

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION
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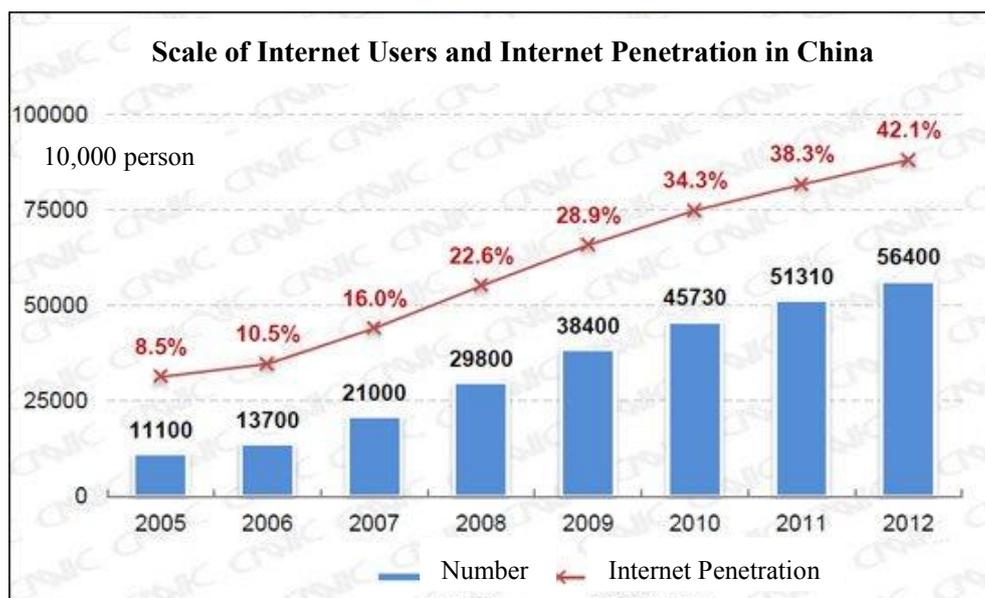
Work Session on the Communication of Statistics
(Berlin, Germany, 27-29 May 2013)

Future ideas in communication

This article mainly talked about four issues: the prospects of traditional media to communicate data; the role of new media platforms in communicating statistics; practices on educating media practitioners in statistics; merging internal and external strategies. This article would not be called paper, as it only shared some experiences and practices of the National Bureau of Statistics of China. Any criticism and comment is highly appreciated.

1. Do we still need traditional media to communicate data?

According to the statistics from China Internet Information Centre, China's Internet users had reached 564 million by the end of December 2012, with an increase of 50.9 million throughout the year. The Internet penetration rate rose to 42.1 percents. Specifically, the number of cell phone netizen was up to 420 million.



Source: China Internet Information Centre

As new media terminals such as tablet PC and smart phone are widely used, traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper and magazine are facing fierce challenges, but meanwhile new opportunities.

Taking the following factors into account, it's obvious that traditional media is facing challenges.

Firstly, the role of traditional media as authoritative opinion leaders is greatly challenged in the 'We-media Time'. Nowadays, everyone can use social media such as blog, twitter or youtube to record what he/she saw or deliver his/her opinion, and make it public, therefore professional newspaper or TV are no longer the only source of news. On the other hand, as the Internet communication is more timely and widely, people would like to browse web pages or search engine rather than read newspaper or watch television. The traditional media's eye effect is weakening.

Secondly, the 'communicator-to-audience' communication mode, which lacks interaction with audience, becomes one of the short board of traditional media. Actually, the previous one-dimensional audience has turned into specially-tailored and actively-participated user. They can easily feedback comments to the author through online posts or comment button under the news article. The interaction of new media is so attractive that lots of users of traditional media betray.

Thirdly, it's not feasible to response timely through newspaper or television when a public crisis happens because of its longer editing cycle. On the contrary, it's more efficient for an organization to talk with its audience through blog, twitter, portal website, email, etc.

Fourthly, the structure of users of traditional media is changing. The new generation prefers to receive information through computer or cell phone. Only drivers listen to the radio, and middle-aged and eldly intellectuals read the newspaper. Traditional television viewership is declining because television is rather used as a screen to connect with ipad or iphone.

Last but not least, the information provided by traditional media is a little out of date. With the faster pace of people's lives, a lengthy article is often not welcomed. People prefer to read 'fragmented' information. On the other hand, personalized information and one-on-one interpersonal communication is more needed.

However, the following three points are the opportunities of traditional media.

Firstly, the traditional media is developing new carriers such as portal website, mobile application, twitter or WeChat (a mobile phone text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China), which is called 'Media Convergence'. The information is also specially prepared to meet the tastes of its audience. Therefore statistical data can be spread widely through the new carriers of traditional media.

Secondly, the information source of traditional media is more authoritative and credible because of the professional expertise of its practitioners, so that it has won a high degree of user loyalty. Information from an ordinary netizen may be faster, but less credible, or even rumours. People are more likely to believe the statistics published in the newspaper, but not a personal blog.

Thirdly, content innovation is a new lifeline for traditional media. As the information market is increasingly fragmented, more and more traditional media repackage their original 'popular' news into 'personalized' information to meet the individual needs.

Analysis based on the challenges and opportunities faced by traditional media shows that traditional media still bear a significant role in statistical data release in the new media age. On the one hand, it's more credible to publish statistical data by traditional media. On the other hand, relying on its strong think-tank analysts, traditional media can make timely and valuable interpretation of statistical data, thus contributing to the public understanding of statistics.

The National Bureau of Statistics of China still attaches importance to maintaining cooperation with traditional mainstream media such as People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency, Economic Times, China Central Television, China National Radio, etc. These media have a high visibility and authority in the country, so the information can easily be cited and spread widely. Furthermore, we have strengthened cooperation with online media such as Sina, Tencent, Sohu, Phoenix, etc. The rapid and extensive spread of online media information makes it quite effective to disseminate statistical data and response to public opinion. Besides, we strengthen contacts with foreign media such as The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, Dow Jones Newswires, Reuters, etc in response to international public opinion crisis.

2. The role of new media platforms in communicating statistics.

According to Wikipedia, the definition of 'new media' is as following.

Most technologies described as 'new media' are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. Some examples may be the Internet, websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMS, and DVDs. New media do not include television programs, feature films, magazines, books, or paper-based publications - unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity.

Based on the definition, the characteristics of new media could be figured out. Firstly, the user structure of new media shows the following traits: younger age, more active statements and not limited to the high-educated group. Secondly, the communication is more targeted. The mode of communication is turning from one-to-mass to one-to-one as users' needs are personalized and fragmented. Thirdly, information can be received anytime and anywhere using new media such as tablet computer or cell phone, which is more timely and efficiently.

Nowadays, new media is playing an increasing important role in statistical releases. For example, the presentation of statistics can be dynamic charts, animation, mobile application, etc., which is diversified, visualized and fashionable. Besides, the customized statistical data can be delivered to a certain person timely. It's also more convenient to answer users' questions or share statistical data. Furthermore, statistical organizations can get rid of traditional media and publish information by themselves.

The new media applications by the National Bureau of Statistics of China are as follows:

- Official micro-blog. The National Bureau of Statistics of China opened its official micro-blog in April 2013, the primary responsibility of which is releasing statistics, answering users' questions, guiding public opinions, promoting governmental image and popularizing statistical knowledge. The link addresses of statistical database, readings and release schedule are also provided on the micro-blog webpage.



Picture 1: The official micro-blog of National Bureau of Statistics of China

- 'China Statistics' and 'Data China' mobile application. 'China Statistics' is a statistical service platform for smart phone users, providing with real-time statistical information such as statistical news, latest data, hot issue interpretation and indicator definition. 'Data China' is a mobile database which can display the key indicators of national economy of China in forms of dynamic charts. The users include journalists, investors, analysts, etc. Both of the applications can be downloaded in the Apple Store and Android Market.



Picture 2: 'China Statistics' and 'Data China' mobile application

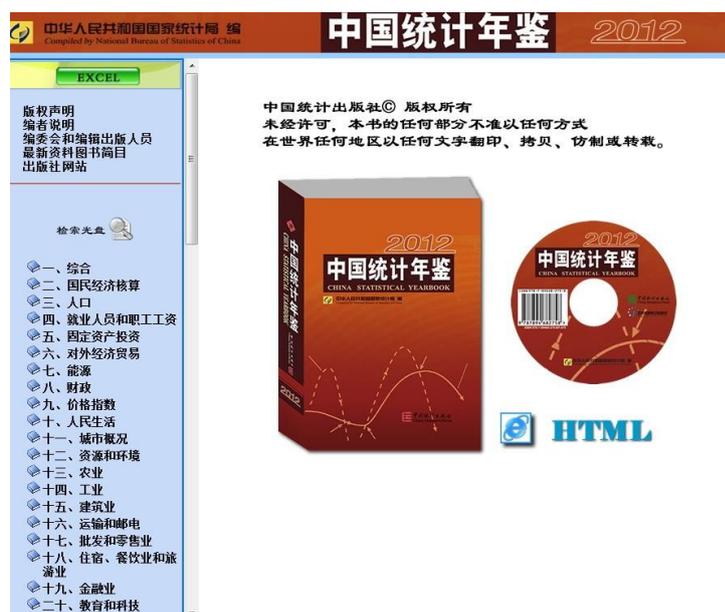
- China statistical database. Since opened up on the official website of National Bureau of Statistics of China, China statistical database has won a high page click through rate. By the end of 2012, it had uploaded 3,881 statistical indicators, 12,887 charts and over 1.91 million data. Users can easily search the annual, quarterly and monthly statistics of China.



Picture 3: China statistical database (English Version)

- The online version of China Statistical Yearbook. China Statistical Yearbook can be uploaded on the official website of NBS of China within one month after its publication.

Users have online access to the Statistical Yearbook from 1996 to 2012 and can download the excel forms for free.



Picture 4: The online version of China Statistical Yearbook

3. Educating media practitioners in statistics.

It's necessary to educate media practitioners in statistics. Firstly, journalists still play an important role to be opinion leaders. Their insights in the articles effect the public greatly. It's saying in China that to catch bandits, first catch the ring leader. Secondly, there are increasingly young media practitioners. They may misread or misuse statistics because they have no statistical working experience, so as to cause public misunderstanding of statistical data. Therefore, it's important to strengthen the training of young journalists.

The National Bureau of Statistics of China carry out the following activities to train media practitioners every year.

- The statistical knowledge seminars for media practitioners. It has been launched once a year since 2009. Hundreds of journalists would be invited to participate in the seminar to learn and discuss statistics. Every year there will be different subjects, for example, the subject in 2011 was *Household Surveys*, and that of 2012 was *Reform of Statistical System and the Quality of Statistical Data*. In addition to learning statistical knowledge, journalists also participate in panel discussion and propose recommendations about statistical work.
- Field interview at the frontline of statistics. Every year, the NBS of China would lead journalists to the frontline to study and research the grassroots work of statisticians, so that they could obtain the first hand information about the process of data collection and production. For example, in 2012, journalists had a chance to experience the process of price collection with price collectors in different provinces, and talk with household

bookkeepers and check their accounting books. Most journalists welcomed this kind of field interview as it's interesting and intuitive.

- China Statistics Open Day. On September 20th every year, the NBS of China would invite the public to visit their office and China Statistical Exhibition. A symposium is also held that day to answer some widely-concerned questions of statistics. Journalists are invited and always the main askers.
- Briefing meeting. It's used to explain some key statistical issues to reporters. Compared with a news conference, it's much more relaxed and reporters could ask detailed questions and acquire deeper knowledge.

4. Merging internal and external strategies.

The public relations of statistical organizations usually include internal public relations and external public relations. The main targets of external public relations include the media, associations, users, respondents, etc. The internal public relations mainly aim at employees in the organization.

Some people think that an organization should focus on external public relations, but pay little attention to its employees. This kind of view is biased. Practice has proved that an organization suffered a crisis of public opinion should pay equal attention to the media, the relevant parties, and its internal staff. If employees are not timely guided, journalists may get the opportunity to find negative reports.

Based on the above understanding, the NBS of China are now making more efforts on internal public relations.

- Setting up a liaison team for public affairs. The News office selected 2-3 part-time liaison for public affairs from each departments of NBS. The responsibilities of liaison are to monitor public opinion, response to the crisis, provide information for official microblog. When a public opinion crisis happened, they would be the first to understand the ins and outs of crisis, and could properly response to the media and the public.
- Organizing media literacy training for employees. Nowadays, a statistician not only need to be an expert in statistics, but also need to know how to deal with the media and communicate statistics. The NBS of China conducts an annual media literacy training for all employees. The contents of the training include how to deal with the media, how to be an excellent spokesman, how to interpret statistics, etc. Teachers are domestic and international media experts. Besides, employees in the news office who are not major in statistics would have a number of training opportunities to learn professional statistical knowledge.

Conclusion

In summary, the traditional media is still valuable in communicating statistics. Meanwhile, In order to meet the needs of the younger age groups, statistical organizations have to develop more visualizing and fashionable products to showcase statistics through new media.