

Innovation and Tradition: a New Challenge for Communication

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Abstract

With the 7th General Census of Agriculture, the first one to be digitalized and the last one to be held every ten years, Istat faces the challenge of communicating the importance and usefulness of quantitative information to farmers: an extremely varied and difficult to reach audience.

Today's agricultural sector, in fact, combines tradition and innovation in a peculiar and new relationship; in parallel, communication has become more and more digitalized.

In this context, how do we make it to reach both trends and their respective targets knowing that technology may speed up and facilitate the data collection procedure within the census for some but not for all?

Istat has chosen to focus on the value of reciprocity: the bond between the Institute and the Country within the census operations, and to make it become the main concept of the communication strategy, along with a functional combination of both innovative and traditional means of communication.

The communication strategy -designed on the bases of the main objectives of the census- has undergone to remodulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to unexpected and sudden changes that have involved work, relationships and communication itself.

What is Istat doing in order to achieve the Census' goals and how is it going?

Innovation and tradition. A new challenge for communication.

Introduction

With the 7th General Census of Agriculture, the first to be fully digitized and the last to be held every ten years, Istat faces the challenge of communicating the importance of quantitative information to an extremely varied target such as farmers.

Today's agricultural sector, in fact, presents a curious combination between the rural tradition and the new conception of agriculture made of work, knowledge and future prospects, proper to the new generations of farmers.

In order to put together the rural tradition of our country and the new frontiers of agricultural and livestock development, Istat developed a communication strategy that was able to reach its different targets and support the methodological innovations introduced by the Census, with specially selected tools channels and messages.

A digitized Census

The 7th General Census of Agriculture is the first Census to provide a fully digitized data collection procedure, executable through three different channels:

- online filling-in of the questionnaire through the digital platform provided by Istat;
- online filling-in of the questionnaire with the support of an authorized telephone operator;
- online filling-in of the questionnaire with the support of the Survey Network.

This procedure is therefore an important novelty that allowed to speed up and simplify the data collection thus without losing the chance to receive 'human' support for those who needed it.

We therefore faced an important binomial: digitization/human support which Istat had to take in consideration to meet the needs of the different respondents called to participate in the survey.

On this binomial Istat built the communication strategy of the Census with the main aim at respecting the different targets involved by customizing the communication activities.

To do this, it was necessary to build motivational messages capable of reaching the traditional farmer as well as the young entrepreneurs in search of innovation.

How did we do that? We bet on the value of **reciprocity** that binds the Institute to the country:

- "L'Italia che fa crescere l'Italia"
(*"The Italy that makes Italy grow"*)



- "Se ti facciamo domande è perché meriti risposte"
(*"If we ask you questions, it's because you deserve answers"*)



- "L'agricoltura conta su di te, fai contare l'agricoltura"
(*"Agriculture counts on you, make agriculture count"*)

- "Con il 7° Censimento generale dell'Agricoltura, l'ultimo decennale, definiremo insieme lo scenario del mondo agricolo italiano, per renderlo migliore e più vicino alle tue esigenze"
(*"With the 7th General Census of Agriculture, the last ten-year, we will define together the scenario of the Italian agricultural world, to make it better and closer to your needs"*)

The concepts involved are those of 'utility', 'responsibility' and 'awareness': pivotal points of the participation of respondents in the survey, especially in this survey that presents a high degree of technological innovation within its architecture and organization to which respondents must 'adapt' for the first time.

The communication campaign

Designing the communication campaign, we kept in mind the most important characteristic of our target group: it is made up of both representatives of the rural tradition of our country and of representatives of today's new face of agriculture: young entrepreneurs in search of technological innovation, smart farming, and e-commerce.

In order to reach both and to respond to their different needs, we designed and implemented a communication campaign that -on the one hand- used traditional media such as: TV, radio, billboards and press both, at national and territorial level, and -on the other hand- used the latest digital means of communication.

This is what it turned out to be the breaking point of our communication strategy: a digital and innovative communication, although at the forefront, does not necessarily meet the needs of all users.

Starting from January 2021, Istat sent letters to the whole target group communicating the start of the survey and its importance for the country. We were therefore sure that most of our respondents would -in that way- know about the Census and participate in it. But, during the data collection phase we became aware of the fact that a digitized questionnaire was harder to fill in by elder farmers than a 'normal' paper one. We realized at that time that the new digital architecture of the Census indeed helped to speed up the data collection process and to reduce the risk of compilation error but not for all of our respondents. Thus, we were missing a part of our target group.

The point is that today we have no excuses: we must know how to reach our different target users. We have the duty, the responsibility, and the possibility to do so and, in order to do so, we must first understand the needs of our users and how they wish to receive information by us.

For this reason, we led the communication campaign of the 7 General Census of Agriculture strongly backed by Istat historical experience in the field of 'Census communication' but also with a strong attention and care to a constant work of monitoring the response of our target. This is what has made it possible to finalize the actions taken to achieve an effective communication.

In this way we made it to reach the younger farmers, approaching their way of communicating through the web and social networks, but also to reach the older ones respecting their needs that recall concepts such as 'human support' and 'procedural simplicity'.

The communication campaign has undergone adjustments in the course of work, certainly due to the pandemic emergency (COVID-19) but also due to the different response rates coming from the territory and depending on the different specificities of the Italian regions.

These different response rates led us to make an even more careful assessment of who our targets were and suggested us to change the messages conveyed and the communication means according to who we were 'talking to'.

As for the southern Regions, for example, which registered a low rate of response, the original call to action “L’agricoltura conta su di te, fai contare l’agricoltura” (“Agriculture counts on you, make agriculture count”) has been changed into “L’agricoltura conta su di te, compila il questionario” (“Agriculture counts on you, fill in the questionnaire”) in order to eliminate any uncertainties and recall a precise action: fill in the questionnaire!

Differences in communication actions was the lead of the entire communication campaign.

As for some farmers we invested more in traditional means of communication such as: TV, Radio, Posters and Press -first at the national level and then with a greater territorial detail- and for others we chose a digital kind of interaction, much faster and engaging.

- First flight

Between January and March, 2021 the campaign focused mainly on conventional means of communication such as: Tv, radio and press. Messages were disseminated at a national level in order to reach the entire target group across the whole country and create a common awareness on the survey and on its importance for the Italian agricultural sector.

The investment in advertising was high and expected: **770 Tv Ads** on Rai channels (Italian’s Government TV) and other private television stations (Watch the TV Ad).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InJByp4uCEk>

735 Radio Ads on National Radio stations

(Listen to the Ad)

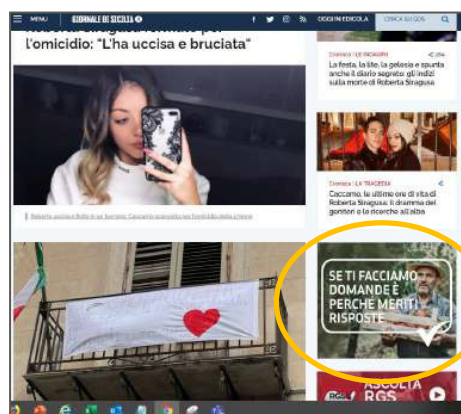


“There are questions you can always give an answer to: you answered courageously in difficult moments, some answers can change your life... or change the lives of others. And always, for every answer you give, there’s one you deserve.

Today Istat asks you to respond to the 7th General Census of Agriculture, to better know your needs and those of the agricultural world. If we ask you questions, it’s because you deserve answers.

[General census of Agriculture: the Italy that makes Italy grow]”

57 Press Ads on national press and trade press



- Second flight

This phase of the campaign started on April 18, 2021 by recalling the importance of the respondents' participation in the Census. This time the communication was not disseminated at a national level but only at a local level.

The number of **advertisements on billboards, press, TV and local radios** and their territorial distribution was decided on the basis of the response rate received by respondents in the different Italian regions and on the basis of the population rate of each municipality.

In the detail:

- **3008 Poster displays** covering 8.983.738 inhabitants: 336 displays at malls and 1300 displays at the railway stations.

At this stage of the campaign, we decided to change the call to action “L’agricoltura conta su di te, fai contare l’agricoltura” (*“Agriculture counts on you, make agriculture count”*) into “**L’agricoltura conta su di te, compila il questionario**” (*“Agriculture counts on you, fill in the questionnaire”*) in order to make it clearer for those who at that time, for some reason, still hadn’t participated in the survey.



- **78 Ads on Local Press:** 19 newspapers and magazines
- **200.550 Ads on Local Radios:** 5 radio stations per 23 channels
- **5088 Ads on Local TV:** 26 channels
- **35 Ads on RAI TV:** 3 channels (May 18 – May 24, 2021)

Moreover, starting in May 2021, Istat promoted the Census also within **trend television and radio programs** according to the agreement with Rai - Radiotelevisione Italiana S.p.A. – which gave us the opportunity to reach (again) the general public, especially those respondents who don’t usually surf the web!

During this phase Istat carried out as well **PR activities with the Stakeholders and the Agricultural Assistance Centers (CAA)** as part of the Survey network in order to better reach the elder farmers who needed more ‘human’ support.

Nevertheless, digital communication activities were carried out throughout the whole period of the campaign (January-June 2021).

A faster and digital interaction

As already said, the campaign intended to reach both faces of today's agricultural sector. For this reason, along with the conventional means of communication thought for the elder and less technology friendly farmers, Istat chose to engage women, young entrepreneurs, students, and Instagrammers by organizing digital campaigns, challenges, and events.

The main purpose of the different initiatives was that of underlying the importance of sustainability, biodiversity, innovation, and technology and recalling the concept of reciprocity. Participants would get in return:

- information about their work sector – by helping to build updated, correct and useful information
- participation in initiatives related to environmental protection – by joining important projects of reforestation
- visibility for their activities – by presenting and promoting projects and expressing hopes and prospects for the future of the agricultural sector.

Listed below are some of the many activities we organized since January 2021:

1. **“Istat’ first social forest”**, born in Basilicata, in the “Parco delle Chiese Rupestri”, thanks to the partnership with **‘Treedom’**, the web



platform that allows the planting of trees at a distance. During the data collection phase, every 10,000 questionnaires compiled by the respondents Istat planted a tree!

All the phases of the operation have been documented showing the beginning and the development of the project in a digital logbook of the tree, available on the Census' website <https://7censimentoagricoltura.it/sostenibilita/>

Thanks to the important participation of respondents to the Census we planted more than 100 trees.

Watch the video! <https://youtu.be/Po6jSLQlhBE>

2. **“Premio Donne e Sostenibilità”** (*“Women and Sustainability Award”*), totally dedicated to women and to their daily effort in defending the environment.



It is not by chance that we decided to launch the award on 8 March last, upon the celebration of International Women’s Day!

The winner will be awarded upon the occasion of Istat National Conference of Statistics in November 2021 and the best video will be presented within a famous TV program, while all the other participants in the contest will receive a tree from the Treedom project.

Watch the videos:

https://youtu.be/Om-g4_7geAE

<https://7censimentoagricoltura.it/premio-donne-e-sostenibilita/>

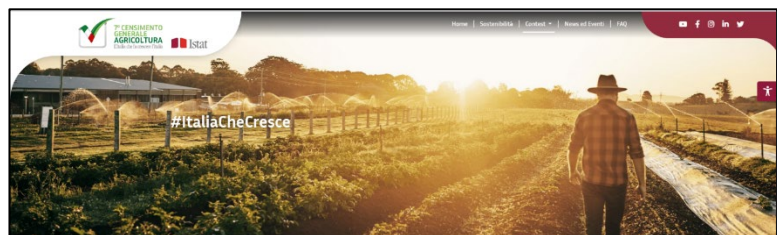
<https://youtu.be/HXxNCHO4K-s>

3. **“Coltiva la tua idea. Condividi il tuo progetto per l’Agricoltura del futuro”** (*“Grow your idea. Share your project for the Agriculture of the Future”*), dedicated to students who attend Agricultural Institutes. It and aims at presenting their projects on agriculture focusing technology, innovation, sustainability or biodiversity.



The videos realized by the students have been posted on their personal Instagram accounts with the intention to use their communication skills and their networks and communities and, of course, to promote their projects and the Census!

4. **#Italiachecresce** (*#Italygrows*), a digital campaign designed to transform our users into the main players of a ‘visual tale’ on our Country. This project has been realized



thanks to Instagrammers committed in various ways in the agricultural sector, multipliers of our messages. As well as giving visibility to the most beautiful pictures of our rural landscapes and territorial specificities, the campaign wanted to exploit the

potential of the Instagrammers' channels and give wide diffusion to the initiative and to the Census.

For each one of these activities, we realized videos, DEMs, social cards and promotional digital kits that were sent to our stakeholders and target groups.

In parallel to these activities, others are planned to be carried out for recalling the importance of the human factor which we cannot -under any circumstance- abandon in this context.

For example, experts will tell stories and experiences on the Italian agricultural sector explaining how agriculture changes and evolves along with the changing of society. Farmers will have the chance to listen to real stories and view successful projects that may inspire them and increase their knowledge by making lever on values shared.

We will explore the field of Social agriculture within multifunctional farms as a new frontier of the agricultural sector; new contests will be organized involving farmhouses and students also within gamification activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I must say that Istat is fully responding to this hard challenge called: 'Communicating today at different target groups'!

The combination between digital/innovative means of communication with the conventional ones has given us the possibility to reach and engage our multi-faceted target group of respondents.

A lesson learnt is that despite the speed at which communication runs and despite the high level of technology to which we are used to today, there is still a part of the population that seeks a more 'human' interaction and communication.

The secret is to monitor and listen to the information needs of our users, always and in any case. Thus, users' profiling, and ausers' analytics, are essential for implementing a customized and effective communication strategy.

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