Who is our audience and how are they getting their facts?

Sahir Khan

OECD Committee of Statistics and Statistical Policy
October 5-6, 2017
Paris, France
The case of the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office

BACKGROUND
The Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office

- A legislative budget office accountable to the Canadian Parliament
- PBO* mandate includes independent analysis into the economy, nation’s finances, appropriations and costing
- Supports four parliamentary committees (HoC Finance, HoC Public Accounts, Senate Finance, HoC Estimates)
- 12-15 staff and CAD2.8 million annual budget
- Kevin Page, Canada first PBO, and I now run a think tank at the intersection of money and politics at the University of Ottawa

*Under Kevin Page, the PBO was considered, by some, to be among the most media savvy organizations in Canada
Objectives of the presentation

1. Examining public confidence in institutions
2. Understanding your institutional and political context
3. Strategies for effective communications
Declining trust in institutions – the Canadian context

CONFIDENCE
Trust in all four institutions declines in 2017

Per cent trust in the four institutions of government, business, media and NGOs, 2016 vs. 2017

Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. Q11-020. Below is a list of institutions. For each one, please indicate how much you trust that institution to do what is right using a nine-point scale, where one means that you “do not trust them at all” and nine means that you “trust them a great deal.” (Top 4 Box: Trust) General Population, Canada.
Gap between Informed Public and Mass largest yet

Per cent trust in the four institutions of government, business, media and NGOs, 2012 to 2017

Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. The Trust Index is an average of a country’s trust in the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs. Informed Public and Mass Population, Canada.
Credibility of leadership slipping fast

Per cent who rate each spokesperson as extremely/very credible, and change from 2016 to 2017

Financial Industry Analyst and CEO credibility decreased the most, both are at an all-time low

Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. Q130-747 Below is a list of people. In general, when forming an opinion of a company, if you heard information about a company from each person, how credible would the information be—extremely credible, very credible, somewhat credible, or not credible at all? (Top 2 Box, Very/Extremely Credible) General Population, Canada, question asked of half the sample.
2016: The Inversion of Influence

Source: 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer. The Trust Index is an average of a country's trust in the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs. Informed Public and Mass Population, Canada.
Understanding the political environment
Context – the UK environment

Boris Johnson 'misused' figures with £350m Brexit claim, UK statistics chief says
Context – the PBO environment
Context - diversity of topics posed challenges...

...so our strategy had to reflect this reality
The stakeholder universe

- Citizenry
- PBO's Peers
- Think Tanks and Academics
- Media
- Executive and/or Legislative
- PBO
The Canadian PBO Case: balancing rigor and accessibility

STRATEGY
Roland Barthes - Wrestling vs boxing

- This public knows that boxing is a sport, based on a demonstration of excellence.
- A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time.
- In wrestling, the logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future.
- Wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone, without ever extending to the crowning moment of a result.

Thinkprogress.org – “This French philosopher is the only one who can explain the Donald Trump phenomenon”
September, 2015

Some actors have turned politics into wrestling and have found a receptive constituency, while the institutions that make up our democracy are still boxing.
Strategy

- **Know your clients** – go to them and be proactive
- **Leadership** – no substitute for creating political space
- **Credibility** – must be established broadly and defended
- **Technology** – get out of the bunker. Social media may have saved the PBO

Both product and strategy must adjust to the realities of the environment
Thank-you

Sahir Khan
Exec. Vice President
Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy
+1 613 724 7503
sahir.khan@ifsd.ca
www.ifsd.ca