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(i): Social Media

**How Social Media Monitoring can Help Corporate Communication – From
Information Management to E-reputation Management**

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Abstract:

Information management in general and the attempt to prevent the misuse of statistical data in particular are important tasks for every statistical office. A small formal error of journalists or other authors using data or a rumour in the news may end in a public scandal and become a danger to reputation. To prevent the misuse of statistical data and to react without much delay, qualified media monitoring is necessary – especially in times of important statistical projects. This year the main focus of the German statistical offices is on the 2011 Census. The readiness of the whole population to support the 2011 Census will be the basis of its success. For this reason, the statistical offices' main task is to inform the whole population about the use and methodology of the 2011 Census. To be warned of any misuse of statistical data or criticism regarding the project, broad media monitoring was needed. Besides the traditional news channels, criticism was often published through tweets and in blogs. We therefore monitor those social media platforms with a special tool. It gives a broad overview of discussion themes related to the 2011 Census and warns about new themes coming up in public discussion. Such information helps us to react at short notice to special news or new plans of critics, e.g. through press releases or information published on the webpage www.zensus2011.de

I. Overview: How to Deal with the Misuse of Data or Errors in News Articles

1. The reaction to a misuse of statistical data depends on the type of misuse. The misuse of statistical data can be distinguished in different categories: it may be a false report, a misinterpretation (either unknowingly or intentional) or a criticism. Important for the reaction to that misuse is its degree: Is it a formal error? A marginal or a serious misuse (error)? Or, most important, could it be a danger to the corporate image? Especially for the last question the spread of the misuse is crucial: Does the author (and his misuse of statistical data) have a limited publicity or a high one? Could this end in a public scandal?

2. The identification (detection) of misuse and possible reactions depend highly on the time of detection. There are two different ways of identification: internal and external. Besides calls or inquiries of journalists or public reporting about the misuse by others, the internal tools of identification are very important. The observation of news agencies, the use

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of alerts for online news, and press monitoring are the most important tools. Since 2010, in the run-up to the 2011 Census, we have highly focused as well on social media monitoring through a special internet-based tool.

3. When we identify a misuse, there are different possible ways to react – in general our reaction depends on the level of publicity. In cases of limited publicity we will contact the journalist or write an official letter to the editors. In cases of higher publicity we will write a public letter to the editor, publish a press release, come out with a counterstatement or announce a press conference or other public statement. The last-mentioned reactions we would choose if we saw a danger to the corporate image/reputation.

4. Critical for the terms and conditions of possible reactions are the time of detection, the manning and the equipment with which a possible misuse of data can be identified. Last, but not least, the coordination of action with other concerned persons/organizations is important. In case of the 2011 Census, misuse is not only a danger to the reputation of the Federal Statistical Office but a serious danger to official statistics in general. In Germany the Federal Statistical Office organizes the 2011 Census in cooperation with the sixteen German Länder and their statistical offices. As it is an authority in the sphere of responsibility of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, in serious cases the Federal Statistical Office has to inform the Ministry, too.

II. The Census and its Special German History

5. The Census has a special history in Germany: the census planned for 1983 met with severe protests. In the end it was stopped by the Federal Constitutional Court with its population census judgement of 1983 and a new attempt was made in 1987. In 24 years no German government tried to organize a new census. The 2011 Census is therefore a very important project for the German statistical offices. To avoid massive protests like those of the Eighties, we follow a broad communication strategy that aims to provide reliable information about the 2011 Census to all inhabitants. For that we use a variety of tools: a homepage – www.zensus2011.de, several press conferences, background briefings for journalists in different German cities, service hotlines, back-offices for written inquiries, flyers and brochures, and a big advertising campaign with spots in cinemas and on TV and posters in all big cities. Concurrently, in the run-up to the 2011 Census, the interest of the media is very high and so is the number of news articles about the census.

III. Social Media Monitoring: Tools and Benefits

6. Social media monitoring is a method to track special key words you have chosen in online articles, comments in blogs and Twitter messages. Several companies round the world distribute this relatively new, in most cases internet-based tool. The variety is large: Some basic tools are free of charge, others are offered in combination with high-priced consulting services. Depending on the tool, you get an overview about all relevant online news providers, blogs and Twitter messages. We have used a tool for social media monitoring since 2010 to monitor and cover daily news reporting as well as special topics such as the 2011 Census. With that tool we monitor online newspapers as well as social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and various blogs.

7. To use those social media monitoring tools you define “agents” with special search words – they then track all available sources for you. First of all you search, for example, for your own name to see in what context your name is mentioned – therefore it is sometimes called “ego tracking.”

8. The tool tracks all sources selected and gives you different reports on this search. You can choose among the following sources: Twitter, News, Blogs or Facebook. The results of the queries are presented in two different forms. On the one hand, you can see a simple list of all articles and notices which contain your key words. On the other hand you can create so-called “dashboards.” Here you can see all topics with which your name or search words were connected. This gives you a quick overview of the connotation of the articles or discussions you were mentioned in. When we find an article or a comment in a blog in which statistical data is misused we act as described before. Our reaction will depend on the level of publicity and the degree of the misuse.

IV. Social Media Monitoring of the 2011 Census: Examples

9. To monitor the media coverage of the 2011 Census and the discussions in public we have defined agents, for example with search words like “Statistisches Bundesamt” in combination with “2011 Census” and “1987 Census.” In addition to that we can react on ongoing discussions and define new agents if needed and add special search words. When it comes to the 2011 Census, two people have access to the tool and the tracking results. If the results are interesting, they will inform the relevant colleagues and suggest a reaction. To be able to react directly to false news or criticism a strong cooperation is needed – therefore we have put the responsibility for the tool into the hands of the press office and the census communication. In their function they link the census department with the administration of the Federal Statistical Office. Whenever needed they will inform other offices or ministries.

V. Information Management/E-reputation

10. In January 2011 we got a call from a newspaper – a journalist informed us that a political party, the right-centered NPD, was planning to misuse the census for its own political plans. The members were trying to infiltrate the system of interviewers for the census to get more information about the public and their political attitudes.

11. In that case we informed all important administrations and the Federal Ministry of the Interior and planned a reaction to the NPD’s announcement. We wrote a public statement and informed the whole staff in all press offices of the Federation and the Länder about it. In addition to that we gave a hint to our colleagues working on service hotlines: they have the task to calm down worried callers and explain to them the measures statistical offices will take to avoid the misuse of the census by any party.

12. A first scan carried out with the social media monitoring tool directly after the journalist’s call did not produce any relevant results nor did it identify important sources. But after a while the results improved. Here is one disadvantage of the tool: you get a massive number of results that are all linked to your search words in some way or other – and sometimes you do not see the relevant ones because of the enormous number of hits. But the more often you search with your agents, the more hits the tool will find and the better the hits will be sorted. To improve results it also helps to define, for example, sources that are very important for you – they will be on top of the list.

13. Later our press monitoring revealed that a journalist had written an article containing incorrect information about the NPD’s plans: she wrote that the NPD was planning to organize its own census. Several newspapers and online news platforms copied that information. Based on a misinterpretation, several reports with incorrect information were written. Our strategy therefore was to call the journalists directly and ask them to eliminate the error. With the help of the monitoring tool we saw that in blogs and tweet messages the topic was highly discussed in the following but no one questioned the 2011 Census in

general. Most people laughed about the fact that the journalists had copied the mistake of one author. We saw that our communication strategy in this point was successful and there was no need for another reaction.

14. In another case we heard a rumour in the media regarding the advertising campaign for the 2011 Census launched in April/May. With the help of broad media monitoring we got to know what several authors claimed: the advertising campaign was too expensive and a waste of taxpayers' money. Here we saw a danger for the corporate reputation of the 2011 Census and the statistical offices of the Federation and the Länder in general. At short notice we planned a press release about the advertising campaign and its costs. There we explained that one result of the 1983 protests and the population census judgment had been the mandate to inform people more broadly. With the advertising campaign the statistical offices of the Federation and the Länder did not waste taxpayers' money but met those legal obligations.

VI. Support of the Strategy: Open Dialogue with Critics

15. The Federal Statistical Office uses social media monitoring not only for reputation management or to prevent the misuse of data. We also use it to filter out interesting criticism on the 2011 Census in general or special worries about its methodology or the security of data. By monitoring articles, blogs or tweets we get to know what people are talking about. That gives us the chance to be prepared for possible questions of the media or worried people. We have the chance to prepare answers to those questions and give broad information – before anyone asks us directly. The most interesting questions or worries we collect and discuss e.g. on our homepage of the 2011 Census. With that we give critics a platform and try to encourage an open dialogue.

VII. Conclusion

16. Social media monitoring is an important supplemental tool for the Federal Statistical Office's information and reputation management. It can help to identify the misuse of data, upcoming discussions and critics. To avoid missing relevant articles, blogs or tweets you have to search regularly and invest some time in preparing definitions. To make sure you will always keep the focus on the corporate reputation and your actions will be well-coordinated with those of other concerned persons/organizations, it may be advisable to put the responsibility for social media monitoring into the hands of a cross-section unit.