

Fake news, alternative facts, and National Statistics

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“How statistics lost their power” was the title of a recent long read article published by the Guardian. It describes how many people are turned-off by or have a mistrust of statistics. In particular it highlights the disconnect between some of the traditional measures we are familiar with, such as GDP and migration, and people’s personal experiences with society. It highlights recent political events such as Brexit and the US elections as evidence of a shift away from facts towards emotional driven decision making.

So we should all pack up our bags and head home – the world has had enough of statistics.

Or you could argue that now, more than ever, the world needs statistics and needs facts. The challenge is multi-faceted - from the measures we collect, to the way we use statistics in our communication. This presentation focuses on the work of the ONS to improve its communication of statistics with the general public – not an audience typically served well by NSIs. It will focus on how we’ve used different formats and approaches to increase the relevance of our statistics – thus increasing the engagement with the public. In particular it looks at techniques we’ve used to challenge commonly held misperceptions, or to increase the personal relevance of our statistics and connect with people’s emotions.