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Topic - Working with the media

MEASURING PRESS CITATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL NEWS RELEASES AND PUBLICATIONS

Submitted by Statistics Denmark¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Most companies and organisations of a certain size are monitoring the media. It is not a new invention, and for years professional companies have specialised in keeping the media under watch. Media monitoring serves two main purposes for a national statistical institution as Statistics Denmark: It makes us able to learn and able to react.
2. When we read about Statistics Denmark and see the use of our individual news releases as well as our publications in the media, we get a good impression of the effects of our work; we get to know which statistics are extensively used in the media, and which are rarely quoted; and we learn from positive and negative publicity. Measuring the visibility of the organisation and the individual statistics in the media, is an aspect of learning. If there are misunderstandings or misuse of our figures, we are able to ask for corrections, and when we have made an error in the published data, we can trace it, apologise, and ask for corrections. Media monitoring is a key tool for maintaining our credibility.
3. Hence, it was a both necessary and useful step, when Statistics Denmark in 2003 developed a tool to gather information on all press citations. In that way it was possible in an easy, quick and orderly manner to get a general view of the picture of Statistics Denmark in the media. This paper will describe and discuss the experiences with a database system by telling how the system is structured, how it works in everyday job life, and the potentials of the system. All this will be spiced up with cases, where we have used the system dealing with crises, developing news releases and publications as well as prioritizing our efforts.

II. MONITORING THE MEDIA – AND REACTING

4. Statistics Denmark has several statistical releases in the form of individual news letters and publications. The media are one of the primary target groups of Statistics Denmark, as they are able to communicate our individual news releases and publications to the public. The media usually quote the statistics correctly, but once in a while it happens that the information is incorrect or misinterpreted – either because of misunderstanding of the figures or actual errors in the releases. It is vital that Statistics Denmark is able to react quickly, if we discover such errors, in order to reduce the spread of inaccurate information. Although Statistics Denmark has pretty good media relations, we must be prepared for possible criticism. In these situations it is important to monitor the criticism in the media (as well as weblogs and other discussion forums) and to react, if criticism is misplaced. With an even greater focus on being first with the latest news the webmedia, radio and tv have taken over a huge part of the traditional news update which the printed media used to do. Webmedia, radio and tv have a short production time, which means that there are only seconds from the release of our

¹ Prepared by communication officer and journalist Anders Tystrup, aty@dst.dk.

news to the breaking story in the web, radio or television. Errors and criticism may spread in several media faster than ever before, which increases the need for tools monitoring the media.

5. Statistics Denmark has been monitoring the media for many years. More than a decade ago the company Ajour offered us the service by monitoring all major newspapers. We often received the clippings with the press citations several days after their appearance in the newspapers, magazines, radio or television. We firmly glued the clippings on paper, circulated them by internal mail, and stored them in large boxes. This way of monitoring the media, circulating and archiving press citations is obsolete. Today it is fully electronic.

6. In Denmark a few competing companies specialize in media monitoring. Statistics Denmark uses the company Infopaq (www.infopaq.dk) to monitor the media. They monitor around 2,900 different media – mostly Danish – both printed (newspapers, magazines, journals, etc.) and electronic (webmedia, radio and television). We have chosen keywords to capture as many relevant press citations regarding Statistics Denmark as possible. Statistics Denmark has an average of more than 3,000 press citations every month, and we are the most quoted public institution in Denmark. However, it may be difficult to keep track of so many press reports, if you do not have the proper tools.

7. Against this background, a database expert at Statistics Denmark's Communication Centre has developed a tool in the form of the system SAP (*System for Analyzing Press Citations*). SAP is a large database in which all press citations are entered, registered and filed. This enables us to be in control of the most recent press citations as well as the press citations, which have been made by Statistics Denmark over the years. The media monitoring company Infopaq prepares four times a day (7.00 a.m., 8.15 a.m., 1.00 p.m. and 11.50 p.m.) summaries of the most recent press citations from the printed media and radio/TV. In contrast, the webmedia are monitored minute-by-minute. Every time Statistics Denmark is mentioned by a webmedium, an email is sent to the inbox and a text-message clicks the mobile phones of both the Head of Communication and the Media Coordinator of Statistics Denmark. In this way, we are able to follow press citations around the clock and be fully updated. SAP is updated automatically as often as required by us, and it is also possible at any time to update SAP manually, if this is considered necessary. Every time SAP is updated, all collected information is automatically subjected to error checks. We are highly aware to avoid errors in the collected information, as this is essential in maintaining a functional and trustworthy database.

8. SAP provides us with an easy and comprehensive overview of the current press citations 24 hours a day. We are thus able by a delay of a few seconds to follow all press citations relating to Statistics Denmark and react if we discover any errors or misunderstandings of our figures. If errors or misunderstandings are spread from one medium to other media, SAP makes it possible for us quickly to create an overview. Subsequently, we contact the media in order to correct the errors as soon as possible, in order to avoid further spreading. SAP contains an internal comments-function, which makes it possible to add special comments to each press citation in the case of, e.g. errors, misunderstandings, criticism or other. The comments-function makes it possible for colleagues to follow the progress in a possible crisis situation, and it may be of great help in connection with the next publication of the same statistics.

9. **The case of the statistics on population in urban areas:** In July 2007, one of Denmark's largest morning newspapers (Politiken) criticized on its front page Statistics Denmark's statistics on population in urban areas. Two towns in Jutland had grown to more than 40,000 inhabitants, which is a limit that is politically of interest, because it opens up the possibility for the towns to build large-scale shops, despite very strict rules. The article criticized Statistics Denmark's decision to include population numbers from surrounding villages in the population numbers of the large towns, which seemed contrary to the rules applying. The definition of an urban area can be interpreted in several ways. However, such criticism put forward by one of Denmark's most important newspapers combined with a possible internal conflict in Statistics Denmark's Division for Population Statistics about how to decide on an interpretation could cause serious damage to the reputation of Statistics Denmark.

10. SAP was here used in maintaining an overview of the media to which this criticism was being spread, and how the crisis situation developed minute-by-minute. In addition to the circumstance that the story was also spread to the News Programme of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation and some other webmedia, SAP

showed that the case was not followed up by any other journalists over the next couple of days. This crisis situation was therefore handled comparatively easily.

11. The statistics on population in urban areas were released again in 2008, and before the publication of this statistics we prepared ourselves by looking through the files of press citations in SAP in connection with the release of the same newsletter in 2007. In this way, we were able to prepare ourselves and avoid any new criticism.

12. **Religious cases:** Several times throughout the years, debaters and journalists have used the statistics on immigrants from Muslim countries and their descendants compiled by Statistics Denmark to infer the number of believing Muslims in Denmark. When this happens, we immediately react – generally with a letter to the editor prepared by Statistics Denmark’s Director General or by the Head of Communication – in order to emphasize that statistics on religion are not published by Statistics Denmark, and that it is therefore the conclusion of the debater or journalist that all immigrants and their descendants are Muslims. It is easy in SAP to find the previous press citations with the same misunderstanding and make use of the experiences from these. The most recent example was in February 2009, when the Danish magazine “Ugeskrift for Læger” (weekly news for doctors) published a figure on Muslim citizens in Denmark citing Statistics Denmark as source. This was quickly captured by our media monitoring, and on the same day our Head of Communication wrote a letter to the editor, which was subsequently published in “Ugeskrift for Læger” with a correction.

13. Once a day (typically at 10.00 a.m.), an email is sent to all employees at Statistics Denmark with an overview of today’s press citations. The email contains all the citations that have been registered in the last 24 hours. In this way, all employees are kept informed of the most recent media citations and are consequently able to participate in checking for factual errors in the media coverage of their statistics.

14. Each press citation that we receive is registered in details. Which media have used the citation, the name of the journalist, location in the media and the background to the citation are registered. The most important piece of information that is added is the news release or publication of Statistics Denmark “responsible” for the citation. That is to say, if we, for example, have just published a current newsletter within the same subject area, this is added as the source of the citation. If the medium itself has looked into our online database (StatBank Denmark) or other previously published data we just add the name of the subject matter division responsible for the figures.

III. MEASURING THE PRESS CITATIONS

15. As each individual press citation is registered in great details and is entered in the database, it is also possible to measure each individual publication and each individual subject matter division at Statistics Denmark with regard to the number of press citations that they have generated, and thereby the concrete interest of the media in a specific publication or statistics. In this way, we can quickly create an overview of which published statistics are of most interest to the media.

16. The accumulated knowledge is actively used in, e.g. planning our future publications and not least in developing our existing publications. We carry out regular workshops with employees from our subject matter divisions for the purpose of developing their newsletters and publications. SAP makes it easy to extract information about the number of press citations for each publication and statistics in order to see the impact in the media for a specific individual news release or a specific publication. If an individual news release whose subject is otherwise very popular only gets a few press citations, it could be of relevance to look into at greater detail why this is the case. Furthermore, the press citations could also inspire us to look at a general publication and find out what interested the media by looking at the angles of the media. Hence, the SAP system can with great advantage be used for development of existing publications.

17. For example, the individual news release “Adoptions 2007”, which was published in March 2008, did not according to SAP receive any press citations at all. Consequently, we decided to include this publication at one of our workshops, where together with the subject matter division we were able to look into the possibilities of developing the news release to generate more press citations next time. Different ideas were put

forward, and in February 2009 “Adoptions 2008” were published. According to SAP the news release this time received a total of 55 press citations, which to a great extent was due to the changes made in the publication in connection with the workshop – for which the newsletter on the basis of SAP had been selected.

18. We use the front page of www.dst.dk for publishing most of our latest statistics in the form of individual news releases. They are published at 9:30 a.m. sharp, where the media, free of charge, can obtain the latest figures. On most weekdays, more than one newsletter is published, and as a consequence of this it is necessary to prioritize the order of the individual news releases on our website. This prioritization is made by the news release editor, who also decides which individual news releases are to be placed at the top, second from the top, etc. The prioritization is made on the basis of some rules, which, among other things, imply that the individual news release, that historically has incurred most press citations, must be given the highest prioritization. SAP enables the news release editor to easily determine the prioritization of today’s news releases.

19. Each employee at Statistics Denmark has access to the SAP-database and is able, at any time, to follow the press citations of each and every of Statistics Denmark’s publications. Consequently, it is, at any time, also possible for each individual employee to see which press citations, his or her publications have been given. Ten days after the publication of a news release the writer and the Head of Division of the subject matter division, that has prepared the news release, receive an automatic email with an overview of where, when and how many times the news release has been cited in the media.

IV. SELF-DEVELOPED – AND SO WHAT?

20. As previously mentioned, media monitoring is an essential tool for an organisation in maintaining a high degree of credibility. It is also essential to measure the outcomes of the publications of the organisation in order to be able to develop these. Statistics Denmark has developed SAP for the purpose, among others, to measure the popularity in the media of our publications. We are making great efforts to further develop and refine SAP. At the moment, we have particularly focused attention on increasing user-friendliness. For example, the daily email with today’s press citations to all employees at Statistics Denmark is frequently very long due to the huge amount of press citations received by Statistics Denmark’s publications. This may make it difficult for each individual employee to quickly create an overview on the basis of the daily email. We are therefore working on a solution, which will make the contents in the email more easily comprehensible. We are also making efforts to improve SAP in relation to the part of the registration which is carried out manually.

21. Measuring the publications of an organisation can be an expensive and complicated mission. But with a system like SAP it is possible in an easy and fairly inexpensive way to measure the outcome in the media of individual news releases and publications. In the Communications Centre we are convinced, that not only a great overview of all press citations but also the possibility of measuring the use of general publications is vital for a professional statistical institution. And why not develop a proper database system yourself instead of paying loads of money in surveys by external organisations?