The role of inter-ethnic online friendships in prejudice reduction in post-conflict societies: Evidence from Serbia, Croatia and Cyprus

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## Sample

374 undergraduate university students studying social sciences in the capital cities in one of the three countries: Serbia, Belgrade (156), Cyprus, Nicosia (88), and Croatia, Zagreb (130).
Age raged from 18 to 45. The mean age of the total sample was 21.19 (SD ¼ 2.43), and this was comparable across countries, Serbia: M ¼ 21.16 (SD ¼ 2.09), Cyprus: M ¼ 21.21 (SD= 3.12), Croatia: M ¼ 21.20 (SD=2.28). The vast majority of the participants were females (81%).
The sample included individuals belonging to the majority ethnic group, that is, Serbs in Serbia, Greek Cypriots in Cyprus, and Croats in Croatia.

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Youth organizations

# Abstract

Direct contact between members of ethnic groups is proven to reduce intergroup prejudice. Recent research, however, explores the effects of alternative types of contact, amongst them via social networks in virtual space. This is especially important for e.g. post-conflict societies in which there is limited opportunity for direct contact between the groups. Drawing from a sample of 374 ethnic majority students from three such societies e Serbia, Croatia, and Cyprus, we tested if the number of online interethnic friends predicted more positive out-group attitudes over and above the effect of face-to-face contacts. This relationship testified to the added value of online ties. We also tested if intergroup anxiety and perceived ethnic threat would mediate the relationship between online friendships and out-group attitudes. Results from the combined sample showed clear mediation effects. This suggested that the mechanisms through which online contact reduces prejudice are comparable to the mechanisms detected for face-to-face contact. Yet the mediation was not convincingly replicated at the country level.
Further research could make use of this simple measure of alternative contact, as well as test a different set of mediators to identify mechanisms that are possibly unique to online contacts.

# Outcome

"Our results are the first to provide support for the positive intergroup effects of online friendships with out-group members.
In a sample that combined participants from three post-conflict societies, namely Serbia, Cyprus and Croatia, we found that online intergroup friendships were related to more positive feelings towards rival out-groups. This relationship held over and above the effect of face-to-face contacts, testifying to the added value of online ties. When looking at the three countries separately, we replicated the effect in the Cypriot and Croatian samples and found
a similar positive trend in the Serbian sample. This is an important finding as these are divided societies that provide very few opportunities for direct contact and are hence characterized by low levels of face-to-face intergroup interactions. Thus, online friendships represent an alternative to direct contact in situations in
which contact is not attainable." (Žeželj et al.,, 2017, p. 392)
"Our results obtained from the combined sample showed clear mediation effects, both via intergroup anxiety and perceived threat, suggesting that the mechanisms through which online contact reduces prejudice are comparable to the mechanisms detected with respect to direct,
face-to-face contact. However, this finding was not convincingly replicated at the country level. We did find that the patterns of associations were very similar across countries, however, these were non-significant. This could be due to relatively small sample sizes combined with complex modeling. The bivariate correlations were, in contrast, significant and in the expected direction in all three countries. (Žeželj et al., 2017, p. 393)