

# **The mass media as a bridge between official agencies and data users in the popularization of official statistics : from the perspective of a news editor**

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## **1. Mass Media and Statistics**

### **1.1 " Numbers " can figure the worlds.**

In today, people are living with " numbers" (statistics) one way or another. However only few of them realize the fact whenever they are making a decision or persuading the others, statistics are playing a leading role. Also, statistics can tell the quality of life and society.

In newspaper or Broadcasting field , statistics are getting more use of their rooms. Because statistics make the communication more efficient and contribute to increase the reliability of contents on newspaper or even the facts.

From the official statistics, we can see the behavior of economics, politics and society even culture of their country. That is the "Numbers" are the picture of our lives. With that matter, in the point of view of reporter who delivers the story within limited time and space, "numbers" are very attractive symbols.

### **1.2 " Numbers " sometimes tell lies**

Improper interpretation and use of the numbers could make the reporters lie . Sometimes misleading of statistics can be seen on mass media. Who should be blamed ? May be the person who produce the statistics , deliver the statistics or both ? As matter of fact, reporters who deliver the statistics, can not escape from the responsibilities of misleading the statistics than producing statistics. And getting over that responsibilities will be suggested later.

### **1.3 Numbers = Science ?**

Should numbers or statistics are to be considered as science or not ? Sometime it should be "Yes" , sometimes it can be " No ". In case of " No ", the numbers(statistics) can be interpreted by several different way with reasonable proof. Therefore when you define the

science as an exact one solution it may be "No". However specially official statistics is being used by deciding major policies affecting peoples' lives then in terms lives, it is really hard to make a decision with a certain condition.

#### **1.4 How reporters handle the statistics**

Most of time, reporters focus on the numbers itself. Therefore, it is easy to miss the real meaning of the statistics behind the numbers.

Then, with lack of knowledge and definition of a certain statistics, it obviously will put the numbers to wrong spot . In that sense, after producing and releasing the statistics done by government office , delivering and explaining to people are left to reporters. Therefore, reporters should know how and why the statistics are produced and especially right and exact definitions of the statistics should be in reporters mind. That gives the more reliable story about statistics to readers.

Reporters should give the people to read the statistics right way without any doubt. Without any doubt, these days statistics are always inf mass media and reporters' story.

## **2. Reliability of the institute that produce statistics**

### **2.1 Reliability of Official Statistics**

From the point of reporters view, statistics are not just " facts " , they are more likely to the " values" which include the judgement and it is important from which angle the reporters are looking numbers . Therefore , reporters are ought to dig into the bottom of the data themselves.

### **2.2 Statistics are being produced by group of wealth, knowledge and power**

In general, official statistics are produced by government office with experts. Then reporters are the interpreters of numbers(statistics) . When announcing or reporting the official statistics, it sometimes was influenced by government who produced and distribute the official statistics. And rearrangement of the official statistics on purpose will easily give the untrue story to people.

### **2.3 Are statistics the tools to govern ?**

In developing country, sometimes official statistics can be use of tool of govern the people. And also the statistics can be used as a tool for the commercialism, such as advertisement.

One other miss use of official statistics could be caused by using the different definition at same statistics. For instant, unemployment rate can be differently calculated by ILO or OECD and announce the different values for each other.

Popularization of statistics will be more important in developing country and at the same time statistics can be misused more often in those countries.

## **2.4 Mass Media should play the role of bridge between readers and official statistics**

In general , since office of producing official statistics are belong to the government system, official statistics can be easily affected by bureaucracy. And for that matter , specially unemployment rate or consumer index can be easily used by political purpose. It is more likely to happen in the developing countries. Therefore bringing the exact news and informations about statistics to the people is now really depends on reporters through mass media.

## **2.5 The same of survey can leads to the totally different conclusion**

Statistically, it is obvious and totally true that the results of survey could be different from each distinct survey. Therefore, official statistics should be strict with the reliability on the " numbers " with officially announced survey methods. After that , mass media should be the one which give right directions of using statistics to data user. Sometime, for political reason, official statistics can be a strained interpretation. Korea lost its credibility quite a lot during the IMF occasion with imprecise statistics about foreign debt and international reserves. We now realized that exact statistics and right interpretation are very important in everywhere.

## **3. What is the best way of reporting and using of statistics**

### **3.1 Are the mass media really interpret the statistics right ?**

At interpreting the statistics, understanding of statistics should be rely on not only the positive side but also the negative side. Form time to time , same statistics ("number") can be interpreted differently by different groups which have the different view point. For instant, consumer index, wage rate, rate of labor force, etc. Therefore, when reporters report the statistics, they should understand the value and definition first.

And also demanding the needed statistics to the office where produce the statistics can be the one of mass media' role.

### **3.2 Exhibit of new statistics**

In case of Korea, we need more and precise statistics about environment, public health ,welfare statistics. Specially environmental statistics meets only 5

### **3.3 Needs of the education**

One of the reporters' role is making a statistics easier and more understandable to readers. In order to do that role, the statistics knowledge of reporters is important and regular and systematic education program should be arranged for the reporters. Moreover each press needs to create the position which screens the statistics before printed.

### **3.4 Living with statistics and realizing that at early age**

These day, we all are living with statistics. Even though, we don't realize that we use the statistics without proper knowledge from early age. So, it is really important that people who read newspaper or faced TV-news need to have basic ideas or ways of understand the official statistics which is delivered through mass media. In National Statistical Office(NSO), we have statistical concept competition for elementary school 4 to 6<sup>th</sup> grad kids, we call it " Children Statistics Competition" , then that way, from early age, they will be getting know the statistics better.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1 Statistics are the honest and mirror of society**

Statistics can show past , present and future. Reading the story behind statistics(number) can give you the answers of lives and show the ways of forwarding or backwarding . Therefore, statistics are the basic public infrastructure that need public investment. There should be more expert and professionals in the public statistical bureau. At the same time the education for the reporters and for editorial desks are essential.