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NEW TRENDS IN COMMUNICATION: BRANDING AND CONTENT MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the measures taken by the Federal Statistical Office to prepare its communication for the digital era. Major steps towards this goal are the branding of official statistics and content marketing.

This article has been written for the 2017 edition of the "Power from Statistics Outlook Report" (https://powerfromstatistics.eu). The 'Power from Statistics' initiative, jointly organised by Eurostat and the European Political Strategy Centre, aims to determine which topics will be relevant to decision makers and citizens in the future and how official statistics could best deliver this information.

↘ *Schlüsselwörter: Kommunikation – Branding – Transparenz – Content Marketing – statistische Kompetenz – Vertrauen*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Beitrag beschreibt, welche Schritte das Statistische Bundesamt bereits unternommen hat, um seine Kommunikation für die digitale Ära zu rüsten. Wichtige Maßnahmen auf diesem Weg sind, die amtliche Statistik als Marke zu stärken (Branding) und verstärkt auf die Vermarktung von Inhalten (Content Marketing) abzustellen.

Der Artikel wurde für die Ausgabe 2017 des "Power from Statistics Outlook Report" (https://powerfromstatistics.eu) verfasst. Ziel der von Eurostat und dem European Political Strategy Centre organisierten Initiative "Power from Statistics" ist es zu ermitteln, welche Themen für Entscheidungsträger sowie Bürgerinnen und Bürger in Zukunft relevant sein werden und wie amtliche Statistiken diese Informationen am besten liefern können.

1

Introduction

In the era of data overload, authoritative facts, and the ways in which they are communicated, are becoming increasingly important. The authority and credibility of statistics has become a main issue. Official statistics need to stand out from others as being a guaranty for quality statistics.

Statistical organizations should develop promotion strategies to advertise their strengths, ensuring that they connect effectively and efficiently with their users and building their reputation as providers of trustworthy data. In this article, authors will make the case for statistical offices to make more use of marketing tools to get the brand official statistics known as a trustworthy source of information, getting out the message about the value (quality) of their data by using different communication channels and technics; also by using tools available to bring statistics to life (UNECE, 2017).

2

Branding

To deal with the increasing amounts of data, people need to be more aware about the quality and reliability of data. Quality should become the decisive factor when choosing a data source. That's where official statistics can stand out of the piles and piles of other data. National Statistical Offices (NSOs) produce official statistics and strive for accuracy, reliability and uncompromised objectivity using the best methods, as enshrined in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (United Nations, 2014). NSOs should therefore work towards strengthening the brand of "official statistics" vis-à-vis other data producers by emphasizing the quality aspects of their data (main competitive advantage).

It is thus necessary to clearly explain in the institution's website the quality framework/guidelines and all the measures that are put in place to ensure the quality of the data. NSOs should make a clear and concise quality statement that summarizes how they implement the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, thus

guaranteeing the reliability, objectivity and high quality of the products they produce, in distinction from other data providers that do not apply the Fundamental Principles rigorously.

This alone does not convince our users of the quality of our data. In Europe we have put in place the European Statistical System Statistics Code of Practice (European Commission, 2011) as a guarantor for quality and have recently adopted a quality declaration (European Statistical System, 2016), these are important cornerstones but we have to transmit these values to our users. This is branding: we have to raise the awareness of our users of the quality of our data and thus improve the trust in our institutions.

3

Communication strategy

Statistical offices have to first internally position themselves on how they would like to be perceived by the users (NSO's key message: you can trust our institution and our data). Second, develop a communication strategy stating the goals to reach. This provides the basic frame for action. Destatis has developed a communication strategy based on five pillars: strengthen the brand of 'official statistics', improved access, meet the needs of target groups, expand the dialog and improve understandability (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2016). Third, choose a marketing approach.

Which set of marketing and communication methods could we use to distinguish the NSOs and official statistics from competitors and create a lasting impression in the minds of our users?

Getting the brand known: 'open copyright'

A first step to start to build the brand is to use 'Open Copyright' as an incentive for users to refer to official statistics and by making sure that the source is always present and correctly quoted.
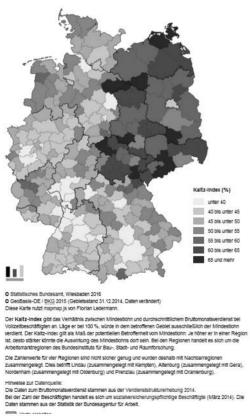
It is important to provide products displaying a clear copyright and that can be used by different media (ready

to use graphs, info graphics and interactive maps). The trade mark 'official statistics' should be perceived as a seal of quality for the users increasing the trust in statistical offices institutions and ultimately in their data.

In Germany the trade mark of the NSO refers to 'Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis)', to make clear that we are talking about a sole institution. In this effort to make their trademark known, Destatis has started to clearly display it in graphs and ready to make tables that can be

Figure 1
Example for a ready to use interactive graph used by a newspaper

Schon der schnelle Blick verrät: Der Mindestlohn kommt vor allem in Ostdeutschland zum Tragen. Die Region Perleberg in Brandenburg weist mit 74 Prozent die höchste Betroffenheit in Deutschland aus. Dort beträgt der Bruttoverdienst der 26.000 Beschäftigten im Durchschnitt

used by newspapers and magazines and other sources. These ready to use interactive graphs can be used in different internet platforms making the official statistics brand known. ↘ Figure 1

4

Building the trust in 'official statistics'

How to make sure that the brand 'official statistics' is associated to high quality statistics and NSOs are considered as trustworthy sources?

In this section we will list some tools that can be used by NSOs to increase trust of users by improving user engagement and user focus. We will illustrate this with examples based in our experience at Destatis.

Data with personal relevance for users

Statistics frequently use concepts that are meaningless to the majority of the persons; these are complex and abstract artifacts that need to be translated to be meaningful to people. An everyday example is the inflation rate – it needs to be disaggregated to be understandable. Users need to find and identify themselves in the data NSOs produce: an average alone is most of the time meaningless. It is necessary to provide the context and to communicate the range so that persons find themselves reflected in the numbers. This increases the trust of the users in the data. Statistical offices need to develop the ability to put themselves in the place of the users.

Transparency

Another measure to ensure trust is to be transparent about the methods that the NSOs use and clearly state divergences in numbers. A recent example of transparent reporting in Destatis was the way we published the differences in the different calculations behind the number of citizens with double citizenship. ↘ Figure 2

Figure 2

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Holders of dual citizenship: differences between microcensus and population census results

Against the background of recent developments in Turkey, politicians in Germany are currently debating the issue of dual citizenship again. The results of the microcensus show that roughly 1.8 million people with dual citizenship were living in Germany in 2015.

1.7 million people with dual citizenship were holders of both the German and another foreign citizenship, while 107,000 people had two foreign citizenships. Among the German people with dual citizenship those with a Turkish passport formed the largest group (246,000). They were followed by people from the Russian Federation (228,000) and Poland (220,000).

These results differ widely from the data obtained in the 2011 Census. According to the population census results, the number of people with dual citizenship was roughly 4.3 million on the Census reference day (9 May 2011). Approximately 690,000 people with German citizenship had an additional Polish passport, 570,000 a Russian passport and 530,000 a Turkish passport.

While there is a trend towards undercoverage of people with dual citizenship in the microcensus data, it can be assumed that the relevant number in the population census is too high. Please see the article on "Wie viele Menschen in Deutschland besitzen eine doppelte Staatsbürgerschaft?" for more information on the reasons for these differences.

→ Archive "IN FOCUS"

Transparently explaining the strengths and weaknesses of particular statistics is an essential part of the communication to users as is providing impartial interpretation of what underlies trends and comparisons.

Dialog with users

Statistical offices can also increase trust by engaging in constant dialog with their users, which can take many forms such as showing that their feedback on issues such as new graphics, is taken seriously; all this builds up the trust and enhances the reputation of the institution and ultimately of the data produced. Effective user engagement should be a continuous dialogue, not just a series of one off consultations.

NSOs need to make an extensive analysis of what is being said about them in social media and react when needed. It is necessary to respond to what is being said in the different platforms, show that they are listening and handle important issues in the platforms where the users are active i.e. by going to their meeting place (e.g. Twitter, Instagram). Talk with the network and spread the statistical office brand. Actively participate. It is not a question of how many there are, but who they are and of what the NSO has to communicate. ↘ Figure 3

In Destatis we received positive feedback in Twitter after we changed our press releases in order to clearly state the methods and data sources used as a reaction to pre-

vious criticism by journalists. This contributes to establishing our brand as an institution that people can trust thus also bringing them to trust our data.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Public relations: influencers

NSOs can also resort to advertise their message by making use of influencers: identifying individuals that have influence over potential users and orient marketing activities around these influencers. NSOs can resort to having their messages repeated by 'influencers' that have a clear reputation that gives weight to their message and expanding its publicity. In its 2015 annual report, Destatis included an interview with a State Minister. ↘ Figure 4

Content Marketing – from the get to the targeted delivery culture

The majority of the public, however, will never directly consult a statistical office or look to it as a source of news. For most citizens, it was the news media itself – newspapers, radio and television – that provided their exposure to official statistics. As the 'gatekeepers' to the public, the news media gave statistical offices a powerful tool to fulfill a critical part of their mandate. But many statistical offices have already done a step further pursuing a new goal – starting to act as news agents themselves by publishing news themselves via social media channels (e.g. Twitter) or by developing products that can be easily used by the media (e.g. interactive info graphics, videos). Two examples in this domain are the case of Netherland's[1] and Mexico's Statistical offices[2] both producing videos for the media.

Still the extent to which statistical offices can collaborate with the news media, and communicate effectively through them, has an enormous impact on how well they can inform the general population. A good example is the relation that the UK Statistical Office (ONS) has developed with BBC. The BBC has recently commissioned an independent study 'Making Sense of Statistics' (BBC Trust, 2016) to analyze how statistics are being reported, it concludes by highlighting the importance of data journalists for successful communication. Destatis has for instance held recently a special workshop for data journalists.

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1 www.cbs.nl/en-gb
2 en.www.inegi.org.mx/

5

Content marketing

Destatis has also started take its first steps in another front in the efforts to establish their brand through content marketing. This is a new trend in leading German enterprises like Daimler[3] and Telekom[4] as well. At Destatis this is done by using software to research which topics are being discussed in different websites, which ones have a high relevance and in which statistics are not well represented, and analyze how to bring statistics into these sites. It can be through making new statistical contents available or just by making aware to the website owner of already existing products, highlighting the advantages of having this statistical information. When this happens we have succeeded in our marketing campaign.

This is associated to a change in our institutional culture, it is no longer enough to produce statistical products that answer to user needs and wait for them to come and get it from our website; we need to place this products in the relevant platforms and formats to increase the impact.

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3   www.horizont.net/ (Sohn, 2017).
4   www.telekom.com/

6

Statistical literacy

In view to produce high quality statistics and to communicate with users, the promotion of statistical literacy and culture, as basic pillar of statistics use in the benefit of citizens and of the society is highly important and constitutes a major task of the statistical institutions. There is a need for enhancing statistical literacy among all segments of current and potential users.

A statistical culture, promoted by the national statistical institutions among the large public should lead to a diminution of misunderstandings and to an increased capability of properly catching the significance and meaning of statistical information, of analyzing and using the data provided to the public.

Destatis has invested in visualization tools, invested in e-learning modules aiming to improve statistical literacy; one of the more useful is the module that helps to avoid the common pitfalls of statistical interpretation[5]. Whilst enhancing the statistical literacy of user these measures also contribute to increase trust.

Finally and to make use of the Agenda 2030[6] motto, we need as NSOs to leave no one behind thus effectively reaching all users: in Destatis this is also done by hav-

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5   www.destatis.de/
6   sustainabledevelopment.un.org/

Figure 5

Gebärdensprache

Herzlich willkommen auf der Internetseite des Statistischen Bundesamtes (Destatis).

Zwei Filme in Deutscher Gebärdensprache (DGS) stehen Ihnen zur Verfügung. Sie stellen Ihnen das Statistische Bundesamt vor und sollen Ihnen die Orientierung im Internet-Auftritt unseres Hauses erleichtern.

Das Statistische Bundesamt stellt sich vor

In diesem Gebärdensprach-Film (Video auf YouTube) erhalten Sie Informationen über das Statistische Bundesamt (Destatis), über seine Aufgaben und Ziele, über Methoden und Organisation.

Eine Textversion des Gebärdensprach-Films gibt es ebenfalls.

ing contents in sign language. This increases our under-standability, increases trust and establishes our brand.
↘ **Figure 5**

7

Conclusions

Statistical offices main message: their reliability based on quality data and transparent methods should be conveyed through an effective communication strategy thus building a specific brand. To this end, NSOs can resort to marketing techniques, production of statistical products tailored to users' needs, measures to increase statistical literacy and by being transparent. This is of strategic importance for increasing the appreciation of official statistics, leading users to perceive the statistical offices as trustworthy. ▥

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