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On resonance: a study of culture-dependent reinterpretations of extremist violence in Israeli media discourse

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Abstract

When and why do communities accept novel ideas as intuitively convincing? In this study, we make use of the socio-cultural fragmentation of Israeli society to expose the discursive processes shaping the culture-dependent resonance of ideas. Specifically, we trace how Israeli president Reuven Rivlin's interpretation of two lethal attacks by Jewish extremists on a Palestinian family and the Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade was received across Israel's ultra-orthodox, settler, LGBT, and Palestinian communities, as well as the mainstream right, center, and left. In a comparative analysis of media coverage catering to these groups, we distinguish six discursive responses to proposed ideas, which depend on their perception as plausible and appropriate given prior community beliefs. Our findings suggest a distinction between two possible meanings of resonance: Some ideas 'click' and are seamlessly appropriated in passing by a community, while others 'strike a chord' and raise a salient and emotional public debate.

Keywords

comparative analysis, cultural belief system, cultural resonance, extremism, frame analysis, news discourse

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Disruptive events challenge societies to make sense of the available information and derive valuable meaning. Following the initial reports of extraordinary occurrences, numerous actors contribute to constructing possible accounts, emphasizing different aspects and drawing different conclusions. However, only few such constructions 'resonate': They are widely accepted as intuitively convincing and relevant, and become part of the societally shared interpretation of the event (Gamson et al., 1992; Vliegenthart and van Zoonen, 2011).

Despite the ubiquity of resonance processes in public sense making, there is surprisingly little scholarly knowledge about the culture-dependent processes that render ideas intuitively convincing. The most common approach focuses on external drivers of persuasion, such as the credibility of sources and media, or the mode of presentation, which have little to do with the presented ideas themselves (e.g. Druckman, 2003; Fox and Irwin, 2010; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). Others have linked the persuasiveness of ideas to general message properties, including the use of evidence or the (informal-)logical coherence of arguments (e.g. Macoubrie, 2003; O'Keefe, 2003). However, this approach explains neither the success of unfounded and illogical ideas nor the differential resonance of equally viable interpretations. By contrast, researchers that focus on the role of cognitive (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973) or professional journalistic heuristics (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001) have acknowledged that persuasiveness often depends also on the match between an idea and specified prior beliefs. However, most research has focused on individual-level and situational factors, such as personal knowledge, involvement, and processing goals (e.g. Baden and Lecheler, 2012; Ottati and Wyer, 1990), and ignored the role of cultural, shared beliefs. While the cultural contingency of persuasive appeal has been often noted, most authors have resorted to vague metaphors (e.g. ideas 'resonate' (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) or possess 'narrative fidelity' Snow and Benford, 1988), or treated resonance as attribute of the presented ideas (for instance, 'strong' vs. 'weak' frames; Chong and Druckman, 2010; Rhee, 1997; Tewksbury et al., 2000). In this article, we aim to uncover some of the discursive, cultural processes that lead communities to preferentially accept specific ideas and reject or reinterpret others to achieve resonant meaning.

In order to expose the subtle processes underlying resonance, this article employs a comparative, discourse analytic design: It departs from two lethal attacks by Jewish extremists on 30 July 2015 – one against a Palestinian family home in the occupied West Bank and one against the Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade – which shook Israelis' deep-rooted conviction that terrorism is generally perpetrated by the 'others'. Specifically, we trace how a controversial interpretation offered by Israel's president Reuven Rivlin resonated within Israeli media discourse, both across the political mainstream and among those communities most directly affected by the attacks. Through our analysis, we distinguish two interacting processes: a heuristic, epistemic evaluation of the plausibility of ideas and a normative evaluation of their appropriateness. Depending on the constellation of evaluations, the same idea may be ignored, rapidly and seamlessly assimilated into regular discourse, or trigger heated, often lasting debates.

Theoretical points of departure

Societal sense making and journalism

Societal and cultural belief systems are not static but evolve over time. Novel events and ideas keep challenging shared beliefs, and are discussed among the members of each group, updating and reaffirming their common knowledge (Baden and Stalpouskaya, 2015; Graber, 1988; Neuman et al., 1992). Through public, mediated debate, each group aims to reach agreement as to how events can be understood and how this affects existing beliefs about the state, functioning, and normative order of the world (Gamson et al., 1992; Moscovici, 1961). Ideas that resonate with cultural beliefs are appropriated and assimilated, while others are discarded. In this process, the media – in particular, the news – play a critical role (e.g. Entman, 1991; Ferree, 2003; Gamson, 1988; Noakes and Johnston, 2005; Shen, 2004; Snow and Benford, 1988; Sotirovic, 2003; Van Gorp, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 1997), owing to their ability to synchronize the understandings of large parts of a group. Observing ongoing public debates, often actively participating in these, and communicating relevant ideas back to a mass audience, journalists are among the key actors shaping the ongoing adoption and adaptation of ideas into shared cultural beliefs (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Sotirovic, 2003).

In this process, journalists take in several important roles. First, journalists act as primary gatekeepers deciding whether to expose the community to novel ideas and events. Besides a range of general news values, this decision also depends on the extent to which news matter to a group (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001, 2016). Next, journalists routinely 'domesticate' the news (Alasuutari et al., 2013; Clausen, 2004). Appealing to shared values, interests, and emotions, while foregrounding actors and other aspects that relate to the group, journalists 'construct[.] the meanings of these events in ways that are compatible with the culture and the dominant ideology' (Gurevitch et al., 1991: 206; see also Gans, 1979; Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden, 2016). They align current news within the context of ongoing public debates, link them to recently covered events and issues, and draw out implications for shared identities and agendas (Baden, forthcoming; Olausson, 2014). Following the initial coverage, furthermore, journalists recruit and amplify selected voices from within the group – as sources, commentators, letter writers, and so on – that provide additional contextualization. Placing, framing, and sometimes directly evaluating such contributions, finally, journalists moderate the public debate toward the emergence of widely acceptable interpretations (Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2015). In consequence, journalists' various interventions in 'transforming' the news (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden, 2016) constitute a deliberate effort at creating resonance.

Cultural resonance, plausibility, and appropriateness

Despite the scarcity of research on cultural resonance, studies in persuasion, argumentation, information processing, and related fields have described numerous factors that influence people's willingness to accept ideas as valid.

One strand of arguments, which gauges to what extent ideas are regarded as *plausible*, is primarily rooted in psychological and persuasion research (Johnson et al., 2005). Most notably, extant studies have documented that people regard ideas that as more plausible to

the extent that these sound familiar (Dechêne et al., 2010; Koch and Zerback, 2013; Zaller, 1992). In this view, people assess the believed truth of claims primarily based on a simple availability heuristic that responds to previous exposure to similar claims (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). While providing evidence helps (Hoeken and Hustinx, 2009; Zillmann, 1999) and obvious non-sequiturs may be rejected (O'Keefe and Jackson, 1995; Wilson and Sperber, 2012), this perspective explains how also incorrect or logically flawed ideas may be widely resonant. Importantly, as perceived plausibility depends not on the message alone but on its match with familiar, prior beliefs, heuristic processes can explain the emergence of culturally dependent resonance phenomena (Ferree, 2003). To the extent that prior beliefs are synchronized through societal discourse, a message may appear familiar and, hence, plausible to members of one group, yet be discarded as implausible in another. Ideas that affirm common myths, and shared ideologies, or popular stereotypes stand good chances to be widely accepted (Van Gorp, 2007), as do ideas that relate to recent debates and news (Baden, forthcoming; Baden and Stalpouskaya, 2015; Van Dijk, 1988). In consequence, the heightened perceived plausibility of ideas salient within a group feeds a self-reinforcing dynamic, which results in the likely affirmation of existing beliefs.

A second important strand, with roots in persuasion research and cultural studies, investigates to what extent ideas appear *appropriate* in the light of evaluative beliefs, norms, and values. Brewer (2001) has documented how people prefer ideas that refer to values they share and counter-argue claims that openly conflict with their attitudes (see also Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004; Nelson et al., 2015; Tourangeau and Rasinski, 1988). Especially values that touch upon personal or collective identities powerfully shape which ideas appear acceptable, while challenges to communities' positive self-evaluation tend to be repudiated (Rowling et al., 2001). Similarly to the judgment of plausibility, general message attributes (e.g. negativity and ambivalence) play only a secondary role. In consequence, shared identities, values, and attitudes give rise to culturally contingent evaluations of appropriateness, focusing on the congruence of an idea's normative implications. However, such evaluations do not rest on a simple heuristic but on a narrative process that relates an idea to a community's evaluative beliefs (Baden and de Vreese, 2008; Nelson et al., 2015). For instance, Goode and Ben Yehuda (1994) have shown how transgressions can be attributed to deviants, who are symbolically ostracized and pillorized, restoring positive collective self-evaluation (see also Kepplinger et al., 2012). In consequence, ideas should appear appropriate if they can be brought to affirm existing values and inappropriate where the group cannot dissociate itself from negative evaluations.

Closely related to judgments of appropriateness, there are indications that ideas may also be accepted for instrumental reasons if they further personal interests (e.g. Alasuutari et al., 2013; Druckman, 2003; Snow and Benford, 1988). However, only interests shared across a group can sustain cultural-level resonance, which is comparatively rare. Emotional appeal, by contrast, transcends cultural settings, and has been tied to heightened persuasiveness in anthropological, psychological, and communication research (e.g. Entman, 2003; Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004; Wikan, 2012). As empathy tends to be more pronounced toward similar groups (Keen, 2006), also emotional appeal can, to some extent, contribute to culturally contingent resonance. By contrast, most insights concerning argument quality highlight factors that increase persuasive appeal irrespective

of the social context (O'Keefe and Jackson, 1995), and, hence, cannot explain culture-specific resonance.

Importantly, cultural resonance is an emergent phenomenon. Individuals, not groups, initially decide whether they regard ideas as plausible, appropriate, or otherwise convincing, based on personal beliefs and attitudes (Rhee, 1997). However, socialization, shared experiences, mediated discourses, and other influences synchronize, to some extent, the beliefs and attitudes of individuals sharing specific life worlds, be they defined by ethnicity, nationality, geography, activity, gender, or other factors. If we define culture broadly as a set of shared beliefs and imaginations (Geertz, 1973), individuals sharing a culture should evaluate new ideas based on similar prior beliefs and find similar ideas resonant. Subsequently using these ideas in their own communication, they expose their interlocutors and audiences to the same views, rendering them familiar. If we define cultural groups as individuals with shared beliefs who engage in densified communication and, thus, recognize themselves as a cultural community, powerful self-reinforcing dynamics foster the resonance of similar ideas throughout the group (Moscovici, 1961). Especially individuals capable of communicating with large audiences – notably, journalists and others admitted onto the stage of the media – play a central role as catalysts in the cultural resonance process.

Researching resonance

Despite the ubiquity of resonance processes in public communication, their scientific investigation has remained a challenge for several reasons. First, most research on resonance-related phenomena focuses on culturally homogenous settings. Where participants, researchers, and even reviewers share similar beliefs, the specific cultural setting is easily naturalized, hiding cultural contingencies and misleading researchers to label ideas as 'inherently' resonant. Second, most research emphasized identifying patterns that apply irrespective of specific cultural settings. Researchers have studied universal heuristics (e.g. Tversky and Kahneman, 1973), general credibility factors (e.g. Renn and Levine, 1991), or global news values (e.g. Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), and thereby sidelined group-based variance. Third, consequently, there is very little relevant comparative research. Despite rising attention to culturally contingent communication practices (e.g. Hanitzsch et al., 2010) and contents (e.g. Wessler et al., 2016), the influence of cultural settings on reception and persuasion processes has remained largely unexplored. Fourth, while many researchers – notably, in cultural studies, anthropology, and sociological communication research – have described instances of cultural resonance, only few have systematically addressed the underlying social, cultural, and psychological mechanisms (for notable exceptions, see Ferree, 2003; Gamson et al., 1992; Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994; Moscovici, 1961).

Design and method

Material and approach

In this study, we address these challenges by exploiting a natural, 'quasi-experimental' setting. On 30 July 2015, two lethal attacks by Jewish extremists shook the Israeli public.

In the afternoon, an ultra-orthodox attacker stabbed six participants of the Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade, one of whom – a teenage girl – eventually died of her wounds. In the same night, extremist settlers torched a family home in the West Bank village Duma, killing an infant and severely injuring both parents, who died in hospital in the following days. A second injured child survived the attack. Amid the public outrage that followed, Israeli president Reuven Rivlin condemned both attacks as acts of Jewish terrorism and attributed part of the responsibility to Israeli society's lack of determination in countering violence and extremism. Expressing shame and calling for concerted societal and political change, this interpretation was discussed controversially throughout the country. By analyzing the differential reception of Rivlin's statement in Israeli mainstream society and among the four communities involved in the attacks – ultra-orthodox Jews and the Israeli lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, Jewish settlers, and Palestinians – we exploit the deep cultural rifts between these groups to expose the mechanisms underlying resonance.

Our analysis builds upon the coverage in seven outlets, which play a central role in the respective groups' public discourses. To gather the bandwidth of responses found within Israeli mainstream society, we rely on three opinion-leading news outlets representing the political left (the elite broadsheet *Haaretz*), right (the popular, free newspaper *Israel Hayom*), and center (the main commercial paper *Yedioth Ahronot*). Within each of the four subgroups, we selected outlets that reflect the group's mainstream: From the media addressing the settler and national-religious audience, we chose Channel 7 (Israel National News); from the ultra-orthodox community, we selected the online news portal Kikar Hashabat; for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, we included the Arabic-language online newspaper *Kul Al-Arab*; and among the LGBT community, we relied on the Facebook feeds of the two main community organizations, the Jerusalem Open House and Haaguda, the LGBT national association. From each outlet, we identified all texts covering the attacks, as well as further coverage related to Rivlin's statement. From this corpus, we determined which issues were linked to the events in each news discourse (notably, violence, extremism, homosexual rights, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, several government policies, and the roles of the respective communities). By tracing the coverage of these issues over 2 months prior to the attacks, we composed a reference corpus to identify related, established beliefs, values, and narratives in each community.

For the analysis, we employed a threefold comparative design: First, we compared Rivlin's interpretation of the attacks to their coverage in each outlet, including the coverage of the presidential statements themselves. Thereby, we identified which aspects were appropriated or emphasized, downplayed or omitted, and how they were embedded in each outlet's news narrative. Second, we compared the resulting news narratives to the same media's discourse before the attacks, identifying how each claim related to beliefs previously established in the group's discourse. Finally, we compared different instances of dealing with resonant or challenging claims across different media and communities, and identified recurrent patterns that point to the underlying mechanisms. To enable a systematic comparison, we relied on Entman's (1993) distinction between the problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation of frames: For each interpretation offered of the attacks, we collected statements that

contributed to each frame element, identified characteristic and recurrent claims, and compared them across the different outlets and corpora.

In the following, we first sketch the main differences in the communities' relevant beliefs, and present the interpretation offered by president Rivlin. After a brief overview over the mixed receptions of this interpretation, we discuss six recurrent response patterns that emerge from the analysis. In the final step, we analyze the occurrence of these patterns and point at characteristic relations between claims and established beliefs that contribute to explaining the cultural resonance of ideas.

Cultural belief systems

Without attempting a definite characterization of the relevant cultural belief systems of the observed groups, there are several widely shared beliefs and experiences that likely affect the resonance of Rivlin's account. To begin, most Israelis share the experience of numerous, extensively covered terrorist attacks by Palestinian radicals (e.g. Peffley et al., 2015). Accordingly, they should easily recognize a wide variety of terrorist acts (including arson and stabbings) and associate them primarily with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. By contrasts, major acts of Jewish terrorism are comparatively rare (see Ben Yehuda, 1993, for an overview). Most Jewish Israelis see their own society as under siege, where Jews engage in violence mostly or exclusively to defend themselves against terrorism and military threats. Only the left wing and part of the LGBT community regularly discuss also unjustified violence exercised in the context of the occupation and by racist, nationalist, religious, and homophobic extremists. Among the Palestinian population, Israeli structural and military violence is a salient theme (e.g. Jamal, 2013), and many view terrorism against Israel as understandable defensive act (Shamir and Shikaki, 2002).

The farther right a group, the more pronounced is the conviction that Jews are generally moral, and that criminal deviance is rooted in personal character flaws. Arabs are perceived as hostile by the center and right wing, hatefully so on the far right. Hatred of gays, citing biblical commands, is common among both settlers and ultra-orthodox communities. The center and mainstream right, by contrast, tend to endorse homosexual rights as proof of Israeli liberalism and 'fig leaf' (Gross, 2015) to distract from the illiberalism practiced toward other minorities. The farther left a group, the more are minorities viewed as fellow humans entitled to individual and collective rights. Crime and violence are contextualized in sociological terms and acknowledged as common in all societies, including the Jewish one.

Left-wing groups and the LGBT community tend to view juridical institutions as trustworthy and distrust the incumbent right-wing government, which they see as hijacked by extremist groups. Inversely, the right wing, including settlers, distrusts legal institutions (especially regarding human rights), and the center remains ambivalent. While the mainstream right supports executive politics – the paper *Israel Hayom* is widely understood as a mouthpiece of the prime minister – many settlers also distrust the political system for failing to defend them properly against Palestinians and the courts (e.g. Peffley et al., 2015). In consequence, while most mainstream groups and the LGBT community vest considerable trust in the security institutions, many settlers do not – implying that violent self-defense appears generally understandable.

Among the Arab population, the security institutions mostly appear as extended arm of hostile government politics (Jamal, 2013). Ultra-orthodox communities, finally, distance themselves from the state and rely on community institutions wherever possible (Friedman, 1991).

President Reuven Rivlin's interpretation

In his statement from 31 July 2015, published in Hebrew[1] and Arabic on 2 August in *Yedioth Ahronot*, president Rivlin broke with the common view that terrorism is essentially the domain of Israel's enemies, and that violent transgressions perpetrated by Jews are the acts of deviant criminals. Following Entman's (1993) four frame elements, Rivlin's *problem definition* stated that 'my people have chosen the path of terror'. Under the title 'I am ashamed', the president declared his pain (*moral evaluation: emotional*) at the realization (*moral evaluation: moral*) that the Jewish people had 'lost their humanity': 'This way is not my way. This way is not the way of the State of Israel, nor the way of the Jewish people'. Interpreting the attacks not as isolated cases but as part of a wider 'phenomenon' (*problem definition: quality*), he located responsibility not exclusively with an extremist 'ideological group […] dangerous and determined to destroy the bridges we have worked so hard to build' (*causal attribution: intention/agency*), but insisted on a fundamental societal co-responsibility for the deeds (*causal attribution: enablement*): '[W]e have addressed the phenomenon of Jewish terrorism too loosely', allowing 'flames [to] spread in our country' and creating an atmosphere where 'extremists [could] go safely on the main road'. Elaborating at a rally in Jerusalem, he denounced the practice of excusing the acts of 'weeds' – an Israeli expression for black sheep – as a dangerous failure to address the societal embedding of extremist violence. Accordingly, an appropriate response to the attacks had to go far beyond the determined prosecution and trial of the perpetrators (*treatment recommendation: sanction*): Rather, he called upon both politics and society to urgently change gears, recognize the danger posed by extremist hatred, and 'attack' the danger 'at its source' (*treatment recommendation: policy response/prevention*). Despite its brevity, Rivlin's framing of the attacks, thus, presented a significant departure from previously accepted beliefs in Israeli society. Figure 1 summarizes the main propositions advanced by the president's interpretation.

Findings

The analyzed media differed widely in their treatment of Rivlin's interpretation. No element of the president's interpretation was accepted by all outlets, yet each was accepted unchanged by at least one. Notably, all right-wing outlets rejected collective responsibility and shame and cast the perpetrators as criminal deviants instead. Most media reinterpreted the attackers' motives, citing psychopathy/delinquency (center/right), ignorance and incitement (center/left/Palestinians), and anti-Arab politics (Palestinians). At the same time, all media condemned the crimes as painful and destructive, even if some continued to put things into perspective, and all agreed on a need for strict law enforcement.

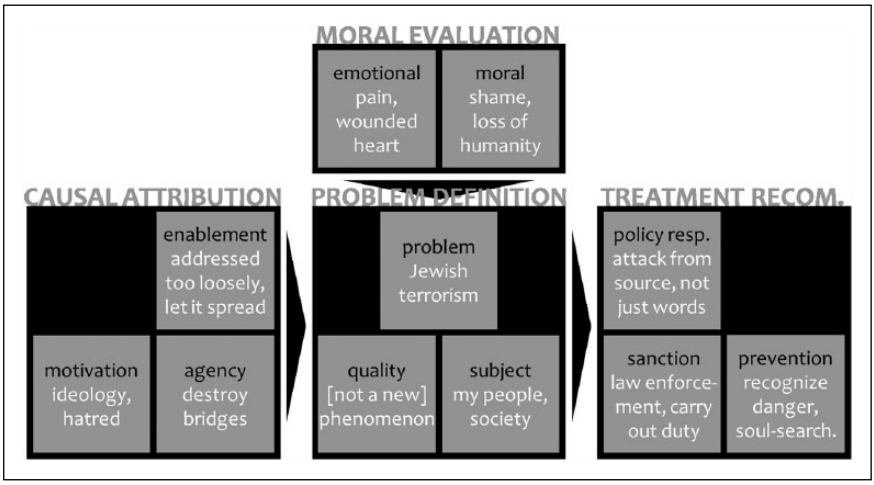

Figure 1. Summary of president Rivlin's interpretation.

No group accepted all of Rivlin's interpretations unchanged (only *Haaretz* came close), and none rejected all of its elements. *Kul Al-Arab* appropriated mostly the generalizations, but not the political interpretation and agenda. The three right-wing outlets emphatically echoed the condemnation of hateful terrorism, but separated the attacks from other social or normative debates, countering Rivlin's proposed agenda. Among the left, Rivlin's socio-political interpretation resonated well and was seamlessly appropriated into routine discourse, recasting merely the attacks as not so exceptional. Only in the centrist newspaper *Yedioth Ahronot*, the events triggered a moral panic, marked by shock and incredulity, and a hectic scrambling for decisive political and societal responses.

Across all outlets, we identified six recurrent strategies for dealing with proposed ideas. Media could accept (A), omit (O), or expressly challenge (C) parts of the account, they could rephrase (R) elements or elaborate (E) upon them, and *Yedioth Ahronot*, finally, scandalized (S) multiple claims. Table 1 summarizes how each outlet (rows) received the respective claims, constituting the frame elements in the president's interpretation (columns).

Acceptance

In about half of all cases, Rivlin's ideas were essentially appropriated. Media took over Rivlin's terminology (notably, 'Jewish terrorism'), paraphrased key clauses (notably, 'we have treated the phenomenon … too loosely'), and provided additional background supporting the claims. On one hand, neither Jewish nor Palestinian Israelis had difficulties recognizing the attacks as terrorist hate crimes, validating Rivlin's description, as well as his expression of pain and grief. *Israel Hayom* wrote, 'There is no moral difference between a Palestinian terrorist who murders a Jewish baby, and probably Jewish terrorists (unless proven otherwise) who murdered the toddler Ali Dawabsheh' (2

Table 1. Treatment of idea elements across the sampled outlets.

	Problem Definition			Causal Attribution			Treatment Recommendation			Evaluation	
	Problem: *Jewish terrorism*	Agent: *my people*	Quality: *[not new] phenomenon*	Motive: *ideological*	Aim: *destroy bridges*	Enabler: *addressed too loosely*	Society: *recognize danger*	Politics: *attack from the source*	Law enforcement: *carry out duty*	Emotional: *wounded heart*	Moral: *shame, lost humanity*
Kul Al-Arab	A	R E	A	E	R	C E	O	C	A E	A	A
JOH/Haaguda	R	O R	A	R	A	A	A	A	A R	A	O
Haaretz	A	A	A	A	A	A R	A	A	A	A	A R
Yediot Ahronot	A	A S	A	R E	A	A E	A	A	A R	A	S
Israel Hayom	A R	C	R C	A R	A	R	C	E	A E	A E	C E
Arutz 7	R C	C	R C	R E	R	E	R C	E	A	A E	C
Kikar Hashabbat	A	C E	A R	R E	A E	A R	E	O	A	A	A R

A: Acceptance; O: Omission; R: Rephrasing; C: Challenge; E: Elaboration; S: Scandalizing
Reading example: *Kul Al-Arab* (row 1) (A)ccepted Rivlin's problem definition of 'Jewish terrorism' (column 1), but either (R)ephrased or (E)laborated upon the president's attribution of this problem to 'my [the Jewish] people' as main agent (column 2).

August). Only among the Settlers, who normally interpreted violence in the West Bank as ongoing fight, this terminology was cited in politicians' and religious leaders' condemnations, but not appropriated; and in the LGBT community, to whom homophobic 'hate crimes' (Haaguda, 31 July; 2 August) were more salient, the term 'Jewish terrorism' was not used at all.[2] The reference to hatred was more readily accepted in those outlets that had also previously discussed related offenses – notably, *Haaretz* and *Kul Al-Arab* regarding hatred of Arabs, and to a lesser extent, *Yedioth Ahronot* and *Israel Hayom*. Homophobia had been a theme almost exclusively among the LGBT organizations. Also, those communities hostile toward Homosexuals and Arabs naturally expressed grief and condemned the murder of a toddler and a teenage girl, even if they contested other elements of the frame: 'Let's not get confused, this is a terrorist attack' (Kikar Hashabat, 2 August).

On the other hand, the appropriation of interpretations beyond the immediate characterization of the attacks depended on their compatibility with each group's narratives. For instance, *Haaretz*' routine coverage of violence against Arabs, right-wing policies and extremism, and anti-pluralist attitudes among ultra-orthodox communities supported Rivlin's characterization of hateful, ideological extremism among Jews. Easily identifying parallels with numerous prior acts of violence, *Haaretz* agreed that 'Jewish terrorists did not land from Mars, they always were and will be made in the country' (5 August). Having published similar complaints before, the presence of a 'public atmosphere that allows extremism and extremists go safely on the main road' (1 August) convincingly explained how destructive ideologies could create 'a subculture of bad people' (6 August), and justified Rivlin's attribution of societal co-responsibility. Accordingly, *Haaretz* readily endorsed the president's call for societal and political efforts to quell the flames.

Omission

While all mainstream outlets considered Rivlin's entire interpretation, some community-specific media ignored part of the statement. The ultra-orthodox news neither cited nor discussed political initiatives for combating hatred, reflecting the group's general disinterest in state politics beyond religious affairs. Confident that the religious community had no reason to doubt its ways, as its rules forbid murder, Kikar Hashabat fully ignored the theme. Similarly, for *Kul Al-Arab*, Rivlin's call for societal soul-searching was ignored as irrelevant: Viewing anti-Arab violence as generally supported by Jewish antagonism and government policy, the outlet attributed blame to Jewish Israeli society as a whole, citing Palestinian official Erekat: 'Once again, Israel is responsible for the terrorist crime' (1 August). Used to measuring Israel by its deeds, not the words of its agents, the outlet acknowledged high-ranking Israeli politicians' condemnations as mere symbolic gestures focusing on their political functions, but largely eclipsed expressions of grief and shame. Throughout the 2 weeks following the attacks, *Kul Al-Arab* not once referred to the intense societal debate in Hebrew-language public discourse. Accepting Rivlin's evaluation of the attacks as pain- and shameful, the article failed to acknowledge Jewish Israelis' widespread and emotional agreement, maintaining their depiction as, by and large, hostile toward the

Palestinian population. While Hebrew-language media merely omitted claims judged as irrelevant, the language barrier enabled the Arabic-language outlet to also ignore claims that challenged its prevalent narrative.

Challenge

Where ideas that conflicted with existing beliefs were too salient to ignore, they were challenged. *Kul Al-Arab* mostly countered claims without citing them first, simply by asserting its rival narrative. For instance, it did not engage Rivlin's suggestion that hateful violence had been treated 'too loosely', which appeared scandalously understated, given the paper's routine attribution of violence to anti-Arab policies: It simply insisted on Israeli political responsibility for the attacks.

The three Jewish right-wing outlets challenged primarily the societal attribution of responsibility and shame. Believing Jewish society to be essentially (among the ultra-orthodox, qua definition) moral and righteous, the suggestion that 'one crazy person has become the test of an entire society' (Kikar Hashabat, 2 August) appeared preposterous. All three papers categorically refuted that social values contributed to the murders, but attributed the crimes to personal character flaws. To Kikar Hashabat, it was self-evident that neither attack could be linked to the strictly observant, ultra-orthodox community: The murderers 'violated one of the prohibitions of the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not kill". How can I look at them as from my community?' (2 August). Labeling the Jerusalem stabber as 'psychopath' (2 August) with 'inflamed imaginations and messianic delusions' (2 August), the paper even cast doubt on his motivation by hatred of gays, severing the last link of possible co-responsibility. *Israel Hayom* simply prefixed the term 'terrorist' with 'criminal', emphasizing deviance. Locating the perpetrators among society's outcasts, separate from good law-abiding citizens, and subject to law enforcement, calls for societal soul-searching were dismissed as absurd: 'I am not prepared to apologize for what I did not do…. Broadcasters and commentators, state media representing the Socialist Left, do not make me beg forgiveness for a murder committed by repeat offenders and certified outsiders' (3 August).

Rephrasing

In many cases, outlets neither fully accepted nor rejected specific claims, but treated them as generally appropriate yet inaccurately phrased. Especially Rivlin's causal explanation for the attacks was commonly rephrased. To *Israel Hayom*, for instance, the president's complaint about too much leniency toward violence and crime appeared generally valid. However, in the paper's view, this was primarily a failure of criminal prosecution. Lacking proper means and setting wrong priorities, intelligence and police needed to 'remove the gloves' (4 August) and tackle Jewish extremism in an 'all-out war' (3 August). As the need for a more resolute response shifted entirely toward the security agencies, socio-political aspects of curbing intolerance and hatred disappeared from view.

Haaguda primarily rephrased references to the nature and motive of the attacks. On one hand, the community's experience with homophobic hatred and violence validated Rivlin's talk of ideologically motivated attacks. On the other hand, casting them as

ideological 'terrorism' suggested both too much exceptionalism and implied a political quality of homophobia that the LGBT community rejected. Accordingly, Haaguda replaced the label 'terrorism' with 'hate crime' or 'hate murder' (31 July). Emphasizing homo*phobia* as a motive, furthermore, the organization shifted the location of fear from the community under terror to the attackers themselves, whose 'baseless hatred' (Jerusalem Open House, 31 July) derived from mere 'ignorance and agitation' (2 August).

Elaboration

At other times, outlets perceived specific claims as generally plausible but misleading, not because they misrepresented believed facts or ideas but because they failed to highlight important related information. In the view of Channel 7, which relied heavily on elaboration, highlighting hatred and violence against Arabs alone flagrantly ignored the context breeding anti-Arab sentiment, as well as the comparative rarity of terrorist acts in which Palestinians were the victims, not the perpetrators. For an appropriate understanding, hence, the account had to be expanded. In line with its steady coverage of violent confrontations between settlers and Arabs, the outlet maintained that the 'difficult and complex struggle for the Land of Israel often involves justified anger and frustration caused by the murderous conduct of the Palestinians' (31 July). At the same time, the attacks in Duma and in Jerusalem were interpreted as fundamentally different from such confrontations, constituting 'atrocities' which were 'anti-Jewish, anti-human, and anti-moral' (31 July). Instead, Channel 7 contextualized the attacks against the grief caused by terrorism against Jews, including the threat of another 'murderous wave of Palestinian Terrorism' triggered by the attacks.[3] In consequence, the outlet's strong condemnation of the attacks, nevertheless, shrank in comparison.

Both the ultra-orthodox and the settler community also elaborated upon Rivlin's expression of shame. In Channel 7's view, the acts of 'one person' had fueled a 'willfully distorted misrepresentation' (6 August) aimed at shaming ultra-orthodox, right-wing, and settler communities. Citing ex-minister Yair Lapid, Kikar Hashabat described the terrorists as 'natural partners of Hamas, Hezbollah, and ISIS', a Jewish 'fifth column' of 'traitors' (31 July) who help the enemies of the settlement enterprise. Far-right MP Bezalel Smotrich called the attacks 'bad because they are bad, and bad because they are harmful [to the settlers' cause]' (Channel 7, 31 July). Elaborating upon Rivlin's perceived incomplete depictions, both outlets added explanations and context that substantially altered the interpretation and evaluation.

Scandalizing

Finally, two claims triggered a veritable moral panic in the centrist commercial paper *Yedioth Ahronot* (and only there). Similarly to the above elaborations, the paper accepted the proposed account as plausible. However, instead of reconciling it with societal self-valuations by re-interpretation, the account was marked as both undeniably significant and unacceptable. The paper expressed shock and incredulity at the insight that 'we are not better' (2 August): 'No, it cannot be!' wrote columnist Noah Kliger (2 August).

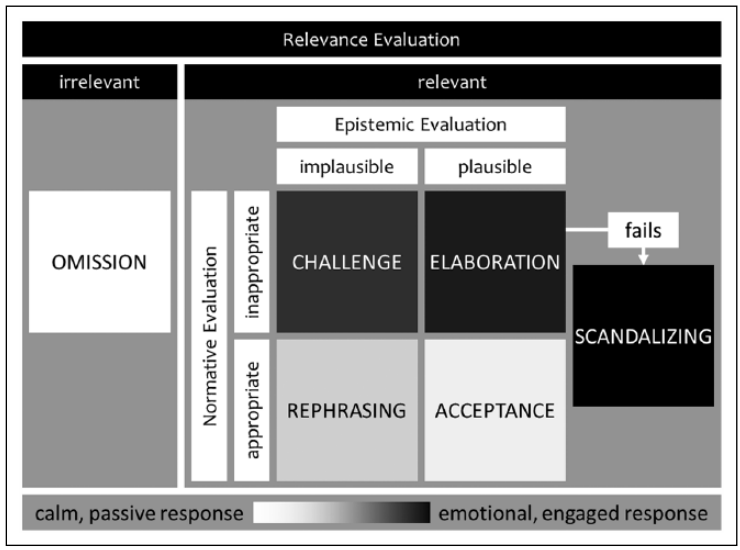

Figure 2. Dependency of the resonance of ideas on their evaluation as relevant, plausible, and appropriate.

For *Yedioth Ahronot*, the depiction of both events as Jewish terrorism appeared evident. Used to examining the background of terrorist perpetrators and routinely covering the complexities of hatred and violence both outside and within Israel, however, the paper could not refute Rivlin's attribution of societal co-responsibility. At the same time, as a paper oriented toward popular taste, *Yedioth Ahronot*'s ethnocentric coverage had cast Jewish society as civilized, compassionate, and – despite all conflicts – geared toward peaceful solutions. While *Haaretz* could accept the existence of Jewish terrorism from its more cosmopolitan, self-critical perspective, for *Yedioth Ahronot*, society faced moral bankruptcy: 'The story ends. If we thought that … Jews did not do such, that only the others can kill children' (2 August). Failing to construct an acceptable explanation, it emphatically expressed its 'horror' (31 July) at the 'cancer of a new kind, violent and foul' (3 August). Driven by the urgent need to regain society's 'lost humanity' (2 August), the paper elevated Rivlin's call for societal and political change to a level of moral panic.

Explaining resonance

From the analysis of different responses, a discernable pattern emerges. Seen from an epistemic point of view, three responses – Acceptance, Elaboration, and Scandalizing – accept claims as generally correct, whereas two – Challenge and Rephrasing – reject them as inaccurate. Simultaneously, two responses – Acceptance and Rephrasing – agree that a point is normatively valid, while two – Challenge and Elaboration – deny this. Scandalizing occurred when ideas were evaluated as evidently valid yet unacceptable; and Omission followed where ideas were regarded as insufficiently relevant to expressly regard their plausibility and appropriateness.

Accordingly, we can begin systematizing the observed treatments of ideas in a simple two-by-two matrix, displayed at the center of Figure 2, based on their evaluation as epistemically plausible and normatively appropriate. Ideas judged as both implausible and inappropriate were challenged, pointing to their lack of plausibility as grounds for refuting their normative implications. Ideas that appeared both plausible and appropriate were accepted and taken over as self-evident. Where epistemic and normative appraisals diverged, additional effort was needed. Ideas that made a valid point but failed to resonate in familiar knowledge were retained but rephrased. Translating the statement into the symbolic universe of the group, the description was shifted to emphasize aspects that made sense to the group. Undeniably plausible ideas that suggested evaluations deemed inappropriate challenged communities to reconcile them with shared values and attitudes. Adding ameliorating circumstances and putting details into perspective, they elaborated sometimes complex accounts that explained how entirely different evaluations were appropriate.

In this view, Scandalizing arose when Elaboration failed: Departing from an idea that appeared plausible but inappropriate, *Yedioth Ahronot* could not explain how Rivlin's account could be correct yet mean something other than proposed. Unable to refute the undeniably plausible account, the paper was stuck with accepting the unacceptable. In turn, it unfolded a moral panic, denouncing the shocking present and calling for a crusade against hatred, which would restore the community's positive self-valuation in the future.

Generally, normative conflicts raised active, often emotional reactions to the perceived inappropriate ideas. Not only moral panics but also elaborative rectifications and refutations were accompanied by a sense of disappointment over believed unjust characterizations to be urgently set straight. Active engagement could be short-lived where conflicting ideas were successfully refuted or raise lasting debates (especially among the right wing and in the center's moral panic). Normative agreement raised no comparable emotional response. Ideas were accepted and rephrased in passing, and integrated seamlessly into ongoing discourse. The only emphatic endorsements of perceived appropriate ideas could be linked to instrumental support for specific agendas (notably, *Israel Hayom*'s endorsement of stricter security; LGBT support for antidiscrimination legislation).

Discussion

Overall, our findings resonate well with the existing scholarship. As in the literature, we find the two most influential processes shaping resonance to focus on the epistemic and normative evaluation of ideas. Where novel claims reiterate beliefs established in prior discourse, they are judged as plausible, while unfamiliar claims seem inaccurate, if not false (Dechêne et al., 2010; Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). Claims that challenge shared norms and attitudes – notably, a group's positive self-evaluation (Rowling et al., 2011) – are denounced as inappropriate, while those affirming them are endorsed (Brewer, 2001; Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994).

Importantly, both dimensions interact: On one hand, neither evaluation alone is sufficient to determine the reception of ideas. Each constellation raises different forms of appropriation and rejection. Where both evaluations agree, responses are quick and effortless, whereas discrepant evaluations trigger more creative responses. On the other hand, what ideas end up appearing appropriate or inappropriate also depends on how a

group interprets its social life world (Baden & de Vreese, 2008; Moscovici, 1961; Nelson et al., 2015). For instance, the possibility that Jews are 'not better' only challenged social values in the Israeli mainstream, which viewed Jewish society as an inclusive group with high moral standards. Right-wing communities also viewed themselves as morally superior; however, their more exclusive definition of society enabled them to deflect the challenge by discursively expelling the perpetrators (Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994). Among the political left, society was understood as inclusive but heterogeneous, easily accommodating also some black sheep. By rephrasing perceived appropriate but badly stated claims or elaborating upon plausible but believed misleading depictions, all observed outlets were able to also bring partially aligned ideas into alignment.

These contingencies point to an important vagueness underlying the resonance metaphor. In our study, the only clearly not resonant ideas are those that were rejected or ignored. In all other four constellations, at least parts of the original idea are successfully appropriated into cultural discourse. If we understand resonance as the extent to which ideas are appropriated and naturalized (e.g. Gamson, 1988; Snow and Benford, 1988), Acceptance presents the purest case, where both normative and descriptive contents are preserved. Rephrasing constitutes an impure case, where the meaning is adjusted to match a community's symbolic universe. Elaboration substantively distorts the idea, while Scandalizing preserves the meaning but prevents its naturalization. However, neither Acceptance nor Rephrasing raises much engagement or emotional response, which is critical for resonance in a different meaning. If we understand resonance as an idea's ability to initiate an active societal debate (e.g. Ferree, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997), Elaboration and Scandalizing qualify, while Acceptance and Rephrasing do not – with the possible exception of instrumentally endorsed ideas.

In our view, it is therefore useful to distinguish two meanings of resonance: In one sense, resonance refers to the extent that proposed ideas 'click': Once presented, they appear intuitively convincing and can be incorporated into existing beliefs without much further ado. However, exactly because they can be appropriated, they do not raise much attention and debate and quickly fade into the background of obvious knowledge (Baden & Lecheler, 2012). In the other sense, resonance refers to the extent that ideas 'strike a chord': Although intuitively relevant and plausible, they stir up something important that forbids simply accepting and appropriating them, triggering a salient need for discussion about the implications for existing beliefs (Wilson and Sperber, 2012). It is unclear whether ideas can be resonant in both ways at once. On one hand, the need for discussion characterizing 'chord' style resonance appears to arise from unresolved evaluative tensions, which are exactly absent in 'click' style resonance. In our study, almost all cases fell clearly into only one of the categories, suggesting that these constitute complementary, mutually exclusive phenomena. On the other hand, the few deviant cases point to a possible overlap. For instance, even though the (rephrased) need for tougher law enforcement perceptibly 'clicked' within the mainstream right, it also triggered a heated debate over failures and needs in Israeli security policy. However, the debated value conflict did not concern the interpretation of the attacks, but referred to a prior debate over allegedly insufficient security measures: The passing appropriation of one idea rendered salient another value conflict in the group's related prior beliefs (Tapiero, 2007). Considering that many studies invoking resonance describe emotionally charged appropriation

processes (e.g. Entman, 2003; Ferree, 2003; Gamson, 1988; Snow and Benford, 1988), this combination may, in fact, be rather common.

Our findings remain subject to several important limitations. For this study, we have deliberately chosen an extreme, highly conflictual case. Exploiting the controversial issue and deep fragmentation of Israeli society to increase contrast, our analysis may have eclipsed patterns and processes that operate in less heated situations. Our comparative analysis relies heavily on the interpretation of differences in the respective groups' discourses and remains remote from the perceptions (among journalists and sources) and communicative interactions (among these) shaping mediated discourse. Despite the central role of journalistic narratives, cultural resonance truly emerges only through prolonged, interactive social debates. To further corroborate our interpretations, it would be desirable to investigate these social-psychological, social, and communicative dynamics over time.

This study is, to our knowledge, the first to systematically address the functioning of cultural resonance. Beginning to organize related arguments from the fragmented scholarly debate, we have corroborated the pertinence of epistemic plausibility and normative appropriateness judgments for understanding cultural-level sense-making processes. Highlighting the contingency of collective judgments on culturally shared beliefs and societal discourse, we have investigated how ideas are received differently in different communities' debates. We have proposed an analytic distinction between 'click'-style resonance, where ideas are seamlessly appropriated as intuitively convincing, and 'chord'-style resonance, where ideas reverberate emotionally and trigger a heated debate. Beginning to dissect the common metaphor of resonance to analyze its underlying mechanisms, we hope to have made a first, important step toward the scientific study of the pervasive, yet elusive phenomenon.

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Notes

1. The entire statement, translated by the Jerusalem Post, reads,

> We awoke this morning to a sad day. The murder of Ali Dawabsha, a baby sleeping in his bed, and the severe damage to his family members; his mother, father and brothers, wounded the hearts of all of us. But more than feeling ashamed, I feel pain. Pain for the murder of this small child. Pain that my people have chosen the path of terror and lost their humanity on the way. This way is not my way. This way is not the way of the State of Israel, nor the way of the Jewish people. Unfortunately, until now it seems that we have addressed the phenomenon of Jewish terrorism too loosely. Maybe we have not recognized strongly enough that we face an ideological group, one that is both dangerous and determined to destroy the bridges we have worked so hard to build. I strongly believe that we need to understand that we face a real danger and we must attack it from the source. In these moments of pain, I turn to the citizens of Israel, Israeli Arabs, to the Palestinian people, to all law abiding citizens, and I urge you to please not give in to these feelings of anger

and fury. It is the time to join hands, and leave the law and justice system to find the killers. Let the law carry out its duty, and be wary of being drawn into harmful and unnecessary acts. To take the law into your own hands and surrendering to violence is letting the killers win. We must continue to build our bridges of co-existence and living together. We must not let terrorism win.

2. Due to the use of Facebook posts as opposed to news texts for this analysis, the two lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations generally do not quote others much, so the lack of quotes should not be overestimated.
3. Similarly, Kikar Hashabat cited far-right MP Bezalel Smotrich's depiction of the LGBT community as 'violent and aggressive' (2 August), underscoring ultra-orthodox Jews' righteous struggle against this group, while separating this mostly political confrontation from the shocking but exceptional attacks.

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