[Psychology + Security]

Crisis, emergency and disaster psychology

Reducing perceived threat toward immigrants with testimonials. Indirect effects of empathy and similarity through identification, transportation and counterarguing

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Research work developed thanks to the financial support granted by Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities to the project entitled "*Narrative tools to reduce prejudice. Effects of similarity, imagined contact, empathy and narrative voice*" (reference: CSO2015-67611-P).

Immigration as a threat

We find in the **media** many images that associate immigration with "**security problems**" or with "**symbolic and realistic threats**"

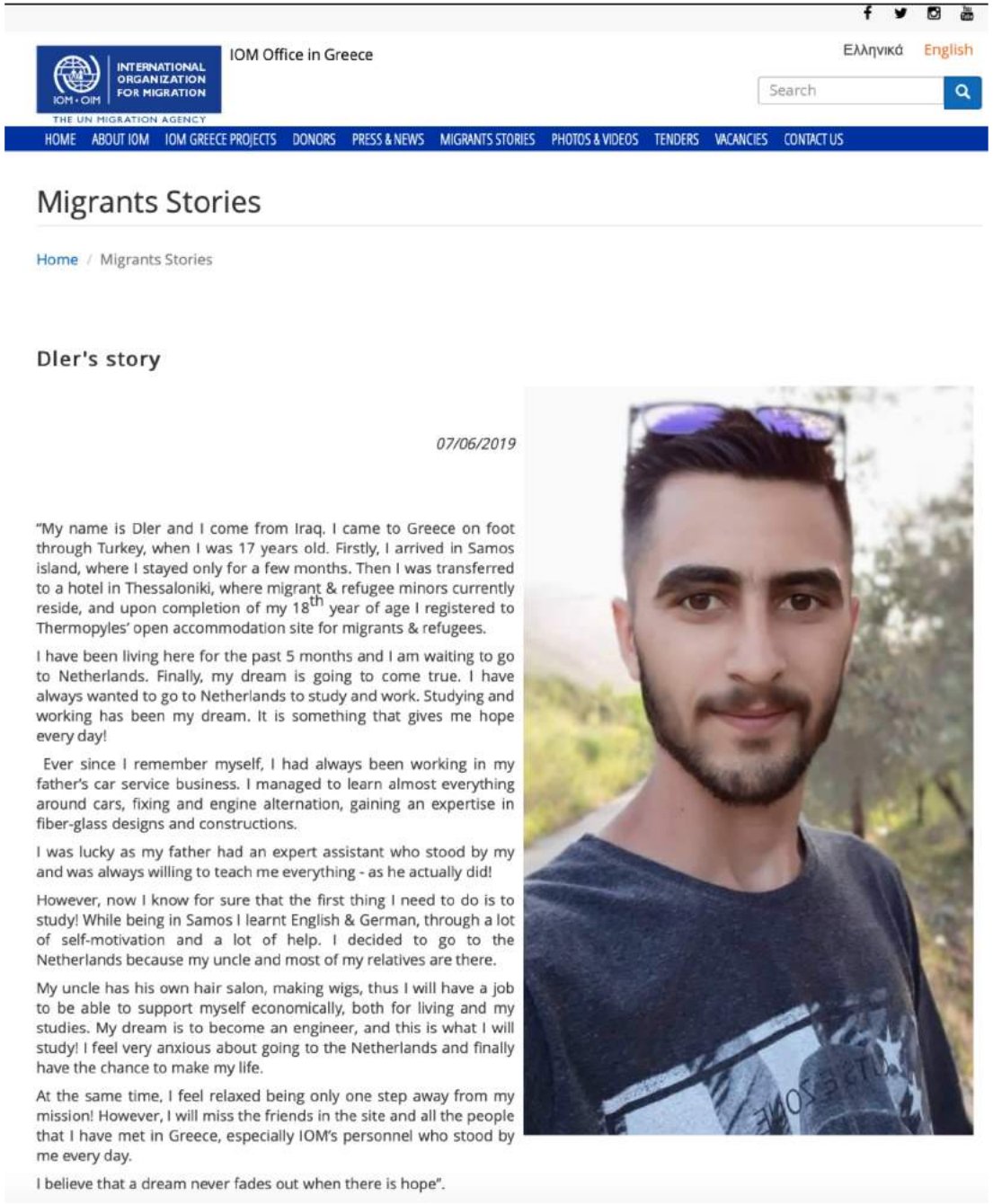
It has been observed that this **feeling of threat** reinforces prejudice, negative emotions, and participation in collective actions against immigrants (e.g., Schmuck & Matthes, 2017; Shepherd, Fasoli, Pereira & Branscombe, 2018; Wlodarczyk, Basabe & Bobowik, 2012).

Research goal

In the **present research** a narrative strategy is proposed aiming to **reduce perceived threat toward immigrants**.

Personal narratives = first-person narratives or testimonial messages

People often encounter personal narratives in the media, in online blogs, in newspaper articles, in magazine testimonial ads, or through social media



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Dler's story

07/06/2019

"My name is Dler and I come from Iraq. I came to Greece on foot through Turkey, when I was 17 years old. Firstly, I arrived in Samos island, where I stayed only for a few months. Then I was transferred to a hotel in Thessaloniki, where migrant & refugee minors currently reside, and upon completion of my 18th year of age I registered to Thermopyles' open accommodation site for migrants & refugees.

I have been living here for the past 5 months and I am waiting to go to Netherlands. Finally, my dream is going to come true. I have always wanted to go to Netherlands to study and work. Studying and working has been my dream. It is something that gives me hope every day!

Ever since I remember myself, I had always been working in my father's car service business. I managed to learn almost everything around cars, fixing and engine alternation, gaining an expertise in fiber-glass designs and constructions.

I was lucky as my father had an expert assistant who stood by my and was always willing to teach me everything - as he actually did!

However, now I know for sure that the first thing I need to do is to study! While being in Samos I learnt English & German, through a lot of self-motivation and a lot of help. I decided to go to the Netherlands because my uncle and most of my relatives are there.

My uncle has his own hair salon, making wigs, thus I will have a job to be able to support myself economically, both for living and my studies. My dream is to become an engineer, and this is what I will study! I feel very anxious about going to the Netherlands and finally have the chance to make my life.

At the same time, I feel relaxed being only one step away from my mission! However, I will miss the friends in the site and all the people that I have met in Greece, especially IOM's personnel who stood by me every day.

I believe that a dream never fades out when there is hope".

Narrative Impact: Meta-analysis review

- Narrative interventions produce significant effects on the dependent variables considered (in beliefs, r = .17; attitudes, r = .19; behavioural intention, r = .17; and behaviours, r = .23), but **significant variation** in these narrative effects is also detected (Braddock & Dillard, 2016).
- Although narrative messages can serve as a promising health communication tool, **not all narratives are effective**.
- **An important question:** which are the "***ingredients***" of the narratives that are most effective from a persuasive point of view?

Theoretical background: Narrative Persuasion

When it comes explaining ***how*** personal narratives influence individuals, **narrative persuasion** models focus on **identification with characters** and **narrative transportation** as the two principal **mechanisms**, and recent research examines how to ***intensify*** these processes (de Graaf, Sanders, & Hoeken, 2016; Tukachinsky, 2014).

It is a complex task to foster identification and transportation when messages feature stigmatized immigrants (Walter, Murphy, & Gillig, 2017).

Identification and transportation

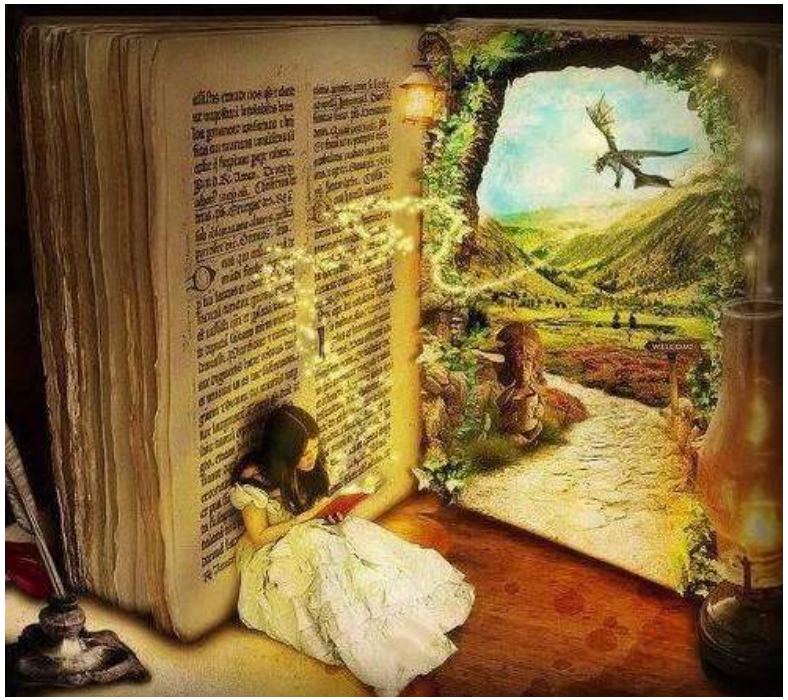
Identification with the protagonist

An imaginative process that involves the gradual loss of self-consciousness and the assumption of the affective and cognitive point of view of the protagonist of a narrative (Cohen, 2001).

Empathy and merging with the character

Narrative transportation

Audience focuses attention on the story, becomes emotionally involved in it, and forms clear and vivid mental images about the different elements of the story (Green & Brock, 2000).

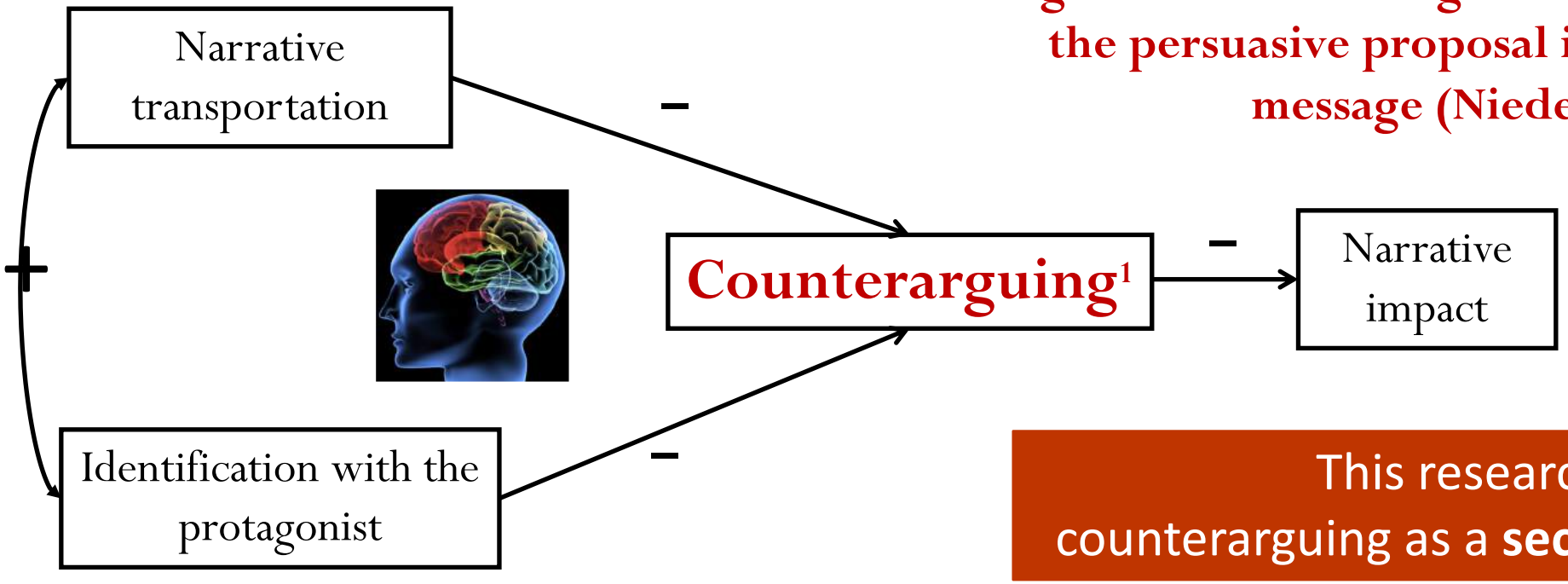


Engagement or immersion with the story and the events narrated

Identification, narrative transportation and counterarguing

Narrative transportation and identification with the protagonist induce a persuasive influence because both processes contribute to **lowering the critical capacity** of the audience (**counterarguing** is reduced).

[1] The generation of thoughts that explicitly refute the persuasive proposal incorporated in the message (Niederdeppe et al., 2012)



This research tests the role of counterarguing as a **secondary mediator**.

Primary mediators

Secondary mediator

How to increase identification and narrative transportation?

Joint (additive) effect of "exposure conditions" and "narrative attributes"

Manipulating "**exposure conditions**" + Altering narrative **content and form** attributes = ↑ Identification and narrative transportation → Narrative impact

A particular psychological state in which people receive the message (e.g., distraction; Tukachinsky, 2014)

Textual factors (e.g., narrative voice) and characters' traits (e.g., protagonist's virtue) (de Graaf et al., 2016; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2015)

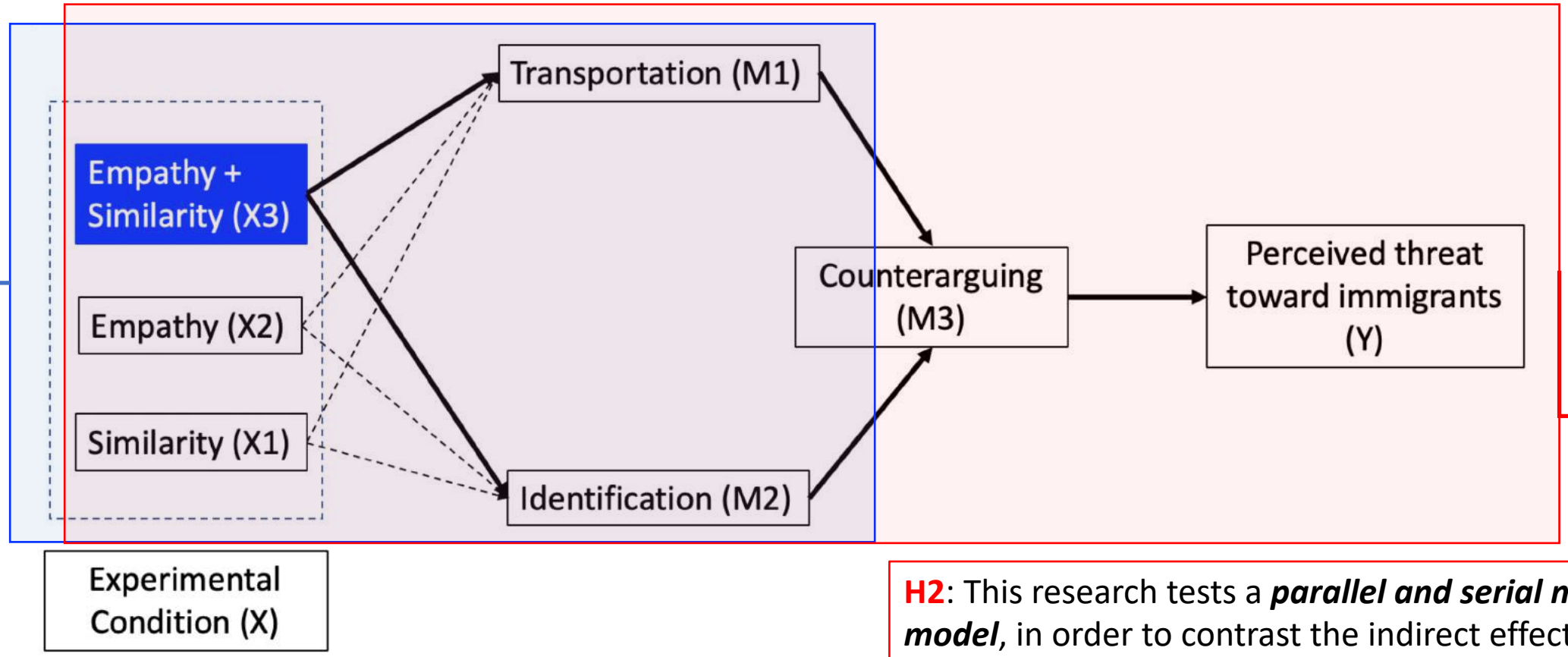
Character similarity

- **Similarity** describes a situation in which the audience shares certain demographic, psychological, or social features with the protagonist of the message.
- Empirical evidence is inconclusive (e.g., Tukachinsky, 2014).
- Similarity is a multidimensional construct and previous research has only focused on the effect of demographic similarity (e.g.., Cohen, Weimann-Saks & Mazor-Tregerman, 2018).
- **Similarity in terms of social identity***:* in subjective aspects such as **national feelings** (*what group you identify with*) and attachment to **cultural elements** (such as a language). It brings to the forefront **what people have in common** and the feeling of social identity ("we're all part of the same group").
- The effect of similarity can be **intensified** by simultaneously **altering certain reception conditions**.

Empathy as an “exposure condition”

- **Empathy**: a kind of *social glue* that eases coexistence and can help to improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups (e.g., Batson, Chang, Orr & Rowland, 2002).
- **In the present study**: Empathy is considered as an ***exposure condition*** (Tukachinsky, 2014); that is, a particular psychological state in which people receive the message and which facilitates an involved reception.
- We propose that the effect of similarity on identification and transportation can be **amplified** if instructions to increase empathy are given beforehand.

Hypothesized mediation model and Hs



H1: the joint effect of "training" empathy before reading a high-similarity narrative will increase identification and narrative transportation (as compared to the control condition).

H2: This research tests a ***parallel and serial mediator model***, in order to contrast the indirect effect of the experimental condition that combines empathy with exposure to a high-similarity narrative on attitudes toward immigration, through identification and narrative transportation (primary mediators) and counterarguing (secondary mediator).

Study 1 (Spain) - Method

Pre-test

Socio-demographics (political self-positioning)

50% women.
Mean age = 40.0 (*SD* = 12.48, range: 18-65).

Political self-positioning (from 0 = left to 10 = right, *M* = 4.39, *SD* = 2.46).

Independent Variable 1

[Instructions]

Empathy (Yes, No)

Independent Variable 2

[First-person testimonial: a Moroccan immigrant]

Similarity between the protagonist and the audience (low, high)

Participants are randomly assigned to 4 groups of even size (N = 92-98)

[2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design]

Post-test

Manipulation checks

Identification
(α = .92, *M* = 3.08, *SD* = 0.82)

Transportation
(α = .85, *M* = 4.62, *SD* = 1.24)

Counter-arguing
(α = .74, *M* = 3.48, *SD* = 1.35)

Perceived threat toward Moroccan immigrants (α = .92; *M* = 2.53, *SD* = 1.12)

Sample: **383 individuals** of Spanish origin whose parents were also Spanish

Online experiment: opt-in online panel of QUALTRICS

Study 1 – Empathy manipulation

[Batson et al. (1991), Batson et. al. (1997) & Wojcieszak & Kim (2016)]

Empathy instructions:

"You are going to read a brief history, in which a person shares his experiences related to his life in Spain. While reading, **try to put yourself in that person's place and imagine how he feels** about the **events** he describes. **Try to experience the emotional impact of the situations that are narrated**"

CONTROL GROUP (objective condition):

"You are going to read a brief history, in which a person shares his experiences related to his life in Spain. During the reading, try to maintain an **objective perspective** on the **facts** that person describes in the narrative. **Try not to pay attention to the feelings of the protagonist, stay objective and distant**"

Wojcieszak, M., & Kim, N. (2016). How to improve attitudes toward disliked groups the effects of narrative versus numerical evidence on political persuasion. *Communication Research*, *43*(6), 785-809.

Study 1 - First-person narratives: similarity manipulation (Moroccan immigrant)

Me llamo Saîd, soy de Marruecos, llevo 10 años viviendo en España y **sobre todo me siento español**. Te voy a contar mi historia.

Porque las condiciones de trabajo en mi país no eran muy buenas, vine a España para trabajar y así lograr un futuro mejor para mi familia. Trabajé muchos años en la construcción como peón, más tarde como camarero en un restaurante y, en estos momentos, tengo un pequeño negocio.

En estos diez años pude traer a mi familia, mi mujer y dos hijos. Me siento muy bien viviendo en España y tengo muchos amigos españoles. Por cierto, disfruto mucho en compañía de mis amigos españoles y con ellos me reúno algunos fines de semana y así aprovecho para comer **paella, mi comida favorita**. Con mis hijos, en casa, casi siempre hablo en español. Además, creo que **hablo muy bien el español** y casi siempre leo los periódicos españoles. A pesar de que procedo de un país musulmán, **no me considero una persona religiosa**, como la mayoría de los españoles que conozco. En definitiva, **me siento español**.

A pesar de llevar tanto tiempo viviendo en España, a veces me he sentido rechazado. Recuerdo varias anécdotas, pero hay dos cosas en particular que me provocan tristeza. En primer lugar, he tenido que escuchar muchas, muchas veces que "los inmigrantes quitan el trabajo a los españoles". Y no es cierto, ya que cuando yo llegué, los españoles no querían trabajar en la construcción. Además, cuando trabajaba como peón siempre fui explotado por mis jefes. Y, si protestaba, me contestaban que esas eran las condiciones (jornadas de hasta 12 horas), y si no me gustaba ya sabía dónde estaba la puerta... Pienso que los españoles deberían saber que muchos inmigrantes son explotados. Y el Gobierno español debería vigilar y perseguir este tipo de explotación.

Por otro lado, muchos españoles dicen que los inmigrantes somos delincuentes. He notado muchas veces que, en el metro, la gente se aparta o se aleja de mí si escuchan mi acento, como si pensaran que les voy a robar. No entiendo por qué se da este rechazo hacia los inmigrantes. En mi opinión, se debería recordar a través de campañas de información que los inmigrantes son iguales que los españoles en muchos sentidos. También se debería insistir en esta idea en las escuelas para que los niños aprendan a ser más tolerantes con los inmigrantes.

Sí, nací en otro país. Pero aquí pago mis impuestos y trabajo duramente para mantener a mi familia y darles lo mejor, como cualquier padre español desea para sus hijos. De todos modos, mi decisión de emigrar a España fue positiva para mí, para mi familia y también pienso que estoy aportando algo positivo a España. A pesar de ser marroquí, **me identifico mucho con la cultura española, y por eso sobre todo me siento español**.

Me llamo Saîd, soy de Marruecos, llevo 10 años viviendo en España, aunque **sobre todo me siento marroquí.** Te voy a contar mi historia.

Porque las condiciones de trabajo en mi país no eran muy buenas, vine a España para trabajar y así lograr un futuro mejor para mi familia. Trabajé muchos años en la construcción como peón, más tarde como camarero en un restaurante y, en estos momentos, tengo un pequeño negocio.

En estos diez años pude traer a mi familia, mi mujer y dos hijos. Me siento bien viviendo en España y tengo algunos amigos españoles. Por cierto, disfruto mucho en compañía de mis amigos marroquíes y con ellos me reúno algunos fines de semana y así aprovecho para comer **cuscús, un plato típico de Marruecos y que es mi comida favorita**. Con mis hijos, en casa, casi siempre hablo en árabe. Además, creo que **hablo muy mal el español** y casi siempre leo los periódicos marroquíes. Dado que procedo de un país musulmán, **me considero una persona religiosa**, como la mayoría de los marroquíes que conozco. En definitiva, **me siento marroquí**.

A pesar de llevar tanto tiempo viviendo en España, a veces me he sentido rechazado. Recuerdo varias anécdotas, pero hay dos cosas en particular que me provocan tristeza y malestar. En primer lugar, he tenido que escuchar muchas, muchas veces que "los inmigrantes quitan el trabajo a los españoles". Y no es cierto, ya que cuando yo llegué, los españoles no querían trabajar en la construcción. Además, cuando trabajaba como peón siempre fui explotado por mis jefes. Y, si protestaba, me contestaban que esas eran las condiciones (jornadas de hasta 12 horas), y si no me gustaba ya sabía dónde estaba la puerta... Pienso que los españoles deberían saber que muchos inmigrantes son explotados. Y el Gobierno español debería vigilar y perseguir este tipo de explotación.

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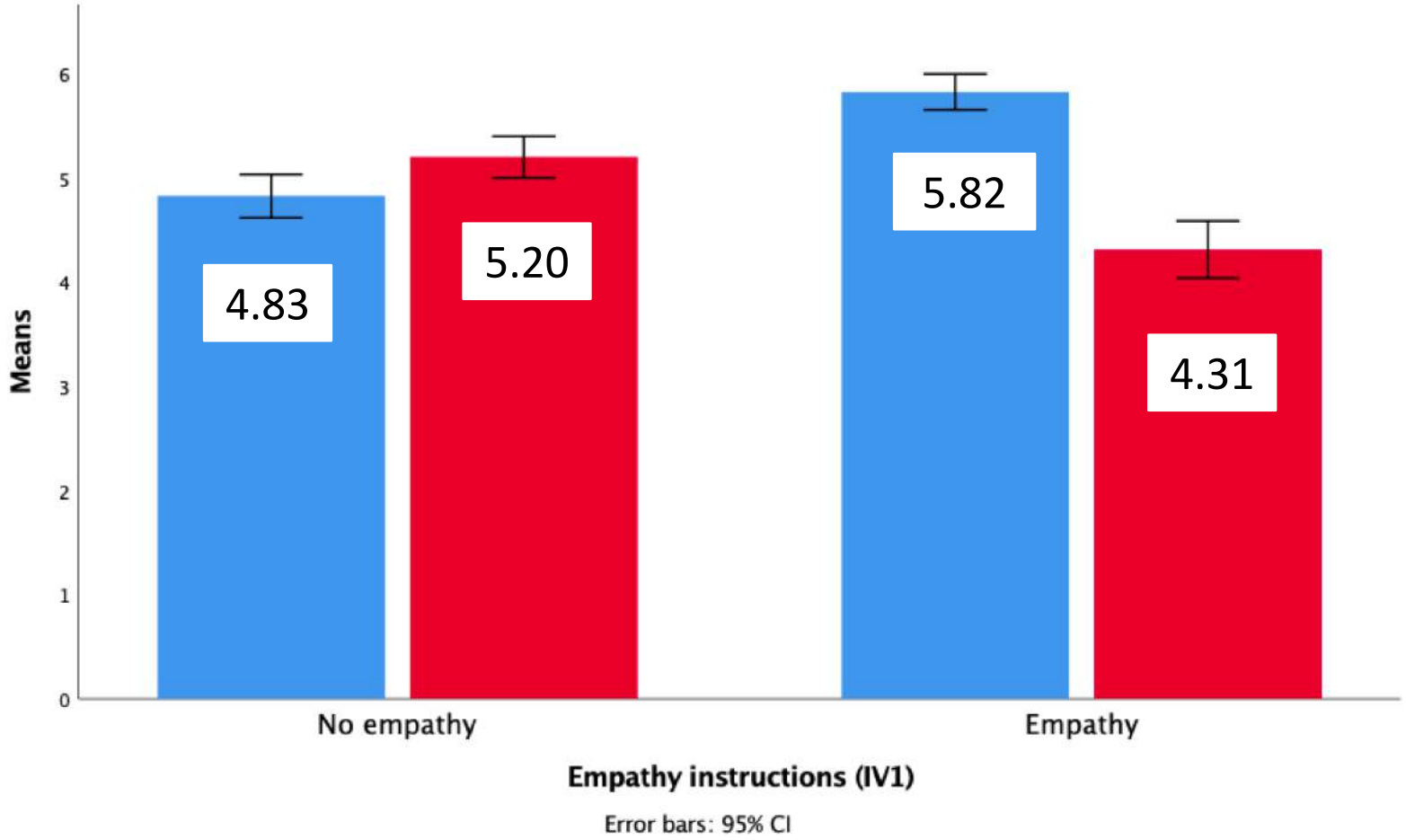
The protagonist also defends immigrants and asks for greater tolerance, positing measures such as prosecuting worker exploitation and developing educational campaigns and actions against racism and xenophobia.

Independent variable 2: ***Similarity in terms of social identity*** between the protagonist and the audience (high, low):

The narrative protagonist (**Saîd**) emphasized:
… feeling Spanish (versus Moroccan in the low similarity condition),
… that his friends are mainly Spanish (Moroccan),
… that his favorite food is Spanish (Moroccan),
… that he usually speaks to his children in Spanish (Arabic),
… that he reads mainly Spanish (Moroccan) newspapers,
… and that he identifies with Spanish (Moroccan) culture.

Study 1 - Manipulation check [Empathy instructions, IV1]



"I tried to put myself in the place of the protagonist and feel their same emotions"

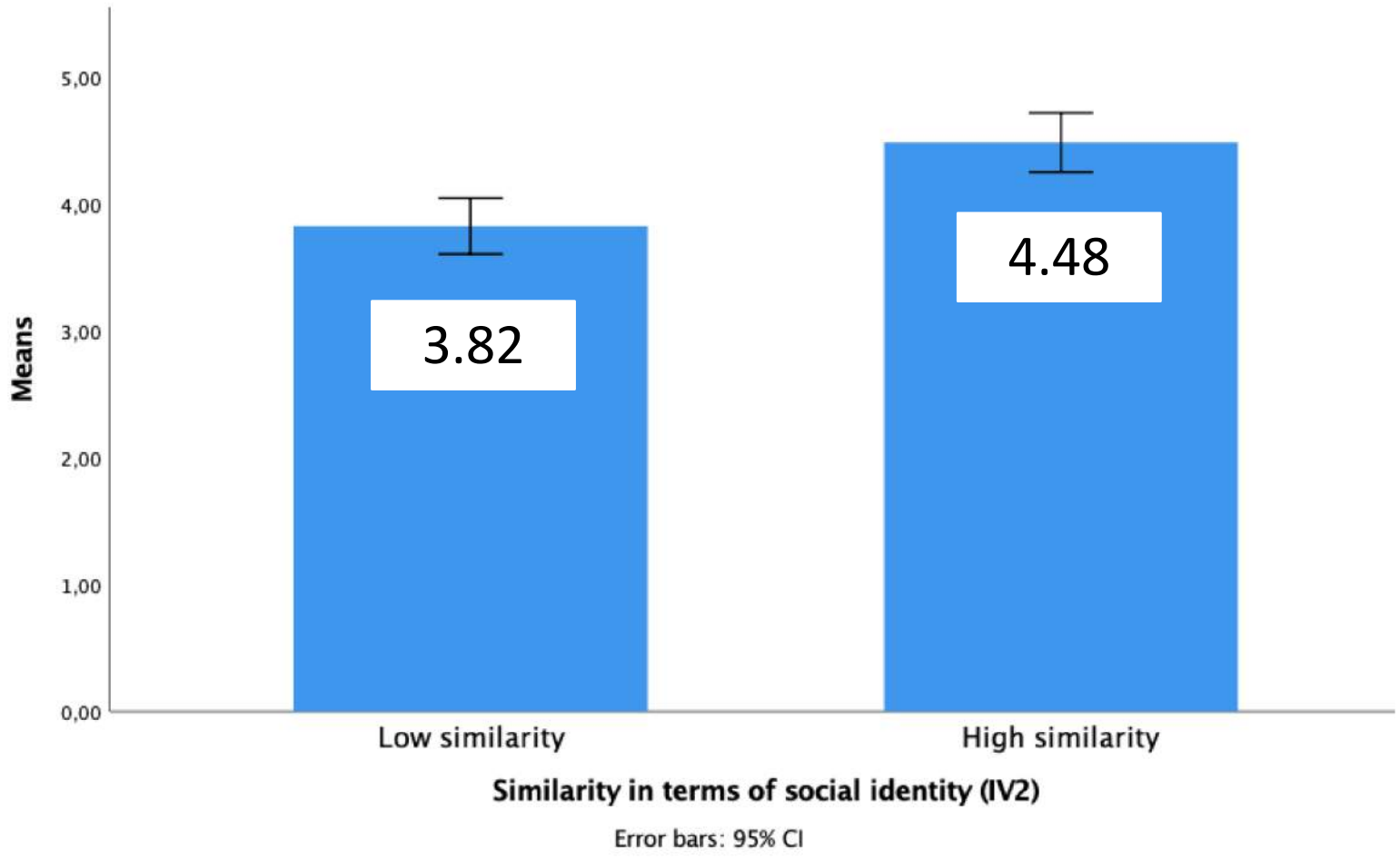
"I have tried to stay objective and distant with respect to the story that was told"

From 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree"

$t(381) = -7.26$, $p = .000$

$t(381) = 5.18$, $p = .000$

Study 1 - Manipulation check [Similarity with the protagonist, IV2]



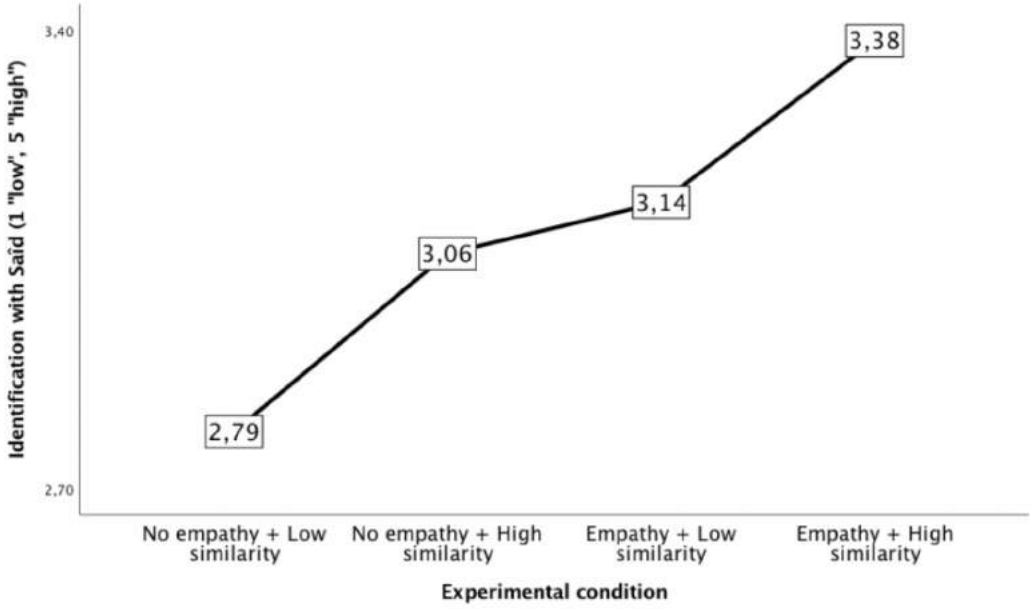
Index of perceived similarity (from 1 "low" to 7 "high") :

"To what extent do you consider that you have things in common with **Saîd**?"
"To what extent do you consider that he is like you?"
(r = .61, p = .000)

$t(381) = -7.26$, $p = .000$

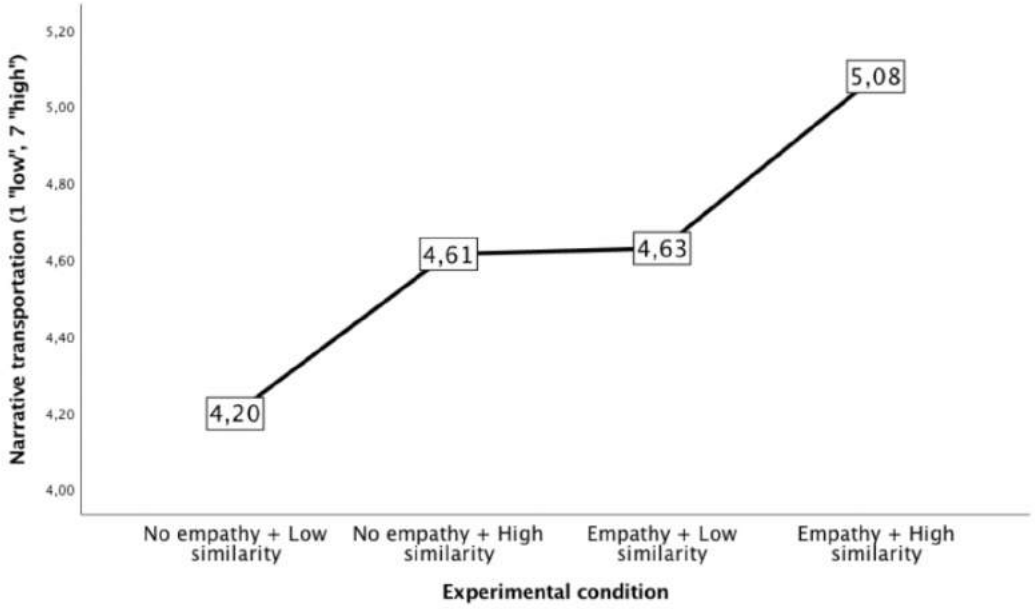
Study 1 – Results H1 (ANOVA, planned contrast analysis)

Study 1 - Spain ($N = 383$)
Identification with Saïd (from 1 to 5)



$F_{\text{condition}}\ (3, 379) = 9.03,\ p < .001,\ \eta_p^2 = .006$
$t_{\text{contrast 1 (-1, 0, 0, 1)}}\ (379) = 5.14,\ p < .001,\ r = .25$
$t_{\text{contrast 2 (-1, -1, -1, 3)}}\ (379) = 4.08,\ p < .001,\ r = .20$

Study 1 - Spain ($N = 383$)
Narrative transportation (from 1 to 7)



$F_{\text{condition}}\ (3, 379) = 8.37,\ p < .001,\ \eta_p^2 = .062$
$t_{\text{contrast 1 (-1, 0, 0, 1)}}\ (379) = 5.01,\ p < .001,\ r = .24$
$t_{\text{contrast 2 (-1, -1, -1, 3)}}\ (379) = 4.13,\ p < .001,\ r = .20$

Study 1 – Results H2 (mediation models)

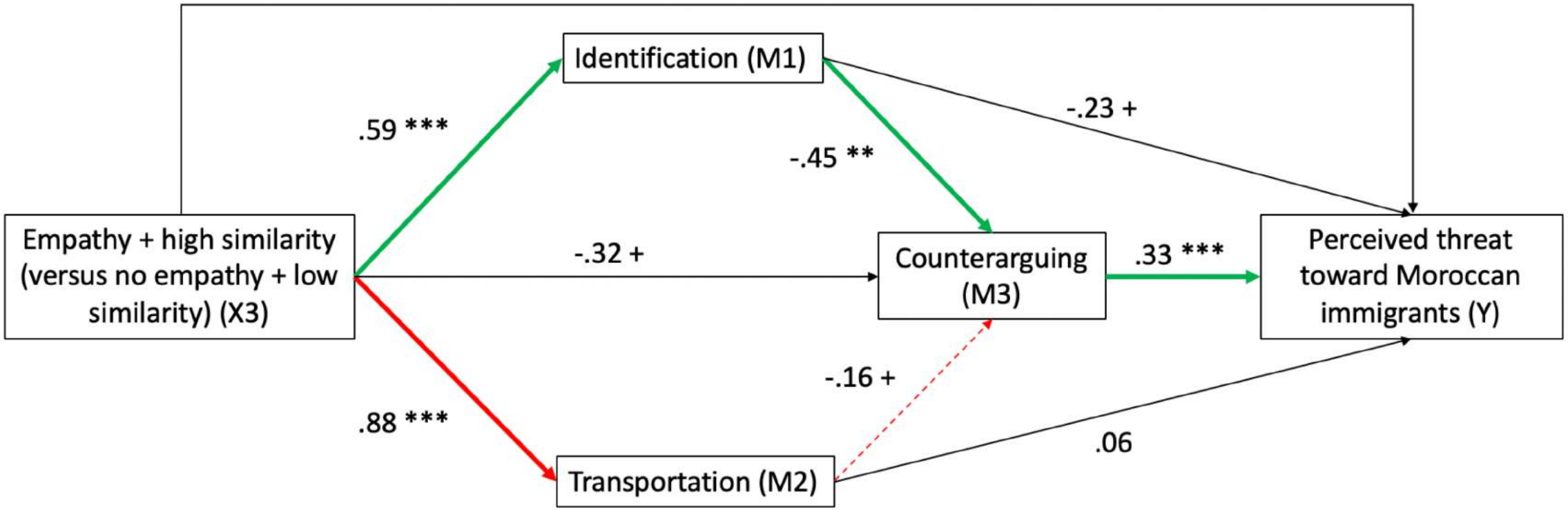
PROCESS for SPSS (Model 80; 10,000 bootstrapped samples with 95% percentile confidence intervals; Hayes, 2018): to estimate the **indirect effect of empathy and high-similarity narrative condition (X3)** on perceived threat toward Moroccan immigrants, as mediated by identification and transportation (primary mediators) and counterarguing (secondary mediator). X1 (similarity effect) and X 2 (empathy effect) were included in the models as covariates. Similar coding approach has been used by Bolkan, Goodboy & Myers (2017).

Experimental condition (as a multicategorical independent variable)	Dummy codes		
	X1	**X2**	**X3**
1.- No empathy and low similarity (***reference condition***)	0	0	0
2.- No empathy and high similarity	1	0	0
3.- Empathy and low similarity	0	1	0
4.- Empathy and high similarity	0	0	1
	Similarity effect	**Empathy effect**	**Empathy and high-similarity narrative**

Study 1 – Results H2 (mediation models)

Spain (*N* = 383)

Total effect = -.09 / Direct effect = .23 +



Indirect effect X3-Identification-Counterarguing-Threat: B = -.09, SE = .04, Boot 95% CI [-.182, -.024]

Indirect effect X3-Transportation-Counterarguing-Threat: B = -.04, SE = .02, Boot 95% CI [-.117, .014]

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Study 2 (Netherlands) – Method
Close Replication (Lindsay & Ehrenberg, 1993)

Pre-test

Socio-demographics (political self-positioning)

50.2% women.
Mean age = 42.79 (*SD* = 13.75, range: 18-75).

Political self-positioning (*M* = 5.11, *SD* = 2.27).

Independent Variable 1

[Instructions]

Empathy (Yes, No)

Independent Variable 2

[First-person testimonial: **a Turkish immigrant**]

Similarity between the protagonist and the audience (low, high)

Participants are randomly assigned to 4 groups of even size (N = 103-105)

[2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design]

Post-test

Manipulation checks

Identification
(α = .92, *M* = 2.62, *SD* = 0.87)

Transportation
(α = .86, *M* = 4.26, *SD* = 1.29)

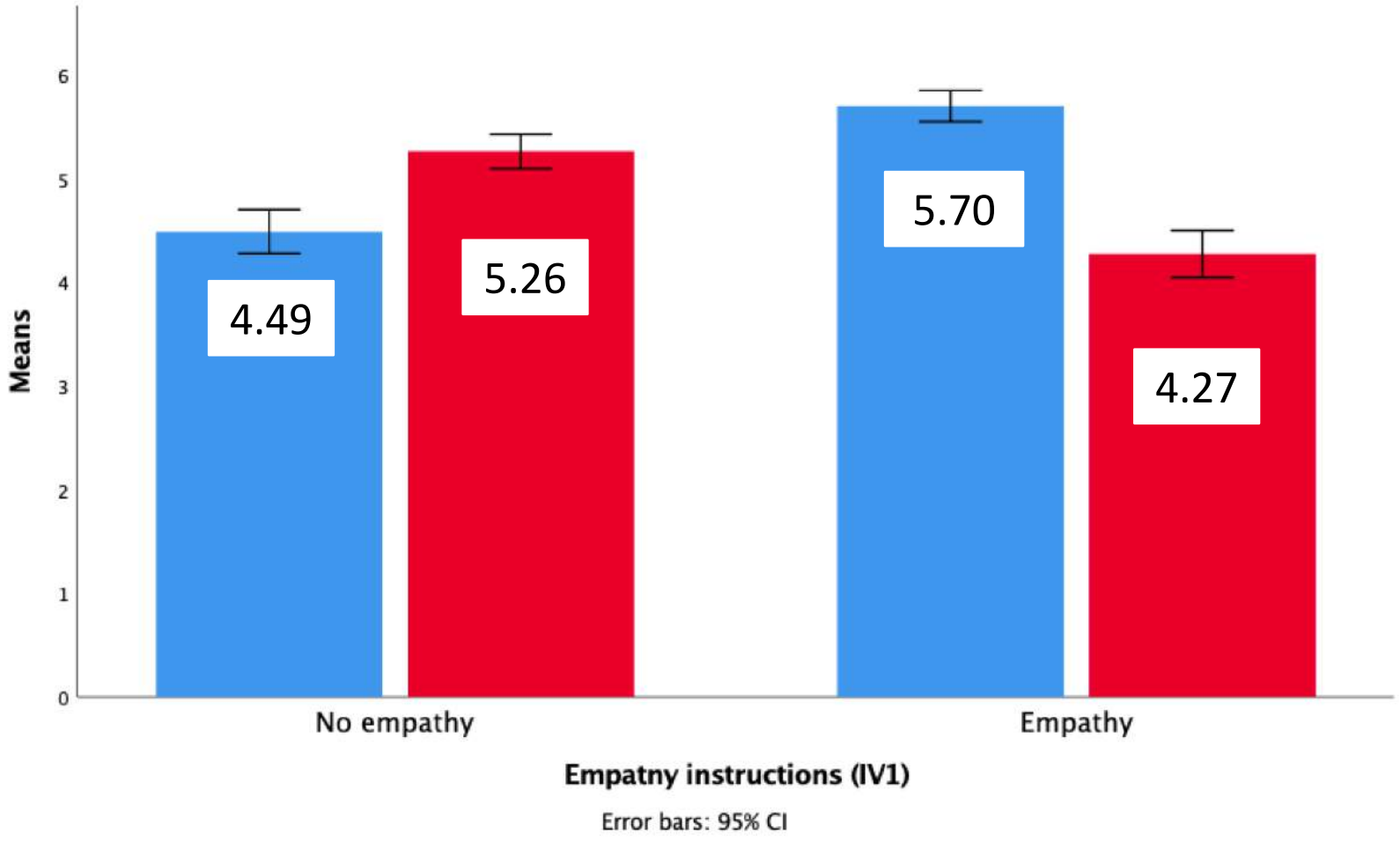
Counter-arguing
(α = .72, *M* = 3.52, *SD* = 1.26)

Perceived threat toward Moroccan immigrants (α = .89; *M* = 2.56, *SD* = 1.05)

Sample: **416 individuals** of Dutch origin whose parents were also Dutch

Online experiment: opt-in online panel of QUALTRICS

Study 2 - Manipulation check [Empathy instructions, IV1]



"I tried to put myself in the place of the protagonist and feel their same emotions"

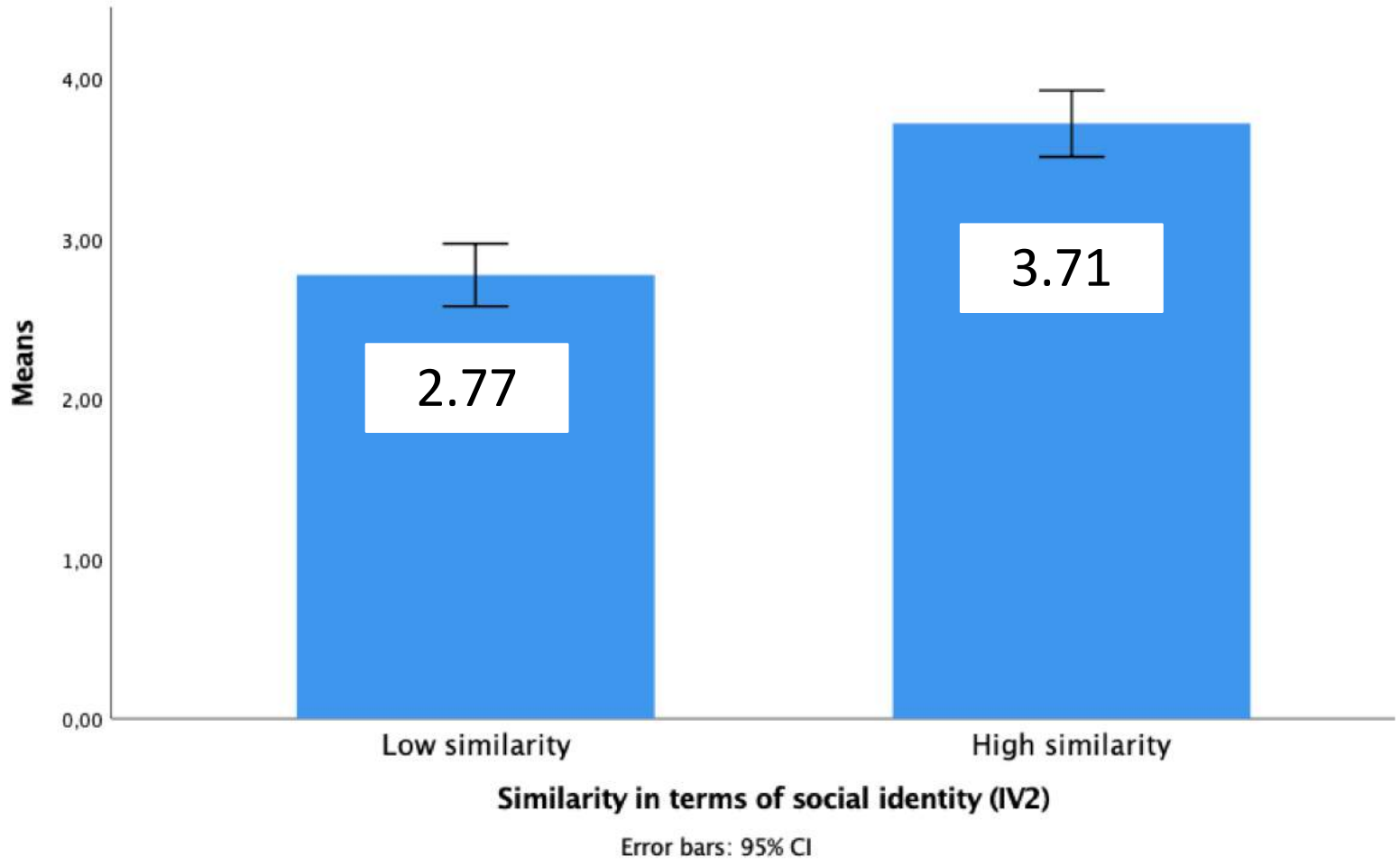
"I have tried to stay objective and distant with respect to the story that was told"

From 1 "Strongly disagree" to 7 "Strongly agree"

$t(414) = -9.19$, $p = .000$

$t(414) = 6.90$, $p = .000$

Study 2 - Manipulation check [Similarity with the protagonist, IV2]



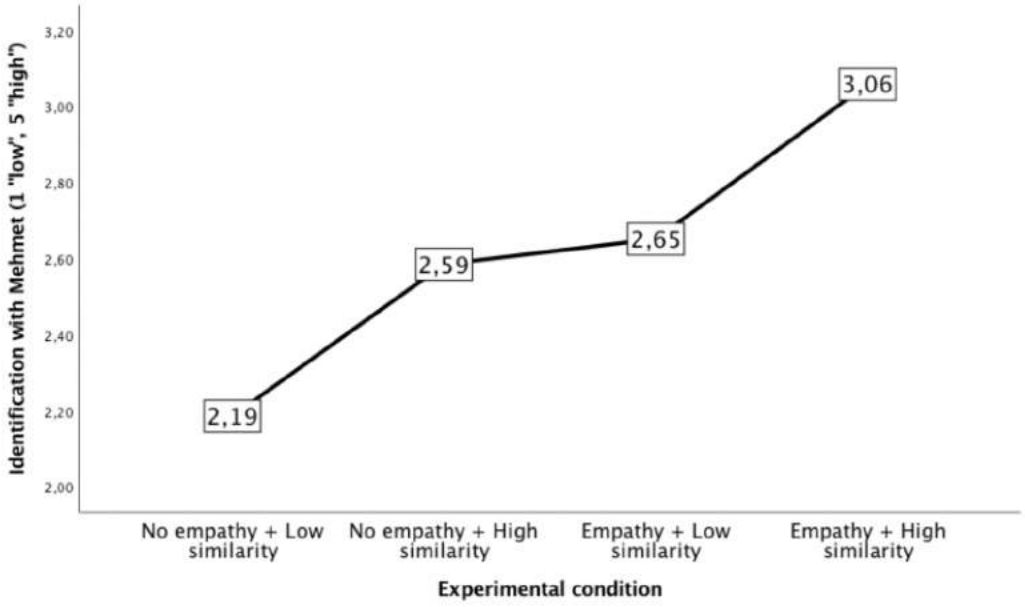
Index of perceived similarity (from 1 "low" to 7 "high") :

"To what extent do you consider that you have things in common with **Mehmet**?"
"To what extent do you consider that he is like you?"
(r = .74, p = .000)

$t(416) = -6.54$, $p = .000$

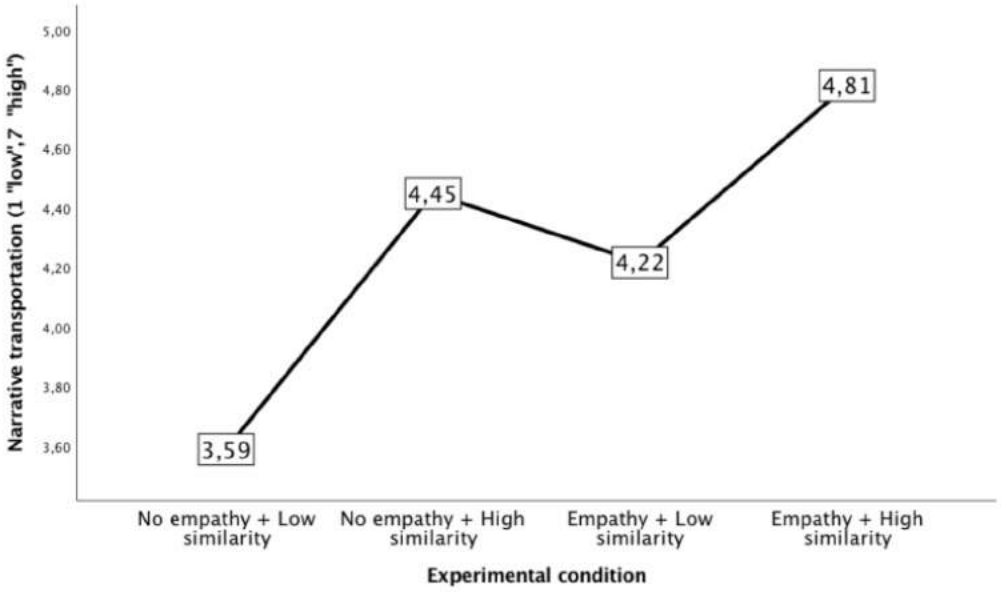
Study 2 – Results H1 (ANOVA, planned contrast analysis)

Study 2 - The Netherlands (N = 416)
Identification with Mehmet (from 1 to 5)



$F_{\text{condition}}$ (3, 412) = 19.70, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .125$
$t_{\text{contrast 1 (-1, 0, 0, 1)}}$ (412) = 7.65, $p < .001$, $r = .35$
$t_{\text{contrast 2 (-1, -1, -1, 3)}}$ (412) = 6.28, $p < .001$, $r = .29$

Study 2 - The Netherlands (N = 383)
Narrative transportation (from 1 to 7)

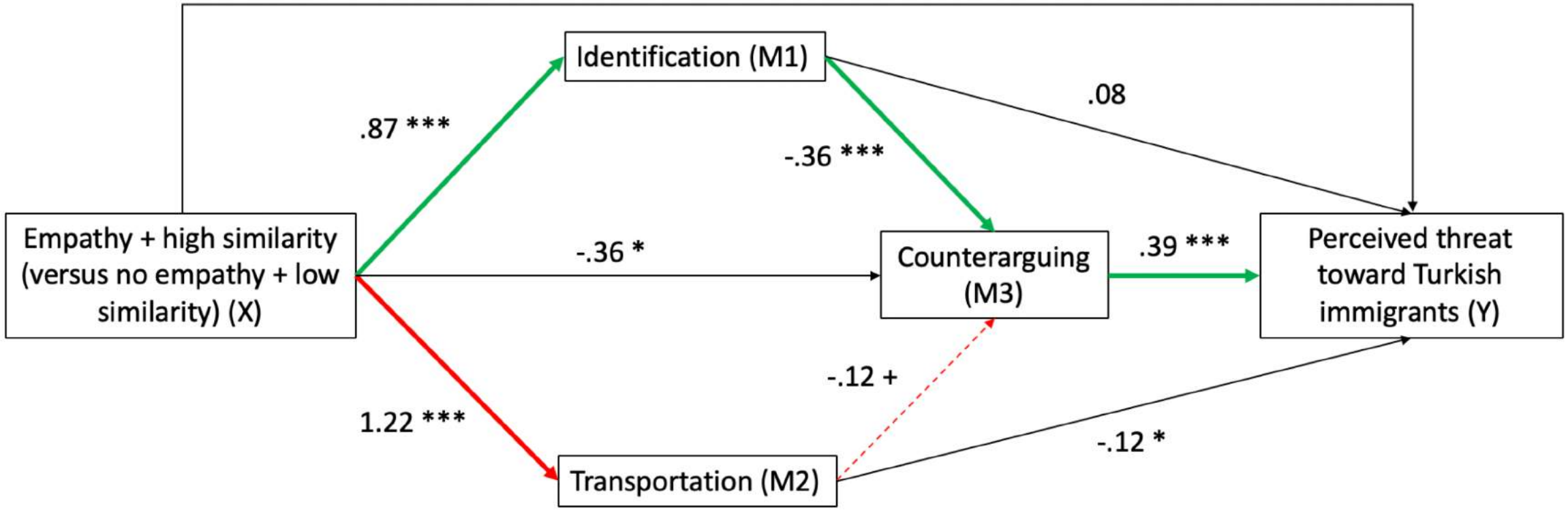


$F_{\text{condition}}$ (3, 412) = 18.28, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .117$
$t_{\text{contrast 1 (-1, 0, 0, 1)}}$ (412) = 7.19, $p < .001$, $r = .33$
$t_{\text{contrast 2 (-1, -1, -1, 3)}}$ (412) = 5.23, $p < .001$, $r = .24$

Study 2 – Results H2 (mediation models)

The Netherlands (*N* = 416)

Total effect = -.24 + / Direct effect = .16



Indirect effect X3-Identification-Counterarguing-Threat: B = -.12, SE = .04, Boot 95% CI [-.221, -.042]

Indirect effect X3-Transportation-Counterarguing-Threat: B = -.05, SE = .04, Boot 95% CI [-.150, .020]

+ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Conclusions & discussion

- To **clarify** the relatively **inconclusive evidence** regarding the **effects of similarity**.
- A new dimension of similarity: **Similarity in terms of social identity**. It is possible that certain types of similarity are more effective than others in provoking identification and narrative transportation (see, Igartua, Wojcieszak & Kim, 2019).
- **Empathy** as an ***exposure condition*** *that can* facilitate the effect of similarity on identification and transportation.
- There was **not** a significant **association** between **transportation and counterarguing**.
- Perhaps in the context of **testimonial messages**, where there is a clear protagonist that captures the audience's attention, **identification is a more relevant process** than narrative transportation as an explanatory mechanism (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2016).
- Beyond attitudes and beliefs: a **new dependent variable in narrative persuasion research**: *Perceived threat toward immigrants*.

Thank you for your attention!

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This presentation

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