



Promotion of official statistics and communication strategies targeting different age groups in Palestine

Daliah Shahin

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Daliah Shahin
dshaheen@pcbs.gov.ps
**Palestinian Central Bureau of
Statistics (PCBS)**

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ABSTRACT

Official statistics in contemporary societies is an important element in the planning, development, research and analysis process that will contribute effectively to decision-making processes in all sectors which will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) has developed strategic goals to promote the use of statistics through the development of measures to increase user awareness through the use of modern technologies, in addition to joining the most important international dissemination standards such as (GDDS, SDDS).

PCBS continuously seeks to present official statistics in a clear, accessible and understandable manner. It also developed new means and tools for the dissemination of statistics to guarantee keeping up with technological developments in order to ensure the access of official Palestinian statistics to all beneficiaries, in order to reduce the reliance on traditional means of dissemination and to increase transparency with the user audience, PCBS explained the statistics by displaying the metadata on the official website.

The paper will discuss the methods used by PCBS to promote its statistical outputs in order to reach the different sectors of society with its institutions and individuals, decision-makers covering different age groups and the approach used by PCBS to deal with statistical literacy, by providing the statistical figure in a simplified and easy manner for data users. In addition to releasing the interactive screen for school students, and it will also explain the future role of partners in the national statistical system.

In this context, we will review the activities of PCBS to achieve its objectives by presenting the following fields:

- Increasing statistical awareness among school students through a range of activities.
- Website for children, which was established and the competition that was launched in 2017 (competition statistics in numbers).
- Develop and update the official website of PCBS.
- Create a PCBS page on social media sites.
- Use Social media in the work of PCBS and will be shown in numbers about the level of satisfaction received by users about these media that were measured through the users' satisfaction survey.

Finally, the paper shows PCBS intention and its future steps towards continuing the way to reach all users and develop the work according to the latest technologies used globally, and the ambition of PCBS is to develop a strong communication strategy that increases users trust and increases statistical knowledge.

Keywords:

Statistical Outputs, Communication, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Dissemination.

INTRODUCTION

The world today is like a small village because of the accelerated development information technology. The process of communication and dissemination of information has become so fast that it has spread to all parts of the world, which has greatly affected human life and brought about a radical change. While evidence based policy-making is becoming more and more important in our society, the understanding of facts and figures behind policies still faces communication gaps between data users and producers. Statisticians need to understand what users are looking for, and as the world now depends entirely on technology, this promoted the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in the recent years to make big efforts to make its dissemination system become more efficient through abiding by modern standards.

On the other hand, PCBS aims to increase its communication with the data users and followers through adopting and using the most up to date tools and practices and to reach to different sectors of society for that PCBS has developed procedures to raise awareness of users which will increase the trust of users in official statistics. In addition, the activation and improvement of data dissemination process through the utilization of modern techniques, such as social media and web-based tools (Interactive Dissemination), in order to reach users in better way, all these efforts lead to the goal of developing statistical literacy.

OVER VIEW

In line with PCBS strategy to keep up with the IT continuous development and build up the confidence of the different data users and followers towards widening the scope of reaching the largest number of the public, PCBS launched its first website in 1996, where it covers all PCBS statistical publications, news, services and statistical data.

PCBS developed its dissemination policies, that aim to develop methods for dissemination and joining the most important international dissemination standards such as (GDDS and SDDS). PCBS officially subscribed to the IMF's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) in April 2012, which is fully compliant with other international statistical principles and standards.

In addition, PCBS always seeks to develop its capacity and performance in using the websites and social media platforms in order to increase the interaction of the data users and followers with the statistical news and publications of PCBS.

Therefore, PCBS, in 2017, launched sub-websites interactive version: Censuses website, Statistical Atlas website, Students web portal, and to ensure better development it has formed a team for dissemination on social media. Since then PCBS has been committed to disseminate its productions through its social media accounts in parallel with the other dissemination channels.

PCBS aims to increase its communication with the data users and followers through adopting and using the most up to date tools and practices in the field of social media, where PCBS together with civil society organizations, ministries and the private sector joined forces to lead and coordinate efforts to localize Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs) indicators and monitor and provide any relevant data.

STATISTICAL LITERACY

Statistical literacy is the ability to understand statistical data and results that are needed in our daily lives, by promoting a set of skills, such as the ability to perform analysis on data, read graphics...etc.

In line with the concept of literacy, PCBS launched its new strategy which is valid for the period 2018-2022 to focus on all users of all different sectors of society in different age groups "citizen first", including the development of dissemination tools.

The ambition of PCBS is to develop a strong communication strategy that increases the use of statistical data as the foundation for better planning and better political decisions to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and to give the citizens a better basis for their personal choices, so that increases statistical knowledge and statistical literacy.

In line with the data revolution and technological development, where the Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017 data showed that the illiteracy rate among individuals (15 years and above) in Palestine was 3.3% in 2017, which encouraged the investment in statistical literacy to increase the awareness of the value of official statistics that will empower people to use it in decision making. PCBS aims to improve literacy in statistics as well as the citizens' own use of the statistical outputs for personal decisions.

DEVELOPED DISSEMINATION POLICIES AND TOOLS

As stated in the Code of Practice for Palestine's Official Statistics, official statistics is a public commodity accessible to all users free of charge without any discrimination among them. Official statistics must therefore be presented in a clear and easily understandable manner that does not necessarily require specialized statistical expertise. The results of 2017 census showed that the percentage of households that own a smartphone was 84.2% in Palestine. The results also showed that 43.1% of the households have a computer (Desktop or Laptop or Tablet and iPad) in Palestine. As for the use of computers among individuals, 61.4% of the households have users of computer; therefore, PCBS always seeks to develop means for dissemination of statistics and keeps up with the latest technological developments.

PCBS developed its dissemination policies since 2014, with the aim to develop methods for dissemination of statistics in the Palestinian society. PCBS developed dissemination channels to ensure that all users have access to the Palestinian official statistics as well as dealing with their feedback in accordance to the international recommendations and standards with a focus on utilizing Info graphics and Data Visualization in disseminating statistical data products issued by PCBS, where the reliance on traditional printed copies was reduced and contributed to the improvement of dissemination channels:

- Data Visualization Techniques
- PCBS Portal and Statistical Calendar
- Social Media, and YouTube Account
- Mobile Applications/SMS
- Customers' services section and reception section at PCBS
- Public Use Data File (PUF)
- Interactive Maps and Atlases
- Scientific Research Center and library

TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION AND INCREASING STATISTICAL AWARENESS

Now, we in the statistical community have to rise to this huge challenge to put in place the systems together and analyze the data needed, and to fill the many data gaps using all the tools at our disposal (both traditional and innovative sources). It is necessary to strengthen the national statistical systems and also keep up with the developments of the data revolution ,including the mission of increasing statistical literacy through creating, supporting and participating in statistical literacy activities and promotion around the world.

Another aim is to bring together different actors: producers of statistics, statisticians, users. The most important is raising awareness towards SDGs inside PCBS, and on the national level (governmental, public sectors, private sectors, civil society, and research centers). To promote the use of official statistics in decision making, awareness of statistics importance should be consolidated among all categories of the Palestinian society. A series of activities was carried out to achieve fundamental role in consolidating statistical awareness and those activities can support the National Statistical System (NSS) as follows:

1.Develop and update the official website of PCBS

PCBS website and online dissemination is the first and best channel in dissemination, and the site has been established on the internet (www.pcbs.gov.ps) since 1996, the website provides data to researchers, international organizations, media and decision makers with information about a certain topic and area of interest with all tables and statistical data.

The website has been updated based on the recommendations of the technical missions and the results of the user satisfaction survey 2010. The update was made during 2013. In 2017, a significant upgrade was made to the website and it was launched in its new design. So that the site contains a large amount of information, the most important of which:

- Statistical data, reports, statistical news and press releases
- Key statistical indicators such as living standards, health, population, agriculture...etc.
- Public Use Data File (PUF)
- Pal Info database
- Census Info database
- Environmental Information System
- Geographic database
- Index of documented surveys
- Statistical terms and indicators
- Students web portal
- Statistical calendar
- A portal for e-services

In this context the results of the last user satisfaction survey showed that the average satisfaction of all users on the official website of PCBS is approximately 71%.

The website had 240,000 visitors in 2017, and expected by end of 2018 to reach 250,000, these numbers are increasing continuously.

2. Students web portal

Out of PCBS dedication to raise awareness among students on the use of statistical figures in their academic and professional life, it established a special portal on its website contains statistical data presented in a simple and interesting manner to enable students associate the figures to their life, especially that the Palestinian curricula include many topics related to statistics.

The basic and secondary levels of education are of great importance in terms of professional and scientific literacy in all fields. This stage is the basis for shaping and building the scientific background and basic practical skills of the students, and provides statistical figures in a simplified and easy to use. To raise awareness and enhance statistical knowledge in this category currently will be reflected positively on all sectors of society in the future as the outputs of this stage is the upstream of all professions and jobs in the future.

The Statistics Promotion Team was established on 2013, whose main task was to present a plan of action for the promotion of statistics for school students category dissemination of statistical awareness among school students through a range of activities one of these activities is the launching of students portal in 2017 which includes the following:

- Definition of statistics
- General statistics in various fields of health, environment, unemployment, poverty and education, what students need and answer their questions.
- The statistics are compiled on the site in a smooth way through the link "Did you know?".
- A special game, where students go to the site to answer the statistical questions of the game in a way that is interesting and attractive
- Resources, figures and statistics entitled "Towards a better future"
- Two animated films for children and the public using PCBS data.
- Child friendly data, information, and tools (animation short segments).

The promotion of statistics for school students is particularly important for the following considerations:

1. School students comprise about a quarter of the population of Palestine, where the number of students in schools in the scholastic year 2017/2018 reached about 1,253,000 students, and the number of schools was 2,998 schools.
2. The promotion of statistics for this category will reach as many citizens as possible and reach every home, which increases cooperation in the collection of statistical data.
3. Raising awareness of the importance of scientific research and developing students' abilities to research, and linking the theoretical aspects of the study to the practical ones.

3. Create a PCBS page on social media sites

The media plays a key and pivotal role in this user-producer relation; however, statisticians' goal is to reach a larger public, when one talks about social networks, the examples mentioned are Facebook, Twitter first, then comes LinkedIn or YouTube where studies have shown 87% of Facebook users is the highest number of Internet subscribers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In order to keep up with the statistics technological revolution of social media and to ensure better development PCBS has formed a team for dissemination on social media mid of 2014. Since then PCBS has been committed to disseminate its productions through its social media accounts.

Objectives of using social media:

1. Helps in reaching and getting in contact with more people and users.
2. Social media challenges the traditional ways of searching and accessing information.
3. Many debates and exchanges of knowledge take place and opinions are formed.
4. Ensuring that the available statistics are used to the maximum extent possible in informing debate, decision-making and further research.

Steps taken by PCBS to activate its accounts on social media sites:

- Social media team was formed in 2014.
- Prepared a study of the feasibility of using social media sites in the system and defined what are the target groups and related dissemination objectives. Carried out analysis of opportunities and identified potential difficulties, conducted a benchmarking analysis on good practices.
- Contract with several experts in the field of media and communication to benefit from their expertise and recommendations.
- Recommending the use of Twitter as a professional site in the first place, which is the approach of most national statistical offices.
- PCBS started using facebook and instagram in 2015.
- Using linked-in in 2017.
- Currently all the activities of PCBS are published on all platforms, and the videos are posted on PCBS channel on YouTube.

The following table shows the number of followers of PCBS page on social media in 2017 and expected by end of 2018:

Site	End of 2017	Expected by the end of 2018
Facebook	59k likes	90k likes
Twitter	Following 16 Followers 176	Following 20 Followers 250
Instagram	Followers 585	Followers 600
YouTube	54 user	80 user
Linked in	59 user	200 user
Number of visitors to the website	240,000	250,000

4.Data Visualization Techniques

The global trend in dissemination of statistical data is by use of interactive visual techniques that do not require previous knowledge in statistics or in reading of statistical figures. Such techniques enable us reach different users, mainly the general public and students with an appropriate and interesting method in order to achieve that, PCBS developed an interactive visual techniques; here below are some examples of data visualization that were developed by PCBS and its partners:

- 1- Two Films were produced: (Karmel's visit to Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics).
- 2- Seven TV Short Flashes were produced and presented on Palestine TV (Economics, Unemployment, Education, Youth, Energy, Poverty, Population).
- 3- Several infographics were produced on different subjects.
- 4- Produced an interactive game for students and it is uploaded on the students web portal.

Data visualization is one of the tools for statistical literacy, where data distribution is allowed through different shows and designs, to be more aware and knowledgeable about interpreting and producing visualizations of information and quick analysis and decision-making.

On the other hand, the expansion of the field will require us to continue learning and developing as change is inevitable, where we need to adapt to fulfil our requirements and consider good practices of data visualization as it is a practical tool that helps in improving understanding, and if used correctly it would contribute to the change in the way we disseminate and interpret data.

5. Infographics in data display

Infographic drawings are visual representations that highlight the information you want to publish clearly without too many words. It takes complex data and makes it visible and interesting. Infographics is one of the most popular ways to share statistics with your audience. Not only are infographics eye-catching, but also they make data more engaging and impactful.

In theory, graphs are used to make subjects easier to understand. We can also say that it is another form of presenting information / data in a new way that helps to convey complex ideas in a clear and beautiful way. However, they are often created to make the topic less boring to readers. Infographic works change the way people think in terms of graphics, information and storytelling.

Why do we prefer to use visual content?

We rely on images in many things in our lives. We see the picture in street signs and banners for films and websites. Images have been used to express information for a long time and these are some of the reasons why we use images and visual content:

- 1- Getting attention: Visual content enhances the retention of information and highlights it better than just text.
- 2- Simplicity: We are simply ready for rich visual information, and we can understand the most complex information when presented visually.
- 3- Credibility: It is one of the biggest reasons for the use of optical means. When you put statistical figures in an article, there will be a question. While if we put the statistical figures in optical form they will become a reality. Each form of visual information lends credibility.

Now at PCBS several infographics were produced on different subjects printed and disseminated on PCBS facebook page and website. PCBS aims to continue to depend on visual imaging (infographics) as a tool to present data in a simplified way to users and the public more than the tables.

6. Competition statistics in numbers " My future in figures"

PCBS organized a statistical competition entitled “My future in figures” in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and with funding from the European Union. The competition targeted students in grade ten in private and government schools nation-wide, since it is a detrimental year in the students’ choice of academic path, and the competition focused on statistical activities carried by PCBS in order to attract the attention to the role and importance of official statistics in the Palestinian life. The final stage of the competition was held in Ramallah on December 12th 2017 in a special ceremony to honor the winners of the first five ranks and to thank all the participants in the different phases of the competition.

The competition was as follows:

- The number of participating schools reached 89 public and private schools from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- The first rounds and second rounds were prepared by the team based on the data published on the website. The first round was conducted through the directorates of education in the different governorates. 209 students participated in this round.
- The second round was carried in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where 70 students participated.
- A list of 20 students was selected to participate in the final round.
- The final ceremony was attended by 115 students, who participated in all stages of the competition and six students from Gaza Strip were among the 20 participants in the final round.

Finally and in order to encourage the students, prizes were distributed to the winners.

PCBS aims to stimulate the awareness of statistics by promoting statistical literacy and curiosity among students, while encouraging teachers to use new educational materials based on official statistics. Our goal is to teach statistics concepts. Most importantly, we want the participants to have basic knowledge in statistics, the history of statistics, the phases and process of statistical/information production, and have a basic understanding that the numbers mean data.

7.The Play

PCBS is always trying to find more creative and unique channels of dissemination to the data produced, raise awareness to the importance of data and make it more appealing and approachable.

For the first time, PCBS coordinated with a local theater to create a theater play titled " A Move In The Right Direction" in which data on gender gap issues were raised. The play was not only played live but it was video taped and shared on our website and social media channels .

This unique activity was planned and implemented with the kind support of the Representative Office of Norway to the Palestinian Authority aims to raise awareness to the importance of the production of gender statistics as part of PCBS' dissemination strategy which focuses on presenting statistics in a non-traditional and approachable manner.

PARTNERSHIPS

PCBS seeks to enhance cooperation with the partners in NSS; ministries and government institutions, NGO, Private Organization...etc, to implement several projects and statistical surveys and disseminate joint statistical reports and press releases several actors are able to contribute to better statistical literacy,

PCBS build partnerships with relevant institutions such as Ministry of Education and Higher Education and local media.

In addition, PCBS has adopted the policy of implementing the user-producer dialogue, through which PCBS demonstrates its most recent indicators and statistical data and consults with the users their needs and priorities of data; this program is implemented in all the governorates and targets data users and producers, which helps to identify and meet different needs, as part of PCBS efforts to promote statistical literacy.

As part of PCBS efforts to produce official statistical data and implementation strategic objectives, PCBS established a comprehensive and updated database of SDGs indicators, and there are efforts in coordination with the partners in NSS to establish, develop and implement a National Quality Assurance Framework that includes unified standards for statistical products to enhance the quality of official statistics.

As a conclusion, PCBS has taken clear steps to statistical literacy, after it has defined the user's needs of data, among of which continuing improvement of the quality of its outputs, establishing partnerships with various sectors and developing the methods of publishing to reach official statistical products that are clear, accurate and accessible to users.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES

1. Many political, economic... events occur in Palestine, due to its exceptional situation, that spread rapidly on social media sites, where attention goes to those news more than Palestinian statistical data.
2. Lack of public knowledge and interest in the importance of statistical information and data and its impact on improving the living conditions and strengthening the various institutions and sectors, because of the impression among the public that figures and statistical information belongs only to decision makers, researchers and media professionals.
3. Different interests and priorities of the public needs, which affect the way they browse websites and social media sites.
4. The prevailing image of statistics in general public is that it is numbers, tables and data, which are considered as difficult to understand and deal with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since 30 % of the total population in Palestine are youth, it is very important to reach this group and encouraging them to use statistical data. It is suggested to collaborate actively with youth associations and teachers' associations and school administrations to increase the use of statistical data, and spread statistical information among the students of schools, universities, youth and the public in general.
- Developing dissemination policies based on modern methods and techniques in disseminating data associated with modern statistical standards and activities at the local and global levels, including keeping up with the development of dissemination tools.
- Continuous work on developing statistical products and outputs that meet the needs of users, availability and accessibility of open data for all segments of society and their use and participation, by website which is constantly updated.
- Developing different kinds of strategic partnerships in official statistics among all relevant parties from the public sector, NGOs and private sector to increase the reliance on the statistical figures in policy-making and planning.

- Focusing on capacity building, new methodologies, and mobilizing the resources for developing SDGs monitoring system.
- Measuring the satisfaction of users of electronic dissemination channels issued by PCBS through a mini questionnaire on PCBS website to ensure continuous improvement throughout the year.

The vision is to encourage increased use of PCBS statistics, through developing a strong communication strategy to improve literacy in statistics as well as the citizens' own use of the statistical outputs for personal decisions, where the strategy shall help in building the credibility and image of PCBS.

Main objective of future strategy is to enhance the interaction of the public with the website and the accounts of PCBS on social media sites, in addition to several sub-goals such as bringing the concept of statistics closer to the general public, bringing the public closer to PCBS and knowing its role, and the importance of this role, which intersects with the conditions of society and with the development plans, raising awareness among the media and the public about the importance of statistical data at the national and international levels.

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