

Informal marketing of Israel experience educational tours.

Cohen, Erik H. "Informal marketing of Israel experience educational tours. " Journal of Travel Research. 37.3 (Feb 1999): 238(6). Academic OneFile. Gale. Hebrew University of Jerusalem. 13 Apr. 2008 <<http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A54036698&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=huji&version=1.0>>.

Abstract:

The Israel Experience educational tours attract participants primarily through informal marketing. Friends, family, and former participants are the most effective advertisers. Most participants are already connected to community networks through which informal marketing takes place. Those attracted through informal, personal channels are more satisfied with their tours than are those recruited through conventional mass media advertising.

Full Text:COPYRIGHT 1999 University of Colorado

The Israel Experience is a short-term educational tour program organized and sponsored through the Youth and Hechalutz (Pioneer) Department of the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education. It provides an interesting case study of a tour package that is part education, part vacation, and part spiritual pilgrimage (E. Cohen 1979).

The program began after the 1967 Six Day War, when visits of Western youth to Israel substantially increased. An estimated one-half million Jewish youngsters have come to Israel over the past 25 years, the majority within the framework of the Youth and Hechalutz Department. Soon the children of many former participants will become the second generation to take part in this program. The various programs range from 1 to 8 weeks in length. They include educational seminars, tours of religious and historic sites, and leisure/social activities. Programs take place in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Galilee (northern region), the Negev (southern region), and Eilat (on the Red Sea). Groups come from all over the world. All are accompanied by both Israeli guides and counselors from the participants' countries.

Although the Israel Experience is not a conventional for-profit tour package, the Joint Authority would like to widen its outreach; therefore, it commissioned this analysis of current marketing strategies and opportunities to improve them. The purpose of the cluster of programs is to strengthen ties between Diaspora Jews and Israel, and this goal must be taken into account in any marketing strategy.

METHODOLOGY

No more than 3 days before their departure from Israel, participants of the Summer 1996 and Summer 1997 program were asked to respond to evaluation questionnaires. The surveys were part of a larger comprehensive study of the programs, and marketing questions were only one of several sections. Participants were asked how they learned about the program and what influenced their decisions to take part in it. They also were asked for information about peers who had wanted to join the program but who did not.

A total of 12,000 students completed these questionnaires. The resultant data are not a representative sample but rather refer to a census of the whole population.

RESULTS

General Data

The bulk of the participants are between 14 and 17 years of age. They come from North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe, the Confederation of Independent States (of the former Soviet Union), Australia, and South Africa. The largest single group of participants (42%) come from the United States. Girls outnumber boys (57% female, 43% male). More than 70% of the participants have had 10 to 12 years of schooling. These statistics vary little from year to year.

Prior Experience and Affiliation

The overwhelming majority of participants have had some Jewish education before this visit to Israel. In 1997, 43% of all respondents were active members of the Jewish community; that is, they had participated in community events at least once a week during the 2 years preceding their trips. Less than 10% stated that they had not participated in community life during the preceding 2 years (Table 1). Also, 67% of those who took part in community events once a month, and 89% of those who took part once a week, did so in the framework of a youth organization. Not only are active members of the community more likely to join an Israel Experience tour, they are more likely to be satisfied with it and recommend it to their peers.

Previous research has shown that in many Western Jewish communities, the adolescent years are those of the least community participation (E. H. Cohen 1991). It is precisely this age group that Israel Experience targets. To recruit members, the Youth and Hechalutz Department is dependent on the existing personal networks among the limited proportion of teenagers who are connected with the Jewish community.

TABLE 1

INVOLVEMENT IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DURING THE PAST 2 YEARS (PERCENTAGES)

Frequency of Involvement	Summer 1997	Summer 1996
Never	7	8
Rarely	21	21
Frequently	29	27
Very frequently	44	44

Note: Among the frequencies of involvement, rarely = once or twice a year, frequently = once or more a month, and very frequently = once or more a week.

TABLE 2

HOW DID THE PARTICIPANTS LEARN ABOUT THEIR ISRAEL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS? (PERCENTAGES)

Media Channel	1997	1996
Friends	69	67
Family members	40	38
Youth organizations	35	35
Posters	6	6
Radio/television	1	1
Former participants	47	47
Newspapers	3	4
Mail brochures	35	35
Jewish Agency representatives	10	7
Community staff	26	30

Note: Each participant could indicate more than one answer.
Therefore, the grand totals exceed 100%.

INFORMAL AND HORIZONTAL MARKETING

The Israel Experience participants learned about the existence of their programs through what we may refer to as informal or horizontal marketing. It is horizontal in the sense that it takes its form and expression through

peers, coparticipants, previous participants, other youth organization members, and family. Mass media (e. g., posters, radio, television, newspapers) reach no more than 7% of all Israel Experience participants. This does not indicate the failure of the mass media but rather serves as confirmation of the internal logic of intense Jewish community participation, where the essence of the message is passed by word of mouth in face-to-face contacts. In fact, participation in an Israel Experience program is the product of an ongoing and recurring dialogue between and among Jewish youngsters involved in their communities (Table 2).

First Contact

In the preceding figures mentioned, no notion of time is considered. Thus, for example, we could not determine whether a participant's first contact was through a mail brochure and was then reinforced by further contacts with friends or with program alumni. Therefore, we were interested in ascertaining the principal agents that inaugurated the process. The responses to this question were congruent with those already indicated. Once again, the informal means of communication were cited most frequently (Table 3).

TABLE 3

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ISRAEL EXPERIENCE PROGRAM?
(PERCENTAGES)

Media Channel	1997	1996
Friends	31	32
Family members	23	22
Youth organizations	9	10
Posters	1	1
Radio/television	[less than]1	[less than]1
Former participants	14	16
Newspapers	1	1
Mail brochures	8	8
Jewish Agency representatives	4	2
Community staff	8	8

Note: Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole numbers, so they do not exactly total 100%.

TABLE 4

WHICH ITEM HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT ON YOUR DECISION TO COME TO
ISRAEL THIS YEAR? (PERCENTAGES)

Media Channel: First Choice	1997	1996
Friends	41	40
Family members	23	23
Youth organizations	5	5
Posters	[less than]1	[less than]1
Radio/television	[less than]1	[less than]1
Former participants	19	21
Newspapers	1	[less than]1
Mail brochures	5	5
Jewish Agency representatives	2	1
Community staff	4	4

Note: Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole numbers, so they do not exactly total 100%.

In Tables 1 to 3, the importance of family and peers is marked, a phenomenon that we will see confirmed in the subsequent tables.

Decision Analysis

To understand the marketing of a product, it is important to be able to analyze potential consumers' exposure to specific modes of communication. However, we also must understand the play of influences that affect a youngster and help him or her decide to take part in a program. Therefore, we asked our participants to tell us what factors had the greatest impacts on their decisions to come to Israel on their specific programs (Tables 4 and 5).

We see the prime importance of peers and family confirmed. Former participants appear as one of the keys to existing marketing. Nevertheless, it is helpful to note the weight that the mail brochure represents. It serves as a type of program "showcase" that can be displayed to family and friends and, therefore, represents a significant aid, even though on its own it plays only a modest role.

TABLE 5

WHICH ITEM HAD THE SECOND GREATEST IMPACT? (PERCENTAGES)

Media Channel: Second Choice	1997	1996
------------------------------	------	------

Friends	27	26
Family members	19	19
Youth organizations	9	10
Posters	1	1
Radio/television	[less than]1	[less than]1
Former participants	22	22
Newspapers	1	1
Mail brochures	11	11
Jewish Agency representatives	3	2
Community staff	7	8

Note: Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole numbers, so they do not exactly total 100%.

The Jewish Agency representatives who organize and help publicize these trips seldom are cited by participants as significant factors in their decisions to come to Israel. This might be because their influence tends to be indirect, through posters and brochures and through their work with the youth groups. More research is needed to determine whether these professional representatives are, in fact, a marginal factor in bringing youth to Israel or whether their behind-the-scenes role is simply not recognized by the participants.

Correlation between Marketing Channels

In an attempt to uncover the internal structure of the marketing system, we conducted a multivariable analysis. Although there is much more to be learned by direct inspection of the tables, we wanted to go beyond a linear reading of the data to discover whether there is an internal structure of the methods by which participants are recruited to these tours.

We can more easily explore the interactions among the various elements in the marketing of Israel Experience programs by calculating the correlations between them, as shown in Figure 1. To calculate these correlations, we used the monotonicity coefficient (MONCO) procedure, a regression-free coefficient of correlation (for a mathematical presentation of the MONCO, see Guttman 1986, pp. 80-87).

These correlation coefficients were then run through a computer program that allows the relationships among all 10 media channels to be considered simultaneously. We chose to use a statistical package based on the work of Louis Guttman. The structure of the data from the study is presented through a data analysis technique known as smallest space analysis (SSA).(2) SSA is a subset of the broad family of data analysis called multidimensional scaling that portrays the data spatially so that they can be easily read (Young 1987).

The SSA method graphically represents these variables as points in a Euclidean space. The points are plotted on a map so that the greater the correlation between two variables, the closer together they will be on the map

and so that, conversely, the smaller the correlation between two variables, the farther apart they will be on the map (Guttman 1968, 1994; Levy 1994). We used the Hebrew University Data Analysis Package (HUDAP) software program to map the 10 marketing channels used to reach potential clients [ILLUSTRATION FOR FIGURE 2 OMITTED].

The map shows that the media channels can be divided into two main categories: mass media and personal media. The mass media include brochures, newspapers, radio, and the like. The personal media can be further divided into the following subcategories: informal (friends, family, former participants, community staff members) and organizational (youth groups, official Jewish Agency representatives). In the personal media region, two centers of Jewish community life are represented, one centered around family and friends and the other around groups and organizations.

The plotting of these variables shows us the categories into which the various marketing channels can be divided, but it does not tell us which segments of the population are more influenced by each of these marketing strategies. We wanted to determine whether different types of logic influenced various types of young people. We also wanted to see whether a correlation existed between the way in which participants were drawn to the program and their satisfaction with it. Thus, we used a special technique developed in recent years whereby external variables, representing population subgroups, could be introduced onto the map.

It is important to understand that these external variables do not play any role in the location of the original 10 marketing channels on the map. With the use of a special algorithm developed for the purpose, the original map is first "fixed," and then the external variables are plotted, one by one, based on their correlations to the 10 marketing items (Cohen and Amar 1993). These population variables are located in the SSA with respect to the original variables and not with respect to each other. Furthermore, the external variables must in no way influence the location of the original variables. In other words, the location of the population variables is dependent on the original variables, whereas that of the original variables is not dependent on the external variables.

These six external variables also are called dummy variables because they were extracted from two other primary variables. One such primary variable, satisfaction, had four categories as it appeared on the questionnaire: very satisfied, satisfied, not satisfied, and not satisfied at all. These categories produced three dummy variables: very satisfied, satisfied, and not satisfied/not satisfied at all. The three variables for community participation were similarly extracted from four other categories on the questionnaires.

The inclusion of these external variables representing subpopulations in the analysis helps us to further understand the logic behind the marketing of this program. Earlier research showed that the degree of satisfaction with the trip to Israel can be seen as a type of abstract or summation of the program (E. H. Cohen 1995). In a client-oriented approach to marketing, satisfaction is a key concept. It also is important in terms of informal education. Kahane (1997), a scholar and author on the topic of youth organizations, lists "expressive instrumentalism" (activities performed for instant satisfaction) as one of the key components

of informal education (p. 29).

Participation in the Jewish community also has been revealed to be a significant variable. As mentioned earlier, the teenagers who take part in the Israel Experience programs tend to be those who are much more active in the community than are their peer groups at large. We wanted to understand the interrelation between community participation and effective marketing, namely, whether there are different means of reaching youngsters actively involved in the community and reaching those on the fringes.

The Cognitive Map and Community Involvement

On this cognitive map, we plotted the frequency of attendance at community events prior to the Israel Experience tour. This helped us to analyze which marketing strategies were reaching youth of various levels of community involvement. Those most active in community events (very frequently response in Table 1) appear in the personal media/organizational region of the map. This tells us that they were most likely to hear of the program through their youth groups or the Jewish Agency staff who work with the youth groups. An intensified connection with these groups, so that more of their members hear of the Israel Experience program, would be the easiest way in which to reach these youngsters at the core of the community.

Those who participated only occasionally (once a month), seldom, or never were in the mass media region. They were less likely to be influenced by a youth group or Israel Experience alumni. Mail brochures or ads might attract them to the program, but they are closest to the family coordinate because this probably is their primary connection to the Jewish community. Their parents should be targeted as a method of reaching these youngsters on the periphery.(3)

The Cognitive Map and Satisfaction with the Program

Next, we wanted to analyze the correlations between the various marketing media and satisfaction with the program. The results clearly confirm our hypothesis about the relationship between informal advertising and the success of the tour. Those most satisfied with the program are seen in the informal/personal media region of the map. This tells us that friends and former participants play an even greater role for these students than does the family. Here the Israel Experience uniquely expresses the importance of its own informal logic. The tour is, first of all, an informal educational program implemented in the framework of a peer group, and for those who learned about the program through the informal channels, their sense of community belonging is reinforced by the experience. There is a type of reciprocal reinforcement between the Israel Experience and involvement in the informal Jewish community, a fact that enabled us to understand why those who were only satisfied or were not satisfied are located in the opposite diagonal on the map. We should recall that in this type of educational experience (where a small minority of individuals were unsatisfied), the real difference is not between the satisfied and the unsatisfied but rather between those who were very satisfied and those who were merely satisfied (E. H. Cohen 1994).

The participants recruited through mass media tend to be less satisfied with the program. They are further from the core of the community and probably have fewer friends among the other group participants. Because the curricula and activities of most programs are geared toward youngsters with some background in Jewish or Zionist education, participants who are less actively involved and who learned about the program from radio spots or newspapers might not be as able to appreciate the program as are those more intimately involved with the Jewish community.

The fact that the most involved and the most satisfied both appear in the personal media half of the map reinforces the pattern of informal marketing. These young people are part of an existing community, and it is within this framework that the most effective advertising for Israel Experience takes place. Despite the fact that the former participants overwhelmingly indicated their satisfaction with the program and reiterated that it had a tremendous impact on them, there has been no significant increase in the number of youngsters coming on these tours in recent years. This can be understood when we see that effective marketing takes place within a limited population, that is, those already involved in the Jewish community and likely to come in contact with the most successful marketing channels: former participants, youth group leaders, and the like.

Recommendations as Advertisements

In our comprehensive study of the Israel Experience, we asked teenagers concluding the program whether or not they would recommend it to others. These recommendations are one of the most valuable (and cost-effective) forms of advertising. One way of intensifying such informal marketing would be to provide alumni with brochures or other materials to help them encourage their peers to look into the program.

Primary Targets

As already noted, Israel Experience participants are essentially part of the core community or the immediate periphery. It is not at all certain that Jewish youngsters on the more distant periphery can ever be reached. Before attempting to conquer this very distant public, we would suggest, first of all, that the more reasonably approachable public be considered, that is, the Jewish youngsters who are active in Jewish community life as well as those on the immediate periphery whose involvement is more informal and sporadic (limited to family or religious occasions) (Goldfarb Consultants 1991; Hochstein 1986).

To learn more about this primary target population, we asked participants for information about any of their close friends who had wanted to come to Israel but could not. We have already successfully applied this type of question in previous market survey studies, with our respondents becoming informants on their immediate milieus. Obviously, this type of indirect information cannot provide very precise statistics, but it has the triple advantage of being easily operational, very cost-effective, and (ultimately) a fair index of the problem under consideration.

More than two-thirds of the youngsters interviewed each year indicated that they had at least one close friend

who would have liked to participate in an Israel Experience program but did not (Table 6). We can estimate that about 5,000 youngsters fall into this category each year.

The price of these programs seems to be the main reason why these youngsters did not participate. It is reasonable to assume that parental objection is, in fact, more often a reason for not participating than might appear from the data; the majority of participants interviewed are adolescents and, therefore, not always inclined to admit the importance of a parental influence. The response "too expensive" might actually hide parental objection. Hence, parents should be taken into account as a future marketing target.

TABLE 6

DID RESPONDENTS HAVE ONE OR MORE JEWISH FRIENDS WHO WANTED TO COME TO ISRAEL THIS YEAR BUT DID NOT? (PERCENTAGES)

	1997	1996
Yes	63	67
Reasons for not coming		
Too expensive	29	34
Other obligations	26	25
Parental objection	13	19
Inconvenient dates	12	12
Summer school	6	7
Other reasons	7	7

Note: Respondents could choose as many of the five available options that they believed to be relevant. This was imperative because the respondents at times indicated more than one friend.

Reaching the Unaffiliated

Virtually nothing is known about unaffiliated Jewish youth, that is, those on the more distant periphery. If there

is any way in which to reach them, then it seems plausible to assume that it will not be through the regular settings, which are precisely those in which these youngsters do not take part. By the same token, if organizers manage to reach them and persuade them to sign up for the Israel Experience program, then it will be necessary to invent new curricula and hire a new type of personnel (Bouganim 1988; E. H. Cohen 1994).

As stated, there is a positive correlation between the degree of involvement in Jewish community life and the degree of satisfaction with the Israel Experience program (E. H. Cohen 1986, 1994, in press). This suggests that, under present conditions, the Israel Experience program does not respond to the needs and aspirations of Jewish youngsters not already prepared and educated for such a tour. If such "peripheral" youth are recruited, then the tour is liable to disappoint them, and a potentially meaningful experience can become a "pseudo-event" (Boorstin 1964).(4) If these young people are to be targeted, then the organizers of Israel Experience tours also must conceive programs and educational settings in which they will not be made to feel like outsiders.

CONCLUSIONS

This study of the Israel Experience shows the advantages that informal marketing schemes can have in promoting tour packages for targeted populations. Conventional, formal marketing schemes can play a role in providing information about programs, prices, and the like, but they are less effective as primary attractants.

We found that most Israel Experience participants learned about the existence of their programs through what we might refer to as informal or horizontal marketing. Even more significantly, those who were most satisfied with their programs were those recruited by this type of marketing. This phenomenon becomes self-replicating as these participants recommend the program to their friends. Similarly, young people active within the Jewish community and youth organizations tended to learn about the program through these channels and, again, to pass information about it on to their peers. Intensified advertising within these informal channels seems to be the most fruitful means of recruiting new participants. Those less actively involved generally are connected to this network through their families. Parents should be targeted as a way in which to reach these youngsters on the periphery.

This study uses a specific case to demonstrate universal laws of organization between mass media and personal media as marketing agents in the tourism/pilgrimage industry. It provides a theoretical model of reading market analysis for any tourism program aimed at a specific population that has its own communications network already in place. Investigating ways in which to further tap into this existing network would do more to boost participation than would expensive mass advertising aimed at the general public.

NOTES

1. This comprehensive market survey analysis was preceded by earlier studies (E. H. Cohen 1986; S. M. Cohen 1986; Ruder Finn and Rotman 1989; Levenberg and Isaacs 1991; Jewish Education Service of

North America 1991).

2. SSA and many other Guttman data analysis techniques such as POSAC, MSA, and DISCO are available in the Hebrew University Data Analysis Package (HUDAP). HUDAP was written by two mathematicians, Reuven Amar and Shlomo Toledano, under the mentorship of Guttman. The whole package is based on the nonlinear monotonous mathematical approach (Guttman 1968). HUDAP can be purchased through the computer center of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

3. On the concept of center and periphery in sociology, see Shils 1975.

4. Following the work of MacCannell (1976), we discovered that for Jews coming from the core of community life to Israel, the visit is transformed into a very profound experience by the integration of multiple mirrors of Jewish identity formed in the Diaspora (E. H. Cohen 1986). This trait corresponds to the highest experiential and existential forms of tourism (E. Cohen 1979).

REFERENCES

Boorstin, D. J. (1964). *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in American Society*. New York: Harper & Row.

Bouganim, A. (1988). *Short Term Programs' Tourism and Education Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Israel, Jewish Education Committee*.

Cohen, E. (1979). "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experience." *Sociology*, 13: 179-201.

Cohen, E. H. (1986). "Tourisme et identite." *Pardes*, 4: 84-97.

----- (1991). *L 'etude et l'education juive en France*. Paris: Editions du Cerf.

----- (1994). *Toward a Strategy of Excellence: The Israel Experience Ongoing Survey and Evaluation*. Jerusalem: Youth and Hechalutz Department.

----- (1995). "Toward a Strategy of Excellence: A Systemic Analysis and Policy Research based on External Variables in SSA." In *Facet Theory Analysis and Design*, edited by J. J. Hox, G. J. Mellenbergh, and P. G. Swanborn. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, pp. 55-62.

----- (in press). *The Israel University Experience: A Comprehensive Survey of Visiting Students in Israel (1994-1997)*. Jerusalem: Research and Evaluation Consultants.

Cohen, E. H., and R. Amar (1993). "External Variables in WSSAI (Including External Profiles and POSAC

Regions): A Contribution." Paper presented at Fourth International Facet Theory Conference, Prague.

Cohen, S. M (1986). Jewish Travel to Israel: Incentives and Inhibitions among U.S. and Canadian Teenagers and Young Adults. Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Israel, Jewish Education Committee.

Goldfarb Consultants (1991). "Attitudes toward Travel to Israel among Jewish Adults and Jewish Youth." Research Report for Charles Bronfman Foundation, Jerusalem.

Guttman, L. (1968). "A General Nonmetric Technique for Finding the Smallest Coordinate Space for a Configuration of Points." Psychometrika, 33: 469-506.

----- (1986). "Coefficients of Polytonicity and Monotonicity." In Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences. Vol. 7. New York: John Wiley.

----- (1994). "A General Nonmetric Technique for Finding the Smallest Coordinate Space for a Configuration of Points." In Louis Guttman on Theory and Methodology: Selected Writings, edited by S. Levy. Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth.

Hochstein, A. (1986). The Israel Experience: Summary Report to the Jewish Education Committee. Jerusalem: Jewish Agency for Israel, Native Policy and Planning Consultants.

Jewish Education Service of North America (1991). Israel Program Marketing: Feasibility Study. Final report. Jerusalem: Jewish Education Service of North America.

Kahane, R. (1997). The Origins of Postmodern Youth: Informal Youth Movements in a Comparative Perspective. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Levenberg, J., and L. Isaacs (1991). Israel Experience Marketing Project: Highlights of Findings and Recommendations. Jerusalem: CRB Foundation and Jewish Agency.

Levy, S., ed. (1994). Louis Guttman on Theory and Methodology: Selected Writings. Aldershot, UK: Dartmouth.

MacCannell, D. (1976). The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class. New York: Schocken.

Ruder Finn and Rotman (1989). "Marketing Manual for Agencies Involved with Youth Travel to Israel." Draft edition for review by Jewish Agency, Jewish Education Committee, Jerusalem.

Shils, E. (1975). Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Young, F. W. (1987). Multidimensional Scaling: History, Theory, and Applications. Robert M. Hamer, ed. Hillsdale, N J: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Erik H. Cohen is a lecturer in the School of Education at Bar-Ilan University and is director of Research & Evaluation, a group of independent consultants and researchers in Jerusalem. The comprehensive survey of Israel Experience Tours, which produced the information for this article, was commissioned by the Youth & Hechalutz Department of the Joint Authority for Jewish-Zionist Education. Thanks to Allison Ofanansky and Ruth Rossing for their help in editing this article.

Gale Document Number:A54036698
