

A Strategic Approach to Social Media Strategy

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1. Introduction

At present, Statistics Denmark (DST) is in the middle of a reform and strategy process leading towards a new strategy – Strategy 2020. One of the focus points has been the communication of statistics and a need to be more open and engage stronger with the users.

In the future DST must:

- be the preferred supplier of facts about society
- strengthen the organization's role in the public debate
- engage more strongly with users

Social media is a perfect mean to achieve some of these goals. To illustrate how this can be done, this paper offers insight into a theoretical approach “The Perfect Storm” by Peter Svare. The theory describes why the inclusion of social media in the communication strategies of NSI's can be very useful reaching strategic goals.

The paper also gives a glimpse at the work around the development of a new overall strategy for DST, including a social media strategy.

2. Statistics Denmark under transition

A new national statistician – Jørgen Elmeskov - set foot in DST in October 2013. One of his first announcements was to make the institution more visible and active in the public debate and his first initiative was to establish a twitter-account for DST. This was effected on January 1, 2014 – and was well received by the Danish tweeps. In the first three hours 1,000 chose to follow @DSTdk. The number of followers is now 6,400 - and the crowd keeps on growing day by day.

In 2014 a reform process was initiated to form a new strategy: Strategy 2020. This work is still in process and will be finished by the fall of 2015. Staffs have been invited to participate in this process. Other valuable input have been gathered from a budget analysis performed by an external consultancy bureau and a peer review performed by Eurostat. As a supplement to these inputs, user surveys have been conducted in 2014.

With regards to communication it has been suggested both internally and externally, that we should become engaged with users to a greater extent, e.g. by the use of social media. Other initiatives suggested were more digitalization and use of visual presentations of statistics.

Generally, it seems like DST will move in this new direction:

From old vision *Strategy 2015*

- User & data provider friendly
- Effective and innovative
- Collect official statistics
- Attractive workplace

To new vision *Strategy 2020* (not approved yet)

- Preferred supplier of data and knowledge about Denmark and the Danes

3. Inspiration from a theoretical framework

My personal approach and framework in my work with the reform and strategy process, I have been very inspired by the book "The Perfect Storm" by Peter Svarre, which contains a strategy model describing how a company or an organization should develop a strategy for social and digital media.

The model takes the company's specific strategic situation into account **before** deciding whether and how to engage actively on social media.

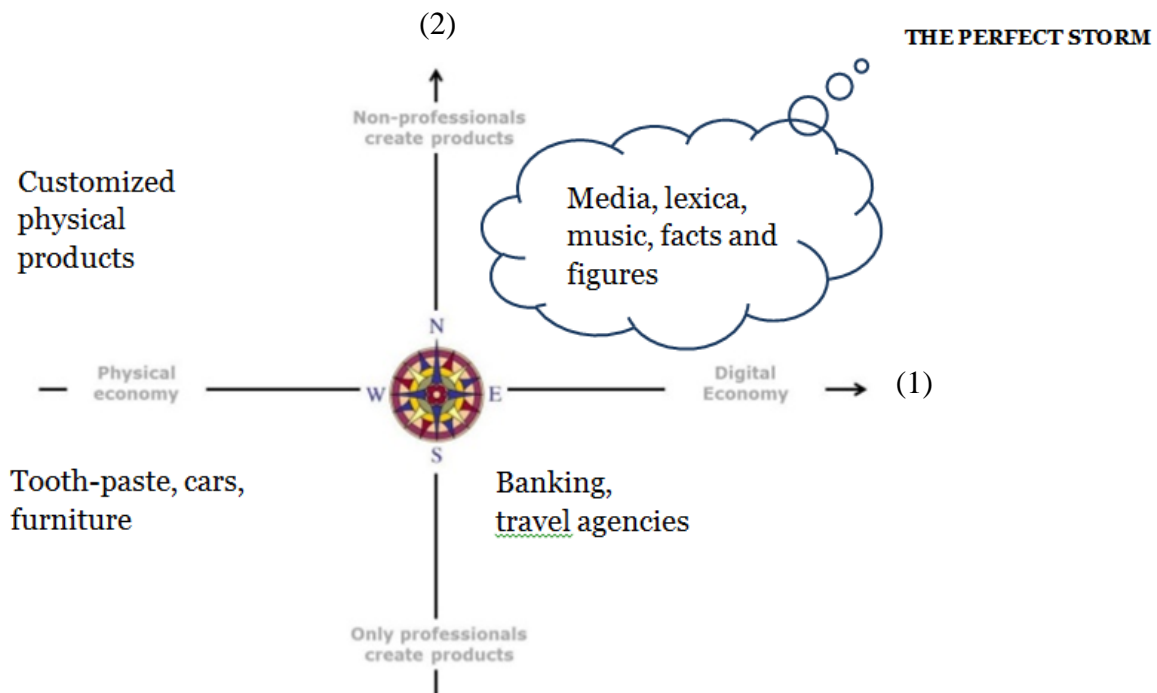
The book and the model address, what happens to companies or organizations in a world, where everybody has in fact become their own media publishing their personal news on social media, blogs, etc. In this world, companies have to rethink their products and the relationship to their customers. In Peter Svarre's model, an organization's or company's products or services can be measured on two dimensions; the sociological and the economical.

Dimension 1: Sociological axis

Users have increasing access and skills to create their own content and their own products. More and more companies are realizing how ordinary people create products or content which earlier could only be created by professionals. In recent years, it has become increasingly evident, how traditional media are being challenged by ordinary people and professional experts who have started their own blogs or micro media. The degree of this is measured on the vertical axis in figure 1.

Dimension 2: Economical axis

This dimension concerns the cost of digital products. When the products go from being physical to being digital, there is radical change in production, market and sales. In a world of physical products, it costs money to produce, store, distribute and sell the products. In the digital world, these costs are so infinitely small that the real cost of selling another product actually costs no money. Economists refer to this as a situation where the marginal cost of the digital product approaches zero. The degree of this is measured on the horizontal axis in the figure below.



In this model, a statistical products score high on both dimensions – user creation and digitization – and lies in the north eastern corner - and in the eye of the so called “The Perfect Storm”:

Dimension 1: Sociological axis

Everybody has now access to produce and distribute their own statistics, as it has become increasingly cheap to make your own survey or distribute statistics on the internet. Another example is the free access to APIs in many statistical agencies, which allow the average citizen to produce their own presentations on their websites - almost without any costs.

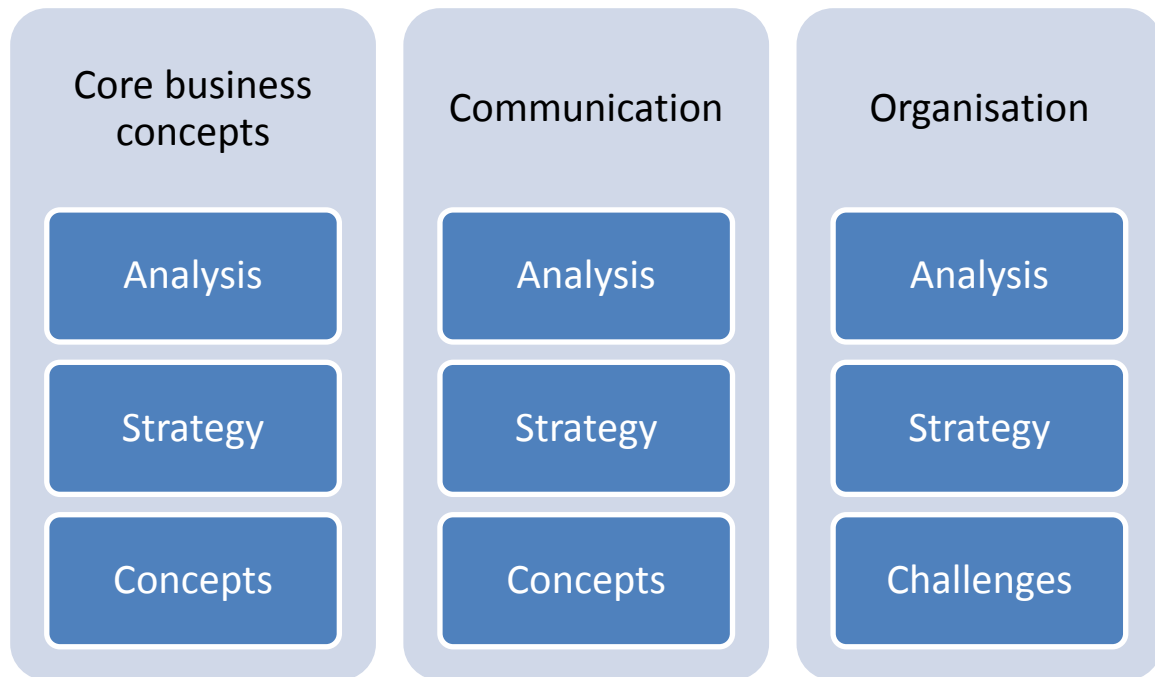
Dimension 2: Economical axis

Statistics are now 100 per cent digitalized both with regards to production and distribution and have moved from physical to digital economy – apart from a few printed publications here and there.

Peter Svarre’s hypothesis is that individually, user creation and digitization are powerful storms, that can blow enterprises away and create the foundation for new ones, but when the two storms blow at the same time, they create such an exceptional storm. The storm will be

so powerful that it not only creates new terms to operate under, but completely changes how to do business, communicate and organize.

Peter Svarre's model can be used to develop a unique strategy for coping with - or taking advantage of - "The Perfect Storm", which determines the company's business and communication strategy. But it can also be used as a model for delivering content to the respective business and communication strategy. Peter Svarre's analysis comprises three steps and will lead to a strategy for digitalization and social media:



In the case of DST, the reform process should lead to:

- To strengthen our role in the public debate
- To increase our professionalism and the quality of our statistics
- To engage with users to a greater extent

These targets can be addressed in the model: how can DST use social media or deportalised media to communicate better and more effectively with users? Is the organization of DST ready to handle an active presence at social media?

4. Core business concepts and communication

Below, the core business concepts and the communication aspects in the model are addressed.

Analysis

In order to develop a social media strategy it is necessary to have a precise understanding of the core business concepts: how is a statistical agency of value to society and the users of statistics?

DST produces high quality knowledge in the form of statistics covering most areas in the Danish society. The data are disseminated on DST's own platforms, primarily the website and publications – but from the beginning of 2014, DST also has used Twitter: @DSTdk.

Previously, statistics has been published in traditional publications and books. Now statistics are disseminated on the internet free of charge. The internet has changed the way knowledge is produced and distributed (The Perfect Storm). The Internet with its hyperlinks and reference systems has given a great tool for communicating statistics. The only drawback is that the product is now "worthless" in the commercial sense, since it is available free of charge.

Previously, media and DST also had an almost exclusive right to disseminate and produce statistics. The internet has radically changed this, and statistics are today distributed digitally from many other platforms and broadcasters. And DST is only partly a monopoly with regards to the production and dissemination of statistics. Many others produce statistics – both within the public and private sector. And with regards to dissemination, almost everybody can spread news based on statistical facts.

The use of statistics depends, however, still on whether the source is authoritative and reliable - and here DST has a competitive advantage. This is a very central parameter to count on, as statistical institutions in many countries have a high degree of credibility in the general public. This is a significant parameter to focus on in securing the future role of DST as preferred and well known supplier of statistics. The strategic target "to increase our professionalism and the quality of our statistics" makes good sense.

Strategy

To address the above challenges, it is necessary to strengthen DST's voice in the public debate and the institution's commitment to users. DST's role as the most important supplier of knowledge has to be reinforced in the strategy.

DST has unique opportunity to reinforce the role of the institution. It can choose to take part in the conversation about statistics and social change in social media. A possible position of DST in this conversation could be:

To contribute with objectivity and relevance to the debate about social issues - on social media

By this DST has the opportunity to communicate in its own tone of voice directly to the users – and is not limited to communicate via traditional media.

Concepts

DST must strive to provide objective and professional input to the users, to comment on and upgrade existing conversations and finally to draw attention to misleading use of statistics, results and conclusions. Such a strategy can be both active and passive.

Active strategy:

- Writing and listening (even more) on Twitter
- Establishing a more personal voice by introducing personal twitter DST-accounts, e.g. specialists.
- Active engagement on LinkedIn (passive today)
- Elmeskov's blog
- Engagement on other social media platforms relevant for key target groups

Passive strategy:

The passive strategy is about making existing content more accessible, which, incidentally, is related to the choice of digital strategy/communication strategy. A new digital strategy is also part of the reform process. Both new and existing figures should be made more easily accessible to the outside world, and thereby enable the inclusion of the content from DST in the conversation on social issues in social media.

Otherwise, DST will be seen as a nerdy and inaccessible authority, and others will take over as the primary providers of statistics - and the preferred partner and consultant within the area of statistics.

The passive strategy includes three points:

- More transparency: More and better digital dissemination.
- More search ability: Ensure that the digital material can be found by search engines.
- More push and curation: Ensure that the best material is on top of website -and pushing it out to the right recipients.

In a deportalised communication set-up, where the communication is still based on the content on the web site, but distributed more actively via other channels, where the target group communicates an a daily basis:



5. Organization

Analysis

The organization will have to undergo a transformation in the transition towards more digital communication and more commitment to social media. Previously, the communication was usually by email and telephone. But, today communication takes place on other platforms: on forums, social media, blogs, etc. and everybody is expected to take part in the conversation. This also includes statistical agencies whether they are actively engaged on social media or not.

Strategy and challenges

This may be a challenge as the focus in a statistical agency is on quality and the production of the compilation of correct figures of high quality. Thus, it is challenging for an academically oriented staff to disseminate knowledge and communicate on social media platforms that can be perceived as somewhat volatile and frivolous.

However, this is where politicians, analysts and specialists communicate and an acceptance of these new ways of communicating must be addressed. Resources must be allocated to educate and inform staff about the advantages of communicating on these new social media platforms using new concepts, working methods and procedures.

6. The next steps

This is where DST stands now: Dissemination of DST's products and services must meet user needs and be accessible, relevant and credible. The communication must be visible and proactive in the public social debate and create value for the relevant target groups. This will include a more intensified use of social media.

DST must establish a new digital publishing structure, which is based on user needs.

Appropriate communication channels should be identified where DST on the one hand actively advertise and offer statistical information, and on the other hand strengthening and developing self-service solutions that users can intuitively access.

The next steps:

- **Communication strategy for DST**
- **Implementation of the strategy (communication plan)**
 - New publication procedure
 - New publishing structure
 - New communication policy
 - New press policy
 - New IT architecture for communication systems
- **New policies for proactive communication incl. a social media strategy and guidelines**

7. References

Svarre, P. 2011, Den perfekt storm, Gyldendal Business.

www.denperfektestorm.dk