

**Leveraging social networks to create social change:
Ripple effects of Taglit-Birthright Israel on parents of participants**

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Abstract

In the present accountability-oriented policy environment, funding and replication of educational and public health programs are contingent upon evidence-based evaluations and demonstrable outcomes. In many cases, resource constraints preclude the delivery of interventions to all potential beneficiaries; furthermore, even when programs are available, not all targeted beneficiaries would agree to participate in them. It is possible, however, for program reach to be extended through the consideration of the effects of the program on secondary groups in the social networks of the targeted population. Even when programs are designed to affect a specific population of interest, it is possible that others in the social networks of the target individuals – peers, family members, neighbors – will benefit from a positive “spillover” of program effects. Although attitudes and behaviors are known to spread through social networks and this mechanism is utilized in a small number of studies in public health and education, this social network effect has far-reaching implications for program design and evaluation that have not been well explored.

Using a single case of a targeted educational program, this dissertation examines methodological issues in the explicit identification and measurement of such effects, referred to here as “ripple effects” and defined as the dissemination of positive indirect outcomes of a program on targeted individuals through their social network ties. Specifically, the study assesses the impact of the Taglit-Birthright Israel travel program to enhance connections to Israel for parents of participants through their indirect exposure to their adult children’s experience. Taglit-Birthright Israel (Taglit) is a large-scale, successful educational travel program that provides a gift of ten-day trips to Israel to Jewish young adults. A substantial body of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of Taglit in strengthening the Jewish identity of young Diaspora Jews. Anecdotal evidence suggests that participants whose interest in Israel is enhanced by their Taglit experience share what they have learned with their parents, resulting in an increase in Israel interest for the parents, but the present study is the first to systematically analyze impact on parents.

This three-paper dissertation utilizes a mixed-method approach. A set of 19 semistructured interviews of Taglit participants and their parents were conducted in order to develop themes and hypotheses to be tested through pre- and post-trip surveys of parents. Survey topics included parents’ expectation for and satisfaction with the Taglit experience, their own Jewish background and current Jewish behavior and attitudes, and their relationships with their adult children. In addition, the survey collected data on parent’s prior trips to Israel and plans for future Israel travel. Surveys include several open-ended questions to provide additional qualitative data used for analysis. The pre- and post-trip surveys were designed to have identical measures when appropriate so that comparisons could be drawn. Parents of young adults who registered for the trip but did not participate were included in both the pre- and post-trip survey in order to serve as

a comparison group for assessing trip effects. Survey participants were drawn from the Taglit registration database for the winter 2013-14 trip. Pre-trip surveys were completed by 4,924 parents in November 2013-January 2014 and post-trip surveys were completed by 2,748 parents in May 2014.

Each of the three papers that comprise this dissertation focus on the ripple effects of Taglit-Birthright Israel from a distinct perspective for a particular audience. The first paper, entitled *"Incorporating social network 'ripple effects' in program outcome measurement,"* describes the theoretical social network framework within which ripple effects are theorized to operate and recommends methods to incorporate the measurement of ripple effects in program evaluation. It analyzes changes in parent attitudes about Israel as a case study for the measurement of ripple effects. The second paper, entitled *"Upward transmission of cultural values: emerging adults as agents of parents' interest in heritage tourism,"* utilizes a framework of emerging adulthood and focuses on the process of persuasion through which emerging adults influence the views of their parents. This paper finds evidence that trip participants encourage their parents to visit Israel when they believe that parents will be most amenable to such persuasion. This paper concludes that changes in the parent attitudes appear to result from the persuasive efforts of their children.

The last paper, entitled *"I wish they had Birthright for adults!': The effect of Taglit on Jewish parents' interest in visiting Israel,"* is targeted specifically on the degree to which Taglit-Birthright Israel enhances parent interest in visits to Israel. This paper shows that, for Jewish parents, the primary impact of Taglit is on increased interest in visits to Israel and reduced concern about the safety of Israel travel. The effect of the program was most pronounced for parents who had never been to Israel themselves.

Policy implications of this research include findings specific to Taglit as well as to other programmatic interventions in areas such as education and public health. Evidence of ripple effects on secondary groups outside the targeted population can lead to the design of programs to maximize and capture those effects. Further, evidence of otherwise unmeasured program effects could be incorporated into program evaluation in order to more precisely evaluate a program's effectiveness. By ignoring these indirect effects, the actual effects of programs might be underestimated.