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Migration communication campaigns: towards a research agenda and open database

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ABSTRACT
Every year, government agencies, international organisations, and civil society associations produce public communications campaigns designed to inform, persuade, and motivate behaviour regarding numerous facets of migration. Despite their increasing ubiquity, resources, and – possibly – impact, as well as the profound scientific relevance in understanding them, such campaigns remain relatively understudied and existing research is disjointed across various disciplines. This article takes three steps to propose and initiate a unified, interdisciplinary research agenda on migration communication campaigns (MCCs). First, we overview the need for a research agenda based on their increased substantive importance and scientific interest. Second, we outline what such a research agenda should look like, proposing six research themes. Third, we contribute to this proposed research agenda in two ways: with a typology of MCCs and by presenting our open-access, collaborative database to kick-start more systematic research in this field, including theoretical justifications for each variable. The database includes 301 MCCs conducted in 32 European countries between 2012 and 2022. We invite submissions of all types of MCCs globally to create a bridge between communities of academics, policymakers, and communicators.

Introduction

How can scholars understand the increasing number of public communication campaigns designed to affect people's migratory attitudes and behaviours?

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Such campaigns have become widespread in recent years as government agencies, international organisations, and civil society associations at local, national, and global levels respond to increased political salience of large-scale migration in the twenty-first century. This has resulted in larger budgets and more ambitious policy objectives regarding the attitudes and behaviours of host populations and actual and would-be migrants in origin, transit, and destination countries. In Europe, specifically, recent events like the so-called 'migration crisis' in 2015–2016 and the mass displacement of individuals from Ukraine have prompted institutional actors to increasingly turn to communication to manage and achieve objectives across all facets of migration. These campaigns, which we label 'migration communication campaigns' (MCCs), are *coordinated communication efforts to inform, persuade, or motivate behavioural changes regarding migration in specific target audiences*. MCCs have also attracted dispersed studies from a broad range of social sciences using varied epistemological and methodological approaches.

We respond to both the increased prevalence of MCCs and their currently fragmented but progressing scholarship by proposing a unified research agenda for their study in three ways. First, we argue why a specific research agenda on this topic is necessary. We provide evidence of their increased real-world substantive importance and overview the scientific literature on the subject. Second, we identify six objectives for such a research agenda. Finally, we offer two initial contributions to the research agenda by conceptualising and proposing a typology of MCCs and introducing an original, open-contribution online database of 301 MCCs. We invite other scholars to contribute to the expansion of this research agenda and the database, which is open-access and open-source.

The theoretical framework, typology, and open-access database presented in this paper are primarily based on European cases but are designed with the goal of global applicability. We believe this effort will offer both scientific and practical benefits. It paves the way for more rigorous testing of MCC determinants and effects, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, and connects the academic, policy, and communication sectors. By encouraging collaboration and providing easy access to existing MCCs, it also facilitates linking MCCs with other types of organised communication campaigns, further broadening the research scope.

Setting a MCC research agenda

In recent years, MCCs have been repeatedly characterised by policymakers and civil society organisations as critical tools for achieving migration policy objectives of the utmost importance, including upholding human rights and democratic legal orders, improving quality of life via integration, reducing xenophobia and discrimination, correcting misperceptions, tackling

misinformation and conspiracy theories, and reducing smuggling, human trafficking, and fatalities during migration (Brändle & Tolochko, 2023; Global Forum on Migration and Development, 2020; OHCHR, 2020; Tjaden, 2023).

MCCs are increasingly seen as necessary tools for achieving policy goals such as those of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (United Nations, 2018), 'de-polarised' migration debates (OSCE, 2021), or 're-balanced' narratives, the goal of the ICMPD's 2020–23 EuroMed V programme. European Commissioner (EC) Dimitris Avramopoulos used his 2015 speech at the first European Migration Forum (EMF) to state, 'Our biggest concern is … To communicate the positive contribution of migration, I intend to launch an EU-wide campaign to improve the narrative about migration.'[1] The European Commission also provided a 2021 local integration toolkit aiming 'to communicate a positive narrative on migration.'[2] Similarly, the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which has a seven-year budget of nearly €9.9 billion[3] lists 'Communication actions, including campaigns, social media activities and other actions aimed at raising awareness, understanding and acceptance' as one of its eleven action types.[4]

Recent international MCCs include, for example, those by the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on promoting balanced narratives[5], the IOM on the safety of migrants fleeing Ukraine[6] and fighting human smuggling in Central America[7] and beyond. However, these international MCCs are far outnumbered by national and local campaigns (Clarinet, 2021; Dennison, 2020). Many such campaigns are produced by civil society organisations, which are also increasingly more involved in creating best practice guides for MCCs, often informed by academic findings (Browne, 2015; Jinkang, 2022; Tjaden et al., 2018; see Dennison, 2024, for overview of ten guides).

Academics have also taken an interest in overviewing and providing best practices for evaluating such campaigns. Notably, Tjaden et al. (2018) identify 65 MCC *impact evaluations* – though note that only 30 were publicly available and only two were published in peer-reviewed journals – while also classifying MCC communication tools, message types, and objectives. A more comprehensive understanding of MCCs would be valuable even for those who are not specifically focused on migration issues, as these campaigns often reflect broader trends in government strategy, media influence, and public engagement (Bennett & Manheim, 2001; Zahariadis, 2008). Focusing on MCCs can help us better understand the effectiveness, benefits for public officials, and the impact on democratic processes of public information campaigns (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). This includes explaining why such campaigns succeed or fail (Hyman & Sheatsley, 1947) and exploring deeper critiques that challenge the very necessity and assumptions behind these campaigns (Bennett & Manheim, 2001; Rakow, 1989).

The significance of MCCs is evident in the substantial resources that academic grant-awarding bodies have allocated to them in recent years. The European Commission's Horizon 2020 programme included a call for projects to change the debate on migration in Europe with a budget of €3 million.[8] In 2022, the Swedish Research Council (SRC) had a call for a 'Grant for research communication in migration and integration'.[9] These programmes point to the expanding resources dedicated to creating more effective MCCs connecting academic, practice-oriented and policy perspectives.

Overall, the stated importance of MCCs by political actors, their possible effects, their seeming increased prevalence also among civil society organisations, and the increasing resources devoted to them all suggest substantive importance.

What do we know about MCCs?

Understanding the nature, contents, determinants, and effects of MCCs – and how and why these are changing over time – provides evidence to support broader and more profound theories of the causes of human attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours – both in terms of migration and beyond. On the one hand, what are the attitudinal and behavioural effects of such campaigns and to what extent do they achieve their policy objectives – in those cases when objectives are clearly stated – and why? On the other, what does the changing production, prevalence, and composition of such campaigns tell us about the motivations and assumptions of those producing them? We suggest that existing scientific studies that have started to investigate these questions can be organised along five main strands of research.

First, researchers have sought to understand the effects of MCCs on migration behaviour and decision-making via several recent experimental studies of real-world MCCs. These MCCs include film screenings, awareness-raising events, peer-to-peer communication, and various forms of counselling for would-be migrants, with studies measuring their impact on self-reported propensities, perceptions, and knowledge (Bah & Batista, 2018; Bia-Zafinikamia et al., 2020; Caso & Carling, 2024; Cham & Trauner, 2023; Dennison, 2023a; Molenaar & Jucker, 2021; Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021; Pécoud, 2010; Shrestha, 2019, 2020; Tjaden, 2023; Tjaden & Dunsch, 2021; Tjaden & Gninafon, 2022; Trauner et al., 2022). These studies – often explicitly – respond to a lack of robust impact evaluation amongst policy practitioners. However, the generalisability of some of these findings is limited, not least because the contents of such MCCs are left relatively unanalysed in these studies. A deeper examination of the messaging, strategies, and target audiences within these campaigns may provide more robust and widely applicable insights.

Second, researchers have sought to understand the effects of MCCs on *public attitudes to migration* using survey experiments increasingly in

recent years, with policymakers seeking to understand how to reduce xenophobia towards migrants (Dennison, 2022). These studies share theoretical sophistication and internal validity. However, they often lack external validity (though see Kalla & Broockman, 2023). Conversely, such survey experiments remain largely constrained to public perceptions of immigration, ignoring other policy objectives (though see Hager, 2021). In addition, they are overwhelmingly focussed on high-income countries.

Third, and somewhat conversely, MCCs have been interpreted as resulting from or reinforcing policy narratives, discourses and framing in migration policy, including securitisation (e.g., Boswell et al., 2011; Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2017; Hadj-Abdou, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Williams & Coddington, 2023). Relatedly, fourth, research from international migration law has considered the negative rights-based impacts of such campaigns in the context of deterrence, containment, and securitisation of migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 2017; Pijnenburg, 2020).

Finally, numerous critical and media studies of MCCs have focussed on the motivations and aesthetic contents of the campaigns themselves. Oeppen (2016) argues that information campaigns aimed at would-be migrants are duplicitous in their aims, nefarious as means of control, political acts aimed at domestic audiences, and a way of shifting responsibility onto migrants. Musarò (2019, p. 629) analyses the imagery of a campaign to argue that such campaigns 'contribute to nurturing a 'compassionate repression'. This approach is expanded by Van Dessel (2023) and resembles the discourse analysis of Williams (2020; Watkins, 2020; Heller, 2014) and the ethnography of Vammen (2022). More positivist studies include Schenetti and Mazzucato's (2024) ethnography of local implementers of MCCs, Trauner et al.'s (2024) comparison of MCC contents and migrant narratives, and Brändle and Tolochko's (2023; also Brändle, 2022; Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2020) social network analysis.

Notably, scholars utilising these approaches have not considered the MCCs that focus on reducing xenophobia, negative attitudes, and misperceptions amongst host populations, despite such campaigns often being produced by the same international and national organisations as part of the same programmes. Whether these campaigns are more or less numerous than those aimed at would-be migrants remains an important, open empirical question. Furthermore, although these studies analyse the contents of MCCs in depth, with great potential theoretical utility, the explanatory elements – in terms of determinants and effects – are rarely tested and often assumed.

A unified MCCs research agenda: what should it look like?

The above categories conceal unifying connections between different approaches, underscoring the need for a more interdisciplinary and

methodologically pluralist nature of MCC research. First, most studies consider *either* MCCs focused on influencing emigration behaviour or public perceptions of immigration, with each hitherto built on separate literatures with vastly distinct normative assumptions and empirical approaches. Though partially understandable given their distinct aims and target audiences, this is despite MCCs being often produced by the same actors (national governments and international organisations) and often as part of the same public policy programmes (such as the Global Compact for Migration) thus sharing the same origins and causal antecedents. In short, the reasons for the simultaneous increase in public campaigns aiming to reduce anti-migrant xenophobia and those aiming to reduce irregular migration are at least partially overlapping: 'managing' migration. Their broader motivations (e.g., 'safe, orderly, regular') have commonalities, with the Global Compact simultaneously committing signatories to 'preventing irregular migration' *and* 'eliminat[ing] all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance against migrants and their families'.[10] Indeed, this combination is now typical[11] of international migration governance agreements that are centred around a 'Grand Compromise' between origin, transit, and destination countries for which these two aims are among the most central (Arar, 2017; Simon et al., 2024).

Moreover, the distinction between campaigns focussed on emigration and immigration makes the mistake of not envisaging migration as a single phenomenon, albeit viewed from multiple perspectives, and thus tends to be Eurocentric (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Leloup, 1996). This is not to suggest that all MCCs are conceptually identical; rather, they share a common underlying objective of managing migration. Neither is it to say that such campaigns do not overspill onto other, non-migration related objectives (e.g., regarding ethnic minorities). The scattered nature of MCC research means that there is a lack of comprehensive evidence on broader trends and recurring themes within the field. This absence of a unified framework restricts our understanding of how MCCs vary over space and time in either qualitative or quantitative terms, including their objectives, origins, budgets, strategies, contents, media, actors, and placement within broader policy programmes.

For example, in terms of explanation, claims regarding the causes of MCCs come overwhelmingly from critical and media studies of campaigns regarding irregular migration, with the attendant strengths and weaknesses these approaches. Conversely, claims regarding the effects of MCCs come overwhelmingly from experimental studies, either based on impact evaluations of real-world campaigns in the case of those affecting emigration behaviours or *ad hoc* survey experiment treatments aimed at influencing attitudes to immigration, both of which typically emphasise internal over external validity,

in part owing to the lack of theoretical consideration of the supposed causal mechanism within the contents of the MCCs themselves.

Relatedly, as the strands of the literature have rarely spoken to each other, they have quickly become highly distinct despite being relatively nascent. As such, there is very little interdisciplinarity despite significant potential gains given each strand's relative shortcomings. Similarly, whereas those experimental studies of real-world MCCs evaluate the impact of campaigns organised by international organisations, empirical studies on attitudes to immigration less commonly reflect broader academic-policymaker cooperation (though see, e.g., Dennison, 2020).

Building on the above, we identify six particularly pressing areas for an MCC research agenda:

(1) Defining and conceptualising MCCs in the abstract, including an effective typology of how they vary.
(2) Describing variation in MCCs empirically according to the above typology and metrics of their determinants and effects.
(3) Explaining variation in the use, contents, and type of MCCs across space and time.
(4) Determining the effects of MCCs on their stated migration objectives and otherwise.
(5) Identifying complementarity between the disparate academic works for which MCCs are relevant, not only in terms of inter-disciplinarity but also in terms of methodological and epistemological approaches.
(6) Identifying cooperation and interaction between academia and the design, implementation, and assessment of these campaigns by those who produce them.

Towards an MCC research agenda: a typology and a database

We now offer initial contributions to the first two of the above-identified six research areas. These contributions are necessary to later move onto explanatory analysis (research areas three and four) and identify broader trends and engagement between research and policy (research areas five and six).

An MCC typology

First, we conceptualise and propose a typology of MCCs. Our starting point is Rice and Atkin's (2009; also Rogers & Storey, 1987) definition of public communication campaigns more broadly as 'purposive attempts to inform, persuade, or motivate behavioural changes in a relatively well-defined and large audience, generally for non-commercial benefits to the individuals

and/or society at large, typically within a given period, using organised communication activities involving mass media, and often complemented by interpersonal support'. We include in our typology all communication efforts that respond to these criteria and explicitly include references to 'migration', with no preconceptions for the contents, quality, or political leanings of the campaign. This means that some of the campaigns may intentionally mislead for persuasive purposes or may be based on specific and controversial assumptions.

Drawing a definitive line between what constitutes a 'migration communication campaign' and what does not is challenging. As suggested above, our approach may lead to the exclusion of some organised communication efforts that indirectly, and perhaps implicitly, address migration themes – such as those aimed at reducing xenophobia that do not explicitly mention migration. Conversely, it may lead to the inclusion of campaigns that are not primarily focused on migration – such as those targeting ethnic minorities or addressing societal disinformation. Nevertheless, we believe this framework serves as a valuable starting point.

We follow Rice and Atkin's (2009) also regarding the three fundamental objectives of campaigns: informing, persuading, and motivating behaviour change. This distinction is found in health communication (Oxman et al., 2022), climate communication (Pelletier & Sharp, 2008), drug use prevention (Donohew et al., 2001), and elsewhere. We apply this to migration. To *inform* refers to increasing the awareness and understanding among the target audience by providing clear, accurate, and relevant information. To *persuade* implies changing or reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, and preferences. To *motivate* consists of driving the audience to take specific, desired behavioural actions by providing the necessary motivation. Naturally, there is some degree of overlap between these types given the incremental nature of informing to persuade and persuading to motivate behaviour. Of note is also Crawley's (2009:, p. 4) distinction between two types of public communication campaigns in the field of migration, which together we take as our typological starting point: those to inform and shape the propensity to migrate of would-be-migrants in countries of origin and those to change the attitudes and behaviour of host country populations. Drawing upon these initial distinctions, we propose a broader and more nuanced typology of organised, strategic communication in the field of migration based on the first principles of their stated goal.[12] This similarly allows us to incorporate ambiguities (e.g., transit countries) and multiple perspectives.

From these, as outlined in Table 1, we suggest five objects of change. First, *awareness* and *misinformation* relate to the objective of informing. Second, *individual beliefs* and *public preferences* are linked to the objective of persuading. Third, behaviour links to the objective of motivating. An MCC can stimulate action and foster long-term behaviour change. In addition, we propose

Table 1. Migration Communication Campaign typology.

Objective	Object of change	Example specific MCC objectives
Inform	Awareness	Awareness raising of risks of irregular emigration and/or promotion of safe options for migrants and prospective migrants
	Misinformation	Fact-checking; 'myth-busting'; correct information on emigration/immigration and their effects and outcomes
Persuade	Individual beliefs	Decrease prejudice; change perceived effects of immigration/emigration; narrative change
	Public preferences	Affect support for migration policies
Motivate	Behaviours	Affect propensity to migrate; promote integration initiatives; act for/against migrants

Source: Authors' elaboration.

four typical target audiences from these several specific MCC objectives: would be-migrants in the country of origin, migrants in the country of destination, population in the country of destination, and expert audience in the country of destination.

This typology allows us to move onto our second contribution.

An open-access, open-collaboration migration communication campaign database (MCCD)

We introduce an original database of 301 campaigns to kick-start more systematic research in this field, the 'Migration Communication Campaigns Database' (Piccoli et al., 2024).[13] The database includes a diverse set of variables that can be used to compare MCCs. For the first release of the database, we limit the temporal, geographical, and issue focus of the included observations for feasibility reasons. We currently have information on campaigns conducted in countries of the European Union (EU), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and the United Kingdom (UK) between 2012 and 2022. We restrict ourselves to this frame because we could rely on previous projects providing data on MCCs (see below). However, these projects do not – and indeed, no project feasibly could – provide a comprehensive coding or overview of existing campaigns. Additional definitions are available in the database's codebook (Piccoli et al., 2024).

We built the dataset in three steps. First, we collected existing sources and systematically coded the MCCs that had already been identified. We used various sources. Chief among these, two repositories of, respectively, 105 MCCs between 2015 and 2019 created by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Dennison, 2020) of which we retained 78 items and excluded 27 due to the lack of information, linguistic barriers, or campaigns falling outside of the geographical scope, and an updated repository of 310 campaigns between 2019 and 2022 of which we retained 132 MCCs. We also used a repository of MCCs created by the OECD (2022, p. 46

campaigns between 2013 and 2022 of which we retained 38 items) and the list of MCCs by the Clarinet project (2021, 53 campaigns between 2013 and 2020 of which we retained 32 items). Second, we searched on the Web of Science for all the academic articles on MCCs published between 2012 and 2022. We used the following keywords: 'migration campaign' OR 'information campaign' OR 'narratives' AND 'migration' OR 'immigration' OR 'emigration'. We found 161 articles, and we selected eight of them, which in turn helped us identify campaigns held in Denmark, Hungary, Spain, and the UK (Bajomi-Lázár, 2019; Blay-Arráez et al., 2019; Cattaneo & Grieco, 2020; Caviedes, 2015; Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019; Merkovity & Stumpf, 2021; Shah & Ogden, 2023; Terrón-Caro et al., 2022; we note the high-income profile of these countries). Third, in December 2022, we circulated a survey among prominent advocacy, regulation, and migration research institutions. We selected institutions to reflect a diversity of scale, mandate, geography, and other characteristics. A complete list of the institutions with whom we shared the survey is available in Appendix A (Table A1). We also published the survey on our social media channels. In March 2023, we received 17 additional campaigns through the survey.

We made the database open-source because we plan to extend it over time, space, and issue areas. We will include additional data, both internally (i.e., adding more campaigns in our countries of observation during our period of observation), externally (i.e., expanding the geographical coverage to other countries), and longitudinally (i.e., expanding the period of coverage). For this, we invite other scholars to contribute to the expansion of the dataset by filling out a dedicated form online (link: https://eui.eu. qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8uJIeF2c4Vsu8Xc). We will periodically code new proposals that fit our selection criteria and publish annual updates of the Database and its Codebook. We welcome contributions from all regions.

Organisation of the data

The Database is organised around a typology of four key overarching substantive themes, which draw on previous research on migration-information campaigns (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021): objectives ('why?'), demographics ('when, where, by whom?'), substantive content ('what?'), and message ('how?'). For each theme, we include a set of binary variables (rather than categorical, since most variables have the potential for multiple responses, such as the MCC's country). Overall, the Dataset comprises a total of 19 substantive components: while the complete list and description can be found in the codebook (Piccoli et al., 2024), here we discuss ten key components that inform the research agenda we lay out in this article. Descriptive statistics from these variables, as well as a brief discussion, are shown in Appendix C (Table C1-4).

Demographic: time, location, platform, subject actor (institution or person) and impact assessment. We include a set of standard variables to capture the MCC's demographics of when, where, and by whom. 'When' is measured by year. 'Where' is measured by how many countries, which countries, and which platforms (dedicated website, social media, billboards, leaflets, advertisements on newspapers, radio, and television, and community-level programmes such as exhibitions, workshops, cultural and social events). 'Who' considers who created the MCC (international organisations, NGOs, governments, etc.). Finally, these variables include whether the MCC states the existence of an impact assessment, defined as 'an evaluation that makes a causal link between a program or intervention and a set of outcomes' (Bia-Zafinikamia et al., 2020; Tjaden et al., 2018).

Objective: type, object of change, specific objective, and target audience of the campaign. Our 'objective' set of variables measure why the MCC has been produced. Three variables are drawn from our MCC typology in Table 1 that incrementally narrow down the campaign's exact focus(es). Important to mention is that one campaign can have more than one objective, which is reflected in the coding strategy adopted. Fundamentally, the three 'objective type' variables are 'inform', 'persuade', and 'motivate', while the 'object of change' variables consist of 'awareness', 'misinformation', 'beliefs/perceptions', 'preferences', and 'behaviours'. More open to expansion are our other two sets of variables in this group. The variables on 'specific objective' include those typical specific MCC objectives that are shown in Table 1, notably 'awareness raising of migration opportunities/risks', 'fact checking on migration statistics', 'change perceived effects of immigration', 'affect support for migration policies', 'lower propensity to migrate irregularly'. 'Target audience' is typically one of 'migrants', 'potential migrants', and 'host populations', though this may also be 'experts' or 'journalists'.

Substantive content: topic and subjects of interest. The 'what' set of variables measures the MCC's contents and subjects of interest. On the contents, we use as a reference the migration topic clusters identified by Pisarevskaya et al. (2020) and Levy et al. (2020): 'gender and family', 'governance and politics', 'health', 'immigrant incorporation', 'migration processes', and 'Migration-related diversity'. These topics are not mutually exclusive. We build on the scholarship on migration and refugee labels (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Zetter, 1991, 2007) to identify what group of migrants are the subject of the MCC: 'Refugees and asylum seekers', 'International migrants', 'Irregular migrants', 'Children', and 'Other' (e.g., Women, individuals with disabilities).

Message: strategies, values, and emotions. This group of variables describes how the MCC sought to achieve its objective. First, following Dennison's typology of strategies used in MCCs (2022), the database includes nine variables regarding the methods used by campaigns: correcting information, appeals to emotion, appeal to interest, emphasising conformity or diversity, migrant description, emphasising common ground, appeal to empathy, messenger effects, and appeal to identity. These variables are not mutually exclusive.

Second, we attempt to code the values – in terms of Schwartz (1992) 10 Basic Human Values – to which each MCC appeals (see Appendix B, Table B1, for an explanation of each of the ten). Migration advocacy and policy communication regularly cite appealing to one's audience's 'personal values' as key to strategic communication while such values – defined as one's broad motivational goals in life – have indeed been shown to strongly affect a wide range migration attitudes (e.g., Davidov & Meuleman, 2012). Moreover, recent meta-analyses of the effects of communication that appeal to values highly support the notion of their effectiveness (Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2022). Dennison (2020; 2023b) applies these values to designing effective migration communication (see Appendix B, Table B2).

Similarly to values, migration advocacy and policy communicators insist that eliciting emotions rather than using facts makes for more effective communication (Dennison, 2024) by making a message more resonant and act alongside cognitive processes of persuasion and motivation. We code each campaign according to Plutchik's (1980) eight Basic Emotions, each of which have a corresponding involuntary physiological response (see Appendix B, Table B2) that communicators attempt to induce to achieve objectives.

Discussion and conclusion

Inspired by the growth in MCCs – as well as the scattered and nascent state of the literature on the topic – we sought to propose and initiate a unified, interdisciplinary research agenda on the topic in four steps. First, we overviewed the need for a research agenda based on their increased substantive importance and scientific interest. Second, we outlined what such a research agenda should look like, proposing six research themes. Third, we contributed to this proposed research agenda in two ways: with a typology of MCCs and by presenting our open-access, collaborative database to kickstart more systematic research in this field, including theoretical justifications for each variable.

Each of these four initial steps remains just that: initial, and therefore very much open to development and improvement in multiple directions. Our attempt to overview the literature is inevitably limited. However, we do see our identification of five literatures directly addressing MCCs and each of

their typically attendant shortcomings – regarding generalisability, validity, assumptions, and selection of campaigns – as broadly fitting. Our delineation of six priority areas for shaping an MCC research agenda and our subsequent typology aim to address these shortcomings, not least by fusing the various strands of the literature.

Answering our call for what the research agenda should do and based on this typology, we presented the MCCD, our open-access, collaborative database of 301 MCCs to kick-start more systematic research in this field, including theoretical justifications for each variable. We invite submissions of all types of MCCs globally to overcome the current high-income country centric selection of countries. We plan to keep this database running through ongoing in-house work and collaborations with international organisations such as GFMD, IOM, OSCE, EU, and ICMPD, as well as maintaining as much of an open-access, collaborative approach as possible with academics taking the lead and responsibility for the content. We believe this would be important to ensure the sustainability of the database over time, but also to better coordinate academic and policy efforts, strengthening connections and bridging the gap between research and practice.

The current version of the MCCD has important limitations. The first concerns the coverage of campaigns included. We do not claim the Database to be comprehensive; inevitably, there will be campaigns we have yet to encounter during our data collection. We aim at expanding the database over time, both internally (i.e., including more campaigns in our countries of observation during our period of observation), externally (i.e., expanding the geographical coverage to other countries – particularly those of different income levels), and longitudinally (i.e., expanding the period of coverage). For this, we invite other scholars to contribute to expanding the database by filling out a dedicated form online (https://eui.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8uJleF2c4Vsu8Xc). The primary function of the MCCD, in any case, remains heuristic, allowing users to compare key themes across campaigns systematically. We would also like to include more *types* of campaigns in future, not least those attempting to encourage migration behaviour.

The second limitation concerns the range of variables included. For example, due to the difficulty in gathering transparent and precise data on the topic, the Database does not contain information on the funding structure of MCCs. This information would provide important insights into the existing funding channels, the organisation and items included in the budgets (salaries, consultancy, production materials, equipment rental, paid advertisements …), and the scale of different campaigns. Other additions could include (1) the reach and output of such campaigns; (2) who delivered the communication of the campaign (not just the medium or funder); and (3) further sub-classifications of target audiences, such as refugees or those in

transit. Furthermore, we hope to add further information on impact evaluations, such as whether they were internal or external, their effects and sizes, and methodologies used.

As we consolidate the Database, we may also expand the range of substantive information provided with each campaign, although this remains difficult to access. Various hypotheses and research questions can already be tested regarding such campaigns, partly using our database: To what extent are campaigns with differing objectives and audiences created by the same or different organisations? More broadly, how can we describe and explain variation in MCCs across different actors, spaces, and times? We hope that answers to these questions will provide insights not only into MCCs but also into more general theories of migration and communication.

Notes

1. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/SPEECH_15_3781
2. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/positive-storytelling-migration-toolkit-local-authorities_en
3. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/funding/asylum-migration-and-integration-funds/asylum-migration-and-integration-fund-2021-2027_en
4. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-12/AMIF%20-%20Thematic%20Facility%20Work%20Programme%202021-2022_en.pdf
5. https://www.iom.int/shaping-public-narrative-migration-and-migrantsa-guide-promoting-balanced-dialogue
6. https://ukraine.iom.int/news/eu-and-iom-launch-all-ukrainian-awareness-raising-campaign-prevention-human-trafficking-during-war
7. https://programamesoamerica.iom.int/sites/default/files/communication_campaigns_on_migration_2021-2022.pdf
8. https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/H2020_MIGRATION-09-2020
9. https://www.vr.se/english/applying-for-funding/calls/2022-08-17-grant-for-research-communication-in-migration-and-integration.html
10. https://americas.iom.int/en/objective-17-eliminate-all-forms-discrimination-and-promote-evidence-based-public-discourse-shape-perceptions-migration
11. See, for example, 'The Budapest Process' https://www.budapestprocess.org/?jet_download=73c5068e70a82f757c41e09f89277c2819ab17a7
12. See previous section for a discussion on how the stated goal of a campaign may not necessarily correspond to the actual goal(s) of those launching the campaign.
13. https://migrationpolicycentre.eu/campaigns

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