

Influence of internet on dissemination of official statistics

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In the pre-internet period official statistics was first available in paper publications, computer printouts and later on magnetic tapes and CD-ROMs. In time statistical tables became more detailed and gradually more written material such as statistical analysis, explanation notes on concepts, sources and methods, and charts were added to facilitate user interpretation and maximisation of the use of statistics. Due to electronic data processing time series became available. The main users in the pre-internet period - researchers and government officials - were statistically literate. Less statistically literate users such as journalists (who are among the most important disseminators of official statistics) and the general public were not major user groups at that time.

The Internet has introduced a revolution in dissemination, communication and accessibility of official statistics in the second half of the 1990s. Web 1.0 is mostly about publishing static HTML pages on a server and it upgraded dissemination, communication and accessibility of official statistics substantially with the creation of NSO websites. Official statistics became more visible, accessible and used more than ever by different user groups (media, general public, researchers, students, policy makers, businesses, non-governmental institutions, etc.). Involvement of user groups became more influential than ever before. It resulted in developments of new products and services (extraction of data from electronic databases, storytelling and writing for web, better metadata, reports aiming to build trust in the system of official statistics).

Web 2.0 (from 2000 on) is more dynamic and interactive. It has enabled NSOs to make decisive steps in the so-called knowledge continuum (data, information, knowledge, wisdom) mainly through self-help tools for data visualisation and animation and upgrading statistical literacy. Notification e-mails, RSS and bookmark and share tools have become frequently used by NSOs. In some countries with a large number of institutions cooperating in the production of official statistics portals for official statistics have been introduced. In some NSOs wiki technology to produce Wikipedia-style portals for presentation of statistics has been introduced. A decisive step in communication among official statisticians was achieved by sharing visualisation tools.

Emerging Web 3.0 (semantic web, data web) is all about improvements in technology. We have to remember that technological improvements have always resulted in major improvements in official statistics (computers, Web 1.0). Web 3.0 technology will enable remix, reuse and repurpose of official statistics on the web in quantity and ways never seen before. Different data will compete in the virtual world of the internet and official statistics has a lot of advantages in "competing" with other data: attached metadata, quality reports, long time series, regional breakdowns, comparison in international context.