

**Are Rabbis Informed?: Mass Media Information and Jewish  
Clergy in Israel**

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A clash of cultures exists between the world of the rabbi and the mass media environment given that the rabbi emerges from a conservative culture representing established traditions and religious structures, and is confronted with accelerated cultural change exemplified by the media. To be true, the synagogue has for hundreds of years been losing its monopoly of strengthening moral values. If religion in traditional societies was based upon authority vested in religious bodies, in complex industrial societies there is increased emphasis upon personal choice in moral and religious matters with religious and spiritual issues increasingly mediated through print and electronic technologies. Mass media has in effect become a secondary causal agent of contemporary religious identity.

The impact of the media upon the Israeli rabbi is partly determined by the professional role which the rabbi fulfils today. The rabbinical profession may be broken down into three types: community rabbis; rabbis teaching in schools or at higher institutes of religious study (*yeshivot*); and religious court judges (*dayanim*) who are authorised by the state to adjudicate in personal status matters (Stern & Friedman, 2011). In Israel, the rabbi and the synagogue do not enjoy a monopoly in being a single focus of Jewish identity, as they do in the Diaspora. The Jewish state itself, its official organs and other non-official institutions, have replaced the synagogue to a considerable extent as focii of Jewish identity. Moreover, the synagogue in Israel has a limited impact on the lives of Israeli Jews beyond the strictly religious than that in the Diaspora where it serves as the focus of the community for also the traditional, or not strictly

orthodox. The functions of the synagogue in Israeli society are narrower mostly comprising the holding of religious services and educational activities like religious lessons (*shiurim*) and lectures. Apart from the strictly religious – whether defined in terms of the Haredi or ultra-orthodox and modern orthodox terms or whether including also the small conservative and reform communities in Israel -- the rest of the Israeli Jewish population (estimated to be between 70-75%) have no regular daily or weekly interaction with the synagogue in Israel.

To be true, the traditional, as distinct from the orthodox Jewish communities – which account for 45% of the Israeli Jewish population – also have varying degrees of selective or irregular contact with the synagogue, such as comprising attendance at the Jewish holydays including the New Year and participation in holidays like Passover and Sukkoth and Purim, and life-cycle events including circumcision, the *barmitzvah*, the wedding *huppa*, or funeral. Yet even in Israel, religion enjoys a centrality in public life which does not exist in other religions in many other countries. This includes responsibility by the state rabbinical religious courts (*batei din*) for certain aspects of legislation concerning personal status such as determining who is a Jew, religious conversion, marriage and divorce. Rabbis play important roles in the state education system notably the modern orthodox (or *dati leumi*) stream and Haredi stream but also by conservative rabbis in the newer Conservative-affiliated 'Tali' school network.

Rabbis and Jewish educators in Israel are beginning to come to terms with the implications of the information age, and with their own changing role.

But this in no way diminishes the challenge and task for rabbis (Cohen, 2006b, 2012a). The relationship between rabbis and mass media may be broken down into five broad types: First, as moral leaders rabbis legitimise – and delegitimise – mass media. The exposure of Haredi Jews to mass media has been heavily influenced by their spiritual leaders. The influence of religious hierarchies -- notably rabbis -- is paramount in the Haredi communities – whether in the Lithuanian Haredi stream where the rabbi's role is to interpret *halakhah* (Jewish religious law), or in the hassidic Haredi stream in which the `admor' fulfils a father figure role in the community and his influence is wider-ranging; he is also consulted on a range of social and other matters. The rabbi-teacher in the school system has an important pedagogic function in influencing the outlook of religious children and youth towards the wider society, including towards the media and regarding such values as freedom of speech and tolerance. These include taking positions on whether adults or children should be exposed to the media, particularly to television and Internet. Secondly, rabbis - particularly community rabbis - increasingly recognise the opportunities which mass media channels offer as alternative `pulpits'. The rabbi's influence is felt within the religious population such as from the pulpit to congregants through the Sabbath sermon, but the media is an additional channel to spreading the rabbi's religious message even if this tends to occur much more in the religious media than in the secular Israeli media. Rabbis and communal leaders are discovering the value of Internet in circumventing the mainstream media and in building community websites.

Fourth, the media play an important role in constructing mutual perceptions between religious and secular communities. The secular media's pre-occupation in coverage with the religious political parties, and with the wheeling and dealing over state-religion matters, including funding for Haredi institutions, distorts the perception of Haredim in the eyes of the secular population. State-religious relations and the religious political parties are featured in the electronic media in particular - enabling different sides to give vent to their feelings - and discussion inevitably focuses on the conflictual aspects. In the case of the Haredi media, for example, the media image shows secular Israelis as not observing religious laws – deemed so important by the Haredim.

But no less significant is a fifth role which the media play for rabbis as providers of information. Rabbis are themselves updated about events from the media both generally and regarding current religion-related developments. Rabbis use news media sources to gather information about general national and world affairs and about developments inside their religious communities. In order to be effective rabbi-teachers in *yeshivot* and synagogues, rabbis require to be exposed to the media to which their own audiences, children or synagogue congregants are exposed. Rabbinical court judges, for example, in determining decisions (*pesuk din*) require not only mastery of Jewish religious law (*halakhah*) but also awareness of contemporary affairs. This paper focuses on this dimension of the work of the Israeli Rabbi.

Given that the rabbi has a leadership and guidance function in his community -- indeed are key 'decisionmakers' in the world of religion -- it needs to be questioned whether, and if so to what extent is the rabbi in touch with the wider environment and to what extent are rabbis exposed to the same media to which their community is. This article examines the information-gathering practices of Israeli rabbis, and the impact of information sources upon the rabbis.

Reflecting the low priority which religion enjoys among mass communications researchers in Israel, little applied research has been carried out concerning the interplay of media and religion in the Israeli Jewish context (Cohen, 2012a). Most academic attention has focused on official state-religion relationships. The religion-state relationship in Israel has been subject of wide academic attention (Abramov, 1976; Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983; Sharansky, 2006). Notwithstanding popular street-level discussion inside Israel about the media's coverage of religion, much less academic attention has been given to non-official actors like mass media. Most research on religion and media has been carried out in the US context (Abelman & Hoover (1990); Buddenbaum (1990); Ferre (1980); Garrett-Medill (1999); Hoover (1998) et al). Israel provides a contrasting case from the US experience, because religion and the Jewish state are, by nature, interwoven. The coverage of religion in the secular media has received almost no attention (Heilman, 1990, Cohen 2005). Other aspects of media and religion in Israel include foreign correspondents' coverage of religion (Cohen, 2012b). To the extent that the subject has been researched, much of the research focused upon the relationship of the haredim and the media

(Cohen, 2011b). The Haredi sector is estranged from the general population, with their own separatist media, raising important anthropological and socio-psychological questions. The Haredi press has been described (Levi, 1990; and Micolson, 1990). Religion content in different Israeli news media forms, religious and secular, was examined (Cohen, 2005). Baumel (2002, 2005) examined the Haredi press through linguistic tools in order to generate the Haredi outlook on the social role of media inside the Haredi community. Horowitz (2000) describes early Haredi rabbinical attitudes to Internet. Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai (2005) examines how Internet has been adapted to Haredi community needs, and Tydor Baumel-Schwartz (2009) analysed Orthodox Jewish women's internet forums. The question of Jewish theological attitudes concerning the social role of the media was discussed by Korngott (1993); Chwat (1995) and Cohen (2001, 2006a). Schwartz (2005) examined the computer from a Jewish religious law perspective. Rabbinical attitudes to the media were measured (Cohen, 2011a).

No research has been carried out examining the role of information among rabbis. Although the discipline of media and religion exists thirty years, the specific subject of the role of information sources has received little attention, in particular among religious clergy. Cannon (2007) examines church newspaper readership as a factor in the functioning of a faith community. Armfield & Holdbert (2003) examined religiosity as a factor in Internet use. Cantoni & Zyga (2007) examined the use of Internet communication by Catholic congregations Golan (2002) takes the research further to address the question of the influence of the

media, and the extent to which religiosity impacts on this. The question of the role of information among religious clergy was addressed quantitatively by Brown and Smidt (2003) examined Reformed clergy, and by Cantoni, Rapetti, Tardini, & Vannini (2010) examined catholic priests worldwide and new media sources, and Lambert (2010) discusses information tools among Baptist ministers. Informational and variegated roles of church websites was examined by Smith (2007). Notwithstanding that Captoni, Rapetti, Tardini & Vannini (2010) found that only 36% of catholic priests pray on-line daily or weekly, Roman (2008) represents a typology of on-line churches

The rabbi has an important role as a community leader in influencing the views and behaviour of his flock. To be examined are rabbis' usage of media. The study examines rabbis' exposure to media, the impact of the media on rabbis' opinion formation, and breaks down between sources of general news and sources of religion news. Also examined are the usage by rabbis of computer databases comprising Torah - or Jewish religious – for preparation of sermons, religious lessons, and study. To produce a more precise picture of rabbis' information sources, the author completed a survey of Israeli rabbis. 1800 questionnaires were sent out to rabbis, and 302 filled questionnaires were returned. Rabbis from different branches of Judaism were surveyed about their information sources: *haredi* or ultra-orthodox; or modern orthodox; conservative, and reform. It is instructive to explain the background of the different perspectives of the respective groups in order to understand the approach of



rabbis to media exposure. The Haredi community limit contact with the secular society for fear that 'impure' aspects of modern society will influence their ghetto-style of life. Haredi rabbis have over the years issued religious decrees (*pesuk din*) against exposure to mass media regarded as a threat to Torah family values. From the appearance of newspapers in the nineteenth century, through to the development of radio and television, and latterly to video, computers and internet and cellcom phones, Haredi rabbis have enacted such decrees. When Israel Television was established in 1968, Haredi rabbis banned their followers from watching television because its content was considered morally inappropriate; while entertainment per se is not invalidated, the Haredi perspective is nevertheless critical of television regarding it as little more than a relief from such higher values as religious study. The bans on television and secular newspapers were the most successful of the bans against media with the overwhelming number of Haredim respecting them. For this reason this study does not differentiate between the exposure of rabbis to secular media and to religious media. The earlier ban on radio – based on the prohibition against hearing social gossip (*loshon hara*), as well as the importance of modesty because radio programming prior to television had a much wider gamut of subjects including drama - is less respected than the television ban because Israel's ongoing security problems of the country make it difficult for people to refrain from following the news. When videos cameras were produced -- with many Haredi families using them to record family celebrations -- no rabbinical ban was introduced initially because its usage could be controlled. However, after it was

discovered that television programmes could be seen if videos were plugged into computers, Haredi rabbis also banned videos. More latterly, Haredi rabbis took a similar approach towards Internet, where the existence of websites like pornography was seen as a greater threat than all earlier media forms.

By contrast to the haredim, the modern orthodox – in addition to identifying with Zionism and the modern state of Israel – perceived exposure to the media playing an integral life in modern statehood. A sub-category of the modern orthodox is the *hardal* (literally *haredi leumi*) which while Zionist in national outlook are inclined to exposure to the wider culture.

The non-orthodox, the conservative and reform, are small in size in Israel but are the dominant communities in the US where there are six million Jews. Reform Judaism, which originated in Germany in the nineteenth century, legitimises change in Judaism and denies eternal validity to Jewish law. Reform's founders removed the national dimension from the faith. In contrast, Conservative Judaism, while also favouring the emancipation of the Jews and opposing ghettoisation, adhere to key tenets of Judaism delineated in the Five Books of Moses, including, for example, the observance of *kashrut* (religious dietary laws) and the Sabbath.

Religion coverage on the news pages mostly focuses upon aspects of state-religious relations. These include the religious political parties (which in 2013 held a quarter of the 120 seats in the Knesset, and participated in past years in the coalition-style government), government funding for *yeshivot*, army exceptions for yeshiva students, the status of the small but growing non-orthodox

religious streams (the reform and conservative which do not enjoy official recognition by the government) and the question of the official status of religious conversions carried out by them, and Sabbath and kashrut observance in public institutions. National newspapers, radio and television each have a religious affairs correspondent covering the beat, in most cases on a full-time basis. Internal religious matters such as synagogal life, liturgy, rabbis, religious educational institutions (with the exception of government funding), and religious youth groups receive scant attention.

The Haredi population which makes up 450,000 of Israel's five million Jewish population is the religious stream receiving most media coverage due both to their political clout and their anti-modern lifestyle. The modern orthodox (180,000) are today less focused on narrow questions concerning state-religious relations and more are in the forefront of Jewish settlements in the the West Bank (or the biblical territories of Judea, Samaria) captured in 1967. The Reform and Conservative receive far less coverage except when they appeal the courts or the government in their struggle for official recognition. There is almost no religion-related coverage neither of the Israeli Muslim population, despite that they make up a sixth of the population, nor the Christian communities, despite the presence of key Christian churches in Jerusalem, Nazereth and the Palestinian-controlled Bethlehem (Cohen, 2005).

Examined in this study of informational sources of rabbis are mass media sources for different categories of information. Also examined was the use of data bases in new media, containing Jewish religious information from the Bible,

Talmud, and law codes like Maimonides. In addition, rabbis were asked to evaluate the impact of the various types of information upon them. Responses from rabbis are broken down according to place of birth and divided between those born in Israel (171 rabbis), Western countries (North America, West Europe, South America) 88 rabbis, East European-born rabbis (22 rabbis), and *Sephardi* (oriental) or those born in Arab countries (18 rabbis). It is hypothesised that the state of the media in the countries where the rabbis grew up -- whether the media was free or not free -- may be a factor which influences the rabbi's general attitude to questions like the freedom of the press. Responses were examined according to age groupings of rabbis. 96 rabbis were born 1961-1980; 146 1941-1960; 39 1921-1940; and 4 1901-1920. It is argued that rabbis who grew up in the television age might have different attitudes towards the media than older rabbis. Similarly, responses were also examined according to whether rabbi-respondents had children at home (211 respondents) or did not have children at home (77 respondents at home). It is hypothesised that this will influence the rabbi's attitudes to the question of limiting children's exposure to media or not.

### **Rabbis' exposure to the media**

Newspapers were less widely seen than could be expected for persons who hold key posts in Jewish communities. 58%, 50% and 28% of modern Orthodox rabbis, Haredi rabbis, and non-Orthodox rabbis do not see a daily newspaper. Breaking down the 58% figure for modern Orthodox, 70% of hardal rabbis and

50% of mainstream modern Orthodox rabbis do not read a daily newspaper. Given the role of rabbis as community leaders, the relatively low figure for newspaper readership raises concern. Israeli rabbis are less exposed to the media than, for example, their Christian colleagues in the Reformed Church in the US; Brown & Smidt found that 97% of Reformed Christian Ministers read secular newspapers in contrast to 42%, 50% and 72% of modern orthodox, Haredi, and non-orthodox rabbis. This was also true of television: 93% and 80% of Reformed ministers watch network TV and public TV in contrast to 47% of mainstream modern orthodox rabbis, 53% of the hardal substream, and 19% of haredi rabbis.

There was a greater inclination for western rabbis (67%) to read a daily newspaper, and a lesser inclination of Sephardi or those born in Arab countries (39%) to. In terms of age, a difference in reading daily newspapers was found, with younger rabbis inclined not to. 74% of rabbis born 1967-1980 did not read a daily newspaper in contrast to 44% of those born 1941-1960, and 28% born 1921-1940. Of those who do not read a daily newspaper, 39%, 27% and 12% of Haredi rabbis, hardal rabbis, and modern Orthodox rabbis cited religious reasons for not doing so. Of those who do not read newspapers, the most given factor was time. 93% , 78% and 48% of non-Orthodox, modern Orthodox, Haredi said time was the factor.

In the case of television, 81% of Haredim and 63% of hardal rabbis said they do not view tv for religious reasons as opposed to 47% of modern Orthodox. 15%

of Haredim cited time. 46% of modern Orthodox (mainstream modern orthodox and hardal combined) and 65% of non-Orthodox (conservative and reform) also did so. Of those rabbis who do not have television, 58% of those who have children at home gave religious reasons as opposed to 31% of rabbis who do not have children at home. Similar figures were given for those who replied they do not listen to radio. Of those who do not listen to radio regularly, 50%, and 20% of Haredi and modern Orthodox rabbis cited religious reasons.

There were wide differences between orthodox and non-orthodox rabbis regarding whether the press damage religious values. 95% of orthodox rabbis said that the press damage religious values to some extent, to a large extent or to a very great extent as opposed 31% of non-orthodox rabbis. Among the orthodox, haredi rabbis were more inclined (64%) than modern orthodox (*hardal* and mainstream modern orthodox combined) 32% to say that the press damage religion to a very great extent. It confirms Armfield and Holbert (2003) who found that the more religious the person the less likely he is to use Internet. It contrasts with Finnegan and Viswanath (1988) who found that members of a church are more likely to read a major daily newspaper, as well as Swatos (1988) who found that a sizable majority of Conservative Christians read a secular publication. Smith (2007) noted that most religious organisations with a website lack data about usage of the website. Yet even 39% of modern orthodox rabbis agreed the press damage religious values to a large extent. Similar findings were found for radio, as well as Internet; in the case of non-orthodox rabbis a

significant number (47%) said that the Internet damaged religious values to some extent, to a large extent, or to a great extent.

### **Media sources of general news and religious news**

The media has an important role in connecting the rabbi to the wider environment, enabling the rabbi to learn and be informed of news and general developments both within the religious community and among the wider Israeli society. The findings showed a greater tendency for rabbis to follow national political news than to follow religious news, and that the media had a greater impact on influencing their attitudes regarding non-religious matters rather than religious matters.

Forty-four per cent of all rabbis follow news about political-economic-defence matters with a 'high frequency'. Given the country's ongoing defence problems this is not so surprising. There was a mild tendency for haredi rabbis and hardal to follow these a little less than rabbis of other streams. Western and East European born rabbis were more inclined to follow this than East European and Middle Eastern ones.

Other categories of news were less followed. Content about family and education were of certain interest – among all groupings – (28%, 29% and 41% of haredi, dati leumi and non-orthodox said they had interest) but an average of 9% listened a lot or all the time. Sport is of little or no interest to rabbis, with non-orthodox rabbis slightly more interested. 89%, 71% and 61% of haredi, dati leumi, and non-orthodox rabbis expressed no interest in sports news. No

differences with age or national background. The same was true with entertainment with Haredim (89%) and modern orthodox (69%) expressed no interest. Notwithstanding this, 29% and 16% did say they followed entertainment 'from time to time' or a lot.

Religion news in the media was followed less than general news developments. It was followed at a 'high frequency' by only 20% of rabbis and 8% all the time. 37% of rabbis of all streams in following news about religion-related developments did so from time to time. But only 20% did so at a rate of high frequency, and 8% all the time. (No difference between different streams was found). This is surprising since it is their occupation. As noteworthy was the number who were inclined not to, which: 33%, 39% and 28% of haredi. Modern orthodox and haredi rabbis did not follow religion news at all or to a small degree only. 33%, and 39% of haredi and modern orthodox rabbis respectively do not follow religion news at all or do so only to a small degree only.

East European rabbis were less inclined to follow religion news. Those born 1921-1940 were more inclined to read everything on religion or to do so with great frequency (48%) as opposed to those born 1941-1960 (26%) and 1961-1980 (21%).

All were inclined to follow national religious developments, albeit Haredim a little less. In terms of religion news broken down, 33% of all rabbis followed national religious developments a lot, and 32% did so a lot. Rabbis of different streams had different reasons to follow national religious news: the Haredim felt that Torah values were attacked by state and court decisions. The modern



orthodox saw in state-religious institutions the fulfillment of the religious Zionist dream in state-religious institutions. The non-orthodox sought legitimacy from the Israeli state.

By contrast, local religious community news was less followed: 14% followed a lot, 31% at times, and 33% occasionally. The haredim were slightly less inclined to follow local community news.

In gathering religion news, rabbis were preoccupied with news about their own religious stream. News about the rabbi's own stream (haredi, mainstream modern orthodox, hardal, conservatrive, reform) was followed incrementally more than were other streams; 13% of all rabbis 'all the time', 28% 'most of the time', and 37% 'at times' follow news about their own stream compared to 6% of rabbis who follow news about other Jewish religious streams 'all the time', 24% of rabbis 'most of time', 36% 'at times', and 22% 'on isolated occasions'.

Rabbis follow news about other, non-Jewish religions even less: 33% 'occassionally' and 37% 'never', non-orthodox rabbis are much more inclined to follow news about non-Jewish religions than orthodox rabbis. Thus, 33% and 40% of non-orthodox rabbis were more inclined to read most of the time, or from time to time, information about other religions in contrast to 4% and 12% of orthodox rabbis. Partly, the lack of interest reflected the very lack of coverage which other religions receive in the Israeli media; Cohen found that Islam and Christianity each received only 1% of all religion news content (Cohen 2005). It was despite that there are 1m Israeli Arabs, and that key Christian churches of international significance to Christianity are in the Holyland.

### **Impact of media upon rabbis**

The impact on rabbis of the media should be differentiated between religion-related information and news or background features about general news developments. In the case of news about non-religious matters like politics, the influence of the media's coverage of the secular environment was considerable: 26% of rabbis said so to a very great extent, 31% a lot, and 22% at times. This was particularly true with non-Orthodox rabbis: 44% of non-Orthodox rabbis replied 'to a great extent'. A further 31% of non-Orthodox rabbis replied 'from time to time'. This contrasted with only 24% of Haredi rabbis (modern Orthodox: 32%). The exposure to the media changed the outlook about the general secular environment 'a lot' for 8% of all rabbis, and 'at times' for 27% of rabbis; however 35% of rabbis said it changed only a little, and 28% not at all.

The media had less impact upon the rabbi's knowledge of religious news developments: 52% said the media had no impact at all, 29% a little, and 14% at times. Haredi rabbis were less inclined than non-Orthodox rabbis to be influenced. The influence of the media on the rabbis' understanding of the religious environment was low: 37% replied that the media had no influence upon their understanding of the religious environment was 'not at all', 38% 'a little', and 20% 'at times'. Rabbis had other, non-mass media, channels for learning about changes on the religious scene. And, the extent to which the media altered the rabbis' outlook towards the religious world was even less given that

the rabbi by virtue of identifying with, and belonging to a religious stream, had a definite view on the subject: 49% not at all, and 34% a little.

### **Torah data bases**

The technological information highway is affecting the Israeli religious world no less than other non-Jewish religious communities, particularly given the high priority which religious study has in the religious community. Torah data base websites contain computerised collections of traditional texts like Bible commentaries, the Talmud, and Jewish law codes. Lerner surveyed the manifold types of resources available digitally about Orthodox Judaism, emanating from institutions, organisations and individuals, covering historical, theological, institutional and communal information (2009). These developments provide access which had beforehand been limited to a few in libraries or private manuscript collections to the entire Jewish learning world. *Otzar Hachochmah* contains over 28,000 searchable books of Jewish learning and periodicals in their original format. One of the earliest attempts to computerise Jewish sources was the Bar-Ilan *sheiltot* project – which stored in a computerised form 100,000 rabbinical *sheiltot* – or rabbis’ answers from the Geonic period in the Sixth century to the present day to a range of questions concerning the application of Jewish law to particular situations. In 1994 the entire data base was placed on a CD Rom – “the Global Jewish data base “ – enabling individuals and institutions to purchase it. The Torah Communication Network, created in New York by Rabbi Eli Teitelbaum provides access to any desired page in the 14 volume

Talmud. The network has expanded beyond the Talmud to include the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, *Midrash*, Jewish legal codes like Maimonides, and Jewish Thought.

Whereas Sturgill (2004) discussed the broad range of purposes of Baptist congregation websites, including the provision of evangelical information, this study focuses upon the uses and gratifications by rabbis of Torah data bases. Non-orthodox rabbis were most inclined to use data bases. 40%, 22% and 15% of non-orthodox rabbis, modern orthodox rabbis, and haredi rabbis respectively use these websites 'a lot' or even 'all the time'. 67%, 49% and 30% of haredim, modern orthodox, and non-orthodox rabbis respectively do not use these at all. There has been long discussion within the Haredim and modern orthodox, including a ban by the former in Internet use. Haredi rabbis – facing a self-imposed ban on Internet because of sex-related content - have yet to benefit fully from these Torah websites despite their single-minded goal of Torah study. True, that the threat from Internet occurred at the same time as the parallel proliferation of Jewish-related websites made it more difficult for rabbis imposing their anti-internet line. But some Haredim today recognise the technological value of these websites and this trend may be expected will increase.

One recent development is on-line shiurim. For example, in the Web Yeshiva, established in 2007, students study in a live on-line *shiur* (religious lesson) – as well as learning on-line with a *chavruta* (a study partner). Transcending geographical limitations, classes are available from 4 am to midnight in Hebrew,

English and Russian. But the pedagogic benefits of *shiurim* transmitted through technological means have been questioned. True, the traditional one-on-one student-rabbi *shiur* enabled interactive learning which has been a basic ingredient of study in *yeshivot* (talmudical colleges) over hundreds of years. “Each interaction that relates to those lines – with a study partner, another student, a teacher – probes that much deeper. However, the solidary and usually shallow world of the net surfer rarely offers this kind of rigorous inquiry,” remarked one critic, Rabbi Marc Bleiweiss.<sup>i</sup>

### *Conclusion.*

Given the very need for information about Jewish religious developments it was surprising that the news media’s role in providing what is the most important information need of rabbis – information about current developments in Judaism – is limited. This is despite the forgone conclusion that it was most unlikely that the media would bring about any change of opinion by rabbis about their own stream. It was therefore, ironic, the news media was more important for rabbis as a source of information about non-religious developments. Equally, it was unsurprising that the news media would influence rabbis’ positions on general issues of the day unrelated to religion.

Future patterns of rabbis and information will necessarily be influenced by patterns in media coverage of religion coverage. Trends in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009) towards religiosity suggest an increase in religion news interest among Israelis. Unresolved tensions between the secular and ultra-

Orthodox also suggest that religion will remain on the news agenda. Indeed, mutual perceptions between rabbis themselves and journalists will continue to be defined, in part, by how the respective media – secular media and religious media – each define the issues: the secular media from a secular viewpoint of the separation of synagogue and state, and the religious media, particularly the Haredi media, seeing the Torah as the prime mover or criterion whether in private or public life. Diplomatic and military issues concerning the as-yet-unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict are likely to continue to dominate the media's attention, turning attention away from such other subjects including religion. Yet, Internet – characterised by unlimited virtual space – will ensure that the amount of space which religion receives in new media will no longer be determined by 'bigger' stories like the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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