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Engaging with hard-to-reach audience: young people and Statistics Finland

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Young people are the users and interpreters of future statistics. They are therefore an extremely important target group for all of us statistical institutes. At the same time, young people are also a very challenging target group: they think slightly differently from us middle-aged people, use different channels for daily communication than we who grew up in the paper era and often question messages from the older age group.

Long-term work with young people and schools

Statistics Finland has worked long over the years to inspire young people to use statistics and to promote statistical literacy among young people. We have formed contacts with schools and teachers, we pay visits to educational institutions and schools visit us, we send newsletters to teachers and we involve young people by means of international statistical competitions.

The Learn about statistics website is based on the ability to read and use statistics. Various guides for the use of statistics can be found on the website. In addition, the website provides basic competencies to carry out a simple statistical study and school project. It also helps in creating statistical posters, which is the aim in national poster competition. The website also promotes the European Statistics Competition organised by Eurostat.

We have fixed cooperation relationships with teachers' organisations, the Finnish Statistical Society and the Heureka Science Centre. We also cooperate with the Bank of Finland's Financial Literacy Centre.

School groups are welcomed to visit the NSO office to learn more about statistics and their compilation, as well as their use. We also arrange topic-related lectures and workshops at fairs and offer to send our experts to schools to talk about statistics. In Finland our approach towards engaging with schools is very practice oriented. We have found that learning by doing is the best method to promote statistical literacy at schools.

Poster competitions have been organised since 2010. The main idea is that students working in teams of one to five people conduct a small-scale study using statistics and create a poster about it. The aim is to teach students the whole statistical research process through creating a statistics poster: from defining the research question to collecting and analysing data, presenting it and making conclusions. Statistics Finland also coordinates the International Statistical Literacy Project.

Educational content on our social media channels

In spring 2023 we updated our social media policy and our aim is to produce content for our social media channels according to four content pillars: statistics, products and services, topical themes and phenomena, employer image and educational content.

The information included in the educational content consists of contents that open the meaning of information, develop statistical literacy, new learning materials, describe cooperation with educational institutions, such as the Statistics Olympics, and entertaining quizzes and trivia on statistics.

We publish the Statistics tips series on our Twitter and Facebook channels. Followers can learn basic things about statistics and their production from Statistics tips. The series also gives tips on how to interpret statistics. All statistics tips are collected on our Learn about statistics website for the use of teachers. On our Instagram account we weekly publish a question of the week on a topical topic and an answer to it.

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Lively and insightful school visits

For us, school visits are often once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to meet students and teachers and to teach statistics and statistical literacy. It is not possible to teach everything in a short time, so it is essential to leave a pleasant memory of statistics on the students, so that in the future, they themselves would be interested in statistics and statistical literacy.

When preparing our communication policy, we defined the tones of voice for our communication at Statistics Finland. During the spring, we also specified the tones of communication at various events. The communication used during visits to educational institutions of young people is lively and insightful. Our aim is to produce insights to young people and to direct the presentations of the visits to a younger target group so that the matter concerned has to do with the lives of young people and things familiar to them. The presentations are compact and we try to create a rhythm at the events in which things are lightened by means of videos, for example.

Our experience has shown that it is easy to reach talented and informed young people. New means of communication, perhaps captivating games or fun things having to do with everyday life are needed to get other young people excited about statistics as well. However, the production of materials suitable for young people requires investment in both resources and competence, which may be challenging to many statistical offices.

Social media influencers encourage to take part in statistical competitions

In recent years, we have also made use of social media channels to reach young people. We have worked together with a YouTuber, we meet young adults on Instagram and we have marketed statistical competitions on TikTok together with a TikToker favoured by young people.

We have marketed statistical competitions through teachers and schools, and in recent years increasingly with the help of social media influencers. Social media influencers are active on social media platforms and have an identifiable personal brand, committed followers, regular interaction with their followers and ability to influence the behaviour of their followers. Influencing comes from their appealing contents, interaction and personal charisma. The skills and expertise of social media influencers can also be utilised in the consulting and development of the organisation's communication.

With the help of a social media influencer favoured by young people we have brought forward statistical competitions and visibility for public voting on Statistics Olympics videos. During the coming competition period, we intend to collaborate with teachers active on TikTok.

News is also followed on TikTok

In Finland, people under the age of 25 use Snapchat, WhatsApp and TikTok most actively of social media applications. Videos with background music are published on TikTok. Often the target is to entertain but videos can also be used to share information in a light style. Nowadays, news are also being sought from TikTok. According to the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report for Finland, TikTok's news use nearly tripled in all age groups from the year before. Could there also be more news about statistics on TikTok?

TikTok's advantage is the addictive algorithm that picks contents for users that interest them from among all contents on the platform. Any video can therefore become viral. Growth in TikTok's use is limited by the data security concerns related to it.

Should a statistical office set up its own TikTok account?

In addition to cooperation with social media influencers, we have been preparing the setting up of our own TikTok account for statistical communication. There are still many challenges in communication with TikTok, but we believe that even the statistical office must be where young people are. For the time being, it is not

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permitted to install TikTok onto the agency's devices, but we are looking for a solution to this. We have realised that TikTok requires a lot of time and planning to work properly. The organisation must be constantly aware of the trends of the channel and willing to brainstorm about the content related to them. It is also possible to share the TikTok account with several statistical operators, so the brainstorming and implementation of the contents would be shared with several organisations.

Our present social media communication focuses on Twitter, where we reach the media and experts, but there are hardly any young people there. With TikTok, we could reach even more young people and have a more easily approachable image of Statistics Finland. Statistics Finland's TikTok face could make it easier for young people to contact us and become interested in statistics and understand the importance of statistical literacy.

How do we get young men to respond to data collections?

The falling respondent rates in data collections is a concern in many countries. In Finland, too, it has become more difficult to get hold of respondents during the mobile phone age. Young men are the target group that is particularly difficult to reach in Finland. To continue to have a sufficient response rate to statistical inquiries and thus reliable statistics, it is important that young people understand the meaning of statistics and the importance of responding to statistical inquiries.

Over the years Statistics Finland has conducted several campaigns to improve the response rate and reach young men. We have made videos starring a young man. We have had #pleaserespond campaigns on social media channels. In addition, we have marketed data collections in TikTok cooperation. This spring, we also remodelled our data collection website to be more user friendly.

What kind of new campaigns could we try?

In the early part of the year, we launched a cooperation project together with our communications agency partner in which it designed in a workshop campaigns for reaching especially the most challenging target groups: young men and persons with immigrant background. We received over 20 ideas, from which we will select the most effective ones for actual application.

Based on the organisation's discussion we picked a few suggestions, which we will try out within the scope of available resources. In connection with the data collection for the Labour Force Survey, we are going to test a blue envelope for sending survey materials. The aim is to make the letter of Statistics Finland distinguishable and expected. When the recipients receive the letter, they know that they are expected to respond to Statistics Finland's inquiry for reliable information. We would launch the letter with a teaser video and with a communication stunt when the first letters are sent. In social media we would involve the recipients to share information about the arrival of the letter under the hashtag #blueletter.

Another interesting suggestion was the introduction of a general telephone number for all data collections. The statistics number could always be answered and called reliably. The fact that people no longer respond to unknown phone numbers causes non-response for data collections in Finland. Many socially significant operators have identifiable numbers, such as the emergency number.

More ideas: Missing campaign and news without statistics

In campaigns aimed especially at young people, particular interest was shown to the Missing campaign where classical Missing posters with a mirror surface would be placed in visible spots, like bus stops, saying, for instance Missing! Make sure that you are visible. Without you Finland is not complete. The campaign would be launched in those areas where it is the hardest to get answers. Statistics Finland would become the talk of the day by arousing attention where people move around. The aim of the campaign would be to highlight the

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fact that without statistics from all population groups, decision-making is not equal and Finland is not complete.

The communications agency also proposed cooperation with the media. Together with some media we could perhaps produce news without statistics that would reveal the importance of statistics in society. The world would look different without reliable information. What would that world look like? What kind of news would we hear? How would we justify our opinions without information? What everyday challenges would we face? A similar idea has been put into practice in our data collection campaign last year when we made humorous videos on our YouTube account where experts asked a guru for exact statistical data and the guru answered something ambiguous.

One of the ideas was also to reward active respondents for their good deeds for society. Every respondent is a hero. We could draw lots for one lucky statistical respondent of the year and offer something special, such as an invitation to a prestigious event, and thus raise awareness of the social significance of statistical surveys.

Sources

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