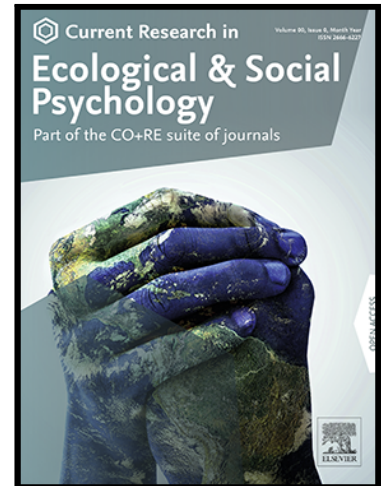# Journal Pre-proof

#WeDontWantRefugees: Mass-mediated contact, dehumanization, and support for Afghan refugee rights in Turkey

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Highlights:

- We tested mass-mediated contact in the context of Afghan refugees in Turkey.
- In Study 1 positive and negative mass-mediated contact predicted attitudes and support.
- In experimental Study 2 positive mass-mediated contact improved positive attitudes.
- In Study 2 negative mass-mediated contact improved attitudes and support indirectly.
- These associations were mediated by outgroup dehumanization.

#WeDontWantRefugees: Mass-mediated contact, dehumanization, and support for Afghan refugee rights in Turkey

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Abstract

In two studies, we investigated how positive and negative mass-mediated contact shape attitudes towards refugees and support for their rights through dehumanization. Study 1 (correlational, $N = 193$, community sample) demonstrated both positive and negative mass-mediated contact to predict attitudes towards Afghan refugees, as well as support for their rights, through lower and higher levels of dehumanization, respectively. Study 2

(experimental, $N = 214$, student sample) showed that positive mass-mediated contact directly improved attitudes towards refugees, whereas negative (but not positive) mass-mediated contact increased the dehumanization (*less human* view) of refugees, which was in turn related to reduced support for their rights. Findings highlight the critical role of mass-mediated contact in the formation of pro-refugee attitudes in an increasingly hostile migration context.

Keywords: Mass-mediated contact; contact valence; dehumanization; support for rights; refugees.

#WeDontWantRefugees: Mass-mediated contact, dehumanization, and support for Afghan refugee rights in Turkey

1. Introduction

Despite significant growth in egalitarian values and tolerant attitudes towards minority group members in recent years, refugees still constitute one of the most marginalized groups in society, suffering from pervasive discrimination (e.g., Cheung et al., 2022). The so-called *refugee crisis* in various parts of the world is eventually accompanied by increased contempt, distrust, and perceptions of threat among host society members who strive to protect their privileges against the increasing number of newcomers (e.g., Esses et al., 2017; Esses et al., 2021). Hostile discourses towards refugees have become much more prevalent universally, and are even more visible in countries such as Turkey where the influx of refugees has rapidly amplified anti-refugee sentiments and defensive reactions (Aktas et al., 2021; Bagci, Verkuyten et al., 2022; De Coninck, Ogan et al., 2021).

While refugees' residential movement into cities creates opportunities for native-refugee interactions to take place in various societal settings such as schools and neighbourhoods (e.g., Wagner et al., 2006), in practical terms such encounters that cross group boundaries may not easily transform into meaningful intergroup experiences due to various psychological barriers (e.g., Kotzur & Wagner, 2021; Paolini et al., 2021). Hence, indirect types of contact such as interactions that occur through mass media (mass-mediated contact, but see also parasocial contact, e.g., Schiappa et al., 2005) may partly shape attitudes towards refugees, with whom high quality direct contact may not be feasible (e.g., Gregurović et al., 2019; Joyce & Harwood, 2014). However, like other forms of contact, mass-mediated contact can also stimulate hostile attitudes and behaviors towards refugees who are often portrayed in negative ways in various communication channels (e.g., Igartua et al., 2014; Visintin et al., 2017). In such contexts, mass media may become an important agent of

dehumanization (e.g., Esses et al., 2013; Jelínková, 2019), a process whereby outgroup members are deprived of uniquely human traits and emotions and are perceived to be less human than ingroup members (see Kteily & Landry, 2022 for a review).

Through two studies (one correlational and one experimental), we aimed to delineate how both positive and negative mass-mediated contact with Afghan refugees in Turkey would predict natives' attitudes and support for refugee rights through outgroup dehumanization, over and beyond direct contact effects. Despite increasing attention to the role of mass-mediated contact on attitudes towards refugees worldwide, existing research has been primarily correlational (e.g., Graf & Sczesny, 2019; Visintin et al., 2016), focused on the amount of mass-mediated contact with no valence considerations (e.g., De Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios et al., 2021), and has rarely tested the role of dehumanization in this relationship (e.g., Esses et al., 2013). Moreover, how mass-mediated contact with refugees shapes the perception of natives has been studied primarily in Western contexts (e.g., Pagotto & Voci, 2013; Visintin et al., 2016), limiting the evidence regarding the potential generalizability of existing findings. We aimed to fill these gaps in the literature by using both correlational and experimental methods to reveal the unique effects of positive and negative mass-mediated contact in the understanding of increasing hostility towards Afghan refugees in Turkey.

1.1. Mass-mediated contact

Over the last decades, intergroup relations research has consistently shown contact to be one of the most effective tools to reduce prejudice in a variety of intergroup contexts (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2003; Lemmer & Wagner, 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), primarily through increased empathy and decreased intergroup anxiety (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Hence, a great deal of research has shown direct intergroup contact to effectively improve attitudes and behaviors towards refugees in various cultural settings (e.g., De Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios

et al., 2021; Graf & Sczesny, 2019; Kotzur et al., 2019; Lutterbach & Beelmann, 2020; Meleady & Forder, 2019).

Recent research avenues in the intergroup contact field have further suggested that contact may also improve intergroup relationships even when it does not involve direct, face to face interactions (e.g., Brown & Paterson, 2016; Dovidio et al., 2011). An increased volume of research conducted within the last two decades has shown that indirect contact can function not only as a replacement of direct contact, but as a unique tool that directly influences attitudes towards outgroups (White et al., 2021). Among indirect contact strategies, mass-mediated contact which is an indirect interaction with an outgroup member through newspapers, TV news, and social media is suggested to be particularly relevant for shaping attitudes with refugees, given that media consumption is often a primary mechanism of interaction and impression formation about this outgroup (e.g., Abrams et al., 2018). While mass-mediated contact (like other indirect forms of contact) has been suggested to exert a greater impact on attitudes when direct contact is absent (e.g., Shim et al., 2012), other studies have indicated such contact to have unique effects beyond direct experiences (e.g., Abrams et al., 2018; De Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios et al., 2021; Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016).

Contemporary literature also acknowledges now the role of negative contact experiences in addition to positive ones (e.g., Paolini et al., 2010). Research considering the differential effects of positive and negative mass-mediated contact on attitudes revealed mixed findings (e.g., Schemer, 2012; Visintin et al., 2017). While positive or negative mass-mediated contact can be more predictive of attitudes across different intergroup contexts (Pagotto & Voci, 2013; Rupar & Graf, 2019; Rupar et al., 2022), a recent meta-analysis concluded both forms of contact to produce opposite, but equally strong effects on attitudes (Banas et al., 2020).

While scarce research is devoted to understanding the associations between mass-mediated contact and support for outgroup rights, existing evidence suggests that contact through media may also shape attitudes towards immigration policies (e.g., Esses et al., 2013). For example, mediated contact with Black characters on television was found to be associated with a more favourable perception of Black people, as well as increased support for racialized social issues (Stamps & Sahlman, 2021). On the other hand, negative portrayal of immigrants on media is likely to trigger tendencies to support anti-immigrant actions (Saleem et al., 2017). Overall, these findings suggest that both positive and negative mass-mediated contact are likely to shape not only attitudes towards refugees, but also the extent to which refugee rights are supported.

1.2. The mediating role of dehumanization

Despite growing interest in mass-mediated contact, only few social psychological processes have been investigated as explanatory mechanisms. Park (2012), for example, indicated that mediated contact shapes perceptions of the outgroup, since the audience would identify with the outgroup member and thereby show greater outgroup empathy. Further research has shown typical contact mediators such as trust, empathy, and anxiety to explain mass-mediated contact effects (Pagotto & Voci, 2013; Visintin et al., 2017). Critically, consistent research in the media literature has also indicated that refugees and immigrants are likely to be portrayed as delinquents or criminals in many societies and they are depicted as positing important cultural, economic and security threats to the host nation (see Eberl et al., 2018 for a recent review; Parker, 2015; Müller, 2018; Wahlström et al., 2021), which may in turn provoke dehumanizing beliefs about the outgroup (e.g., Louis et al., 2013). In fact, depictions of refugees in mass media might bolster their dehumanization through representing this group as a critical source of threat (De Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios et al., 2021; Esses et

al., 2013), and using consistently a dehumanizing language (Lazović, 2021; Steuter & Wills, 2009).

Following this line of research, we focused on dehumanization - the denial of full humanness to others – as an explanatory variable between mass-mediated contact and refugee attitudes and support. Based on previous research that has shown both direct and indirect forms of contact to relate to outgroup dehumanization (Bruneau et al., 2021; Capozza et al., 2014; Prati & Loughnan, 2018; Stathi et al., 2017), as well as studies suggesting mass media to function as one of the primary tools to stimulate the dehumanization of particular groups in society such as refugees (e.g., Esses et al., 2013), we argued that both positive and negative forms of mass-mediated contact would be linked to the extent at which refugees are seen as more or less human.

Dehumanization, in turn, explains hostile behaviors towards various groups, especially vulnerable ones such as refugees, through negative emotions such as contempt and anger (e.g., Esses et al., 2013; Utych, 2018). Dehumanization of refugees and the associated threat perceptions may justify dominant groups' willingness to protect their own privileges (Esses et al., 2013; Esses et al., 2021), supporting the process of moral disengagement in society (Motal, 2015). More specifically, dehumanization has been found to relate to support for deportation and forced internal displacement, as well as rejection of refugees or immigrants (e.g., Esses et al., 2021; Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Therefore, we expected that positive and negative mass-mediated contact would be linked to attitudes and support for refugee rights through decreased and increased dehumanization of refugees, respectively.

1.3. The Afghan refugee context

Turkey has witnessed a significant influx of Syrian refugees (over three and a half million, UNHCR, 2022) within the last decade, which was followed by a second wave of Afghan refugees after 2018 (Karakaya & Karakaya, 2021). While initial responses to

immigration were characterized by humanitarian concerns, with increasing numbers of refugees and heightened perceptions of threat, the welcoming climate has become more hostile over time (e.g., Bagci, Baysu et al., 2022; Bagci, Verkuyten et al., 2022). A recent study comparing attitudes towards refugees in Europe and Turkey, for example, indicated that negative socio-economic conditions as well as the higher number of refugees accepted in the country explained Turkish natives' relatively greater hostility towards refugees compared to Europeans (De Coninck, Ogan et al., 2021).

Hostile attitudes towards refugees in Turkey are also represented in various mass media tools (Ünal, 2014). For example, the popular campaign of '#I don't want refugees in my country' has been a trending topic on various social media platforms such as Twitter. Refugees, in general, are commonly situated at the center of societal issues such as increased economic problems and conflicts, and are depicted with exclusionary and separationist discourses (Göker & Keskin, 2015; Gölcü & Dağlı, 2017). Yet, this literature has primarily centered on Syrian refugees (e.g., Çirakoğlu et al. 2021; Firat & Ataca, 2021; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018), with much less empirical research devoted to understanding attitudes particularly towards Afghan refugees.

Afghan immigration to Turkey dates to early 70's, yet Turkey has received a recent wave of refugees from Afghanistan particularly after 2018 (Ministry of Migration, 2021). Whereas the number of Afghan refugees is smaller compared to the number of Syrian refugees, the arrival of Afghans corresponds to a period when Turkish society was already dealing with what many consider as a 'refugee crisis' from Syria (e.g., Eroler & Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2021). Moreover, unlike the majority of Syrians, Afghans do not have the 'under temporary protection' status in Turkey (Karadağ, 2021). Therefore, compared to Syrian refugees, Afghan refugees are often evaluated even more negatively by Turkish citizens (Bagci & Saglam, 2022). Recent research has indicated specifically Afghans to

constitute a socially 'ignored' group in Turkey, facing a variety of challenges (Karakaya & Karakaya, 2021) and being consistently represented in mass media as 'invaders' (Erol & Yaylaci, 2022; Tümtaş, 2022). Hostile attitudes towards Afghan refugees become even more prominent with increased tensions in the country. For example, after the devastating earthquakes that took place in Turkey in February 2023, refugees have been depicted as 'looters' and anti-refugee discourses have greatly increased in mass media. This suggests the urgent need to investigate how mass-mediated contact may shape the perception of refugees in this increasingly hostile context.

1.4. The current study

In summary, the current studies explored the role of positive and negative mass-mediated contact on attitudes towards refugees and support for their rights, by testing dehumanization as a mediator in a correlational (Study 1) and an experimental (Study 2) study. We aimed to contribute to the existing literature by a) investigating the role of both positive and negative mass-mediated contact, b) testing dehumanization as a critical mediator, c) using experimental procedures to draw causal assumptions between the variables (Study 2), d) controlling for both positive and negative direct contact to explore the unique effects of mass-mediated contact, and e) focusing on a less-investigated sociocultural context, Turkey, that has experienced a recent, considerable influx of refugees.

Based on previous research, we hypothesized that positive mass-mediated contact would be associated with more positive attitudes and greater support for refugee rights, whereas negative mass-mediated contact would be associated with more negative attitudes and lower support. Moreover, we expected dehumanization to function as a critical explanatory mechanism on these relationships. We also hypothesized mass-mediated contact to have unique effects on the dependent variables after controlling for both positive and negative direct contact.

2. Study 1

Study 1 (correlational) tested Turkish natives' positive and negative mass-mediated contact with Afghan refugees in relation to their outgroup attitudes and support for refugee rights. Furthermore, we examined the role of dehumanization as a mediator and controlled for direct positive and negative contact experiences.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and Procedure

The final sample included 193[1] Turkish adults ($M_{age} = 38.04$, $SD = 14.57$; 111 Females, 79 Males, 1 Other, 2 Unreported) who participated in an online study advertised on social media and data were collected through the help of research assistants. The mean subjective socio-economic status of participants ('How would you rate your income?', ranging from 1 = *Very low* to 7 = *Very high*) was close to mid-point 4 ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.06$, $t(192) = -.75$, $p = .455$). The political tendency of the sample was closer to the left (1 = *Extremely left*, 11 = *Extremely right*, $M = 4.14$, $SD = 2.26$, $t(192) = -11.43$, $p < .001$ when compared to mid-point 6).[2]

2.1.2. Measures

Direct positive/negative intergroup contact were each measured by a single item ('On average, how frequently do you have positive contact with Afghan refugees?' and 'On average, how frequently do you have negative contact with Afghan refugees?' response scale ranging from 1 = *Never*, 7 = *Extremely frequently*) adapted from Barlow et al., (2012).

We assessed *mass-mediated positive/negative intergroup contact* (adapted from Graf & Sczesny, 2019 and Pagotto & Voci, 2013) by using two items for each construct: 'How

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[1]We estimated our sample sizes in each study to be around 200, as generally required for the use of Structural Equation Modelling based on Kline's (2012) suggestion. Our initial sample sizes (without any exclusions) were both > 200, satisfying the minimum requirement.

[2]The initial sample included ethnic minority participants ($N = 11$), yet there were mean differences demonstrating ethnic minority group members to be more positive towards refugees. Therefore, we only included ethnic/native Turks in the final analysis.

frequently do you get positive/negative impressions about Afghan refugees from what you hear or read about them in the news (TV news, radio news, newspaper, and social media)?' and 'How frequently do you hear positive/negative information about Afghan refugees in the news (TV news, radio news, newspaper, social media)?', with a response scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 7 (*Extremely frequently*). The scales formed a reliable measure for both constructs (Positive mass-mediated contact $r = .71$ and Negative mass-mediated contact $r = .73$, both $p < .001$).

Our measure of *outgroup dehumanization* consisted of nine items and was adapted from Kteily and Bruneau (2017), asking participants to rate the extent to which they attributed different humanity characteristics (e.g., 'refined and cultured; 'rational and logical', 'savage and aggressive') to Afghan refugees. The response scale ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*) and the items were recoded such that higher scores indicated greater dehumanization (Cronbach's Alpha = .91).

Attitudes towards Afghans were assessed with a *feeling thermometer* (Haddock et al., 1993): 'Please report your feelings towards Afghan refugees using a scale from 0 degree (*Extremely unfavourable attitudes*) to 100 degrees (*Extremely favourable attitudes*)', with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards the outgroup.

Support for refugee rights was measured with a five-item scale (adapted from Firat & Ataca, 2021) assessing participants' agreement on granting various rights to Afghan refugees (e.g., 'Afghans should have the right to establish their own schools in Turkey' and 'More precautions should be taken in Turkey against the discrimination of Afghans', 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*, Cronbach's Alpha = .81).

2.2. Results

Means and standard deviations, as well as correlations for the main variables are shown in Table 1. Positive mass-mediated contact ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.08$) was less prevalent

than negative mass-mediated contact ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.85$), as demonstrated by a significant

paired samples t-test, $t(192) = -19.85$, $p < .001$.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for the Main Variables in Study 1

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Positive direct contact	1.57	1.08	-	.41***	.27***	.02	.27***	.12	-.27***
2.Negative direct contact	1.93	1.64		-	.14†	.19**	-.04	-.15*	.11
3.Positive mass-mediated contact	1.88	1.08			-	-.29***	.37***	.29***	-.35***
4.Negative mass-mediated contact	5.30	1.85				-	-.25**	-.13†	.29***
5.Outgroup attitudes	27.12	26.96					-	.60***	-.61***
6.Support for refugee rights	2.67	1.45						-	-.47***
7.Outgroup dehumanization	5.13	1.20							-

Notes. †*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

2.2.1. Mediation model

We tested our model with Structural Equation Modelling using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011). We entered positive and negative mass-mediated contact as independent variables, dehumanization as the mediator, outgroup attitudes and support for rights as dependent variables, while controlling for direct positive and negative contact effects on both the mediator and the outcome variables[3]. Mass-mediated contact measures, dehumanization and support for refugee rights were represented as latent constructs. Model fit was assessed by the following criteria: $\chi^2/df < 3$, CFI ≥ 0.93, RMSEA ≤ 0.07, and SRMR ≤ 0.07 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Marsh et al., 2004). We used random item parceling for dehumanization (three parcels) and support for refugee rights (two parcels) to increase model fit (e.g., Matsunaga, 2008). Indirect effects were tested with bootstrapping (5000 samples).

The measurement model including latent measures had an acceptable fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.75$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09, and SRMR = .06[4], with all items significantly loading on the relevant constructs (item loadings > .62).

The final structural model demonstrated an acceptable fit, $\chi^2/df = 2.60$, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .09, and SRMR = .05. Results demonstrated that positive mass-mediated contact predicted lower dehumanization ($\beta = -.25$, $SE = .08$, $p = .001$), while negative mass-mediated contact predicted greater dehumanization ($\beta = .22$, $SE = .08$, $p = .005$). Dehumanization was, in turn, strongly associated with attitudes, as well as support for rights ($\beta = -.47$, $SE = .07$ and $\beta = -.41$, $SE = .08$, respectively, both $p < .001$). While negative mass-mediated contact was not directly associated with the outcome variables, positive mass-mediated contact was also directly related to both attitudes ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .08$, $p = .025$) and support for refugee rights ($\beta = .25$, $SE = .10$, $p = .010$).

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[3] While age, gender and socio-economic status were not correlated with the outcome variables, their addition to the main model did not change the fit or the associations between the variables.
[4] Although the RMSEA level was relatively high, an RMSEA between .08 and .10 has been shown to demonstrate an acceptable fit (MacCallum et al., 1996).

Our mediational analyses (See Figure 1) demonstrated that the associations between

positive mass-mediated contact and attitudes (β = .12, *SE* = .04, 95% CI [.003, .213], as well

as support for refugee rights (β = .10, *SE* = .04, 95% CI [.003, .195]) were significantly

mediated by dehumanization. The indirect role of negative mass-mediated contact was also

significant through dehumanization (for outgroup attitudes: β = -.10, *SE* = .04, 95% CI [-.203,

-.012]; for support: β = -.09, *SE* = .04, 95% CI [-.184, -.009]).

As control variables, both direct positive and negative contact were associated with

dehumanization in opposite ways (β = -.25, *SE* = .07, and β = .24, *SE* = .07, respectively, both

p = .001). Direct negative contact also predicted lower support for refugee rights (β = -.17, *SE*

= .08, *p* = .043).

Figure 1

Mediation Model Predicting Attitudes and Support for Refugee Rights in Study 1
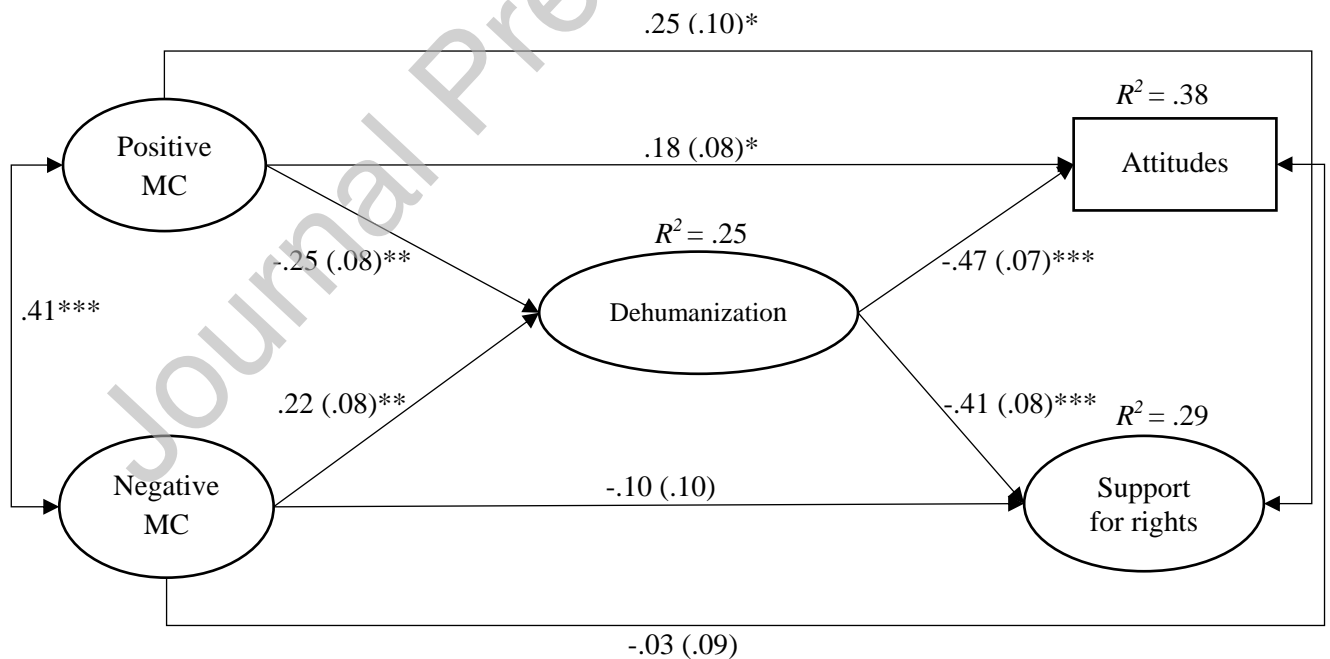
Notes. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

MC = Mass-mediated contact. DC = Direct contact. Standardized coefficients and standard
errors (in brackets) were presented. Correlations between contact variables that are accounted:
Positive and negative MC: *r* = -.31, *p* < .001; positive and negative DC: *r* = .41, *p* < .001;

Positive MC and DC: $r = .32$, $p < .001$; Negative MC and DC: $r = .19$, $p = .01$; Positive MC and Negative DC: $r = .17$, $p = .03$; Negative MC and Positive DC: $r = .01$, $p = .87$.

2.2.2. Additional analyses

We conducted additional analyses to test whether the associations between mass-mediated contact and the outcome variables were dependent on participants' level of direct contact, as suggested in previous research. We tested multiple moderated mediations with Process (Hayes, 2012, Model 8), where direct contact was tested as a moderator of the associations between mass-mediated contact and dehumanization, as well as mass-mediated contact and outcome variables. The level of direct positive contact did not significantly moderate the role of positive or negative mass-mediated contact. However, negative direct contact moderated the associations between negative mass-mediated contact and dehumanization (interaction coefficient = .07, $SE = .03$, $p = .016$), such that the role of negative mass-mediated contact on dehumanization was more pronounced among individuals who indicated greater direct negative contact ($B = .31$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) compared to the ones with less direct negative contact ($B = .13$, $SE = .05$, $p = .014$). Other direct or indirect effects were not moderated by negative contact.

2.3. Discussion

Study 1 demonstrated that, as indicated by previous research (e.g., Igartua et al., 2014; Visintin et al., 2017), negative mass-mediated contact was much more prevalent than positive mass-mediated contact and this seemed to be accompanied by high levels of dehumanization towards refugees in the current context. As expected, both positive and negative mass-mediated contact had a unique role in predicting dehumanization of refugees, which was in turn related to whether refugees are positively evaluated and supported. Particularly positive mass-mediated contact was also predictive of attitudes and support for refugee rights directly. While the role of mass-mediated contact was largely present independent of direct contact,

negative direct contact seemed to reinforce the dehumanizing role of negative mass-mediated contact.

3. Study 2

While Study 1 provided important insights into how mass-mediated contact may predict the evaluation of refugees, one limitation was the correlational design of the study, which restricts causal assumptions about mass-mediated contact. Therefore, Study 2 addressed this issue with the use of an experimental design where we manipulated positive and negative mass-mediated contact in the same refugee context.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and Procedure

The final sample was composed of 214[5] university students ($M_{age} = 22.25$, $SD = 1.90$; 130 Females, 82 Males, 2 Other) who participated in an online experiment in exchange for course credit. The mean socio-economic status (indicated by income as in Study 1) was relatively upper-middle class ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.08$, compared to midpoint level 4, $t(213) = 7.27$, $p < .001$) and the sample was mostly left-oriented ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.66$, response scale ranging from 1 = *Extremely left* to 10 = *Extremely right,* compared to midpoint 5.50, $t(213) = -13.10$, $p < .001$).[6]

Participants were randomly assigned to three different conditions. The procedure was similar to mass-mediated contact manipulations used in previous research (e.g., Rupar et al., 2022). The positive mass-mediated contact condition ($N = 65$) included a bogus news report where participants read about the contributions of Afghan refugees to Turkey both culturally and economically, with a specific example of an Afghan refugee who won a scientific prize.

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[5] In Study 2, we also conducted a post-hoc G*power analysis for multivariate analyses. This showed that for a small effect size ($f^2 = .03$), alpha = .05, with three groups and three response variables, our final sample size ($N = 214$) provided a power of .79, which is close to the conventional power criterion (.80).

[6] As in Study 1, since mean differences were different across majority and minority ethnic status group members, the final data did not include ethnic minorities ($N = 25$). Four people were further excluded in the study as they completed the study in under 120 seconds. The exclusion of the participants did not change the overall pattern of the results.

In the negative mass-mediated contact condition ($N = 72$), participants read a similar news report focusing on increased tension and hostility between Turks and Afghans. The neutral condition ($N = 77$) did not include any newspaper report (See Supplementary Materials for all the scenarios). In line with experimentally induced contact literature, to reinforce the manipulation, participants were then asked to report their thoughts and feelings about this news report in five-six sentences.

3.1.2. Measures

The same measures as in Study 1 were used. The reliabilities ranged between (Cronbach's Alpha = .78 - .90). A manipulation check item assessed the perceived positivity of the news ('How positive was the news you read?' ranging from 1 = *Very negative* to 7 = *Very positive*).

3.2. Results

Our manipulation check demonstrated that mass-mediated contact in the positive condition ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 2.02$) was perceived to be significantly more positive than the mass-mediated contact in the negative condition ($M = 1.54$, $SD = .71$), $t(78.29) = -11.48$, $p < .001$.

3.2.1. Group differences

In order to assess mean differences across conditions, we conducted a MANCOVA test where dehumanization, attitudes and support for rights were dependent variables, positive and negative direct contact were covariates.

The overall model was significant, $F(6, 414) = 2.28$, $p = .036$, Wilks' Lambda = .94, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Both direct positive and negative contact as covariates had significant effects on each dependent variable (all $p < .05$). After controlling direct contact effects, condition did not have a significant impact on support of refugees, $F(2,209) = 1.41$, $p = .367$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$,

whereas both dehumanization and attitudes were significantly different across conditions, $F(2,209) = 3.05$, $p = .049$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ and $F(2,209) = 3.11$, $p = .047$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, respectively.

Further LSD post-hoc test results demonstrated that while positive mass-mediated contact ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.19$) did not reduce dehumanization when compared to the neutral condition ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.07$), $p = .582$, negative mass-mediated contact ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.02$) produced more dehumanization compared to the positive condition ($p = .021$). The comparison between negative and neutral condition was marginally significant ($p = .063$). On the other hand, attitudes in the positive mass-mediated contact condition ($M = 24.88$, $SD = 22.46$) were significantly more positive than the neutral ($M = 19.12$, $SD = 18.51$), as well as the negative mass-mediated contact condition ($M = 16.03$, $SD = 18.01$), $p = .027$ and $p = .034$, respectively. Negative mass-mediated contact did not seem to worsen attitudes towards Afghans, $p = .963$. Means and standard deviations for all conditions were given in Table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Main Variables Across Condition in Study 2

Conditions	Dehumanization	Attitudes	Support for rights
Positive mass-mediated contact	5.22 (1.19)	24.88 (22.46)	2.54 (1.28)
Negative mass-mediated contact	5.75 (1.02)	16.03 (18.01)	2.23 (1.21)
Neutral	5.31 (1.07)	19.12 (18.51)	2.58 (1.16)

3.2.2. Mediation analyses

We further used Mplus to test our mediational model through Structural Equation Modelling. We created two dummy variables, one representing positive mass-mediated contact and the other representing negative mass-mediated contact, with the neutral group as the reference category. As in Study 1, we entered dehumanization as the mediator, and attitudes and support for refugee rights as dependent variables, while controlling for positive

and negative direct contact. We used the same model indices and random item parceling methods as in Study 1.[7]

The measurement model had a good fit, $\chi^2/df = 1.07$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .02, and SRMR = .01, and all observed variables loaded significantly on their relevant construct (loadings > .82). The final mediation model also fitted well, $\chi^2/df = .76$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, and SRMR = .02. Accordingly, only negative mass-mediated contact predicted a marginally significant increase in dehumanization ($\beta = .14$, $SE = .07$, $p = .050$), but positive mass-mediated contact did not reduce dehumanization ($\beta = -.04$, $SE = .07$, $p = .627$), compared to the control condition. In turn, dehumanization was associated strongly with negative attitudes ($\beta = -.60$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$) and support for refugee rights ($\beta = -.57$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). While negative mass-mediated contact did not directly change support for refugee rights or attitudes, positive mass-mediated contact directly improved attitudes towards Afghan refugees ($\beta = .12$, $SE = .05$, $p = .015$).

Indirect effects demonstrated that positive mass-mediated contact effects were not significantly mediated by dehumanization. Yet, the effects of negative mass-mediated contact on both attitudes and support for refugee rights were mediated by dehumanization ($\beta = -.08$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [-.17, -.001] and $\beta = -.08$, $SE = .04$, 95 % CI [-.17, .000], respectively). When the effects of direct positive and negative contact were not included in the model, the indirect effects of negative mass-mediated contact (but not of positive mass-mediated contact) through dehumanization were significant and relatively stronger ($\beta = -.14$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI [-.25, -.04] for attitudes and $\beta = -.12$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [-.21, -.03] for support for refugee rights). See Figure 2 for the final mediation model.

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[7] As demographic variables (age, socio-economic status, gender) were only weakly associated with the outcome constructs, they were not included in the final model. With their addition in the model, only age predicted significantly lower support for refugee rights ($\beta = -.15$, $SE = .06$, $p = .023$). The addition of the control variables did not change the overall pattern of the effects.

Both positive and negative direct contact were also associated with dehumanization (β = -.30, *SE* = .06 and β = .31, *SE* = .31, respectively, both *p* < .001) and outgroup attitudes (β = .28, *SE* = .05 and β = -.12, *SE* = .05, respectively, both *p* < .001, respectively).

Figure 2

Mediation Model Predicting Attitudes and Support for Refugee Rights in Study 2
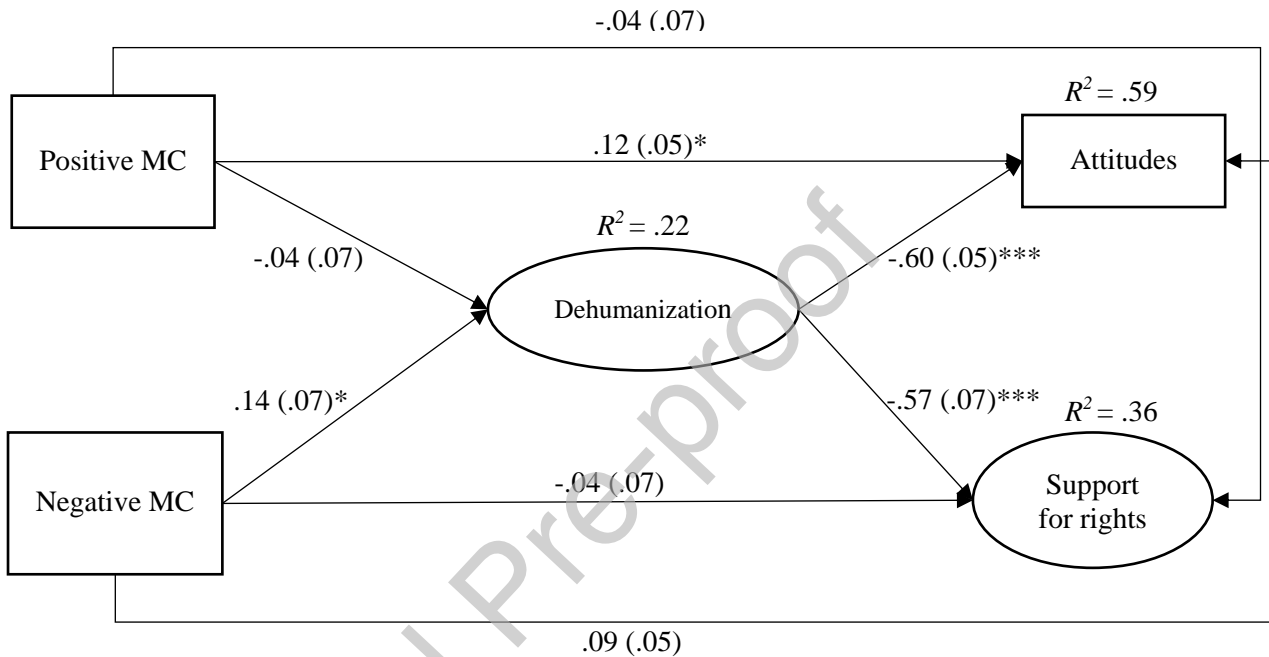
Notes. *p ≤ .05, ***p < .001.
MC = Mass-mediated contact. Standardized coefficients and standard errors (in brackets) were presented.

3.2.3. Additional analyses

As in Study 1, we conducted moderated mediations to assess whether the effects of mass-mediated contact depended on positive and negative direct contact. We detected only one moderation by positive direct contact on the association between condition and support for rights (interaction coefficient = .56, *SE* = .27; *p* = .040); yet the conditional effects were not significant (for lower positive direct contact: *B* = -.26, *SE* = .20, *p* = .191; and for higher positive direct contact: *B* = .30, *SE* = .25, *p* = .237). Negative direct contact did not moderate any effects of mass-mediated contact.

3.3. Discussion

In summary, Study 2 indicated that particularly negative mass-mediated contact played a role in the increase in dehumanization, which was in turn associated with more negative attitudes and lower support of refugees. While positive mass-mediated contact did not seem to reduce dehumanization or support for refugee rights, it did create positivity towards refugees by directly increasing individuals' positive attitudes.

4. General discussion

The way immigration is framed within society is likely to play a critical role in the relationship between natives and newcomers. Representing refugees as bogus claimants who pose cultural and security threats to the country in mass media is likely to trigger a range of hostile behaviors towards these groups (e.g., Esses et al., 2021). The current studies examined how contact through mass media could be linked to pro-refugee attitudes and support for their rights through dehumanization in a context where the refugee crisis has been at the center of public discourse.

4.1. Mass-mediated contact effects

In line with our hypotheses, our initial correlational study indicated that while positive mass-mediated contact predicted more positive attitudes and greater support for refugee rights through reduced dehumanization, negative mass-mediated contact was associated with more negative attitudes and reduced support through increased dehumanization. This was generally replicated in a second experimental study, whereby positive mass-mediated contact improved attitudes directly and negative mass-mediated contact reduced such attitudes and support through decreased dehumanization.

As expected, in both studies, these associations were found over and beyond the effects of direct contact, which is in line with previous studies highlighting mass-mediated contact as a unique form of indirect contact that shapes attitudes towards refugees (e.g., De

Coninck, Rodríguez-de-Dios et al., 2021). Our additional analyses showed only minor moderation effects whereby negative direct contact strengthened the dehumanizing role of negative mass-mediated contact (Study 1) and positive direct contact determined whether negative mass-mediated contact contributed to support for refugees (with non-significant conditional effects, Study 2). Hence, while both forms of direct contact had substantial impact on the outcome variables in both studies, mass-mediated contact also seems to be uniquely linked to how refugees are perceived regardless of how much individuals engage in direct positive and negative contact. Nevertheless, considering the mixed findings regarding the moderating role of direct contact though, future research should explore its role further. For example, research can consider not only the valence of direct contact as a potential moderator, but also the content of direct and indirect forms of contact between natives and refugees (Stathi et al., 2020; Tropp et al., 2021).

We further found that the relative strength of positive versus negative mass-mediated contact effects varied across variables. For example, particularly in Study 1, positive mass-mediated contact (but not negative mass-mediated contact) was a direct predictor of all the outcome variables, which is in line with previous research conducted in more hostile intergroup contexts (Rupar et al., 2022). Studies conducted in Turkey have also previously shown direct positive contact to have a stronger role in predicting attitudes compared to negative contact, potentially due to greater category salience of positive contact which might be more transformative in highly threatening contexts (Bagci, Baysu, et al., 2022; Bagci & Turnuklu, 2019). In fact, Study 1 showed that negative mass-mediated contact was more prevalent than positive mass-mediated contact, which is in line with previous research demonstrating refugees to be disproportionately negatively depicted in various mass media channels (e.g., Rupar et al., 2022).

While Study 2 confirmed that positive mass-mediated contact directly affected outgroup attitudes unlike negative mass-mediated contact, we also found that only negative mass-mediated contact had indirect effects through dehumanization. The differential effects of positive and negative mass-mediated contact particularly in relation to dehumanization across the studies may be based on different sample characteristics. While dehumanization was equally high in both studies, the sample in Study 2 included participants who are younger and of relatively higher socio-economic status. Therefore, they might be less exposed to (or less interested in following) news about Afghans compared to the community sample in Study 1, who are likely to be more 'desensitized' to negative news. Consequently, the negative mass-mediated contact procedure in our experiment might have been more effective on dehumanization among those people who are relatively less exposed to such news in real life. Future research may consider controlling for initial levels of mass-mediated contact in addition to direct contact to assess whether the effectiveness of such bogus news reports changes with varying levels of initial mass-mediated contact. On the other hand, in a context where the level of outgroup dehumanization is particularly high (in both studies, $Ms = >5$ in a 7-point scale), the use of an experimental, one-shot positive indirect contact manipulation may not be robust enough to produce a substantial change in supportive behaviors. A combination of outgroup-specific strategies to enhance humanization (Vezzali et al., 2022) and subsequent attitudinal and behavioral positivity may be essential in such contexts.

4.2. Limitations and future directions

A few limitations of the study should be acknowledged. Our data in both studies were collected through convenience sampling and from a large city (Istanbul), which means that our participants were less likely to represent the overall population's diverse reactions to refugees. Moreover, our studies were conducted in Turkey, which is a unique socio-cultural context where the overall refugee population has increased drastically in a very short period

of time. Previous studies have shown that attitudes towards refugees are particularly negative in such a context compared to European countries, mainly because of existing socio-economic challenges at the country level (De Coninck, Ogan et al., 2021). Therefore, while negative mass-mediated contact was found to be more prevalent than positive mass-mediated contact similar to some other contexts (e.g., Visintin et al., 2017), the particularly threatening 'refugee crisis' in the country may be a more central element of public discourse in Turkey, making mass-mediated contact a critical impression formation tool in this context.

Methodologically, while we focused on the valence of mass-mediated contact in the current study, we conceptualized mass-mediated contact as a single construct with no distinction across different types of media sources. For example, distinguishing between 'news' and 'movies' contact, Pagotto and Voci (2013) found that negative news contact, but positive movie contact, were associated with attitudes towards outgroups. Similarly, De Coninck, Rodriguez-de-Dios et al. (2021) demonstrated that exposure to news, as well as public news consumption were positively related to attitudes, whereas commercial news consumption predicted more negative attitudes.

Relatedly, the effectiveness of the experimental procedure we used in Study 2 was confirmed with a single manipulation check item that asked about the valence of the news, but not whether the impression of refugees on media was positive or negative. Moreover, the bogus positive and negative news reports included scenarios that differed contextually. While we believe the external validity of both news reports is high because of the similarity of such news to real-life media content, further research is needed to fully understand what specific types or sources of mass-mediated contact are more effective in shaping attitudes towards refugees. On the other hand, the negative mass-mediated contact procedure was intended to temporally increase the salience of dehumanizing attitudes in an already negative intergroup

climate. While we believe these effects are short-lived, an assessment of how long-lasting these negative effects are is critical.

Although we investigated the mechanisms of how mass-mediated contact is effective in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards refugees, we were unable to show which (individual) factors may increase the predictive role of mass-mediated contact on attitudes. For example, Bond (2020) indicated that initial levels of prejudice were likely to increase the effectiveness of a fictional television series on prejudice reduction. Beyond the classically studied ideologies such as social dominance orientation in the direct contact literature (e.g., Asbrock et al., 2011), future research could also examine various personality factors that determine 'who' is more likely to be influenced by mass-mediated contact. For example, previous studies suggested extraversion and openness to experience to be associated with mass media usage (Finn, 1997), as well as the ability to discern real and fake news (Calvillo et al., 2021), indicating some individuals to be potentially more vulnerable to the effects of positive and negative mass-mediated contact.

4.3. Implications and Conclusion

In summary, using both correlational and experimental research designs, the current research contributes to the growing mass-mediated contact literature by examining the role of both positive and negative mass-mediated contact on pro-refugee attitudes, testing dehumanization as a critical mechanism underlying these effects. Findings highlight how both types of mass-mediated contact may link to a *less human* perception of refugees and the extent to which they are supported in a unique immigration context. Overall, these findings may have important implications for policies regarding the integration of refugees. Since the initial arrival of refugees in Turkey, attitudes towards this group have drastically become more negative over time (Bagci, Baysu, et al., 2022) and as this study shows, dehumanization

and negative attitudes prevail to a large extent, overall demonstrating the urgent need to understand social psychological processes that underlie responses to refugees.

Particularly, Study 1 demonstrates clear evidence about the disproportionate exposure of individuals to negative portrayals of refugees, which implies that reducing negative mass-mediated contact might directly decrease dehumanization of refugees and encourage pro-refugee support. Hence, it is important to consider ways of reducing these negative portrayals and the dehumanizing language used in mass media and encourage more informative and inclusive representations of stigmatized minority groups such as refugees. For example, mass media channels can work toward establishing anti-racist and inclusive language and norms, which can enhance societal awareness as well as broader diversity and equality literacy (e.g., Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). At the same time, promoting positive mass-mediated contact (along with other humanizing strategies based on, for example, categorization) may function as an important 'rehumanizing' tool that would create better ways to integrate refugees in the society (Esses et al., 2021). Future research is needed to understand the types of mass-mediated contact that are effective in shaping attitudes towards refugees, as well as to recognize the mediating and moderating processes that can facilitate a peaceful integration process.

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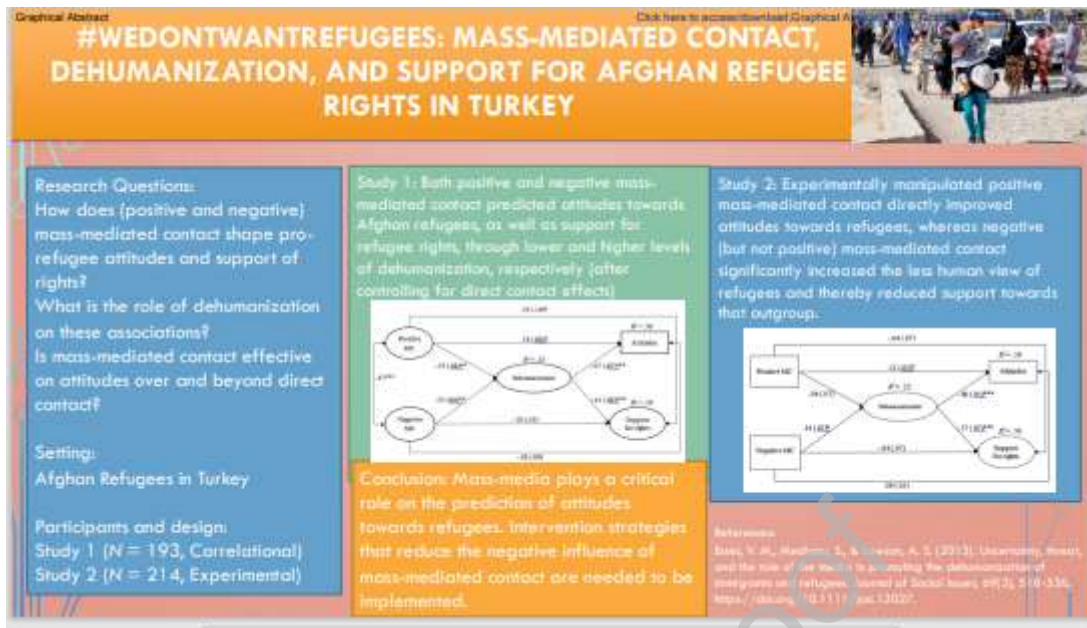
Declaration of interests

☒The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: