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Review of Google Trends. In A Few of Our Favorite Things: Part II edited by M. Mallon

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Google Trends

<http://www.google.com/trends/>

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Since 2004, Google has published its annual zeitgeist to illustrate the ideas that dominated searching during that year. Google Trends turns that glimpse into a daily examination, allowing users to see what people are searching, where those searches are taking place (75 countries), and track the popularity of searches over time (2004-present).

Google Trends has three main tools. The first, Trending Now, shows which searches are currently “hot.” Users can click on the words Trending Now to see an expanded list, and the “Load more” button at the bottom of the page allows users to go backward a few days at a time. All Hot Searches link to a news source that provides context as to why that person, event, etc., is being searched.

The second tool, Monthly Charts, presents the top five things being search in 47 predetermined categories like Athletes, Colleges & Universities, Movies, Politicians, TV Shows, etc. Monthly charts are available in the United States only; users can also choose “Entire Year” to get yearend charts and links to the annual zeitgeists. In other countries, fewer categories are tracked and these are reported in yearly totals only.

The final tool is the most interactive and is called Explore In Depth. It allows users to search for up to five terms and compares them over custom geographic areas, time periods, categories, or Google Product (such as Web Search, YouTube, etc.). Searches for Harry Potter, Narnia and Twilight show that Harry Potter is the most popular, and then connects to news

headlines that explain peaks in search activity. Geographical data starts worldwide, but it can be narrowed to the United States, a single state, and sometimes even a metro area or large city.

Another useful breakdown is related searches, which tells users what other people have typed in that is similar to their term, and how popular those terms are relatively. This is potentially useful to demonstrate to students why searching a variety of terms is important.

Google Trends defaults to searches based in the United States, but users can change the coverage to Global or a specific country. In addition, Trends can be viewed in 46 languages other than U.S. English by clicking on the gear icon and choosing “Language.”

In summary: In this era of big data, Google suggests using Trends to “build a story” (Google, 2014). And there are a lot of stories to be told. Professors can incorporate Trends into assignments that examine current events, pop culture, marketing/advertising, multiculturalism and geography. Scholarly and professional researchers can easily create and insert charts into research papers, reports or presentations or even embed interactive charts into websites and blogs; in addition, data can be exported into a CSV file for further manipulation. Librarians can utilize it to influence collections and programming decisions, or help small business owners with advertising purchases and search engine optimization. Overall, it is an engaging and illuminating tool that underscores just how much we can learn about a society by examining what it searches in Google.

Highly recommended

References

Google. (2014). Welcome to the Google Trends help center. *Trends Help*. Retrieved May 02, 2014, from <https://support.google.com/trends/?hl=en#topic=4365599>