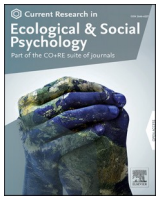
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How do messages based on collective memory help to reduce anti-immigrant prejudice?

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ABSTRACT

This study explores anti-immigrant prejudice reduction through Collective Memory (CM). Drawing on mediated contact and narrative persuasion research, a narrative experiment ($N = 260$) with a two-group design tested the effectiveness of testimonial CM-based messages in the context of Venezuelan immigration to Colombia. Relevant moderator (xenophobia level) and mediators (identification and narrative transportation) were included in the model. Results showed no interaction effect between CM cue and xenophobia on mediating variables. However, serial mediation analysis revealed that the CM cue activated perceived past-remembering, increasing mediators and ultimately favorable outcome variables. Implications for prejudice reduction are discussed, enhancing our understanding of CM's impact.

Introduction

Collective Memory (CM) can influence attitudes towards immigrants (e.g., Ariely, 2019), yet little is known about how it can be mobilised to reduce anti-immigrant prejudice. Drawing on social psychology, the CM shapes group identity through shared historical representations (Liu and Hilton, 2005), and has been shown to play a significant role in intergroup attitudes (Hanke et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014), particularly in immigration contexts (Ariely, 2019; Vollhardt et al., 2016).

Amidst rising international migration, it is crucial to develop strategies to counter prejudice against immigrants. One effective approach involves persuasive communication methods through mass media, promoting positive mediated contact (Banas et al., 2020; Harwood, 2017; Park, 2012). In this domain, narrative messages have demonstrated effectiveness (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019; Murrar and Brauer, 2019), emphasizing the need for convincing arguments in achieving successful persuasion (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Park, 2012).

This article examines prejudice reduction against immigrants through narrative messages based on the CM argument, using Venezuelan migration to Colombia as the empirical context. Colombia has experienced a surge in refugees, primarily due to the influx of Venezuelan immigrants, leading to growing prejudice and xenophobia (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2024c; Lebow et al., 2020). Venezuelan migration to Colombia has increased over the past decade, reversing the previous trend from the mid-20th to early 21st century, when many Colombians fled to Venezuela due to internal conflict and violence. Since Colombia has been characterised throughout history as "a country of emigrants" (Calderón-Canola, 2012), with Venezuela as a destination par excellence, this study attempts to understand whether evoking memory of massive emigration through persuasive messages affects Colombian's attitudes towards Venezuelan immigrants. Building on insights from social psychology and research on mediated intergroup contact and narrative persuasion, an experiment tests the efficiency of the CM argument.

This paper employs short testimonial narratives designed as social media posts, a novel context not previously addressed by mediated contact scholars regarding anti-immigrant prejudice (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2024a). Unlike previous studies using longer narratives, such as stories, movies, videos, and newspaper reports (e.g., Guerrero-Martín and Igartua, 2021; Igartua et al., 2017), this experiment assesses whether brief social media as a type of mediated content can activate narrative persuasion mechanisms. Prior research in this field has often focused on specific countries, such as the United States (e.g., Kim and Wojcieszak, 2018), Spain (Igartua et al., 2019), Italy (e.g., Vezzali et al., 2014) or Germany (e.g., Schemer and Meltzer, 2020), limiting their findings to specific immigrant outgroups. Given evidence that contact effects vary across groups (Harwood, 2017), this study addresses a new empirical context: Venezuelan immigration to Colombia. It introduces three

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innovations: using a constructed manipulation of CM-based argument, examining a new immigration context, and exploring the impact of social media as a persuasive medium.

Mediated intergroup contact and narrative persuasion

Mediated intergroup contact is a modern extension of Allport's contact hypothesis (1954), which proposes that positive interaction between ingroup and outgroup members can reduce prejudice against that outgroup as a whole (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). It involves exposing one group to another through media (Harwood, 2017; Joyce, 2017), replicating the favorable effects of intergroup contact (Park, 2012; Schiappa et al., 2005). Media shapes people's ideas and attitudes about different social groups, both fictional and factual (e.g., Ortiz and Harwood, 2007; Schiappa et al., 2005), creating parasocial interactions between viewers and outgroup media characters (Schiappa et al., 2005). Research (e.g., Graf et al., 2020; Schemer and Meltzer, 2020; Wojcieszak et al., 2020) shows that this modality of contact effectively reduces prejudice and improves attitudes towards discriminated collectives (e.g., immigrants). Mediated contact's advantage over other forms of contact (e.g., direct or face-to-face contact) lies in its pervasive nature, as media already serves as the primary source of information about outgroups for many individuals (Mutz and Goldman, 2010).

Media take various forms, and content creators should be aware of how to design mediated contact and how mediated contact can shape intergroup attitudes (Banas et al., 2020; Park, 2012). Exposure to narrative messages featuring members of an outgroup facilitates the prejudice reduction toward that outgroup (Wojcieszak et al., 2020; Zhuang and Guidry, 2022). This effect can be conceptualised under the narrative persuasion which is defined as "any influence on beliefs, attitudes, or actions brought about by a narrative message through processes associated with narrative comprehension or engagement" (Bilandzic and Busselle, 2013, p. 201). Narratives provide a non-threatening context in mediated contact, avoiding the discomfort that may arise in direct encounters with outgroup members (Chung and Slater, 2013). Extensive research (e.g., Igartua et al., 2018; Igartua and Cachón-Ramón, 2023; Igartua and Guerrero-Martín, 2022) confirms that both textual and (audio)visual narratives help reduce stigma against discriminated immigrants.

Three interrelated approaches, namely Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM) (Slater and Rouner, 2002), Transportation-Imagery Model (TIM) (Green and Brock, 2002), and Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model (EORM) (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), can explain how narratives influence attitudes. These models postulate that narrative persuasion works primarily through two mechanisms: identification with the protagonist, where individuals imagine themselves as the character and adopt their goals (Cohen, 2001; Igartua and Barrios, 2012), and narrative transportation, a mental immersion in the story (Green and Brock, 2002). Empirical findings (e.g., Guerrero-Martín and Igartua, 2021; Igartua and Cachón-Ramón, 2023) demonstrate that activating these mechanisms enhance the persuasive impact of narrative messages aimed at reducing prejudice against immigrants, making it crucial to understand how to bolster these aspects.

Collective memory and anti-Venezuelan prejudice reduction

The CM is a pool of shared memories central to a group's social identity (Halbwachs, 1950; Wertsch and Roediger, 2008). It serves as "an umbrella term that reflects how people remember their past as members of the group" (Roediger and Abel, 2015, p. 361). Individual memories are constructed within social structures, with the social group shaping the memory and individuals doing the work of remembering (Halbwachs, 1950). Cultural tools like texts and narratives mediate people's relation to the past and influence the group's historical understanding (Wertsch, 2002).

De Saint-Laurent (2018) introduces the concept of "memory act", defining CM as the moment when the collective past is enacted in present discourses and practices. As Bartlett (1995) states, memory is not about reproducing the past but adapting to the present. The CM can mobilise national sentiments and impact society members' behaviour (Zerubavel, 2003), undergoing constant reconstruction to reflect present needs (Halbwachs, 1994). In other words, "collective memory does not retain the past as events really happened, but as remembered in the present" (Šubrt et al., 2020, p. 63).

Sociologists (e.g., Glynn and Kleist, 2012) link socially shared understandings of the past to migrant incorporation politics. The limited empirical evidence (e.g., Ariely, 2019) shows contradictory results on CM's role in shaping attitudes toward immigration. Ariely's study (2019) on Israeli Jews and Holocaust memory indicates that lessons from the Holocaust can influence attitudes toward asylum seekers based on beliefs regarding these lessons. However, evoking Holocaust memory merely through narratives doesn't affect attitudes toward asylum seekers. Different interpretations of Holocaust lessons also matter. Ariely (2019) therefore argues for including the CM when exploring different factors that shape attitudes toward immigrants.

Colombia and Venezuela share common values, such as language, culture, religion, and migration background (Rueda Gómez, 2020). This shared migration background is crucial for understanding the relationship between Venezuelan immigrants and Colombians (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2024b; Pineda and Ávila, 2019). De Leon Vargas (2018, p. 113) emphasizes that Colombians "must remember their past" and avoid xenophobia and social stigmas towards Venezuelan immigrants. In this sense, the authors propose using an argument based on the CM for mediated contact, serving as a reminder stimulus for Colombians to reduce prejudice against Venezuelan immigrants. Unlike previous studies, this research employs a more complex model by using a constructed manipulation of the CM, rather than mere exposure to textual message, to investigate underlying mechanisms that might affect prejudice reduction.

The shared migration background also relates to narrative persuasion, particularly the effect of similarity with the protagonist (e.g., Hoeken et al., 2016; Igartua et al., 2019). Similarity refers to the state in which a message viewer shares specific characteristics with the protagonist, and this bond increases persuasive impact of the message. Research evidence (Cohen et al., 2018) shows that message viewers can establish strong affective and cognitive ties with protagonists who are similar in demographic, social, or psychological terms. Ample research has been conducted on objective demographic attributes, such as age or sex (e.g., de Graaf, 2014; Hoeken et al., 2016), whereas research on psychological or subjective characteristics (e.g., Cohen and Hershman-Shitrit, 2017; Guerrero-Martín and Igartua, 2021), such as beliefs, values, attitudes, belonging, or life experiences (e.g., being migrant in our study) cries out for more scholarly attention. Moreover, evidence is required to discuss the inconsistent results about the effect of similarity (Tukachinsky, 2014).

Previous level of xenophobia

Xenophobia, defined as attitudinal, affective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants, is a relevant psychological variable that can influence how individuals engage with mediated intergroup contact, particularly in narratives that portray immigrants as protagonists (Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2024a). Perceiving outgroup members as unfriendly, untrustworthy, or threatening to the ingroup often evokes feelings of distrust, insecurity, and fear (Van der Veer et al., 2011). Consequently, individuals with high levels of xenophobia may respond differently to narrative messages involving immigrants, especially in terms of identification with characters and transportation into the story world. Additionally, the effects of contact may vary depending on the nature of the immigrant group, existing attitudes towards outgroups in a society, or other idiosyncrasies in social contexts (Wojcieszak et al., 2020).

Prior research (Eno and Ewoldsen, 2010; Igartua et al., 2018; Igartua

and Frutos, 2017) provides insight into the psychological mechanisms by which pre-existing prejudices strongly influence the processing of intergroup narratives. Modern racism, for example, affects the interpretation and reactions to pro-migrant films (Eno and Ewoldsen, 2010), and a negative correlation exists between previous levels of modern racism towards immigrants and identification with immigrant characters in films (Igartua and Frutos, 2017), affecting the persuasiveness of the narrative. Ample research (e.g., Hirsh et al., 2012) has shown that individuals' characteristics can exert influence on persuasion processes. Previous level of xenophobia, considered as an individual difference (O'Keefe, 2016), can influence the persuasive communication outcome either by being relevant to the specific topic of advocacy in the message (such as CM argument) or by wielding a more general impact on persuasion mechanisms (such as identification or transportation).

In addition, initial levels of prejudice may moderate the effictivenes of contact-based narrative interventions by influencing how individuals percieve the prosocial behaviours of outgroup members. Borinca et al. (2020) found that individuals high in prejudice tend to attribute fewer prosocial motives to outgroup (vs. ingroup) members and are less willing to accept their help. In a similar vein, Borinca et al. (2023) demonstrated that even individuals with low prejudice levels exhibit less trust and more negative emotions and perceptions toward the outgroup when intergroup help is perceived as a threat to their ingroup's superiority and dominance. This suggests that xenophobia can moderate the impact of CM-based messages by shaping whether individuals interpret historical narratives as a form of outgroup benevolence or as challenges to their ingroup's moral superiority.

Further evidence for xenophobia as a moderating factor comes from Valsecchi et al. (2023), who highlight the importance of individuals' pre-existing outgroup attitudes and varying opportunities for intergroup contact in shaping conformity to inclusive social norms. Their findings indicate that individuals with prejudiced views are more likely to conform to inclusive norms if they have had positive intergroup experiences beforehand, whereas those lacking such experiences tend to resist these norms. Based on this, the authors propose that Colombians with high levels of xenophobia, reflecting more extreme negative attitudes towards Venezuelan immigration, may experience lower identification with Venezuelan immigrant characters and narrative transportation, resulting in minimal attitudinal shifts from narrative messages. Furthermore, elevated xenophobia could undermine the acceptance of pro-migrant attitudes conveyed through the CM argument.

Objectives and hypotheses

Persuasion research examines how narrative messages impact beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behaviours (Braddock and Dillard, 2016; de Graaf et al., 2016; Igartua, 2007; Tukachinsky and Tokunaga, 2013). Therefore, most studies in this field use as dependent variables measures linked to beliefs (cognitive judgments through which events or objects are associated with attributes), attitudes (evaluations or opinions), behavioral intention (willingness to engage in future behaviours), and behaviours (self-reported behaviours) (Igartua, 2020). This narrative experiment has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to contrast the combined effect of CM cue and xenophobia level on narrative persuasion mechanisms.

H1: Narrative social media post featuring an immigrant protagonist would lead to greater identification (H1a) and narrative transportation (H1b) in people with low xenophobia when the CM argument is present (vs. absent).

It can also be argued that CM cue can have independent effects not only on the reception processes, but also on attitudinal and intentional features towards immigrants. Thus, a second objective is to contrast the indirect effects of CM cue on dependent variables (perceived persuasive effectiveness, positive attitudes towards contact with Venezuelan immigrants, and intention to share the message), through identification with the protagonist and narrative transportation.

H2: When the CM argument is present (vs. absent), the narrative social media post featuring an immigrant protagonist would have an indirect effect on perceived persuasive effectiveness, positive attitudes toward intergroup contact, and intention to share the message, through mediation of identification with the protagonist (H2a) and narrative transportation (H2b).

Methods and materials

Design and participants

To test these predictions, an online experiment was conducted using *Qualtrics*. An a priori power analysis was performed using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) to determine the minimum sample size required for testing the planned moderation and mediation models. Based on an expected small-to-medium effect size of .19 (Braddock and Dillard, 2016), an α value of .05, and a desired power of .80 for a study with two groups, the analysis indicated that a minimum of 220 participants would be required. This estimation was selected to ensure sufficient power for detecting moderation effects (H1) and indirect effects via mediation (H2). To supplement this, mediation analyses are conducted using 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrapping samples, which provides more robust estimates of indirect effects even in modestly sized samples (Hayes, 2018).

A total of 260 individuals of Colombian origin, whose parents were also Colombian, were recruited. To further assess the adequacy of the sample, a sensitivity power analysis was also conducted, which indicated that our final sample size of 260 was sufficient to detect effect sizes of .20 or larger, assuming an α value of .05 and power of .80. Sex and age quotas were established to access a representative sample of the Colombian population (50 % men and 50 % women; M_{age}= 37.99 years, SD = 11.94, range: 18–65 years). The experiment had a 2-group between-subjects design, considering CM cue (presence vs. absence) as the manipulated independent variable. Half of the participants read a narrative message containing CM cue (information with reference to the past) and the other half read a narrative message without CM cue (information with reference to the present).

Respondents were assured of anonymity and were asked to complete a consent form. The design consisted of a pre-test questionnaire, experimental manipulation, and post-test questionnaire. The pretest measured sociodemographic variables (sex, age, education) and level of xenophobia. The pre-test questionnaire also included three screening questions ("In which country were you born?" and "In which country was your father/mother born?"). Having completed pre-test questionnaire, participants were randomised to two experimental conditions based on the design (presence vs. absence of CM cue). They read a first-person narrative message whose protagonist was a Venezuelan immigrant. Following the narrative post, posttest measures were presented, including questions about mediating variables (identification with the protagonist and narrative transportation), one attention check question (participants who did not select the correct answer were excluded from the final sample), and dependent variables (perceived persuasive effectiveness, positive attitude toward intergroup contact, and information-sharing intentions).

Stimulus materials (independent variable)

The experimental stimulus was an invented Facebook post from the Colombian Red Cross, featuring a first-person testimonial of a Venezuelan immigrant, named José, in Bogotá. Messages with first-person (vs. third-person) narrative voice are more effective (Chen and Bell, 2022; Igartua and Rodríguez-Contreras, 2020). In the brief textual

testimonial, the fictional character provided information about Venezuelan migration to Colombia (vs. Colombian migration to Venezuela) and expressed his hope of being accepted by Colombian society. The post had the underlying persuasive goal of reducing prejudice against Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia. Two versions of the post were created (see Figs. 1 and 2), one with CM cue (119 words)[1] and one without CM cue (123 words)[2]. The authors manipulated the stimulus by including or removing textual information about the history of Colombian migration to Venezuela mentioned by the Venezuelan immigrant.

To contrast the effectiveness of manipulation check, a scale consisting of four independent perceived past-remembering questions (e.g., "The post made me remember how and why Colombians migrated to Venezuela"; from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree*), was included in the post-test questionnaire. A pilot study ($N = 50$) validated the manipulation, showing that those exposed to the post with CM cue remembered their emigration history more than those without CM cue. Both versions of the post were rated as equally understandable, believable, interesting, and realistic. All materials related to the online experiment, including the experimental stimuli, questionnaire, dataset

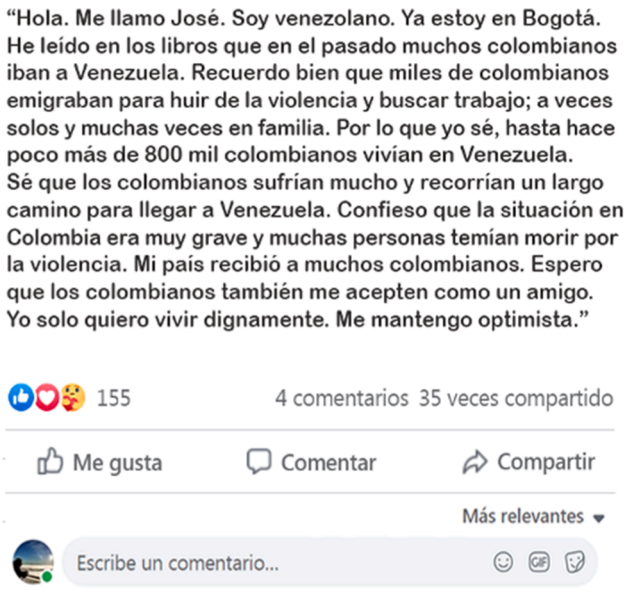


Fig. 1. Experimental stimulus for the condition "narrative post with CM cue".

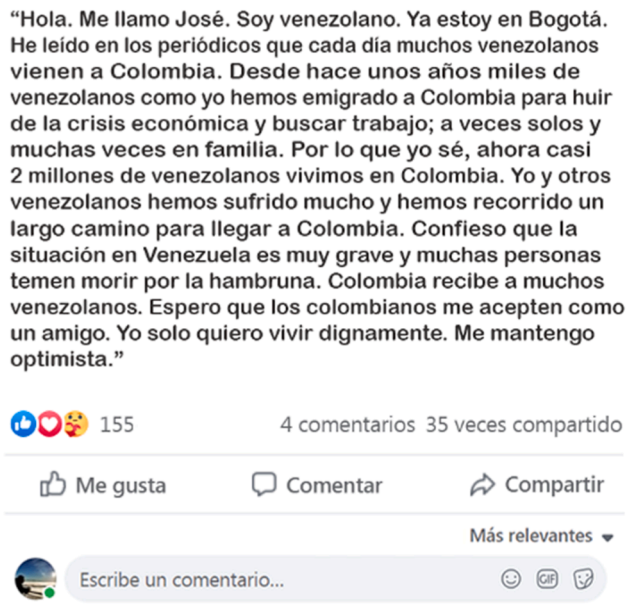


Fig. 2. Experimental stimulus for the condition "narrative post without CM cue".

and syntax files, are available at *Open Science Framework* repository.

Measures

Moderating and mediating variables

Xenophobia level. Xenophobia is measured as an individual disposition using a 5-item scale (Van der Veer et al., 2011) (e.g., "Interacting with Venezuelan immigrants makes me uneasy"; from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree;* $\alpha = .77$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.27$).

Identification with the protagonist. This mediator was assessed using an 11-item scale (Igartua and Barrios, 2012) which measures degree of identification with a specific character (e.g., "I felt emotionally involved with José's feelings"; from 1 = *nothing*, to 5 = *a lot;* $\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.83$).

Narrative transportation. This mediator was measured using the 5-item Transportation Scale-Short Form (Appel et al., 2015), adapted to Spanish by Igartua et al. (2019) (e.g., "I could imagine myself in the situations described in the text"; from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree;* $\alpha = .85$, $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.23$).

Dependent variables

Perceived persuasive effectiveness. This variable was evaluated using a 4-item scale constructed from previous works (Igartua and Rodríguez-Contreras, 2020; Kim, 2019; O'Keefe, 2020) (e.g., "the message was convincing"; from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree;* $\alpha = .88$, $M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.24$).

Positive attitude toward intergroup contact. To measure the extent to which participants attributed to themselves a positive attitude towards intergroup contact, a 3-item scale (Crisp and Husnu, 2011) was used (e.g., "Thinking about your own attitudes towards contact with Venezuelan immigrants, how friendly do you think you are to Venezuelan immigrants?"; from 1 = *nothing*, to 5 = *a lot;* $\alpha = .86$, $M = 3.35$, $SD = .85$).

Information-sharing intentions. This variable was assessed using a 6-item scale (Barbour et al., 2016) (e.g., "I would be willing to share this information with others"; from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 7 = *strongly agree;* $\alpha = .93$, $M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.38$).

[1] English translation of the post with CM cue: "Hello. My name is José. I'm Venezuelan. I'm already in Bogotá. I've read in books that in the past, many Colombians went to Venezuela. I clearly remember that thousands of Colombians emigrated to escape violence and look for work—sometimes alone and often with their families. From what I know, until recently, over 800,000 Colombians were living in Venezuela. I know that Colombians suffered a lot and travelled a long way to reach Venezuela. I admit that the situation in Colombia was very serious, and many people feared dying from the violence. My country welcomed many Colombians. I hope Colombians will also accept me as a friend. I just want to live with dignity. I remain optimistic."

[2] English translation of the post without CM cue: "Hello. My name is José. I'm Venezuelan. I'm already in Bogotá. I've read in the newspapers that every day many Venezuelans come to Colombia. For several years now, thousands of Venezuelans like me have emigrated to Colombia to escape the economic crisis and look for work—sometimes alone, and often with our families. From what I know, nearly 2 million Venezuelans now live in Colombia. My fellow Venezuelans and I have suffered a great deal and traveled a long road to get here. I admit that the situation in Venezuela is very serious, and many people fear dying from hunger. Colombia is welcoming many Venezuelans. I hope Colombians will accept me as a friend. I just want to live with dignity. I remain optimistic."

Results

Preliminary analysis

First, random allocation was successful. Experimental conditions did not differ significantly in sociodemographic terms (gender ($\chi^2(2, N = 260) = 2.707, p = .258$; age ($t(258) = .716, p = .475$); education ($\chi^2(2, N = 260) = 1.080, p = .583$), and xenophobia level ($t(258) = -1.29, p = .196$).

Secondly, the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation of argument framing (presence vs. absence of CM cue) was confirmed. After exposure to stimuli, participants responded to four perceived past-remembering items (manipulation check). The independent sample *t*-test indicated that there were statistically significant differences between experimental groups in all four items; (item 1) "The post was about the history of Colombian migration to Venezuela" ($t(258) = -10.933, p < .001$), (item 2) "The post was about the history of Venezuelan migration to Colombia" ($t(258) = 5.789, p < .001$), (item 3) "The post made me remember how and why Colombians migrated to Venezuela" ($t(258) = -8.580, p < .001$), (item 4) "The post made me remember how and why Venezuelans migrate to Colombia" ($t(258) = 5.378, p < .001$). That is, participants who were exposed to testimonial with CM cue considered that the post was about the past and ranked higher in item 1 ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 2.03$), and item 3 ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.42$), as compared to participants who were exposed to testimonial without CM cue; item 1 ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.95$), and item 3 ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 2.18$). In contrast, participants who were exposed to testimonial without CM cue considered that the post was not about the past and ranked higher in item 2 ($M = 6.24$, $SD = 1.30$), and item 4 ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.09$), in comparison to participants who were exposed to testimonial with CM cue; item 2 ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.95$), and item 4 ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.83$).

Effect of CM cue and xenophobia level on mediators (H1)

To test H1 (moderation model), the *PROCESS* macro for *SPSS* was used (Model 1; Hayes, 2018). This model estimates conditional effects at different levels of the moderator, allowing for an examination of how the relationship between the independent and dependent variables changes across varying moderator values. It also provides unstandardized coefficients (*B*), *p*-values, and standard errors (*SE*) to assess significance.

The results indicated no statistically significant interaction between CM cue and xenophobia level in predicting identification with the protagonist ($B_{interaction} = .00$, $SE = .07$, $p = .901$). This suggests that xenophobia level did not significantly moderate the relationship between the CM cue and identification. As a result, the conditional effects at different levels of xenophobia were also not statistically significant: for individuals with low xenophobia, the effect of the CM cue on identification was not significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Identification)}|(\text{Low xenophobia level}) = -.11$, $SE = .13$, $p = .376$; for individuals with medium xenophobia, the effect was similarly non-significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Identification)}|(\text{Medium xenophobia level}) = -.10$, $SE = .09$, $p = .264$); for individuals with high xenophobia, the effect remained non-significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Identification)}|(\text{High xenophobia level}) = -.09$, $SE = .14$, $p = .503$).

In the case of narrative transportation, a certain trend toward significance was observed in the interaction ($B_{interaction} = .19$, $SE = .11$, $p = .089$), though the conditional effects were not statistically significant: for low xenophobia, the effect of the CM cue on transportation was not significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Transportation)}|(\text{Low xenophobia level}) = -.28$, $SE = .20$, $p = .168$; for medium xenophobia, the effect was also non-significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Transportation)}|(\text{Medium xenophobia level}) = -.04$, $SE = .14$, $p = .749$); for high xenophobia, the effect was again non-significant ($\theta_{(CM\ cue \rightarrow Transportation)}|(\text{High xenophobia level}) = .22$, $SE = .21$, $p = .289$). Therefore, H1 was not confirmed (see Table 1).

Nonetheless, independent of the experimental condition, main effects of xenophobia level on identification and narrative transportation were observed. Two multiple regression analyses were run to predict, respectively, identification and narrative transportation from the xenophobia level, including in the model CM cue, sex, age, and education as predictors. The first model was significant (F (5, 254) = 14.34, $p < .001$), explaining 22 % ($R^2 = .21$) of the variance in identification with the protagonist. The second model was also significant (F (5, 254) = 7.63, $p < .001$), explaining 13 % ($R^2 = .11$) of the variance in narrative transportation. The results showed that the xenophobia level predicted both identification ($B = -.27$, $t = -7.32$, $p < .001$) and narrative transportation ($B = -.30$, $t = -5.18$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the higher the level of xenophobia, the less identification and the less narrative transportation are activated.

Table 1
Interaction effect of CM cue and xenophobia level on reception processes (Model 1 PROCESS).

Dependent variable: Identification with the protagonist				
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	4.52	.24	18.83	.000
CM cue	-.14	.34	-.42	.669
Xenophobia level	-.25	.05	-4.86	.000
CM cue × Xenophobia level	.00	.07	.12	.901
Conditional effects of CM cue at different values of xenophobia level	*θ*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Low xenophobia level	-.11	.13	-.88	.376
Medium xenophobia level	-.10	.09	-1.11	.264
High xenophobia level	-.09	.14	-.67	.503
Dependent variable: Narrative transportation				
Predictor variables	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	6.27	.37	16.94	.000
CM cue	-.91	.53	-1.71	.088
Xenophobia level	-.37	.08	-4.52	.000
CM cue × Xenophobia level	.19	.11	1.70	.089
Conditional effects of CM cue at different values of xenophobia level	*θ*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Low xenophobia level	-.28	.20	-1.38	.168
Medium xenophobia level	-.04	.14	-.31	.749
High xenophobia level	.22	.21	1.06	.289

Effects of CM cue (H2)

To test H2, a mediation model (customised with *PROCESS* macro) was used (Model 4; 10,000 bootstrapping samples to generate 95 % confidence intervals; Hayes, 2018). The *PROCESS* macro allows the estimation of indirect effects, standard errors (*SE*), and confidence intervals (*CI*) using the bootstrapping technique. An indirect effect is regarded as statistically significant when the generated confidence interval (*CI*, at 95 %) does not include the value 0.

The analysis showed that there was no indirect effect of CM cue on dependent variables since the independent variable had no statistically significant effect on identification ($B = -.15$, $SE = .10$, $p = .125$), nor narrative transportation ($B = -.09$, $SE = .15$, $p = .534$). The indirect effects of the CM cue (through mediation of identification) on perceived persuasive effectiveness (95 % $CI = -.3564, .0369$), positive attitude toward intergroup contact (95 % $CI = -.2220, .0249$), and information-sharing intentions (95 % $CI = -.3809, .0444$) were not significant. Similarly, no significant results were observed in terms of indirect effects of the CM cue (through mediation of narrative transportation) on perceived persuasive effectiveness (95 % $CI = -.2830, .1486$), positive attitude toward intergroup contact (95 % $CI = -.1402, .0714$), and information-sharing intentions (95 % $CI = -.2548, .1349$).

O'Keefe (2003) argues that the measures used to test the efficiency of experimental manipulations should be involved in the mediation analyses, as they may serve as mediators of psychological states (such as identification and transportation in our study) and represent key underlying processes. He further notes that while researchers often

demonstrate that a message variation influences both a perceptual state (via a manipulation check) and persuasive outcomes, they frequently neglect to test whether the perceptual state itself mediates the persuasive effect. In line with this reasoning, and as part of an exploratory post hoc analysis, we examined whether our manipulation check functioned as a mediator. Specifically, we selected one manipulation check item (item 3: "The post made me remember how and why Colombians migrated to Venezuela") as a measure of perceived past-remembering of participants to be included in our mediational model.

Therefore, a second model of serial mediation (Model 81, Hayes, 2018) was proposed to check the indirect effects of the CM cue on dependent variables through perceived past-remembering (primary mediator), and identification and narrative transportation (secondary mediators). To evaluate whether the sample size was still adequate for the exploratory serial mediation model, another sensitivity power analysis was conducted using G*Power. Modelling the outcome as a multiple regression with four predictors (the CM cue and three mediators), the analysis indicated that with a sample size of 260, $\alpha = .05$, and power = .80, the study was powered to detect effect sizes of .20 or larger.

These results were convergent with indirect effects of CM cue (see Fig. 3 and Table 2). It was observed that CM cue increased perceived past-remembering ($B = 1.96$, $SE = .22$, $p < .001$), which in turn increased identification with the protagonist of the post ($B = .12$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$), which was ultimately associated with a greater perceived persuasive effectiveness ($B = .30$, $SE = .11$, $p = .007$), positive attitude toward intergroup contact ($B = .49$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$), and information-sharing intentions ($B = .75$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$).

Regarding the role of narrative transportation, it was observed that the CM cue increased perceived past-remembering ($B = 1.96$, $SE = .22$, $p < .001$), which in turn increased narrative transportation ($B = .15$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$), which was ultimately associated with a greater perceived persuasive effectiveness ($B = .52$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). However, in this latter path, no statistically significant association between narrative transportation and positive attitude toward intergroup contact was observed ($B = .07$, $SE = .06$, $p = .198$). In the case of information-sharing intentions, although statistically significant association was observed ($B = .20$, $SE = .09$, $p = .025$), the confidence intervals regarding the specific indirect effect of CM cue on this dependent variable includes the value 0 (95 % *CI* = -.0035, .1501), hence the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Table 2
Specific indirect effects of CM cue on dependent variables.

Indirect effects	Effect	Boot *SE*	Boot 95 % *CI*
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Identification → Perceived persuasive effectiveness	**.0746**	**.0353**	**[.0166, .1551]**
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Identification → Positive attitude toward intergroup contact	**.1202**	**.0413**	**[.0524, .2134]**
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Identification → Intention to share the message	**.1811**	**.0611**	**[.0798, .3164]**
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Transportation → Perceived persuasive effectiveness	**.1581**	**.0538**	**[.0622, .2733]**
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Transportation → Positive attitude toward intergroup contact	.0233	.0229	[-.0197, .0710]
CM cue → Perceived past-remembering → Transportation → Intention to share the message	.0625	.0393	[-.0035, .1501]

Note. An indirect effect is statistically significant if the established confidence interval (95 % *CI*) does not include the value 0 (Hayes, 2018). Statistically significant indirect effects are marked in bold.

The pattern of significance or nonsignificance for individual paths in a mediation model is not fully pertinent to whether the indirect effect is significant. Researchers should absolutely estimate the indirect effect through quantitative instantiation of the mediation process and irrespective of the outcome of hypothesis tests for individual paths (see e.g., Hayes, 2018; Igartua and Hayes, 2021).

Discussion and conclusions

The CM can affect attitudes towards immigrants, yet little is known about how it can be mobilised to improve pro-migrant attitudes. Drawing on research in mediated contact and narrative persuasion, this paper explored not only the indirect effects of the CM on reducing prejudice, but also how these effects are operationalised. Results highlight the capacity of CM cue to amplify the effects of narrative media that

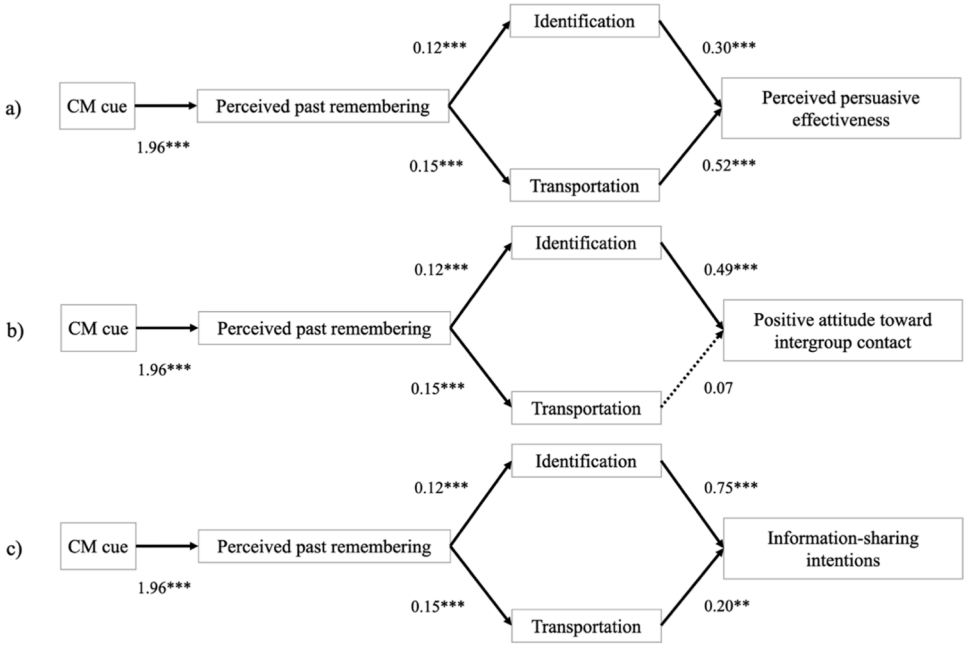


Fig. 3. Mediational analysis: specific indirect effects of CM cue.
Note. The figure shows the unstandardized regression coefficients (B). The dashed line represents non-significant coefficients. + $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

feature stigmatized immigrants. Specifically, this research focused on reducing prejudice against Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia through narrative testimonial messages framed as social media posts. In our experimental study, reminding Colombian citizens of their own history of emigration to Venezuela led indirectly to anti-Venezuelan prejudice reduction.

Understanding the persuasive power of narrative messages requires examining the underlying explanatory mechanisms (Bilandzic and Busselle, 2013). As compared to previous research (e.g., Ariely, 2019), this study tested the role of CM within a more complex model, incorporating relevant mediators and moderators. Our initial findings regarding the effects of CM cue and xenophobia level on narrative underlying mechanisms, as well as on perceptual, attitudinal, and intentional outcome variables were inconsistent and weak, potentially due to several factors. Xenophobia, as a key variable in mediated contact research, might not have moderated the effects of CM because the CM narratives did not directly engage with individuals' prior intergroup experiences or explicitly challenged their existing biases. Morris et al. (2005) argue that the presented persuasive information should cohere and engage with the attitude structure of an individual. As discussed in previous research (Ariely, 2019), respondents' reactions to CM stimuli are different and the effectiveness of such messages largely depends on how well CM cues are framed to resonate with the audience's beliefs or values.

Furthermore, the study's design might not have sufficiently engaged the psychological mechanisms through which prejudice influences narrative processing. It is plausible that in the current study, Colombians with varying levels of xenophobia perceived the CM-based narratives as either threatening or inauthentic (see Borinca et al., 2023; Stephan et al., 2005), thereby reducing both their engagement with the post and their receptivity to its underlying persuasive claims. Additionally, if participants lacked a strong, personally relevant connection to the historical context (i.e., shared migration history between Venezuelans and Colombians), they might have found the cues as less pertinent to current social issues, thereby diminishing their impact. Research has shown that individuals are less likely to engage in deep message processing when they do not perceive the content as personally relevant (Morris et al., 2005; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Many studies (e.g., Paolini et al., 2004) also indicate that personal experience with the migration issue influences the effectiveness of mediated contact interventions.

Although the initial results were non-significant, our study found promising evidence by exploring the mediating role of manipulation checks as underlying mechanism of persuasion (O'Keefe, 2003). Incorporating perceived past-remembering into the mediation analysis, a post hoc approach also used in earlier studies (see e.g., Guerrero-Martín and Igartua, 2021), enhanced participants' recall of related historical events, thereby strengthening their identification with the protagonist as a key mechanism in E-ELM and EORM. Notably, the significant indirect effects of the CM on dependent variables were primarily driven through the mediation of identification, rather than narrative transportation. This distinction echoes primarily the tenets of TIM, which posits that transportation and identification are separable mechanisms influencing persuasion via different psychological pathways. Despite their potential interactivity (Fitzgerald and Green, 2017; Moyer-Gusé and Dale, 2017), identification seems to be more relevant than narrative transportation, at least in testimonial-based messages. This may be due to the limited number of protagonists depicted. In this study, the social media posts did not feature many Venezuelan immigrants simultaneously, which may have constrained transportation but facilitated identification. The literature shows that based on their psychological underpinnings, identification and narrative transportation are distinct processes that can affect audience involvement differently, depending on specific characteristics and manipulations of the message (see Tal-Or and Cohen, 2010).

Our findings from serial mediation analysis converge with narrative persuasion theories, affirming E-ELM, TIM, and EORM propositions regarding the roles of identification and transportation in persuasion. Together with perceived past-remembering, these mediating mechanisms help explain the persuasive effects of CM-based narratives. However, as our mediation analyses were conducted in a cross-sectional framework, they are intended to explore associative pathways rather than establish definitive causal relationships. We highlight that longitudinal designs would be necessary to establish causality with greater certainty. In addition, the observed indirect effects may reflect general historical awareness rather than responses specific to CM. As a first step, this study focused on the act of remembering, but future research may tap also into different interpretations of the CM, recognizing that individuals' behaviours are shaped by their understandings of the CM (Ariely, 2019).

In terms of the effect of similarity with the protagonist on persuasion, this study can potentially expand the research on psychological and subjective characteristics. As highlighted in the EORM, perceived similarity can lower resistance and increase openness to outgroup characters. Since messages featuring stigmatized immigrants, as compared to other protagonists (e.g., an ingroup member), activate less identification (Chung and Slater, 2013; Igartua and Frutos, 2017), more powerful narrative resources than objective demographic attributes (e.g., age or sex) are required to establish affective and cognitive bonds with the protagonist. In this study, it was observed that the CM cue (representing common migration background) may serve also as a dimension of similarity which can elicit identification with stigmatized immigrants as well as narrative transportation. Following this result, the perceived similarity may be a potential mediator to be explored in future studies (see Tukachinsky, 2014).

Limitations and implications

This paper, like all empirical studies, has its limitations. First, the authors portrayed the outgroup protagonist in the stimuli materials recounting his experiences as a testimonial and measured merely participants' identification with the protagonist and narrative transportation. However, as also emphasized by the EORM, the narrative portrayal of the outgroup character may have induced additional mechanisms, such as counterarguing (Slater and Rouner, 2002) and reactance (Brehm, 1966), which could have had persuasive effects, e.g., through rejection of an argument based on CM and affecting other narrative persuasion mechanisms. It would have been more convenient to include also counterarguing or reactance (Bilandzic and Busselle, 2013; Slater and Rouner, 2002) in the model with the aim of analyzing reception processes in a more complete and accurate way during exposure to the stimuli.

Another limitation of this study is the potential influence of social desirability bias on participants' responses. Given the focus on intergroup attitudes, participants may have been motivated to report more favorable views in order to align with socially acceptable norms, rather than to reflect their true feelings (Fisher, 1993). Previous research on mediated intergroup contact has noted that socially desirable responding is a common concern when evaluating attitudes toward outgroups (Blaylock and Briggs, 2023).

Moreover, only one narrative message per condition was employed. This design choice raises the possibility that the observed effects may have been influenced by idiosyncratic features of the specific stimuli (Slater et al., 2015). To minimize stimulus-specific effects and enhance the robustness and external validity of findings, future research should incorporate multiple exemplars per experimental condition (Reeves et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2015), thereby allowing for conclusions that are less dependent on any one particular narrative. Another methodological limitation concerns the nature of the control condition. In this experiment, one condition alludes to Colombian migration towards Venezuela, activating similarity with the protagonist through a common migration history. While the second condition could offer a neutral or non-historical baseline (as a control condition), it presented an

alternative historical framing focused on Venezuelan migration toward Colombia. As a result, it may be difficult to determine whether the observed effects of the CM-based message stem specifically from collective memory activation or from a broader historical framing effect. Future studies would benefit from including a truly neutral control condition that omits historical references altogether, to more precisely isolate the effects of collective memory cues on narrative persuasion outcomes.

In addition, this study focused specifically on parasocial mediated contact. Therefore, one cannot infer whether effects of CM cue in parasocial contact can be translated directly to media portrayals of outgroups in other modalities of contact (e.g. vicarious) (Banas et al., 2020). Thus, these findings should be replicated with multiple message conditions to confirm whether the effects of CM cue hold regardless of the contact format. Additionally, it is unknown how long-lasting the positive effects of CM cue are and whether and how fast they dissipate.

Furthermore, the authors used self-report measures to evaluate underlying processes of persuasion (identification, transportation), as well as to assess the activation of collective memory. These measures are valid, reliable, and widely used in communication research, especially because their brevity (small number of items) facilitates their application in online studies. However, the reception of a persuasive message is a dynamic phenomenon, which implies that mediating processes fluctuate and undergo changes throughout the exposure to persuasive content (e.g., Igartua, 2020). Additionally, self-reported measures of past-remembering, while practical, may be susceptible to demand characteristics and may not fully capture the implicit activation of collective memory (i.e., whether the CM condition truly triggered collective memory processes or merely reminded participants of historical migration narratives). Future research could complement retrospective self-report assessments with implicit measures, such as reaction-time-based tasks or open-ended recall protocols, to evaluate the activation of collective memory processes more rigorously. Combining self-report with physiological and neurophysiological (biometric) indicators (see Madera and Hebl, 2012; Murray and Antonakis, 2019) may also provide a more comprehensive analysis of message reception experiences during exposure.

While our approach regarding experimental design aligns with existing research in narrative persuasion and mediated contact by distinguishing between dispositional moderators (e.g., xenophobia level) and attitudinal outcomes (e.g., positive attitude toward intergroup contact), we acknowledge that using the same constructs in both pre- and post-exposure could have allowed for a within-subjects design and repeated-measures analysis, offering additional insights. Future studies might explore this alternative design to better assess changes in attitudes over time.

Regarding empirical contributions, this paper was an attempt to expand geographically the samples involved in mediated contact research and persuasive communication by conducting experiment in a Latin American migration context. Most of the mediated contact research in the context of anti-immigrant prejudice has been carried out for countries such as the United States, Spain, or Italy, and less scholarly attention was dedicated to other migration contexts.

By designing an experiment in the context of social media, this paper attempted also to explore deeply the implications of mediated contact, in particular parasocial contact, in social media. As theorized in E-ELM, triggering identification with a (stigmatized) character is one of the main challenges in narrative persuasion (Chung and Slater, 2013; Igartua and Frutos, 2017). Another interesting finding from this study is that even short messages that are disseminated through social networks have the capacity to stimulate processes of narrative persuasion, such as identification or transportation. In addition, the results reiterate that mediated contact, particularly in the form of personal narratives or short testimonials, provides a non-threatening context compared to direct interaction with immigrants, facilitating prejudice reduction.

This evidence is valuable not only for Colombian humanitarian agencies, but also for international non-profits and policy makers seeking to develop more effective anti-xenophobia media campaigns. Given that much hate speech targeting immigrants spreads through social media (Ekman, 2019), our study shows that these platforms can also be leveraged to counteract such harmful messages. By tailoring CM-based posts to specific target audiences, while adjusting message features like content, style, and structure (see e.g., Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2024a), humanitarian actors can strategically address biases and misconceptions, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for migrants across different contexts.

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Ethics & informed consent statement

All participants provided informed consent prior to involvement in the study, in accordance with ethical standards and institutional guidelines, ensuring their understanding of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Declaration of competing interest

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.

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Data Availability

All materials related to the experiment, including the experimental stimuli, questionnaire, dataset and syntax files, are available at: https://osf.io/7q3fy/?view_only=a472bd32ad594b7e8f5390d10b91867a.

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