



How can the internet be used for research and analysis?

The internet can be used in research and analysis because it contains a vast source of data. It can also be used to access and analyse data, to compare and contrast data, and to present data in interactive ways.

Accessing and analysing data

Popular internet sources of data include:

Formal data sets

International institutions including the World Bank and the United Nations present formal data sets in reports such as the annual Human Development Report. Formal data sets can be useful for comparing one country with another. Central Statistical Offices in specific countries often provide detailed data about different regions within a country on their websites.

- See <http://data.un.org> for UN formal data sets
- See <http://data.worldbank.org/> for World Bank formal data sets

Open data

The idea of open data is based on the premise that some data should be freely available to everyone to use as they wish, without restriction. National governments provide open data in a format that allows for the data to be interpreted, applied, adapted, published, and disseminated. Open data can be useful for holding national governments to account for their promises.

- See <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/> for information about the global partnership of countries that have signed up to empower their citizens in active governance by providing open data
- See <http://www.opendata.go.ke/> and <http://www.huduma.info> for examples from Kenya

Freedom of information

National governments will produce data in response to legislation concerning freedom of information, but only when specifically requested by their citizens. This route can be useful for accessing information that would not otherwise enter the public domain. Data will be shared in a format that complies with the applicable national law. Using freedom of information legislation to access data is popular in Brazil and India, as well as in other countries.

- See https://informationactivism.org/en/exploring_the_truth for suggestions about how to request data using freedom of information laws
- See <http://www.freedominfo.org/> for details about which countries operate freedom of information laws

Crowdsourcing

Anyone can start crowdsourcing by asking people to contribute to the collection of data, or the systematisation or analysis of data. In advocacy, this can be done in order to identify and understand a need or problem, and to gain an overview of an issue. No payment is involved. It is important to be aware that crowdsourcing is based on an open call to an undefined group of people, which makes it self-selecting and therefore limiting.

- See <http://internationalbudget.org/> to find out how to collaborate with others in civil society around the world to analyse and influence government budgets

- See <http://www.ipaidabribe.com/> for an example from India. Data was collated concerning the value of bribes being paid to officials. This provided an overview of the scale of the problem. The data was then used to advocate for action by the government
- See <http://www.involve.org.uk/back-to-basics/> for a useful blog post on advocacy-specific crowdsourcing

Comparing and contrasting data: budget tracking

Budget tracking is often used for advocacy that involves monitoring government expenditure on basic service provision. It is useful because it helps advocates research and analyse whether money is being spent in line with planned government commitments, and whether the spent money has had the intended beneficial impact on citizens' lives.

In many cases, a government will produce a simple guide and put it online, giving details of what budget they have and how they will spend it, including the amounts they plan to spend, what services and projects they plan to spend it on, and in which communities.

Where this is the case, it is possible to track actual budget expenditure on different services and projects, particularly if different communities log details online of their experiences at the receiving end of these budgets. It is also possible to analyse different aspects concerning, for example, the people who are making decisions about the budget at each level, whether these decisions are transparent and whether the money is reaching the people it is intended to reach.

Presenting data

Online tools and software can be used to present the information and data that has been gleaned from research and analysis about an issue in a compelling and interesting way.

Visualisation

'Visualisation' techniques are ways of communicating messages visually, for example by using images, interactive graphics, diagrams or animations.

It can be an effective way of making details about data come alive for those we are trying to influence.

It can help us communicate complicated things in a simple way. It can also be a useful way of communicating across languages, or in communities where literacy rates are low. For example, we might look to plot information onto an online map to show the distribution of how an issue affects a population, with links to photos and videos.

- See https://informationactivism.org/en/original_10_tactics_project for information about visualisation techniques that are useful to advocacy (look for tactic 3).

Wordle

A Wordle is a simple and common visualisation tool, which generates 'word clouds' from text provided. It gives greater prominence to the words used most frequently in the source text. This can help to highlight key themes and phrases. In advocacy, a Wordle can be useful for analysing any important text, for example, a government report or a ministerial speech.

To read other documents regarding ideas for using the internet and mobile phones in specific parts of the Advocacy Cycle, visit this page on the TILZ website – <http://tilz.tearfund.org/advocacycomms>