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Israel's Travel and Tourism Public Relations

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renee Crown University Honors
May 2013

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Abstract:

Israel's geopolitical location and conflict with its surrounding neighbors has resulted in constant negative media coverage and poor public perception of the country. As a result of the ongoing turmoil and biased media reports, the country's tourism industry has failed to live up to its dreams and expectations. In an attempt to fully understand Israel's travel and tourism industry, the researcher wrote a case study analysis that analyzes Israel's PR efforts and media campaigns that are created to brand the country and change its negative image in the media. Through online research, news articles, scholarly journals and in-person interviews, the author examines the positive and negative aspects of Israel's tourism industry. In conclusion, the author found that while Israel's tourism industry largely suffers because of unfavorable media reports, there are also many internal problems that need to be addressed so that the country's tourism industry can prosper.

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Introduction:

The aim of my capstone project for the Renee Crown University Honors program is to research, examine and critique Israel's travel and tourism public relations. Israel is a very interesting place to analyze because it is a complicated country that is understood by a few and disliked by many. One common view of Israel is that it is a dangerous war zone. The other view, which is really only known by people who visit the country, is that Israel is a gorgeous place filled with diverse culture and wonderful people. Since Israel is notoriously known to be disliked around the world by many, Israel has to work extra hard to develop creative ways to attract tourists to the country. Public relations practitioners are hired to attract tourists to Israel so that the country can continue to be a popular tourist destination. As trouble in the Middle East has increased and as the media continue to negatively portray Israel, PR professionals have had to develop ways to pitch the positive and wonderful aspects of Israel to the uninformed public. This task requires creative ideas, money and the support of proud Israelis.

Tourism is a growing industry that many cities and countries rely on. While conflict may continue to worsen in the Middle East, Israel's economy can't afford a decline in tourism rates; Israel is very reliant on the tourism industry because it is a large contributor to the economy. More importantly, Israel relies on tourists to visit the country so they can see for themselves that Israel really is more than just a war zone. Israel's reputation has been an issue

since it was first established in 1948. It has been the job of public relations practitioners to solve this problem so that Israel is well represented in the media.

Research Questions:

The capstone project will be broken up into three parts: research, evaluation and critique. Once the first two phases are complete, I will draw conclusions on Israel's travel and tourism PR efforts and attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Americans perceive Israel? What are American perceptions and misperceptions of Israel?

RQ2: What challenges and setbacks does Israel face in properly branding itself to the public?

RQ3: How does the Israel Ministry of Tourism work with PR professionals so that the media positively portray Israel? What kind of PR campaigns has it created?

RQ4: Does the Israel Ministry of Tourism find the PR campaigns to be successful and beneficial? Have Americans' perceptions of Israel changed for the better as a result of public relations practitioners' work?

Concepts:

The following listed concepts are terms that will be vital toward answering my research questions: branding, travel and tourism, and reputation. In order to properly draw conclusions and answer the research

questions, there needs to be a clear understanding of these terms and how they apply directly to Israel.

Branding:

In an effort to properly understand nation branding, Jeremy Funk and Fang Wan interviewed Israel's consul general in Toronto, Amir Gissin. Prior to his current position, Gissin held many roles in the Israeli government such as: chief of staff to the minister for Diaspora affairs, assistant to prime minister's foreign policy advisor, and deputy spokesman in the ministry of foreign affairs. Through Funk and Wan's in-depth interview, the audience learned how Gissin and his team have worked to properly brand Israel (Funk & Wan, 2011).

Most recently, Gissin served as director of the public affairs department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Through this position, Gissin worked on Israel's public diplomacy strategy and helped launch Israel's branding project. According to Gissin, there are external and internal approaches to branding Israel. An external approach is when an advertising or marketing agency is hired and uses techniques like celebrity endorsement. The internal approach is more soulful and requires starting with internal stakeholders and focusing on pairing multiple stakeholders with Israel's core values. Gissin believes that the internal approach is more useful in the case of Israel; the country has to focus on internal branding to steer away from its conflict and "deliver an inviting message of passion, creativity, and social vibrancy" (Funk & Wan, 2011, p.106).

According to Gissin, the branding of Israel is far different from the branding of any other country. Most countries choose to brand themselves and undergo a facelift because of a certain event that occurred and ruined their image. Gissin gives South Africa as an example because the country had to brand itself *due to* the fall of the apartheid regime. This differs from the case of Israel because there was nothing specific that happened—rather, many problematic events have occurred in Israel and they have resulted in negative public perception (Funk &Wan, 2011).

According to Gissin, since Israel's conflict is so current and prevalent in the media, his team doesn't aim to erase the conflict through branding. Rather, they try and add layers to Israel's image so that people have a more multidimensional view of Israel. Their goal is to "educate internally; to connect people, to create the buy-in internally, then start to do it externally without hiding the conflict" (Funk & Wan, 2011, p.108).

Gissin and his branding team attempted to brand Israel internally by answering the questions, "What is an Israeli for me?" and "Am I proud of it?" Gissin and his team tried to find what Israelis love about their country so that they could use that information to change its image. Through research, they found five clear characteristics that most citizens believe adequately represent Israel. In the end, Gissin decided that only three of the characteristics would be useful in marketing messages about Israel to other countries abroad. The first quality was passion; Israelis love, hate, eat and fight with passion. The branding team used this characteristic by branding Israelis as people who are

proud of their passionate hardworking culture. The second characteristic is creativity. Many people are unaware of Israel's technological innovations and how much they have contributed to the world. For example, the Israeli company Marvel is the creator of the technology that allows Blackberry devices to operate (Funk & Wan, 2011, p.109). The last characteristic is fusion; Israeli communities are mixed together and cultures are blended into one another to create a diverse, fused country (Funk & Wan, 2011).

Defining the three qualities of Israel—passion, creativity and fusion—was the first stage in branding Israel. At the time of Funk and Wan's interview, Gissin and his branding team were still in the first stage. Looking toward the future, the second stage in branding Israel would be to diffuse the three messages throughout Israel; they couldn't market messages to other countries if people internally were unaware of them. Thus, the branding team would work to make Israelis more aware of the three qualities that accurately represent their country. Gissin said the third stage would involve creating marketing campaigns to disperse Israel's brand. Sending out the messages would involve using Israeli connections all over the world. Instead of relying on the media to relay Israel's image, Gissin would reach out to international Israeli partners to help spread the image in their local communities (Funk & Wan, 2011).

Travel and Tourism:

Once the PR professionals have successfully lured tourists to Israel, it's the Israel Ministry of Tourism's job to make sure that tourists have a satisfying visit. Like all countries, tourism in Israel operates on transportation and sightseeing locations. The Israel Ministry of Tourism, located in Jerusalem, manages Israel's travel and tourism. The ministry serves several roles and is very important to Israel's travel and tourism. The ministry's website is organized so that tourists can navigate the site and learn what Israel has to offer for every individual, why they should travel to Israel, and how to plan an itinerary.

Tourists can travel to Israel by air, sea or land. Israel's positive relationship and proximity to its neighbors, Egypt and Jordan, allow for people to travel in between the borders. However, as conflict continues to worsen in the Middle East, tourists have to be aware of updated border crossings when traveling in between the countries (Feinberg, 2005).

In order to understand Israel's travel and tourism industry, it's important to know the locations that Israel relies on tourists to visit. The ministry has a section on its website of 18 suggested itineraries that could appeal to a variety of tourists. Each itinerary was created so that someone could travel the country in four, seven or 10 days. For example, the "general interest itinerary" is organized so that a visitor travels to the most popular tourist hotspots in Israel. These locations are frequently visited by tourists and are the reason why many people choose to visit Israel. According to the

ministry, to have a full Israeli experience, the average tourist should visit these destinations: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Caesarea, Haifa, Rosh Hanikra, Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, Hula Valley, Massada, the Dead Sea, Eilat, the central Negev and the Avdat and Be'er Sheba. The ministry also includes several other tourist locations near each main area previously listed (Feinberg, 2005).

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics has several statistics on tourism in Israel. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the tourist arrivals in Israel from the years 2000 to 2010 were:

Year	Number of tourist arrivals in Israel
2000	2,416,800
2001	1,195,700
2002	861,900
2003	1,063,400
2004	1,505,500
2005	1,902,700
2006	1,825,200
2007	2,063,100
2008	2,568,600
2009	2,321,400
2010	2,803,200

(*Tourist Arrivals*, 2011, Appendix A)

After evaluating these numbers, it's clear that travel and tourism rates in Israel have fluctuated over the years. It's possible that Israel's deep decline in tourist arrivals in 2001 and 2002 was due to the violence that broke out in 2000 between parts of Israel and Palestinian territories, Gaza and the West Bank.

'Israel: One Hundred Years of Green' is a large campaign that the Israel Ministry of Tourism has been working on in recent years. The campaign was launched to promote Israel's environment and eco-friendly traveling. The ministry's website provides information for how tourists can green their stay

while touring Israel. Through this campaign, the ministry is able to promote several tourism sites in Israel while attracting eco-travelers. The ministry promotes travelers to participate in outdoor activities and to tour historical sites that have environmental significance. Additionally, the ministry suggests eco-friendly lodging: Kibbutzim (collective living communities), bed and breakfasts on the countryside, hotels that adhere to strict environmental policies and camping in the Negev Desert (*Israel: One Hundred Years of Green*, 2011).

Reputation:

Reputation Management

According to David Deephouse's journal article, *The Term 'Reputation Management': Users, Uses and the Trademark Tradeoff*, reputation management is a fairly new term that became popular in the 1990's when *Fortune* magazine released a survey about the Most Admired Corporations. The survey motivated corporations to be more cautious with how their reputation was perceived by the public because they knew they were being evaluated by the media (Deephouse, 2002). Corporations' reputations are one of the most important variables to a successful thriving business; stakeholders invest in companies that are known to be reliable and profitable. Thus, companies have to make sure the public favors them so they can gain more stakeholders.

A company's reputation can be extremely well liked by the public and then tarnished and destroyed minutes later. All it takes to ruin a company's public image is one mistake. Companies use reputation management to maintain their image or fix an image that is negatively affecting their company. According to Peeka Aula's article, *Social Media, Reputation Risk and Ambient Publicity Management*, "the loss of reputation affects competitiveness, local positioning, the trust and loyalty of stakeholders, media relations, and the legitimacy of operations, even the license to exist" (Aula, 2010, p. 44). Reputations influence every sector of a company and therefore should be highly supervised. Organizations that fail to monitor their reputation are often those that haven't properly researched and experimented with risk management strategies (Aula, 2010).

Israel's Public Reputation

Whether it's positive or negative, every country around the world has a reputation. Public perception of a country often derives from personal firsthand experience or from what one hears and sees in the media. The media are often the ones who create the most generalized opinions and reputations of a country. Israel has been a very popular topic in the media since it was first established in 1948. It's very important for PR professionals to understand Israel's historical and present international reputation so that they can take the right steps in branding the country.

According to Eli Avraham's article, *Marketing and Managing Nation Branding during Prolonged Crisis: the Case of Israel*, when Israel was first

established in 1848 after World War II, the world viewed Israel as a place for "Jewish immigrants who were building the only democratic country in the region, with manifold economic difficulties; its very survival was subject to doubt" (Avraham, 2009, p.204). Israel was perceived as a weak, hopeless country because it was starting from scratch in the very undeveloped Middle East. However, Israel's reputation changed drastically in 1967 when Israelis fought for their land in the Six-Day War against its neighboring Arab countries. Israel won control of several Arab territories and was suddenly perceived as the strong powerful David against the weak Goliath Arab countries (Avraham, 2009).

Since the Six-Day War, Israel's troublesome battle with its neighbors has increased and become a modern-day international issue. According to Avraham (2009), the media have a tendency to sympathize with Palestinians when covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The media as well as Arab states' promotion of the 'victim image' have turned Israel's reputation to be more of the Goliath character. Additionally, Avraham notes that there is a difference in American and European perception of Israel based on how the media report the conflict. Many Americans choose to sympathize with Israel due to the government's strong relationship with Israel. However, it is believed that Europeans sympathize with the opposing Palestinian side (Avraham, 2009). Israel's international reputation can vary greatly depending on someone's personal beliefs and background.

Methods

In order to properly understand and organize the research on Israel's travel and tourism PR, a case study was created to reveal the process, results and conclusion. The researcher used the third and fourth editions of Robert Yin's book, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, in order to understand what a case study is and to explain why it was an appropriate research method for the capstone project. According to Yin (2009), "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident," (p.18). This definition validates why the author chose a case study for Israel's tourism PR; her topic entailed in-depth research into an industry that is a current, social phenomenon and is affected by numerous outside variables.

According to Yin (2009), case studies are appropriate when the research calls for "many more variables of interest than data points." (p. 2). Thus, case studies require multiple sources of evidence to answer the research questions that will result in triangular data. A case study was the most appropriate method for the capstone project because it involves in-depth research about "how" or "why" a certain phenomenon operates. Additionally, a case study works best when the research doesn't require controlling behavioral events and rather focuses on contemporary events. Researching Israel's tourism relied on current and recent media campaigns as well as current social, cultural and political situations that affect the tourism industry.

Using these resource variables as well as primary interviews, the researcher was able to learn "how " and "why" Israel's tourism industry functions.

Yin (2009) writes about the detailed sequence of events that are useful when gathering research for a case study. In order to stay organized, the researcher followed this sequence while gathering primary evidence for the case study. The sequence entails: creating questions prior to the interview, reviewing the respondent's answers immediately after the interview and developing those results into new questions that can ultimately further your research. According to Yin (2009), "as you collect case study evidence, you must quickly review the evidence and continually ask yourself why events or facts appear as they do" (p. 69). This is vital to proper case study research because it will help build data and lead the researcher in search of further evidence (p. 69).

Additionally, Yin suggests that it's important that the researcher is flexible and has good listening skills. Flexibility and listening skills were two traits that appeared daily throughout the capstone project. The author was constantly listening to what the interviewees had to say while resisting the temptations to include her own biased opinions. Including her own opinions could have created an uncomfortable environment between the interviewee and herself as the interviewer and ultimately could have hindered the research's progress and results. The author was also aware that she needed to be flexible with the project because she didn't always receive the answers and data that were originally hypothesized. Finding unexpected research and data

was an obstacle that was both exciting and frustrating; discovering this information meant a lot more work but it also introduced the researcher to people with different opinions that she would have never considered important toward her research. The greatest lesson that the researcher learned from the process was that in case studies, no schedule is as organized and definite as you design it to be because unexpected information will always appear.

Yin (2009) states that in a case study the best way to maximize your research is by using evidence from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artifacts. According to Yin (2009), it is important to collect data from multiple sources because the end result should be triangulation. Yin (2009) writes how collecting multiple sources of data will allow the author to "address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues" and the most important advantage is the "development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration," (p.115-116). You are able to successfully triangulate data when the final facts of your case study are supported by multiple sources of evidence. Using multiple sources of evidence and triangulation will ensure the case study's validity rather than relying on a single source of information (Yin, 2009, p. 117).

Throughout the research period, the researcher used five of the six sources Yin recommended: documents, when reading through media campaigns; archival records, such as the Central Bureau of Statistic's *Israel in Figures 2011*; interviews, with several professionals in Israel's tourism

industry as well as tourists; direct observation, when interviewing interviewees in their work environments; participant observation, when participating in organized tours around Israel to experience tourism first hand. The researcher was able to successfully gather evidence from five out of the six artifacts—physical or cultural artifacts were neither useful nor needed for this field of research.

The author's main source of evidence resulted from interviews. Yin (2009) discusses the most appropriate ways to conduct an interview for a case study. As Yin (2009) suggests, the author always attempted to ask the interview questions in an unbiased manner while guiding the conversation. Most of the interviews could have been considered a "focused interview" because they were open-ended conversations that were guided by a list of premeditated questions (Yin, 2009, p. 107). One of the most enjoyable interviews for the author was when the prearranged interview turned into an in-depth interview. The meeting with Oren Mor, manager of the tourism office in Jerusalem, was supposed to simply focus on prearranged questions but quickly turned into a more personal in-depth interview; Mor provided answers to the questions as well as his own personal opinions on the matters discussed. Yin (2009) discussed how often, at the end of an interview, the interviewee will provide the interviewer with other potential people to interview about the subject matter (p. 107). This situation fortunately occurred for the researcher during the interview with Mor. Mor was kind enough to

connect the author with other reliable sources that were helpful with her research.

According to Yin (2003), it's very important that the researcher creates an organized case study database so that future investigators can "review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written case study reports" (p. 102). An organized and functioning database includes case study notes, case study documents, tabular materials, and narratives. While researching and writing the case study on Israel's travel PR, the researcher kept an organized case study database. Using her computer and hard files, the researcher divided all of her case study notes by subject and date so that they stayed organized throughout the project. The researcher separated the files by research notes, interview notes, scholarly journals and news articles. This form of organization made it easier for the researcher to return to the database and retrieve necessary information. Additionally, the organization allowed the external observer to easily "follow the derivation of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions" (p. 105). The material was presented in this manner in the event that future audiences want to read the case study for further analysis and potential replication.

In addition to collecting information about Israel's travel industry from in-depth interviews, the researcher utilized online articles. Instead of researching the Internet for random articles that may or may not pertain to Israel's travel and tourism industry, the author used Google Alerts to help with her research. Google Alerts were extremely efficient because she would

receive an email notification once a day when articles containing the keywords "Israel tourism" were published on the Internet. This reliable resource introduced the researcher to credible articles from leading online newspapers such *as Haaretz,* the *New York Times,* the *Times of Israel,* the *Jerusalem Post, Forbes* and more.

Once all of the research and data were collected and recorded, the researcher used a pattern matching technique to analyze the case study information. According to Yin (2003), pattern matching is used by comparing "an empirically based pattern with a predicted one (or with several alternative predictions). If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study to strengthen its internal validity" (p. 116). By incorporating the pattern matching technique into her case study, the researcher was able to compare the scholarly articles she originally analyzed with the research findings she discovered. The scholarly articles discussed in the beginning of the report covered important topics—branding, travel and tourism and reputation—that were helpful in creating and answering the original research questions. After all of the research on how Israel uses travel and tourism PR to brand itself was recorded and organized, the researcher used pattern matching to compare her findings to the scholarly articles that focus on branding, travel and tourism and reputation. Through the analytical case study process, the researcher looked to determine the proper ways to maintain a brand, reputation and travel and tourism industry, according to the scholarly articles and matched those results with how Israel actually maintains its brand, travel and tourism

industry and reputation. The researcher was searching for comparisons, differences and ultimately, to see if the theories matched and if not, to determine which approach was better. After comparing the literature with the research results, the researcher was able to answer her original research questions and draw conclusions.

Results

The researcher began the study with the assumption that analyzing the Israel Ministry of Tourism's PR campaigns would be sufficient enough material to understand Israel's tourism PR industry. However, as the process unfolded, she realized that in order to collect enough data and create a proper case study analysis it was necessary to additionally include campaigns created by other professionals in the industry. Since information was collected that didn't necessarily pertain to the original research questions, the audience will notice that the material in the results and conclusions answers questions beyond the four established research questions. The research questions that were created prior to the data collection period were as follows:

RQ1: How do Americans perceive Israel? What are American perceptions and misperceptions of Israel?

RQ2: What challenges and setbacks does Israel face in properly branding itself to the public?

RQ3: How does the Israel Ministry of Tourism work with PR professionals so that the media positively portray Israel? What kind of PR campaigns has it created?

RQ4: Does the Israel Ministry of Tourism find the PR campaigns to be successful and beneficial? Have Americans' perceptions of Israel changed for the better as a result of public relations practitioners' work?

The answers to the research questions come from interviews, campaigns and news articles. In an effort to answer the research questions, the researcher will summarize the campaigns, interviews and news articles.

RQ1: How do Americans perceive Israel? What are American perceptions and misperceptions of Israel?

Fran and Max Hamburger, a married couple from Dix Hills, NY, visited Israel for their first time from March 14 to 26, 2012. Prior to their arrival in Israel, the only knowledge they had about Israel was what they learned from the media and friends and family members who had previously visited the country. The Hamburgers were very excited for their trip because they had only heard the most wonderful stories about the country. However, while the Hamburgers were looking forward to their two-week-long excursion, media reports in the news made them slightly concerned for their safety and well-being (F. Hamburger, personal communication, March 26, 2012) (M. Hamburger, personal communication, March 26, 2012).

The Hamburgers had the pleasure of touring most of Israel and even fit in a day trip to Petra, Jordan. The Hamburgers visited and toured most of Israel's celebrated tourist sites: Tel Aviv, Yafo, The Dead Sea, The Red Sea, the Negev Desert, Eilat, Casarea, Akko, Tiberia, the Sea of Galilee, Haifa, Herzaliya, Natanya, the Golan Heights and Svat. As the Hamburgers reflected on their trip and all of the sites they visited, they came to the conclusion that Israel was far more primitive than they had expected. They felt that the

country's structure and architecture was a mix between Europe and the Middle East. The Hamburgers also stated that while most of the country was beautiful and filled with wonderful history, they didn't find some parts of Israel to be particularly aesthetically pleasing. However, they said that the dirt and smell of several parts of the country didn't hinder their incredible experience. Additionally, the Hamburgers said that they were surprised at how safe they felt during the entirety of their trip. Fran said that she felt safe "99% of the time." The only time that Fran didn't feel safe was while walking from Yafo to Tel Aviv. Yafo is located at the most southern part of Tel Aviv. Yafo is the most ancient section of Tel Aviv and is famous for its old port and delicious Jaffa Oranges. While Tel Aviv is predominately populated by Jewish Israelis, Yafo is home to Muslim and Christian Arabs. However, the residents of Yafo and Tel Aviv have successfully lived side by side for many years. Fran was unaware that her hotel would be located closer to the Yafo section and therefore, she often felt uncomfortable walking between the two areas (F. Hamburger, personal communication, March 26, 2012) (M. Hamburger, personal communication, March 26, 2012).

Erica Neuman from Natick, Mass., decided to visit a friend studying at Tel Aviv University while she was spending her semester abroad in Athens, Greece. Beyond the proximity to Greece and to visit her college friend, Neuman said she wanted to visit Israel because "it [was] an area of the world I had never seen before, yet hear so much about." While Neuman is not Jewish, she has several friends who are Jewish and have a strong connection to Israel

so she felt that it was important for her to understand the country. Prior to visiting Israel, Neuman said that she had no idea what to expect because she didn't know anything about the country other than what she heard on the news and in some history courses. Neuman said that she imagined Israel to have more of a Middle Eastern feel with lots of deserts. "I always had a very theoretical view, a general feel of what I think the country should be like, but I never really thought in actuality what the country [was] like" (E. Neuman, personal communication, May 23, 2012).

While Neuman only spent three days in Tel Aviv and one in Jerusalem, she admits that she fell in love with the country. Neuman said that she hopes to return to the country in the near future so that she has more time to really soak in the atmosphere and culture. Coming from Athens, Neuman was surprised with how progressive the city of Tel Aviv was. Neuman felt like the city had a "feeling of change and purpose" and that the people "seem to have motivation and drive for advancing the city." From what she experienced, she found that Israelis were very friendly, disciplined, charismatic, and always willing to be of assistance and guidance. The only time that Neuman felt uncomfortable in Israel was while she was at the airport returning to Greece. While at the security checkpoint, security asked her about her religious beliefs and about the origins of her German last name. Neuman said that the heavy interrogation led her to believe that in an "extended stay in Israel, religion may be a factor of unease." On the subject of the media, Neuman felt like journalists didn't accurately portray Israel because if it did,

she would have had a better understanding of what to expect upon her arrival. Neuman said, "I really felt that in order to understand what Israel was like, I had to experience it for myself. In the media, they twist stories and tell you only the view that will attract viewers" (E. Neuman, personal communication, May 23, 2012).

RQ2: What challenges and setbacks does Israel face in properly branding itself to the public?

Media:

While Israel might be a country of 7,765,700 people and is geographically the size of the state of New Jersey, the small country attracts a lot of media attention. Israel has a large presence in the media mainly because of its controversial alliance with the United States and constant conflict with neighboring countries. While most of the world knows something about Israel because it is constantly brought up in the media, journalists are usually discussing the country's geopolitical conflict. Thus, media have a huge effect on people's opinions of Israel because the messages they receive are generally negative and pertain to war, bloodshed and conflict. As a result, it has been a challenge for the Israel Ministry of Tourism and other professionals in the public relations, advertising and marketing industry to create media campaigns that will educate international audiences about Israel beyond the conflict. All professionals in the industry who work to brand Israel have the same overarching goal: to promote tourism using media campaigns that will

help the country move away from its negative image in the media. Through research, interviews and articles, the researcher has identified the major challenges and setbacks that Israel faces in properly branding itself to the public.

Fixing the Product:

On May 2, 2012, the researcher met with Oren Mor, the manager of the tourist office in Jerusalem. Mor has been working in Israel's tourism industry for the past 21 years. Mor kindly explained the structure and dynamics of the Israel Ministry of Tourism. According to Mor, the ministry has three main departments: marketing, services and development. All of the employees stationed in his office are volunteers and students. Additionally, Mor makes sure that his employees represent a diverse variety of religions such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Mor does this so that tourists from all over the world feel comfortable in his office and so that they can see that contrary to what the media might say about Israel, people from these diverse backgrounds are capable of working together peacefully in Israel. Mor's main responsibility is to communicate with tourists visiting Jerusalem and to work with the municipality, police and authority to assure tourism safety (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Throughout the interview, it became very obvious that Mor had several issues with how the ministry conducts its business. According to Mor, the 3.4 million tourists who visited Israel in 2011 is not an impressive number

when you compare it with Paris' 70 million tourists a year. Mor continued to discuss why Israel's tourism numbers are so low and how the ministry should go about fixing this issue. According to Mor, the Israel Ministry of Tourism has an $80 billion budget and most of the money is distributed between advertisements and public relations campaigns. Mor believes that while the ministry spends most of its money to promote Israel, it really should be focusing its efforts on enhancing and fixing the product, Israel. To explain this theory, Mor used Jerusalem as an example. The ministry invests so much money on creating commercials about Jerusalem so that they are viewable by international audiences. However, according to Mor, the world already knows what Jerusalem is thanks to "Israel's free advertisement tool, the Bible" (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Since Jerusalem is a brand that doesn't need further publicity, Mor believes that the ministry should instead spend its money on making Jerusalem more accessible for tourists. Improving the product, which in this case is Jerusalem, would mean creating more transportation opportunities for tourists to travel to and from Jerusalem as well as building additional hotels and hostels so that tourists can have more places to stay. According to Mor, it's extremely expensive for tourists to stay overnight in Israel and travel to, from and within the country. Since it's very expensive for tourists to travel and stay within Israel, Mor said that a lot of international tourists will travel and stay in Egypt for two weeks and make day trips to the Holy Land to see the main sites (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Mor's theory was also discussed in a *Haaretz* article published on October 29, 2012. According to the article, a large reason why Israel experiences low tourism numbers compared with neighboring countries is because it's very expensive to come to Israel. The author said, "Israeli hotel prices are through the roof" due to government taxes and regulations (Rozenberg, October 29, 2012). Travelers prefer to stay in other Middle Eastern countries because their hotel rates are much more affordable and thus, more desirable. While Israel and its surrounding countries might offer the same sea, sand and sun, tourists are more inclined to stay in the location that offers the best prices. The article went into detail on why hotel rates are so expensive and why hotel owners aren't in a rush to develop more hotels in Israel. According to the article, it's abnormally expensive for people to develop hotels in Israel and thus, investors are not interested in wasting their money. Additionally, hotels spend NIS 185 million on security to ensure that their customers are safe and protected. Hotels are also forced to comply with Israel's strict regulations on kosher food, maintenance staff for the pool and exercise rooms. According to the article, the Ministry is working with the Israeli government to change regulations that would expect "flight and hotel costs to drop between 15 percent and 20 percent and tourism to Israel to bump 10 percent." According to Ami Federmann, president of the Israel Hotel Association, "in most parts of Israel it still doesn't pay for entrepreneurs to establish new hotels" (Rozenberg, October 29, 2012).

Another *Haaretz* article from October 30, 2012 stated that in addition to expensive hotel rates, tourists have realized that they are paying more than local Israelis for hotel rooms when it's supposed to be the other way around. Thus, many tourists find alternate accommodations such as staying with family and friends, staying in hostels or renting out private apartments. As a result, there was a two percent drop in the number of nights tourists spent in hotels over the first nine months of 2012 compared with 2011. The author of the *Haaretz* article interviewed hotels to understand why this was issue was occurring. Rimonim Chain Hoteliers responded, "the price gap exists due to deals offered to locals, or to special offers covering restricted dates, with a lag in price adjustments for tourists." Similarly, officials at the Dan hotel said "the chain sets prices according to demand, based on a stay of four nights. Due to changes in exchange rates, a price gap of NIS 50 can arise between locals and tourists" (Rozenberg, October 30, 2012). However, unlike Israeli residents, tourists are exempt from paying value added tax (VAT) on hotel rooms, excursions and car rentals (Rozenberg, October 30, 2012).

The most expensive part about Israeli tourism is flying to and from Israel. According to Allison Sommer's *Haaretz* article on November 13, 2012, the issue with Israel's tourism industry boils down to two factors. The first issue is Israel's image in the media as a "war-torn country and the perception that is dangerous to be here" (Sommers, November 13, 2012). Secondly, she believes that it is simply too expensive to travel to Israel. Sommers said that airline tickets, particularly coming from the United States, are way too

expensive and are continually rising. Similarly to Mor, Sommer believes that the ministry needs to spend money on fixing the product rather than marketing the product. In the article, Sommer questions why the ministry isn't "busy packaging tickets, accommodation, tours and transportation so that the average foreign tourist can afford them and access them easily" (Sommers, November 13, 2012)? Allison went on to suggest that the Ministry should subsidize a friends and family discount for Israelis who regularly bring large numbers of tourist friends to visit the country. Allison said that Israelis are the first to understand why people don't want to travel to Israel; Israelis can't even afford to travel within Israel themselves so they choose to vacation in Greece and Turkey (Sommers, November 13, 2012). However, in another *Haaretz* article written by Rozenberg on October 29, 2012, she stated that in an effort to increase competition between airlines flying to Israel, Israel created an open-skies agreement with the European Union (Rozenberg, October 29, 2012).

According to Mor, the more affordable rates offered in neighboring countries and Israel's expensive flights, hotel accommodations and transportation are all a very large problem for both tourists and Israel's tourism industry. Mor says that this issue negatively affects tourists who choose to stay in neighboring countries and make day trips to Jerusalem because they wrongly believe that they have seen the Holy Land simply because they visited most of the well-known sites. Additionally, because they can't afford to stay overnight and travel within Israel, they miss out on Israeli

traditions and fail to see the other beautiful areas of the country. Mor said that day visitors are also a huge issue for Israel's tourism because these tourists are not visiting other tourism sites around the country. Additionally, this is an issue for Israel as a brand because day visitors are only seeing the religious component of Israel and aren't getting acquainted with the other cultural elements that Israel has to offer. Mor noted that the Ministry's statistics are slightly flawed because the day visitors who are spending less than twenty-four hours within the country's borders are included in the final tourism reports. Mor said that if transportation and accommodation were more affordable and available for tourists, it's possible that tourism numbers and the economy would increase because more people would be spending money on tourist sites and hotels across the country. Overall, Mor believes that by spending money to fix the product, Israel, tourism numbers would increase in Israel (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Tourism vs. Terrorism:

Mor also discussed another Israeli flaw that has had a large effect on Israel's Tourism Industry. According to Mor, the Israel Ministry of Tourism works hard to send messages to the media that convey how safe and beautiful Israel is for visitors. While the ministry is disseminating those messages, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IMFA) distributes messages that report Israel is too dangerous for tourists to travel. Mor said that the IMFA doesn't care about Israel's tourism rates and thus doesn't care if its messages conflict

and scare away tourists. The issue, according to Mor, is that the IMFA and the Ministry of Tourism don't collaborate to deliver tourists one unified message (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012). The researcher heard the same theory from a public relations practitioner, Gil Lavie, in an interview on June 6, 2012. Lavie has had a lot of experience working on PR media campaigns for the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the IMFA. Lavie also believes that the reason why Israel sends out so many clashing messages is because the ministry and IMFA work in opposite directions. According to Lavie, the IMFA media campaigns are more successful because they are less official and don't stamp their commercials with "brought to you by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" like the ministry does with its messages. By disconnecting the campaign from the government organization that created the message, Lavie believes that the information is more engaging for audiences. Additionally, Lavie said that the ministry fails to do its job well because the office is unorganized and always changing roles. Tourists are hesitant to travel to Israel because in addition to hearing negative facts from the media, Israel's government sends out conflicting messages (G. Lavie, personal communication, June 6, 2012). Mor said that the IMFA and ministry need to collaborate and deliver the media messages that clearly define the difference between terrorism and visitors' ability to safely travel around the country (O. Mor, personal communication, May 2, 2012).

Mor's theory on how the Israeli government handles tourism vs. terrorism occurred in November of 2012. On November 14, 2012 the Israeli

Defense Force launched Operation Pillar of Defense in retaliation to rockets launched from Gaza. For eight long days, Israel and Gaza exchanged hundreds of missiles in both directions. While Israel utilized its Iron Dome to deflect most of the incoming rockets from Gaza, several successfully landed within the country's borders. A couple of the missiles even reached as far as Tel Aviv. Safety was Israel's number one concern during Operation Pillar of Defense but the country's tourism was another alarming issue. Prior to the heated conflict, according to a *Reuters* article on November 18, 2012, Israel was celebrating a record year for tourists with "2.6 million visitors entering the country in the first nine months of the year—a new high and seven percent more than the same period last year" (Rabinovitch, November 18, 2012). Tel Aviv is a huge tourist attraction and due to the conflict, several tourists were canceling their trips. According to the ministry on November 18, 2012, there were already a few registered cancellations and trips cut short. The ministry also set up its own "situation room to mitigate damages" (Rabinovitch, November 18, 2012). Airlines, hotels, tour companies and cruise ships all experienced cancellations during the dangerous time period. Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport was forced to cancel several flights in order to "free up air space for Israel's air force operating in Gaza" (Rabinovitch, November 18, 2012). Stas Misezhnikov, Israel's Minister of Tourism, was quoted in the article saying that "the continued firing on the south…is expected to exact a heavy price on the tourism industry which is one of the central anchors in the region" (Rabinovitch, November 18, 2012).

While on November 18, 2012, the ministry reported that Operation Pillar of Defense negatively affected Israel's tourism industry, *Travel Pulse* released opposing information on November 20, 2012 (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). According to this article, the ministry allegedly reported on its website's new page "Behind the Headlines" that Israel was still safe for tourists to travel to the country's major sites and attractions (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). The ministry utilized the new page to inform tourists where the rockets were landing and to alert them that most of the rockets were brought down by Israel's Iron Dome system (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). While the new page was very helpful and informative for tourists, some of the posted information conflicted with other reports coming from the ministry. For example, while earlier articles reveal that the ministry stated that tourists were cancelling trips, on November 20, 2012, the Ministry said that "there are currently more than 100,00 tourists vacationing in Israel and there are no signs whatsoever they are cutting their trips short" (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). According to the article, the Ministry also reported "the current situation has had little effect on life in most of Israel" (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). The Ministry attempted to comfort tourists by saying "if we felt it was inappropriate for you to come now, we would ask you not to. If you're already in Israel, you are in good hands and know there's nothing to be overly concerned about" (Shillinglaw, November 20, 2012). Additionally, during the height of the crisis, according to an article from the *World Travel Watch* on November 21, 2012, Israeli tour operators reported that tourism was

unaffected by the recent chaos. Tour operators stated that it was business as usual and that there were very few cancellations. During this period, the Israel Ministry of Tourism stated that conditions were normal and that tourism wasn't affected. Contrarily, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv issued a security alert for citizens abroad or who were planning on traveling to the region (Habegger and Weed, November 21, 2012).

As the tension subsided in the Middle East, journalists and tourism operators used the media to reflect on how the crisis affected Israel's tourism industry. A *Forbes* article on November 29, 2012, quoted Geoffrey Weill, publicist for the Israel Ministry of Tourism, "we think that travelers have become accustomed to the knowledge that life in Israel goes on even during such troubling and headline-grabbing moments." Weill continued, "inevitably during the Gaza affair, bookings slowed, but it was a short crisis. Israel has a very high percentage of repeat travelers (40%-plus) so they know what the realities are, even when the headlines are blaring" (Greenfield, November 29, 2012). While Mr. Weill stated that it was a "short crisis" the Tourism Review reported on December 3, 2012, "Israeli tourism industry suffered damages worth $1.8 billion during the recent Gaza Operation. Emergency meetings are being held by tourism industry leaders to assess the damage. It is estimated that the Pillar of Defense Operation has resulted in cancellation by almost 300,000 tourists" (Tourism Review, December 3, 2012). According to the article, after the conflict settled, the ministry requested $2 million from the

treasury to repair Israel's tourism industry. The ministry wanted to use the money to increase marketing efforts during the winter season and to directly market to tourists from the U.S. and Russia (Tourism Review, December 3, 2012).

Right before the end of 2012, the *Times of Israel* reviewed Israel's tourism statistics in an article on December 23, 2012. The article stated "this year broke the record despite a marked drop in visitors in November as a result of Israel's Pillar of Defense. November tourism had been projected to increase by 12% over the previous year, but instead dropped by 43% because of the 8-day escalation in the Gaza Strip" (Zeiger, December 23, 2012). The article continued to say that "the US—despite a drop of 4% from last year—remained the country sending the highest number of tourists to Israel: 610,000 in 2012" (Zeiger, December 23, 2012). The most visited sites around the country in 2012 were Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, the Dead Sea, Tiberias and Nazareth. Additionally, according to a JTA article from December 21, 2012, while the Ministry's reports may have been confusing during the conflict, the U.S. travel advisor to Israel and the West Bank congratulated Israel and the Palestinian Authority Bank. The advisor praised the regions for their "considerable efforts" to protect tourists and said conditions in Tel Aviv and Haifa were "comparable to or better than" other major cities in the world" (JTA, December 21, 2012).

RQ3: How does the Israel Ministry of Tourism work with PR professionals so that the media positively portray Israel? What kind of PR campaigns has it created?

While collecting data about Israel's tourism industry, the researcher studied several media campaigns that were created by Israeli PR organizations, the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption. In this section of the case study, the researcher will explain the media campaigns in detail. While answering research question number four, the researcher will discuss the media campaigns' effectiveness and criticism that it received from the media, Israelis and Americans.

The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption:

In December 2011, Israel's Ministry of Immigrant Absorption launched a campaign targeted toward Israelis who moved to the United States of America. The Ministry wanted to send the message to Israelis abroad that while they might always be considered Israeli, their children will not be. The Ministry delivered its message by creating a variety of video and advertisements and billboards. According to a *New York Times* article on December 2, 2011, "one video advertisement shows a Jewish elderly couple distraught that their Israeli granddaughter in the United States thinks Hannukah is Christmas" while another video "shows a toddler calling "Daddy! Daddy!" to his napping Israeli expatriate father, who finally awakens

when the child switches to Hebrew: "Abba!" The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption stated that the videos "were intended to touch the sensibilities of Israeli expatriates and tap into their national identity" (Kershner & Berger, December 2, 2011).

Israel Ministry of Tourism Campaigns:

1. "Kol echad mevi echad":

When the researcher met with Lavie on June 6, 2012, he informed her that he was working with the ministry to create a campaign that would be released in the upcoming months. The campaign that Lavie was referring to was called "Kol echad mevi echad" or "Everyone Brings Someone" and was launched on October 21, 2012 for an estimated cost of NIS 6 million. The goal of the campaign, according to Lavie, was to utilize the Israeli population to attract tourists to the country. Lavie said, "this method was different than the usual advertising and PR campaigns because they were getting the Israeli public directly involved" (G. Lavie, personal communication, June 6, 2012). According to the *Times of Israel* article on October 10, 2012, the campaign was run by the Ministry of Tourism in conjunction with the Israeli media site, Mako, and headed by Israeli model and actress, Noa Tishby (Shmulovich, October 10, 2012). The campaign used commercials starring Noa Tishby to spread word about the country's new initiative. In the commercials, Noa Tishby approaches Israeli actress, Gilat Ankoria, as she lies in ambush among other IDF soldiers. Tishby tells Ankori "we haven't asked you to lie in

ambush." The commercial ends by informing audiences to check out the campaign's website so that they can learn how to help Israel's tourism industry.

According to the article, the campaign was designed so that "Israelis send invitations to friends, colleagues, and relatives around the world via digital videos or postcards that contain enticing information about Israel through Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms." "In return, Israeli participants will take part in a lottery to win one of 200 travel packages. Their chances of winning the travel prize will increase each time they sound out an invitation" (Shmulovich, October 10, 2012). According to Lavie, the hope was that Israelis would invite visitors to the country and treat them with traditional Israeli hospitality. Lavie believed that this campaign would be a huge success for the country because "even if 10 percent of the population brought one person, tourism numbers would increase" (G. Lavie, personal communication, June 6, 2012).

2. Israel World Cup:

Like many nations in Europe and the Middle East, soccer is Israel's most competitive and popular sport. Israelis take pride in their soccer teams and were dismayed when the Israel national football team failed to make it to the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. The Israel Ministry of Tourism took advantage of the country's defeat and created a media campaign that focused around the loss. The ministry produced a short commercial featuring Israelis

playing soccer on a beach in Tel Aviv. During the video, women in bikinis who were playing matkot, a popular Israel paddle ball game, distract the soccer players. The men stop playing soccer and turn around to watch the women who were rinsing off their bodies in the water. The video ends with the quote "Israel. No wonder we didn't make it to the World Cup…" and the ministry placed its website, www.goisrael.com, at the bottom of the screen (*Israel-No Wonder we didn't make it to the World Cup*, 2006). The commercial was created to turn what was a rather embarrassing loss for Israel into something comical and attractive for international audiences. According to Lavie, the video received 10 million viewers and a lot of press (G. Lavie, personal communication, June 6, 2012).

3. Israel is a Dangerous Place:

Similarly to the World Cup commercial, the ministry used Israel's negative media image and turned it into a satirical commercial in 2008. The ministry produced a video that mocked the incorrect perception that Israel was a dangerous place for visitors. The video opens with a woman in a bikini walking down the beach. A man notices her and tries to get her attention by inviting her to join him for water and sun block lotion. As the woman is rejecting the man, she walks into a pole and falls to the ground. The video ends with the text "Indeed, Israel can be a dangerous place. If you thought you knew all about Israel, think again." The ministry used this commercial to

educate international audiences that Israel was not as dangerous as the media makes it seem (*Israel is a Dangerous Place*, 2008)

4. "Come find the Israel in you":

The Israel Ministry of Tourism's website is located on goisrael.com. Under the 'tourist information' page there is a section labeled 'media campaigns.' This section of the website is where the ministry placed examples of its most recent media campaign commercials for the North America region. As of February 21, 2013, three videos were posted on the site. The three videos were tourism ads for different tourist sites around Israel such as the Sea of Galiliee, Tel Aviv, Ramon Crater, Fortress Masada, Dead Sea and the Negev. While the three videos feature different regions in Israel, the videos all follow the same format; the videos revolve around young couples and families traveling through Israel. As an example, the researcher will explain the video for the Sea of Galilee. The video starts with the narrator saying "Anywhere else this would be a vacation by a lake. But this is the Sea of Galilee where many of the inspiring stories we grew up with happened. There's a little bit of Israel in all of us. Come find the Israel in you" (*Come Find the Israel in You)*. The other videos are similar in that the narrator takes the region and compares it with a similar area in a different country but then ends the video by saying why this specific Israeli region is unique and better than any other place in the world. The ministry produced the videos to send the message that there is something for everyone who visits Israel. The videos were created to attract

tourists who would be interested in Israel's ancient biblical history, rural adventures and colorful culture. Overall, the videos were made so that visitors would "Come find the Israel in you" (*Come Find the Israel in You)*.

5. Winter Israel Tourism Campaigns:

Israel's conflict with Gaza during Operation Pillar of Defense caused a brief decline for the country's tourism. The Ministry of Tourism was aware that it was going to have to develop a new creative way to reassure tourists that it was safe to travel to Israel after the tension subsided. According to a *Yeshiva World* article on December 14, 2012, Tourism Minister Stas Misezhnikov issued the statement,

> After restoring stability and security to the south, now is the time to rehabilitate tourism to Israel and return to the upward trend from before the operation. In the last month, the Tourism Ministry has launched large campaigns overseas with a total investment of 15 million NIS that is being expanded to include domestic tourism campaigns (Yeshiva World, December 14, 2012).

The Ministry's future campaigns will target Christian communities to offer them packages to travel to Israel in the winter season to experience the Holy Land and the other spiritual regions around the country. According to the article, the advertising campaign will appear in the U.S in both "mainstream and Christian print media, billboards, TV and ratio stations digital and social media, under the slogan: Visit Israel. You'll never be the same" (Yeshiva World, December 14, 2012).

The ministry is also working with local tourism industries to encourage Israelis to travel to the south. Using the slogan "It's so good you've

come south" they hope that Israelis will travel to tourism sites in the south. The campaign will cost 300,000 NIS and will be launched on the Internet and radio commercials (Yeshiva World, December 14, 2012).

Other PR Efforts and Campaigns:

1. Kinetis:

Kinetis is an Israeli non-profit organization that works to brand Israel to the media. According to the company's mission statement:

> Kinetis is a nonprofit educational organization established to promote, at home and abroad, the recognition of Israel as a vibrant and inspirational source of creativity and innovation. By educating about and exposing the creative energy of the Israeli environment and people, we seek to enhance global appreciation for Israel's unique contribution, and to revitalize national pride (Mission & Vision).

British-born Israeli lawyer and entrepreneur, Joanna Landau, founded Kinetis. In an effort to change media perceptions about Israel, Landau and her team work to enhance Israel's image in the eyes of audiences abroad. Through Kinetis' program, Vibe Israel, Landau and her team invite international journalists and bloggers who have made large impressions on their local communities to come experience Israel. Through a week-long all expenses paid trip, Kinetis travels with its guests throughout Israel so that they can experience the real Israel that's not shown in the media. Vibe Israel hopes that its tours will create a large impact and "generate significant on and offline buzz about what the Israeli people and environment have to offer in a wide variety of areas" (Mission & Vision) Vibe Israel's goal is that its guests will

help improve Israel's image by spreading awareness about the country's unique and positive aspects.

2. Association for Tourism Tel Aviv:

On May 8, 2012, the researcher interviewed Etty Gargir, General Director of Association for Tourism Tel Aviv (AFT). According to Gargir, the Association for Tourism Tel Aviv is a part of Tel Aviv's municipality and works with the Hotel Association of Tel Aviv and the Ministry of Tourism to bring tourists to the city. Gargir said that AFT receives a budget from the municipality and then approaches the ministry to match the budget so that her team can create efficient media campaigns to lure tourists to the city. While AFT was launched sixteen years ago, as of May 2012, Gargir claims that the organization has only had enough funding to create media campaigns for audiences in France, Russia, Britain, Italy and Germany. Gargir said that she hopes to be able to target American audiences in the future because she knows how important they are to Tel Aviv's tourism industry (E. Gargir, personal communication, May 8, 2012).

Gargir said that she travels to foreign countries to inform travel agents about upcoming events and deals in Tel Aviv. She does this so that the agents pass along the information to their clients. Additionally, while abroad, AFT hosts workshops to communicate with travel agents and notifies them of hotel prices for Tel Aviv's upcoming season. According to Gagrir, "Tel Aviv is the only city in the world that gives every tourist four free guided tours around the

city. Also, TLV is the only city in Israel that has three tourist information centers" (E. Gargir, personal communication, May 8, 2012). Gargir strongly believes that it's crucial that Israel's tourism industry focuses on promoting Tel Aviv as a destination because "Israel is Tel Aviv and Tel Aviv is Israel. Tel Aviv is the cultural center of Israel and there's a vacation for every budget" (E. Gargir, personal communication, May 8, 2012). Gargir hopes journalists will come to Tel Aviv and see with their own eyes how amazing, safe and wonderful the city really is (E. Gargir, personal communication, May 8, 2012).

RQ4: Does the Israel Ministry of Tourism find the PR campaigns to be successful and beneficial? Have Americans' perceptions of Israel changed for the better as a result of public relations practitioners' work?

1. Expat Campaign:

The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption's campaign targeting Israelis living abroad in the United States caused such an international outcry that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately aborted it. According to Zachary Katowtiz's *Haaretz* article on December 3, 2011, the campaign "created a firestorm in the American Jewish community" because the advertisements blatantly insulted American Jews (Katowitz, December 3, 2011). In addition to offending American Jews, the advertisements created more negative media attention for Israel. According to a *New York Times* Article on December 2, 2011, the Jewish Federations of North America was

completely insulted by the advertisements and the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Abraham H. Foxman, said the campaign was "heavy-handed, and even demeaning" (Kershner & Berger, December 2, 2011).

In an effort to appease the situation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pulled the campaigns and his spokesperson issued an apology: "We are very attentive to the sensitivities of American Jewish community. When we understood there was a problem, the minister immediately ordered the campaign to be suspended" (Kershner & Berger, December 2, 2011). Additionally, a spokesman for the ministry apologized to all those who were offended. According to Katowitz's article, neither the Prime Minister nor the Israeli Embassy in Washington were aware that the campaign was even being launched. Katowitz finished his article by saying,

No government agency should be able to get around the prime minister when implementing government policy, especially with regards to such a delicate topic. Israel must get its priorities together and come up with an effective way to get expatriates back to Israel, without insulting American Jews in the process (Katowitz, December 3, 2011). While it was widely understood that the campaign was created with good intentions, it ended up being a waste of time, money and a failure for Israel's tourism industry.

2. "Kol echad mevi echad":

The Ministry's campaign, Kol echad mevi echad" received a considerable amount of negative press after it was launched. Itay Segal's article on *Ynet* from November 1, 2012, attacked the campaign for being offensive and sexist. Segal believed that the video sent the message to Israelis that "we've tried everything, so now it's your turn" (Segal, November 1, 2012). Segal viewed the campaign as a sign that the ministry was giving up with its tourism promotion and was leaving it up to Israelis to attract tourists to the country. He compared the Ministry's attempt at national recruitment to John F. Kennedy's famous speech "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country" (Segal, November 1, 2012). Segal also didn't believe that the campaign was credible since the head of the campaign was an actress who spends most of her time in the United States. Lastly, Segal didn't understand how the ministry could ever expect tourists to view Israel as more than a war zone if the campaign was filmed in a battle scene with soldiers and weapons. According to Segal, if the ministry wants to change Israel's unfortunate image from a war zone to something more favorable, it shouldn't incorporate those elements into its commercials (Segal, November 1, 2012).

The ministry's campaign received further criticism from *Haaretz* contributor Allison Kaplan Sommer on November 13, 2012. Sommer considered the campaign to be one of the "stupidest government campaigns ever launched" (Sommer, November 13, 2012). Sommer explained that her

disapproval of the campaign was because of the "cost of all that airtime and fancy web work is a scandalous waste of our tax shekels" (Sommer, November 13, 2012). According to Sommer the campaign was worthless because the ministry created it to tackle the wrong tourism issue; the ministry believed that Israel's tourism industry suffered because it failed to properly attract travelers to the country. However, the real issue, according to Sommer, was a two-part problem. The first concern was Israel's image in the media as a "war-torn country and the perception that it is dangerous to be here" and the second is because it was simply too expensive to travel to Israel (Sommer, November 13, 2012). Sommer's article stated that airline tickets, particularly coming from the United States, were way too expensive and were continually rising. She brought up the point that Mor discussed in his interview with the researcher; the ministry needed to spend money on fixing the product not marketing the product. Sommer asked in her article why the tourism ministry wasn't busy packaging tickets, accommodation, tours and transportation so that the average foreign tourist [could] afford them and access them easily" (Sommer, November 13, 2012)? Sommer went on to suggest that the Ministry should subsidize a friends and family discount for Israelis who regularly get large numbers of tourist friends to visit the country. Sommer said that Israelis are the first to understand why people don't want to travel to Israel—even Israelis can't afford to travel within Israel so they choose to vacation in Greece and Turkey. How can the ministry expect tourism to grow in Israel

when its own residents have to flee the country for an affordable vacation (Sommer, November 13, 2012)?

3. Tourism Statistics:

On September 6, 2012, a *Travel Market Report* article released data that showed Israel was a popular travel destination. The article stated that Haim Gutin, Israel Tourism Commissioner for North and South America, claimed, "the period from 2009 through 2011 was the best for tourism in the country's 64-year-history" (Amster, September 6, 2012). According to Gutin, 3.4 million visitors traveled to Israel in 2011 and 650,000 were from the U.S. Gutin said that he thought Israel had become a "hot destination" because it offered "the full package for sophisticated travelers looking for something different. And Israel is no longer a war zone" (Amster, September 6, 2012). (It's important to remember that this article was released prior to Operation Pillar of Defense).

Israel has received positive international attention from media outlets by being presented with awards such as: Top 10 beach resorts by National Geographic Traveler, Top beach destination by Lonely planet, best city in the Middle East by Travel +Leisure, world's best gay travel destination for 2011 by an American Airlines poll, 10 best cities for architecture lovers by Conde Nast Traveler and city of the year by the Wall Street Journal (Amster, September 6, 2012).

Stas Misezhnikov, Israel's tourism minister discussed Israel's tourism industry in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post* on August 8, 2012. According to Misezhnikov, while Israel was experiencing a rise in tourism, the Ministry needed to put more of an emphasis on the country's SSS—sun, seas and sand. Misezhnikov said that campaigns were too focused on religion and needed to highlight Israel's SSS and the country as a holiday recreational destination with sun and surf. Unlike Israel's unique religious advantage because it is home to the major holy sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the country has to compete with neighboring countries such as Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan who can also offer tourists SSS (Benzaquen, August 8, 2012). At the end of 2012, the ministry reported that despite a slight decline due to Operation Pillar of Defense, "some 3.5 million tourists will have entered Israel by the end of the 2012, an increase of 4% over last year's figures" (Shumulovich, October 10, 2012).

Conclusion:

After reviewing all of the research, interviews and news articles, I noticed that Israel's travel industry has several overlapping trends. These notable topics were brought to my attention during interviews and again highlighted in articles that discussed Israel's tourism industry. I've categorized these themes below in an effort to show the positive and negative aspects of Israel's tourism industry.

1. Branding Israel:

While I originally attempted to narrow my research on the media campaigns created by the Israel Ministry of Tourism, I soon realized that it was virtually impossible to ignore all of the other media campaigns created by Israeli PR professionals. While living in Israel and meeting with various PR practitioners, I realized that a large issue with Israel's tourism industry is the disconnection between all of the various media campaigns designed to bring tourists to Israel. While many people believe Israel's tourism industry suffers because it's in constant conflict with neighboring countries, the real issue is due to failed internal communication among those who create media campaigns. This problem stems from the fact that there are too many Israeli organizations creating tourism media campaigns. The ministry and other PR organizations are more than capable of producing creative media campaigns that steer the country's image away from the conflict. However, the reason

why these campaigns aren't always so successful is because there are too many and they aren't executed well.

A great example of this issue was the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption's controversial expat campaign that was launched in the United States in 2011. Since the campaign was launched in the United States and targeted at Israel's greatest ally, the ministry should have first received confirmation and approval from several different government leaders before it was launched. Nonetheless, the campaign was released and offended many American allies. Additionally, it didn't look good for Israel's public image when Prime Minister Netanyahu's team denounced the campaign and admitted that his team wasn't informed the campaign was ever created. While the government may have been trying to protect itself from ridicule by making these statements, it only sends foreigners the message that Israel's government is unorganized.

Foreigners are confused about what they should believe about Israel because in addition to negative media coverage, they receive too many conflicting messages from all of the disconnected Israeli media campaigns. How is the outside world supposed to understand Israel beyond what the media portray if Israelis themselves can't communicate a clear message? A solution to this communication problem would be if all media campaigns for the state of Israel were created with one unified message. Israeli professionals who work on branding Israel need to come together and disseminate messages that are similar and unified in their meaning so that one collective message is

sent to foreigners. In branding, it's important that audiences understand the brand's intentions. If organizations want to properly brand Israel as a tourist destination, it needs to decide on a concise branding message.

2. Israel as a Product:

One of the largest issues with Israel's tourism industry is how the Ministry spends its budget. This problem was first brought to my attention in an interview with Oren Mor but was repeatedly discussed in news articles. According to Mor, most of the ministry's budget is dedicated toward creating media campaigns that sell product names such as Jerusalem and other well-known tourist sites. However, Mor said that the ministry should be spending money to fix the product because people already know what Jerusalem is thanks to free media coverage and the Bible. According to Mor, fixing the product would mean providing tourists with more affordable transportation methods and hotel accommodations. I think that by building more hotels and offering alternative transportation methods, tourism would steadily increase because foreigners would have more options. It's very difficult for tourists to travel to and from Israel and within the country's borders because there aren't enough affordable options. As a result, Israel loses a lot of business to surrounding Middle Eastern countries who offer tourists more feasible choices. Additionally, the ministry needs to work with airlines to lower the prices of flights and create more travel packages. If Israel wants more tourists

to visit the country, it needs to accommodate tourists by making flight prices more reasonable for the average traveler.

3. Conflicting Media Reports:

Since war with surrounding neighbors is Israel's largest image issue, Israel's government leaders need to make sure that they are communicating properly with tourists and audiences abroad. While Israel is usually very responsible during war periods because it reports on what is occurring rather than hiding information from the outside world, it does not always deliver messages in the most pragmatic way. For example, the ministry failed to create clear safety warnings for tourists traveling to and within the country during Operation Pillar of Defense. While the ministry created a website that was solely dedicated to updating people on the conflict, the media reported conflicting information that directly quoted the ministry's top leaders. Journalists described several different stories—some said it was safe to travel in Israel while others disagreed—and it was difficult to tell if the ministry was sending out mixed messages or if the media were interpreting them incorrectly. Regardless, since the media delivers the messages, it reflected negatively on Israel that the ministry was sending out conflicting reports.

Additionally, during Operation Pillar of Defense, there were many conflicting reports on whether or not the tension was actually hindering Israel's tourism industry; to the outside world, it was unclear if the conflict was affecting tourists' decision to book or cancel flights, hotel rooms and

tours around the country. There were several reports coming from the ministry that said Israel's tourism industry was unaffected by the tension and then later reports said that the country's industry suffered tremendously. It's very confusing and irresponsible when conflicting statements are being released from the same government agency that is in charge of Israel's tourism industry. If Israel wants foreigners to perceive the country as organized and safe, government leaders and agencies need to first work together and clean up any internal communication problems.

4. Israel Beyond the Conflict:

PR professionals are more than aware that Israel struggles to attract tourists to the country because of its image in the media. As a result, practitioners have wisely attempted to steer the media away from the conflict by turning its negative image into humorous media campaigns. The stereotypical belief that Israel is a war zone was incorporated into media campaigns such as "Israel is a Dangerous Place" and "Kol echad mevi echad" in an attempt to create entertaining commercials. Using this stereotype that is perpetuated by the media, professionals were able to produce engaging media campaigns that sent out the message that the media exaggerate the severity of Middle Eastern conflict. Additionally, the campaigns informed audiences that there is much more to see in Israel beyond the conflict that journalists like to dwell on in the media. Another example of Israel making light of a serious situation was through the commercial about Israel's failure to advance to the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The ministry wisely used what was a rather sad defeat

for the country and turned it into a humorous campaign. All three of the campaigns were successful in attracting a lot of media attention. However, not all of it was favorable publicity because some of the media campaigns offended certain audiences. Nonetheless, it's not possible to create a media campaign that will please all audiences viewing the material.

5. Final Comments

If Israel's government leaders and PR organizations collaborate in branding Israel, it's possible to hypothesize that the country's tourism industry will steadily improve. Working as a team, these people and organizations will be able to properly brand Israel with one unified message. Eventually, international communities will gain a holistic view of Israel and will come to understand and appreciate the many wonderful aspects of Israel that exist beyond the country's conflict.

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Appendix A

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics:

TABLE 2. TOURIST ARRIVALS IN ISRAEL (1) — **לוח 2. כניסות תיירים לישראל (1)**

Thousands unless otherwise stated — אלפים אלא אם כן צוין אחרת

		Thereof: By air — מזה: בדרך האוויר				Total — סך הכל (2)					
		אחוז שינוי חודשי של המגמה Monthly percentage of change in trend	מגמה(R) Trend(R)	מנוכי עונתיות(R) Seasonally adjusted(R)	נתונים מקוריים Original data	אחוז שינוי חודשי של המגמה Monthly percentage of change in trend	מגמה(R) (3) Trend(R)	מנוכי עונתיות(R) Seasonally adjusted(R)	נתונים מקוריים Original data		
2000					1,955.1				2,416.8		2000
2001					1,060.2				1,195.7		2001
2002					778.5				861.9		2002
2003					972.2				1,063.4		2003
2004					1,339.0				1,505.5		2004
2005					1,653.0				1,902.7		2005
2006					1,568.0				1,825.2		2006
2007					1,747.1				2,063.1		2007
2008					2,103.1				2,568.6		2008
2009					1,963.4				2,321.4		2009
2010					2,313.5				2,803.2		2010
2010	I-X				1,941.2				2,341.2	I-X	2010
2011 *	I-X				2,051.1				2,357.6	I-X	* 2011
2008	I	2.5	163.9	159.6	120.9	2.8	198.2	190.5	151.0	I	2008
	II	2.3	167.7	164.8	140.7	2.6	203.4	200.0	174.8	II	
	III	2.0	171.1	179.5	188.2	2.3	208.1	222.8	235.2	III	
	IV	1.6	173.9	179.7	203.2	1.8	211.9	218.7	254.5	IV	
	V	1.2	176.0	184.1	208.5	1.3	214.7	224.4	252.6	V	
	VI	1.0	177.7	174.7	172.1	1.0	216.9	213.7	205.5	VI	
	VII	1.0	179.5	174.2	186.7	1.0	219.1	209.7	219.2	VII	
	VIII	1.3	181.8	171.5	185.2	1.3	221.9	208.4	217.8	VIII	
	IX	1.6	184.6	184.3	173.8	1.6	225.6	227.4	212.4	IX	
	X	1.8	187.9	184.3	196.5	1.9	229.9	227.0	246.9	X	
	XI	1.9	191.4	198.6	173.7	2.1	234.7	242.0	219.4	XI	
	XII		143.4	152.5	153.7		163.9	181.2	179.4	XII	
2009 *	I	1.6	145.7	145.9	102.2	1.9	167.1	164.2	118.1	I	2009
	II	1.6	148.0	143.9	119.4	2.0	170.5	168.2	139.8	II	
	III	1.8	150.7	144.0	151.6	2.3	174.4	167.4	180.4	III	
	IV	2.1	153.8	159.0	191.9	2.6	179.0	183.6	222.8	IV	
	V	2.4	157.5	156.5	170.7	2.9	184.3	184.1	203.7	V	
	VI	2.5	161.5	155.0	154.5	3.0	189.8	183.8	179.2	VI	
	VII	2.4	165.4	166.2	184.1	2.9	195.3	197.5	212.1	VII	
	VIII	2.1	168.9	173.9	186.6	2.5	200.1	201.1	212.6	VIII	
	IX	1.7	171.8	176.4	156.8	2.0	204.1	208.8	188.8	IX	

Summary of Capstone Project

The aim of my capstone project for the Renee Crown University Honors program is to research, examine and critique Israel's travel and tourism public relations. Israel is a beautiful country and filled with unique cultures and generous, heartwarming people. Unfortunately, many people around the world don't understand or appreciate Israel for what it actually is because it constantly receives negative media coverage. Since Israel was first established in 1948, it has endured countless battles with its surrounding neighbors to keep the land that they rightfully deserve. The wars and controversies that Israel is constantly involved in result in negative media coverage and misrepresentation. Thus, people around the world have many biased, uninformed opinions of Israel.

However, while the conflict in Israel is the majority of what people talk about, this capstone project focuses on a different aspect of the country. The researcher created a case study that analyzes Israel's travel and tourism public relations. Over the past two years, the author has complied a substantial amount of research on the topic. The author read and examined scholarly journals and newspaper articles to understand travel PR and more specifically, how Israel's tourism industry operates.

Additionally, while studying abroad in Tel Aviv, the researcher interviewed American tourists and public relations practitioners who specialize in branding Israel. Interviewing these specific people allowed the researcher to understand Israel's tourism industry from two points of view;

Americans traveling the country for the first time and PR professionals who create the messages for tourism media campaigns. Once all of the data were collected, the author compared the findings from her primary interviews with the commentary in newspaper articles and scholarly journals.

The case study was formatted so that it contained an introduction, methods, results and conclusion sections. The introduction included in-depth definitions of three topics that were necessary to understand before moving forward with the research process: branding, travel and tourism, and reputation. Using scholarly journals, the author defined these concepts and referred to them throughout the research period. Additionally, the introduction includes the author's four research questions:

RQ1: How do Americans perceive Israel? What are American perceptions and misperceptions of Israel?

RQ2: What challenges and setbacks does Israel face in properly branding itself to the public?

RQ3: How does the Israel Ministry of Tourism work with PR professionals so that the media positively portray Israel? What kind of PR campaigns has it created?

RQ4: Does the Israel Ministry of Tourism find the PR campaigns to be successful and beneficial? Have Americans' perceptions of Israel changed for the better as a result of public relations practitioners' work?

The methods portion of the case study was written using the third and fourth editions of Robert Yin's book, *Case study research: Design and*

methods. The researcher referred to Yin's book in order to explain why a case study was the most effective way to demonstrate her results and conclusion. Throughout the methods section of the case study, the author explained the different components of the case study starting from the initial research up until the results section. Using pattern matching, a technique that analyzes data, the researcher was able to examine her results. Pattern matching allowed the author to compare the findings in the scholarly articles she originally analyzed with the data she discovered from interviews and articles.

The results component was the bulk of the case study because it's where all of the data were presented. Each research question was answered in the results section by referring to the data collected from interviews, media campaigns and news articles. The main data stemmed from media campaigns created by the Israel Ministry of Tourism, PR professionals and other organizations that work to brand Israel. These organizations and individuals create commercials, videos, pictures and websites to promote Israel for American audiences.

All of their campaigns have two unifying goals: to promote Israel in a way that will attract American tourists and to help change the country's negative image in the media. The researcher analyzed the ministry's media campaigns such as, "Kol echad mevi echad," Israel World Cup, Israel is a Dangerous Place, "Come find the Israel in you," and the Winter Israel Tourism Campaigns. Additionally, the researcher focused on media

campaigns created by Kinetis, Association for Tourism Tel Aviv and The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption.

The conclusion section was where the researcher included her own beliefs and opinions about Israel's travel and tourism PR. The researcher analyzed all of the data she collected and then proceeded to draw her own conclusions on the subject matter. In her final analysis, it became apparent that there were many positive and negative aspects of Israel's tourism industry. While creative media campaigns are produced for the state of Israel, they aren't delivered to audiences in an organized manner. In order to improve Israel's tourism industry, Israeli organizations and practitioners who work on branding Israel need to focus on creating a clear, unified message. Additionally, the ministry needs to stop spending so much of its budget on marketing Israeli cities that are already well known in the public eye. It's important that the ministry devotes part of its budget toward building more hotels, arranging more affordable air travel and establishing more transportation methods so that tourists can afford traveling to and within the country. Lastly, Israel's top leaders need to make sure that they properly communicate with tourists and the media during war periods. Sending the media concise messages about what is occurring during war times will help tourists and international audiences have a clearer understanding of the state of Israel.