

Online algorithms are driving Israel's global reputation crisis - opinion

Algorithms and short attention spans are eroding Israel's image, but strategic engagement could change the nation's fortunes.

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The algorithm is killing Israel's reputation, among many other things.

Israel's narrative, with its heavy reliance on understanding historical complexity and nuance, has a built-in disadvantage. The human brain, never designed to handle hundreds of digital stimulations, craves simplicity in the face of growing complexity. Information overload, orchestrated by the merciless algorithm, pushes people to adopt a binary worldview.

The algorithm creates an "illusion of knowledge," causing people to feel that they have enough information to form an opinion.

Thus, amid the ongoing wars – with Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah – Israel's reputation is deteriorating, especially among the younger generation, which is characterized by an abysmal attention span and lack of depth.

The good news is that superficiality works both ways and therefore can also present an opportunity.

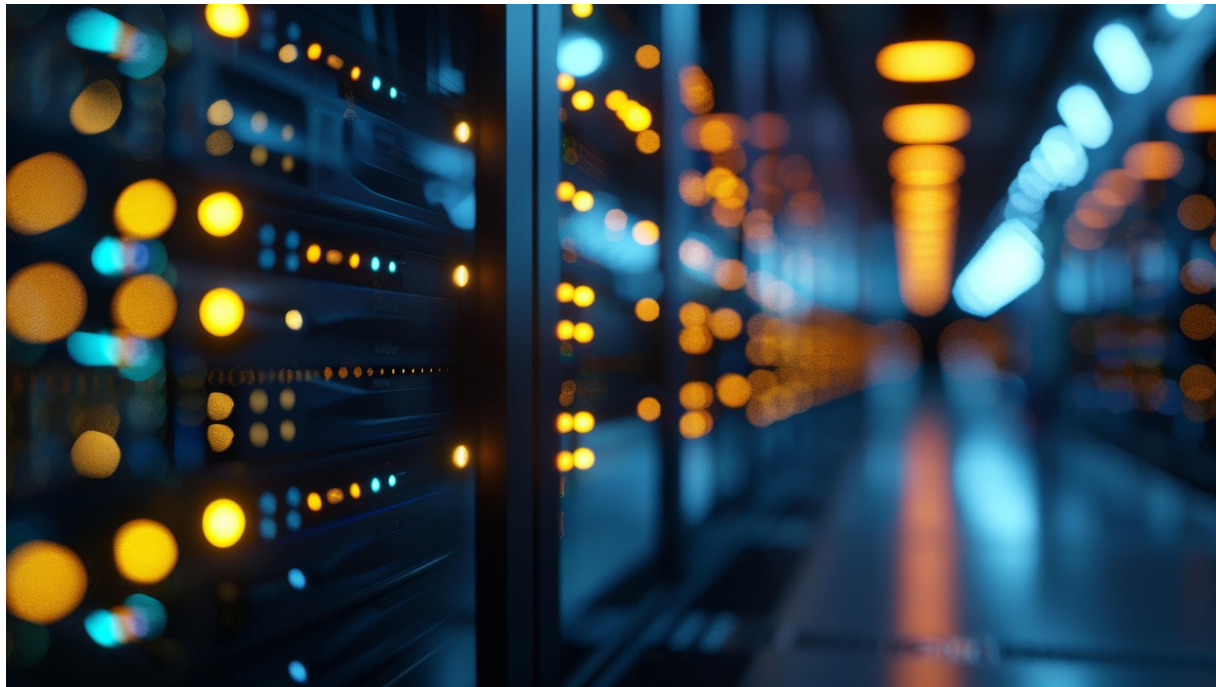
According to a new and comprehensive AI study conducted by one of the most celebrated market research companies in the United States, the younger generation's disdain of Israel is not a result of any deep-seated convictions.

It is a trend driven by the urge to engage in virtue signaling.

The study clearly indicates that young people are highly impressionable and persuadable.

Israel must invest heavily and consistently in engaging this demographic through a combination of facts and emotional stimulation. If Israel can execute this properly, it might be able to move the needle in its favor.

Israel faces several obstacles



Whether Israel is capable of moving the needle depends on its overcoming various obstacles.

First, Israel refuses to acknowledge it has a problem. Astonishingly, even after the shock of October 7, 2023, investment in Israel's well-reputed security is still viewed as a luxury within the Israeli public sphere.

National security continues to be viewed through one perspective: military power. Moreover, Israel's political leadership is incentivized to think short term, obsess over credit, and, as a result, is programmed to be self-centered and self-absorbed.

Second, Israeli society, too, has become self-centered and narcissistic. The assumption is that Israel is at the center of the universe. It is all about "us." This radical form of ethnocentrism creates a severe distortion in assessing the problem.

Third, Israel and its well-wishers' habitual tendency is to respond solely and directly to the source of agitation. Their energy is directed at the most hardcore haters and has very little likelihood of altering their positions.

It is the persuadables who are being neglected.

Israel's "room to grow" does not exist on the margins but rather at the center. Countless studies have proven this over the years. The strategy must be to provide Israel with a "human" face, so that people will develop the ability to relate to, feel, and care about it.

This must be done by sharing the stories of Israelis and their uniquely creative and inspirational spirits, and it cannot be achieved by uniformed men talking about military operations.

Writing about the pressing issue of the Jewish state's declining global reputation, Yonatan Adiri, a digital healthcare entrepreneur, argues that the decline in support for Israel among the younger generation is not necessarily a result of its policies but rather of a generational change: the adoption of a longstanding anti-Western sentiment.

Israel represents, in this case, collateral damage. In other words, folks who hate America also hate Israel, by definition. "Israel has become a symbol of everything that young people feel uncomfortable with" (Ynet, March 19, 2026).

If this analysis – that Israel has lost the younger generation because of generational shifts beyond its control – is correct, then what does "support" for Israel mean?

We wrongly assume that if a person supports Israel's policies, it also means that he or she is attracted to everything Israel represents. This is not supported by research. In fact, Israel occupies the unenviable niche of being "better known than liked."

People have heard of Israel, are aware of its predicament, and may even support its political plight. But at the same time, they dislike what the country represents and are not attracted to its persona (usually because it is viewed as aggressive, overly militaristic, and too transactional, among other things).

Levels of support do not necessarily predict behavior. The quality of the emotional connection is a much more reliable predictor.

Adiri is correct in providing the context to the decline in Israel's reputation, but there is a great deal that the state can do. The assumption that it is all about knowing the "facts" has already been proven wrong with the rise of the post-truth era.

Contempt for science and the constant challenging of objective truth have eroded the stature of facts and raised the value of opinions and narratives.

Virtue signaling is one very common manifestation of the rise of opinions at the expense of facts.

Just one example of how this could have worked: There was a moment, right after October 7, when Israel had an opportunity to cement its own narrative: “The Palestinians don’t want peace and never did. They are the ones seeking conflict, while Israel has demonstrated again and again its desire to make peace.”

This narrative, combined with the massive release of the footage of the atrocities, could have prevented the quick meltdown on social media.

Currently, given the geopolitical circumstances, Israel’s attention must be given to the management of the ongoing crisis triggered by October 7, but the day will come (hopefully, sooner rather than later) when Israel will have to invest very heavily, and in an unprecedented fashion, in its own reputation to move the needle among the young.

Hundreds of delegations of people who matter should be visiting the Jewish state every year.

It should heavily incentivize foreign students to obtain their academic degrees here. A goal of 100,000 students per year is realistic.

Israel must develop the world’s best film production rebate program in order to attract foreign productions.

It must invest in the brand “Albert Einstein,” which is tightly linked to Israel’s academic prowess.

Israel must support Israeli and Jewish organizations that promote soft assets by emphasizing the emotional connection to the country and its people through sports, culture, and lifestyle.

There are dozens of other examples. These are all achievable goals that have been successfully implemented elsewhere.

Korea, Spain, Ireland, and Singapore, today’s magnates of soft power and tourism, can all serve as sources of inspiration.

All we have to do is put our minds to it.

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