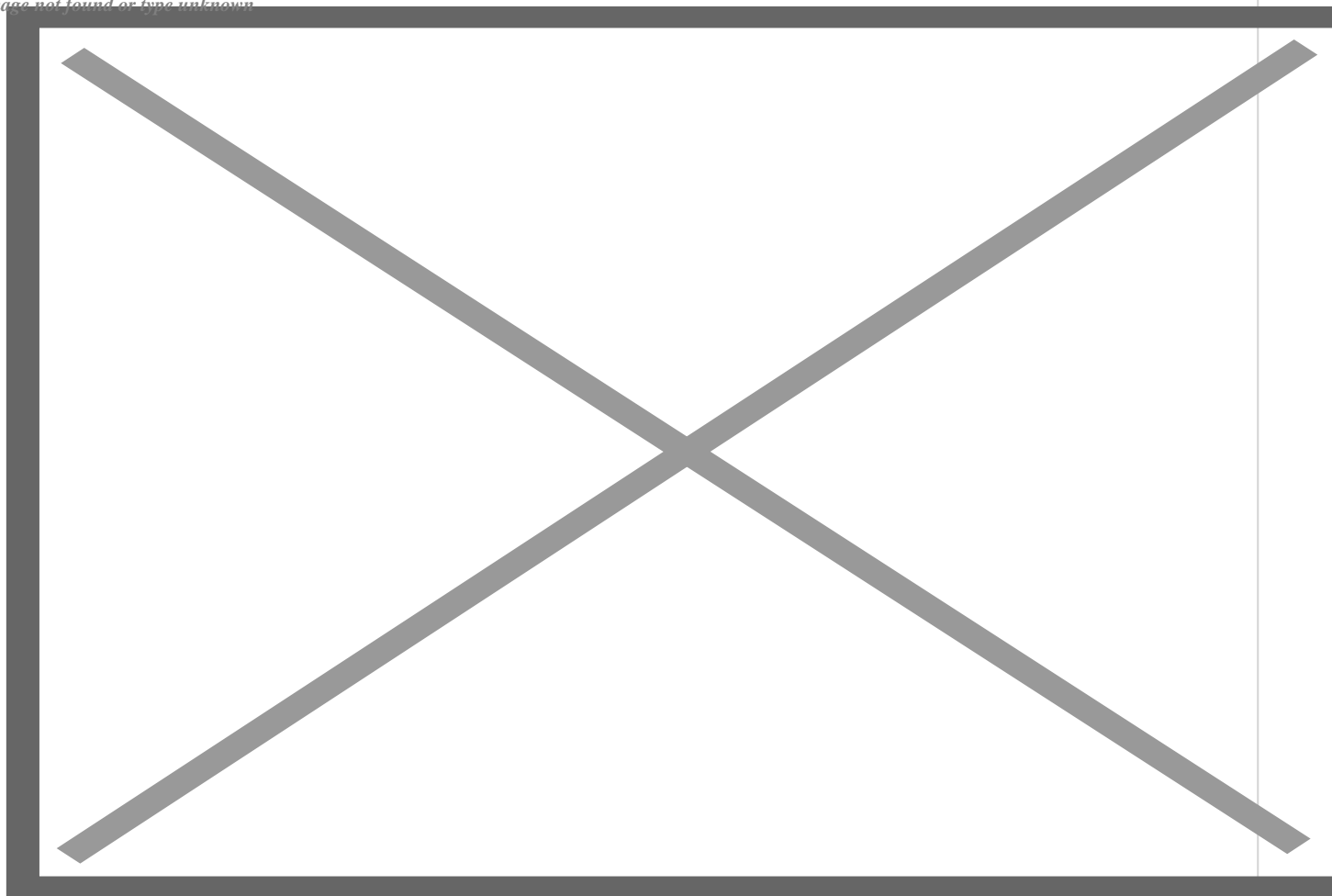


# *Israeli military's TikTok attempt to make propaganda cool*

---

*Image not found or type unknown*



**With almost 100 videos, the IDF's TikTok mirrors typical 'influencer' content [File: Mike Blake/Reuters]**

Tel Aviv, July 2 (RHC)-- One month before engaging in the 11-day attacks of May that resulted in the deaths of more than 250 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, the Israeli army posted a TikTok video where plane pilots celebrate Israel's independence to the sound of "Pretty Boy Swag."

With more than 100,000 followers and almost 100 videos, the Israeli army's TikTok mirrors typical influencer content. On the official profile, one can find fitness tutorials, food recipes, hide-and-seek

games and “soldier-training hacks” such as scuba diving techniques and Krav Maga workouts.

The first video was posted in September 2020 to celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. Since then, the army’s page has built a substantive audience with its most popular video -- promoting the Iron Dome air defence system -- being watched almost one million times.

TikTok, a youth dominated platform, has a delicate relationship with political content. Although some political influencers have sparked debates, users normally handle politics with great precaution or nuance – in part because of the platform’s moderation guidelines and censorship.

Nevertheless, when it comes to serious international crises and national security affairs, it is possible to find essentially any and all viewpoints. At least in the virtual field, the dispute is not disproportionate – many posts are pro-Palestine, but there are also a lot of pro-Israel ones.

When you search “Israel” on TikTok, dozens of related hashtags appear, including “loveisrael” and “boycottisrael.” The posts in the “israel” tag have, collectively, more than seven billion views. The videos under “loveisrael” have more than 30 million.

The people featured in the content are doing a range of things: they share knowledge, messages of support, and sometimes joke about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

And the jokes do not come solely from personal profiles. Co-opting in the popular hashtag #HotGuyShit, the Israeli army shared “Just a bunch of empowered women defending their country.” In the post, women Israeli combatants mimic the behaviours of macho soldiers.

In another video captioned “No makeup, only camouflage,” female recruits carry on training activities to the sound of pop music. And these two examples are not isolated. On the forces’ TikTok, there seems to be an active effort to highlight the female presence in the Israeli army.

The Israeli army was contacted by Al Jazeera, but there was no response to an interview request. “It’s a way [featuring women soldiers in TikTok posts] to diversify your lethal forces, not just women, but also people of color, and kind of putting pluralism into these violent organizations,” says Yael Berda, an assistant professor of sociology and anthropology at Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

According to Berda, the social media strategy also draws parallels with the Israeli state’s “pinkwashing” efforts. Israel has been criticised for using the state’s vibrant gay scene as a guise of progressiveness and a way to deviate from accusations of violating Palestinian human rights.

The Israeli army’s apparent strategy on feminism also seems to backfire because of inconsistency. While the profile celebrates its female troops, it also constructs content with what can be seen as a misogynistic sense of humor.

Using the trend #SuperModel and the caption “We’re serving looks since 1948”, TikTok users see the camera pan over an Israeli tank while listening to a voice recite: “And I’m telling you, Bob. With a body like that, a face like that, and legs like hers, she’s gonna be a Victoria Secret supermodel.”

“Of course it’s a propaganda tool,” says Rebecca L Stein, author and cultural anthropologist at Duke University. “Basically, ‘militainment’ can be seen as the combination of a military apparatus and arsenal with an entertainment apparatus and arsenal.”

Stein argues the Israeli military wants to create a compelling social media narrative, with popular language and relatable content. In other words, they want to humanise their image in order to win international hearts and minds.

“They [Israeli military] have lost this online war and they are desperate to find a fix,” Stein says. The author adds that the Israeli army’s social media believes the solution is to improve its messages, images and infographics – more dancing soldiers that humanise the military’s face. “They [the Israeli forces] refuse to consider this as a broader political problem ... and that’s why they are living a profound crisis, one that not even the best ‘militainment’ can solve.”

Stein also points out that the Israeli military has a flexible communication strategy. Their narrative focus shifts depending on the platform and the language spoken. In the Hebrew channels, Stein identifies the predominance of the “soldiers returning home and being reunited with their families” narrative. In the English channels such as TikTok, Stein believes that the Israeli army stresses the narrative of Israel under fire, therefore aiming at victimisation and self-defence grounds.

Regardless of the approach, the author says “they [the Israeli forces] are definitely seeking to make their soldiers influencers with viral power”.

During the latest Israeli attack on Gaza, the Israeli military posted 22 videos on TikTok, an average of two per day. In the posts, they talked about military operations, showed videos of rockets, and asked TikTok users: “What would you do if this was your home?”

The communication strategies received criticism. “Every time I think there’s a limit to the sheer joy someone can take in human suffering, the IDF social media manager bursts through,” one Twitter user wrote. Israel struggles to outmatch everyday Palestinians on social media – people who filmed the scale of Israel’s military assault up close, in real time.

While the Israeli army creates content for TikTok, Gaza is being rebuilt, from ruins, for the fourth time over the last 12 years. “We walk on the shattered glass of our broken windows,” says the Gaza-based Palestinian poet Nadine Murtaja.

Whether TikTok can serve as an “unbreakable” window to the world remains to be determined. However, most experts agree Israel is likely to continue losing the narrative war and people are aware of social media framing. Or, as the Israeli military’s caption goes: “Camouflaged or not, our soldiers are masters of disguise.”

---

<https://www.radiohc.cu/index.php/en/noticias/internacionales/262572-israeli-militarys-tiktok-attempt-to-make-propaganda-cool>



**Radio Habana Cuba**