



More Fans, More Moments: Basketball Madness Begins

Written by
Jordan Rost
Allison Mooney

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Consumer behavior has changed going into this year's March Madness. Now brands can connect with more fans at key moments in deeper ways. Here's how.

think with Google™

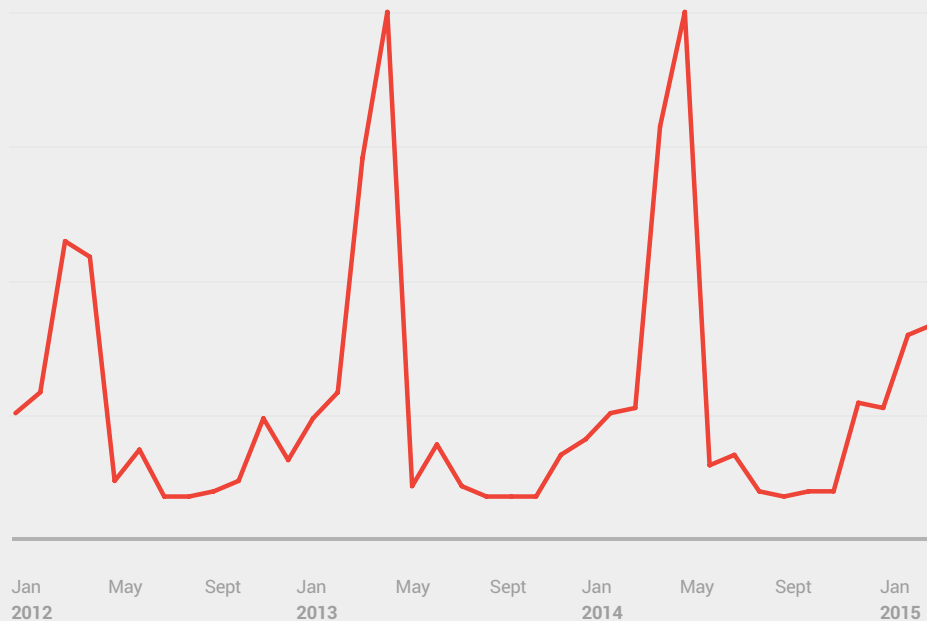
Competitive stat slinging at bars, trash talking in man caves, taunting rivals from the stands—this was the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament, aka March Madness, in years past. Today, it's much more. Mobile and video have taken center court. Conversations happen earlier. Stats fly faster. More people get in on the action. As a result, there's an opportunity for brands to connect with more fans at key moments in deeper ways. We looked at Google and YouTube data to see how consumer behavior has changed going into this year's tournament.

The Big Dance is bigger than ever

Despite its name, March Madness isn't just for crazed fanatics. Bracketology has become a national phenomenon, and fans of all stripes are united in fevered searching. This year, interest is rising for [college basketball](#) and [March Madness brackets](#), especially among casual fans, and they're using search for College Hoops 101.

- 30% of people in the U.S., an [estimated 90M](#), reportedly filled out a bracket last year, according to a Google Consumer Survey.¹ Meanwhile, the best-rated game last year [reached 4.7M people](#).
- Top questions about college basketball are from entry-level fans: "How long do college basketball games last?" and "how many quarters in college basketball?" dominated during the tournament last year.²
- So far this year, searches for "who won college basketball?" (another newbie question) have grown 65% since 2014. They're also starting earlier, meaning that would-be fans are spending more time getting up to speed³ (see graph below).

Searches for “Who Won College Basketball”



Source: Google Data, January 2012–February 2015, United States.

Coaching questions:

- Are you including casual fans in your strategy?
- How can you help newcomers get up to speed?

More moments to reach sports fans

Before, during, and after the game, fans use the web to stay connected to the action—checking scores, trash talking rivals, searching for stats. And because our devices are always with us, we reach for them in the moment. It's a reflex, as finely tuned as Pistol Pete's jumper. In fact, as we dig into the consumer trends around search, we're seeing that the 2015 tournament is set to be the most mobile ever.

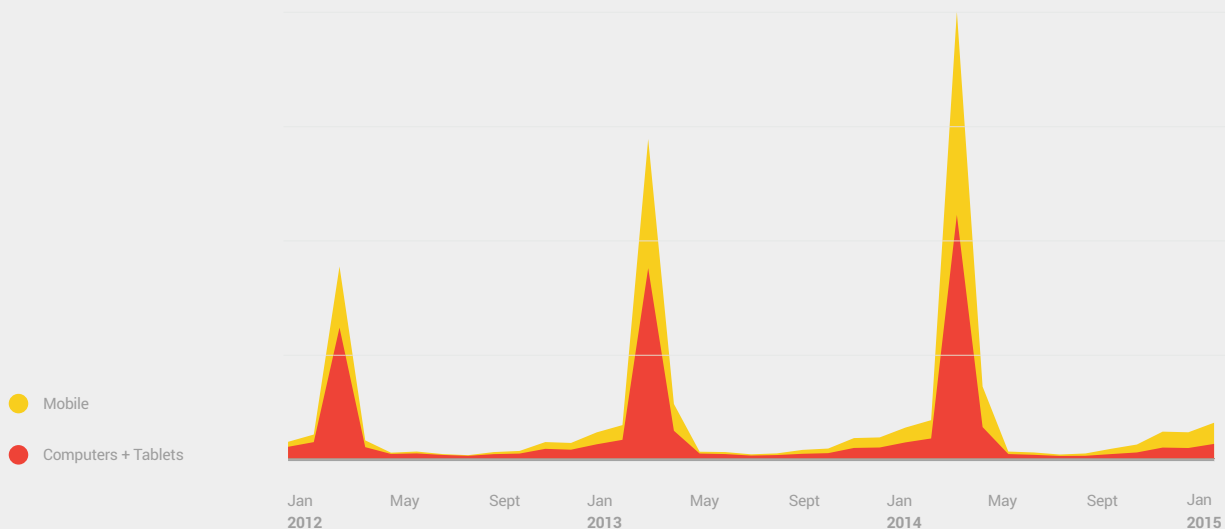
Before the tournament begins, bracket mania sweeps the nation.

- During March and April 2014, 40% of searches related to brackets were on **mobile**.⁴

Once the season starts, fans are searching about college ball and live-streaming games.

- Half of all searches related to college basketball were on mobile last March and April. Since then, mobile share of these searches has continued to grow, reaching 60% in January 2015 (see graph below).
- Last season, Turner saw 70 million live streams, and that's not just on big screens. [Turner Broadcasting reported](#) that 45 million of those streams came from its mobile app, March Madness Live.

Searches for March Madness and College Basketball by Device



Source: Google Data, January 1, 2012–January 1, 2015, United States.

During the game itself, second screens dominate.

- College basketball games are short, averaging just 105 minutes.⁵ And during that limited time, mobile users' attention is fragmented, but that means many new opportunities to connect. A Google Consumer Survey revealed that while [second-screening during games](#), fans are most likely to (in order): check other scores, watch highlights, search for information about players, and post on social.⁶

After the game, YouTube is a way to catch up on the highlights.

- Three in ten college basketball fans actually prefer to watch online highlights over the live game.⁷
- In 2014, the peak day for highlight searches was the day between the Final Four and the National Championship, a day when no games were scheduled.⁸

Coaching questions:

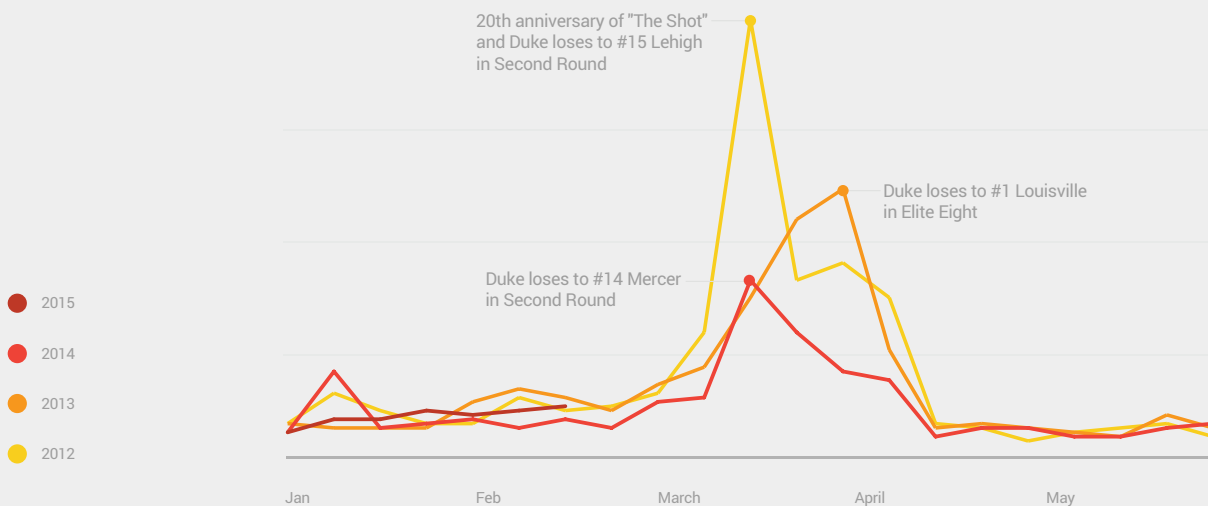
- How can you join the conversation in each of these moments?
- What can you do that adds to the action vs. being a distraction?
- Are you ensuring a great experience on mobile?

Deeper connections with diehards

For the true fanatics, engagement goes into overtime. During the season and beyond, many will be watching (and rewatching) the best moments from past games and tournaments online. Nostalgia for college hoops is on full display on YouTube, where the top college basketball-related videos are historical: compilations of big moments as well as full-length games and clips.

- [NCAA Vault](#) (part of NCAA OnDemand) has the largest online archive of March Madness highlights and tournament video footage, with nearly [300 NCAA men's basketball games from 1976 to 2011](#).
- Every March, Duke fans turn to Google to relive one of the greatest moments in college basketball history: 1992's game-winning jumper by Duke's Christian Laettner with 2.1 seconds left in overtime (otherwise known as ["The Shot"](#)). Fans' enthusiasm grows (and shrinks) based on how the Duke Blue Devils are doing in the tournament that year.
- In 2014, two-thirds of the hours watched on major conference YouTube channels came in months other than March or April (see graph below).

Searches Related to Former Duke Blue Devil Christian Laettner



Source: Google Trends, January 2012–January 2015, United States.

Coaching questions:

- How can you capture the power of nostalgia?
- Do you have old content or existing assets that you can put to work?

Tips before tip-off

This year's March Madness will be marked by college pride, memorable plays, Cinderella stories, and, well, a lot of [face paint](#). Before the nets are cut down and CBS plays "[One Shining Moment](#)" at the tournament's end, there will be many chances for marketers to engage this growing audience (after, too). Here are a few things to think about as the Madness begins:

- Are you including casual fans in your strategy?
- How can you help the newbies get up to speed?
- How can you join the conversation in the moments that matter?
- What can you do that adds to the action instead of being a distraction?
- Are you ensuring a great experience on mobile?
- How can you capture the power of nostalgia?
- Do you have old content or existing assets that you can put to work?



Jordon Rost
Analytical Insights Marketing, Google



Allison Mooney
Head of Trends & Insights, Google

Sources

- 1 Google Consumer Survey, February 2015 (n=1,506).
- 2 Google Data, March–April 2014, United States.
- 3 Google Data, January 2012–February 2015, United States.
- 4 Google Data, March–April 2014, United States.
- 5 Southall, R. M., Brown, M. T., Nagel, M. S., and Southall, C. (in press). Media March madness: A comparative content analysis of 2006 and 2011 NCAA Division I Men's National Basketball Tournament broadcasts. *International Journal of Sport Management*.
- 6 Google Consumer Survey, September 2014 (n=1,546).
- 7 Google Consumer Survey, September 2014 (n=1,546).
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