



Tova Persoff\*

The Open University of Israel

## Understanding Israeli Start-Up Founders in the context of “Tikkun Olam”\*\*

### KEYWORDS

start-up founder identity, Tikkun Olam, pay-it-forward, hybrid founder identity, start-ups, entrepreneurship

### ABSTRACT

Tova Persoff, *Understanding Israeli Start-Up Founders in the context of “Tikkun Olam”*. Culture – Society – Education no. 2(20) 2021, Poznań 2021, pp. 71–89, Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-0422, ISSN (Online) 2719-2717. DOI 10.14746/kse.2021.20.4

Context impacts a start-up founder’s behavior, activities and choices. This study uses the three founder identities introduced by Fauchart and Gruber (2011) Darwinian, communitarian and missionary to classify Israeli start-up founders who have created diverse products. It presents an innovative context-based interpretation of Tikkun Olam – which in Hebrew means ‘making the world a better place’ as a possible explanation for the relatively large number of Israeli start-up founders who were found to have a hybrid identity.

Entrepreneurship has a rich history of meanings. For some, entrepreneurial activity may be defined as fulfilling a dream in creating something new or “doing things differently” in the realm of economic life” (Schumpeter, 1939: 59). Advancing an idea from the stage of creative thought process to actual production and financial success is a huge mountain to climb. In general, “(...) entrepreneurship, understood broadly, is heterogeneous, blooming, messy, and a sometimes-glorious social tool that is widely available” (Welter, Baker, Audretsch, Gartner, 2017: 317). Creating a viable company with a promising financial future is a challenge which

\* ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3296-9292>.

\*\* Tikkun Olam is a term in Hebrew which when translated literally means, ‘repairing the world’ but can also be understood to mean ‘improving the world’ and ‘making it a better place’

requires managerial, financial and personal skills. Some are acquired through life experience or higher education while others are mastered and honed on the job. It is necessary to do market research in order to identify the need for a product or service as well as to have a sound business plan with funding to facilitate the business goals even before beginning the creation of a company.

Start-ups are a type of entrepreneurial firm usually founded by one person or with a co-founder which begins small with little funding and few employees making it a risky venture. “A start-up is a temporary organization in search of a scalable, reputable, profitable business model” (Blank and Dorf, 2012) seeking technological solutions for existing problems, upgrading an existing product or technology or innovating a new product for a niche not yet conceived. Because start-up firms frequently only have seed funding, start-up founders need to swiftly implement their vision by inventing a prototype of their product to prove its validity, potential value and to secure funding from larger investors or venture capital. This enables them to continue developing their product and keeps their company afloat long enough to ensure success and financial revenue.

Several start-up ecosystems exist around the world. According to “The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2020” (Startup Genome, 2020: 26), the top-ranking ones in 2020 were Silicon Valley, New York City and London (tied at second place), Beijing, Boston and Tel Aviv/Jerusalem (tied at sixth place with Los Angeles). This article will focus on the Silicon Wadi in Israel and on a trait that is unique to Israeli start-up founders: Tikkun Olam. It is outside the scope of this article to discuss the intricacies of the Israeli start-up phenomenon and explain Israel’s meteoric global economic start-up success. “Success does not come easy and every start-up founder worldwide is aware of the data estimating that 90% of start-ups will eventually fail” (Griffith, 2014). It is a wonder, then, that start-up founders have the courage to take up this challenge and try to succeed in a nascent venture.

This paper will briefly survey the concept of social identity theory and then start-up founder identities. It will present a study conducted on Israeli start-up founders whose purpose was to discover if there are specific distinguishing features of the Israeli start-up founder identity. Next it will present the research questions and methodology. Finally, the results will be discussed in connection with the specific milieu of Israeli start-up founders. A possible and context-based conclusion is presented. It is a unique Judeo-Christian ideal embedded in Israeli education called – Tikkun Olam – (in Hebrew literally translated as “repairing the world”) which has encouraged them to advance and reach their objectives. This article hopes to further emerging research on start-up founder identity within a specific context.

## **Social identity theory**

The formation of a person's identity is a complex dynamic process. The questions of "who am I?" and "how is our identity created?" are quintessential for all individuals. Their essence begins from birth and changes throughout the growing-up process and even in adulthood. In the past century, researchers from a wide variety of disciplines sought to understand how identity develops and to explain it. Mead (1934) explains that human identity is created through the shared symbols of both spoken and non-verbal language which are used to interact with one's surroundings. He understood that people of all ages develop within the environment in which they live and carry out their daily routines. Using their experiences and interactions with other people, they learn both about themselves and what others think about them. As a result, they may experience a shift in how they reflect on themselves as well as on how others think of them (Cooley [1902] 1964) and having done so may modify their sense of self.

Over half a century later Tajfel and Turner (1979) expanded on these ideas, conceiving social identity theory to illuminate how a person's group membership impacts their sense of self or identity. This identity is "a general, if individualized, framework for understanding oneself which is formed and sustained through social interaction" (Gioia, 1998: 19) and an essential element of how people reflect upon themselves as individuals. Stryker and Burke (2000) also relate the idea of self to identity theory, iterating that "self is multifaceted, made up of interdependent and independent, mutually reinforcing and conflicting parts" (Stryker and Burke, 2000: 286). This understanding reinforces several concepts such as the fact that a person's values and personal inclinations comprise his identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) as well as the awareness that identification with certain ideals which were a part their upbringing (Hogg, 2012) and the community in which they were raised (Hewitt, 2000) result in these being key building blocks of their lives. Identity then is flexible and ever transient; its creation being a "complex, multifaceted process which produces socially negotiated temporary outcomes of this dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions" (Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis, Sabelis, 2009: 301). Social identity will help us give context to and better understand start-up founder identity.

## **Founder identity**

Founder identity is an emerging field. A study by Fauchart and Gruber (2011) has delineated three entrepreneur founder identities. These can help us under-

stand what motivates start-up founders to blaze the trail with their innovations and products as well as what influences their behaviour, activities and decisions.

Fauchart and Gruber (2011) studied entrepreneurs in the sports equipment industry and presented three clear social identity perspectives for classifying entrepreneurs: Darwinian, communitarian and missionary. The main focus of Darwinian entrepreneurs is establishing strong and profitable start-up companies based on solid business standards “with the primary motive of making profits and accumulating personal wealth” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 942). For them competition provides the momentum to prevail as the best in their field. Communitarian identity is the second grouping of founders who focus on creating an innovative and useful product for a unique group of which they are part. Support from other community members in the innovation process is not only a catalyst for product success but also for achieving peer recognition and contributing to community development. The third category, missionary identity, includes entrepreneurs who believe that “firms can be powerful agents of change in society and [they] engage in new firm creation to establish a platform from which they can pursue their political visions and advance particular causes, generally of a social or environmental nature” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 944). They also found that some of the founders they studied fell into a hybrid identity grouping: a combination of the three identity types. It is these entrepreneurial identities based on social identity theory which have guided this study and research questions:

What are the primary types of founder identities among Israeli start-up founders? What is a possible explanation of the predominance of one founder identity over others among Israeli start-up founders?

## Methods

Qualitative methodology focuses on the experiences of the individuals being studied, the meaning they attribute to their experiences and the subsequent interpretations given to them in order to form a deeper understanding of phenomena (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Yin, 2003). Since “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3) it is sound to use it to study the day-to-day functioning of subjects in their natural setting and understand the “essence or essences to shared experiences” (Patton, 2015: 192) of the Israeli start-up reality.

## **Setting and participants**

This study's purpose is to examine primary founder identities among Israeli start-up founders. Israel is considered a Start-up Nation (Senor and Singer, 2009) with a high concentration of start-up companies in its Silicon Wadi spanning the width of the country from the Israeli coastal plain cities to Jerusalem. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013) and later snowball sampling (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) were used to locate Israeli start-up founders or co-founders of start-up companies involved in: biodegradable food wrappings, worker safety, food technology safety, a learning disabilities assessment platform, website accessibility compliance, environmentally friendly clothing made to order, smart toys, a crowdsourcing news/photo share platform, environmental wellness, non-invasive ultrasound technology for emergency room diagnosis of heart emergencies and more.

Eighteen in-depth interviews (12 men and six women) using a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2013; Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) were carried out between August and November 2019, sixteen interviewees were Jewish Israelis and two were Christian Arab Israelis. Each interview lasted from 1.5 to nearly three hours and took place in a variety of locations. Nearly all interviews (15) were carried out in Hebrew but three were done in English at the request of the participants. Before each interview, permission to record was requested and assurance of anonymity with pseudonyms was given. Participants were assured confidentiality of any information shared. No compensation was given for participation. Each interviewee agreed in writing and orally to participate in the research process. These efforts were made to ensure ethical standards.

Each interview began with a personal introduction and some general information about the research. The same semi-structured question protocol focused on a variety of topics such as founders' upbringing, education, military service as well as the personal process leading to the birth of their innovation and the founding of their company. Participants were asked about challenges they had faced and were still facing in the start-up process as well as how they see their product enhancing the world market. Conversation was allowed to flow in order to facilitate additional data collection and increase participant comfort and trust. This resulted in more elaborate participant descriptions of complex situations as well as the opportunity to ask for clarification if a question was not understood (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

In order to enhance the validity of the interview process, participants' answers were continuously paraphrased to clarify their accuracy. Over 350 pages

of notes were taken to supplement the recorded and transcribed audio files. After each interview, the recordings were transcribed, translated into English and coded to classify each founder based on the three core dimensions or attributes “that researchers use to define social identity: an individual’s (1) basic social motivation, (2) basis of self-evaluation, and (3) frame of reference” (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 940). In order to develop an understanding of the source of founder identity, interviewees were given a score using the guidelines and format proposed by Fauchart and Gruber (2011). Their format used a formula of  $x_1, x_2, x_3$  where  $x_y$  indicated the relative importance of the predominate themes or elements in each core attribute. “For instance, if the meanings that the founder associated with new firm creation all pertained to the first theme, their score was (1.0; 0; 0) for that dimension [attribute]; if half of a founder’s meanings pertained to the first theme, half to the second and none to the third, their score was (0.5; 0.5; 0)” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 940). Interviews were reread several times to verify the scores and to double-check the accuracy of the analysis. The Israeli start-up founders fell into two main groupings: pure founder identities were those whose founder identity focused on one core dimension or attribute and hybrid identities were those with a combination of more than one dimension or attribute.

## Results

This research set out to discover what founder identity is most salient among Israeli start-up founders and in what way the context in which they grew up and developed influenced their identity, if at all. Identity can be considered the various meanings attached to oneself by the self and others (Ashforth, 2001; Gecas and Schwalbe, 1983) and can be considered a social creation (Mead, 1934; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) formed as a process (Gecas, 1982) in conjunction with the environment in which one resides and therefore “may be regarded as a fundamental bridging concept between the individual and society” (Ybema et al., 2009: 300). This concept is relevant to the way founders perceive themselves, their inherent value, their entrepreneurial activities and their product.

Analysis of the interview transcripts enabled the classification of the start-up founders into the categories listed above based on the three core dimensions. All the start-up founders interviewed had the primary goal of start-up success, i.e., making money. This is a Darwinian typology (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011) whose main objective is a profitable flourishing business. The majority of their attention

and efforts are aimed at using “tried and true” entrepreneurial principles to ensure success. Knowing that most start-ups fail, “45% of those founded in 2011–18 had shut down by the end of the period,” (Levy, 2019) each Israeli start-up founder expressed acute stress regarding this possibility. The analysis revealed that the only pure identity was Darwinian, with nearly half (8) characterized by revenue being their main objective. Tanya (pseudonym), founder of a website accessibility compliance platform, said she tells prospective clients:

I have a great product (...) and I know what I can deliver at the end of the day. My automatic testing tool is not yet 100% automatic but I am going to provide 100% services so that you [the client] can get what you are expecting to get in a short time.

She continued that although she is also a wife and mother, she is “24/7 work because I go to sleep at night thinking about the Excel and I wake up in the morning after I remember that my dream was about the Excel.” She concluded, “I know that I have one goal and one clear job. My job is to bring the money to the company. My goal is to make it happen and put us out there.”

Tanya knows there is a huge market for the company’s platform because of new global government regulations regarding website accessibility and measures herself by profits repeating, “my success will be how much revenue we bring to the company.” Tanya and other Darwinians value the strong work ethic that helps them reach their business goals. She perceives herself as a consummate professional who can give an amazing pitch and attract new investors and customers. The knowledge that there are others competing to fill her niche in the digital world motivates her to consistently present how her start-up is better than others who might have a similar product.

Chen, too, iterated the idea of the profitability of his database systems product above everything else explaining that from the beginning they focused on making large sales to the biggest companies,

When we just started out, we were a poor company. We had no money. Our only way to thrive was to sell products to earn revenue... We had to have customers... We continued with this mentality even when we became a public company... [and years later] when we got to NASDAQ, we were a very healthy company because we were big and profitable.

Chen elaborated that this was carried out with a very professional and technical short pitch of no more than 30 minutes in the first meeting, where he confidently explained to the client who they were and what the product could do for their firm. It is this principle of selling a product and making money that pushed his start-up forward and characterizes him as a Darwinian founder.

Two additional founder identities presented by Fauchart and Gruber (2011), communitarian and missionary, were not observed in their pure forms in this study. Rather, over half of the interviews revealed start-up founders with a hybrid-founder identity- that is a combination of two different founder identities. The next section will explain these findings.

## Hybrid founder identity

A hybrid founder identity is a combination of two or more pure identities which form the core of a start-up founder identity. These founders are an amalgam of the dimensions of each identity mentioned by Fauchart and Gruber (2011): their basic social motivation as a start-up founder, the basis of self-evaluation as a start-up founder and the frame of reference they attribute to themselves as founders in contrast to others as being in competition with others, as being part of a community or as being a part of the world's population. They cannot be pigeonholed into one category. All of the start-up founders who fell into this hybrid-founder identity category (10) possessed a dominant Darwinian identity and a second supplementary identity. Most founders who possessed a hybrid identity had a combination of a Darwinian and a missionary founder identity (7) and a few (2) were a mix of Darwinian and communitarian identities and one was all three. In the interviews, all these founders clearly expressed their desire to focus on more than just being financially successful.

The missionary founder identity is characterized by the desire to create something with a higher goal of making the world a better place and affecting others positively. According to Fauchart and Gruber (2011) "missionary founders believe that firms can be powerful agents of change in society and engage in new firm creation to establish a platform from which they can pursue their political visions and advance particular causes, generally of a social or environmental nature" (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 944). Several interviewees iterate this idea of making a difference. From the analysis of the interviews, Israeli start-up founders' contribution to the world can be subdivided into three categories. The first is working for the greater good of all citizens of the world. These start-up founders want to make life better and safer for the population of the world- not just in Israel. This desire to 'do good', 'make a difference' or 'leave a mark' on the world appeared across a range of start-up fields. Hagit, founder of a worker safety start-up, who had written the entire code for her product, was very explicit about the goals she and her start-up were aiming to reach. "We want to do it. We believe that we are going to change



the world. We believe we will be a central factor in protecting workers in factories and reducing accidents to zero. This will change the world.” Her intention is to change what happens in factories globally, so that there are as few work-related accidents as possible- a truly admirable goal. Another example is Osher, founder of a start-up platform for diagnosing children with learning disabilities. He shared that his experiences as a child suffering from severe dyslexia was a motivator for his start-up. He spoke about “improving the quality of life of others [saying] we want to make an impact on people’s lives.” Osher expressed this feeling of advancing the greater good when he said,

I think if I can help parents [get help for their learning-disabled children] with this [his start-up] then not only do we have a big business but also impact society for the better. I really think that what we are doing has a big impact and is a ‘game changer’. If we are successful, we will be part of introducing a change to this world.

His start-up is based on helping individual families with the challenging issue of identifying their child’s learning disabilities and getting tools and assistance to help them succeed socially and academically. Once the start-up platform is translated into multiple languages, it will have tremendous global ramifications.

The second category of Darwinian and missionary hybrid-founder identity relates to the idea of creating a start-up with the joint goal of making a profit while preserving the environment of our big blue marble. Lior, founder of a biodegradable food wrapping start-up, with a strong background in chemistry has utilized his scientific knowledge and technical know-how, to create an environment-friendly food packaging product which simultaneously “preserves food freshness and doesn’t pollute the environment.” With less garbage produced by fast food companies which will use this product, Earth’s sustainability is being addressed. This is a main factor in Lior’s start-up, giving him a missionary founder identity, but it doesn’t overrule his desire “to make it big.” Sustainability of the environment was also a huge motivator for all the stakeholders involved in his start-up: investors and employees.

Anna, founder of a made-to-order fashion start-up, explained how her fashion start-up protects the environment. She said that “the fashion industry today is considered one of the most polluting industries in the world, which some claim to be the second largest, right after the oil industry.” She presented some facts to support her claim describing the excess waste of textile products, discarded clothing and unsold merchandise in the West that gets resold in Africa and the East and is sometimes dumped into landfills in those areas. She pointed out that plastic materials used to color fabrics seep into the drinking water of Third World countries

where the textiles are manufactured resulting in health issues in these countries. Anna also mentioned the transport of tons of garments which is “environmentally and financially costly” and shared that her idea, to “change the method of production” in order to produce only what people actually need, as in the past, will facilitate the protection and sustainability of our planet’s resources.

A third category of hybrid Darwinian and missionary identity was to help others in a personal way by assisting and giving advice to other start-up professionals. Theodore, for instance, who created a gaming platform to enhance tolerance between Israeli and Palestinian youth, also volunteers with the Christian Arab Israeli start-up community. He said, “I’ve always perceived myself as a business entrepreneur who believes it is my personal responsibility ‘to pay it forward’. I do this by volunteering on Mobile Monday (MoMo) in Nazareth.” He has taken his success to further his personal community and country in the open and innovative MoMo platform bringing together start-up professionals to facilitate networking and partnerships. Amin, another Christian Arab start-up founder, also gives back to his community. He understands the challenges Israeli-Arab university students face with a higher dropout rate and mentors engineering students saying, “I strive to help students, by mentoring them and giving them the tools to test what they like and what they want to do.” He explained that Christian Israeli-Arabs traditionally go into conventional professions such as medicine or accounting where he says you can ‘actually find a job right after graduation.’ Amin said that many young Christian Israeli-Arab students lack familial and community support when choosing engineering as a major and then trying to take the next step into the start-up world which is why he lends a personal hand. These two Christian Israeli-Arab start-up founders take the time to regularly give back to their community as well as looking beyond its boundaries to help improve relationships between different cultural populations in Israel.

Osher, too, shared that he volunteers in the ‘Friday Morning Coffee Club’ which gives individuals with new start-up ideas the opportunity to meet “other entrepreneurs at the top of their field.” Although he has not ‘made it’ yet and is still in the process of ‘getting there’, he feels that if he can help facilitate someone else’s success, all the better. Clearly this concept of ‘paying it forward’ as Theodore calls it, building connections to help other start-up professionals at the beginning of their journey or like Osher mentions, to help peers reach their potential, is part of the Israeli missionary-founder identity to help and improve our world. None of these interviewees feels too important to be of assistance to others.

While the hybrid of Darwinian and missionary start-up founders is divided into three categories, the combination of Darwinian and communitarian start-

up founder identity is less diverse. The communitarian start-up founder identity (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011) emphasizes a contribution to a specific community which holds shared interests and/or values. None of the start-up founders interviewed in this study had a pure communitarian founder identity. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hila, who had spent over a year travelling the globe, founded an innovative crowdsourcing story-telling platform. Her start-up's objective was dynamic user participation worldwide to not only upload stories and pictures that had great interest for them but also add to existing stories created by other users. This resulted in joint story creation about specific places and experiences. Hila shared,

I really liked the venture and I was emotionally attached to it. It was an ultimate self-realization because it dealt with all areas I love: technology, design, photography, storytelling, people, community... I had photographers from Bangladesh, the foot of the Himalayas, Washington, Panama, everywhere.

Hila's focus on the importance of shared interests enabled a global community of users to actively create in an authentic manner with “amazing synergy.” Hila revealed that her passion for “doing good” helped her create a meaningful social community as well as a platform for the members to get “recognition by their peers” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 943). For Hila, reaching as many people as possible with her avant-garde cooperative platform was as important as creating a financially stable start-up firm.

Issac is also a hybrid Darwinian and communitarian start-up founder. His start-up caters to a community of marketing professionals who need one address for marketing material. Isaac explained that from his experience universities fail to provide practical courses for marketing professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, when a person looks for guidance in this area, they go to Google to find the most appropriate and reliable professional content. He described a concept called ‘content shock.’ This is when individuals feel overwhelmed by the many articles on the Internet which causes ‘paralysis.’ This inability to sift through enormous amounts of content can stymie productivity. Isaac's goal is to deal with this cognitive shutdown with his product “a product made by a community of professionals who check and filter the information ... so that the information needed is most relevant and dependable.” His start-up personalizes content for marketing professionals according to their individual needs with a variety of modalities- visual with text or videos or audio with podcasts according to their personal preferences. No matter the product they are providing, these Israeli start-up founders are “enthused by their ability to contribute to their community with their innovative

products and value the support they receive from fellow community members in their entrepreneurship endeavors” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 943). Both Hila and Issac have revealed a desire to create a community for people who they know will appreciate the product they are facilitating.

## Discussion – Tikkun Olam

From the results of the interviews, it is clear that many of the Israeli start-up founders can be categorized as having a pure Darwinian founder identity. This confirms the findings of Fauchart and Gruber (2011) that “founders with Darwinian identities are more common than founders with communitarian or missionary identity” (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011: 950). However, by the same token, the results show others who are motivated by more than ‘just’ financial success. In this article, I would like to propose that there might be a unique element in the Israeli context that makes them want to add good to the world in addition to the basic entrepreneurial drive for financial success. This ‘adding of good’ is reflected in a large range of interactions among people to ensure social and economic fairness as well as between humans and the environment. In Hebrew, this idea is called “Tikkun Olam” which literally translates as ‘fixing the world’ but actually means ‘making the world a better place.’

The source of Tikkun Olam is Biblical. Genesis (The Bible Chabad Online, N.D., 1:28) says “And God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.’” This verse is a direct command from God telling human beings that it is their task to enhance and improve the world and be responsible for the prosperity and sustainability of the Earth and its people. They must become the world’s guardians. They are not told how to do it, but later the Bible is specific in its directive on what must be done: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (The Bible Chabad Online, N.D., Leviticus 19:18) and by so bringing light and healing to the world. Maimonides, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, declared that every single individual who does acts of kindness, such as economic activities that help the poor and persecuted, has the capacity to perfect the world for the benefit of the common good. He says that each of us should see ourselves as if our next deed could change the fate of the world (Maimonides, Repetition of the Bible, Laws of Repentance 3:4).

This directive is also rooted in the Kabbalistic tradition of the 16<sup>th</sup> century which held that performing good deeds was the responsibility of all in order to reconstruct the world and make it a better place. In addition, there has been much Jewish commentary on the subject from that era including the present. The New

Testament also mandates doing good for others with no intrinsic reward in return as an integral Christian value. This can be seen when Jesus repeats the Jewish commandment to help others as a measure of personal dignity and self respect (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matthew 22:39). Tikkun Olam is an ancient tenet of the Judeo-Christian culture emphasizing social responsibility, altruism, a sense of belonging as well as environmental sustainability. This provides a common ground for Israelis, both Jews and Christians, in their aspirations to make the world a better place.

Volunteerism and community activism is an integral part of Israeli society. The Israel Council for Volunteerism was created in 1972 to provide services to volunteers and NGOs and coordinate their activities. According to the Israeli Network of Volunteers website, 20.6% of the population in Israel volunteers on a regular basis (Israeli Network of Volunteers, 2021) in all kinds of activities. Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics website confirms this and reports that in 2019, 1.3 million Israelis (about 23% of the population) from ages 20 and above, both male and female from a range of backgrounds, ages and social groups volunteered regularly (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In 2009–2010, The Joint Distribution Committee (an NGO) and The Israeli Ministry of Education surveyed Israeli youth to learn about volunteerism among teenagers. Results revealed that 47% of this population was involved in volunteering activities on a regular basis, not connected to their school responsibilities (Nahmani, 2020). In 2012, the Israeli government created the Inter-sectoral Volunteering Initiative whose goal was to promote awareness of the importance of volunteering and social participation among and between the wide variety of communities in Israel. One result of this initiative was to pass a law (2017) creating one body to coordinate intersectoral leadership and action and increase awareness of the community, boosting the quantity and quality of volunteers in Israel. An inclusive website for the Israeli Council for Volunteering (Israeli Network of Volunteers, 2021) was also created to achieve these goals and facilitate greater accessibility for the general population.

Several social non-profit start-ups have a declared objective to help organizations and volunteers fulfill their potential. For example, in 1996 the Ruach Tova (“Good Spirit” in Hebrew) non-profit (Ruach Tova, 2020) was founded to advance volunteerism in all sectors of Israeli society by matching volunteers with causes and organizations that interest them with separate departments for business volunteering, municipal councils, and local authorities in the Arab sector. This organization initiated the “Good Deeds Day” in which over 2.4 million Israelis participate even today on a yearly basis. In 2017, Helpi (2020), a social start-up launched its website to make volunteering easy and accessible to the general public as well as to em-

ployees of companies by custom fitting them to volunteer opportunities whenever and wherever it is convenient for them. The same year, we-tribu (2021), another social start-up was founded with a multifaceted platform: for private companies to promote and manage employee volunteering and to help the Ministry of Education facilitate student volunteering. The Israeli Ministry of Education accords great importance to the universal values of social solidarity and mutual responsibility implementing the words of the prophet Isaiah (58:7) “Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house...?” The curriculum requires Israeli students to participate in programs in their different communities in order to develop their social involvement ‘muscles’. Nearly 70% of middle school youth volunteer once a week and nearly one quarter do so several times a week either as part of their school program or as members of the many youth movements that exist in Israel (Bar, 2008). In fact, Israeli high school students cannot receive a full matriculation certificate without fulfilling a quota of 120 hours of civic engagement with the goal of enhancing service learning (State of Israel, Ministry of Education, Social and Youth Administration, 2021). These young adults can choose from a wide range of volunteering opportunities in education with young children, older people, special needs individuals, health care organizations, human rights groups which work to develop a sound foundation for coexistence in Israel as well as environmental organizations which nurture responsibility for Israel’s beaches, wildlife, nature reserves and city cleanliness.

Another example of how integral volunteering is in Israeli society, is the trend of post-high-school students to do a year of national service before their compulsory military service of two years for women and nearly three years for men. According to the Research and Information Center of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament, 2015), in 2014–2015, approximately 3000 young people volunteered in youth groups, youth village centers and other organizations. This means that they are devoting three-to-four years of their lives to national needs before they begin their personal lives as young adults. All of the above emphasize the cultural tradition of contributing to society by helping others in a variety of venues.

The concept of Tikkun Olam is also the driving force behind emergency assistance and humanitarian relief efforts that the Israeli government has provided to numerous countries around the world. Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a special division called MASHAV which has sent trained army teams to Haiti, Japan, Sri Lanka and Nepal among others in times of natural disasters to build field hospitals and provide urgent medical care and supplies (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Several Israeli organizations facilitate voluntourism providing young Israelis with intercultural exposure by pairing them with global volun-

teer opportunities thereby familiarizing them with other cultures. For example, the Project Ten (2021) website offers opportunities both in Israel and worldwide to “promote social resilience for disadvantaged communities in Israel and around the world.” Bina is another organization furthering community building and Tikkun Olam through learning and volunteering in Israel (Bina, 2021). Still other organizations, such as Aardvark Israel (2018), match foreigners who wish to experience and strengthen Israel through volunteer opportunities via its website. The Israeli platform GivingWay (2021) promotes voluntourism, on-site or online teaming-up volunteers with global locations where they can make a difference in a field of their choice and contribute to a community. We can see from these examples that the volunteerism of Tikkun Olam is not limited only to youth and teenagers but includes adults as well.

This brings us to the concept of social identity and how the idea of Tikkun Olam connects with it. Social identity refers to how an individual develops their sense of self in order to answer the question of “Who am I?” Mead (1934) focuses on the development of the individual in society and maintains that the “self” is created in the socialization process, which includes the meanings and subsequent interpretations people assign to other people, objects and events through interaction with them. A person cannot develop their sense of “self” without society around them. This process occurs via social interaction using both language and non-verbal communication. Through this interaction and subsequent feedback, meaning is constructed and a person’s identity is formed. In the Israeli context, the socialization of individuals is infused from a young age with the idea of activism - social, moral, political or environmental with the goal of mending, restoring and rejuvenating the world. It is possible to consider this an integral part of the Israeli individual’s DNA.

Many of these acts take place on a micro-level influencing the more immediate environment; others have a broader reach. But all of these acts, large and small, can have a cumulative effect which resonates on a macro-level affecting the local, national or global scene. Not only do we have the potential to make a difference by repairing flaws we see and fashioning something better- one thing at a time, but we also have an obligation to try and better the world for the welfare of everyone. It is this Israeli context of Tikkun Olam – collective societal responsibility that offers a possible explanation for the prevalence of the hybrid Darwinian and missionary and Darwinian and communitarian founder identity among Israeli start-up founders. This may also explain why founders choose to focus on and develop a given product.

Implementation of Tikkun Olam is based on the assumption that a person’s identity is created in a long-term process within a social group beginning from

childhood (Turner, 1968), nourished through social interaction (Gioia, 1998) and the feedback received (Fauchart and Gruber, 2011). These findings also support both Barrett and Vershinina (2017) and Donnellon, Ollila, Williams-Middleton (2014) who explain the prominence of context in entrepreneurial identity. Israel can, therefore, be considered a test case of Judeo-Christian values influencing the commonality of hybrid entrepreneurial identity motivating start-up founders from all over Israel to be responsible for society- each with their own distinctive product and in their own unique way.

This study's contribution is a novel interpretation of the Israeli context of entrepreneurial identity. More research needs to be done on a larger sample of Israeli start-up founders to determine if these findings can be generalized. In addition, it would be interesting to do future research with Muslim start-up founders to research whether the precepts of Islam also espouse this idea of Tikkun Olam. Future research could also strive to identify intentionality in entrepreneurial identity to discover if founders are aware of what motivates their actions. Additionally, the entrepreneurs' social identity scale developed by Sieger, Gruber, Fauchart, Zellweger (2016) could add an empirical component to the present results. Finally, it is important to replicate this research in other countries around the world to compare the prevalence of hybrid Darwinian- missionary and Darwinian- communitarian identities specifically among start-up founders from different fields.

## Conclusion

It is possible that the Israeli context immersed in Judeo-Christian Biblical values has a very strong influence on the population of Israeli start-up founders. This paper has ventured to demonstrate the depth and breadth of Tikkun Olam. Having a hybrid start-up founder identity does not negate wanting to be financially successful, rather it complements it by allowing start-up founders to take their success and 'pay it forward.' It seems clear that Tikkun Olam influences and inspires some start-up founders in the State of Israel to be proactive and 'think big' because every individual can make a huge difference in the world.

## Bibliography

- Aardvark Israel (2018), <https://aardvarkisrael.com>, accessed: 06.05.2021.
- Ashforth B.E. (2001), *Role Transitions in Organizational Life: An Identity-Based Perspective* (LEA's organization and management series), Mahwah, NJ.



- Ashforth B.E., Mael F. (1989), Social Identity Theory and the Organization, *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), pp. 20–39, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233729899\\_Social\\_Identity\\_Theory\\_and\\_Organization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233729899_Social_Identity_Theory_and_Organization), accessed: 15.11.2020.
- Bar R. (2008), Development and Advancement of Youth Volunteering in Israel, *Mandel Education Conference*, pp. 113–118 [Hebrew], <https://www.mandelfoundation.org.il/english/SiteCollectionDocuments/publications/Mandel.book.pdf>, accessed: 16.05.2021.
- Barrett R., Vershinina N. (2017), Intersectionality of Ethnic and Entrepreneurial Identities: A Study of Post-War Polish Entrepreneurs in an English City, *Journal of Small Business Management*, 55(3), pp. 430–443, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303322109\\_Intersectionality\\_of\\_Ethnic\\_and\\_Entrepreneurial\\_Identities\\_A\\_Study\\_of\\_Post-War\\_Polish\\_Entrepreneurs\\_in\\_an\\_English\\_City](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303322109_Intersectionality_of_Ethnic_and_Entrepreneurial_Identities_A_Study_of_Post-War_Polish_Entrepreneurs_in_an_English_City), accessed: 14.05.2020.
- Bina (2021), <https://www.bina.org.il>, accessed: 06.05.2021.
- Blank S., Dorf B. (2012), *The Startup Owner’s Manual: The Step-by-Step Guide for Building a Great Company*, K & S Ranch.
- Brewer M.B., Gardner W.L. (1996), Who Is This “We”? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), pp. 83–93, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232469632\\_Who\\_Is\\_This\\_We\\_Levels\\_of\\_Collective\\_Identity\\_and\\_Self\\_Representations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232469632_Who_Is_This_We_Levels_of_Collective_Identity_and_Self_Representations), accessed: 22.11.2020.
- Central Bureau of Statistics (2020), *Selected Data from the 2019 Social Survey about Volunteering for the International Volunteer Day* [Hebrew], [https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2020/389/19\\_20\\_389b.pdf](https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2020/389/19_20_389b.pdf), accessed: 05.12.2020.
- Cooley C.H. [1902] (1964), *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York.
- Corbin J., Strauss A. (2015), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Los Angeles.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Denzin N.K., Lincoln Y.S. (eds.) (2011), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Donnellon A., Ollila, S., Williams-Middleton K. (2014), Constructing Entrepreneurial Identity in Entrepreneurship Education, *The International Journal of Management Education*, 12(3), pp. 490–499, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262975002\\_Constructing\\_entrepreneurial\\_identity\\_in\\_entrepreneurship\\_education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262975002_Constructing_entrepreneurial_identity_in_entrepreneurship_education), accessed: 01.05.2021.
- Fauchart E., Gruber M. (2011), Darwinians, Communitarians and Missionaries: The Role of Founder Identity in Entrepreneurship, *The Academy of Management Journal*, 54(5), pp. 935–957, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46286385\\_Darwinians\\_Communitarians\\_and\\_Missionaries\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Founder\\_Identity\\_in\\_Entrepreneurship](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46286385_Darwinians_Communitarians_and_Missionaries_The_Role_of_Founder_Identity_in_Entrepreneurship), accessed: 13.11.2020.
- Gecas V. (1982), The Self-Concept, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8(1), pp. 1–33, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.so.08.080182.000245>, accessed: 17.12.2018.
- Gecas V., Schwalbe M.L. (1983), Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 46(2), pp. 77–88, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/16320244\\_Beyond\\_the\\_Looking-Glass\\_Self\\_Social\\_Structure\\_and\\_Efficacy-Based\\_Self-Esteem](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/16320244_Beyond_the_Looking-Glass_Self_Social_Structure_and_Efficacy-Based_Self-Esteem), accessed: 28.10.2020.
- Gioia D.A. (1998), *From Individual to Organizational Identity*, [in:] D.A. Whetten, P.C. Godfrey (eds.), *Identity in Organizations: Building Theory Through Conversations*, Thousand Oaks, pp. 17–32.

- GivingWay (2021), <https://www.givingway.com>, accessed: 06.05.2021.
- Griffith E. (2014, September 25), Why Startups Fail, According to Their Founders, *Fortune*, Leadership, Startups, <https://fortune.com/2014/09/25/why-startups-fail-according-to-their-founders/>, accessed: 27.11.2017.
- Helpi (2020), [www.helpi.org.il](http://www.helpi.org.il), accessed: 04.05.2021.
- Hewitt J.P. (2000), *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology* (8<sup>th</sup> edition), Boston.
- Hogg M. (2012), *Organizational Orthodoxy and Corporate Autocrats: Some Nasty Consequences of Organizations Identification in Uncertain Times*, [in:] C.A. Bartel, S. Blader, A. Wrzesniewski (eds.), *Identity and the Modern Organization*, London, pp. 35–59.
- Israeli Knesset, Research and Information Center (2015, July 25), [https://fs.knesset.gov.il/globaldocs/MMM/7d1107dc-1277-e511-80d1-00155d0ad6b2/2\\_7d1107dc-1277-e511-80d1-00155d0ad6b2\\_11\\_8454.pdf](https://fs.knesset.gov.il/globaldocs/MMM/7d1107dc-1277-e511-80d1-00155d0ad6b2/2_7d1107dc-1277-e511-80d1-00155d0ad6b2_11_8454.pdf), accessed: 04.05.2021.
- Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021), [https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/aid/pages/israel\\_humanitarian\\_aid.aspx](https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/aid/pages/israel_humanitarian_aid.aspx), accessed: 05.05.2021.
- Israeli Network of Volunteers (2021), <http://www.ivolunteer.org.il/>, accessed: 01.05.2021.
- Kvale S., Brinkmann S. (2009), *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, Los Angeles, CA.
- Levy R. (2019, December 31), Number of Startups in Israel Declined in 2018, *Haaretz*, Business Section, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/.premium-number-of-startups-in-israel-declined-in-2018-1.8342259>, accessed: 06.10.2020.
- Maimonides D. (1180), Repetition of the Bible, Laws of Repentance 3:4.
- Mead G.H. (1934), *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago.
- Nahmani S. (2020), Volunteering in Israel. Mapping and Background Data, *Jerusalem Institute for policy research* [Hebrew], [https://jerusalemstitute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A0%D7%93%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C\\_%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%99-%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99-%D7%A8%D7%A7%D7%A2\\_17062020\\_-%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%A0%D7%99-compressed.pdf](https://jerusalemstitute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A0%D7%93%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C_%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%99-%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99-%D7%A8%D7%A7%D7%A2_17062020_-%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%A0%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%A0%D7%99-compressed.pdf), accessed: 10.05.2021.
- Patton M.Q. (2015), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> edition), Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Project Ten (2021), <https://www.project-ten.co.il/t-en>, accessed: 05.05.2021.
- Ruach Tova (2020), <https://www.ruachtova.org.il/>, accessed: 03.05.2021.
- Schumpeter J.A. (1939), *Business Cycles*, Cambridge, UK.
- Senor D., Singer S. (2009), *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*, New York.
- Sieger P., Gruber M., Fauchart E., Zellweger T. (2016), Measuring the Social Identity of Entrepreneurs: Scale Development and International Validation, *Journal of Business Venturing*, 31(5), pp. 542–572, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0883902616300325>, accessed: 16.05.2021.
- Startup Genome (2020), *The Global Startup Ecosystem Report GSER 2020*, <https://startupgenome.com/reports/gser2020>, accessed: 16.05.2021.
- State of Israel, Ministry of Education, Social and Youth Administration (2021), <https://edu.gov.il/noar/minhal/Pages/hp.aspx>, accessed: 05.05.2021.
- Strauss A.L., Corbin J. (1998), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Thousand Oaks, CA.

- Stryker S., Burke P.J. (2000), The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4), pp. 284–297, [https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d9d9/f9f83697e9de-8920190d955b3c427030497b.pdf?\\_ga=2.27771390.374828516.1593334498-321731854.1563098550](https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d9d9/f9f83697e9de-8920190d955b3c427030497b.pdf?_ga=2.27771390.374828516.1593334498-321731854.1563098550), accessed: 01.04.2020.
- Tajfel H., Turner J.C. (1979), *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*, [in:] M.J. Hatch, M. Schultz (eds.), *Organizational Identity*, New York.
- Tribu (2021), [www.we-tribu.com](http://www.we-tribu.com), accessed: 05.05.2021.
- Turner J.C. (1968), *The Self-Conception in social interaction*, [in:] C. Gordon, K.J. Gergen, (eds.), *The Self in Social Interaction*, New York, pp. 93–106.
- Welter F., Baker T., Audretsch D.B., Gartner W.B. (2017), Everyday Entrepreneurship – A Call for Entrepreneurship Research to Embrace Entrepreneurial Diversity, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(3), pp. 311–321, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/etap.12258>, accessed: 01.06.2021.
- Ybema S., Keenoy T., Oswick C., Beverungen A., Ellis N., Sabelis I. (2009), Articulating Identities, *The Tavistock Institute*, 62(3), pp. 299–322, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0018726708101904>, accessed: 29.12.2018.
- Yin R.K. (2003), *Case Study Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA.