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The effects of escalation- vs. de-escalation-orientated conflict coverage on the evaluation of military measures

Kurzfassung: Die diesem Artikel zugrunde liegende Studie untersuchte, inwieweit verschiedene Texte der Konfliktberichterstattung Leser in ihrer Akzeptanz militärischer Maßnahmen beeinflussen, und wie diese Texte bewertet werden. Dazu wurden mehrere Texte entworfen, welche internationale Konflikte zum Thema hatten. Drei internationale Konflikte wurden gewählt, zu denen je zwei Texte entwickelt wurden; je einer favorisierte ein konfrontatives Vorgehen (Eskalationsorientierung) während der jeweils andere vor einer Eskalation der Gewalt warnte (Deeskalationsorientierung). Diese Texte wurden den Versuchsteilnehmern präsentiert, welche daraufhin gebeten waren, die Texte zu bewerten, sowie die Angemessenheit verschiedener militärischer Maßnahmen zu beurteilen. Durch die Präsentation unterschiedlicher internationaler Konflikte wurde versucht, auf Seiten der Teilnehmer Gefühle der Verbundenheit und Parteilichkeit variierenden Ausmaßes hervorzurufen. Jedoch zeigte sich, dass die verschiedenen Konflikte geringen Einfluss auf die Bewertungen der Texte und der militärischen Maßnahmen hatten. Im Gegensatz dazu zeitigten die Texte einen klaren Effekt: Deeskalations-orientierte Texte wurden signifikant besser bewertet als eskalations-orientierte Texte. Darüber hinaus riefen eskalations-orientierte Texte im Vergleich zu deeskalations-orientierten Texten eine signifikant höhere Akzeptanz militärischer Maßnahmen hervor. Dieses Ergebnis illustriert die besondere Verantwortung, welchen Journalisten bei der Konfliktberichterstattung zukommt. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird argumentiert werden, dass Verhaltensnormen stark von situativen Faktoren abhängen. Dies ist möglicherweise die Grundlage für die Tatsache, dass innerhalb weit eskalierter Konflikte Verhaltensweisen gezeigt werden, welche in friedlicheren Zeiten kaum denkbar wären.

Abstract: This paper is based on a study of the extent to which differently written reports on conflicts influence reader approval of military measures and how readers evaluate different texts. Several texts were developed for the study that described various conflicts in different ways. Three conflicts were chosen, and two texts were developed for each conflict: one supported a confrontational policy (escalation-oriented), whilst the other warned against the escalation of conflict (de-escalation-oriented). The texts were presented to the participants of this study, who were then asked to evaluate the texts and to evaluate the acceptability of various military measures. By presenting different conflicts, the study attempted to evoke different degrees of participant partiality and involvement. It was found that differences among the conflicts had little influence on the evaluations of the texts and the military measures. However, the texts themselves had a clear influence: De-escalation-oriented texts were judged to be better than escalation-oriented ones. Moreover, escalation-oriented texts produced a higher degree of acceptance of military measures than did de-escalation-oriented texts. These results illustrate the particular responsibility of journalistic reporting on conflicts. The present paper argues that the standards accepted as guides for behaviour are strongly affected by overall situations. This may explain why behaviour in highly escalated conflicts may deviate strongly from behavioural norms accepted in peacetime.

1 Theory

1.1 Introduction

Many authors (e.g. Kempf, 2003; Seib, 2004; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) emphasise the central role played by media in complex modern societies. Media are so important because to a great extent the various segments of modern societies communicate via media. Media are able to choose from a great variety of potential news and have enormous latitude with respect to their interpretations. That is why media are likely to strongly influence how "media-consumers" perceive different events. In the case of conflict coverage, this influence is of great interest, as important political decisions are at stake. What psychological mechanisms could be involved in this context? This is the basic question underlying section 1 of this paper. In particular, the following questions will be posed: How are moral standards applied to judge the acceptability of certain behaviours in conflicts? What particular conditions explain why behaviour in escalated conflicts differs from behaviour in more peaceful times? These questions will be the focus of this section. In section 1.2, Kohlberg's developmental model of principle-guided behaviour is introduced. Contrary to this model, it will then be shown that many people seem to apply different standards depending on the situation. In section 1.3, the strong influence of competitive situations is described. Under 1.4, studies are presented that show how even minor variations in situations can have major effects on behaviour. 1.5 discusses Bandura's model of "moral disengagement" in the light of the previously addressed findings. 1.6 outlines the puzzling behavioural tendencies of people who identify themselves as group members. Based on that, 1.7 argues that groups are strongly affected when members become the victims of highly escalated conflicts. 1.8 introduces the concept of "framing" as used in media studies. Finally, in section 1.9, Kempf's checklist of conflict coverage will be introduced, which includes several coverage techniques. These techniques are in turn based on psychological mechanisms that will be discussed in the following sections.

1.2 Behavioural norms and Kohlberg's model of Moral Development

"The continuation and protection of life probably rank among the most sacred and most universal values of mankind" (Bar-Tal, 2000, p. 68). When societies are at war, however, this "sacredness of life" no longer seems to hold for everyone. How is it possible that killing is abhorred by a society in times of peace, but may be accepted by the same society in times of war? In order to answer that question, we examined how people deal with societal norms.

Kohlberg (1968, 1976) held that there is a connection between personal norms and moral behaviour. His model subdivides moral development into six stages. (Individuals are assigned to one of these stages based on their evaluations of moral dilemmas.) There are three "levels," each of which contains two of the stages. These levels are: Pre-Conventional Level (Stages 1-2), Conventional Level (Stages 3-4) and Post-Conventional Level (Stages 5-6). On the Conventional Level, societal rules are obeyed because they are regarded as necessary for the functioning of society. On the Pre-Conventional Level, rules are obeyed only if obedience is thought to be personally advantageous. Finally, on the Post-Conventional Level societal rules are accepted if they are regarded as based on general moral principles. If any rule contradicts those general principles, the principles are favoured. Studies of behavioural correlates with these levels have showed that it is notably helpful to distinguish individuals on the Post-Conventional Level from individuals on the other two levels. E.g., in one study 75% of the "principle-guided" participants refused to administer increasing doses of electrical shocks to alleged victims; among the other participants, the share was only 13% (see Kohlberg, 1968). This suggests that the guiding function of personally-derived principles is more important than that of societal norms. So, the inclination to make principle-guided judgements seems to reflect a relevant personality trait.

Further investigations (e.g. Bandura, 1990; Beck et al., 1999) found *intra*-individual variations in moral judgements. In different contexts the same individuals made judgments that corresponded to different stages of Kohlberg's model. Thus, the assumption that Kohlberg's stages are developmental stages in a strict sense can hardly be maintained. As a consequence, it may be wise to drop the assumption of mutually exclusive levels and, e.g., to think instead of a continuum upon which people can be located according to their tendency to prefer principle-guided judgements.

1.3 Effects of competition

When people find themselves in a competitive situation, their behaviour can change markedly, as Deutsch (1973) showed in a classic study: Groups of participants were asked either to work together on a given task or to compete with each other. These conditions produced the following effects: In situations of *cooperation*, ideas were exchanged openly and members took into account the needs of others. In situations of *competition*, communication was used as a means of deception, and the needs of others were ignored in the pursuit of selfish gains.

In a classic study by Sherif et al. (1961), even more dramatic outcomes were observed: During a holiday camp, two groups of boys were induced to compete with one another in playing various games. Marked aggressive feelings arose between the groups, even leading to fights.

Apparently, competition has a considerable effect on the types of behaviour people display. Again, this could reflect the activation of certain behavioural *norms* depending on the current situation. Possibly the activation of norms is linked to *needs* or *goals* that accompany competitive situations. The goal to cultivate a positive self-image of being superior to others could be the point of departure which influences the kinds of behaviour regarded as acceptable. It is conceivable that the only limit to the flexibility of behaviour is set by a tendency to orient oneself to moral principles (cf. above).

1.4 Situational dependence of behavioural norms

An investigation by Ross & Samuels (1993, unpublished; in: Ross & Ward, 1995) showed that even minor changes in contextual elements linked to cooperation or competition are sufficient to produce major effects on behaviour: Ross & Samuels selected participants using a method intended to maximise individual differences and then asked the subjects to play *prisoner's dilemma*. Their experimental procedure consisted of two steps. First, representatives of student groups were asked to judge the students in their group: The representatives were asked to rate the students' tendency to cooperate. Then, students with extremely high or low ascribed cooperative tendencies were selected. The students chosen in this way afterwards played prisoner's dilemma. Thereupon, in a second step, students who showed an especially high or low willingness to cooperate in playing prisoner's dilemma were selected as participants for the critical experimental condition: The game was then referred to as either the "community game" or the "Wall Street game." It was observed that participants cooperated about twice as much when prisoner's dilemma was called the "community game" than when it was called the "Wall Street game." The two rounds of pre-selection had only a minor effect. So, a small change in the context had a much stronger effect on the outcome than did individual differences. Apparently, the respective naming activated specific behavioural norms linked to the corresponding situations.

The next study suggests that situations can be rather easily linked to behavioural norms. (It is not maintained, however, that this is the *usual* way that such links are established): Research assistants visited several households in California and asked the occupants to display a small sign in one of their windows (Ornstein, 1991). The sign was the size of a *postcard* and bore the motto: "Keep California Beautiful." Two weeks later, other research assistants visited a number of households, half of which had been approached by the above-mentioned research assistants two weeks before. This time, the research assistants asked people to erect a large (1.8 m x 2.5 m) sign on their front lawn with the safety message "Drive Carefully." Almost no one volunteered who had *not* been previously approached with the "postcard – request." However, 60% of those who had been *asked* (!) to display the small sign agreed to set up the very large sign on their front lawn (Ornstein, 1991). Apparently, the "postcard – request" created a link between the particular situation and the behavioural norm of cooperation.

Against this background, Bandura's model of "Moral Disengagement" will now be presented.

1.5 Bandura's model of Moral Disengagement

According to Bandura (1990, 1999), people normally comply with values learned from society. He assumes that behaviour that violates a person's values usually produces self-condemnation; on the other hand, it should be possible to *disengage* oneself from this inner control through certain mechanisms specified by Bandura. Two examples of Bandura's "mechanisms" are presented here (Bandura, 1990, 1999):

- *Moral Justification* means that an act is interpreted as serving moral ends. For example, killing people in a war can be justified as a way to ultimately achieve peace.
- *Advantageous Comparisons*: The acts in question can be compared to other acts in the past that brought about a positive result. E.g., in the case of military actions it can be claimed that countries like France and the USA achieved democratic governments by means of violent conflict.

As was seen in the previous sections, behavioural judgements seem to be highly dependent on the respective contexts. This suggests a certain understanding of Bandura's "moral disengagement." The "mechanisms" possibly link certain conflict situations to behavioural norms that represent military actions as appropriate forms of behaviour, so that rules forbidding such actions are not drawn upon and taken into consideration. Again, a habitual concern for moral principles seems likely to set limits.

1.6 Group behaviour

During times of group conflict, especially in times of war, group members regard themselves to be in conflict with others whom they do not know personally and about whom they lack any personal information. That is why we will now focus on the psychological meaning of group membership: According to Augoustinos & Walker (1995) and Turner & Oakes (1989), people are inclined to cognitively assign others to social groups. Tajfel (cf. 1981) was interested in the minimal conditions that can induce people to behave differently depending on their

group membership. In a study by Billig & Tajfel (1973, in Tajfel 1981), an attempt was made to minimise the importance of group membership by using the following procedure: Participants were shown that they were being assigned to one of two groups by a coin toss. Then, each participant was given the task to transfer certain sums of money to other participants. They never saw any of the other participants and knew nothing about them except their assigned group membership. It was found that in each case the participants favoured members of their own group. They even preferred to distribute smaller sums of money to participants, as long as they could favour members of their own group in turn. Allen & Wilder (1975, in Turner 1982) noticed that they preferred to favour members of their own group even when they perceived the member in question of the respective *other* group as *more similar* to themselves than the member in question of their own group.

According to Tajfel (1981), people have a "social identity" which contains knowledge of belonging to a group, as well as of the value assigned to that group. Various studies have shown that people try to cultivate a positive image of their own group (e.g. Pettigrew, 1979; Duncan, 1976). This image work and the tendency to favour one's own group can be explained by Tajfel's theory that social identity is part of a person's self-concept (Tajfel, 1981). It also helps to explain why people often passionately defend their own group in times of group conflict.

1.7 Highly escalated conflicts

As stated at the outset, Bar-Tal (2000) emphasises the enormous significance assigned to human life and its protection, transcending the borders of most societies. The deaths of group members tend to arouse intense personal grief in groups. Bar-Tal claims that people are strongly affected by the deaths of group members even when they have not known them personally. (This suggests Tajfel's concept of *social identity*.) Bar-Tal assumes that especially the deaths of innocent civilians trigger the dynamics of violent conflict escalation, as, on the one hand, the opponent is viewed as a clear danger, and, on the other hand, the desire for revenge escalates.

1.8 Framing news events

When media report on a certain event, they have a broad space of interpretation and can classify it in terms of numerous different contexts. The concept of "framing" refers to this kind of interpretation and contextualisation of news events. According to Entman (1993: 52), frames single out and lend salience to certain aspects. Frames define problems, diagnose causes, imply moral judgements and suggest remedies. As an example, Entman illustrates how certain international events were selected in U.S. news coverage during the Cold War era: A Western "Cold War frame" could define "civil wars" as problems, diagnose "Communist insurgents" as the causes of the problems, evaluate war from a moral standpoint as "atheistic aggression," and propose "U.S. support for the other side" as the solution. It seems likely that such interpretations in news coverage can have lasting effects on public opinion. Iyengar (1997) reports on an experiment that involved two types of frames for "poverty" in the U.S. One of the frames focused on individual cases, while the other covered poverty on a more abstract level (e.g. the official government definition of poverty). The type of frame employed significantly influenced participants' attributions of responsibility for poverty.

McQuail (2005: 385) points out, however, that media content is "polysemic," i.e. it has "multiple potential meanings" for readers or viewers, and Gamson (1996: 122) argues that viewers' perceptions of media contents depend on their "experiences and personal associations." Still, even if the opinions of media consumers are not perfect mirror images of media depictions, the media do seem to exert a definite influence on an aggregate level.

1.9 Aspects of conflict coverage

According to Kempf (2003), when journalists report on conflicts, they are also influenced by the psychological mechanisms outlined above. That is why they may come to perceive any conflict in extremely one-sided ways and consequently frame the conflict in a way that is also one-sided and escalation-oriented. However, some journalists are aware of the underlying mechanisms and therefore can deliberately decide whether to choose a one-sided and escalation-oriented frame, or to represent the respective events in a more balanced and de-escalation-oriented way. Next, certain techniques will be presented that are related to the above-named psychological mechanisms, namely the effects of competition, group membership, behavioural norms and goals. Kempf (2003) has developed a checklist containing various techniques and aspects that are organised into thematic domains. These domains are briefly outlined here:

	Escalation-oriented coverage	De-escalation-oriented coverage
Conceptualisation of a conflict	The conflict is depicted as a win-lose situation in which only one side can win, while the other has to lose.	The conflict is portrayed as a win-win-situation in which joint problem-solving can lead to an outcome that is advantageous for all sides.
Evaluation of rights and intentions	The rights and aims of a favoured party are idealised and those of the opponent are denigrated. Common interests are denied.	The rights and aims of all parties are taken into consideration. Common interests are emphasised.
Evaluation of actions	The actions of the favoured side are justified, those of the opponent condemned.	A balanced evaluation of the actions of all parties is strived for.
Social Identification	The coverage presents identification offerings on behalf of one of the conflict parties, at the same time depicting the opponent negatively, so that identification with the latter becomes unlikely.	The coverage presents identification offerings on behalf of the victims of all conflict parties.
Emotional involvement	The pernicious and threatening character of the opponent is stressed, while the strength of one's own side is emphasised, as well as the justness of one's own side's goals.	Empathy with the victims of all parties is encouraged; respect and understanding for the opponent is promoted.
Motivational Logic	War is presented as a bridge to a better future.	Peace is presented as a bridge to a better future.

These techniques and aspects can be interpreted as being related to the psychological mechanisms mentioned above:

Conceptualisation of the conflict & evaluation of rights, intentions and actions: In the case of an escalation orientation, one's own aims are emphasised, and the opponent is accused of seriously threatening these aims, so that a situation of *competition* is depicted. (The effects of a perceived *competitive* situation have been outlined above.) In contrast, where there is a de-escalation-orientation, common interests are stressed which provide broad latitude for cooperation.

Social Identification: On the basis of Tajfel's "*social identity*" (1981) concept, it can be expected that perceiving oneself as a member of a group creates distinct loyalties as soon as members of this group become the victims of violence, as suggested by Bar-Tal (2000). This means that either the "opponent" (escalation-oriented texts) or war (de-escalation-oriented texts) will be viewed as an unacceptable threat to a group's welfare.

Emotional involvement: By focusing on the allegedly cruel and threatening character of the opponent, escalation-oriented texts suggest the necessity (or the goal) of defeating the opponent, while de-escalation-oriented texts promote mutual understanding.

Motivational Logic: Escalation-oriented texts not only portray the opponent as a serious threat to group welfare, but as already explained, they also suggest appropriate responses to the threat. Accordingly, the only appropriate response to the threat is to eliminate it; that is, to defeat the opponent. In other words, these texts link the conflict situation to a *behavioural norm*, consistent with the maxim: "Extraordinary situations require extraordinary measures." De-escalation-oriented texts offer a different response: They suggest that peaceful cooperation is the *appropriate behaviour* for working toward a peaceful future.

2 This study

2.1 Research questions and hypotheses

The study discussed in this paper was designed to address the following questions:

1. To what extent are escalation- vs. de-escalation-oriented texts (designed using the above-mentioned criteria) able to influence readers' conflict-evaluations?
2. How are such texts perceived in cases of highly escalated conflicts involving readers?
3. How easily are readers involved in highly escalated conflicts influenced with respect to their acceptance of military solutions?

To answer these research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- a. Readers of escalation-oriented texts will accept military responses to a higher degree than readers of de-escalation-oriented texts.

Rationale: Escalation-oriented texts suggest that the central goal in the respective conflict is to defeat the opponent. At the same time, they present military action as the appropriate means in the particular conflict situation.

- b. When readers feel attached to one party of a highly escalated violent conflict, they will accept escalation-oriented texts to a higher degree than in cases where their involvement is low. The opposite will be true for de-escalation-oriented texts.
- c. When readers feel attached to one party of a highly escalated violent conflict, they will accept military measures to a greater extent than in cases where their involvement is low.

Rationale: As was explained above, competition and violence are likely to exacerbate conflicts. Escalation-oriented texts should therefore be more attuned to the perceptions and feelings of the parties to highly escalated violent conflict.

- d. When readers feel attached to one party of a highly-escalated violent conflict, their acceptance of military solutions will be less easily influenced by texts.

Rationale: Readers who feel attached to one party of a highly-escalated violent conflict should already have formed an overall opinion about that conflict and the appropriate behavioural options.

2.2 Operationalisation

The above-discussed checklist, as proposed by Kempf (2003), was the basis for the development of escalation-oriented and de-escalation-oriented texts. In order to address the hypotheses, three violent conflicts were selected. For each of these conflicts, an escalation-oriented text and a de-escalation-oriented text were developed. These texts were then used in a study conducted in Konstanz, Germany. A video about the respective conflict was presented to most of the subjects before they read the texts. The purpose of showing these videos was, on the one hand, to present information about the respective conflict, and, on the other, to heighten the one-sidedness of the participants' attitudes. After this, participants were asked to fill out questionnaires indicating their responses to the respective text and the appropriateness of using military measures in the particular conflict.

Conflicts presented in this study

The study compared the effects of the following three conflicts on the subjects:

- *Al-Qaida vs. USA:* It was expected that participants would tend to support the USA in this conflict and feel attached to the people of the USA, since the victims of the terrorist acts in New York City had cultural backgrounds relatively similar to those of the participants. Moreover, the participants could not feel absolutely safe from acts of terrorism in Germany or at foreign holiday resorts and elsewhere abroad. A further characteristic of this conflict (related to the former) is that participants would be relatively familiar with this conflict, compared to the other conflicts.
- *Aum Cult vs. Japan:* In this case, the sense of strong attachment and the one-sidedness of attitudes were expected to be less pronounced than in the case of *Al-Qaida vs. USA*, as, firstly, it is unlikely that participants would feel threatened by the Aum Cult, secondly, the cultural proximity to Japan is lower than that to the USA and, thirdly, far fewer casualties resulted from the attack by the Aum Cult. Familiarity with this conflict was estimated to be low.
- *Indonesia vs. East Timor:* The sense of attachment was also estimated to be low in this conflict, since, firstly, it likewise involved an unfamiliar cultural background, and, secondly, it was assumed that conflict in Indonesia was unlikely to arouse feelings of personal threat. However, compared to the *Aum Cult vs. Japan* conflict, a higher level of attitudinal one-sidedness was expected, because the research materials focused strongly on human rights abuses by the Indonesian army and referred to the great numbers of East-Timorese casualties. Familiarity with this conflict was estimated to be low.

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

The study participants were 96 undergraduates and graduate students from various disciplines recruited at the University of Konstanz. The sex factor was equalised in each experimental condition, as 48 of the participants were female and 48 were male. (Previous studies by Grussendorf, 2002, as well as McAlister, 2001, found a higher acceptance of military measures on the part of male as opposed to female participants.)

3.2 Experimental design

Each participant was exposed to one experimental condition (between-subject design) and filled out each questionnaire just once (unrelated measures). There were two different texts on each of the three conflicts, yielding six experimental conditions. These provided the experimental conditions, as illustrated in Table 1. Each experimental condition was presented to eight female and eight male participants; thus there were overall 96 participants.

Texts	Presented Conflict		
	Al-Qaida vs. USA	Indonesia vs. East Timor	Aum Cult vs. Japan
Escalation-oriented			
De-escalation-oriented			

Table 1: Experimental Conditions

3.3 Experimental procedure

Videos

A written introduction was presented to the participants, outlining the content of the respective video that was about to be presented. Then the videos were shown.

Texts

Now, an escalation- or a de-escalation-oriented text about the respective conflict was presented. The introduction to the text stated that it was taken from the editorial section of "a major German newspaper."

Evaluations by participants

Subsequently, participants had to complete four questionnaires. The first served as a "manipulation check," the second asked participants for evaluations of various aspects of the texts, the third asked for their evaluations of several concrete military measures, whilst the fourth asked for their opinions about military measures in general.

3.4 Experimental materials

3.4.1 Videos

The videos were edited by means of the "Storm Edit" program and stored in the MPG format. The presentations were made on a 15-inch flat screen. The videos were composed as follows:

- *Al-Qaida vs. USA*: A German film, "Spiegel TV: Angriff auf Amerika" (2001), was one source. It shows the 11 September 2001 attacks on the New York World Trade Center. Another source was a German news broadcast, "Tagesthemen" of 11 March 2004 (NDR, 2004), which reports on the terrorist train bombings in Madrid. The latter was added to increase the personal relevance for the participants, since it involved Islamist terror attacks in Europe.
- *Indonesia vs. East Timor*: A film entitled "In Cold Blood: Massacre in East Timor" (Stahl, 1992) was shown. This film focuses on human rights abuses committed by the Indonesian army between 1975 and 1991. It ends with a report about a massacre committed in 1991.
- *Japan vs. Aum Cult*: The source for this video was a German news broadcast, "Tagesthemen" of 20 March 1995 (NDR, 1995). This video shows the victims of the attack on the Tokyo subway system and provides background information about sarin, a poison gas used in the attacks.

3.4.2 Texts

For each of the three conflicts, escalation-oriented and de-escalation-oriented texts were developed. The organisation of the text materials was oriented to the checklist named in section 1.8 (Kempf, 2003). First, texts were prepared for the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" conflict. These texts then served as the basis for writing texts for the other two conflicts, whereby an effort was made to ensure a maximum degree of parallelism between the de-escalation- and the escalation-oriented texts.

3.4.3 Manipulation check

In order to obtain information on how participants perceived the conflict parties, the participants were asked to rate:

- to what extent they felt attached to each of the conflict parties
- to what extent each of the conflict parties was responsible for the general situation that led to the acts of terrorism or to the massacre in East Timor
- how much responsibility for injustice could be assigned to each of the conflict parties
- how much participants themselves had learned via the media about the respective conflict

3.4.4 Evaluations of the texts

In order to obtain a measure of the extent to which the participants agreed with the texts, they were asked to give ratings on the following dimensions, among others:

- their personal agreement with the argumentation
- the extent to which the facts were described accurately or were distorted
- the journalist's expert knowledge of the reported events
- the general quality of the text

As part of the data analysis of this study, these items were included in an analysis of scale construction. Because the item "journalist's expert knowledge" produced no increase in Cronbach's Alpha, it was dropped from the scale. The new scale, based on the remaining three items, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.87.

The scale was further studied by means of factor analysis (Main Component Analysis). One factor was extracted (Selection criterion: Eigenvalue greater than one) which explained about 80% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 2.40.

3.4.5 Evaluation of concrete military measures

In order to obtain a measure of how much participants accepted concrete military measures, they were asked to rate the appropriateness of military measures including:

- air strikes on camps for training terrorists and/or soldiers
- the risk of killing a person during "police action" linked to an act of terrorism or the massacre in East Timor, respectively
- the attempt to kill a person with an air strike
- the attempt to destroy Al-Qaida or the Aum Cult by military measures, or the attempt to end human rights abuses in East Timor

As part of the data analysis of this study, these items were entered into an analysis of scale construction. The scale yielded a value of 0.78 for Cronbach's Alpha.

The scale was further studied by means of factor analysis (Main Component Analysis). One factor was extracted (Selection criterion: eigenvalue greater than one) which explained about 60% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 2.41.

3.4.6 Acceptance of military measures in general

In order to examine the acceptance of military measures in general, a "Terrorism Questionnaire" was presented that was developed by Eckstein-Jackson & Sparr (2005). This questionnaire asks about the acceptance of military measures in certain contexts. All the items of the questionnaire were included in the analysis for the scale construction. The scale yielded a value of 0.80 for Cronbach's Alpha. (This value is close to that reported by Eckstein-Jackson & Sparr, who found a value of 0.83.)

The scale was further examined by means of factor analysis (Main Component Analysis). One factor was extracted (Selection criterion: eigenvalue greater than one) which explained about 42% of the total variance and had an eigenvalue of 3.40.

4 Results

4.1 Manipulation check

In order to study the attitudes of the participants to the respective conflict parties, they were asked to rate them on several dimensions. Since the Levene Test of Homogeneity of Variances was significant in five of the seven analysed cases, the data were analysed using the Kruskal-Wallis Test (as a parameter-free test): The "conflict" variable was significant for all of the dependent variables, with the exception of "attachment to the 'victim'" (cf. Table 2). The "text" factor significantly influenced only "responsibility 'victim'," $p < .001$, and "injustice 'victim'," $p = .001$ (cf. Table 3).

	attachment to "perpetrator"	attachment to "victim"	responsibility "perpetrator"	responsibility "victim"	injustice "perpetrator"	injustice "victim"	conflict familiarity
Asymptotic Significance	.000	.701	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 2: Influence of the conflict factor on the variables of the manipulation check

	attachment to "perpetrator"	attachment to "victim"	responsibility "perpetrator"	responsibility "victim"	injustice "perpetrator"	injustice "victim"	conflict familiarity
Asymptotic Significance	.169	.536	.365	.000	.231	.001	.642

Table 3: Influence of the text factor on the variables of the manipulation check

4.1.1 Attachment to the conflict parties

The significant influence of conflict on "attachment to 'perpetrator'" is due to the fact that attachment to Indonesia was distinctly higher than to Al-Qaida and the Aum Cult.

Mean Ranks for *Conflict* on attachment to "perpetrator": Al-Qaida: 38.5; Indonesia: 67.2; Aum Cult: 39.8

4.1.2 Responsibility of conflict parties for the overall situation

There were significant influences of conflict on the attribution of responsibility to both the "perpetrator" and the "victim" for the overall situation leading up to the massacre or attacks. Indonesia received higher ratings of "responsibility 'perpetrator'" than the Aum Cult and Al-Qaida. Among the "victim" groups, the USA received the highest rating of ascribed responsibility, East Timor the lowest. Moreover, de-escalation-oriented texts produced a significantly higher degree of responsibility attributed to the "victim" compared with escalation-oriented texts.

Mean Ranks for *Conflict* on responsibility "perpetrator": Al-Qaida: 38.0; Indonesia: 65.3; Aum Cult: 42.2
Mean Ranks for *Conflict* on responsibility "victim": USA: 63.2; East Timor: 34.5; Japan: 47.9
Mean Ranks for *Text* on responsibility "victim": Escalation-orientation: 37.0; De-escalation-orientation: 60.0

4.1.3 Injustice of conflict parties

We found that conflicts exerted a significant influence on the attribution of injustice to both "perpetrators" and "victims." Among the "perpetrator" groups, the highest degree of committed injustice was ascribed to the Aum Cult, the lowest to Indonesia. Among the victim groups, the USA was assigned the greatest degree of committed injustice, and Japan the lowest.

The text factor also had a significant effect in the case of "injustice 'victim'." An inspection of the ranks shows that the de-escalation-oriented texts led to an increase in the attribution of committed injustice to the victim.

Mean Ranks for *Conflict* on injustice "perpetrator": Al-Qaida: 47.9; Indonesia: 37.1; Aum Cult: 60.4
Mean Ranks for *Conflict* on injustice "victim": USA: 72.8; East Timor: 37.4; Japan: 33.3
Mean Ranks for *Text* on injustice "victim": Escalation-orientation: 38.3; De-escalation-orientation: 57.5

4.1.4 Familiarity with the conflict

The conflict had a significant effect on familiarity with the conflict. The highest level of familiarity was found for the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" conflict (Mean Rank: 73.1), followed by "Japan vs. Aum Cult" (44.4) and, last of all, "Indonesia vs. East Timor" (27.8).

4.2 Evaluations of text versions

4.2.2 Factors influencing text evaluations

In order to investigate how various factors affect text evaluations, a three-way analysis of variance for unrelated measures was computed, with text, conflict and sex of participant as independent variables.

Expected study result: Based on hypothesis b and the operationalisations, it was expected that participants exposed to the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" experimental condition would accept escalation-oriented texts more readily than would participants exposed to the other conditions. In the case of de-escalation-oriented texts, the reverse was expected. So, a corresponding interaction of the text and conflict factors was expected.

Results:

There was a significant main effect of the text factor ($F_{(1,84)} = 15.5, p < .001$; cf. Table 4). This effect is due to the fact that de-escalation-oriented texts were preferred compared to escalation-oriented texts (cf. Figure 1). *There was no significant interaction between the text and conflict factors* ($F_{(2,84)} = 1.22, n.s.$). So, the expected results were not found.

(There was a significant interaction between the text and sex variables ($F_{(1,84)} = 4.86, p < .05$))

Source	Sum of Squares Type III	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance	Partial Eta-Squared
CONFLICT	.252	2	.126	.067	.935	.002
TEXT	29.260	1	29.260	15.498	.000	.156
SEX	1.760	1	1.760	.932	.337	.011
CONFLICT * TEXT	4.590	2	2.295	1.216	.302	.028
CONFLICT * SEX	5.674	2	2.837	1.502	.228	.035
TEXT * SEX	9.168	1	9.168	4.856	.030	.055
CONFLICT * TEXT * SEX	1.363	2	.682	.361	.698	.009
Error	158.597	84	1.888			
Total	1964.556	96				

Table 4: Three-way ANOVA for unrelated measures; DV: text evaluation

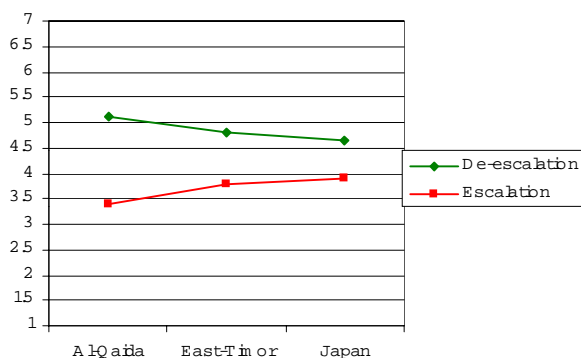


Figure 1: Effects of the various texts and conflicts on the acceptance of the text evaluations

4.3 Evaluation of concrete military measures

4.3.2 Factors influencing the acceptance of concrete military measures

In order to investigate what effect different factors had on the acceptance of concrete military measures, a three-way ANOVA was calculated for unrelated measures, with text, conflict and sex as independent variables.

Expected results:

On the basis of the operationalisations, the hypotheses suggested the following results:

- a) For all three conflicts, the readers of escalation-oriented texts would accept concrete military measures in the respective conflicts to a higher degree than readers of de-escalation-oriented texts. A corresponding main effect of the text factor was expected.
- c) Participants exposed to the *Al-Qaida vs. USA* experimental condition would accept concrete military measures to a higher degree than the other participants. A corresponding main effect of the conflict factor was expected.
- d) Participants exposed to the experimental condition *Al-Qaida vs. USA* would be less influenced by the texts with respect to their acceptance of concrete military measures. A corresponding interaction between the text and conflict factors was expected.

Results:

There was a significant main effect of the text factor, ($F_{(1,84)} = 3.94, p = .05$, cf. Table 5). Escalation-oriented texts resulted in greater acceptance of concrete military measures compared to de-escalation-oriented texts (cf. Figure 2). This result is consistent with hypothesis a. Moreover, there was a significant main effect of the sex factor, ($F_{(1,84)} = 6.68, p < .05$). (As is apparent from Figure 3, female participants were less accepting of concrete military measures than were male participants.)

No significant main effect appeared for the conflict factor ($F_{(2,84)} = 2.18, n.s.$); there was only a slight tendency in the

direction ($p=0.12$) of expectation *c*, cf. Figure 3. There were no significant interactions between the conflict and text factors ($F_{(2,84)} = 0.047, n.s.$). So, expected result *d* was not confirmed.

Source	Sum of Squares Type III	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance	Partial Eta-Squared
CONFLICT	8.103	2	4.051	2.182	.119	.049
TEXT	7.315	1	7.315	3.939	.050	.045
SEX	12.398	1	12.398	6.676	.012	.074
CONFLICT * TEXT	.173	2	8.659E-02	.047	.954	.001
CONFLICT * SEX	3.902	2	1.951	1.051	.354	.024
TEXT * SEX	.510	1	.510	.275	.601	.003
CONFLICT * TEXT * SEX	9.462	2	4.731	2.548	.084	.057
Error	156.000	84	1.857			
Total	1555.375	96				

Table 5: Three-way ANOVA for unrelated measures; DV: Concrete military measures

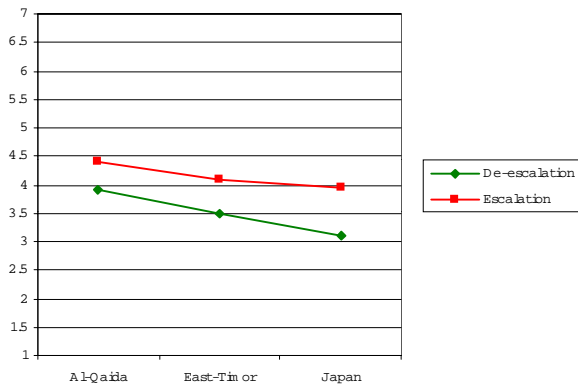


Figure 2: Effects of the various texts and conflicts on the acceptance of concrete military measures

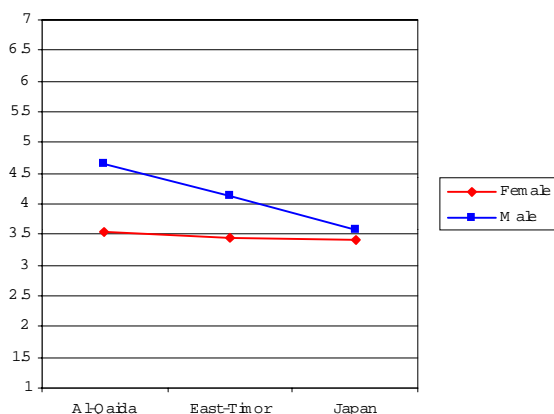


Figure 3: Effects of sex and conflicts on the acceptance of concrete military measures

4.4 Evaluation of military measures in general

4.4.2 Factors influencing the acceptance of military measures in general

Expected result:

On the basis of the operationalisations, the hypothesis suggested the following result:

- a) For all three conflicts, the readers of escalation-oriented texts would accept military measures in general to a higher degree than would readers of de-escalation-oriented texts. A corresponding main effect of the text factor was expected.

Results:

In order to investigate what effects different factors have on the acceptance of military measures in general, a three-way ANOVA was calculated for unrelated measures, with text, conflict and sex as independent variables.

There was a significant main effect of the text factor, ($F_{(1,84)} = 6.87, p = .01$, cf. Table 6). Reading escalation-oriented texts resulted in a higher degree of acceptance of military measures in general, compared to reading de-escalation-oriented texts (cf. Figure 4). This result is consistent with hypothesis a.

Source	Sum of Squares Type III	df	Mean Squares	F	Significance	Partial Eta-Squared
CONFLICT	.739	2	.370	.735	.483	.017
TEXT	3.456	1	3.456	6.873	.010	.076
SEX	1.839	1	1.839	3.657	.059	.042
CONFLICT * TEXT	.141	2	7.058E-02	.140	.869	.003
CONFLICT * SEX	.920	2	.460	.915	.404	.021
TEXT * SEX	.371	1	.371	.737	.393	.009
CONFLICT * TEXT * SEX	2.334	2	1.167	2.321	.104	.052
Error	42.233	84	.503			
Total	797.211	96				

Table 6: Three-way ANOVA for unrelated measures. DV: Military measures in general

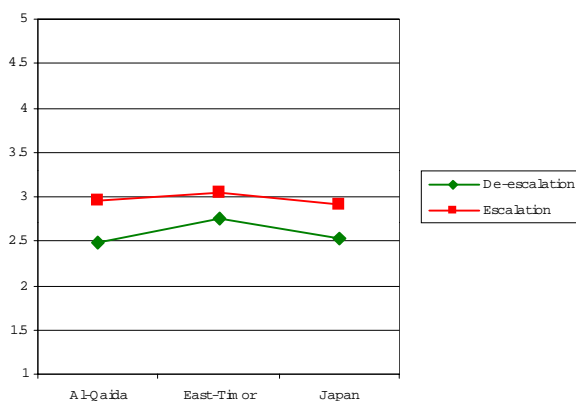


Figure 4: Effects of the texts and conflicts on the acceptance of military measures in general

5 Discussion

5.1 The effects of the examined factors

5.1.1 Influence of the texts on

... text evaluations

De-escalation-oriented texts were rated more positively than escalation-oriented texts. This could be especially interesting for journalists, for whom reader reaction is a criterion for text production. However, it has to be considered that the texts

used here were relatively extreme with respect to their escalation- or de-escalation-orientation, so that the tendency of the argumentation was conspicuous. This might have favoured the result that the de-escalation-oriented texts were rated better, since a higher degree of social acceptability might be linked to that kind of argumentation. Of special importance is the fact that the sample consisted of undergraduates and graduate students, who could differ from other societal groups in their acceptance of de-escalation-orientations. Kempf (2005) reports on two studies that investigated the influence of texts with less extreme (de-) escalation-orientations on more heterogeneous samples. Both studies found that (moderate) de-escalation-oriented texts were not judged to be worse than those with a (moderate) escalation-orientation; in one of the studies, which used readers of prestigious newspapers as the subject sample, de-escalation-oriented texts were even more positively accepted. However, the ratings in these studies could still have been influenced by a tendency of the participants to give socially acceptable responses in the "rational" settings of studies associated with "science."

Moreover, it should be considered that in all of these studies (including the study on which this paper is based) the participants could not choose which text they read. When it comes to the question of selection, it is quite conceivable that many readers tend to pay more attention to more sensational coverage: Ratings of texts do not necessarily reflect the selection of texts and newspapers. This point may be addressed by future research.

A further qualification concerns the constraints of newspaper production. Fawcett (2002) made a case study of two Northern Irish newspapers that were endeavouring to further more peaceful relations between the conflict parties. However, according to Fawcett's analysis, these newspapers frequently reverted to a typical confrontational style of framing, sometimes even within the same article. This suggests that in the normal course of newspaper production it might be rather difficult to shift towards consistently de-escalation-oriented coverage.

... acceptance of military measures

Hypothesis a was: *Readers of escalation-oriented texts will accept military measures to a greater extent than readers of de-escalation-oriented texts.* This expectation was confirmed by the analyses of how the texts influenced the acceptance of concrete military measures and military measures in general.

It could be rewarding for future studies to examine the initial levels of subjects before they are influenced, in order to determine whether escalation- or de-escalation-oriented texts or both chiefly produce the differences.

5.1.2 Influence of the conflicts on ...

... text evaluations

The conflict factor did not significantly influence the evaluations of the texts. The corresponding hypothesis b was: *If readers feel attached to one party of a highly-escalated violent conflict, escalation-oriented texts will be more accepted than in cases in which involvement is low. The opposite will be true for de-escalation-oriented texts.* According to the operationalisations, it was expected that participants exposed to the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" condition would accept escalation-oriented texts to a greater extent and de-escalation-oriented texts to a lesser extent than participants exposed to other conditions. This hypothesis was not confirmed, for reasons that will be discussed under 4.6.

... acceptance of concrete military measures

The expected result for the influence of the conflicts was, according to hypothesis c: *If readers feel attached to one party of a highly escalated violent conflict, they will accept military measures to a greater extent than in cases in which involvement is low.* It was correspondingly expected that participants exposed to the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" condition would accept military measures to a greater extent than other participants. However, only a slight tendency in that direction was observed. Future studies will have to show whether significant effects can be found. Hypothesis d was: *If readers feel attached to one party of a highly escalated violent conflict, their acceptance of military measures will be less easily influenced by texts.* It was therefore expected that participants in the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" condition would be less influenced by the texts than other participants. However, a corresponding interaction of the text and conflict factors was not found. The influence of the texts was more generalised than was expected. This suggests that the activation of certain behavioural norms (possibly triggered by the evocation of certain needs and goals) can be as effective in cases of familiar contexts as in cases of less familiar ones.

... acceptance of military measures in general

The analyses of the acceptance of military measures in general found no significant main effect of the conflict factor and no significant interactions.

5.1.2 Influence of the sex factor

The sex (of participants) factor had a significant main effect on the acceptance of concrete military measures. Female participants accepted concrete military measures less than did male participants. This result is consistent with Grussendorf

(2002) and McAlister (2001), who report a greater acceptance of military measures by male as opposed to female participants.

5.2 Interim review of the results

Texts: De-escalation-oriented texts were preferred by participants and resulted in a lower degree of acceptance of military measures compared to escalation-oriented texts.

Conflicts: This factor did not produce any significant main effect and was not involved in any significant interaction.

Sex: Female participants accepted concrete military measures to a lesser extent than did male participants.

5.3 Mediating variables

5.3.1 Conflicts

The different conflicts showed a strong effect (each $p < .001$) on the following variables of the manipulation check: attachment to the "perpetrator"; injustice attributed to the "perpetrator" and "victim"; responsibility for the general situation attributed to the "perpetrator" and the "victim"; familiarity with the conflict.

The reason why the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" conflict was selected is that this is a highly escalated conflict, and it was expected that participants would feel a strong attachment to the USA as a "victim group." Contrary to this expectation, strong attachment was not found:

- Participants rated their attachment to the victim groups similarly.
- Among the victim groups, the USA was rated highest in terms of committed injustice.
- Among the victim groups, the USA was, likewise, assigned the highest degree of responsibility (for the overall situation leading up to the acts of terrorism).

These judgments suggest that the "Al-Qaida vs. USA" conflict is not very well suited to operationalising attachment and favouritism in a highly escalated conflict and that hypotheses b,c and d were not ideally addressed by this conflict. Future studies examining involvement in highly escalated conflicts could therefore analyse the reactions of participants who are members of one of the conflict parties, to ensure a high degree of attachment and favouritism.

5.3.2 Texts

Significant results were obtained in the case of "responsibility 'victim'" and "injustice 'victim'" (each $p \leq .001$). Readers of escalation-oriented texts attributed to the respective "victim group" distinctly lower levels of responsibility for the situation leading to the acts of terrorism or the massacre. They also ascribed a lower degree of committed injustice to the respective victim group. As escalation-oriented texts depict the actions and intentions of the conflict parties much more one-sidedly, this effect is plausible. It is interesting that the influence of the texts on readers' perceptions of the conflict parties was only significant when "victim groups" were concerned. The texts were not able to significantly improve the image of the "perpetrator groups." Apparently it is not easy to change the image of a group whose violent "acts of war" are highly visible. So, the differences yielded by de-escalation-oriented texts and escalation-oriented texts in the present study seem to be mainly attributable to the perception of the "victim group" as having contributed to causing the conflict.

Possibly, the perception of any conflict group could not be changed easily in cases where readers are members of a conflict group, as group members have a tendency to defend a positive image of their own group (cf. 1.6). Further research is needed here.

5.4 Specific features of the Al-Qaida vs. USA conflict

The analyses of the *Al-Qaida vs. USA* conflict showed a surprising divergence: On the one hand, this conflict evoked the highest degree of acceptance of concrete military measures. (*However, statistically this was only a tendency, with $p = 0.12$. A future study with a larger sample size could try to find support for a potential difference.*) On the other hand, the variables of the manipulation check turned out to be more unfavourable than for the other "victim groups." The USA was rated highest in terms of attributed committed injustice and responsibility for the general situation leading up to the attacks. If the variables of the manipulation check are considered alone, a lower degree of acceptance of concrete military measures could be expected compared to the other conflicts. When the evaluations of the texts are examined, no significant differences can be found that are attributable to the conflicts. So, how did the different degrees of acceptance arise in the case of concrete military measures? The ratings could be a reflection of past media and societal discourse, in which it was common to judge military measures as appropriate behavioural responses in special situations. A second possibility is that participants may have felt threatened by Al-Qaida and consequently were inclined to accept military measures in this case. Why did the USA fare so poorly on the questions of the manipulation check? The results could be due to a critical stance on the

part of participants regarding elements of US foreign policy. Especially the latest war in Iraq has been heavily criticised in German public discourse, where much of the public is opposed. Also, reports of prisoner abuse at Guantanamo Bay and the Abu-Graib prison have adversely affected the public image of US foreign policy. Possibly this negative image also influenced the ratings of the manipulation check.

The attributed committed injustice and responsibility of the USA could also be partially due to the mechanism of "defensive attribution." Brehm & Kassin (1996) collected studies on that mechanism and found the following overall results: A higher degree of responsibility was attributed by readers to victims of accidents, when:

- readers were in a situation similar to that of the victims
- readers were emotionally affected by the accident
- the accident had serious consequences.

By analogy, it is conceivable that the USA was held particularly responsible for acts of terrorism because the cultural background of the victims was similar to that of the readers. That is a possible explanation for the fact that participants, on the one hand, assigned a high degree of responsibility to the USA, while they demanded concrete military measures to a slightly higher degree, on the other hand.

5.5 Types of effects produced by conflict coverage

The present study demonstrated that framing a conflict in either an escalation- or de-escalation-oriented manner can have a significant influence on the acceptance of military measures. The text material used in the study is based on Kempf's checklist, which is in turn related to the psychological mechanisms cited above. However, it is not clear to what relative degree those psychological mechanisms contributed to the effects of this study. There are various ways in which the techniques of Kempf's checklist and the associated psychological mechanisms could interact. On an individual level, it is conceivable that the presence of several escalation-oriented elements works additively: "The more elements are present, the more the reader is influenced towards an antagonistic attitude." Alternatively, certain elements could be necessary and/or sufficient to activate an antagonistic attitude ("threshold models"). The different psychological mechanisms probably interact in a more complex manner. This is a broad area for possible future research. Referring back to Gamson, conflict experiences, either direct or via the media, probably influence how readers will react to certain text elements. Another line of research could address the interaction of behavioural norms and goals. For example, if an "opponent" is perceived as extremely menacing, and a goal of defence is present, how does this affect the personal limits of appropriate behaviour? Presumably, some people change their behavioural norms more readily than others. Referring back to section 1.2, people with an orientation towards personal moral principles do not change their norms as readily as others (by definition). So, it is conceivable that the link between goals and norms is subject to individual differences that could be correlated with a tendency to principle-guided moral judgements. Numerous other interactions among psychological mechanisms are imaginable, which should keep researchers busy in that area.

6 Conclusions

The most distinctive result of this study concerned the influence of the texts. In all the analyses including that factor, the influence of the *text* achieved a level of significance. De-escalation-oriented texts were favoured over escalation-oriented texts. Moreover, de-escalation-oriented texts resulted in a lower degree of acceptance of both *concrete* military measures and military measures *in general*. It is intriguing that the effect of the *texts* was much stronger than the influence of the *conflicts*. It is also remarkable that the extent of influencing produced by the texts in the case of "Al-Qaida vs. USA" was similar to that in the other conflicts, although the participants were much more familiar with the Al-Qaida vs. USA conflict. Obviously, the participants used different standards of evaluation, depending on the texts they read. It was argued in the present paper that various behavioural norms can be specifically activated by corresponding contexts. Various studies have indicated that people link situations to certain norms. Possibly, goals like the removal of a perceived menacing threat play a central role in this process of changing norms. The present study demonstrated that reading ostensible newspaper articles can influence the opinions of undergraduates and graduate students about issues of terrorism and military responses. This influence was even found in the case of conflicts with which participants were very familiar. Escalation-oriented texts often yielded mean values that were on the approval side towards military measures, while the mean values produced by the de-escalation-oriented texts tended toward rejection. This illustrates the special responsibility of journalists in covering conflicts.

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