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Rabbis in Israel, Public Relations and Advertising

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses public relations (PR) and advertising in the work of the rabbi in Israel. The rabbi's influence is felt within the religious population such as through the Sabbath sermon from the synagogue pulpit to congregants, but the media is an additional channel to spreading the rabbi's religious message. The traditional, and secular Israeli Jewish population—as distinct from religiously observant (25 per cent of the Israeli Jewish population)—have no regular daily or weekly interaction with the synagogue, which raises the question of the rabbis using extra-synagogual channels to reach them, notably mass media channels.

In order to throw light on rabbis' attitudes to public relations, the author carried out a survey of Israeli rabbis. Overall, differences were found between rabbis' attitudes to PR and actual practice. The actual appearance of rabbis in the media is less. In attitudinal terms, Haredi or ultra-Orthodox rabbis scored highly in rating the importance of PR, compared to rabbis from other streams, even though Haredi rabbis live in cultural ghettos and Jewish life for

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them is focused on the synagogue and Torah learning. Reaching beyond the pulpit was also important for the more intensive substream of modern orthodoxy, "Hardal". By corollary, it was surprising that PR among the non-Orthodox rabbis—notwithstanding that their arena of religious outreach was secular Israel—was rated lower.

Keywords: *Israel, rabbis, advertising, public relations*

1. Introduction

Public relations (PR) and advertising have a closer connection to theology, including Judaism, than might otherwise be thought. Notwithstanding that Judaism does not have a pro-active agenda of proselytisation, Judaism seeks to promote monotheism and recognition of God Himself. Miraculous events in the Bible—the Israelite Crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus, Chapter 15), to name but one—had an undeniable agenda of publicising the event as a means to win acknowledgement and blessing from Almighty God. When earlier, God appointed Moses—who had a stutter—to be the leader of the Israelites in Egypt, Aaron was appointed as his spokesman (Exodus, 6:30). In addition, the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai were, according to the Jewish Bible commentator, Rashi, given in seventy languages for all humankind to understand.

The traditional framework for rabbis' communication over hundreds of years has been the address from the pulpit in the synagogue (Jewish house of worship). After the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple, Jerusalem, in 70 CE and Jews were exiled from Jerusalem, the ancient rabbis came into their own as teachers of the Torah (the Bible), with the task of interpreting the Torah—the ethical rules for humanity's relationship with God, and relationship among people, including the rabbinical discussions and rulings in the tomes of the Mishna and Talmud (Cohen 2001).

Rabbis draw their thinking and inspiration from the Bible. However, like spiritual leaders in many other faith traditions (Biernatzki 2006; Johnstone 2009), rabbis today recognise the value of using mass media channels to communicate their messages, supplementing the synagogue pulpit (Bigman 2011; Cohen 2024). For example, in modern Orthodox and non-

Orthodox streams in Judaism today, the internet enables synagogue communities to keep in touch with their members and strengthen ties with congregants. So, in the competitive market within mass media channels, Judaism is just one of a multitude of ideas waiting in the marketplace for 'purchasers' who behave and react according to the desire for personal enrichment and enjoyment. This impacts upon religious identity today.

Since the Middle Ages, as the post of rabbi became even more institutionalised, a community rabbi took on additional tasks beyond merely reading from the Torah from the Scrolls of the Law during the Sabbath and holy day services in the synagogue, and also representing the community to outside organs of the state. In doing the latter, the rabbi required general knowledge, far beyond Jewish religious learning, as well as interpersonal communication skills.

In Israel, rabbis do not enjoy a monopoly in being a single focus of Jewish identity, as they do in the Jewish diaspora. The Jewish state itself, its official organs and other non-official institutions, have replaced the synagogue as a focus of Jewish identity to a considerable extent. The media themselves play an important role in building mutual perceptions between religious and secular communities.

2. Jewish Ethics, Public Relations, and Advertising

While the question of public relations and advertising in relations to religion has been treated generally (Bivins 2004; Cohen 2012b; Einstein 2008; Nardella 2014, 2023; Tilson and Chao 2002; Tilson and Venkateswaran 2006; Usunier and Stolz 2014), it has received scant attention in the Jewish context (Dorff 1997; Green 1997; Levine 1981).

This article discusses public relations in the work of the rabbi in Israel. In the contemporary world, PR and advertising are considered distinct. PR often involves spokespersons, such as rabbis, to convey messages. In contrast, advertising typically utilizes purchased space in media channels to promote products and institutions, which can include information about synagogues and the Jewish community. However, ancient Jewish texts do not make this distinction between public relations and advertising. Instead, they discuss both under the general concept of 'persuasion.'

Judaism looks positively on the accumulation of wealth—as long as the rich acknowledge that wealth is a blessing of God (Tamari 1997). Indeed, advertising, such as that apprearing prior to Israeli Jewish holy days featuring content associated with religious commercial goods, contributes, in one sense, to Jewish religious identity (Cohen 2018, Chapter 16). However, Judaism does place limitations on modern advertising and PR when offering rules of behavior that aspire to be suitable for the needs of a modern, complex society (Pava 1998). While advertising may play a positive role in providing customers with information, there are moral limits to what may be done in advertising and PR themselves.

Friedman (1984) argues that, as far back as the age of the Talmud, Jewish values impacted marketing and business ethics. The Ten Commandments—the foundation of Jewish ethics—prohibit stealing (Exodus 20:13). The Book of Leviticus states, "Do not steal, do not deny falsely, and do not lie to one another" (Leviticus 19:11-13). The juxtaposition suggests that giving bad advice in advertising and PR is a transgression of the Torah. Reflecting that truth is regarded as a foundation of the world. The Book of Proverbs (12:19) states, "Truthful lips shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment." So important is truth in all the monotheistic religions that lying is a fundamental breach of the monotheistic code—or, in the case of Judaism, akin to idol worship (Cohen 2001).

The Talmud and its accompanying work, the Mishna, discussed trading practices in depth. Many laws of the marketplace have their origins in these scriptures. Drawing upon Leviticus 25:17, which states, "In selling….do not be distortionate," Judaism prohibits the trader, in promoting his products, from creating a false impression (termed g*enevat daat* in Hebrew). The trader is required to divulge to a prospective customer all defects in his product, but he is permitted to draw the buyer's attention to the good features of a product as long as these are accurate. Levine (1981) argues that projecting the quality of a good or service is regarded positively in Judaism. But goodwill obtained deceptively through a false impression is forbidden. However, a trader is not obligated to correct an erroneous impression that is the result of self-deception. Showing the defects of the opponent's products is forbidden—as distinct from pointing out the positive aspects of one's own products—and is tantamount to slander and falsehood.

Methodology. In order to throw light on rabbis' attitudes to public relations, the author carried out a survey of Israeli rabbis. The author's survey asked whether the media was a "very good means" or "good means" for spreading religion; whether religion should "not appear in the media"; whether rabbis saw being quoted in the media as "a positive thing"; and whether media inaccuracy in covering religion was due to a lack of success in explaining themselves. In addition, the survey provides data on how many times they had been interviewed or quoted, or had written a press article or blog over the preceding twelve months in the secular media and religious media.

A total of 310 filled questionnaires from Israeli rabbis were received between 2020-2022. The rabbinical profession may be broken down into two types: first, community rabbis; second, rabbis teaching in schools or at higher institutes of religious study (*yeshivot*).

3. Religious Controls in Advertising

Beyond the narrow Haredi or ultra-Orthodox Jewish market, comprising 10 per cent of Israel's Jewish population, and to a lesser extent, the modern Orthodox market, some 15 per cent of the Jewish population, it is difficult to find in practice how Jewish values have impacted modern Israeli life. In the case of religious populations, advertising is qualified by rules regarding pictorial modesty—in the Haredi case, not portraying women. True, the modern state of Israel, established in 1948, draws upon the twin goals of Democracy and Judaism, and against a growing trend of religiosity, including after the October 7, 2023 Hamas massacre, in practice Jewish ethical rules have not taken hold in an explicit sense beyond the need for modesty in advertising.

Different Jewish religious streams have perceived Jewish rules on advertising from their religious perspective. The Reform branch of Judaism has campaigned against the sexploitation of women in advertising. The Ultra-Orthodox Haredim have taken to the streets more than once to protest against what they regard as immodest advertising. They have demanded that advertising in public places, such as on public transport, not be immodest. In 1992, Haredim torched 40 bus shelters that had a picture of a model promoting female swimwear. In 2012, the Haredim achieved a victory

when they succeeded in negotiating with Egged, one of the largest transportation companies in Israel, that all advertising on Jerusalem buses would require the approval of a Haredi body called the "Committee for Purity and Sanctity in the Camp." The Israeli statute book includes a law regarding what is acceptable in the broadcasting of sexually oriented content.

4. Rabbis' Critique of Mass Media

There is a dichotomy because, while the media has become an alternative channel for rabbis, mass media is under serious criticism from rabbis themselves, to the extent of critiquing the media's very legitimacy in society. Fifty-seven per cent of all Israeli rabbis surveyed by the author agreed that advertising damages religious values to a "very great extent" or "largely." Only 24 per cent of all rabbis disagreed "completely" or were inclined "to disagree" (19 per cent agreed "to some extent"), even distancing their followers from exposure to the media.

Considerable tension exists in Israel between religious Jewry and the general media, which is regarded by many in the former, in particular the ultra-Orthodox Haredi community as anti-religious, and secular; and among the modern Orthodox as left-wing and anti-nationalist. For all rabbis, the perceived distance between the media and Judaism—indeed the media antagonism—exists because the media presents a selective and often negative image of religion and religious people.

Recognising, perhaps realistically, that the mainstream media is Western, commercial, and democratic, Haredi communities and, to some extent, the modern Orthodox-cum-Hardal have taken the path of escapism to create their own alternative religious media, in accordance with what rabbis believe the media should and should not be.

The teacher-rabbi in the religious state school system has an important pedagogic function in influencing the outlook of religious children and youth towards the wider society, including the media and such values as freedom of speech and tolerance. These include taking positions on whether children and youth should be exposed to the media, particularly to television and the internet. Reflecting its philosophy of withdrawal from modernity, and seeking to maintain religious values in a cultural ghetto framework, Haredi rabbis have over the years issued religious decrees

(*pesuk din*) against mass media as being a threat to Torah family values. From the appearance of newspapers in the nineteenth century, through to the development of radio and television, and latterly video, computers, the internet and portable phones, Haredi rabbis have enacted decrees against media (Cohen 2011a; 2015). Rabbis in the modern Orthodox community have not issued official Jewish legal rulings regarding media use, but instead have offered a thoughtful yet critical response towards the internet by advocating for the need for media literacy in order to create a balanced and acceptable relationship between the Torah world and the world of modern media.

Yet some modern Orthodox rabbis, notably those identified with the 'Haredi Leumi' sub-stream (or *Hardal* in short), share with the Haredim a separatist view towards modern, non-Jewish culture (Lavie 2019), including limits on exposure to secular media, television, and controls on the internet.

All Orthodox rabbis—including the mainstream modern Orthodox—favour some form of supervision. Sixty-eight per cent of Haredi rabbis in the author's survey favoured this "to a great extent" or "largely," and 15 per cent "a considerable degree." Only 5 per cent of Haredi rabbis opposed it completely or were inclined to. Even more rabbis in the mainstream modern Orthodox stream (67 per cent) supported this: 33 per cent "to a very great extent," and 34 per cent to "a large extent." This is even more noticeable among the *Hardal* rabbis given their outlook of suspicions of non-Jewish culture—59 per cent of *Hardal* rabbis supported this to "a very great extent" and 19 per cent to "some degree."

Among Reform rabbis, 59 per cent opposed it "wholly" or were "inclined to oppose it," as did 46 per cent of Conservative rabbis. Nineteen per cent of Reform rabbis "largely agree[d]" and 18 per cent of Conservative rabbis agreed to a supervision of broadcasting media, and a further 12 per cent of Conservative rabbis did "to a very great extent." There was little difference in terms of age between older and younger rabbis.

5. Advertising Tools Used by Rabbis

A rabbi's influence is felt within the religious population, such as through the Sabbath sermon from the pulpit to congregants, but the media is an

additional channel for spreading the rabbi's religious message, even if this tends to occur much more in the religious media than in the secular Israeli media (Cohen 2012). Notwithstanding that rabbis have yet to maximise the plethora of media techniques, evidence exists that certain use is made of them. Haredi rabbis have long used wall posters (*pashkevil*) tacked up in Israeli religious neighbourhoods to attack or excommunicate those individuals or companies whom they regard as behaving inappropriately. Another recent phenomenon of rabbis' communication through the media is synagogal bulletins (*alonei beit knesset*)—weekly pamphlets distributed free of charge, sometimes extending to many pages, which are distributed in synagogues on the Sabbath. These comprise light and popular discussions by rabbis of the weekly Bible reading in synagogues and discussion of topical Jewish issues on the public agenda, including state-religion issues—offering rabbis a seemingly uncontrolled channel. One of Hassidism's branches, Chabad, has become one of the most active Jewish movements involved in outreach work. The mass media were harnessed for the objective. Already in the 1960s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe had a regular weekly programme on a New York radio station, WEVD (Fishkoff 2003).

The age of the internet has revolutionised the structure of religious communities of different faith through community websites (Horsfall 2000). In the Jewish case, participation in forum and chat discussions of religious belief, and participation in *shiurim* (religious lessons) conducted on the Web, contribute to creating virtual communities. To be sure, online and offline rabbinic communication to their flock is not identical. There is no similarity between a rabbi's answer to a question via the internet or oral interpersonal one-to-one communication. In the former, the rabbi is less able to take into account the specific circumstances of the questioner. Also an internet answer is itself short and does not go into detail. The rabbi may not be able to understand the specific circumstances of the questioner—sometimes anonymously online. The ruling will be more reactive than one given privately by the community rabbi to an individual in his own community, given that Jewish law often in practice has a number of options.

The traditional and secular Israeli Jewish population—as distinct from the religiously observant (25 per cent of the Israeli Jewish population)—have no regular daily or weekly interaction with the synagogue in Israel, which raises the question of rabbis using extra-synagogal channels to reach them, notably mass media channels. The presence of rabbis is felt in the Israeli public sphere. Individual rabbis are not afraid to speak out and

critique Israeli public bodies like the courts, the Army and the *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament), and politicians and businessmen consult rabbis on a host of public policy questions such as foreign affairs, economics and crime. Yet Yedidya Stern, co-editor of *Rabbis and Rabbinate: The Challenge* (2011), is critical of the extent to which Israeli rabbis as a whole do not themselves feel competent to speak out about public issues. Rabbis have a self-interest to enter into a dialogue with the journalistic world. For rabbis, the perceived distance between the media and Judaism—indeed the media antagonism—exists because the media presents a selective and often negative image of religion and religious people. But the chances of dialogue are not high.

6. Public Relations as a Rabbinical Tool

The survey focused on rabbis' attitudes towards the role of the media in rabbinic public relations. Thirty-nine per cent and 27 per cent of all rabbis said that the media was a "very good means" or "good means," respectively, for spreading religion. A further 17 per cent said so to a "certain extent." Only 10 per cent and 8 per cent said this was true "to a little extent" or to "no extent," respectively.

On the question of "the role of the media in contributing to religious identity," Haredi rabbis rated the highest: 55 per cent of Haredi rabbis replied that the media contributed to strengthening religious identity "to a very great extent," and a further 21 per cent "to a great extent." *Hardal* rabbis were the next highest: 43 per cent and 20 per cent of *Hardal* rabbis replied that the media contributed to strengthening religious identity "to a very great extent" or "to a great extent," respectively.

In one sense, it reflected a pro-activist approach to spreading Judaism which Haredim and *Hardal* in general held (the 43 per cent *Hardal* was slightly higher than the 36 per cent of mainstream modern Orthodox, and a further 37 per cent of *Hardal* rabbis said so "to some extent"). Yet, the high figure for Haredi rabbis was nevertheless surprising since Haredim tend to be conservative and see Judaism very much focused on the synagogue or *yeshivot* (religious college)..

More surprising was the relatively lower figures for Reform and Conservative rabbis—which, while the major streams of Judaism, notably in the US, have mostly failed to become significant streams inside Israel,

which remains a mostly Orthodox Jewish rabbinate. In contrast to the Haredi and *Hardal* rabbis, only 23 per cent and 31 per cent of Reform rabbis said the media had a role in religious identity formation "to a very great extent" or "to a great extent." And 25 per cent and 19 per cent of Conservative rabbis said so, respectively. A further 25 per cent of Reform rabbis and 28 per cent of Conservative rabbis said so to "some extent." The lower figures for the Conservative and Reform rabbis were surprising given that these two groups identify with mainstream Israeli society—which while traditional, is not strictly observant in the minutiae of Jewish religious law.

Asked if religion should "not appear in the media," rabbis overwhelmingly disagreed: 59 per cent disagreed completely, and a further 20 per cent agreed "to a small extent." Only 5 per cent agreed and 2 per cent "to a very great extent" or to a "great extent," respectively.

But rabbis saw being quoted in the media as "a positive thing": 28 per cent and 28 per cent saw it as "a very good thing" or "a good thing" to be quoted. A further 24 per cent agreed "to some extent." Only 14 per cent and 6 per cent saw being quoted in the media as "not very desirable" or "not desirable at all," respectively.

Yet, rabbis did not agree that media inaccuracy in covering religion was due to a lack of success in explaining themselves. Twenty-six per cent and 22 per cent believed this to "a small degree only" or "not at all," respectively. A further 26 per cent of rabbis agreed "to a certain extent." Only a quarter of rabbis believed this was true to "a great extent" (19 per cent) or to "a very great extent" (7 per cent), respectively.

However, asked how many times they had been interviewed or quoted over the preceding twelve months, 64 per cent of rabbis had not been interviewed or quoted even once; 14 per cent once or twice; 8 per cent 7 to 10 times. Similarly, 73 per cent had not been interviewed once on secular radio stations in the previous twelve months; 10 per cent had 1 to 2 times; 7 per cent 3 to 6 times. Regarding appearances by rabbis on television: 80 per cent had not appeared on television, 10 per cent had appeared 1 to 2 times on television; and 3 per cent 3 to 6 times.

In the case of the religious media, one might have expected a greater interest in interviewing rabbis, but there was no significant increase on the number of times rabbis had appearances in the religious media compared to the secular media. Sixty-six per cent reported that they had not been quoted in the religious media even once in the previous twelve months. Thirteen per cent had been quoted once, 9 per cent 3 to 6 times. This was

even truer on religious radio: 85 per cent had not been interviewed or quoted once; 14 per cent had been interviewed once; and 8 per cent 3 to 6 times.

Yet another means of appearing in the press than being quoted or interviewed was to write a press article or op-ed blog, such as a comment on the weekly Bible reading or about a *halakhic* (Jewish religious law) issue. But 79 per cent had not written once in the previous twelve months in the secular press; 10 per cent had done so once, and 4 per cent had done so 3 to 6 times. This was surprisingly also true in the religious press, where otherwise one might have expected that the religious press would be open to rabbis' appearances: 75 per cent had not written once in the religious press in the previous twelve months; 11 per cent had done so once, and 5 per cent more than once.

These various findings may be broken down into three categories: differences according to religious stream; age of rabbis; and where the rabbi was born.

Religious Streams. The author's survey of rabbis covers rabbis of four main branches of Judaism—Haredi, modern Orthodox or *dati leumi*, Reform, and Conservative. In addition, a fifth grouping, *Hardal* (or *haredi leumi*) is a sub-system of the modern Orthodox/*dati leumi*. Rabbis themselves were asked to define the stream to which they belonged.

Whether or not rabbis had actually appeared in the media, higher ratings were found among the non-Orthodox (Reform and Conservative) than the Orthodox (Haredi, *Hardal*, mainstream modern Orthodox) were found. Only 44 per cent of Reform and 49 per cent of Conservative replied that they had not been quoted in the general secular Israeli press in the previous twelve months in contrast to 74 per cent, 69 per cent, and 61 per cent of *Hardal*, mainstream modern Orthodox, and Haredi rabbis, respectively. In the case of interviews or being quoted in public radio, however, non-Orthodox rabbis were less quoted or less interviewed than in the general press. Sixty-seven per cent of both Reform and Conservative rabbis said they had not been interviewed once on radio in the previous 12 months. In the case of the Orthodox rabbis (Haredi, *Hardal*, and modern Orthodox), there were no differences between appearances on radio and appearances in the general press.

Notwithstanding that non-Orthodox rabbis are inclined to complain that they are mostly shunned by the mainstream media—including public

broadcasting—this reflects the small number of non-Orthodox rabbis inside Israel and the much larger number of Orthodox rabbis. But, statistically, with a limited number of media outlets in Israel, only a small number of the many Orthodox rabbis appear.

In the case of television appearances, 81 per cent of all categories of rabbis—apart from the Reform (63 per cent)—reported not having been interviewed or quoted once in television over the previous twelve months.

In the case of the religious media there was a noteworthy difference between Haredi rabbis and the other four categories (*Hardal*, and mainstream modern Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform). Religious media may be broken down between the religious printed press and the religious radio stations. Seventy-three per cent of *Hardal*, and 66 per cent of mainstream modern Orthodox rabbis had not been quoted or interviewed once in the previous twelve months in the religious press; by contrast, only 47 per cent of Haredi rabbis had not. This reflected that much of the religious press was in fact Haredi-oriented—and comprised four daily Haredi papers, two Haredi weekly magazines, and a range of Haredi magazines—which seek by definition to distance themselves from secular Israeli the broadstream society. To be sure, under the "religious media" category were also a few modern Orthodox or *Hardal*-orientated publications.

Given the delegitimisation of non-Orthodox Judaism, by the Orthodox establishment inside Israel, it was not surprising that Conservative and Reform rabbis were not quoted or interviewed in the religious press. A similar trend was found with religious radio—which comprised two important Haredi radio stations, Radio Kol Chai and Radio Kol Berama.

Another feature of rabbinical public relations is to write articles in the press or blogs on the Web. This may be divided between the secular mainstream Israeli media and the religious media. Non-Orthodox rabbis were more inclined than Orthodox rabbis—Haredi, *Hardal*, and mainstream modern Orthodox—to appear in the secular press. Yet Orthodox rabbis fared little better in the religious press. Seventy to seventy-four per cent of rabbis of all three Orthodox streams (Haredi, mainstream modern Orthodox, *Hardal*) reported not having an article in the religious press in the last twelve months. It suggests that rabbis, notwithstanding their aspirations to spread Torah, failed to try this media channel.

Asked whether rabbis were successful or not in conveying their message, mainline modern Orthodox and *Hardal* were more inclined than other streams to agree that they did not succeed in explaining themselves.

Twenty-seven per cent and twenty-four per cent of *Hardal* and mainstream modern Orthodox rabbis agreed that to a great extent rabbis failed to explain themselves in contrast to 7 per cent of Reform rabbis, 17 per cent of Conservative rabbis, and 11 per cent of Haredi rabbis.

Social background. Does the background from which the rabbi was born influence the rabbis' views on and their practice in public relations? Rabbis of all four backgrounds—Israeli-born, Western-born, East European born, and Sephardic (Oriental) born in Arab countries—were inclined to agree that the mass media were important for strengthening religious identity. Between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of all four categories agreed that the mass media were important to "a very great extent" or "to a great extent."

Age breakdown. It was found that younger rabbis (those born after 1980) were more inclined than those born earlier to recognise the importance of the mass media as an agent for strengthening religious identity. But older rabbis in practice were more inclined to be quoted and interviewed, or to write for the mass media.

Overall, differences were found between rabbis' attitudes to public relations and actual practice, as reflected in the survey. In attitudinal terms, Haredi rabbis scored highly in rating the importance of PR, compared to rabbis from other streams, even though Haredi rabbis live in cultural ghettos and Jewish life for them is focused on the synagogue and Torah learning. Reaching beyond the pulpit was also important for the more intensive branches of modern orthodoxy, *Hardal*. By corollary, it was surprising that PR among the non-Orthodox rabbis—notwithstanding that their arena of religious outreach was secular Israel—was rated lower.

The actual appearance of rabbis in the media is less frequent. In terms of production, older rabbis were more successful in being quoted and interviewed than the younger rabbis, even though the latter replied that they gave more importance to PR. It reflected that the older, well-established rabbi was more senior, and better known in the public eye; in part, it also reflected the public's perception—whether true or false—that the authoritarian-type rabbinical personality is unsuitable for the one-on-one dialogue that characterises reporter-source relations in modern mass media.

7. How the Israeli Public View Rabbis' Usage of Public Relations

Public relations in practice, is a two-way relationship. Rabbis are seldom sought out by the general media in Israel, reflecting the perception that rabbis are not important sources of information for the media. Also, while in some countries, for example the United States, clergy are often approached for commentary on news developments of the day, this is less common in the Israeli case. There is a need for the rabbi to become a true leader by engaging with the intellectual challenges of the state, secularism and liberalism, in order to elucidate a "Jewish position" on these.

To be sure, the synagogue has gradually lost its monopoly on promoting moral values since the time of the Emancipation. The clash of cultures depicted here is not surprising given that the rabbi emerges from a conservative culture representing established traditions and religious structures, and is confronted with accelerated cultural change exemplified by, amongst others, the media.

But the relationship between the media and rabbis is further complicated because the journalistic community, in contrast to the hierarchical structure of the rabbi-community relationship, has a tradition of campaigning against those in power—under the banner of the public's right to know—including the obligation of rabbis and religious structures to be accountable to the public.

Moreover, the extent to which media channels have become an "alternative pulpit" for reaching secular Jews should not be exaggerated. Hoover (2006) has argued that today many draw their religious identity not from formal religious institutions like the synagogue but from the wider social environment, and in particular the media. Yet, in the Israeli Jewish case, according to the Gutman Survey, only 17 per cent of Israeli Jews (2571 respondents) polled in 2009 used the internet for material on the Bible, the Talmud, and other Jewish resources. There is, therefore, no evidence in the Israeli Jewish case to support the theory that non-religious Jews look for their religious identity via the internet. Only 5 per cent of "non-religious but not anti-religious" reported using the net "a lot" or "considerably" for Jewish religious information like the Talmud and Bible. Moreover, zero per cent of non-religious anti-religious said so. Just 12 per cent of "traditional" (i.e., not strictly religious but observing some religious rituals) said so. By contrast, religious Israeli Jews were more engaged. Twenty-six per cent of modern Orthodox Jews said they accessed online Jewish religious

content "a lot" or "considerably." The biggest group was the more intense form of modern orthodoxy, *Hardal:* 41 per cent of *Hardal* did so a great deal or considerably.

The gaps in observance and belief between religious Jews in Israel, traditional Israelis, and secular Israelis was also reflected in rabbis' use of public media channels themselves, with the latter looking askance at the projection of Torah through the media.

In a separate poll of the Israeli public (550 respondents) by the author, it was found that secular Israelis opposed the rabbis' usage of public channels like media. Seventy-four per cent and 12 per cent of Israelis defined themselves as secular atheist and opposed usage "completely" or "to a great extent" (14 per cent to "a certain degree") of mass media channels by rabbis. There was, however, a noticeable difference between secular-not-atheist Israelis and secular atheist Israelis. Thus, in contrast to secular atheist Israelis, 28 per cent and 33 per cent of secular-but-not-atheist opposed "completely" or "to a great degree" that rabbis use the media (5 per cent and 21 per cent secular-but-not-atheist Israelis were even inclined to agree "completely" or "to a large extent" that rabbis should use the media to communicate).

Both Israelis who defined themselves as Reform and Conservative were overall inclined to oppose usage of public channels like media. Thirty-one per cent and 37 per cent of Israeli Reform Jews opposed "completely" or "a lot" (26 per cent agreed to some degree) as did 33 per cent and 15 per cent of Israeli Conservative Jews, respectively (25 per cent of Conservative Jews agreed to "some degree" that it was inappropriate to use the media to communicate).

By contrast, it was not surprising that 16 per cent and 26 per cent of the public who defined themselves as modern Orthodox agreed "entirely" or "mostly" that rabbis should use media channels to explain their views. A further 35 per cent "agreed." This was even truer of the *Hardal*—who are proactive in Judaism being promoted and spread to other Jews: 17 per cent and 32 per cent favoured "entirely" or "mostly" that rabbis should be quoted.

Yet, Haredim opposed this. Only 8 per cent and 4 per cent of non-Hasidic Haredim favoured "entirely" or "almost entirely" that rabbis use media channels. Meanwhile, 50 per cent and 27 per cent of Hasidic Haredim, and 32 per cent and 28 per cent of non-Hasidic Haredim did not agree "at all" or "agreed only a little," respectively, that rabbis should

explain their views through the media. This is difficult to understand since Haredim want to turn Israel into a Torah observant community. Perhaps this is because they see the media itself as unclean and illegitimate.

8. Conclusion

Rabbis do recognise the potential role of mass media channels as additions to the traditional ones of the lectern in the synagogue and the *yeshiva* (a religious college for advanced Jewish legal studies), but rabbis' success in penetrating mass media channels in practice—with the exception of those media channels directly controlled by rabbis—has been limited. Moreover, given the reservations the broad public in Israel still holds today about rabbis in the media and public sphere, the traditional and authoritative frameworks for rabbis like the synagogue and *yeshiva* remain key traditional platforms for delivering the rabbi's message—suggesting that rabbinic media relations appear to remain mostly supplementary to the synagogue structure. Additionally, strictures in the Jewish faith regarding advertising and fair trading remain largely disconnected from the functioning of the country's modern economy and commerce.

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