## SEARCH INSIGHTS:
# Tapping into Cultural Moments and Movements

WRITTEN BY
*Sonia Chung*

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### THE **RUNDOWN**

To keep their brands relevant, marketers need to stay attuned to the cultural zeitgeist. What are people interested in? What are they talking about? What's capturing their collective imagination? Search data can help us identify and monitor the big moments and movements that define our times. In our latest installment on search insights, we examine ways to spot these trends and conversations — from Kate and William's baby to gluten-free food — and how to use the insights to inform everything from a tweet to a new product line.

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Search data is a [power tool for brand marketers](#); it's an authentic pulse of what's on people's minds — a *lot* of people's minds. Fueled by trillions of searches, this data represents a mirror into the collective interests and intents of people across the globe. You can think of it as the biggest focus group in the world — one that's happening all the time, in real time.

That's a powerful dataset, but how do marketers tap into it? How can they use the insights they discover to inform marketing, creative, media and product ideas? There are many ways, from the simple to the sophisticated. We're looking at a handful of them over the course of several pieces.

In this piece, we'll explore how search can be a reflection of cultural trends — from specific moments to broader movements. In a world of increasing consumer control, dynamic markets and continuous digital connections, marketers must be hyper-aware of the latest trends, social conversations and notable news. Failing to do so puts brands at risk of becoming any number of cringe-worthy things — irrelevant, ignorant or just left behind. Using search as a constant barometer of the zeitgeist, brands can stay with — if not ahead of — the curve.

## Our shared cultural obsessions

A great example of search as a barometer of the zeitgeist relates to a big summer event: namely, the birth of baby George, son of British Royals Kate and William. Checking out Google Suggest, we can see that the baby name was the hottest topic amongst those curious about the new royal addition:

kate and william baby |name
kate and william baby **name**
kate and william baby **news**
kate and william baby **gender**
kate and william baby **due date**

Looking back, we can see that the term 'Kate and William' started to hit the blogosphere in 2007 when they became an item, and then their entire story of courtship, marriage and family has since been reflected online through search data. No surprise that searches for their wedding dwarf all others, as it was a globally broadcast event.

*Indexed Search Query Volume, Worldwide*
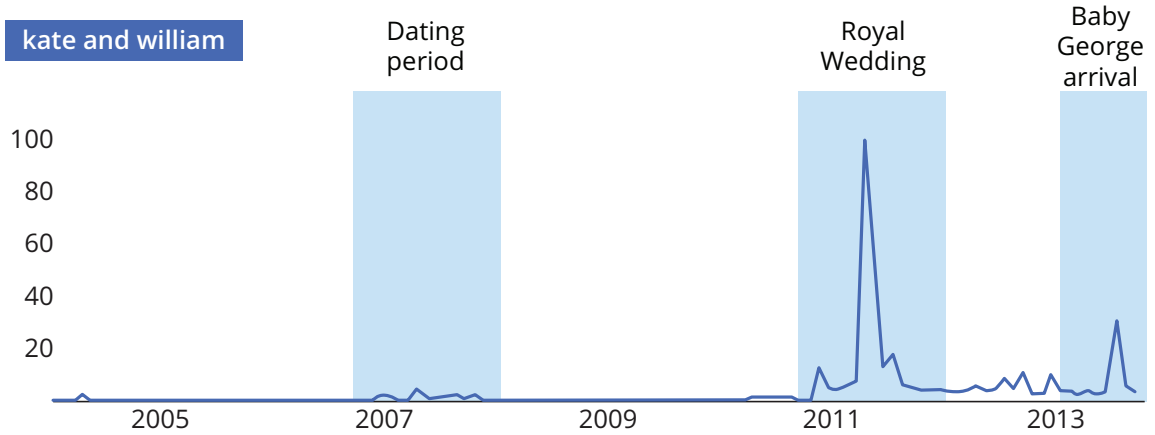


Not only is it fun to see these cultural stories play out through search data, but marketers can also often act on patterns like these. For example, brands of baby food/diapers/ accessories could anticipate the search spikes around the royal baby and develop relevant content and media buys that associate that brand with raising your own prince or princess.

## Rising topics of interest

With search data, we can also discover a topic or opportunity before it might be considered a trend. For instance, we might use search data to look for interesting indicators of health shifts. Searches around gluten free have shown an incredible incline over the last few years, revealing not only growing consumer interest but also, more importantly, a consumer *need* for brands to address.

*Indexed Search Query Volume, United States*
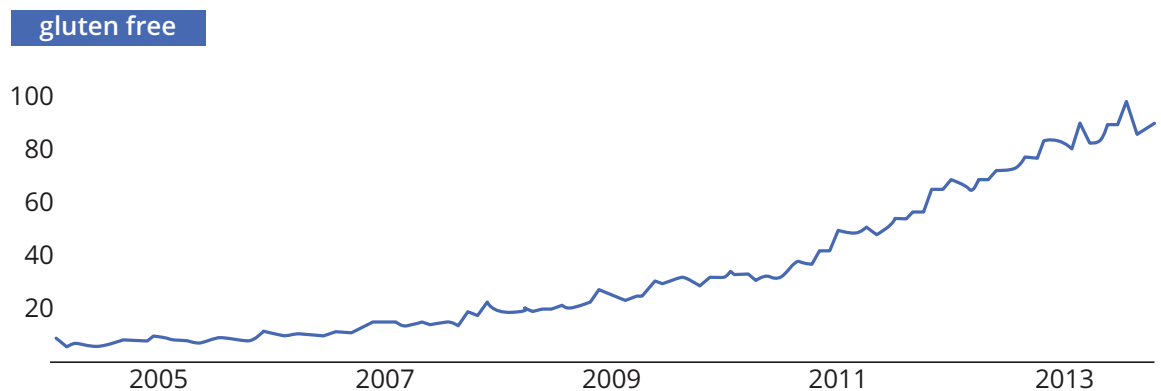
Related searches showing a strong interest in diet and recipes can guide marketers toward addressing more specific interests and concerns related to the trend. While the related searches may seem fairly intuitive in the gluten free category, rising searches give an early heads-up of topics likely to become trends. In other words, these are signals for marketers of a surge in interest that could become a solid marketing, product or messaging opportunity.

| TOP | | | RISING | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| gluten free diet | 100 | | gluten free desserts | Breakout |
| gluten free recipes | 75 | | gluten free oatmeal | Breakout |
| gluten free bread | 50 | | gluten free menu | +350% |
| gluten free foods | 50 | | what is gluten | +350% |
| gluten free food | 40 | | gluten free cheese | +190% |
| gluten free pizza | 35 | | gluten free pizza | +170% |
| gluten free restaurants | 30 | | gluten free restaurants | +130% |

## Passing fads or lasting opportunities

As the tides change over time, consumer movements are captured through search data. Comparing them to related topics can offer some meaningful context when trying to distinguish temporary fads from strong trends from enduring opportunities.

Let's look at the 'gluten free' interest side-by-side with other health-related topics. Although 'gluten free' has been growing like wildfire, it's 'protein' that still dominates when comparing the lot. The 'carb' craze, on the other hand, is past its heyday. With 'calories' there's a predictable New Year's surge in interest, though it's been somewhat less pronounced in recent years. Across the board, marketers can use information like this to inform not only product development and R&D decisions, but also to guide timing and allocation of media investments.

*Indexed Search Query Volume, United States*



| protein | fat free | gluten free | calorie | carb |
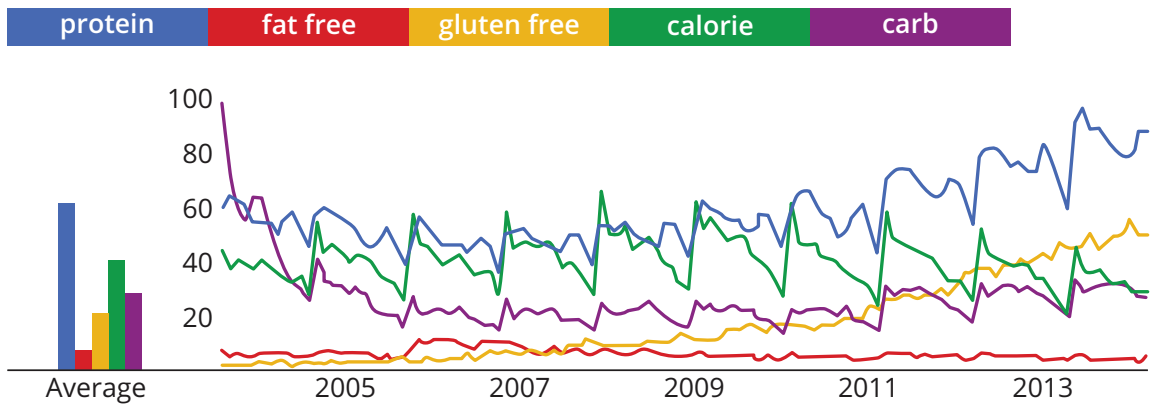
## What's newsworthy is search-worthy

In addition to broad movements, big news moments are also reflected through search and can have learnings and implications for marketers. Let's look at Obamacare and the Government Shutdown. No surprise, the search trend data shows a spike in interest for the topic during the time period we'd expect.
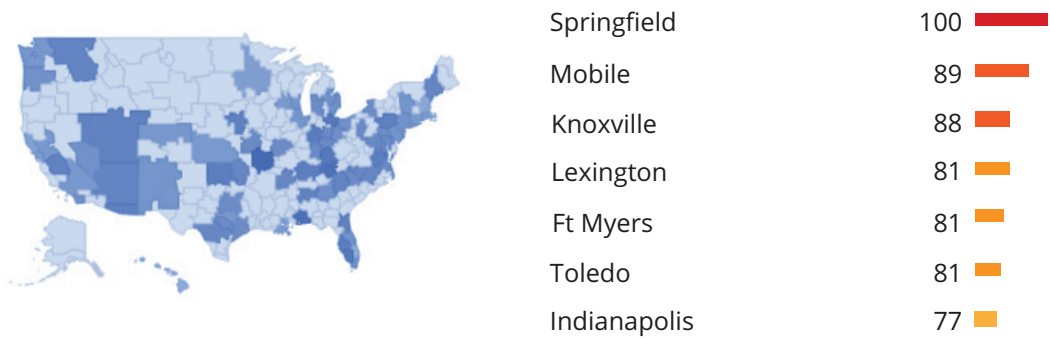
*Indexed Search Query Volume, United States*
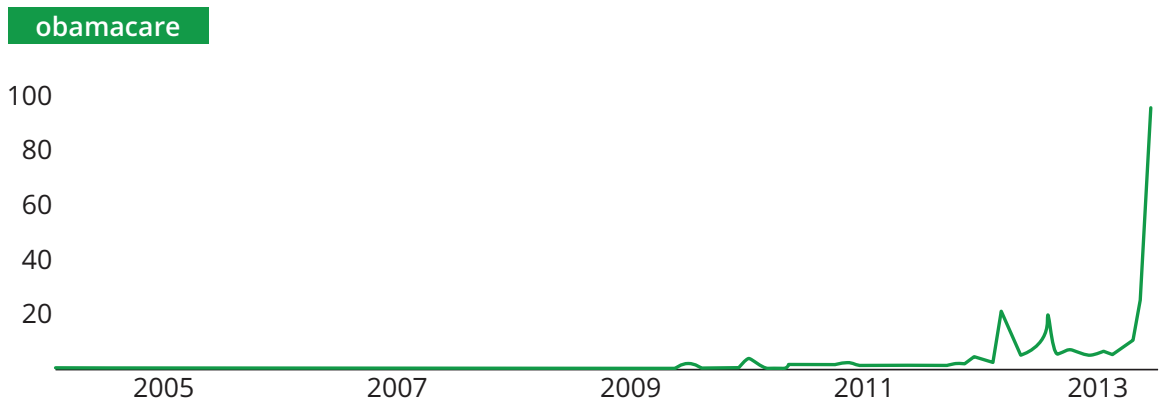


| obamacare |

What's the implication for marketers around a big news moment like this? How can they plug in to the interest generated? Sticking with the 'obamacare' example, health insurance providers might see — or anticipate — the rise in searches related to insurance topics more generally and increase their search advertising investment for offering quotes,

inviting people to compare plan benefits or providing more clarity on the hot issues. They might also delve into the geographic patterns of 'obamacare' searches and use them to inform their messaging and investment for geo-targeted campaigns.

*Indexed Search Query Volume by Metro Area, United States*



| | |
|---|---|
| Springfield | 100 |
| Mobile | 89 |
| Knoxville | 88 |
| Lexington | 81 |
| Ft Myers | 81 |
| Toledo | 81 |
| Indianapolis | 77 |

It's worth noting yet again, though, that search is powerful for putting things in perspective. As much as we might want to believe the general population is solely focused on becoming educated on serious topics like Obamacare, it turns out that more controversial pop culture topics often captivate us even more. When it comes to big September 2013 news, Miley Cyrus' performance at the MTV Video Music Awards actually trumped government topics in terms of interest and attention stirred. Search is nothing if not honest in reflecting back our interests, whether we like what we see or not.

*Indexed Search Query Volume, United States*



obamacare    miley cyrus
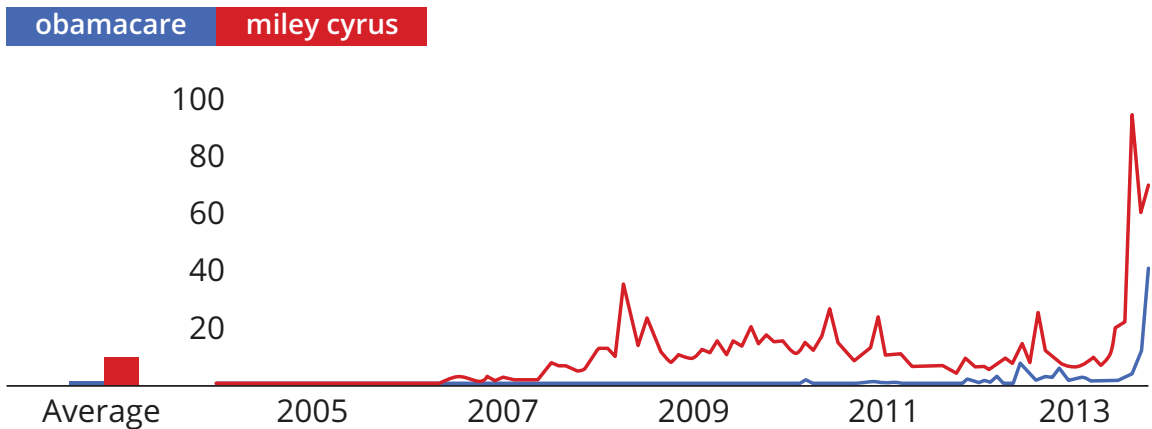
# Riding the waves of cultural interest

Since we rely on search across so many topics, the data it captures offers a real-time pulse of our culture, marketplace and society. We can see stories of history chronicled through search, we can see broad movements and trends reflected back at us, and we can see how certain shared moments (like political or pop culture news) engage our curiosity. For brand marketers, this provides a gold mine of data to better understand what people care about, how that changes, and how it compares to other interests today or in the past.

These are insights all brand marketers should use, especially during planning periods. By looking through this window into our collective mindset and the societal movements and moments defining our times, brands will be more attuned to opportunities to meaningfully plug into the zeitgeist. From there, they can ride the waves of cultural interest — or create new waves altogether.

*This is the second article in a series on search insights. In the next installment, we'll move from the broad cultural lens used here to one focused on exploring insights for a brand's specific category.*

*Sonia Chung*
Head of Insights Strategy, Agency Business Development, Google