

# Academic BRASS

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## **Using Digital Marketing Tools to Teach Market Research in Academic Libraries**

Libraries subscribe to a variety of databases and other resources that provide market research for students. Much of the content is curated and packaged for academic use, justifying high subscription costs. However, in today's digital age, there are free platforms for business information that can aid in students' research and also teach valuable lessons about the practical uses of marketing data. The purpose of this article will be to discuss several such tools and discuss how they could be used in our profession.

### **Facebook**

It's widely recognized that the social media platform Facebook has one of the largest troves of consumer data. There is the information that users manually provide--name, age, and residence--as well as information that is inferred, by way of page likes, browsing history, and Facebook's partnerships with third party data brokers. For a detailed look at the kind of data that Facebook might have on you, read Caitlin Dewey's article "98 data points that Facebook uses to target ads to you" in the *Washington Post* (2016). The list can be a little frightening if you're at all concerned with your online privacy, but for a marketer it's quite fascinating!

Facebook offers a business suite to anyone interested in placing ads or managing the audiences for their public pages. While you'll be paying if you want to actually post an ad using Facebook's targeted marketing, many of the tools they provide are available for free. Log in to your own Facebook account and go through the motions of [creating an ad](#); in a couple of clicks, you'll be offered targeting options and the number of Facebook users that fall into those audience criteria.

Take it a step further and utilize the [Audience Insights](#) feature. Using your target criteria, you'll be provided a dashboard breaking down your target market by age, gender, location, residence information, lifestyle segmentation, household information, spending habits, and even their most-liked pages for a variety of different categories (restaurant, newspaper, etc.). The result is a detailed snapshot of the exact audience you described using Facebook's targeting criteria.

Business schools teach marketing students to identify target markets and research how to reach those markets; while there are various paid resources that provide similar data, I'm not aware of another resource with quite this depth of personal, psychographic information for students and professionals to utilize, especially at no cost.

Beyond its utility as a marketing tool, it's also a great discussion starter on topics such as the collection of consumer data, how companies target consumers, and the broader ethics of data mining as a marketing tool. There are of course limitations to the assumptions one can draw from the data that's provided, and that's just as important to the discussion of research methods in a business context.

## **Google**

Just like Facebook, Google has amassed a wealth of data about its users. Google's [Think With Google](#) lets users peek at some of that data. Google's top asset is its search engine, and thus one of Google's strengths for marketers is the access it provides to search trends.

Google has two iterations of a tool that allows the public to analyze search interest for specific search strings over time and geography. [Google Trends](#) allows an interested user to see how public search interest in a product, company, or anything else has fallen or risen, dating back to 2004. Users can specify a time period, and can even compare search terms for context. Google's [Shopping Insights](#) goes a step further by aggregating related product searches into distinct categories and showing results at the city level. These results date back to 2014. For example, a student who wants to explore search patterns for competing retailers or product brands can get insight into search interest in these businesses. The popularity of different searches is displayed over time on a normalized index of 100. Google provides case studies and analysis of this data, both sharing broad consumer trends and highlighting how the tools can be used.

Google also offers tools beyond its search data. With its [Consumer Barometer](#), Google has packaged the results of consumer digital behavior survey data in the form of insight articles, as well as an intuitive graphical interface to view the aggregated survey data. The user can drill down by country, age, and income of the respondents (and more) to tease out trends in consumer search behavior, like kinds of devices used and how and where consumers research products.

## **Conclusion**

These tools can be used as powerful sources of marketing information, and with the exception of Consumer Barometer, they take advantage of what would be considered big data. Librarians can contribute to students' information and data literacy by sharing popular marketing tools with their students and starting conversations about how these datasets can be used. I encourage business librarians to be open to trying these new tools and have discussions with faculty members about how they could be incorporated into information literacy sessions or classroom assignments.

## References

Dewey, C. (2016, August 19) 98 personal data points that Facebook uses to target ads to you. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/08/19/98-personal-data-points-that-facebook-uses-to-target-ads-to-you/?utm\\_term=.4fb150d96fa8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/08/19/98-personal-data-points-that-facebook-uses-to-target-ads-to-you/?utm_term=.4fb150d96fa8)