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## Mediated communication and refugee resilience: A social psychological model

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**Abstract.** The global refugee crisis, exacerbated by Russian aggression in Ukraine, has been caused by an unprecedented migration of millions of people fleeing wars, conflicts, and persecution. In this context, social psychologists are paying increasing attention to the role of mediated communication in promoting resilience among refugees. This paper explores how mediated communication can promote resilience, drawing on theories of social psychology and empirical research. An overview is provided of the global refugee crisis and the challenges faced by refugees, including those affected by ongoing wars. The concept of resilience and its importance for refugees is presented, and the role of social support, coping strategies, and positive emotions are discussed in fostering this vital quality. The role of mediated communication and its main feature was analysed, which can substantially prevent mental health problems. Mediated communication is considered a powerful tool for promoting refugee resilience, highlighting its ability to provide access to social support networks, promote connection and belonging, and facilitate access to information and resources. Understanding the cultural and social contexts in which refugees use mediated communication, including issues of gender, age, and cultural norms, is crucial for effective intervention. It is concluded that interventions can address the unique challenges faced by refugees, such as displacement, war trauma, and social isolation, including the specific needs of Ukrainian refugees from different cultural and linguistic traditions. Potential challenges and limitations of mediated communication in promoting resilience among refugees, such as issues of confidentiality and security, social isolation, and misinformation, are also discussed. Future research perspectives include empirically testing the conceptual model of the mediated communication potential of refugee resilience and developing scientifically based recommendations for future psychosocial interventions and mental health promotion

**Keywords:** refugee crisis; mediated communication; resilience; psychological well-being; migrant; cultural identity; psychosocial intervention

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## INTRODUCTION

The global refugee crisis is worsening, with ongoing wars, conflicts, persecution, and other forms of violence forcing millions of people to flee their homes in search of safety. As of 2022, there are over 103 million refugees and displaced persons worldwide, a substantial increase from 2021 (a rise of 20 million) (Interactive World Migration Report 2022, n.d.). Most refugees and displaced persons come from a few countries, including Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Somalia. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has led to a large increase in migration, resulting in an unprecedented wave of refugees at the eastern borders of the European Union. Refugees face numerous challenges, such as accessing basic necessities like food, water, shelter, and medical care and rebuilding their lives in new communities (Laban *et al.*, 2004, 2008; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017). In addition, they must navigate the complex social, cultural, and economic environments of host countries (Dalgleish, 2020; Wenzel *et al.*, 2021).

In Europe, millions of refugees have fled Ukraine in search of safety and protection. According to the latest statistics, approximately 8 million refugees were registered in Europe as of 2023 (UNHCR: Ukraine Refugee Situation, 2023). Of these, 5 million were officially registered as refugees in various temporary assistance programmes. Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic have some of the highest numbers of registered Ukrainian refugees in Europe (1.5 million, 900 thousand, and 500 thousand respectively). These numbers highlight the scale of the local and global refugee crises and the urgent need for effective solutions to support refugees and promote their resilience.

In this context, a social psychological approach must focus on the role of communication in promoting resilience among refugees. In the digital age, communication is mediated by various technologies (audio phones and video conferencing over the internet), so it is crucial to explore mediated communication and its potential impact on refugees' mental health. This study explores how mediated communication can foster resilience, drawing on social psychology theories and empirical research. It presents an overview of the global refugee crisis and refugees' challenges, including those affected by the ongoing war.

Psychological challenges, including trauma, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, are prevalent among refugees (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Hollifield *et al.*, 2016; Beers, 2018; Newnham *et al.*, 2018; Wood & Kallestrup, 2018). Therefore, promoting resilience, defined as an individual's ability to adapt and recover from adversity, is crucial for refugees' well-being (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Walsh, 2016; Udash *et al.*, 2019). Resilience can be nurtured through social support, coping strategies, and positive emotions (Southwick *et al.*, 2014; Hou *et al.*, 2020).

Recent research has started to explore the role of mediated communication in enhancing resilience among refugees (Yang *et al.*, 2021; Jauhiainen *et al.*, 2022). Mediated communication (MC) refers to using technology to communicate, such as social media, messaging applications, video conferencing (Buzzanell, 2017), and innovative technologies like multisensory virtual reality. However, it is essential to consider the cultural and social contexts in which refugees use MC. Factors such as gender, age, and cultural norms can affect their use of technology (Dalgleish, 2020). By understanding these contextual factors and integrating them into interventions that use MC, it is possible to support refugees' resilience and well-being better (Purgato *et al.*, 2021; Turrini *et al.*, 2021; Wenzel *et al.*, 2021).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this paper is to analyse contemporary theoretical and practical studies to conceptualise and structure the role of mediated communication in enhancing migrants' resilience. Initially, the concept of resilience and its importance for refugees will be introduced, exploring how social support, coping mechanisms, and positive emotions contribute to resilience. Subsequently, the study will investigate mediated communication as a potent tool for bolstering refugee resilience, emphasising its capacity to provide access to social support networks, facilitate connections and a sense of belonging, and enable access to information and resources. The third stage involves an analysis of the cultural and social contexts in which refugees utilise mediated communication, including considerations of gender, age, and cultural norms, which are crucial for designing effective interventions. Lastly, potential challenges and limitations of mediated communication in promoting resilience among refugees will be discussed, encompassing issues such as privacy and security concerns, social isolation, and misinformation.

This review aims to develop a structural model of the parameters of media communication that can serve as resources for supporting refugees' resilience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Resilience: relevance to refugees. Resilience is a crucial element of mental and emotional well-being for refugees affected by the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as they face various stressors and adversities (Vus & Esterlis, 2022; Paoletti *et al.*, 2023). Social support, coping mechanisms, and positive emotions are key to fostering resilience (Walsh, 2016).

1.1 Social support: a critical component for refugee resilience. Social support plays a vital role in mitigating the adverse effects of stressors and promoting psychological well-being. It can originate from different sources, including family, friends, and others experiencing similar circumstances, such as fellow refugees

and host community members. Support can manifest in various forms, such as emotional, practical, and informational support, essential in helping refugees navigate their challenges (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Wenzel *et al.*, 2021).

MC presents a unique opportunity to enhance social support among refugees by connecting them with their loved ones, facilitating information exchange, and providing access to online communities where they can share experiences and seek advice. For instance, social media platforms and messaging applications enable refugees to maintain relationships with dispersed family and friends, fostering a sense of connection and support during stressful and uncertain times. These connections can promote a sense of belonging and help buffer against adverse psychological effects, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Vervliet *et al.*, 2014; Rachel *et al.*, 2019; Turrini *et al.*, 2021).

Refugees can receive emotional support, practical assistance, and valuable information by maintaining connections with their support networks, enhancing their resilience and overall well-being (Dahya *et al.*, 2019; Miller *et al.*, 2019). For instance, exchanging information about legal procedures, educational opportunities, or employment prospects can empower refugees to navigate their new environments. Moreover, sharing their experiences and expressing their emotions with others who understand their challenges can provide refugees with validation and reassurance (Fadhli *et al.*, 2022).

Virtual reality (VR) technology has the potential to uniquely contribute to enhancing resilience among refugees by offering immersive, interactive experiences to address various psychological challenges. For example, VR-based interventions could be utilised for exposure therapy in refugees with post-traumatic stress disorder, allowing them to confront and process traumatic memories in a safe, controlled environment (Rizzo & Shilling, 2017; Dellazizzo *et al.*, 2020; Vermetten *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, VR can facilitate cultural orientation and language learning for refugees adapting to new countries, providing them with virtual simulations of everyday situations, which can enhance their self-efficacy and coping skills (Bordnick *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, VR-based social platforms could enable refugees to connect with others in more engaging and immersive ways. Although VR use in this context is still in its infancy, ongoing research and technological advancements offer promising possibilities for using VR to enhance resilience among refugees (Yodang *et al.*, 2019). However, it is essential to note that VR remains a niche medium, relatively expensive and inaccessible to this population, and resource-intensive, limiting its applications. Nonetheless, given the promising results, continued research on the use of VR by institutions and non-governmental organisations is warranted (Alberghini, 2020).

1.1.1 Connection and belonging: building relationships with host communities. Mediated communication enables refugees to interact with individuals from host communities, fostering mutual understanding and cultural exchange (Laban *et al.*, 2008). Through participation in online forums, social media platforms, and language exchange initiatives, refugees can cultivate friendships and connections with residents, enhancing their sense of integration and acceptance in their new surroundings (Frounfelker *et al.*, 2017). These connections also contribute to dispelling stereotypes and promoting empathy among host community members, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees (Turner & Brown, 2008; Acosta & Chica, 2018).

1.1.2 Cultural identity preservation. MC can also be pivotal in preserving and strengthening cultural identity among refugees. By connecting with others from their home countries, refugees can maintain a link to their cultural roots and heritage. Sharing cultural experiences, traditions, and narratives online can instil pride in refugees' identities and foster a sense of continuity in their lives despite the challenges and upheavals they encounter (Dutta, 2021; Williams, 2021).

1.2 Coping strategies. The development and use of coping strategies are other essential components of resilience, as they help refugees manage their stress and adapt to new environments (Walsh, 2016). Coping strategies can be broadly categorised into problem-focused coping, which addresses stress sources directly, and emotion-focused coping, which manages emotional responses to stress (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Alonso-Tapia *et al.*, 2018). Both types of coping mechanisms play a role in helping refugees maintain a sense of control and well-being in challenging circumstances (Siriwardhana *et al.*, 2014; Mayordomo-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2015).

MC can support the development and implementation of coping strategies among refugees by providing access to information, resources, and support networks for problem-solving and emotional regulation. For example, online resources and educational materials can offer practical guidance on the asylum process, accessing healthcare and social services, and acquiring new skills (Westwood, 2018). MC can also enable refugees to share experiences, learn from others, and gain emotional support, aiding in managing emotions and fostering more adaptive coping strategies (Lim & Pham, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2020).

1.2.1 Enhancing social capital. Refugees can enhance their social capital through MC by expanding networks and accessing valuable resources (Laban *et al.*, 2008). Engaging with online communities allows refugees to learn about available services, educational opportunities, and legal support. Moreover, MC can empower refugees by providing platforms to share experiences, encouraging collective action and community engagement (Abujarour & Krasnova, 2017).

1.2.2. Facilitating access to information and resources. MC can provide refugees with access to educational resources, language learning programs, and employment opportunities (Laban *et al.*, 2008). Enabling refugees to develop new skills can increase their self-efficacy and control over their lives. Acquiring new knowledge and skills, particularly those related to language proficiency, can enhance refugees' prospects of integrating into their new communities. In addition, the interactive nature of many online learning platforms allows refugees to practice their new language skills with native speakers, expediting their language acquisition and encouraging cross-cultural communication (Patterson *et al.*, 2012; Menashy & Zakharia, 2020). Online job boards and professional networking platforms can assist refugees in identifying and applying for suitable job opportunities, thereby increasing their chances of securing stable employment and attaining financial independence (Martin-Shields & Munir-Asen, 2022). Furthermore, MC can aid refugees in establishing professional networks, acquiring relevant skills through online training programmes, and receiving guidance and mentorship from others in their field.

1.3 Positive emotions. Positive emotions, such as hope and optimism, are crucial elements of resilience, as they help refugees maintain perspective, focus on their strengths and abilities, and envision a brighter future. By experiencing positive emotions, refugees can counterbalance the adverse effects of stress and trauma, promoting psychological well-being and adaptive functioning in their new environments. Positive emotions have been shown to broaden an individual's thought-action repertoire, enabling them to explore new opportunities and devise creative solutions to challenges (Walsh, 2003, 2012, 2016).

MC can facilitate the experience of positive emotions among refugees by offering avenues for social connection, emotional expression, and the sharing of positive stories. For instance, social media platforms and messaging applications can help refugees stay connected with their loved ones, receive updates on their situations, and share joy and accomplishment. Online forums and support groups can provide refugees with a safe space to express their emotions, share their experiences, and celebrate their achievements, fostering a sense of hope and optimism (Felton, 2014; Batenburg & Das, 2015).

2. Cultural and social contexts. It is essential to consider the cultural and social contexts in which refugees use MC. Factors such as gender, age, and cultural norms can impact how refugees use technology to communicate with others. Awareness of these factors and ensuring that MC is accessible and appropriate for all refugees can make interventions more effective and culturally responsive.

2.1 Cultural and linguistic differences. Ukrainian refugees exhibit considerable cultural and linguistic diversity, with differences particularly pronounced

between the eastern and western parts of the country (Plokhly, 2006; Khanenko-Friesen, 2015). The eastern part of Ukraine is predominantly Russian-speaking and Eastern-Orthodox, with historical and political influence from Russia and other Slavic cultures. In contrast, Western Ukraine is primarily Ukrainian-speaking and Greek-Catholic, influenced by various Central European powers (Kemmelmeyer & Malanchuk, 2016). These differences can affect refugees' preferences and comfort levels with various MC tools and the languages they use to communicate and access resources online. Understanding these linguistic and cultural nuances is crucial for designing effective and accessible MC interventions tailored to the unique needs of Ukrainian refugees.

2.2 Generational and gender differences. Age and gender, influenced by traditional gender roles, religious and folk traditions, family dynamics and age hierarchy, can also affect how Ukrainian refugees use MC. Younger refugees may be more tech-savvy and comfortable with various communication technologies, while older refugees might struggle with using these tools or have limited access to them. Similarly, gender dynamics and cultural norms can influence the ways in which men and women use and engage with MC platforms. Barriers to accessing technology, such as a lack of digital literacy or limited access to devices, can hinder refugees' ability to benefit from MC interventions (Garcia *et al.*, 2009; De Mooij, 2014; Alencar, 2020).

3. Potential challenges and limitations. While MC offers noteworthy benefits for promoting resilience among refugees, it also presents potential challenges and limitations, including privacy and security issues, social isolation, and disinformation (Laban *et al.*, 2004; Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

It is essential to recognise the potential barriers and limitations in utilising MC to promote social support, coping strategies, and positive emotions among refugees. Factors such as technology availability, cultural norms, individual preferences, and digital literacy skills may impact the effectiveness of these interventions. Moreover, the quality and appropriateness of online information and support networks may vary, potentially exposing refugees to misinformation, exploitation, or additional stressors. Cultural variations in communication and coping styles and the expression and interpretation of emotions can also influence the outcomes of MC interventions. Therefore, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should ensure that interventions leveraging MC to promote resilience among refugees are accessible, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based (Miller & Rasmussen, 2017; Turrini *et al.*, 2021; Geirsdottir *et al.*, 2022; Lor *et al.*, 2022).

3.1 Privacy and security issues. Refugees, including those from Ukraine, face significant privacy and security challenges related to digital platforms, such as identity theft, cyberbullying, and online harassment (Daguatha, 2022). These risks can have severe

consequences for refugees, exacerbating their trauma, heightening their anxiety, and undermining their trust (Alencar *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, refugees may be targeted by malicious actors seeking to exploit their vulnerability or monitor their online activities for political or nefarious purposes.

To address these risks, providing refugees with adequate training in digital literacy and online safety is essential, equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the digital landscape securely. It may include teaching them to recognise and avoid phishing scams, use secure messaging applications, and protect their personal information online. Service providers and practitioners working with refugees should prioritise the confidentiality of personal information shared on digital platforms and ensure appropriate data protection measures are in place for MC safety (Colucci *et al.*, 2017; Shibli & Kouzi, 2023).

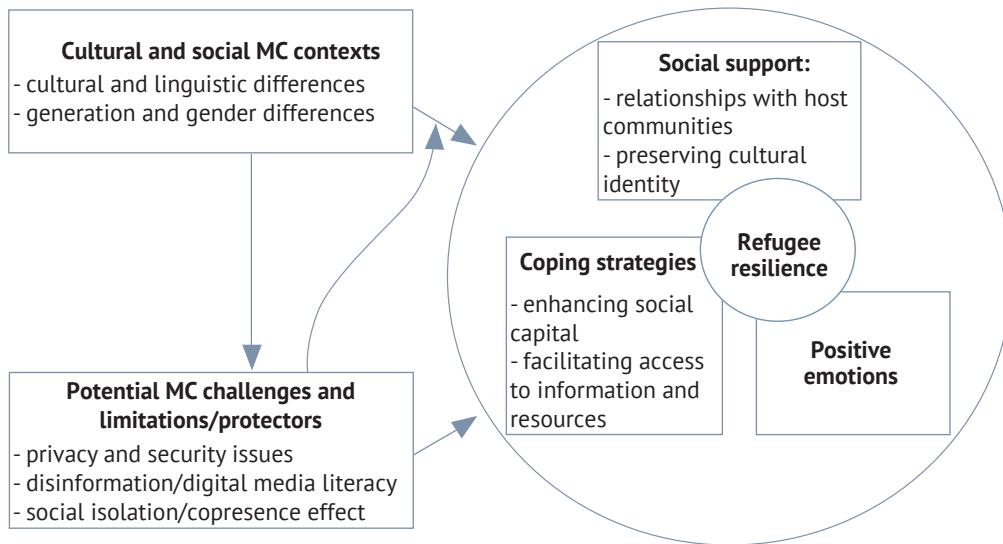
**3.2. Disinformation and digital media literacy.** Refugees may be particularly vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation. Given the ongoing geopolitical conflicts and the influence of external actors, such as Russia and its allies, there is a heightened risk of exposure to disinformation campaigns that may aim to manipulate, polarise, or exploit refugees for political purposes (Wigell, 2019; Moral, 2022).

Interventions should promote critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and information discernment among refugees to mitigate the spread of disinformation

and its harmful effects. This can be achieved through educational programmes that teach refugees how to evaluate the credibility of sources, recognise potential biases, and distinguish between facts and opinions. Media and digital literacy training should address the tactics and strategies employed by disinformation campaigns, such as emotional appeals, divisive narratives, and false or misleading information (Carmi *et al.*, 2020; Gaillard *et al.*, 2021).

**3.3. Social isolation and copresence.** While MC offers numerous benefits to refugees, it can contribute to social isolation if it replaces face-to-face interactions, essential for maintaining social bonds and preventing loneliness (Laban *et al.*, 2004, 2008). Face-to-face interactions provide crucial non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, gestures, and body language, that facilitate emotional connection and empathy, vital for fostering a sense of belonging (Rhoads, 2010; Lorié *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, engaging in offline activities, such as community events, cultural programmes, and group activities, can help refugees build local connections and become more integrated into their new communities. Therefore, interventions that promote MC should be designed to supplement rather than replace face-to-face interactions. However, it should be noted that some studies suggest users who predominantly engage in MC featuring video experience a heightened sense of co-presence, which can enhance their well-being (Świdrak *et al.*, 2021).



**Figure 1.** Structural conceptual model of mediated communication potential for refugees' resilience

**Note:** MC – mediated communication

**Source:** developed by the authors

**CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, mediated communication is critical in promoting resilience among refugees, including those affected by the Russia-Ukraine war, by providing access to social support networks, fostering a sense of

connection and belonging, and facilitating access to information and resources. By leveraging the power of technology, interventions can effectively address the unique challenges faced by refugees, such as displacement, trauma, and social isolation, as well as the

specific needs of Ukrainian refugees from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, it is essential to consider the potential challenges and limitations associated with MC, including privacy and security issues, disinformation, and social isolation.

Future research should focus on understanding how to optimise the use of MC to support refugee resilience while addressing these challenges. Researchers should explore the role of cultural and social contexts in shaping refugees' experiences with MC, considering the unique cultural and linguistic differences among Ukrainian refugees from different regions. By understanding how factors such as gender, age, and cultural norms influence the use of technology, interventions can be tailored to meet the unique needs of diverse refugee populations. By harnessing the potential of MC to promote resilience, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can better support the well-being of refugees,

including those affected by the Russia-Ukraine war, and help them rebuild their lives in the face of adversity.

The proposed structural conceptual model of mediated communication potential for refugees' resilience will be empirically verified in the next stage of the study. The implementation perspective is to develop evidence-based recommendations for psychoeducation, digital media literacy, and mental health promotion interventions for migrants in European host communities.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Опосередкована комунікація та стійкість біженців: соціально-психологічна модель

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**Анотація.** Глобальна криза біженців, посилена російською агресією в Україні, була спричинена безпрецедентною міграцією мільйонів людей, які рятуються від воєн, конфліктів та переслідувань. У цьому контексті соціальні психологи все більше уваги приділяють ролі опосередкованої комунікації у сприянні стійкості серед біженців. У цій статті досліджується, як опосередковане спілкування може сприяти стійкості, спираючись на теорії соціальної психології та емпіричні дослідження. Представлено огляд глобальної кризи біженців та викликів, з якими стикаються біженці, включаючи тих, хто постраждав від війни, що триває. Висвітлено поняття стійкості та її значення для біженців, обговорюючи роль соціальної підтримки, стратегій подолання проблем та позитивних емоцій у вихованні цієї життєво важливої якості. Проаналізовано роль опосередкованої комунікації та основну характеристику, яка може відігравати важливу роль у профілактиці проблем психічного здоров'я. Розглядається опосередкована комунікація як потужний інструмент сприяння стійкості біженців, підкреслюючи її здатність забезпечувати доступ до мереж соціальної підтримки, сприяти зв'язку та приналежності, а також полегшувати доступ до інформації та ресурсів. Розуміння культурних та соціальних контекстів, в яких біженці використовують опосередковану комунікацію, включаючи питання статі, віку та культурних норм, має важливе значення для ефективного втручання. Зроблено висновок, що інтервенції можуть вирішити унікальні проблеми, з якими стикаються біженці, такі як переміщення, травма війни та соціальна ізоляція, а також конкретні потреби українських біженців з різних культурних та мовних традицій. Також обговорюються потенційні виклики та обмеження опосередкованої комунікації у сприянні стійкості серед біженців, такі як питання конфіденційності та безпеки, соціальна ізоляція та дезінформація. Перспективами дослідження є емпірична перевірка концептуальної моделі опосередкованого комунікаційного потенціалу стійкості біженців та розробка науково обґрунтованих рекомендацій для майбутніх заходів із психодедукації та сприяння психічному здоров'ю

**Ключові слова:** криза біженців; опосередковане спілкування; стійкість; психологічне благополуччя; мігрант; культурна ідентичність; психодедукація