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Session iii: Understanding and responding to user needs

Short video statements on statistics

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A. Introduction

1. Potential uses of multimedia are well-known and often taken for granted in our everyday lives. Newspaper companies, for instance, disseminate information by combining publishing text and still images in printed publications with website portals, adding audio and video. The content can be accessed on many portals interactively. These multimedia techniques have an important impact on communication with audiences: this applies not only to media institutions, but also to any other agency whose mission is dissemination or the exchange of information. New communication channels are therefore a substantial challenge for national statistical organizations (NSOs).

2. One of the challenges for NSOs is maintaining stability in the production of statistics. Continuity in the professional, traditional production of data helps to convince users and data providers they can unconditionally trust the quality of statistical products and related services. In other words, the conservative attitude of statistical offices can contribute to the production of relevant, comparable statistics using methodologies which allow comparison over time, over areas, and between domains. However, at the same time, statistical agencies cannot ignore developments in communication, the impact of different techniques and channels, and the expectations of users. In short, statistical offices should heed the growing diversity of communication channels.

3. The Slovenian Statistical Office (SURS) wants its statistics to be interesting and understood by the general public. Statisticians must use ordinary, spoken language when interpreting statistics for public consumption instead of technical jargon. People in general are not statistically literate enough to understand the meaning of pure statistics, so we are obliged to package official statistics in attractive ways to describe our everyday lives.

B. The role of video in recent past

1. At SURS, videos have been used mainly for publishing records and speeches of sophisticated events that underpin the national statistical system: i.e. conferences or ‘round tables’, sometimes organised under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, gathering together statistical experts, academic analysts and policy makers. The goal of publishing these videos on SURS’s website was two-fold: a) dissemination of records that are interesting for different audiences and b) archiving the records. Videos are published on Vimeo, www.vimeo.com/channels/surs.

2. Besides those meetings, SURS also records press conferences, which are generally organized on a monthly basis, where the most interesting results of statistical surveys and analyses are explained by statisticians or by invited experts who can provide journalists with a broader interpretation of statistics (www.stat.si/nk - in Slovenian language only). Video records are published about three hours after the press conference.

3. Video records of press conferences, published on SURS’s website, serve the following purposes:

- a) Access to presentations of statistics for journalists after a press conference, helping to clarify any existing questions
- b) Access for journalists who could not attend the event
- c) Access for young statisticians for educational purposes
- d) Documentation of the event in the case of incorrect use or misuse of data by journalists. According to the Slovenian Media Act, SURS has the right of reply or correction
- e) Archiving records of events

4. Publishing videos of press conferences began in 2011. Despite the fact that presentations are available on SURS’s website, demand from journalists to attend press conferences has actually remained unchanged. Furthermore, we have found out that we can use this channel to explain results of statistical surveys to journalists and show them how to interpret the data.

C. Short video statements on statistics

1. Positive experiences with press conference videos encouraged us to introduce short video statements (www.stat.si/videoizjave) by statisticians on published data in March 2013. Short videos (of between 90 seconds and 3 minutes) are published simultaneously with the First Release on SURS’s website at 10.30. The author of the statement is the statistician responsible for that specific survey. In simple sentences he or she explains the highlights of the statistics using as few figures as possible, but still remains sufficiently informative. To perform a kind of natural conversation, the PR Officer asks one to three simple questions which the statistician answers briefly.

2. After a month of publishing short videos (11 statements), one can hardly judge the long-term success of this work. One of the reasons is the fact that promotional activities have not yet been carried out as planned. At the moment we can describe mostly individual responses, gathered in conversations with some journalists. However, we have some very encouraging reactions. In the light of different expectations of users and the diversity of our communication channels, SURS has no doubt enriched the range of products it offers.

3. Before the introduction of short videos there were some concerns at SURS about the willingness and skill of statisticians in speaking in front of the camera. Fortunately, SURS' statisticians understood and accepted the idea of short statements tailored to broad public consumption. Not only that: the statement of the person responsible for particular data helps reinforce the voice of authority and increases the credibility of official statistics. We believe it also improves users' perception of SURS: it shows we have enough statistical experts who are willing to explain the data in an understandable way.

4. From the start of the project, many technical issues and constraints appeared; so far, they have not yet all been sorted out. For video recording, SURS has hired the Slovenian Press Agency. The cameraman comes to the statistical office usually an hour before the First Release is published or in the afternoon prior to the day of publishing the First Release, so there is no time to produce highly professional videos. Questions remain. What is the best environment: a working room, a meeting room or a library? Should we always use the same room, or should we change the background? How can we ensure the video is going to be published at exactly the right time, i.e. at 10.30? A little further work needs to be done.

5. Promotion of the project 'Short Statements on Statistics by Statisticians' should be launched in April. It will cover the media, governmental institutions and some web portals which are primarily meant for the general public. Depending on the first analyses in May, SURS will change or/and upgrade the project.