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REGULAR ARTICLE

Improving intergroup relation through humanization: The moderating role of negative direct contact and the mediating role of intergroup affect

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Abstract

Research on the interplay between negative direct intergroup contact frequency and outgroup humanization in intergroup relations is limited. Thus, across two different intergroup settings (i.e., Switzerland and Kosovo; $N = 435$), we examined individuals' positive behavioural intentions towards outgroup members (i.e., *immigrants* in Study 1 and *the Roma* in Study 2) as a function of both negative direct intergroup contact and humanizing information versus positive but not humanizing information (both studies) and control/no information (Study 2). Results show that information portraying outgroup members in a humanizing light (versus positive and/or control with no information) decreased anxiety (in both studies) and increased empathy (Study 2), which then related to more positive behavioural intentions among people who reported *high* versus *low* levels of negative direct contact with outgroup members. In this article, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings concerning intergroup relations.

KEYWORDS
affect, humanization, intergroup behaviour, negative contact

1 | INTRODUCTION

The process of outgroup humanization is important for improving intergroup relations. This process involves considering others, such as immigrants, refugees, or other social and ethnic minorities, as equal human beings (Borinca et al., 2023). In other words, it requires an understanding of a person's or group's human qualities—characteristics that distinguish them from animals and objects and serve to illustrate their abilities to experience complex emotions and cognitions (Gray et al., 2007; Harris & Fiske, 2006; Haslam, 2006; Schein & Gray, 2015; Waytz et al., 2010).

Research on priming humanization towards outgroup members has shown that using uniquely human words rather than non-uniquely human- and animal-related words in relation to outgroups resulted in an increase in individuals' willingness to approach and feel close to outgroup members (Capozza et al., 2017; see also Gubler et al., 2015). Similarly, other research has shown that participants who received humanizing information about an outgroup member (i.e., information acknowledging that outgroup member's human qualities concerning their life, personality, emotions, and social cognition) displayed more empathy and less hostile behaviour towards the outgroup than those who received non-humanizing information about that outgroup (e.g., describing their favourite TV shows or preferences; Koetke et al., 2021) (Study 1). Indeed, providing information concerning outgroup members that emphasizes humanity rather than likeability (which is more positive information) triggers positive responses towards outgroup members (Borinca et al., 2021; Experiment 2).

Taken together, prior research indicated that people need to receive humanizing information about outgroups rather than solely positive information in order

to activate their affective responses and behavioural intentions. Because humanization (versus positive information) explicitly emphasizes outgroup members' ability to experience emotions and cognitions, it should also alleviate participants' anxiety and foster empathy towards outgroup members, which can lead to more positive behavioural intentions. Nevertheless, less is known about how this process occurs among people who have experienced negative direct contact with outgroup members. Therefore, the present research sought to examine whether priming humanization concerning immigrants or ethnic minorities enhanced intergroup relations in terms of behavioural intentions and affect among people who reported high versus low levels of negative direct intergroup contact frequency.

1.1 | The moderating role of negative direct contact

Whereas positive exchanges with outgroup members improve intergroup relations, negative intergroup contact deteriorates them (Barlow et al., 2012; Meleady & Forder, 2019; Schäfer et al., 2021). In their meta-analysis of more than 500 studies on intergroup contact, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) observed that less than 5% of such studies in their sample had considered the effect of negative contact and its potential to disrupt the beneficial effects of positive contact. Since then, negative (versus positive) intergroup contact has been shown to have a greater influence on people's attitudes towards outgroups (Graf et al., 2014). In addition, other research has shown that the more people reported negative contact with outgroup members, the greater their negative reactions and emotions in relation to those outgroups (Barlow et al., 2012, 2019; Nijs et al., 2019).

Therefore, improving reactions and emotions among people who have had negative experiences with outgroup members is necessary for improving intergroup relations. We suggest that *outgroup humanization* could be an effective strategy for fostering such improvement for people who report *high* versus *low* levels of negative direct contact with outgroup members. Scholars suggest that humanization is important for people who experience different types of contact, including negative contact with outgroup members (Borinca et al., 2023). Relatedly, the interaction between positive intergroup contact (i.e., imagined contact) and outgroup (de)humanization has been shown to impact intergroup relations even among people most opposed to outgroup members (Borinca, Çelik, et al., 2022). As such, it is reasonable to expect that the interplay between negative direct contact and humanization would also play a part in determining the nature of intergroup relations.

In this research we aimed to contribute to this effort by providing novel evidence of whether negative direct contact moderated the effect of outgroup humanization on behavioural intentions and intergroup affect (i.e., anxiety and empathy). Specifically, people who report less negative direct intergroup contact may be stable in their reactions towards outgroup members in terms of behavioural intentions and affect regardless of humanizing information. However, people who report more negative direct intergroup contact may benefit from humanizing information and thus enhancing their behavioural intentions and positive affect (i.e., less anxiety and more empathy).

Therefore, in this research, we believe that priming individuals who report negative intergroup contact with outgroup members with humanizing information should alleviate their anxiety, enhance their empathy, which, then will result to more positive behavioural intentions.

1.2 | The mediating role of intergroup affect

In the context of intergroup relations characterized by negativity—including past or current experience of negative interactions with the outgroup—the role of affect in intergroup relations appears to be important (Borinca, Çelik, et al., 2022; Borinca, Moreno-Bella, et al., 2022; Pagotto & Voci, 2013). In our research, we examined the mediating role of people's affect towards outgroup members through a measure of intergroup anxiety and intergroup empathy.

Intergroup anxiety—a negative affective state resulting from anticipating negative consequences for oneself during interactions with outgroup members (Stephan & Stephan, 1985)—is particularly problematic when prior interactions have been unpleasant (Greenland & Brown, 1999). Meanwhile, empathy is an affective state that stems from perceptions of the welfare of another person and is often accompanied by taking into consideration the other person's perspective in order to understand their situation (Batson et al., 2002; Johnston & Glasford, 2018).

In this research, we expected that the predicted interaction between negative direct contact frequency and outgroup humanization on behavioural intentions would be explained by both intergroup anxiety (both studies) and intergroup empathy (Study 2). Particularly for individuals who report *high* versus *low* levels of negative direct contact with outgroup members, humanizing information will decrease their anxiety and increase their empathy towards those individuals, leading to more positive behavioural intentions as a result.

2 | OVERVIEW OF THE TWO STUDIES

We tested our predictions through two studies, one conducted in Switzerland with Swiss citizens and the other in Kosovo with Kosovo Albanian citizens. Study 1 was conducted with a specific focus on immigrants (i.e., non-Swiss citizens) as a whole, given evidence suggesting that

there is a great deal of bias and discrimination against immigrants in Switzerland (Brunner & Kuhn, 2018; Fibbi et al., 2022). The second study focused on the Roma people as one of the most stigmatized groups in Kosovo. Indeed, the Roma people in Kosovo have been subjected to inhuman actions such as violence, threats, and persecution (Lee, 2019).

In both studies, we first measured the frequency of negative direct contact, after which participants read fictional news articles either humanizing outgroup members or only describing them positively. In Study 2, one-third of the participants were also exposed to a control condition with no information related to the outgroup. The main dependent variables in both studies were behavioural intentions and intergroup anxiety. We also added a measure of empathy in Study 2.

We hypothesized that negative direct contact frequency would moderate the main effect of humanization information (i.e., an interaction between negative direct contact and outgroup information) on behavioural intentions and affect (i.e., anxiety and empathy) towards outgroup members. Specifically, we expected that people reporting high (versus low) levels of negative direct contact would display more positive behavioural intentions (H1a; both studies), more empathy (H1b; Study 2), and less intergroup anxiety (H2; both studies) in the humanization conditions as compared to other conditions (i.e., the positive condition in both studies and the control condition in Study 2). In addition, we expected that participants' reduced feelings of anxiety (H3a; both studies) and enhanced empathy (H3b Study 2) would mediate the effect of humanizing information versus other conditions on behavioural intentions among participants who reported high (versus low) levels of negative direct contact.

3 | STUDY 1

To investigate intergroup relations between Swiss citizens and immigrants (i.e., the outgroup), Study 1 was designed to provide initial evidence for our hypotheses. Thus, we measured negative direct intergroup contact frequency as an individual difference and experimentally manipulated outgroup information (i.e., humanizing information versus positive information). The primary dependent variables were behavioural intentions and intergroup affect assessed via intergroup anxiety.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants and design

Data were collected from the general public in Switzerland using snowball sampling via social media. Participants were required to identify as being Swiss citizens, living in

Switzerland, and being at least 18 years old. The sample consisted of 135 participants ($M_{age} = 28.51$, $SD = 9.48$), 88 of whom were women. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: the humanization condition ($n = 68$) or the positive condition ($n = 67$). A sensitivity analysis conducted with G*Power (version 3.1.9.2; Faul et al., 2009) for a multiple linear regression model with three predictors (i.e., two primary effects and two-way interaction), assuming an alpha (α) of 0.05 and a power estimate of 0.80, revealed that our final sample size was powered enough to detect an effect size of $f^2 = 0.08$, which conventionally indicates a small effect size (Faul et al., 2009).

3.1.2 | Procedure

We presented the study to participants as an investigation into how people perceive different social groups. The first part of the questionnaire asked participants to provide their demographic information (i.e., age and gender) and report their degree of negative direct contact with immigrants. Afterwards, half of the participants read a short, fictitious news article that humanized immigrants, whereas the other half read a similarly formatted fictitious new article describing immigrants only in a positive light but without attempting to humanize them. Lastly, participants were fully debriefed, thanked for their participation, and asked for their consent to use their data.

3.1.3 | Independent measure and experimental manipulation

3.1.3.1 | *Negative direct contact frequency*
We measured the frequency of negative direct intergroup contact with a single item adapted from Rupar and Graf (2019): "How often have you had negative contact with immigrants?" The response format was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very often*). From the responses we computed an average score of negative direct contact ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.83$).

3.1.3.2 | *Outgroup-related information*
Participants in both the humanization and positive conditions read a fictional but ostensibly real news article about a "Swiss study on immigration." The article for the humanization condition read as follows:

> According to a study by the University of Geneva with a representative sample of Swiss companies, Swiss employees define immigrants as people who are passionate about their work. Indeed, they consider them to be ambitious and optimistic,

which brings companies up to 60% of their turnover. In addition, they are polite and civilized, which improves human relations in the workplace. They are also warm, and they bring a friendly atmosphere. Employees report that their immigrant colleagues are concerned and worried about the country's economy and favour a more local mode of consumption than their Swiss counterparts. In addition, their generosity and humility often lead them to give to and help others. Immigrants are empathetic, optimistic, and affectionate, which makes them indispensable to the proper functioning of Swiss society.

By contrast, the news for the positive condition read as follows:

According to a study by the University of Geneva with a representative sample of Swiss companies, Swiss employees define immigrants as people who are happy to do their jobs. Indeed, they consider them to be attentive workers who bring companies up to 60% of their turnover. In addition, they are friendly and sociable, which improves social relations in the workplace. Employees report that their immigrant colleagues are worried and stressed about the country's economy and have a more local consumption pattern than their Swiss counterparts. In addition, their joviality and sensitivity often lead them to give to and help others. Immigrants are lively, cheerful, and enthusiastic, which makes them indispensable to the proper functioning of Swiss society.

3.1.4 | Dependent variables

We introduced a single attention check in order to determine whether participants were paying attention to the survey (i.e., "This item serves only to identify participants who are not reading and responding to the survey carefully. Please do not respond to this item"). All participants were paying attention to the survey, for none of them responded to the item.

3.1.4.1 | Behavioural intentions

We assessed participants' overall behavioural intentions towards immigrants with a nine-item scale adapted from Yitmen and Verkuyten (2018), including items such as "Participate in a demonstration in favour of immigrants" and "Make a donation to improve the living conditions of immigrants." Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). From the

responses, we computed an average score of intergroup behavioural intentions ($\alpha=0.90$, $M=5.63$, $SD=1.13$).

3.1.4.2 | Intergroup affect

Lastly, we assessed how participants would feel if they were to interact with immigrants using a 10-item scale of intergroup anxiety adapted from Stephan and Stephan (1985), with items such as "Irritated," "Defensive," and "Impatient." Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*). From the responses, we computed an average score of intergroup anxiety ($\alpha=0.85$; $M=2.99$, $SD=0.89$).

3.2 | Results

We regressed all dependent variables on negative direct contact (standardized scores), outgroup-related information (humanization versus positive), and all interactions between these two factors. Table 1 provides correlations between all continuous variables, while Table 2 provides estimated means and standard errors for both dependent variables.

3.2.1 | Behavioural intentions

Analyses revealed that the main effect of negative direct contact frequency was significant, $t(131)=-7.04$, $p<0.001$,

TABLE 1 Correlations among continuous variables (Studies 1 and 2).

	Negative direct contact	Behavioural intentions	Intergroup anxiety
Study 1			
Negative direct contact	—		
Behavioural intentions	−0.521**	—	
Intergroup anxiety	0.465**	−0.710**	—

	Negative direct contact	Behavioural intentions	Intergroup anxiety	Empathy
Study 2				
Negative direct contact	—			
Behavioural intentions	−0.148*	—		
Intergroup anxiety	0.635**	−0.697**	—	
Empathy	0.076	0.878**	−0.500**	—

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (two-tailed).

TABLE 2 Behavioural intentions, intergroup anxiety (both studies), and empathy (Study 2) as a function of negative direct contact and humanization.

	Negative direct contact					
	Low (−1 SD)			High (+1 SD)		
	Outgroup information			Outgroup information		
Study 1 (N=135)	Humanization	Positive		Humanization	Positive	
Behavioural intentions	6.16 (0.16)	6.26 (0.16)		5.44 (0.16)	4.67 (0.16)	
Intergroup anxiety	2.62 (0.13)	2.55 (0.13)		3.16 (0.13)	3.63 (0.13)	
	Negative direct contact					
	Low (−1 SD)			High (+1 SD)		
	Outgroup information			Outgroup information		
Study 2 (N=300)	Humanization	Positive	Control	Humanization	Positive	Control
Behavioural intentions	4.63 (0.18)	4.28 (0.21)	4.45 (0.19)	5.32 (0.21)	3.71 (0.19)	3.38 (0.18)
Intergroup anxiety	2.82 (0.11)	2.83 (0.12)	2.89 (0.12)	3.21 (0.13)	4.90 (0.10)	5.09 (0.11)
Empathy	4.30 (0.24)	4.00 (0.27)	3.84 (0.26)	5.52 (0.28)	3.87 (0.25)	3.95 (0.24)

Note: Means and standard errors (in parentheses) for intergroup outgroup information at conditional levels of negative direct contact.

$\eta^2_p=0.27$: positive behavioural intentions decreased as negative contact increased ($\beta=-0.57$). The main effect of outgroup information was also significant, $t(131)=-2.05$, $p=0.041$, $\eta^2_p=0.03$. Participants expressed more positive behavioural intentions towards outgroup members in the humanization condition ($M=5.80$, $SD=0.97$) than in the positive condition ($M=5.46$, $SD=1.27$). Lastly, as predicted by H1a, negative direct contact × outgroup information interaction was significant as well, $t(131)=-2.64$, $p=0.009$, $\eta^2_p=0.05$ (Figure 1).

Simple effect revealed that individuals who reported a high degree of negative direct contact (+1 SD) displayed more positive intentions towards outgroup members in the humanization condition than in the positive condition, $t(131)=-3.32$, $p=0.001$, $\eta^2_p=0.07$. However, that effect was not significant among participants who reported a low degree of negative direct contact (−1 SD), $t(131)=0.42$, $p=0.670$.

FIGURE 1 Interactive effect of negative direct contact and outgroup information (humanization versus positive) on positive behavioural intentions (Study 1).

$p=0.016$, $\eta^2_p=0.04$. Again, that effect was not significant among participants who reported a low degree of negative direct contact (−1 SD), $t(131)=-0.36$, $p=0.712$.

3.2.2 | Intergroup anxiety

Once again, analyses revealed that the main effect of negative direct contact frequency was significant, $t(131)=5.96$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2_p=0.21$, such that intergroup anxiety increased as negative contact increased ($\beta=0.40$); however, the main effect of outgroup information was not significant, $t(131)=1.47$, $p=0.144$. As predicted by H2a, the negative direct contact × outgroup information interaction was significant, $t(131)=1.98$, $p=0.050$, $\eta^2_p=0.02$.

Simple effect indicated that individuals who reported a high degree of negative direct contact (+1 SD) displayed less anxiety towards outgroup members in the humanization condition than in the positive condition, $t(131)=2.44$,
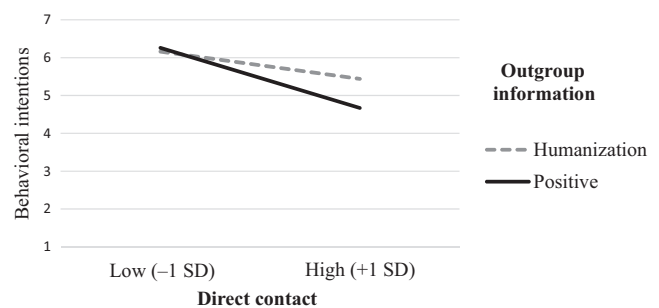
3.2.3 | Mediation analysis

We tested H3a using Model 8 in PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2018; 5000 bootstrapped samples) in a moderated mediation analysis for the outcome measure—that is, behavioural intentions. We entered intergroup help (−1=humanization condition, +1=positive condition) as the independent variable, negative direct contact frequency as the moderator, and perceived intergroup anxiety as a mediator (Figure 2).

In line with H3, the analysis revealed that the moderated mediation index (−0.09) was significant, with an interval value that did not include zero in its 95% CI [−0.19, −0.002].
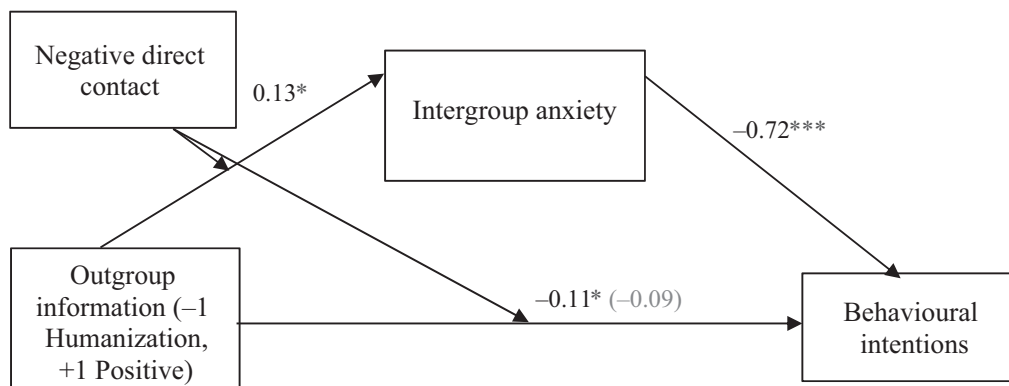
FIGURE 2 Mediation model tested in Study 1. Standardized regression weights and indirect effects for the moderated mediation model in which the effect of outgroup information (humanization condition where outgroup is described with human words versus positive condition in which the outgroup is described positively) on behavioural intentions is moderated by negative direct contact, which is then mediated by intergroup anxiety, Study 1. The direct effect of outgroup information on behavioural intentions is in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.001$.

We next examined the conditional indirect effect at different levels of the moderator (± 1 SD) in order to uncover the specific pattern of the moderated mediation. The indirect effect of outgroup-related information (i.e., -1 for humanizing information versus $+1$ for positive information) was significant at high levels of negative direct contact ($+1$ SD), $\beta = 0.19$ ($SE = 0.08$), 95% CI [-0.35, -0.03], but not at low levels of negative direct contact (-1 SD), $\beta = 0.01$ ($SE = 0.06$), 95% CI [-0.11, 0.13].

3.3 | Discussion

The findings of Study 1 provided support for our hypotheses. Negative intergroup contact frequency moderated the effect of humanization on behavioural intentions and intergroup anxiety. In other words, participants who reported high (versus low) levels of negative direct contact displayed more positive behavioural intentions and less intergroup anxiety towards immigrants in the humanization condition than in the positive condition. Intergroup anxiety also accounted for the effect of the investigated interaction on behavioural intentions. Particularly for individuals who reported high levels of negative intergroup contact frequency, the humanization (as opposed to positive) condition resulted in reduced anxiety towards immigrants, which then was related to an increase in positive behavioural intentions.

We conducted a second study in order to replicate and extend these findings in a different intergroup context, such as Kosovo, where the majority of the population is Albanian, with a focus on one of the most stigmatized groups there, the Roma.

4 | STUDY 2

In comparison with Study 1, four changes were made in Study 2. We conducted this study in a different intergroup context, namely Kosovo, with regard to one of the most stigmatized groups there, the Roma (i.e., the outgroup). The manipulation of *humanization* and *positive* information was similar to that in Study 1; however, here we also added a *control* condition to capture the baseline level of behavioural intentions and affect. To further examine the underlying mechanism, we also included a measure of empathy. Finally, unlike Study 1, which employed an attention check, Study 2 employed a manipulation check to test the effectiveness of our experimental manipulation.

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants and design

Using paper and pencil questionnaires, data were collected from the general public in various public places throughout Kosovo. Participants were required to identify themselves as Kosovo citizens and be at least 18 years old. A total of 300 people filled in the questionnaire ($M_{age} = 31.37$, $SD_{age} = 6.88$), 150 of whom were women and all of whom were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: the humanization condition ($n = 100$), the positive condition ($n = 100$), and the control condition ($n = 100$). A sensitivity analysis conducted with G*Power for a multiple regression revealed that, assuming an α of 0.05 and a power estimate of 0.80, our final sample was sufficiently powered to detect an effect size (f^2) of 0.04, which conventionally indicates a small effect size (Faul et al., 2009).

4.1.2 | Independent measures and experimental manipulation

As in Study 1, we measured negative direct contact frequency ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.92$) but adapted it to the context

of Kosovo in relation to the Roma.[1] Participants then were exposed to experimental manipulation (humanization versus positive information but adapted in relation to the Roma) as in Study 1, but here we also included a control condition with no information regarding the Roma group members.

4.1.3 | Dependent variables

4.1.3.1 | *Manipulation check*

To test whether the humanization conditions versus the positive and control conditions increased perceived humanness towards the outgroup (the Roma), we used three items such as "To what extent do you think Roma people are civilized?", "To what extent do you think Roma people are empathetic?", and "To what extent do you think Roma people have moral values?". Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*absolutely*). We averaged the responses to these items in order to compute a score of perceived humanness ($\alpha = 0.95$; $M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.90$).

We then measured positive behavioural intentions ($\alpha = 0.91$; $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.50$) and intergroup anxiety ($\alpha = 0.87$; $M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.31$) as in Study 1.

Empathy

Finally, we assessed how participants felt regarding the Roma using a six-item scale of intergroup empathy adapted from Batson et al. (2002) and Johnston and Glasford (2018) that included items such as "Sympathy," "Warmth," and "Compassion." Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*absolutely*). From the responses we computed an average score for intergroup empathy ($\alpha = 0.90$, $M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.88$).[2]

4.2 | Results

To test our hypotheses, we computed two orthogonal contrasts, since contrast analysis is a more precise and robust statistical test to analyze the effect of a variable with more than two modalities (Brauer & McClelland, 2005; Furr & Rosenthal, 2003). According to a linear hypothesis, the first critical contrast (C1) compared the humanization information condition (+2) to the average of the positive information and control conditions (−1 and −1). The second critical contrast (C2) compared the positive information (+1) with the control (−1) conditions, while the humanization information condition was coded 0. A linear effect is noted when the effect of C1 but not the effect of C2 is significant. Thus, as in Study 1, we regressed all dependent variables on negative direct contact (standardized scores) and C1 and C2 (standardized scores), as well as the interaction between these factors (except for the interaction between contrasts).

4.2.1 | Manipulation check

The analyses revealed that the main effect of C1 was significant, $t(294) = 3.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$: participants attributed more humanness to outgroup members in the humanization condition ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.80$) than in the positive ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.94$) and control ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.89$) conditions. No other effect was significant.

4.2.2 | Behavioural intentions

Analyses revealed that the main effect of negative direct contact frequency was significant, $t(294) = -2.69$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta^2_p = 0.02$: positive behavioural intentions decreased as negative contact increased ($\beta = -0.21$). The main effect of C1 was also significant, $t(294) = 5.94$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.10$: participants expressed more positive behavioural intentions towards outgroup members in the humanization condition ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.33$) than in the positive ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.46$) and control ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.49$) conditions. However, the main effect of C2 was not significant, $t(294) = -0.40$, $p = 0.683$. As expected, the negative direct contact × C1 interaction was significant, $t(294) = 4.32$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.06$, while the negative direct contact × C2 interaction was not significant, $t(294) = -1.28$, $p = 0.200$.

Simple effects revealed that individuals who reported a high degree of negative direct contact (+1 SD) displayed more positive intentions towards outgroup members in the humanization condition than in the positive and control conditions, $t(294) = 7.00$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.14$. However, that effect was not significant among participants who reported a low degree of negative direct contact (−1 SD), $t(294) = 1.14$, $p = 0.252$.

4.2.3 | Intergroup anxiety

Analyses revealed that the main effect of negative direct contact was significant, $t(294) = 16.93$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.49$, such that intergroup anxiety increased as negative contact increased ($\beta = 0.84$). The main effect of C1 was also significant, $t(294) = -8.67$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.20$: participants reported less anxiety towards outgroup members in the humanization condition ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.96$) than in the positive ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.31$) and control ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.37$) conditions. However, the main effect of C2 was not significant, $t(294) = 1.03$, $p = 0.303$. As expected, the negative direct contact × C1 interaction was significant, $t(294) = -8.13$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.18$, while the negative direct contact × C2 interaction was not significant, $t(294) = 0.52$, $p = 0.600$.

Simple effects showed that individuals who reported a high degree of negative direct contact frequency (+1 SD) displayed less anxiety towards outgroup members in the

humanization condition than in the positive and control conditions, $t(294)=-11.4$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2_p=0.30$. Again, that effect was not significant among participants who reported a low degree of negative direct contact (-1 SD), $t(294)=-0.29$, $p=0.766$.

4.2.4 | Empathy

Analyses revealed that the main effect of negative direct contact was not significant, $t(294)=1.42$, $p=0.157$. However, the main effect of C1 was significant, $t(294)=4.42$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2_p=0.06$: participants displayed more empathy towards outgroup members in the humanization condition ($M=4.82$, $SD=1.80$) than in the positive ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.88$) and control ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.90$) conditions. Once again, the main effect of C2 was not significant, $t(294)=-0.15$, $p=0.879$. As expected, the negative direct contact × C1 interaction was significant, $t(294)=2.70$, $p=0.007$, $\eta^2_p=0.02$, while the negative direct contact × C2 interaction was not significant, $t(294)=0.42$, $p=0.637$.

Simple effects revealed that individuals who reported a high degree of negative direct contact frequency ($+1$ SD) displayed empathy towards outgroup members in the humanization condition than in the positive and control conditions, $t(294)=4.85$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2_p=0.07$. However, that effect was not significant among participants who reported a low degree of negative direct contact frequency (-1 SD), $t(294)=1.24$, $p=0.215$.

4.2.5 | Mediation analysis

As in Study 1, we tested H3 using Model 8 in PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2018; 5000 bootstrapped samples) to run a parallel moderated mediation analysis on the main outcome, positive behavioural intentions. We entered either C1 or C2 as the independent variable and negative direct contact as the moderator. Finally, we entered both intergroup anxiety and intergroup empathy as mediators (Figure 3).

Regarding the mediating role of intergroup anxiety, the analysis showed that the moderated mediation index (0.08) was significant, with an interval value that did not include zero in its 95% CI [0.05, 0.12]. The indirect effect of C1 was not significant at low levels of negative direct contact, $\beta=0.001$ ($SE=0.01$), 95% CI [-0.02, 0.03], but was significant at high levels of negative direct contact, $\beta=0.18$ ($SE=0.04$), 95% CI [0.10, 0.26].[3]

Regarding the mediating role of intergroup empathy, the analysis showed that the moderated mediation index (0.08) was significant, with an interval value that did not include zero in its 95% CI [0.02, 0.14]. The indirect effect of C1 was not significant at low levels of negative direct contact, $\beta=0.04$ ($SE=0.04$), 95% CI [-0.04, 0.14], but was significant at high levels of negative direct contact, $\beta=0.22$ ($SE=0.03$), 95% CI [0.15, 0.30].[4]

4.3 | Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended further our hypotheses in a different context, such as Kosovo. Negative
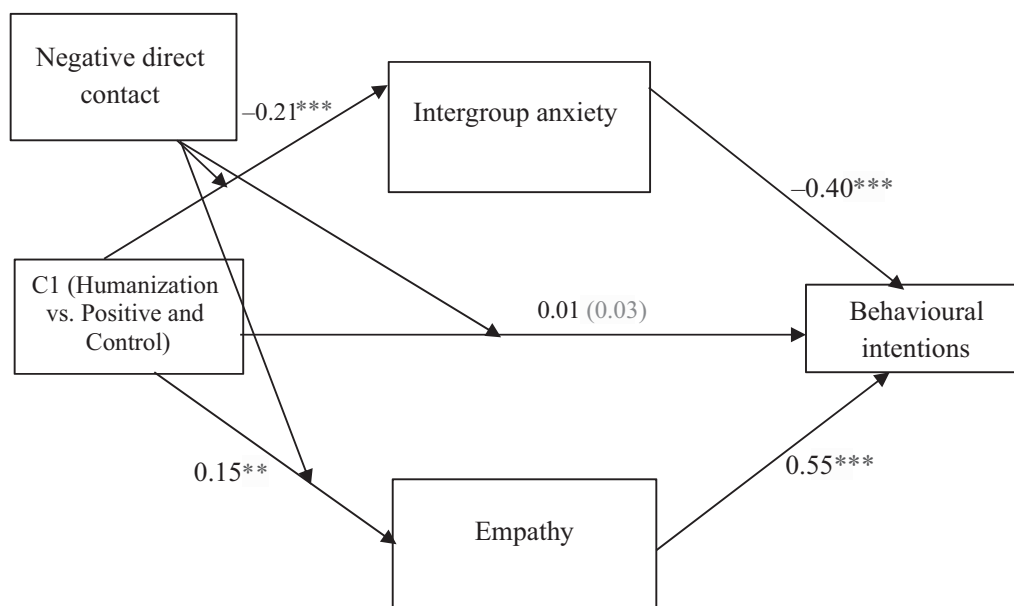

FIGURE 3 Mediation model tested in Study 2. Standardized regression weights and indirect effects for the moderated mediation model in which the effect of outgroup information (humanizing informatization condition versus positive information condition and control conditions) on positive behavioural intentions is moderated by negative direct contact, which is then parallelly mediated by intergroup anxiety and intergroup empathy, Study 2. The direct effect of outgroup information on behavioural intentions is in parentheses. **$p<0.01$, ***$p<0.001$.

intergroup contact frequency also moderated the effect of humanization on empathy in addition to behavioural intentions and intergroup anxiety. Specifically, participants who reported having high (versus low) levels of negative direct contact with outgroup members displayed more positive behavioural intentions and empathy and less anxiety in the humanization condition than participants in other conditions (i.e., positive or control). As expected, the effect of the predicted interaction on behavioural intention was mediated parallelly by reduced anxiety and enhanced empathy concerning outgroup members.

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

In two studies, we examined the role of negative intergroup contact frequency in moderating the effect of outgroup humanization on behavioural intentions and intergroup anxiety. Study 2 also tested whether negative intergroup contact moderated the effect of outgroup humanization on empathy towards outgroup members.

Study 1 was conducted with Swiss citizens and focused on immigrants as the outgroup, while Study 2 was conducted with Kosovo Albanian citizens and focused on the Roma as the outgroup. The results revealed that for people who reported *high* versus *low* levels of negative direct contact frequency with outgroup members, the humanization condition (versus positive conditions in both studies and/or the control condition in Study 2) increased their positive behavioural intentions (in both studies) and empathy (Study 2) and reduced their anxiety (both studies) towards outgroup members. The reason for these results is that the humanization (versus positive in both studies and/or the control in Study 2) condition alleviated intergroup anxiety and fostered empathy among people who reported high (versus low) levels of negative direct contact frequency, which in turn was related to more positive behavioural intentions.

Our findings add to the growing body of work demonstrating that negative contact can have negative consequences for intergroup relations. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the more negative contact people have had with outgroup members, the greater their negative reactions and affect towards those individuals (Barlow et al., 2012; Nijs et al., 2019). The key contribution of our findings is providing evidence for the moderating role of negative direct contact on the effect of humanization strategy on intergroup outcomes, such as behavioural intentions, empathy, and anxiety.

Our findings also provide further evidence of results reported in the literature on outgroup humanization (Capozza et al., 2017; Koetke et al., 2021). The way in which outgroups (i.e., immigrants or ethnic minorities

such as the Roma) are described in the news media seems important for people, especially if they have high levels of negative direct interactions with them. Our research has shown that for people who report high versus low levels of negative direct contact with outgroup members, it is very important that the outgroup be portrayed in humanizing ways in order to influence their positive behavioural intentions and affect (i.e., intergroup anxiety and intergroup empathy).

Finally, our findings also contribute to the literature on the underlying mechanisms of direct negative contact and humanization. Consistent with the literature addressing the underlying mechanisms for positive forms of intergroup contact (Borinca, Çelik, et al., 2022; Pagotto & Voci, 2013), our study shows that both intergroup anxiety and intergroup empathy can explain the interactive effect between negative direct contact and humanization on behavioural intentions.

Although our findings contribute to a better understanding of the interplay of negative direct contact frequency and humanization for intergroup relations, future research may consider some limitations of the current study. First, for people who scored low on negative direct contact, we did not anticipate any significant differences between humanization and other conditions (i.e., positive and control). In fact, we presumed that they would show nearly similar reactions and affect regardless of the experimental manipulation. Even though our results showed that there were no significant differences between our experimental conditions for these people concerning our outcome measures, future research should find ways in which these individuals may also benefit from humanization strategies concerning outgroup members.

Second, it is worth noting that all participants in this study were majority group members. It would be interesting to examine the same experiences (i.e., negative cross-group interactions) and humanization from the minority perspective. Third, because all of our data were assessed at a single point in time, future research should consider using these or similar measures to examine whether there is an over-time effect. Lastly, we acknowledge that our sample sizes may not be sufficient for the moderated mediation test, and future research should consider a much larger sample size.

6 | CONCLUSION

Our findings provide evidence that negative intergroup contact frequency plays a moderating role in the effect of humanization on behavioural intentions via intergroup affect. Results revealed that for people who reported having *high* versus *low* negative direct contact with outgroup members, humanizing information about the outgroup (versus positive information and control) decreased intergroup anxiety and increased empathy, which then was

related to positive behavioural intentions. Our findings suggest that emphasizing the humanity of outgroup members can improve intergroup relations, particularly for people who have had negative experiences with them.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Islam Borinca: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; project administration; resources; software; supervision; validation; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Alan McAuliffe:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Alastair Nightingale:** Writing – original draft; writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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ENDNOTES

[1] It should be noted that this study also employed a second moderator, namely a single item that assessed the frequency of negative extended intergroup contact, which was also adapted from Rupar and Graf (2019): "How often do your family and friends have negative contact with Roma people?" The response format was a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very often*), $M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.98$. Because analyses of the two moderators (negative direct contact and negative extended contact) showed exactly the same results, in the interests of concision and in line with Study 1, we report here only the results as a function of negative direct contact. Results as a function of negative extended contact are presented in Supplementary Material.

[2] An additional study assessed the interaction between extended contact and dehumanization (versus negative information) on behavioural intentions and empathy. Findings showed that for people who reported high versus low levels of negative indirect contact, dehumanizing information (versus negative information) reduced both their empathy and positive behavioural intentions. Because this study focused on two different conditions—dehumanization and negative information—compared to Studies 1 and 2, which focused on humanization and positive information, and brevity concerns, we decided to report this study only in the Supplementary Material.

[3] It is worth noting that the moderated mediation index (−0.01) for C2 was not significant, CI [−0.06, 0.03].

[4] It is worth noting that the moderated mediation index (0.03) for C2 was not significant, CI [−0.11, 0.18].

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