

Jennifer Golbeck: The curly fry conundrum: Why social media “likes” say more than you might think

“It’s sometimes said of Facebook that the users aren’t the customer, they’re the product. And so how do you get a company to cede control of their main asset back to the users? It’s possible, but I don’t think it’s something that we’re going to see change quickly.”

Do you like curly fries? Have you Liked them on Facebook? Find out the surprising things Facebook (and others) can guess about you from your random Likes and Shares. Computer scientist Jennifer Golbeck explains how this came about, how some applications of the technology are not so cute — and why she thinks we should return the control of information to its rightful owners.

Level

- Upper-intermediate
- Advanced

Goals

- More discourse markers
- Vocabulary

Themes

- Data & Privacy
- Monetizing the internet

INTRO DISCUSSION

- How often do you use social media? How much personal information do you put online?
- How important is privacy to you? Do you think it is okay for companies to use your personal information for financial gain?
- Do you think that the world is going to become less or more private in the future?
- Do you like curly fries?

VIDEO

Students to watch Golbeck’s TED Talk.

COMPREHENSION True or False?

1. Most of the content on the Internet together is contributed by average users and not by developers.
2. “Liking” something on Facebook can indicate something about your personality that is totally irrelevant to the content of what you have liked.
3. It is currently not possible for companies to predict your behaviors and characteristics based on what you do on the Internet, but it will be very soon.

4. Liking curly fries is an indicator of high intelligence because only smart people can afford to eat curly fries.
5. The way viral videos and Facebook likes spread across the Internet is exactly the same as the way as diseases spread through social networks.
6. Golbeck says that data should be more private, and that users should be made aware of the risks involved in doing something as simple as “liking” a Facebook page.
7. Golbeck wants people to do more research and develop more ways for companies to exploit the data collected from their users/customers.
8. It seems unlikely that legal representatives and politicians are going to support changes to intellectual property law such that users could own their data.

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Static | A. A social theory that states that people are likely to be friends with similar people. |
| 2. Dynamic | B. To draw a conclusion from reasoning and from certain facts. |
| 3. Homophily | C. Something that signals the existence of a quality, or gives us information about it. |
| 4. Altruistic | D. Constantly changing or moving. |
| 5. Indicator | E. A characteristic of something |
| 6. Trait / Attribute | F. Without change, movement or action. |
| 7. Sweeping (Adj) | G. To be only concerned with the interests of others. Without self-interest. |
| 8. Infer | H. Wide/broad in range or effect. |

Other useful vocab:

- To *cede*

Try to guess the meaning from the following examples:

- “And so how do you get a company to cede control of their main asset back to the users?” (P. 2, L 48)
- “I think encouraging this kind of science and supporting researchers who want to cede some of that control back to users...” (P. 3, L 15)

DISCOURSE MARKERS

Speaking of

A: James started university this month and seems to be enjoying it.
B: *Speaking of* James, did he get the job he was applying for?

- *To change the direction of a conversation by making a link with what was just said.*

By the way / Incidentally

I'm going to the shops at five. *By the way*, your brother called and he wants you to call him back.

- *To introduce a new idea unrelated to the conversation, or to change the subject completely.*

In fact / Actually

The Caspian Sea is *Actually* a lake. *In fact* it is the largest lake in the world.

- *To emphasize the truth of a statement, especially in contrast to what has been previously said.*

In other words

Everybody cheered and clapped. *In other words*, the show was a great success.

- *To restate or clarify something in a different way.*

On one hand...on the other hand

On one hand, people spend too much time at their computers. *On the other hand*, so much work is done online these days.

- *To balance contrasting facts/points. On the other hand can also be used to introduce a contrasting point.*

That is to say

Videogames cause violent behavior. *That is to say*, they encourage children to do violent things by rewarding them.

- *To introduce an explanation or clarification of a point you have just made*

All in all

I like both movies, but *all in all* I think that The Avengers is better.

- *To take everything into consideration and summarize your point.*

As I was saying

As I was saying, if I don't get that job I won't be able to continue paying rent.

- *To return to a previous subject after an interruption or digression.*

PRACTICE

Complete the following using the discourse markers above:

- The Dude** I read that parts of The United States have just legalized marijuana. Isn't that great?
- Bill O'Reilly** No, that's terrible! Marijuana is _____ a huge problem. _____, it often leads to many other issues as a gateway drug.
- The Dude** I don't agree with you. _____ Marijuana is much less harmful than other drugs, and many people use it without going on to try others.
- Bill O'Reilly** _____ you are right, there are absolutely people who use marijuana and experience no harm. _____, don't we have an obligation to those who do have problems?
- The Dude** That's true, but _____ to David the other day, we should just have better programs to help those people.
- Bill O'Reilly** I still disagree, but we're probably not going to make much progress here. _____ David, do you know if he bought that car he was considering?
- The Dude** I have no idea, but I'm going to see him later today so I'll find out.
- Bill O'Reilly** Okay, say hi to him for me. _____, I still have that book I borrowed from you. I'll return it tomorrow.

DISCUSSION

- How can the prediction of peoples' attributes from their behavior online be a good thing?
- Is it possible to maintain your privacy when simple things like "Facebook likes" and Google searches can be used to predict things about you?
- Is privacy actually important? Wouldn't it be okay to give up our privacy if it meant we had great products and services online?
- Does limited privacy mean limited freedom? Why?
- What do you think is the best way to control and protect our personal information on the Internet? Do you know of any products or services that help people do so?
- Would you like to stop using Facebook and similar online services? Do you think you could?

- Do you know of any other companies that use people’s personal information for financial gain, that *monetize* their users?
- Is it a good thing that most of the web’s content is now contributed by average users?
- Is what target does (predicting a “pregnancy score”) ethical?
- Which path to a solution that Golbeck talks about would be the most effective – Through law & policy or science & development?

DEBATE

- Nowadays privacy is just not that important. If we want to have great online services like Facebook, Google maps and others then we must surrender some privacy. We all use these things, and so they must be ethically acceptable.
- It is a good thing that companies can predict our personality traits from our behavior online. It makes online shopping more convenient, and we get to see content that we are actually interested in.
- Giving up our privacy is just the beginning. Soon the Internet will be completely controlled by governments and corporations, and we have to resist this as much as possible. Everybody should start by quitting services like Facebook and Gmail, and using only those that guarantee privacy.

REVIEW / HOMEWORK

Writing

Some discourse markers (including some of the above) are useful in writing and though they can be used in speech, might be considered more formal. Some examples:

- That is to say...
- Incidentally...
- Regarding...
- As far as...is concerned...
- On one hand...on the other hand...

Task:

Choose a topic from either the discussion questions or debate topics above and write approximately half a page expressing your opinion. Make sure to use discourse markers to express your opinion. If you are unsure of how to use them, do some research online or in a dictionary.