Global Conflicts, Episodic Framing and Attitude Change Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
(Short paper)

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Abstract

The experiment compared the effects of episodic framing of the Checkpoint scenario and the Military Raid scenario in Global conflicts, a computerized simulation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on developing impartial attitudes regarding this conflict. The former presents a more human, individual and personal framing of the conflict than does the latter. 210 Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian undergraduate students participated in the experiment, they filled in questionnaires measuring attitudes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before and after playing the scenarios. Results suggested that participants playing the Checkpoint scenario became more impartial toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unlike those playing the Military Raid scenario. The results show that computerized simulations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be used for attitude change intervention, but the framing of the story in the game may be crucial in determining whether the players will become impartial regarding the situation or not.

Keywords: Games for Change, Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Attitude Change, Computerized Simulations, Episodic Framing; Persuasive Games.

Introduction

This article compares episodic framing outcomes of the only two scenarios of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Global Conflicts on generating impartial attitudes (i.e., being able to look at the situation through the lenses of both sides). Global Conflicts is a role-playing computerized simulation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The episodic framing strategy was selected because this framing strategy may point out differences between the only two scenarios in Global Conflicts by examining the extent of the scenario presented in personal, individual and human interest terms (e.g., Iyengar, 1991). In fact, previous studies have only examined attitude outcomes of the Checkpoint scenario (e.g., Cuhadar and Kampf, 2015; Kampf and Cuhadar, 2015) without conducting a comparative study including the Military Raid scenario.

Based on previous research in the conflict resolution field (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014), it can be expected that the Checkpoint scenario, more than the Military Raid scenario, may produce empathy and identification with the "other" side, eliciting more impartial attitudes regarding the situation by being able to look at the conflict through more impartial lenses.

In addition, this study examined whether Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian young people relate similarly to the two scenarios in Global Conflicts, because we know very little about whether directly involved parties to the conflict relate similarly to the same situation (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2013; Salomon, 2008; Salomon and Cairns, 2009).

Research hypotheses

H1: Participants playing the Checkpoint scenario will become more impartial toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unlike those playing the Military Raid scenario or playing neither.

H2: Israeli-Jewish participants playing the Checkpoint scenario will become more impartial regarding the conflict compared to Palestinian participants playing it.

Methodology

Participants

210 Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian undergraduate students from the Departments of Communication and Political Science in Tel Aviv University and in Al-Quds University participated in the study.

50 Israeli-Jewish students and 30 Palestinian students played the Checkpoint scenario, while 40 Israeli-Jewish students and 30 Palestinian students played the Military Raid scenario. 30 Israeli-Jewish students and 30 Palestinian students did not play the scenarios. The groups did not differ in key characteristics that could provide alternative explanation for the results (Table 1).

Table 1. The key characteristics of the experimental and control groups

	Age M(SD)	Male (%)	Political attitudes Left (1) to Right (10) M(SD)	Religiosity: Religious (1) to Secular (10) M(SD)	Playing a digital game in the last 6 months (%)	Interest in the conflict: Not at all (1) to very much (4) M(SD)
Checkpoint	23.1 (1.25)	36%	6.02 (2.45)	6.7 (1.17)	45%	3.54 (0.36)
Military Raid	22.4 (1.18)	33%	5.67 (2.37)	7.79 (1.15)	47%	3.71 (0.25)
No scenario	22.9 (1.23)	34%	5.88 (2.29)	6.45 (1.12)	48%	3.46 (0.45)

The game Global Conflicts

Global Conflicts is an award-winning educational game developed in 2010 by Serious Games Interactive in Denmark (https://school.seriousgames.net/). This study selected the Checkpoint scenario and the Military Raid scenario elaborated earlier.

When the participants opened the study website, they were presented with instructions regarding the scenario they were supposed to play in the game. The site was programmed to randomly assign participants to play one of the two scenarios. They were then instructed that their task was to write a news report for a Western newspaper describing the scenario from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives.

Design and procedure

The experiment was conducted as part of classes in qualitative research methods and participants were randomly divided to play one of the two scenarios or not playing them. The data were collected in the first week of June 2017.

Measures

The attitude measure examined the 'rightness' of each side on key issues in the conflict including water, refugees, borders, settlements, Jerusalem, and security, using the following scale: 1. Palestinians are absolutely right, 2. Palestinians are somewhat right, 3. Both sides are equally right, 4. Israelis are somewhat right, and 5. Israelis are absolutely right. In order to measure impartiality, the data was transformed by measuring the distance to the middle-point which represents impartiality. This measure has already been used in previous studies conducted with Global Conflicts (Cuhadar and Kampf, 2014; Cuhadar and Kampf, 2015), and is based on a questionnaire developed by conflict resolution scholars in Israel and Palestine (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2013; Rosen and Salomon, 2011).

Statistical procedures

Table 2 shows a Repeated Measures ANCOVA, investigating the effects of scenario type (Checkpoint, Military Raid, No scenario) and nationality (Israeli-Jewish or Palestinian) on attitude values before and after the game intervention.

Results

Scenario type and attitudes toward key issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Participants playing the Checkpoint scenario got closer to the middle-point of impartiality, unlike those playing the Military raid scenario (Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

Israeli-Jewish participants playing the Checkpoint scenario got closer to the middle-point of impartiality regarding key issues in the conflict compared to Palestinian participants playing this scenario. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

Table 2. Nationality and scenario type effects on attitudes toward the conflict (ANCOVA)

Effects	MS	*F*	Partial eta squared
Time	0.18	0.23	0
Time * Nationality	17.23	10.21*	.04
Time * Role Type	25.26	17.6**	.18
Time * Nationality * Role Type	5.24	6.54*	.04
Time * Gender	0.02	0.18	0
Time * Religiosity	0.11	1.65	0.01
Time * Political Ideology	0.02	0.05	0
Time*Consuming News about the Conflict	0	0.03	0
Time * Interest in the Conflict	0.21	2.15	0.02

*$p < .05$, **$p < .0001$

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Nationality and scenario type effects on attitudes toward the conflict

	Pre-Game Intervention M(SD)	Post-Game Intervention M(SD)
Israeli-Jews		
Checkpoint	1.74(0.16)*	1.05(0.02)*
Military Raid	1.79(0.49)	1.53(0.25)
No-scenario	1.70(0.16)	1.60(0.29)
Palestinians		
Checkpoint	1.75(0.23)*	1.31(0.28)*
Military Raid	1.62(0.35)	1.41(0.28)
No-Scenario	1.71(0.25)	1.67(0.31)

*p < .05

Conclusions and Discussion

The results suggested that Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian participants became more impartial regarding the conflict after playing the Checkpoint scenario, but not the Military Raid scenario. This may be due to the different episodic framing of the story in the two scenarios. The Checkpoint scenario, more than the Military Raid scenario, presents a personal, human interest and individual elements of both Israelis and Palestinians at a checkpoint in the Palestinian territories, an experience which may produce empathy and identification with both sides, generating more impartial attitudes toward the situation. Yet it should be noted that this finding may be also attributed to other elements in the scenario (e.g., presenting both sides as victims of the situation) (e.g., Bar-Tal, 2013; Kampf and Cuhadar, 2015) which require more studies in the future.

Interestingly this study indicated that Israeli-Jews playing the Checkpoint scenario in Global Conflicts became more impartial toward the conflict than Palestinian playing it. Yet one should not underestimate that despite the strong ethnocentric attitudes toward the conflict, Palestinian young people still obtained relatively positive attitude outcomes in this study, developing more impartial attitudes after playing the Checkpoint scenario.

The current study's theoretical findings are applicable to various fields, such as communication, education, political science, game design and conflict resolution. The study shows that computerized simulations are capable of inducing changes in attitudes about complex situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as promoting and educating the younger generations about peace, and informing them about the situation and the world around them beyond existing attitudes and stereotypes. While face-to-face interaction is limited and precluded in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, computer-mediated communication, much like playing the Checkpoint scenario in Global Conflicts, has the potential of facilitating conflict resolution beyond existing sociopolitical norms (Kampf, 2011; Walther, 2009).

A practical implication of this study may be that designers of computerized simulations focusing on intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian situation should pay close attention to the framing of the story in the game in order to increase the likelihood of a balanced perspective taking. This study indicated that in order to optimize the results the story should be framed in episodic terms focusing on personal, individual and human interest representation of particular cases of individuals on both sides of the divide.

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