

BPstat: speaking official statistics with a stronger brand voice

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Abstract

When people think about brands, they often think about their visual identity: their logo, colours, or fonts. However, if the logo didn't appear with our content, could our audience identify it as coming from us? In a crowded digital ecosystem, invest on visuals is no longer enough to be recognized. The way a brand sounds is just as key as the way it looks, as words are an important part of a brand identity. This paper presents the importance of having a well-defined brand voice to official statistics and describes the way the Banco de Portugal is developing the brand voice of BPstat – modern, informative, clean, empathic, pedagogical, and trustworthy - and how it is being used to improve the dialogue with users and reinforce the confidence and trust in the statistical products and services we deliver.

Keywords: official statistics brand; statistical communication; brand voice; brand tone

1. Introduction

The work of statistical authorities has evolved to respond to the threats caused by changes in economy and society. One of the most recent threats for official statistics has to do with the way disruptive innovations – such as social media or digitalisation – turned content creation and content sharing easier than ever. In 2022, worldwide, *per* minute, 231 million emails were sent, 5.9 million searches were made on Google, 167 million and 3.67 million videos were, respectively, watched in TikTok and YouTube, 66 thousand photos and videos were shared on Instagram and 575 thousand tweets were sent¹. These figures make easy to conclude how crowded the digital ecosystem, in which statistical authorities are working in, is and how their voices are just one in so many. Under this context, the need of creating an awareness strategy for official statistics and of building the “official statistics” brand became dominant issues among statistical producers, who started taking seriously that, if there is no evidence that the statistics they produce are properly used, understood, and applied in society, the purpose of doing the job is questionable.

When one is trying to build a brand, there are three key terms to be aware of. The first is the concept of brand itself. Brand is how people perceive a company. According to Scott Cook, “a brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is”. Although are the customers who decide what a brand is, there are certain actions we can take as business owners to shape their perception on our company. We call it branding – the second key concept. Third, it is through the process of branding that we can build a brand identity: a collection of tangible expressions of our company, such as typography, colour, brand voice, customer experience, consistency, and repetition.

¹ <https://localiq.com/blog/what-happens-in-an-internet-minute/>

The more distinct, specific, and cohesive these elements are, the higher the likelihood that they will shape a differentiated brand that is recognized and admired.

2. Brand voice: what is it and why does it matter for official statistics?

When people think about brands, they often think about their visual identity: their logo, colours, fonts, etc. However, if the logo didn't appear with our content, could our audience identify it as coming from us? Would someone viewing our content on multiple channels would know it all came from the same brand?

The way a brand sounds is just as key as the way it looks. Words are an important part of a brand identity and when used effectively, they can shape how a company is perceived by its audience. We call it "brand voice" – the way words are used to communicate the distinct personality of a certain brand. Because the brand voice expresses the company's values, it is the vehicle to start a dialogue with clients, to foster connection and community, and to instil more confidence and trust in the products and services delivered.

4 reasons for developing a brand voice for official statistics

Positioning: brand voice will carve out our space in the marketplace. The main function of a statistical authority is to collect and analyse data and to publish statistics, but its main purpose is that these numbers provide insights into the society. As stated above, the digital ecosystem is, nowadays, so crowded that breaking through the noise is becoming increasingly difficult. With [des/mis]information coming from everywhere, it's hard to make audiences to direct their attention to the right place. To engage with them, statistical authorities must give something they can't find anywhere else. Our DNA must be how our product or service can improve people's lives in some way.

Recognition: when people know how a brand looks, feels, and sounds, they form an attachment to that identity, the reason why one must guarantee that everything published is cohesive. According to IFC (2022) central banks across the world have been using an increasingly diversified range of communication channels when reaching out their target audiences. This trend is expected to accelerate in the next two years, due to social media, and a prosecution of an omnichannel communication strategy. Inconsistencies in brand elements in these different channels will directly undermine their impact. Brand consistency builds a strong foundation from which audiences will be able to better understand the organization. The result is brand trust, loyalty, and ultimately, the conversion of users into brand ambassadors. When we deliver our content in a consistent style, we are establishing a presence in our audience's memory as a recognizable brand. Cultivating this recognition is a process that includes both repetition and consistency. A consistent voice enables a brand to be easily identified as an authoritative source in a certain area of expertise.

Communication: without a well-defined brand voice, a brand will sound like whoever's doing most of the writing voice. When we have multiple people creating our content, our brand voice could end up all over the place.

3. Building a brand voice to BPstat

BPstat is the Banco de Portugal's statistical website and our main statistical product. In 2019 a new version of the portal was launched to the public, offering users a new look and feel experience. With a refreshed image, BPstat 2.0 gives users the possibility of exploring data in a more dynamic way and to access a more diversified content such as texts, images, infographics, charts, and videos.

The process of creating the visual component of the portal was smooth since the Banco de Portugal had adopted, in 2014, a new corporate identity. The logo, the colours and the iconography were chosen accordingly to this up-to-date, stronger, and easier-to-recognize Banco de Portugal's image, in a joint work with the Communication Department of the Banco de Portugal. But, again, "if the logo didn't appear, could our audience identify content as coming from us?"

Considering that:

- i. we wanted BPstat to be recognized as the digital place to find "statistics to better understand Portugal" - our motto;
- ii. the inherent value of official statistics is ultimately decided by users, and they will attach value to what is relevant, timely and meets their needs;
- iii. contrary to what common sense says, communicate statistics in a relevant way is much more complex than simply translating the jargon of statistics into language the public understand and illustrating texts with some fancy and coloured charts;
- iv. and even being able to translate the jargon is a difficult skill that many practicing statisticians lack, likely due to the combination of increased specialization over time and the absence of formal training in science communication,

developing a brand voice becomes crucial to influence how users perceive our business, build trust, create connection, and allow people to easily identify our voice amongst the noise.

A SWOT analysis: a strong brand voice starts with a deep understanding of the brand—its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

An honest analysis through BPstat allows to conclude that its new functionalities were planned to be its major strength but, the way some of them were poorly implemented, hands in hands with the lack of a statistical communication strategy and experts in communication, made them our big weakness. Looking at the external side, two big opportunities can be identified: the first has to do with an official recognition, among statistical authorities, that, if statistics are not used by anyone, they are useless. This recognition is currently embodied in the Banco de Portugal's strategic plan – which the motto is "promoting proximity and strengthening trust" – as also as in the Portuguese General Guidelines of Official Statistical Activity 2023-27, which vision is that "In 2027, the official statistics, produced independently and securely, maintain the highest quality standards and are the reference source for the timely knowledge of Portuguese society and decision-making". A second opportunity has to do with a deeper partnership with our Communication Department. The main threat has to do with competition: statistical information produced by central banks tends to raise only limited interest among members of the public, especially in comparison with other types of data – e.g., inflation, unemployment and GDP figures that are usually disseminated by the National Statistical Offices.

Understand the audience: the audience is the people and communities who impact the success of a brand, like users, the media, and other people in the business. Going further, a target audience is a specific group of users that is most likely to be receptive to our messages. One of the biggest mistakes statistical authorities make is, sometimes, working in their own bubble: they produce statistics and release them without taking the time to ask what their audience needs to hear. As we start talking with our users, we start getting a better idea of what they need, and what are the main problem we are solving for them. Segmenting our target market allows for effective marketing, since we are exclusively sending information to audiences that are specifically interested in it. On the other hand, if we communicate all content to everyone, our users will become tired of receiving messages that aren't useful to them.

BPstat was mainly designed for the general public, i.e., for those who cannot access microdata or confidential data, such as policy makers, international organizations, internal users or researchers. Among the general public, the work done during the last two years has been mainly addressed to media, high school students and teachers of economics.

Besides this well identified target groups, we started using Google Analytics to get some demographic information on our audience. In 2022, almost 50% of our users were adults, aged between 25 and 44 years old. They were located predominantly in Portugal and their interests were related to financial and banking services and travel. 13% of our users were between 18 and 24 years old and, probably, they correspond to the segment interested in education/pos-secondary education.

A better knowledge on our audience allows us to create more relevant content for them and to increase the probabilities of being more effective in awareness creation.

Discover the brand voice principles and personality: The brand voice should fundamentally connect to the company's values and reflect its mission. There is an unfortunate tendency to assume that anything, but the carefully institutional, rigorous, and formal pool of sanitized vocabulary is too risky to sustain the mission and the independency of a statistical authority. Many of them still articulate with a voice that feels dry, distant, and emotionless, doing little to inspire trust and public interest in their job. While some formality is obviously needed to convey trust and stability, statistical content doesn't need to be stripped of humanity and stories to tell.

The current Banco de Portugal's strategic plan states that, during the coming years, the Banco must build a closer relationship with citizens, share its knowledge with society and listen to the concerns of the Portuguese people. As a statistical authority, we also want our users feel confidence in our work. Dialogue, proximity, trust, and effective and timely action are the key objectives in which our strategic guidelines should be rooted in. Based on that, we can define proximity, trust, and relevance as the three principles of our voice.

Once defined the principles we need to define the brand's personality. A brand personality comes into existence when human-like adjectives – like unique, caring, funny, trustworthy, creative, straightforward, rebel, etc. – are assigned to a brand. A well fleshed-out brand personality is crucial to keep our voice consistent, authentic, and effective. Without a personality to anchor our principles, our voice can go in any direction.

This concept is best understood when we imagine the brand to be a person. Let's do it with a woman pregnant of her first child. She's happy, anxious, and afraid of not being able to give the best to her baby. She starts reading childcare books and doing some research on internet. She finds big check lists to prepare the baby arrives and decide to buy everything, so nothing could miss to her child. After its birth, she realises that most of the things she bought not only are useless as they turn her daily routines more complicated. As she starts knowing better her baby, she starts understanding that less would be better to her child.

This is *BPstat*. The moment its new version was released, the ambition to take care of our users was so big, that *BPstat* was born a giant baby, delivering, without any communication strategy, more than 200 thousand statistical series, lots of charts, tables, and texts.

Three years later *BPstat* is still a modern and informative person, but who believes now in the power of a minimalist and simple way of living. *BPstat* cares about their users, tries to know them better and to solve their problems in an empathic and pedagogical way.

Define the tones of your brand voice: the final step for cultivating a unique brand voice is the concept of tone. While the brand voice is a consistent strategy that is maintained throughout the content, tone can be more flexible according to context. For example, if we publish a video addressed to young people, a more relaxed and funny tone is more likely. However, a press release addressed to media might be more formal, straightforward, and clear.

Variances in tone should be documented, namely, the way they relate to the unified brand voice. Creating a brand style guide is a great way to establish a unified brand voice and to guarantee that everyone inside the corporation will understand how to create content that's aligned with the brand's digital identity. Each employee in charge of content creation should be introduced to the brand voice as soon as possible to ensure they represent the brand's personality.

Corporations should illustrate how the brand voice turns up concretely in their content, though, for instance, a table. Voice guidelines should be easy to share and should be added to the brand's visual guide.

Let's build the *BPstat*'s brand voice table.

Voice characteristic	Description	Do	Don't
Modern	Follow the last trends in digital communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve engagement levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Settle for one-way communication
Informative, relevant	Focus on the messages that matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define a limited scope and concise message Create a content with an objective Prioritize the messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be vague Create meh content Speak all messages to everyone at the same time
Minimalist, clean	Subtract for the sake of focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid clutter Structure content to boost readability Maintain curacy and clarity of complicated scientific messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create distraction from core content, i.e, content either users want to find on <i>BPstat</i> or we want them to see.

Caring, empathic	Content that serves needs and addresses the biggest pain points of our users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the human aspect of business • Weave in opportunities to take action • Educate the audience • Focus on benefits rather than characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish something you wouldn't be willing to share • Use a dry, distant, and emotionless voice • Stripped your content of humanity
Pedagogical	Teach your concepts, your methods, and results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use plain language • Give examples • Tell stories • Use analogies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create content for yourself • Use acronyms and abbreviating words • Use too much jargon • Fall into the "curse of knowledge"
Trustworthy	Content must be reliable, responsible and consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give users the information they need (data sources, methodology, etc) • Write and publish content regularly • Create authoritative content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use blanket statements • Constantly promote our business through our content

4. Final remarks and challenges ahead

Statistical authorities are currently using diversified ways – press releases, videos, infographics, etc. – to communicate statistical information to users and are increasingly complementing traditional content by new media. However, if we don't guarantee that messages spread across channels are consistent, this hard work will be in vain. We will be ending up with a random assortment of voices and tones in content produced which will not provide a consistent picture of our brand. A clear and consistent brand voice become crucial to stand out from the noise, connect with users and build with them a trusting relationship. Under this context, it is time to statistical authorities start taking words as seriously as visuals and stop reducing the importance of words to simply translating the jargon of statistics into language the public understand. It is time to recognize the brand voice as part of the so ambitious "official statistics" brand identity.

In this paper we shared the work that the Banco de Portugal has been developing to define the voice identity of *BPstat*, its main statistical product. Although the efforts that have been done, we still have a long path to run to make *BPstat* a public recognized brand. The creation of the "official statistics" brand demands for continuous and joint work among statistical producers. It's much more than crating appealing visuals or being on social media: it requires defining the type of relationship we want to develop with our users and build that voice that will make users recognize our job.

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