seriously, and processed, even when the reaction reflects discomfort. This perspective aligns with Emotions as Social Information theory, which holds that emotional expressions serve as social cues that observers use to infer the significance and implications of a message, such that any emotional reaction—even negatively valenced—can signal that a communicative act was meaningful and impactful (Van Kleef, 2009).

Higher levels of felt approval were associated with a greater inclination to engage in similar behaviors in the future, including correcting misinformation, fact-checking, and expressing political opinions online. This pattern underscores the motivational role of social approval in sustaining corrective and expressive engagement (Homans, 1958; Bandura, 1977). Importantly, these effects emerged in a social media environment characterized by weak ties and frequent anonymity, indicating that even minimal emotional feedback can operate as a meaningful form of social validation. By connecting such lightweight feedback to subsequent corrective and expressive intentions, the findings extend prior misinformation-correction research, which has largely focused on message credibility (Vraga et al., 2020a) and source characteristics (Vraga & Bode, 2017), by highlighting the motivational implications of interpersonal feedback. More broadly, the results contribute to scholarship on weak ties in social media. Beyond their association with subjective well-being (Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014), emotionally responsive but non-aggressive feedback from weak ties appears capable of sustaining participation in online political discussions.

Taken together, the results suggest that surprised and anxious reactions to misinformation corrections can foster continued corrective and expressive engagement by increasing feelings of social approval.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In **Task 5.1**, we examined how emotions embedded in digital political communication shape cognitive processing, political learning, and engagement across social media contexts. Across three cross-national online experiments conducted in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Poland, the research analyzed how positive and negative emotional appeals influence knowledge acquisition, information seeking, and avoidance. The studies further investigated how emotions shape responses to misinformation and disinformation, including fact-checking intentions, perceived credibility, and perceived control, while comparing elite political communication and citizen-to-citizen interaction. Together, the experiments provide systematic cross-national evidence that advances theory-driven research on emotions in contemporary digital political information environments.

Experiment 1 focused on the role of discrete emotions in shaping political learning in social media contexts. Drawing on data from four countries, the findings demonstrated that both positive and negative emotions can increase approach motivation and reduce avoidance motivation toward political information. However, only positive emotions consistently facilitated deeper cognitive processing by lowering individuals' tendency to disengage from content. Anxiety, anger, and disgust did not differ significantly in their effects,

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suggesting that negative emotions may operate through a shared motivational pathway that heightens alertness without supporting sustained information processing. In an information-rich online environment characterized by overload and disengagement, these results highlight the distinctive capacity of positive emotions to counteract avoidance and support attention to political information.

Experiment 2 examined how emotional feedback to misinformation correction affects emotional exhaustion and subsequent avoidance of corrective engagement. Across countries, enthusiastic and approving reactions were generally associated with lower emotional exhaustion compared to anger, whereas anger emerged as uniquely draining psychological resources. Emotional exhaustion, in turn, consistently predicted higher avoidance of future misinformation correction. Contrary to expectations, correction confidence did not buffer these effects. Instead, in several countries, confidence intensified the positive association between emotional exhaustion and avoidance, indicating that even highly confident users may disengage when corrective interactions become emotionally depleting.

Experiment 3 extended this line of inquiry by focusing on more complex and less confrontational emotional reactions, namely surprise and anxiety. The results showed that both surprised and anxious reactions reliably increased felt social approval across countries. Importantly, higher felt approval was consistently associated with stronger intentions to correct misinformation, to fact-check political information, and to express political opinions online. These findings demonstrate that emotional responses signaling attention or concern, even when not explicitly positive, can foster continued engagement by conveying that corrective efforts were noticed and socially meaningful.

IMPLICATIONS

From a societal perspective, the findings of **Experiment 1** suggest that the emotional tone of political communication has consequences not only for engagement but also for citizens' capacity to learn and make sense of politics. In digital environments marked by information overload, negativity, and widespread disengagement, positive emotions such as enthusiasm or hope appear uniquely capable of lowering psychological resistance to political information and sustaining attention beyond initial exposure. While negative emotional appeals may successfully capture attention in the short term, they do little to support durable understanding or retention. By contrast, messages that evoke positive affect can foster a more receptive mindset, enabling citizens to engage with political content in a less defensive and more cognitively open manner. This implies that political actors, media producers, and civic educators seeking to strengthen informed citizenship may benefit from communication strategies that prioritize affective positivity as a means of supporting democratic competence rather than merely maximizing visibility or reach.

The results of **Experiment 2** highlight that the emotional tone of feedback plays a regulatory role in online political discourse. Anger, in particular, depletes psychological resources and creates a barrier to prosocial behaviors such as misinformation correction. Notably, confidence does not protect users from these effects and may even exacerbate disengagement when emotional exhaustion is high. Understanding how emotional fatigue accumulates in everyday political interactions is therefore crucial for explaining why corrective participation often declines despite high levels of concern about misinformation. These insights point to the importance of promoting more emotionally constructive and

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civil online interactions to mitigate exhaustion and sustain users' motivation to engage in corrective discourse.

Finally, **Experiment 3** suggests that non-confrontational and nuanced emotional feedback, such as surprise or anxiety, can encourage continued engagement by signaling social recognition without escalating conflict. Extending the insights from Experiment 2, these findings indicate that future research and practice should move beyond simple positive–negative distinctions and account for a broader range of emotions with potentially beneficial consequences for democratic deliberation. Emotions that communicate attention, concern, or impact may help sustain constructive participation in online political discussions without triggering exhaustion or withdrawal.

Beyond their immediate societal relevance, the findings across Experiments 1–3 provide actionable insights for the co-creation and foresight activities developed in WP6 and WP7. By identifying emotional cues that reduce disengagement without amplifying conflict, the results can inform the design of citizen innovation labs in WP6, helping facilitators and practitioners craft emotionally constructive narratives that sustain participation while avoiding exhaustion or defensive withdrawal. Similarly, the observed heterogeneity in emotional effects offers an empirical basis for WP7's scenario-building and future-oriented policy exercises, allowing foresight scenarios to be grounded in evidence about which emotional dynamics are more likely to foster democratic resilience rather than polarisation. In this way, the experimental findings support the translation of emotion research into practical tools for narrative co-design, scenario testing, and policy development aimed at strengthening informed and constructive democratic engagement.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. ETHICAL APPROVAL CONFIRMATIONS

ANNEX 1.1 PRETESTING AND EXPERIMENT 1

Confirmation-1397-Stephanie Bührer
Department of Communication

universität wien
Faculty of Social Sciences

Research Ethics Screening Confirmation

The Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences (IRB) at the University of Vienna confirms that the Research Ethics Screening, filled out by Stephanie Bührer for the research project "The Impact of Negative Emotions in Social Media Content on Political Learning", has classified the project in the category of minimal ethical risk. This self-assessment is based on the information provided by the applicant as enclosed in the appendix. The IRB checked the coherence of the information on potential ethical problems or challenges with the overall project description provided by the applicant and concludes that the applicant has proposed sufficient mitigation strategies for ethical challenges in the project to realise it on the researcher`s own responsibility.

This confirmation does not constitute formal ethics approval by the University of Vienna Ethics Committee, which is not required for this kind of research according to the Statutes of the University of Vienna and the Austrian 2002 Universities Act. If any doubts or ethical challenges occur during the further planning and/or implementation of the research project, or if circumstances change that could raise ethical concerns, please contact the IRB.

- [X] I confirm that I filled out the Research Ethics Screening to the best of my knowledge and that I am aware that this confirmation is only valid together with the information provided as enclosed in the appendix.
- [X] I confirm that I will take all measures necessary to identify and address ethical issues in all stages of my research project.
- [X] I am aware that I have to re-run the Research Ethics Screening if there are changes regarding the research design or the use of data that could raise ethical issues.

Researcher

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences

22.05.2025 14:01 1

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ANNEX 1.2 EXPERIMENTS 2&3

Confirmation-1521-Stephanie Bührer
Department of Communication

universität wien
Faculty of Social Sciences

Research Ethics Screening Confirmation

The Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences (IRB) at the University of Vienna confirms that the Research Ethics Screening, filled out by Stephanie Bührer for the research project "The Impact of Emotional Feedback in Response to Misinformation Correction on Social Media", has classified the project in the category of minimal ethical risk. This self-assessment is based on the information provided by the applicant as enclosed in the appendix. The IRB checked the coherence of the information on potential ethical problems or challenges with the overall project description provided by the applicant and concludes that the applicant has proposed sufficient mitigation strategies for ethical challenges in the project to realise it on the researcher`s own responsibility.

This confirmation does not constitute formal ethics approval by the University of Vienna Ethics Committee, which is not required for this kind of research according to the Statutes of the University of Vienna and the Austrian 2002 Universities Act. If any doubts or ethical challenges occur during the further planning and/or implementation of the research project, or if circumstances change that could raise ethical concerns, please contact the IRB.

- [x] I confirm that I filled out the Research Ethics Screening to the best of my knowledge and that I am aware that this confirmation is only valid together with the information provided as enclosed in the appendix.
- [x] I confirm that I will take all measures necessary to identify and address ethical issues in all stages of my research project.
- [x] I am aware that I have to re-run the Research Ethics Screening if there are changes regarding the research design or the use of data that could raise ethical issues.

Stephanie Bührer
Researcher

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences

10.11.2025 23:37 1

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ANNEX 1.3. DATA MANAGEMENT

No personal data (e.g., names or addresses) were collected. All contact information necessary for communication with participants was managed exclusively by the sample provider. Respondents were identified only through anonymous identification codes. At the end of the survey, respondents were provided with an open form through which they could contact the research team. The service provider received a contact list containing the relevant IRB contact information and the contact details of the GDPR data protection officer, along with instructions to forward participants' messages in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Communication. All data were treated with strict confidentiality and are stored securely on university servers for a period of ten years. Access to the data was restricted to authorized researchers involved in the study, all of whom were bound by confidentiality agreements. All data management procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna.

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ANNEX 2. EXPERIMENT 1 TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES

	Gender		Age	Education	
	Male *n* (%)	Female *n* (%)	*M* (*SD*)	Without university degree *n* (%)	With university degree *n* (%)
Austria (*n* = 608)	313 (51.5)	295 (48.5)	43.69 (13.60)	369 (60.7)	239 (39.3)
Bulgaria (*n* = 602)	293 (48.7)	309 (51.3)	42.88 (12.38)	377 (62.6)	225 (37.4)
Denmark (*n* = 605)	305 (50.4)	300 (49.6)	41.36 (14.15)	347 (57.4)	258 (42.6)
Poland (*n* = 615)	310 (50.4)	305 (49.6)	41.58 (12.98)	390 (63.4)	225 (36.6)

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER CONDITION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES

	Experimental Condition				
	Anxiety *n* (%)	Anger *n* (%)	Disgust *n* (%)	Enthusiasm *n* (%)	Control *n* (%)
Austria (*n* = 608)	129 (21.2)	113 (18.6)	117 (19.2)	125 (20.6)	124 (20.4)
Bulgaria (*n* = 602)	123 (20.4)	123 (20.4)	117 (19.4)	116 (19.3)	123 (20.4)
Denmark (*n* = 605)	115 (19.0)	119 (19.7)	127 (21.0)	123 (20.3)	121 (20.0)
Poland (*n* = 615)	127 (20.7)	120 (19.5)	118 (19.2)	126 (20.5)	124 (20.2)

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TABLE 3. *PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS*

	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	B (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*
Approach Motivation								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**.38 (.11), .14**	**< .001**	**.69 (.11), .23**	**< .001**	**.45 (.13), .15**	**< .001**	**.28 (.13), .09**	**.030**
Anger (vs. Control)	**.58 (.12), .21**	**< .001**	**.73 (.13), .25**	**< .001**	**.38 (.13), .13**	**.003**	**.48 (.13), .16**	**< .001**
Disgust (vs. Control)	**.51 (.13), .19**	**< .001**	**.52 (.12), .17**	**< .001**	**.38 (.13), .14**	**.003**	.23 (.12), .08	.062
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	**.59 (.11), .22**	**< .001**	**.63 (.12), .21**	**< .001**	**.39 (.12), .14**	**.001**	**.38 (.12), .13**	**.002**
Gender	**.21 (.08), .09**	**.008**	.14 (.08), .06	.080	.06 (.08), .03	.430	**.26 (.08), .11**	**< .001**
Age	-.00 (.00), -.04	.289	**.01 (.00), .10**	**.002**	**-.01 (.00), -.07**	**.039**	**.01 (.00), .07**	**.036**
Education	-.07 (.08), -.03	.383	-.01 (.08), -.01	.848	-.06 (.08), -.03	.427	-.11 (.08), -.04	.169
Political Orientation	-.03 (.05), -.03	.519	-.00 (.04), -.00	.958	-.01 (.04), -.01	.847	.02 (.04), .02	.619
Trustworthiness	**.42 (.05), .42**	**< .001**	**.42 (.04), .43**	**< .001**	**.44 (.04), .44**	**< .001**	**.49 (.04), .46**	**< .001**
Political Knowledge	**.24 (.05), .20**	**< .001**	.10 (.05), .08	.055	**.17 (.05), .15**	**< .001**	**.20 (.05), .15**	**< .001**
Media Diet	**.21 (.05), .17**	**< .001**	**.37 (.05), .27**	**< .001**	**.26 (.05), .19**	**< .001**	**.27 (.05), .19**	**< .001**

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	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
R^2	.303		.412		.336		.396	
Avoidance Motivation								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	.01 (.13), .00	.952	**-.45 (.13), -.17**	**< .001**	**-.29 (.13), -.11**	**.025**	-.11 (.14), -.04	.436
Anger (vs. Control)	-.17 (.13), -.07	.186	**-.45 (.13), -.16**	**< .001**	**-.27 (.12), -.10**	**.027**	**-.38 (.13), -.14**	**.004**
Disgust (vs. Control)	-.22 (.13), -.08	.077	**-.30 (.14), -.11**	**.033**	**-.29 (.13), -.11**	**.027**	.04 (.14), .02	.765
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	**-.42 (.12), -.16**	**< .001**	**-.65 (.13), -.23**	**< .001**	**-.40 (.13), -.16**	**.002**	**-.38 (.14), -.15**	**.006**
Gender	-.16 (.08), -.08	.062	-.00 (.09), -.00	.995	.02 (.09), .01	.810	.08 (.09), .04	.345
Age	**-.01 (.00), -.08**	**.040**	-.00 (.00), -.03	.510	.00 (.00), .01	.758	-.00 (.00), -.04	.362
Education	-.08 (.09), -.04	.367	.06 (.08), .03	.480	-.04 (.09), -.02	.643	.03 (.09), .01	.741
Political Orientation	.07 (.05), .06	.134	.06 (.04), .06	.138	**.08 (.04), .09**	**.047**	**.09 (.04), .09**	**.034**
Trustworthiness	**-.17 (.05), -.18**	**< .001**	**-.19 (.04), -.21**	**< .001**	-.06 (.05), -.07	.180	**-.10 (.05), -.11**	**.021**
Political Knowledge	-.09 (.05), -.08	.114	.02 (.06), .02	.691	-.09 (.05), -.08	.110	-.01 (.06), -.01	.915
Media Diet	-.08 (.05), -.07	.110	**-.15 (.06), -.12**	**.008**	.11 (.06), .09	.057	-.01 (.06), -.01	.858

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	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
R^2	.083		.112		.033		.052	
Headline Recognition								
Approach Motivation	-.04 (.04), -.04	.410	-.04 (.05), -.05	.362	**-.12 (.05), -.12**	**.029**	-.05 (.05), -.05	.324
Avoidance Motivation	**-.15 (.04), -.15**	**< .001**	**-.17 (.04), -.17**	**< .001**	**-.15 (.05), -.14**	**< .001**	**-.15 (.04), -.15**	**< .001**
Anxiety (vs. Control)	-.06 (.12), -.03	.594	.24 (.14), .09	.099	-.12 (.15), -.04	.422	.04 (.12), .01	.765
Anger (vs. Control)	-.00 (.13), -.00	.975	.01 (.14), .01	.917	.18 (.16), .06	.269	-.06 (.14), -.02	.679
Disgust (vs. Control)	-.12 (.13), -.05	.355	.18 (.13), .07	.170	-.07 (.15), -.02	.634	**-.30 (.13), -.12**	**.016**
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	-.03 (.13), -.01	.807	.14 (.14), .05	.332	-.04 (.14), -.01	.773	-.22 (.13), -.09	.078
Gender	.06 (.08), .03	.480	.10 (.09), .05	.280	**.34 (.09), .14**	**< .001**	.12 (.08), .06	.154
Age	**.01 (.00), .11**	**.006**	-.00 (.00), -.04	.365	.00 (.00), .04	.294	.00 (.00), .01	.846
Education	.17 (.09), .08	.051	**.23 (.09), .10**	**.011**	.06 (.10), .02	.570	.12 (.09), .05	.177
Political Orientation	-.04 (.05), -.04	.354	-.01 (.04), -.01	.855	**-.14 (.04), -.13**	**.002**	-.02 (.04), -.02	.552
Trustworthiness	-.06 (.04), -.06	.161	-.08 (.04), -.09	.057	-.04 (.05), -.04	.384	**-.09 (.04), -.10**	**.040**

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	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	B (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*
Political Knowledge	**.19 (.05), .17**	**< .001**	.03 (.05), .03	.595	**.15 (.06), .12**	**.008**	**.11 (.05), .10**	**.046**
Media Diet	**-.14 (.05), -.13**	**.004**	**-.14 (.06), -.11**	**.021**	-.13 (.07), -.09	.053	**-.21 (.05), -.18**	**< .001**
R^2	.093		.061		.105		.090	
Article Comprehension								
Approach Motivation	-.09 (.05), -.09	.064	-.08 (.05), -.09	.102	-.05 (.05), -.05	.342	-.07 (.05), -.07	.137
Avoidance Motivation	**-.21 (.05), -.20**	**< .001**	**-.11 (.05), -.12**	**.025**	-.09 (.05), -.08	.050	**-.18 (.05), -.17**	**< .001**
Anxiety (vs. Control)	-.04 (.13), -.01	.752	.08 (.14), .03	.533	.04 (.14), .01	.778	.21 (.14), .07	.147
Anger (vs. Control)	.05 (.13), .02	.720	-.12 (.15), -.05	.402	**.32 (.14), .11**	**.023**	.17 (.15), .06	.247
Disgust (vs. Control)	.05 (.14), .02	.730	-.14 (.14), -.05	.334	-.07 (.15), -.03	.618	.05 (.15), .02	.748
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	.05 (.14), .02	.716	.04 (.15), .01	.810	-.03 (.15), -.01	.842	.19 (.14), .07	.188
Gender	-.11 (.08), -.05	.181	-.00 (.09), -.00	1.000	-.02 (.09), -.01	.861	.09 (.10), .04	.338
Age	**.02 (.00), .23**	**< .001**	**.01 (.00), .12**	**.004**	**.01 (.00), .15**	**< .001**	**.02 (.00), .17**	**< .001**
Education	**.50 (.08), .22**	**< .001**	**.19 (.09), .08**	**.030**	.05 (.09), .02	.564	**.22 (.09), .09**	**.014**

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	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	B (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*
Political Orientation	-.01 (.05), -.01	.790	-.03 (.04), -.03	.463	-.03 (.04), -.03	.533	**-.10 (.04), -.10**	**.015**
Trustworthiness	-.07 (.04), -.07	.095	**-.11 (.04), -.13**	**.008**	**-.10 (.05), -.10**	**.025**	**-.10 (.04), -.10**	**.028**
Political Knowledge	**.18 (.05), .15**	**< .001**	.04 (.05), .04	.402	**.16 (.05), .14**	**.003**	.09 (.06), .07	.135
Media Diet	**-.20 (.05), -.16**	**< .001**	.01 (.06), .01	.833	**-.17 (.06), -.12**	**.007**	-.04 (.06), -.03	.461
R^2	.218		.063		.102		.100	

Note. Bold indicates significant coefficients. Gender coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Education coded as 0 = no college/university degree and 1 = with college/university degree.

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TABLE 4. *INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF APPROACH MOTIVATION AS MEDIATOR*

	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Headline Recognition – Indirect Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.05, 0.02]	.434	[-0.10, 0.03]	.375	[-0.12, -0.00]	.073	[-0.05, 0.01]	.420
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.08, 0.03]	.425	[-0.11, 0.03]	.379	[-0.11, -0.00]	.093	[-0.08, 0.02]	.378
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.07, 0.03]	.430	[-0.08, 0.03]	.383	[-0.11, -0.00]	.095	[-0.05, 0.01]	.440
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.08, 0.03]	.418	[-0.09, 0.03]	.374	[-0.11, -0.00]	.086	[-0.06, 0.01]	.385
Headline Recognition – Total Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.31, 0.16]	.513	[-0.08, 0.49]	.153	[-0.47, 0.12]	.255	[-0.23, 0.27]	.845
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.28, 0.23]	.847	[-0.28, 0.25]	.901	[-0.18, 0.45]	.410	[-0.35, 0.19]	.570
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.40, 0.12]	.284	[-0.11, 0.42]	.232	[-0.40, 0.19]	.443	**[-0.56, -0.06]**	**.013**
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.31, 0.19]	.679	[-0.17, 0.40]	.440	[-0.37, 0.19]	.544	[-0.48, 0.01]	.059
Article Comprehension – Indirect Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.09, 0.00]	.117	[-0.13, 0.01]	.119	[-0.08, 0.02]	.373	[-0.06, 0.01]	.251

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Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.13, 0.00]	.098	[-0.14, 0.01]	.127	[-0.07, 0.02]	.386	[-0.09, 0.01]	.188
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.12, 0.00]	.119	[-0.10, 0.01]	.128	[-0.07, 0.02]	.380	[-0.05, 0.01]	.289
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.13, 0.00]	.092	[-0.13, 0.01]	.126	[-0.07, 0.02]	.384	[-0.07, 0.01]	.206
Article Comprehension – Total Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.33, 0.18]	.553	[-0.23, 0.29]	.828	[-0.26, 0.30]	.901	[-0.09, 0.47]	.188
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.27, 0.26]	.964	[-0.45, 0.09]	.192	**[0.03, 0.56]**	**.031**	[-0.15, 0.43]	.345
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.27, 0.26]	.996	[-0.46, 0.09]	.202	[-0.37, 0.19]	.527	[-0.25, 0.32]	.831
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.27, 0.26]	.962	[-0.32, 0.27]	.915	[-0.34, 0.24]	.734	[-0.11, 0.44]	.256

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TABLE 5. *INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION AS MEDIATOR*

	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Headline Recognition – Indirect Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.04, 0.04]	.953	**[0.02, 0.14]**	**.014**	[0.01, 0.10]	.074	[-0.02, 0.06]	.466
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.01, 0.07]	.221	**[0.02, 0.14]**	**.011**	[0.01, 0.09]	.074	**[0.02, 0.12]**	**.028**
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.00, 0.08]	.120	[0.00, 0.11]	.073	[0.00, 0.10]	.062	[-0.05, 0.04]	.775
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	**[0.02, 0.12]**	**.016**	**[0.04, 0.19]**	**.004**	**[0.02, 0.12]**	**.023**	**[0.01, 0.12]**	**.035**
Headline Recognition – Total Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.30, 0.17]	.591	**[0.03, 0.60]**	**.029**	[-0.37, 0.22]	.611	[-0.19, 0.30]	.667
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.24, 0.28]	.872	[-0.19, 0.36]	.532	[-0.09, 0.54]	.174	[-0.26, 0.27]	.996
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.35, 0.17]	.502	[-0.04, 0.50]	.084	[-0.31, 0.27]	.858	**[-0.56, -0.06]**	**.013**
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.23, 0.30]	.829	[-0.03, 0.52]	.082	[-0.26, 0.30]	.891	[-0.40, 0.08]	.189
Article Comprehension – Indirect Effects								

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	Austria (n = 608)		Bulgaria (n = 602)		Denmark (n = 605)		Poland (n = 615)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.06, 0.05]	.953	**[0.01, 0.11]**	**.046**	[-0.00, 0.07]	.182	[-0.03, 0.08]	.458
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.02, 0.10]	.212	[0.01, 0.11]	.058	[-0.00, 0.07]	.163	**[0.02, 0.14]**	**.028**
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.01, 0.11]	.111	[0.00, 0.08]	.117	[-0.00, 0.07]	.163	[-0.06, 0.04]	.772
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	**[0.03, 0.17]**	**.008**	**[0.01, 0.15]**	**.042**	[0.00, 0.08]	.099	**[0.02, 0.14]**	**.031**
Article Comprehension – Total Effects								
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-0.29, 0.21]	.746	[-0.14, 0.41]	.322	[-0.22, 0.35]	.643	[-0.06, 0.51]	.119
Anger (vs. Control)	[-0.18, 0.36]	.541	[-0.36, 0.21]	.627	**[0.07, 0.62]**	**.015**	[-0.05, 0.54]	.114
Disgust (vs. Control)	[-0.17, 0.37]	.496	[-0.39, 0.18]	.473	[-0.33, 0.23]	.748	[-0.25, 0.34]	.790
Enthusiasm (vs. Control)	[-0.13, 0.42]	.318	[-0.18, 0.39]	.452	[-0.29, 0.30]	.966	[-0.02, 0.54]	.074

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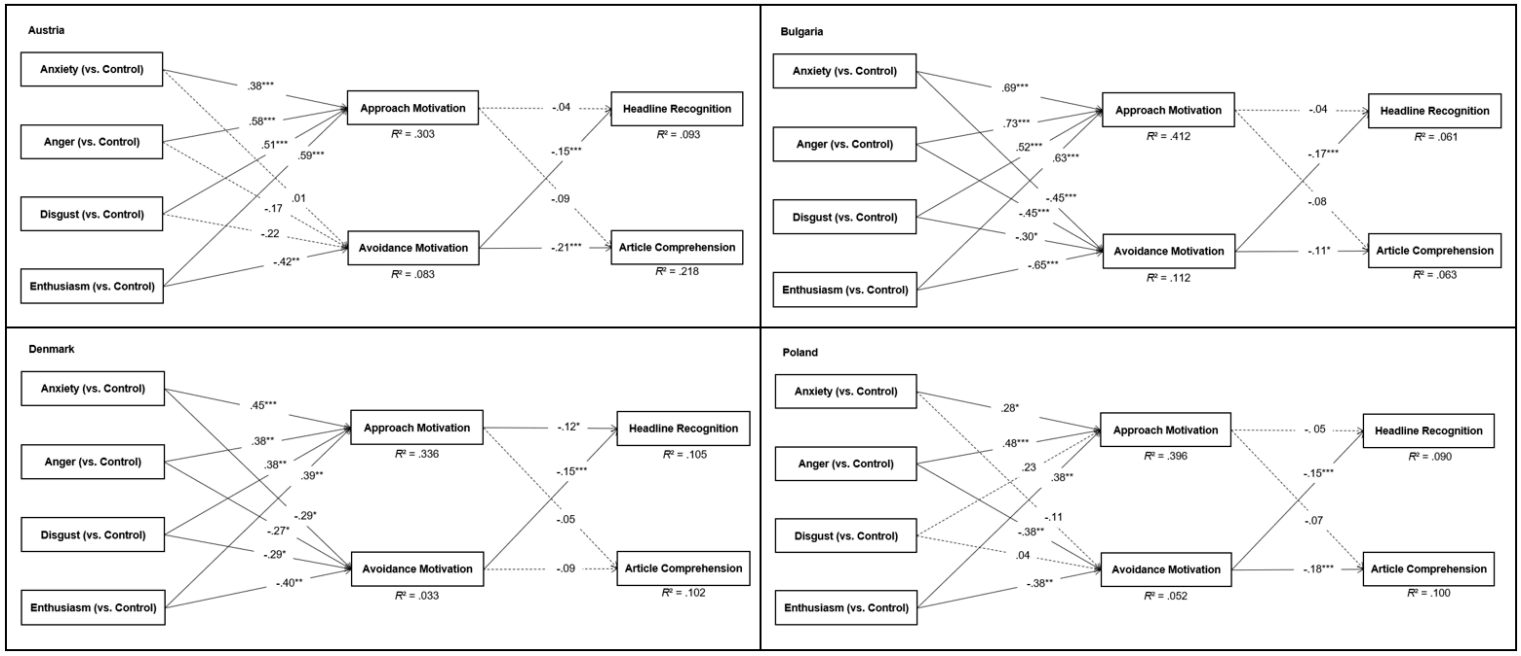
FIGURE 1. *OVERVIEW PLOT FOR PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS*



Note. Additional control variables (gender, age, education, political orientation, trustworthiness, political knowledge, and media diet), direct paths from experimental conditions to headline recognition and article comprehension, mediation path (RQ2), as well as measurement errors were omitted from depiction for clarity reasons. Solid lines indicate significant paths, dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

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ANNEX 3: EXPERIMENT 2 TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 6. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES

	Gender		Age	Education	
	Male *n* (%)	Female *n* (%)	*M* (*SD*)	Without university degree *n* (%)	With university degree *n* (%)
Austria (n = 494)	244 (49.4)	250 (50.6)	44.67 (14.61)	297 (60.1)	197 (39.9)
Bulgaria (n = 501)	251 (50.1)	250 (49.9)	44.13 (13.32)	340 (67.9)	161 (32.1)
Denmark (n = 505)	233 (46.1)	272 (53.9)	44.57 (14.43)	286 (56.6)	219 (43.4)
Poland (n = 501)	245 (48.9)	256 (51.1)	44.52 (14.40)	334 (66.7)	167 (33.3)

TABLE 7. NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER CONDITION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES

	Experimental Condition			
	Enthusiasm *n* (%)	Approval *n* (%)	Disapproval *n* (%)	Anger *n* (%)
Austria (*n* = 494)	122 (24.7)	118 (23.9)	125 (25.3)	129 (26.1)
Bulgaria (*n* = 501)	121 (24.2)	127 (25.3)	124 (24.8)	129 (25.7)
Denmark (*n* = 505)	124 (24.6)	126 (25.0)	117 (23.2)	138 (27.3)
Poland (*n* = 501)	122 (24.4)	127 (25.3)	128 (25.5)	124 (24.8)

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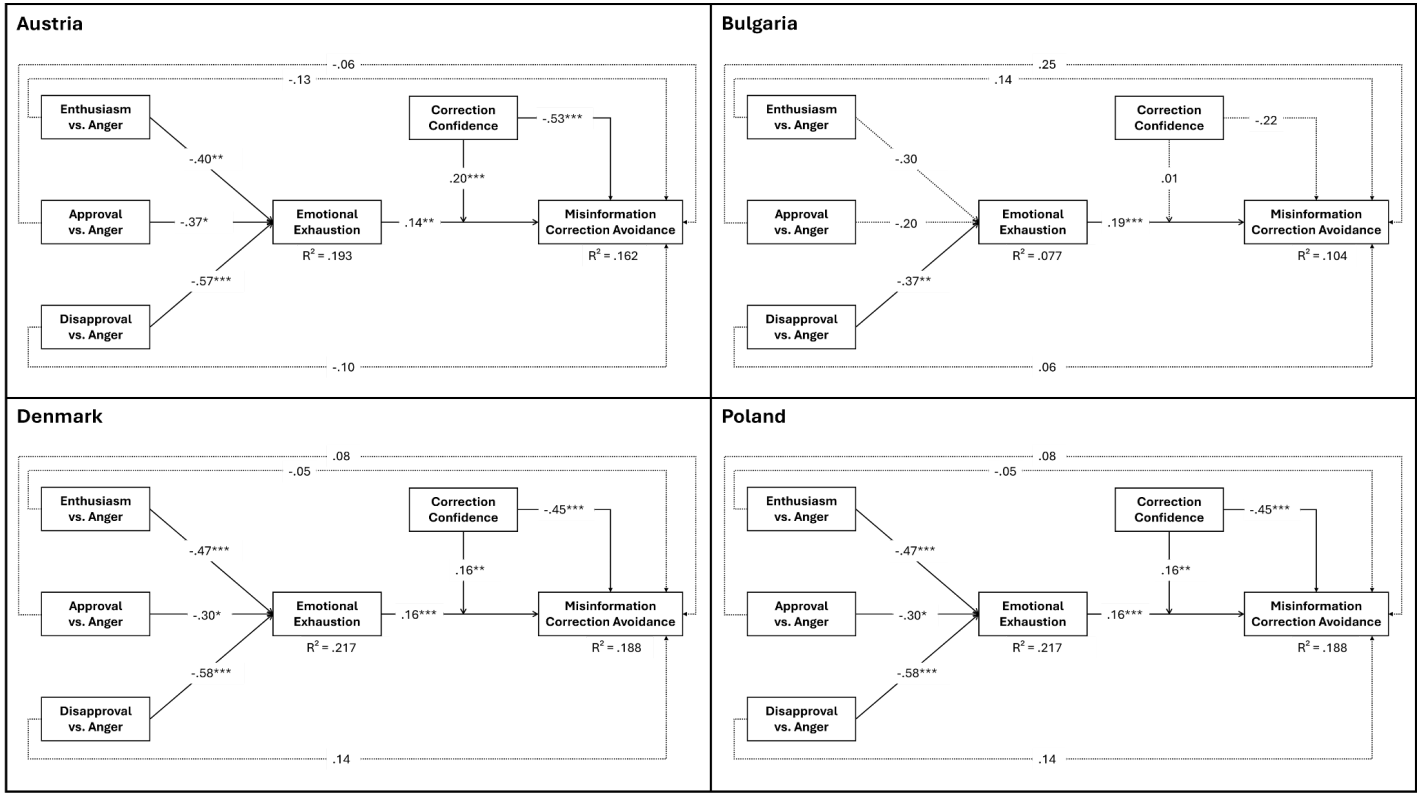
Figure 2. *Overview Plot for Path Analysis Results*



Note. Additional control variables as well as measurement errors were omitted for clarity. Solid lines indicate significant paths, dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

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TABLE 8. *PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS*

	Austria (n = 494)		Bulgaria (n = 501)		Denmark (n = 505)		Poland (n = 501)	
	B (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*	*B* (*SE*), β	*p*
Emotional Exhaustion								
Enthusiasm (vs. Anger)	**-.40 (.14), -.15**	**.005**	-.30 (.16), -.11	.051	**-.47 (.13), -.16**	**< .001**	**-.33 (.15), -.12**	**.023**
Approval (vs. Anger)	**-.37 (.14), -.14**	**.011**	-.20 (.15), -.07	.183	**-.30 (.14), -.11**	**.026**	**-.27 (.14), -.10**	**.049**
Disapproval (vs. Anger)	**-.57 (.12), -.22**	**< .001**	**-.37 (.14), -.13**	**.010**	**-.58 (.13), -.20**	**< .001**	**-.36 (.14), -.13**	**.010**
Gender	-.07 (.10), -.03	.489	-.01 (.11), -.01	.896	-.08 (.10), -.03	.445	.06 (.10), .02	.582
Age	**-.02 (.00), -.26**	**< .001**	-.01 (.00), -.06	.143	**-.01 (.00), -.17**	**< .001**	-.01 (.00), -.08	.079
Education	-.08 (.09), -.03	.397	-.14 (.11), -.06	.193	.16 (.10), .06	.132	.07 (.11), .03	.504
Political Orientation	.07 (.05), .06	.187	.04 (.07), .03	.604	.08 (.05), .07	.096	.05 (.05), .05	.272
Social Media Literacy	**-.14 (.06), -.10**	**.026**	-.02 (.07), -.02	.756	.07 (.07), .05	.306	.07 (.07), .05	.322
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	**.22 (.05), .20**	**< .001**	**.15 (.06), .14**	**.007**	**.35 (.05), .30**	**< .001**	**.32 (.05), .30**	**< .001**

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	Austria (n = 494)		Bulgaria (n = 501)		Denmark (n = 505)		Poland (n = 501)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Fact-Checking Intentions	**.13 (.04), .12**	**.003**	**.18 (.05), .17**	**< .001**	**.12 (.05), .10**	**.024**	**.17 (.05), .15**	**< .001**
R^2	.193		.077		.217		.148	
Misinformation Correction Avoidance								
Emotional Exhaustion	**.14 (.05), .15**	**.003**	**.19 (.05), .20**	**< .001**	**.16 (.04), .20**	**< .001**	**.16 (.05), .17**	**< .001**
Correction Confidence	**-.53 (.11), -.50**	**< .001**	-.22 (.12), -.20	.062	**-.45 (.11), -.42**	**< .001**	**-.49 (.10), -.43**	**< .001**
Emotional Exh. x Correction Conf.	**.20 (.05), .37**	**< .001**	.01 (.05), .02	.864	**.16 (.05), .33**	**.001**	**.11 (.05), .21**	**.016**
Enthusiasm (vs. Anger)	-.13 (.13), -.05	.303	.14 (.14), .05	.322	-.05 (.11), -.02	.661	-.14 (.14), -.05	.321
Approval (vs. Anger)	-.06 (.13), -.03	.630	.25 (.14), .10	.079	.08 (.10), .04	.434	.09 (.13), .03	.467
Disapproval (vs. Anger)	-.10 (.14), -.04	.454	.06 (.14), .02	.653	.14 (.12), .06	.260	.03 (.14), .01	.850
Gender	.13 (.09), .06	.154	-.13 (.10), -.06	.196	.09 (.08), .05	.279	.05 (.10), .02	.649
Age	-.00 (.00), -.06	.187	.00 (.00), .02	.665	**-.01 (.00), -.12**	**.007**	-.00 (.00), -.01	.743

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	Austria (n = 494)		Bulgaria (n = 501)		Denmark (n = 505)		Poland (n = 501)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Education	.01 (.10), .01	.884	-.05 (.10), -.02	.648	-.09 (.08), -.05	.287	.06 (.10), .03	.516
Political Orientation	.10 (.05), .09	.074	-.03 (.06), -.02	.641	.06 (.04), .07	.105	.06 (.04), .06	.183
Social Media Literacy	-.03 (.07), -.02	.675	**.15 (.07), .12**	**.034**	-.04 (.06), -.03	.523	**.22 (.07), .16**	**.003**
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	.05 (.05), .05	.321	**.11 (.05), .11**	**.042**	**.10 (.04), .11**	**.016**	**.10 (.05), .09**	**.046**
Fact-Checking Intentions	-.09 (.06), -.09	.090	.04 (.05), .04	.485	.00 (.05), .00	.951	-.01 (.05), -.01	.792
R^2	.162		.104		.188		.163	

Note. Bold indicates significant coefficients. Gender coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Education coded as 0 = no college/university degree and 1 = with college/university degree.

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TABLE 9. *INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION AS A MEDIATOR*

	Austria (n = 494)		Bulgaria (n = 501)		Denmark (n = 505)		Poland (n = 501)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Misinformation Correction Avoidance – Indirect Effects								
Enthusiasm (vs. Anger)	[-.119, -.009]	.057	[-.129, .002]	.078	**[-.145, -.025]**	**.015**	[-.122, -.007]	.072
Approval (vs. Anger)	[-.110, -.007]	.061	[-.102, .019]	.210	[-.109, -.005]	.063	[-.101, .001]	.095
Disapproval (vs. Anger)	**[-.148, -.024]**	**.014**	**[-.146, -.013]**	**.033**	**[-.167, -.038]**	**.004**	**[-.121, -.011]**	**.044**
Misinformation Correction Avoidance – Total Effects								
Enthusiasm (vs. Anger)	[-.437, .060]	.134	[-.199, .354]	.576	[-.339, .090]	.259	[-.480, .080]	.173
Approval (vs. Anger)	[-.364, .138]	.388	[-.073, .504]	.141	[-.170, .236]	.764	[-.204, .302]	.707
Disapproval (vs. Anger)	[-.442, .086]	.178	[-.279, .262]	.937	[-.192, .282]	.714	[-.300, .234]	.815

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ANNEX 4: EXPERIMENT 3 TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 10. *SAMPLE DESCRIPTION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES*

	Gender		Age	Education	
	Male *n* (%)	Female *n* (%)	*M* (*SD*)	Without university degree *n* (%)	With university degree *n* (%)
Austria (*n* = 385)	191 (49.6)	194 (50.4)	43.47 (14.49)	246 (63.9)	139 (36.1)
Bulgaria (*n* = 376)	186 (49.5)	190 (50.5)	44.45 (13.62)	245 (65.2)	131 (34.8)
Denmark (*n* = 378)	195 (51.6)	183 (48.4)	45.02 (14.25)	220 (58.2)	158 (41.8)
Poland (*n* = 381)	191 (50.1)	190 (49.9)	43.56 (14.31)	254 (66.7)	127 (33.3)

TABLE 11. *NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER CONDITION IN ALL FOUR COUNTRIES*

	Experimental Condition		
	Surprise *n* (%)	Anxiety *n* (%)	Control *n* (%)
Austria (*n* = 385)	126 (32.7)	132 (34.3)	127 (33.0)
Bulgaria (*n* = 376)	129 (34.3)	128 (34.0)	119 (31.6)
Denmark (*n* = 378)	127 (33.6)	128 (33.9)	123 (32.5)
Poland (*n* = 381)	129 (33.9)	122 (32.0)	130 (34.1)

Funded by the European Union

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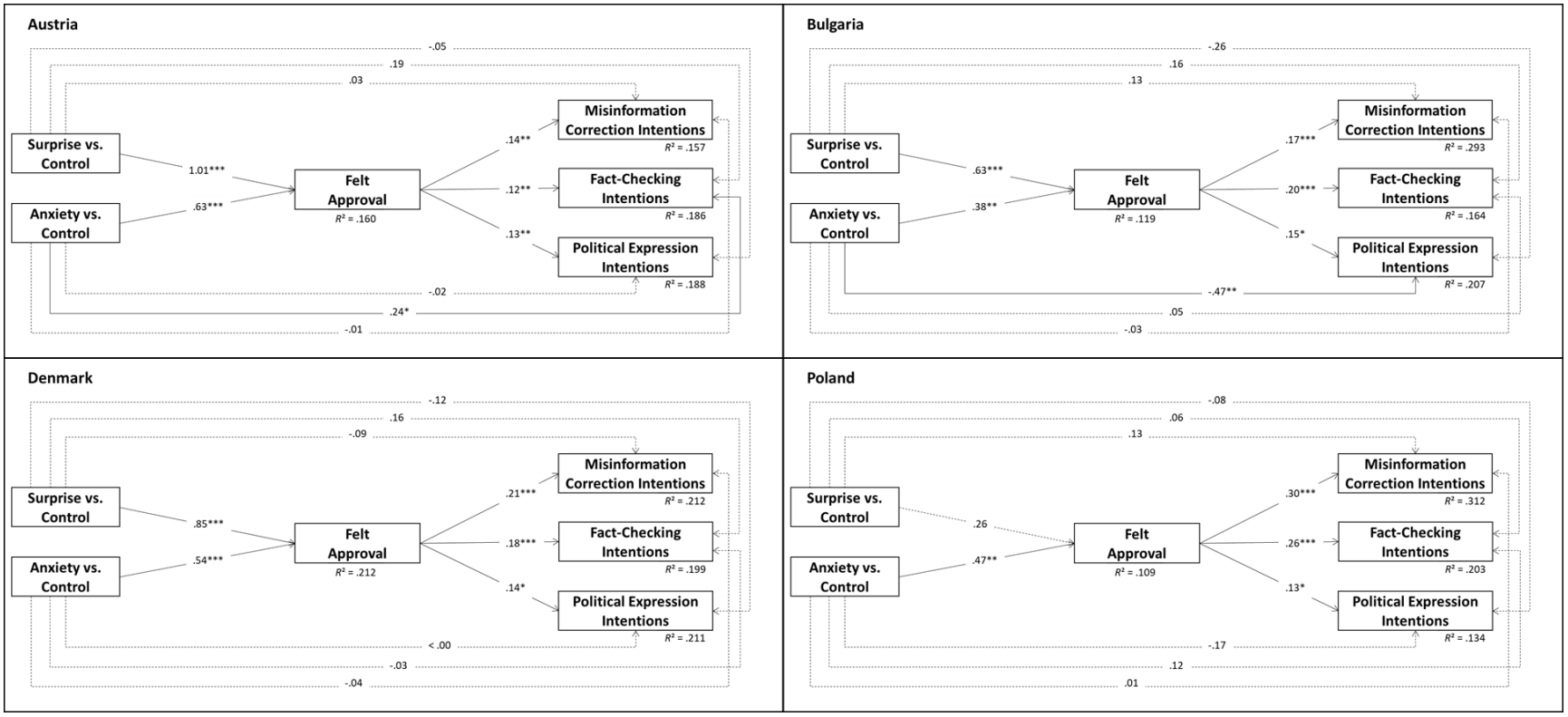
Figure 3. *Overview Plot for Path Analysis Results*



Note. Additional control variables as well as measurement errors were omitted for clarity. Solid lines indicate significant paths, dashed lines indicate non-significant paths. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

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TABLE 12. *PATH ANALYSIS RESULTS*

	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Felt Approval								
Surprise (vs. Control)	**1.01 (.14), .38**	**< .001**	**.63 (.13), .27**	**< .001**	**.85 (.14), .33**	**< .001**	.26 (.16), .09	.119
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**.63 (.14), .24**	**< .001**	**.38 (.13), .16**	**.004**	**.54 (.14), .21**	**< .001**	**.47 (.15), .17**	**.002**
Gender	-.18 (.12), -.07	.131	**-.38 (.11), -.17**	**< .001**	-.13 (.11), -.06	.245	.12 (.14), .04	.390
Age	.00 (.00), .03	.537	.00 (.00), .02	.738	.01 (.00), .07	.175	**.01 (.00), .15**	**.006**
Education	.03 (.13), .01	.793	.20 (.12), .09	.093	.02 (.12), .01	.837	-.02 (.14), -.01	.905
Political Orientation	**.15 (.07), .11**	**.026**	.12 (.06), .09	.059	**.16 (.05), .15**	**.002**	.04 (.06), .03	.526
Social Media Literacy	.11 (.09), .07	.237	-.00 (.08), -.00	.962	.04 (.08), .03	.664	.20 (.11), .14	.071
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	**.12 (.06), .11**	**.038**	**.16 (.05), .15**	**.004**	**.20 (.05), .19**	**< .001**	**-.14 (.06), -.11**	**.023**
Prior AI Knowledge	.10 (.08), .08	.216	.11 (.08), .10	.168	**.21 (.07), .17**	**.005**	.17 (.11), .13	.115

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	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
R^2	.160		.119		.212		.109	
Misinformation Correction Intentions								
Felt Approval	**.14 (.05), .16**	**.003**	**.17 (.05), .16**	**< .001**	**.21 (.05), .23**	**< .001**	**.30 (.05), .34**	**< .001**
Surprise (vs. Control)	.03 (.14), .01	.840	.13 (.13), .05	.301	-.09 (.13), -.04	.471	.13 (.12), .05	.264
Anxiety (vs. Control)	.01 (.14), .00	.959	-.03 (.13), -.01	.825	-.04 (.13), -.02	.740	.01 (.13), .00	.943
Gender	.04 (.11), .02	.725	.18 (.11), .08	.085	-.02 (.11), -.01	.849	.04 (.10), .02	.687
Age	.00 (.00), .05	.339	**.02 (.00), .23**	**< .001**	**.01 (.00), .12**	**.016**	**.01 (.00), .12**	**.010**
Education	-.04 (.11), -.02	.696	-.07 (.11), -.03	.525	-.13 (.11), -.06	.221	-.06 (.11), -.02	.599
Political Orientation	-.07 (.06), -.06	.279	.02 (.06), .01	.801	-.03 (.05), -.03	.602	-.07 (.05), -.07	.123
Social Media Literacy	**.31 (.08), .24**	**< .001**	**.31 (.08), .25**	**< .001**	.14 (.08), .11	.085	**.25 (.08), .20**	**.002**
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	.01 (.06), .01	.925	.01 (.05), .01	.868	.05 (.04), .05	.285	**.10 (.04), .09**	**.027**

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	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Prior AI Knowledge	**.19 (.09), .15**	**.028**	**.30 (.07), .25**	**< .001**	**.32 (.08), .28**	**< .001**	**.22 (.08), .19**	**.007**
R^2	.157		.293		.212		.312	
Fact-Checking Intentions								
Felt Approval	**.12 (.04), .14**	**.004**	**.20 (.05), .20**	**< .001**	**.18 (.05), .22**	**< .001**	**.26 (.05), .31**	**< .001**
Surprise (vs. Control)	.19 (.12), .09	.129	.16 (.13), .07	.246	.16 (.12), .08	.169	.06 (.14), .03	.638
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**.24 (.12), .11**	**.046**	.05 (.13), .02	.714	-.03 (.12), -.02	.788	.12 (.13), .05	.379
Gender	**.28 (.10), .14**	**.004**	.13 (.11), .06	.219	.15 (.09), .08	.108	-.03 (.11), -.01	.806
Age	-.00 (.00), -.02	.695	**.02 (.00), .20**	**< .001**	-.00 (.00), -.01	.776	-.00 (.00), -.01	.870
Education	-.16 (.10), -.08	.106	-.03 (.11), -.01	.808	-.09 (.09), -.05	.325	.03 (.11), .01	.824
Political Orientation	-.03 (.06), -.03	.586	-.04 (.06), -.03	.576	.01 (.05), .01	.823	-.05 (.05), -.05	.269
Social Media Literacy	**.18 (.08), .16**	**.021**	.12 (.08), .11	.108	.09 (.08), .08	.247	.15 (.08), .12	.068

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	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	-.05 (.05), -.06	.265	.04 (.05), .04	.418	-.06 (.04), -.07	.072	.00 (.05), .00	.930
Prior AI Knowledge	**.28 (.08), .26**	**< .001**	**.20 (.07), .18**	**.006**	**.29 (.07), .29**	< .001	**.17 (.08), .15**	**.036**
R^2	.186		.164		.199		.203	
Political Expression Intentions								
Felt Approval	**.13 (.05), .14**	**.006**	**.15 (.06), .13**	**.016**	**.14 (.06), .14**	**.017**	**.13 (.05), .13**	**.018**
Surprise (vs. Control)	-.05 (.14), -.02	.715	-.26 (.16), -.09	.106	-.12 (.15), -.04	.443	-.08 (.15), -.03	.617
Anxiety (vs. Control)	-.01 (.14), -.01	.918	**-.47 (.16), -.17**	**.004**	.00 (.14), .00	.988	-.17 (.15), -.07	.240
Gender	**-.30 (.11), -.13**	**.006**	-.09 (.13), -.04	.453	**-.30 (.12), -.12**	**.012**	**-.35 (.12), -.14**	**.004**
Age	.01 (.00), .07	.183	**.02 (.00), .16**	**< .001**	**.01 (.00), .11**	**.025**	.00 (.00), .02	.666
Education	-.08 (.11), -.03	.459	-.05 (.13), -.02	.730	.06 (.12), .02	.629	.00 (.13), .00	.982
Political Orientation	.06 (.06), .05	.321	.10 (.07), .07	.163	.09 (.06), .08	.117	-.05 (.06), -.04	.424

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	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p	B (SE), β	p
Social Media Literacy	**.23 (.08), .17**	**.004**	**.34 (.08), .24**	**< .001**	**.22 (.09), .16**	**.016**	.15 (.10), .11	.134
Perceived Misinf. Accuracy	**.22 (.06), .20**	**< .001**	**.15 (.06), .13**	**.014**	**.26 (.05), .24**	**< .001**	**.14 (.06), .11**	**.021**
Prior AI Knowledge	**.21 (.08), .16**	**.007**	**.18 (.09), .14**	**.049**	.11 (.09), .09	.212	**.20 (.09), .16**	**.026**
R^2	.188		.207		.211		.134	

Note. Bold indicates significant coefficients. Gender coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Education coded as 0 = no college/university degree and 1 = with college/university degree.

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TABLE 13. *INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS OF FELT APPROVAL AS MEDIATOR*

	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Misinformation Correction Intentions – Indirect Effects								
Surprise (vs. Control)	**[.044, .259]**	**.008**	**[.036, .189]**	**.007**	**[.084, .294]**	**< .001**	[-.021, .181]	.136
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**[.023, .169]**	**.018**	**[.014, .132]**	**.036**	**[.046, .208]**	**.005**	**[.049, .244]**	**.005**
Misinformation Correction Intentions – Total Effects								
Surprise (vs. Control)	[-.091, .448]	.214	[-.012, .483]	.058	[-.177, .346]	.519	[-.039, .454]	.104
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-.173, .367]	.490	[-.222, .287]	.793	[-.192, .337]	.595	[-.118, .407]	.264
Fact-Checking Intentions – Indirect Effects								
Surprise (vs. Control)	**[.037, .210]**	**.007**	**[.049, .216]**	**.004**	**[.062, .266]**	**.003**	[-.019, .161]	.137
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**[.020, .139]**	**.017**	**[.020, .149]**	**.021**	**[.036, .184]**	**.010**	**[.043, .225]**	**.007**
Fact-Checking Intentions – Total Effects								

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	Austria (n = 385)		Bulgaria (n = 376)		Denmark (n = 378)		Poland (n = 381)	
	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	p
Surprise (vs. Control)	**[.061, .550]**	**.015**	**[.024, .540]**	**.034**	**[.087, .550]**	**.007**	[-.141, .403]	.345
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**[.087, .545]**	**.008**	[-.140, .371]	.341	[-.180, .301]	.586	[-.027, .505]	.075
Political Expression Intentions – Indirect Effects								
Surprise (vs. Control)	**[.037, .236]**	**.009**	**[.015, .191]**	**.037**	**[.022, .238]**	**.025**	[-.008, .096]	.224
Anxiety (vs. Control)	**[.021, .154]**	**.018**	[.006, .127]	.070	**[.012, .170]**	**.048**	[.006, .137]	.074
Political Expression Intentions – Total Effects								
Surprise (vs. Control)	[-.180, .351]	.549	[-.480, .151]	.301	[-.280, .290]	.960	[-.334, .254]	.775
Anxiety (vs. Control)	[-.197, .350]	.628	**[-.735, -.100]**	**.011**	[-.196, .354]	.568	[-.411, .174]	.442

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ACRONYM	FULL NAME
AIT	Affective Intelligence Theory
COR	Conservation of Resources Theory
DoA	Description of Action
GA	Grant Agreement
H	Hypothesis
RQ	Research Question
WP	Work Package

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